

## Original Research Article

# Multilingual Integration as Epistemic Negotiation: African Diasporic Voices in Western Institutions

Zakka Shalom Kasham<sup>1</sup>, Temitope Rhoda Olajide<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of European Studies, University of Ibadan**Article History**

Received: 18.11.2022

Accepted: 27.12.2022

Published: 30.12.2022

**Journal homepage:**[https:// www.easpublisher.com](https://www.easpublisher.com)**Quick Response Code**

**Abstract:** In this paper, I discuss the concept of multilingual integration in Western higher education institutions, with a special focus on African diasporic scholars and students as an epistemic negotiation. Based on the analysis of the academic sources, it is clear that the language policies in Western universities act as tools of gatekeeping that exclude the native systems of knowledge and multilingual repertoires, in favor of monolingual standards of English. The members of the African diaspora are able to employ the method of translanguaging, identity negotiation, and strategic use of linguistic resources to negotiate the complex power dynamics. The article combines theoretical concepts such as academic literacies, decoloniality, epistemic justice, and linguistic imperialism in the explanation of interrelationships between multilingualism and knowledge production, institutional access, and cultural identity. Three important dimensions are identified: (1) pedagogical decolonization that acknowledges multilingual competences as epistemic resources; (2) student agency in negotiating academic literacies despite institutional barriers; and (3) institutional hierarchies of languages that recreate colonial legacies. The results suggest that the prevailing monolingualism ideologies in Western institutions are sources of epistemic oppression that prevent the inclusion of the African diasporic voices in knowledge creation. The paper concludes with a recommendation to change the language policy to be transformative, since it is important to reconsider multilingualism as an asset rather than a liability to enable true epistemic pluralism in global higher education.

**Keywords:** Academic literacy, linguistic imperialism, African diaspora, decolonization, multilingualism, epistemic negotiation, higher education.

**Copyright © 2022 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution **4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)** which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

## INTRODUCTION

Linguistic heterogeneity in Western institutions of higher learning is posing opportunities and challenges to the knowledge production and epistemic justice. The African diaspora scholars and students bring a rich diversity of multilingual repertoires into the academic setting, but the institutional factors encouraging monolingual standards of English often depreciate or actively quieten down these linguistic resources (Odeniyi, Ndhlovu, and Clennon, 2020). Important questions raised in the conflict between institutional monolingualism and linguistic diversity include who is listened to, whose knowledge is considered, and how language policies influence access to knowledge in international academia. Multilingualism in Western institutions cannot be viewed only as a technical issue of language acquisition or adaptation. It is a complex,

epistemic negotiation process where the African diasporic individuals bargain between opposing knowledge systems, hierarchies of colonial languages, and institutional frameworks endowed with power (Odeniyi, 2015). Multilingual participants effectively exploit the linguistic resources, negotiate identity positions, and challenge institutional regimes to claim their voices and knowledge traditions in Western academic environments. This is known as epistemic negotiation. This paper will examine multilingual integration as epistemic negotiation through examining how voices of the African diaspora interact with Western institutional structures. The discussion explains the three dimensions that are interrelated: the hierarchies of the institution's language that propagates the colonial legacies, the agency of African diasporic students in negotiating the academic literacies, and the

transformative possibilities of decolonizing pedagogies that can view multilingualism as an asset of epistemological value and not a liability. This discussion relies on the studies in language education, decolonial theory, academic literacies, and critical applied linguistics. This study is important not only to the firsthand experience of African diasporic students. Language policies in colleges and universities reproduce and extend overall tendencies of epistemic injustice, where certain modes of knowing, speaking, and learning are always privileged over others (Andrews, Okpanachi, and Etemire, 2012). As a result, the idea of multilingual integration as epistemic negotiation clarifies some key issues of justice, power and knowledge in the more globalized but also uneven academic space. The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 examines the existing literature on decolonization, academic literacy, linguistic imperialism, and epistemic justice. This analysis was achieved in Section 3. Section 4 breaks down the findings by the key themes that have emerged in the literature, including barriers to epistemic access, student agency in negotiating academic literacies, institutional language hierarchies, and translanguaging practices. In Section 5, a conclusion summarizing the most significant findings is provided, along with the implications of these findings for the practice and policy of Western higher education institutions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theory: Linguistic Imperialism and Epistemic Justice

