

Language Policy and Language Planning in the BRICS Countries: Toward a Meta-Framework for Responding to Linguistic Diversity

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Abstract This article offers a meta-framework for analyzing the different language policies employed by the BRICS countries to address the challenges posed by the presence of linguistic diversity. This meta-framework has a broader utility, and could be used more generally in the development, implementation, analysis, and evaluation of language planning efforts and specific language policies in other settings. The underlying research question for the article is how different BRICS countries respond to linguistic diversity, especially with respect to state schooling. The literature on which this article is based examines the different types of language planning, language policy decision-making, and the nature of and responses to linguistic diversity in all ten BRICS countries.

Keywords linguistic diversity, language planning, language policy, BRICS, medium of instruction

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The status of languages is a profoundly political issue that defines the national narrative of most states. For some, privileging one tongue underscores a message of unity, continuity, and independence, while other states point to diversity as a sign of tolerance and inclusivity. Restoring the importance of the “national” language may be seen as freeing the state from colonial or imperial repression, while recognizing plurality revives a rich cultural heritage. In either case, language

policy can give a sense of renewal and independence from the unipolar world order that has privileged some nations over others. This liberating outlook is at the core of the message of the BRICS countries¹.

The BRICS is a grouping that was formed in 2009 and united Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. In 2024, it was augmented by Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The group was projected as an alternative to the G7 and champion of the “Global South”. The dominant BRICS narrative emphasizes reforming global governance and giving a more credible voice to the developing world. The BRICS nations do not in any sense constitute a unified political or ideological organization, but they do to some extent share a number of fairly common economic interests. The BRICS nations collectively cover around 30% of the Earth’s land area, comprising almost 45% of the global population and about 27% of the worldwide GDP. Its major player is China, which seeks to challenge America’s global economic dominance. At its opening summit in Johannesburg, the BRICS club was presented as a group that could exert significant influence in the international political and economic order traditionally dominated by neoliberal Western countries. In a multipolar world, the BRICS would be an example of South-South cooperation. As Song Wei, a professor from the School of International Relations and Diplomacy at Beijing Foreign Studies University, suggested: “BRICS has solidified the consensus among developing countries and has emerged as a powerful advocate for the development needs of these countries. Whether it is advancing economic collaboration or advocating fairer global governance, the BRICS has consistently championed the practical interests of developing countries”².

By August 2024, more than 30 countries, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Venezuela, and Kazakhstan, had applied to join BRICS, so its message seems to resonate widely. In the age of U.S. President Donald Trump, there is some reason to expect this trend to only increase. The value of the BRICS nations for our research is not in their likeness but in their very diversity, which mirrors in many ways that of much of the world.

This article looks at how the cooperation promised by the current narrative is reflected in language policies, where collaboration between developing countries might challenge the imperialist and colonial legacies the BRICS countries share. As Isheloke [2019] suggests in her discussion of the “BRICS Language Dilemma”, “The BRICS as an organisation is concerned with language problems <...> The paradigm shift between the lingua franca as inherited from the colonialists

¹ At the time of writing, the BRICS countries were Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

² Growing interest in BRICS membership signals consensus among Global South / Global Times. 31 July 2024: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202407/1317126.shtml> (accessed 25.08.2025).

and the more democratic choice of the language”. The BRICS has no central authority or charter but does provide networking opportunities for bureaucrats, academics, and civil activists to share ideas and initiatives in various policy areas [Kirtton, Larionova, 2022]. For individual member states, especially China and Russia, language promotion abroad is a significant aspect of their cultural diplomacy.

The role of education is emphasized by Valeeva and Prata-Linhares: “Within the BRICS nations, a collaborative spirit in the educational sphere emerges as a vital impetus for positive advancement in their academic landscapes. The journey of education evolution in these realms is distinguished by its comprehensive breath and rapid progression” [Valeeva, Prata-Linhares, 2024. P. 27]. For example, plans are in place to “facilitate the recognition of academic qualifications”³.