The theoretical basis of the interpretation of multilingual integration as an epistemic negotiation is a two-related framework: epistemic justice and linguistic imperialism. According to Andrews *et al.*, (2012), epistemic justice refers to the fairness of knowledge production, validation, and distribution, especially in relation to the legitimacy of knowledge and voice representation in academic discourse. The African scholars and students at Western institutions often face what Andrews *et al.*, (2012) define as epistemic oppression, systematic constraints that prevent the credibility of their knowledge assertions, even in an environment of strong familiarity with them. The other facet of language policies that continue to maintain colonial power systems can also be viewed as linguistic imperialism. The prevalence of English in international higher education is an issue of historical colonialism and modern neocolonialism systems that victimize local languages and knowledge systems and privilege the Western systems of knowledge (Ndhlovu, 2008). This linguistic hierarchy is not only established by means of explicit policies, but also by subtle processes, which construct the monolingual English norms to be the unmarked standard and multilingual speakers to be deficient (Martin, 2009). Language is an admission-keeper of knowledge production, a fact that is indicated by the relationship between linguistic imperialism and epistemic justice. When African diasporic students are made to present their ideas in English only and through

Western scholarly norms, they are wounded in a long-term condition, which Hurst (2016) refers to as the colonial wound, which is the injury inflicted by the educational systems that do not value their cultural and linguistic resources. This wound is experienced as a sense of alienation, self-doubt, and purposeful silence as students move through institutional contexts in which the insufficiency of their ways of knowing and means of expressing themselves is explicitly or implicitly conveyed.

### 2.2 Multilingualism and Academic Literacy

The academic literacy research gives important information on the way students cope with the complicated literacy activities needed in tertiary education. Academic literacies frameworks understand the concept of literacy as a social process that exists within the dynamics of power and institutional contexts instead of focusing on deficit assumptions that portray multilingual learners as lacking critical skills (Odeniyi, 2015).

This school of thought explains why African diasporic students have many resources that they bring to the table of creating knowledge despite the fact that these resources are subject to negative evaluation by the institutional criterion that fails to recognize them. The same study conducted on multilingual students in universities in the UK found out that the African diasporic learners possess a superior language level and apply it intentionally in various circumstances (Odeniyi *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, these multilingual abilities are usually disregarded or underestimated by institutional structures. According to Martin (2009), non-traditional multilingual students in higher education in the UK are experiencing the feeling that they have lost their identity and not acquired one of the British because they have to navigate through institutional norms that expect them to conform to monolingual norms. The concept of translanguaging can be handy to comprehend how the language is used by multilingual students in school. Translanguaging acknowledges that multilingual people use their full linguistic resources to create meaning, to develop knowledge, and to negotiate identity instead of following the rigid language apartheid (Hotchkins and Dancy, 2020). Translanguaging is not just a communication tool among African diasporic students but an epistemic approach, which allows how to combine academic knowledge with cultural perspectives and experiences.

### 2.3 Knowledge and Decoloniality

The Making of Knowledge. Decolonial scholarship provides theoretical tools of critical analysis to understand the colonial legacies of contemporary institutions of higher education. Decolonization is not just the political independence, but the challenge of the still existing coloniality of power, knowledge, and life that pervades the international academic systems (Zembylas and Bozalek, 2018). Decolonial views on

language and multilingualism dispute the belief that Western languages and epistemologies are the benchmarks of assessing the rest. A number of researchers have discussed the language question in African higher education and proven that the institutions are still governed by language policies introduced by the colonialists and that restrict access to knowledge (Kaschula, 2016; Mkhize, 2018). The students with native African languages as their first language experience difficulties due to the prevalence of English and other colonial languages in the African higher institutions. This actually restricts the ability of people to access higher education and the knowledge acceptable in the academic setting. The same applies to Western universities, where the African diasporic students are experiencing the same issues with language marginalization. The process of decolonizing higher education needs to have big changes in institutional structure, pedagogical practices, and epistemology, not the fixation on the curriculum (Nyoni, 2019). The

decolonial approaches to language policy require that multilingualism be understood as epistemic capital rather than as an issue to be solved. The African language and multilingualism are redefined as valuable tools that can enhance information production and facilitate more accommodating, fairer academic settings, rather than being viewed as a setback to academic success (Brand, 2005). This idea of epistemic access is particularly relevant to understanding the decolonial language politics. According to Mgwashu (2011), one of the most important epistemic conditions is academic literacy in one's first language, which enables students to engage with complex ideas rather than merely decode a foreign language. This awareness casts doubt on the concept of equal access for all students to English-medium instruction. It demonstrates how language policies may complicate the process of knowledge acquisition among certain students, even in schools that appear to be open to all.

**Table 1: Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing Multilingual Integration**

Framework	Key Concepts	Application to African Diaspora	Representative Scholars
Epistemic Justice	Knowledge validation, hermeneutical injustice, epistemic oppression	Examines how African diasporic knowledge claims are marginalized in Western institutions	Andrews <i>et al.</i> , (2012)
Linguistic Imperialism	Language hierarchies, colonial legacies, linguistic gatekeeping	Analyzes how English dominance perpetuates colonial power relations	Ndhlovu (2008), Hurst (2016)
Academic Literacies	Literacy as social practice, power relations, identity negotiation	Reveals how students navigate institutional literacy demands while drawing on diverse resources	Odeniyi (2015), Martin (2009)
Decoloniality	Coloniality of power/knowledge, epistemic pluralism, indigenous knowledge	Challenges Western epistemological dominance and advocates for multilingual knowledge production	Zembylas & Bozalek (2018), Nyoni (2019)

## METHODOLOGY

The approach this paper uses in order to use the method of systematic literature review consists in synthesizing the research available on the topic of multilingual integration, African diasporic experiences and the problem of epistemic negotiation in Western higher institutions of education. The analysis will use scholarly resources for its suitability to the interaction of the African diaspora, multilingualism, and knowledge production in terms of the institutional practices. There were several steps in the process of the literature review. The sources picked have various methodological designs, such as case studies of language policy in South African higher tertiary education (Greenfield, 2010; Hurst, 2016; Mkhize, 2018), theoretical frameworks of epistemic oppression and academic dependency (Andrews *et al.*, 2012), ethnographic research of multilingual students in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (Odeniyi, 2015; Odeniyi *et al.*, 2020), and conceptual research of decolonization. This methodological variety allows triangulation of findings in a variety of research traditions and settings. The analysis was performed through the close reading of selected sources,

identification of critical themes, theoretical models, empirical data, and theoretical argumentation. Some researchers concentrated on the relationship between language, power, and knowledge in institutions and the way African diasporic people negotiate these relations. Themes were divided into four major categories, including barriers to epistemic access, translanguaging as an epistemic practice, negotiation of academic literacies through agency and resistance, and institutional language hierarchies and colonial legacies. The analysis acknowledges both the positive and negative aspects of the available literature. The chosen sources are very informative about the issue of multilingual integration and epistemic negotiation; nonetheless, several gaps are still present. Most empirical research is done in the context of South Africa or the UK, and little is done to study other Western institutional environments. In addition, the literature does not focus on graduate students' and faculty's experiences as much as it focuses on undergraduate experiences. The discussion acknowledges these limits, which contribute to the formulation of more research ideas.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Colonial Legacies and instituted institutional language hierarchies