The BRICS nations prioritize the preservation of their own cultural identities, oppose Western cultural dominance, and advocate for national values and traditions. They promote a more inclusive global cultural system, in which non-Western nations have increased visibility and cultural impact. The analysis offered here assumes that language policies are not just about communication but are deeply reflective of the cultural ambitions of BRICS countries.

This article will offer a meta-framework for understanding language diversity and the responses to it in the BRICS countries. The focus is on language policy and planning, i.e., deliberate efforts by governments to influence the function, structure, or acquisition of languages within their jurisdiction in order to achieve specific sociopolitical, cultural, or economic objectives.

Research questions

The underlying research question for this article is how different BRICS countries respond to linguistic diversity, especially concerning state schooling. The research questions are:

1. How do BRICS countries address linguistic diversity within their state schooling systems?
2. What are the distinct approaches to language policy in education across the BRICS countries, and how do these reflect broader socio-political goals?
3. Can a meta-framework based on the diverse language policies of BRICS countries be developed to classify and understand language policies in other global contexts?

³ Mashininga K. Beyond BRICS: The Shaping of New Development Narratives / University World News (African Edition). 5 October 2023: <https://www.university-worldnews.com/post.php?story=20231002145405429> (accessed 25.08.2025).

4. How do the differences in language policy among the BRICS countries contribute to our understanding of global language policy trends and their implications for education?

The article asks whether the promise of an alternative global network is reflected in language policy. The creation of a meta-framework based on the BRICS countries will help not only better understand the peculiarities of the education received in these settings but — given the wide range of approaches in the BRICS countries — also classify and understand language policies elsewhere. The analysis offered assumes:

- language policy refers to actions, decisions, and regulations formulated by governmental institutions, designed to address language issues; and
- language planning is the systematic execution of such policies, emphasizing the methods used.

The distinction between policy and planning in the literature on language broadly reflects that in political science. An underlying presumption is that policy, as understood in both disciplines, mirrors the ability of the political élite to have their preferences reflected in practice, especially in state funded contexts. It is also assumed that, along with other symbols and cultural practices, language is a key element in national identity. Of significance to the cases examined, it is understood that membership of BRICS does not provide citizens with a sense of supranational identity, especially compared to entities like the European Union (EU). There are no common institutions or symbols that promote a unified identity among the citizens of the BRICS members.

The meta-framework proposed here juxtaposes two dichotomous variables for each of the BRICS states: ethnolinguistic diversity and dominant educational language policies. A meta-framework of this type has multiple purposes, especially in its ability to synthesize and communicate core information in a field [Partelow, 2023. P. 510]. The meta-framework offered in this article simplifies each state's intricate social and political realities, but it nevertheless provides a valuable framework for comparative study, establishing foundational principles for comprehending complex social phenomena and enhancing communication within and between disciplines. As Wickramasinghe [2006] has suggested, it facilitates "the multi-faceted nature of the knowledge... including its subjective and objective as well as tacit and explicit components" (p. 558). At the same time, no meta-framework, however useful for comparative purposes, can replace the value of single-case studies; therefore, the two sorts of analyses should be used together.

**Literature
review**

In a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center across over 20 countries, a median of 91% of respondents indicated that proficiency in their nation's predominant language is essential for being regarded as a "true national" [Pew Research Center, 2024]. Although 81% said sharing their country's customs and traditions were important, birthplace and religion were significantly less essential to national identity according to respondents.

Ruíz [1984; 1990; 2010] identifies three orientations that can be taken concerning how language policy is viewed:

- language-as-problem;
- language-as-right, and
- language-as-resource.

The issue is whether language diversity is fundamentally a problem to be overcome or a benefit to be enjoyed. The language-as-problem orientation focuses on the complications and challenges created by linguistic diversity, viewing linguistic diversity negatively. Such a perspective results in the disempowerment of individuals and groups and may promote ethnic divisiveness, conflict, and strife. The language-as-right orientation focuses on principles of social justice and on the acceptance that language rights are fundamental. Finally, the language-as-resource orientation argues that linguistic diversity is best seen as cultural capital that society should develop.