African diasporic students and scholars in higher education institutions of the West have issues caused by language hierarchies that are based on and reinforce colonial power relations. These hierarchies are maintained not only by explicit policies but also by unspoken rules that value the ability to speak only English and disdain the ability to know more than one language and be aware of indigenous knowledge systems. A study of South African higher education shows some of the most remarkable examples of the legacy of colonial languages in institutionalism. According to Greenfield (2010), the Afrikaans-medium instruction in historically Afrikaans institutions creates a process that is known as linguistic apartheid in which the representatives of African languages are discriminated against and excluded. One of the students simply explained it by the fact that my language is never heard in a classroom, when I hear Afrikaans, I am rebellious (Greenfield, 2010, p. 124). The movement is a protest against epistemic violence, the deliberate destruction of the linguistic and cultural identity of an individual in an institutional context, and not merely a question of a choice of one language over another. Even the dominance of English in higher education in South Africa, usually presented as an issue of opportunity and access rather than one of oppression, is a heritage of colonialism. As Katunich (2006) reveals, English serves as a tool of maintaining colonial relationships and a bridge to the world of knowledge networks. This duality poses problematic dilemmas for African students and institutions in both senses: it can be practically beneficial, yet it can also perpetuate the marginalization of African languages and knowledge systems as they are adopted. There are language hierarchies in Western institutions that operate through both formal policies and less apparent means of excluding and marginalizing people. Martin (2009) writes about how multilingual students in UK universities navigate an institutional context that portrays them as linguistically incompetent, regardless of their capabilities. According to these students, they feel they have lost their identity but have not acquired a British one, as they attempt to conform to monolingual norms that erode their language and cultural resources (Martin, 2009, p. 377). To discuss the ongoing harm to people through educational systems that do not appreciate African languages and knowledge, Hurst (2016) has coined the term colonial wound. Along with open discrimination, this wound can also be demonstrated in the daily lives of transiting institutional space, wherein the languages, accents, and means of knowing are being subtly stigmatized as insufficient. According to Hurst (2016), to cure this wound, the institutional structures and epistemological beliefs have to be changed radically. The hierarchy in language in institutions also affects the validity and reliability of knowledge. According to Andrews *et al.*, (2012), Western theories and methods of research and publishing

are prioritized over indigenous knowledge systems and local scholarship, indicating that the epistemic inequality of African scholars is experienced even when African contexts are taken into consideration. African scholars need to be recognized by putting their studies into context using Western paradigms and publishing their results in Western academic journals. This is known as academic dependency, which can distort or compromise the wisdom of the African context and epistemology. According to Ndhlovu (2008), the current marginalization of African languages in the development discourse and knowledge production in academic circles is reflective of the historical colonial language hierarchies in modern institutions. Even after political independence, African languages remain broadly neglected in the academic and post-secondary education and in the discussion of academic fields. This restricts the input in knowledge building and the inclusion of various views in the academic discourse. This marginalization has significant impacts on epistemic justice, as it consistently elevates Western voices and perspectives over African knowledge and ways of knowing.

### 4.2. Academic Literacy Management: Resistance and Autonomy

In spite of system constraints, African diasporic students are quite agency in negotiating academic literacies and making a presence in Western institutions. Studies have shown that such students use sophisticated approaches to negotiate institutional needs, retain their affiliations with linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and draw on a range of knowledge-generating resources. The ethnographic research conducted by Odeniyi (2015) on the African diasporic undergraduates in UK higher education offers rich information on how the students negotiate the literacy practices. The study shows that students have elaborate knowledge-building resources because of their multilingualism, multicultural, and diasporic identities, although they are usually judged negatively through institutional standards. These materials allow students to observe the connection between what they study at school and what they practice in real life, and this might give them hints that would not be available to them through Western modes of knowing. The aspect of academic literacies negotiation at the border of divergent linguistic and cultural contexts requires multifaceted identity work as students move between them. Odeniyi (2015) shows that the interaction of students with academic protocols, power structure in classrooms, and overall social settings constantly transform their identities. The students have to decide on their position towards the norms of the institution without losing the sense of genuine contact with their knowledge and cultural heritage. This is a negotiation of identity which is a dynamic and an example of epistemic labor. African diasporic students also defy institutional regulations of underestimating their linguistic and cultural resources. It can be opposed in a variety of ways, both by overt resistance to the rules of monolingualism

and through the insidious means of preserving multilingualism even in informal academic institutions. Greenfield (2010) assumes that these rebellious reactions of the students to the exclusion of language are not emotional reactions but political ones, as they play the role of limiting the legitimacy of language hierarchies in the institutions. In order to make sense of student agency, you must be aware that academic literacies are not only technical skills; they are social practices, too. According to Odeniyi *et al.*, (2020), students' awareness of multilingual repertoires enables them to employ diverse linguistic resources in their educational activities, thereby increasing knowledge production. When schools allow the students to use their entire language skills, they will be able to relate what they learn in school with what they know about their own culture. This culminates in the creation of increasingly more complex and contextually aware understandings. The institutional set-ups and evaluation processes render it extremely difficult to allow students to make their own decisions. Finally, students have to create something of institutional quality, which tends to support Western academic norms and monolingual expression of ideas. Such a conflict between agency and constraint affects students' use of academic literacies. They might even have to alter their language and cultural registers in order to do so intentionally, according to the circumstances and the audience.

### 4.3 The Epistemic Practice of Translanguaging

The use of multiple languages and other linguistic resources in creating meaning, which is referred to as translanguaging, is an essential epistemic practice for African diasporic students studying in Western universities. Translanguaging acknowledges that multilingual people draw on their rich language repertoires to construct knowledge, negotiate identity, and interact with academic materials, but does not view languages as discrete systems to be maintained. Hotchkins and Dancy (2020) discuss the concept of translanguaging as a tool to develop the leadership literacies of Black immigrant college students and explain how multilingual practices can help them to

achieve advanced linguistic and cultural competence. According to their researches, translanguaging is an epistemic act that allows students to relate academic materials with their cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and the background of the community contexts in their lives instead of a communication strategy. This relationship enhances their comprehension and allows them to generate ideas, which they would not have thought of had they just experienced academic material in a single language. The epistemic aspect of translanguaging is reflected in the way students solve complex concepts by using more than one language. Lauwo (2018) investigates the concept of translanguaging in the context of Tanzanian schools in the context of Ubuntu philosophy, stating that multilingual activities are a form of social justice and building a shared knowledge base. This view suggests that translanguaging advances more collective and culturally based modalities of epistemics, challenging Western individualistic conceptions of learning and knowledge. Translanguaging methods are also used to assist students in negotiating their identities, as they enable them to study the materials in the Western academic world and continue to remain in touch with their cultural backgrounds. According to Odeniyi *et al.*, (2020), African immigrant students in London juggle between the various identity positions by drawing on their multilingual repertoires and adjusting linguistic resources depending on the interlocutors and context. Such a shift of languages and identity stands is an example of a multifaceted cultural as well as epistemic negotiation. However, lingual practices are usually limited by institutional settings, especially in formal institutions of higher learning with monolingual English norms. Perhaps students may engage in translanguaging during unstructured study groups, or when they make notes personally, but they may also have a sense that they must write texts in a single language when they are assessed. The epistemic advantages of multilingualism can be limited by the conflict between the students' actual knowledge acquisition process and the expectations set by the institution.

**Table 2: Forms of Epistemic Negotiation by African Diasporic Students**

<b>Negotiation Strategy</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Institutional Context</b>	<b>Epistemic Function</b>	<b>Source</b>
Translanguaging	Fluid use of multiple linguistic resources in meaning-making	Informal study groups, personal notes, peer discussions	Connects academic content with lived experience and cultural knowledge	Hotchkins & Dancy (2020), Lauwo (2018)
Strategic Code-Switching	Deliberate movement between linguistic registers based on context	Formal vs. informal settings, written vs. oral communication	Navigates institutional expectations while maintaining cultural identity	Odeniyi (2015)
Identity Negotiation	Reshaping self-presentation in relation to institutional norms	Classroom participation, academic writing, peer interactions	Claims space for diverse knowledge traditions and ways of knowing	Odeniyi <i>et al.</i> , (2020)

Negotiation Strategy	Description	Institutional Context	Epistemic Function	Source
Resistance Practices	Explicit or implicit challenges to monolingual norms	Language policy debates, classroom discussions, student activism	Contests institutional hierarchies and advocates for linguistic justice	Greenfield (2010)
Resource Mobilization	Drawing on cultural and linguistic backgrounds for knowledge-making	Essay writing, research projects, class presentations	Generates contextually grounded insights and alternative perspectives	Odeniyi (2015)