Language planning and language policy formulation and implementation are essential elements of social and educational policy, especially in the post-colonial world. Efforts are made to address the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing presence of considerable cultural and linguistic diversity. National and official language selection questions seldom avoid controversy, debate, and conflict. The post-World War II era saw a dramatic expansion in language planning efforts as many former colonies gained independence. Numerous language policies were developed in the context of the domination of a former colonial language, most often English or French. Several factors have tended to support the ongoing domination of former colonial languages, including the need for national integration, comparative costs, international communication, and the "world system" (see [Clayton, 1998]). Language policies can also reflect "élite closure", by which a small, privileged group of individuals or organizations maintain control and influence over public policies, often marginalizing less powerful groups [Wornyo, 2015]. In Indonesia, for example, the ideal of "One Nation, One People, One Language" is a core project for a nation of "hundreds of ethnic groups with neither a common racial identity, a common culture nor a common tongue to unite them" [Harper, 2013].

Although language planning efforts have tended to be top-down, they are most effective when they have significant grassroots support.

Inevitably, language planning is profoundly political and involves public decisions about language, its use, status, and development. Implementation efforts are inevitably ideological and controversial. In relatively few BRICS countries are these decisions made in a democratic context. As Ostwald et al. suggest: “Governments of ethno-linguistically diverse societies face a difficult dilemma in opting for which language to use in the education system. While allowing each ethnic group to use its own language is seen as vital for cultural preservation and increasingly as a basic human right, it may also inadvertently undermine social cohesion by contributing to de facto segregation of schools” [Ostwald, Ong, Gueorguiev, 2017. P. 89].

The typology of the language environment offered here is based on each state’s formal declaration and its practical approach. The typology in Table 1 focuses on how the political élite perceived the role of language, especially in the development of the country. National leaders may view linguistic homogeneity as an instrument for preserving sovereignty, enhancing economic connections, exerting soft power and, therefore, wish to see their perspective reflected in educational practice. On the other hand, the élite may regard the preservation of diversity as an instrument for social harmony in an ethnolinguistically divided state. The élite’s propensity to adopt one or other of these approaches may reflect wider state-building strategies, particularly in countries that have not been independent long.

Table 1

		Diversity	
		High	Low
Dominant	Monolingual	Privileged	Protective
	Plurilingual	Pluricultural	Promotive

**Research
Methodology**

By their nature, language planning and policy studies are both interdisciplinary and comparative. The key variable in the analysis offered here is governmental language policy, especially as reflected in educational policy. Each BRICS country is discussed to assess whether official policies are tolerant of diversity or encourage uniformity. It is not assumed that high linguistic diversity leads to political conflict. Still, diversity needs to be addressed in public policy as a problem, a rights issue, or a resource, particularly in education (see [Ruíz, 2010]).

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index distinguishes the political régime in the case study countries according to five key criteria: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties (see [Geissel, Kneuer, Lauth, 2016]). These metrics offer a broad perspective on the state of democracy and political régimes but further comments will be used to characterize the case study political régimes.

According to the Freedom House Index, the BRICS range from free democracies to authoritarian régimes. For instance, South Africa is ranked as “free” though, in the EIU Democracy Index, it is labeled a “flawed democracy”, reflecting institutional weaknesses and corruption. The assumption is that autocratic governments more readily convert their language preferences into policies, though success of the latter may still rely on popular acceptance.