#### 4.4 Epistemic barriers to Epistemic Access.

The African diasporic people continue to experience obstacles to epistemic access in the institutes of the West, despite the agency of students and sophisticated negotiation tactics. These barriers are based on various levels, which include individual traumas of being marginalized and institutional structures that impair the validity of knowledge. Epistemic access is a major issue of language barriers, but not in the simplistic manner that these models typically operate. It is not merely the fact that students do not know English; it is that some of the existing versions of expressing English are overvalued in comparison with other linguistic means and modes of communication due to institutional traditions. According to Andrews *et al.*, (2012), although African scholars have exhaustive knowledge of their fields, language barriers do not allow them to prove their knowledge regarding the same. This is the kind of dynamic that they refer to as hermeneutical injustice, systemic failures in shared interpretive resources that create barriers to the comprehension and appreciation of particular social experiences and knowledge. Colonial past of educational systems forms additional obstacles to access to epistemia. Andrews *et al.*, (2012) condemn learning by chew and pour, as is popular in most schools in Africa. This approach is more based on memorizing and copying western knowledge rather than being able to think and generate knowledge internally. Due to institutional inefficiencies in the encouragement of indigenous modes of thought that were critical and the generation of knowledge rather than innate incompetencies, students attending such schools can become deficient in the critical analytical skills that Western universities cherish. The assessment practices that are carried out in institutions often ignore the diverse resources that African diasporic students bring into their studies.

According to Odeniyi (2015), students are not well evaluated even though they have high knowledge-making skills, because their methodologies are not followed by strict institutional rules. Such a difference between institutional acceptance and resources available to the students limits the people who can make the most

out of the academic knowledge creation and prevents success and development. African languages have been marginalized in higher education, and this significantly inhibits access to epistemic knowledge. According to Mgqwashu (2011), academic literacy in their native language is the only means of accessing epistemically profoundly and engaging in in-depth comprehension of the complex concepts as opposed to a vaneer understanding of complex concepts. When students are forced to attend classes in only other languages, they have cognitive loads that prevent them from even trying to comprehend the academic material of the subject and express their ideas in academic discussions. Brand (2005) discusses the obstacles to incorporating African indigenous knowledge systems due to English hegemony in South African institutions of higher learning. Assuming that academic activity should be written in English limits the epistemic diversity of institutions of higher learning and therefore rules out knowledge based on African languages and cultures. This omission has significant consequences in the overall knowledge-generation process of academic society and on individual students. Epistemic barriers to epistemics are also present in publication and dissemination practices. According to Andrews *et al.*, (2012), African academics who want to be recognized and promoted have to publish in Western journals using Western theoretical frameworks and methodologies. This demands academic dependency that leaves African scholars as consumers and not producers of theory even when talking about African contexts and issues. The net effect is the creation of a global knowledge complex that continuously sets aside African knowledge and modes of knowing and elevates western voices and positions. According to Hurst (2016), the aggregate impact of these struggles can be called the colonial wound, a wound that cannot be healed over time, but only causes a general loss of ability on the part of African diasporic communities to do justice to the knowledge production. Individual accommodations or support services are not all that this wound requires to mend. We must radically transform the institutional organization, the way knowledge is taught, and the knowledge assumptions that promote Western monolingual standards and knowledge systems.

**Table 3: Barriers to Epistemic Access and Potential Interventions**

Barrier Type	Manifestation	Impact on African Diaspora	Potential Intervention	Source
Language Hierarchies	Privileging of monolingual English norms; devaluation of multilingual repertoires	Linguistic marginalization; limited recognition of knowledge claims	Multilingual language policies; translanguaging pedagogies	Martin (2009), Odeniyi <i>et al.</i> , (2020)
Colonial Legacies	Persistence of colonial language policies and epistemological assumptions	"Colonial wound"; alienation; identity loss	Decolonizing curricula and pedagogies; recognition of indigenous knowledge	Hurst (2016), Zembylas & Bozalek (2018)
Assessment Practices	Narrow standards that fail to recognize diverse knowledge-making resources	Unfavorable evaluation despite sophisticated capabilities	Diversified assessment methods; recognition of multilingual competencies	Odeniyi (2015)
Academic Dependency	Requirement to use Western theories, methods, and publication venues	Marginalization of African scholarship; epistemic oppression	Support for indigenous theory development; diverse publication venues	Andrews <i>et al.</i> , (2012)
Mother Tongue Exclusion	Lack of academic literacy development in indigenous languages	Limited epistemic access; cognitive burden of working in non-native languages	Mother tongue instruction; multilingual academic resources	Mgqwashu (2011), Brand (2005)

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the concept of multilingual integration in Western institutions of higher learning as another way of epistemic negotiation with certain reference to African diasporic voices. It can be analyzed that the language policies and practices at these institutions are gatekeeping practices in support of monolingual rules of English and initiate the marginalization of multilingual repertoires and indigenous knowledge systems. The negotiations of power among African diasporic students and scholars are complex and mediated by translanguaging, identity negotiation, and the strategic use of linguistic resources, in which these students and scholars demonstrate high agency despite constraining institutional structures. There are three major dimensions as revealed in the analysis. To begin with, institutional language hierarchies preserve the memory of the colonial past, and African diasporic individuals have difficult access to knowledge. These hierarchies operate both in view policies and in hidden rules that treat multilingual speakers as inadequate and Western monolingual standards as universal. The continuation of such hierarchies is a classic example of what Hurst (2016) calls the colonial wound, a wound sustained by education systems that lack support for African languages, knowledge, and even epistemologies. Second, African diasporic students are highly developed in their agency and in their navigation of academic literacies, despite systemic barriers. Odeniyi (2015) and Odeniyi *et al.*, (2020) show that many of these students experience the ways of learning differently, and they utilize their multilingual abilities, cultural experiences, and diasporic identities to generate new ideas that enhance academic discourse. However, this agency operates within a great

number of constraints prescribed by institutional evaluation procedures and epistemological assumptions that often disregard or underestimate these resources. Third, the discussion highlights the transformative opportunities of decolonizing pedagogies, which consider multilingualism an asset rather than a liability in epistemologies. Hotchkins and Dancy (2020) and Lauwo (2018) analyzed translanguaging practices and found that they are not merely a means of communication but also a means of knowing that helps students draw a line between what they are taught in school and what they have experienced and learned about other cultures.

These practices might be institutionalized and supported, which would help to create more inclusive and epistemically diverse academic communities. These findings indicate that dominant ideologies about monolingualism in Western institutions are expressions of epistemic oppression, which limits the ability of African diasporic voices in knowledge production. Andrews *et al.*, (2012) explain the role of linguistic barriers, academic dependency, and the promotion of Western theories and methodologies in creating systemic disadvantages to African scholars, even when they have massive knowledge on their field of specialization. Overall, this dynamic exemplifies general patterns of epistemic injustice, involving the systematic privileging of certain forms of knowledge and epistemology and the marginalization of others. The solution to these issues is that we must change a great deal at numerous levels. Institutions should do more than issue empty rhetoric about incorporating diversity on a policy level and implement language policies that genuinely appreciate multilingualism and space other modes of speaking and knowing. This involves the promotion of the idea of

translanguaging pedagogies, the development of multilingual educational material, and the recognition of multilingual skills in assessment and promotion decisions. The decolonization strategies are promising areas to create more inclusive and epistemically equal academic spaces. As argued by Zembydas and Bozalek (2018) and Nyoni (2019), decolonization of higher education requires a significant change in the foundations of epistemology, approaches to instruction, and the frameworks of institutions. In language terms, this involves the replacement of the deficit models which depict multilingual students as lacking the necessary skill with asset-based models which recognize their linguistic and cultural resources as important resources in the creation of academic knowledge.

On the epistemological level, genuine epistemic pluralism requires the recognition of the fact that Western knowledge systems and languages are not universal standards upon which all other systems can be rated. Brand (2005) and Mgwashu (2011) propose that the African indigenous knowledge systems should be integrated into higher education and that it requires more than just a change in the curriculum, but deep-seated changes in the knowledge validation systems and the creation of diverse voices in academia. It should be noted that such an analysis has some constraints. The literature reviewed is mainly focused on UK and South Africa environments, and little representation is done on other Western institutional settings. In addition, most of the empirical research is done on the experiences of undergraduates with little emphasis on graduate students or professors. Further studies should explore how multilingualism and epistemic negotiations can be integrated in other institutional contexts and at different stages of career, especially with respect to how African diasporic faculty negotiate their way to academic institutions in the West. Despite these restrictions it is possible to conclude that multilingual integration in Western institutions cannot be perceived as a technical problem of mastering a language or accommodating it. It is rather a complex practice of epistemic negotiation whereby people of African diaspora negotiate institutional structures that are saturated with power, hierarchy of colonial languages and various forms of knowing. It is important to both recognize and support this process of negotiation to create more inclusive, equitable and epistemically diverse academic communities. The paper concludes by recommending language policies that would transform how we conceptualize the idea of multilingualism as a problem to a resource, bringing about the reality of epistemic pluralism in higher education across the globe. To ensure that this change occurs, institutions, teachers and policymakers must be dedicated towards combating the notion of monolingualism, decolonizing pedagogies and ensuring that the voices of the African diaspora are able to be heard during the creation of knowledge. Such kinds of big changes are the only ones that can get Western institutions closer to achieving real epistemic justice and