Every one of the BRICS countries possesses a degree of linguistic diversity, although the origins, nature, and implications of that diversity vary considerably. They diverge in extent due to the number of languages present in the country, the role of the former colonial language(s) in contemporary society, the distinction between the national and official languages, and the methods of policy implementation. They also differ in the underlying ideologies that guide language planning and policies. This difference is especially evident in the educational domain, where approaches to linguistic diversity range from commitments to promoting bilingualism and multilingualism to efforts to establish and maintain a single national and official language. The different approaches are characterized as a monolingual or plurilingual norm to reflect the principal policy implementation pattern rather than the official narrative. In Table 2, the dominant approaches are juxtaposed with the ethnic and cultural diversity of each state studied as measured by the Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization (ELF) Index established by Fearon to enable comparison among the BRICS nations. ELF aims to quantify the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to different ethnic groups. The metric evaluates ethnic variety on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 signifying complete homogeneity (all individuals belong to the same group) and 1 representing maximal diversity (all individuals belong to distinct groups). In the article, low scores (e.g., 0.1 or lower) signify a predominantly homogeneous society with limited ethnolinguistic diversity. Conversely, elevated scores (e.g., 0.7 or above) indicate a state characterized by substantial ethnolinguistic diversity and fragmentation. Intermediate scores, approximately between 0.4 and 0.6, indicate modest diversity. A high score is often associated with social fragmentation, political instability, and conflict, which present challenges to the political élite. The ELF Index may not capture the full complexity and dynamics of ethnic diversity of each state, but it points to the broad ethnolinguistic pattern.

For each BRICS country, there is a substantial body of literature dealing with issues of language planning and policies, and in virtually every instance, these issues have proven to be both complex and controversial. Such controversy is especially common where language policies are concerned with the provision of education [Ferguson, 2006; Lambert, Shohamy, 2000; Tollefson, Tsui, 2004], and this is understandable, since, as Kennedy noted: “The close relationship between use of a language and political power, socioeconomic de-

velopment, national and local identity and cultural values has led to the increasing realization of the importance of language policies and planning in the life of a nation. Nowhere is this planning more crucial than in education, universally recognized as a powerful instrument of change" [Kennedy, 1983. P. iii].

**Educational
language policy
in the BRICS
nations**

Brazil became an independent country in 1825. It is "an example of a settled colony that since independence has achieved a significant status among South American nations and that has successfully adopted Portuguese as its national and dominant language supported by a strong belief in the hegemony of the standard variety" [Spolsky, 2017. Pp. 66–67]. Although most of the population speaks Portuguese as their native language, there is extensive linguistic diversity, including both indigenous and immigrant languages [Sousa, Dionísio, 2019]. The indigenous languages are endangered, with no more than 40,000 speakers mostly in the northern region [Rodrigues, 2005]. In 2002, Brazilian Sign Language (*Libras*) was recognized as the official language of the Brazilian Deaf community [Piconi, 2014]. Although the use of other languages is not forbidden by law (and some schooling does take place in different European languages), virtually all public education in Brazil takes place in the medium of Portuguese. Recently, English has been added to the curriculum as a mandatory subject at the secondary level beginning in Grade 6. However, there are "manifestations of linguistic prejudice, one against external elements and the other against supposedly inferior internal elements, pointing out to a common origin: the myth that the Portuguese language in Brazil is characterized by an astonishing unity" [Massini-Cagliari, 2004. P. 3].

In Russia, the historical tension between Russian, the lingua franca and the dominant language of the state, and the actual linguistic diversity present continues to be a social and political issue (see [Abdullayev, 2019]). This tension reflects history dating back to imperial times. The Soviet era was somewhat more complex, with various approaches toward linguistic diversity. Initially, nationality policies (in which language policies were embedded) emphasized the use and value of local languages and cultures in building socialism; later, the focus shifted to the creation of a common socialist identity fostered by the shared use of Russian as the language of the USSR [Martin, 2001].

In the Russian Federation, language policy is primarily a federal responsibility. In July 2018, the State Duma adopted legislation that made schooling in all languages other than Russian optional. While there was no reduction in the required number of hours of instruction at the federal level (the number is determined at the regional level), many speakers of other languages saw this as the renewal of the historic policy of Russification, and protests were held in several parts of the Russian Federation. In any event, all students are expected to

become literate and fluent in the Russian language. The conflict in Ukraine has accentuated the importance of the use of Russian language as a sign of national and cultural solidarity [Baranova, 2024]. As Noack notes, “promotion of language and culture has an important role to play, as Russia sees preserving, and possibly expanding, the role of the Russian language and of Russian culture in this area (the so called “near abroad”) as a guarantee of political influence” [Noack, 2021. P. 2].