exploit the abundant possibilities of linguistic and cultural diversity in the production of academic knowledge.

## REFERENCES

- Andrews, N., Okpanachi, E., & Etemire, U. (2012). Trends of epistemic oppression and academic dependency in Africa's development: The need for a new intellectual path. *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 5(8), 85-104.
- Brand, R. (2005). 'English only'? Creating linguistic space for African indigenous knowledge systems in higher education: Perspectives on higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(3), 20-34. <https://doi.org/10.4314/SAJHE.V18I3.25478>
- Greenfield, L. (2010). 'When I hear Afrikaans in the classroom and never my language, I get rebellious': Linguistic apartheid in South African higher education. *Language and Education*, 24(6), 517-534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2010.502969>
- Hotchkins, B. K., & Dancy, T. E. (2020). Chapter 12: Translanguaging as a gateway to Black immigrant collegians' leadership literacies. *Teachers College Record*, 122(14), 1-32.
- Hurst, E. (2016). Navigating language: Strategies, transitions, and the 'colonial wound' in South African education. *Language and Education*, 30(3), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2015.1102274>
- Kaschula, R. H. (2016). In search of the African voice in higher education: The language question. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(6), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.5842/49-0-658>
- Katunich, J. (2006). Equity and English in South African higher education: Ambiguity and colonial language legacy. In R. Rubdy & M. Saraceni (Eds.), *English in the world: Global rules, global roles* (pp. 139-156). Continuum. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-0-230-50223-9\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-0-230-50223-9_8)
- Lauwo, S. (2018). Ubuntu translanguaging and social justice: Negotiating power and identity through multilingual education in Tanzania. In P. A. Canagarajah (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of migration and language* (pp. 217-233). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315115702-12>
- Martin, P. (2009). 'They have lost their identity but not gained a British one': Non-traditional multilingual students in higher education in the United Kingdom. *Language and Education*, 23(4), 377-394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780903194028>

- Mgqwashu, E. M. (2011). Academic literacy in the mother tongue: A pre-requisite for epistemological access. *Alternation*, 18(1), 38-56.
- Mkhize, D. (2018). The language question at a historically Afrikaans university: Access and social justice issues. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 36(1), 31-44. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2018.1452878>
- Ndhlovu, F. (2008). Language and African development: Theoretical reflections on the place of languages in African studies. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 17(2), 137-151.
- Nyoni, J. (2019). Decolonising the higher education curriculum: An analysis of African intellectual readiness to break the chains of a colonial caged mentality. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 14(1), 16-28. <https://doi.org/10.4102/THE.V4I0.69>
- Odeniyi, O. (2015). *An exploration of students from the African diaspora negotiating academic literacies* [Doctoral dissertation, University of London]. University of London Research Online.
- Odeniyi, O., Ndhlovu, F., & Clennon, O. (2020). Valuing the multilingual repertoires of students from African migrant communities at a London university. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 33(3), 254-268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2019.1677702>
- Zembylas, M., & Bozalek, V. (2018). Decolonial possibilities in South African higher education: Reconfiguring humanising pedagogies as/with decolonising pedagogies. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(4), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.15700/SAJE.V38N4A1699>

---

**Cite This Article:** Zakka Shalom Kasham & Temitope Rhoda Olajide (2022). Multilingual Integration as Epistemic Negotiation: African Diasporic Voices in Western Institutions. *EAS J Humanit Cult Stud*, 4(6), 243-251.

---