In India, one of the most linguistically diverse countries on the planet, while English and Hindi both play essential roles politically, economically, and educationally, there are a substantial number of other indigenous languages spoken by significant numbers of people, many of which have some degree of official status and recognition [Bhattacharya, 2017; Groff, 2017]. There are 22 “scheduled languages” (including Hindi) which have some legal recognition⁴. In addition, many other languages, which are spoken by many people, do not currently have status as scheduled languages, including Rajasthani, Haryanvi, Bhili, Gondi, and Tulu. Finally, a few languages are identified as “classical languages”, including Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu.

In India, language policy is a shared responsibility between the central and state governments. The federal government sets broad guidelines and recognizes official languages, while states have significant authority to determine and implement language policies within their territories. This division reflects India’s linguistic diversity and the need for flexibility in managing it. The medium of instruction in government schools in India varies among Hindi, English, and various regional languages. Private schools tend to use English, while government schools tend to use Indian languages. In 2020, a National Education Policy was introduced which mandated schools to use regional languages up to Grade 5 and preferably 8 [Mahapatra, Anderson, 2022]. Prime Minister Modi declared that “education in the mother tongue is initiating a new form of justice for students”⁵. In practice, the implementation of the policy is varied with different approaches adopted by state governments [Miglani, Bika, 2024].

There is a clear north — south divide, with northern states predominantly speaking Indo-Aryan languages, such as Hindi; while southern states mostly speak Dravidian languages, such as Tamil. The conflict

⁴ The “scheduled languages” are those identified in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Inclusion on the list of scheduled languages commits the government to the ongoing development of the language (e.g., corpus development), as well as ensuring the right of any person to take civil service examinations in any of the scheduled languages (see [Bhattacharya, 2017; Laitin, 1989]).

⁵ https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/national-education-policy-will-give-due-respect-to-every-indian-language-pm-modi/article-show/102230742.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (accessed 27.08.2025)

between national and regional identity has been a persistent and divisive issue in Indian politics. Certain political parties support elevating a single national language, while others underscore the significance of safeguarding regional languages and dialects. Language politics is intricately associated with regional identity and pride, as numerous states in India are ardently protective of their linguistic history. The federal government has endeavored to elevate Hindi as the national language; nonetheless, a persistent political conflict exists about the medium of instruction in schools.

The primary responsibility for language policy in China lies with the central government. It formulates and implements policies to advance Mandarin as the official language while permitting restricted local usage of minority languages within the designated framework defined by the central authority. Local discretion concerning language is more marked in areas with significant ethnic minority populations, such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. Generally, however, the central control over language is unchallenged. For example, under the gambit of “patriotic education”, “the whittling of opportunities to engage in the Tibetan language extends from kindergarten to the university level”⁶. Nevertheless, the linguistic situation in the People’s Republic is quite complex. Although Mandarin is the widely used national language, there are hundreds of related varieties of Chinese, many of which are not mutually intelligible. Because it is non-alphabetic, written Chinese can function as a common language [Yuming, Wei, 2013]. Standard Chinese is the medium of instruction in most schools in China. In both elementary and secondary schools, ethnic language is also used for some recognized minority groups.

Turning to South Africa, it is worth mentioning the *taalstryd* (“language struggle”), which has played an important role, first as a critical element in Afrikaner nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries [Rotberg, 1987; Steyn, 1987] and later as both an instrument of apartheid and a symbol of resistance to it [Kadt de, 2006; Webb, 2006]. Ironically, “the African National Congress (ANC) <...> promoted English as the language of liberation from apartheid” [Mufwene, 2023. P. 1].

In the post-apartheid era, the adoption of 11 official languages — or rather 12, after South African Sign Language was added in 2023 (see [Reagan, 2020]) — demonstrated a solid commitment to multilingualism, as can be seen not only in the official language policy but also in the creation of the Pan South African Language Board. That commitment has mainly remained rhetorical, however, as English has increasingly come to dominate most of the significant sectors of society (see [Beukes, 2009; Orman, 2008]). The situation concerning medium of instruction policies in South Africa is complicated. Theoretically,

⁶ Miller M. China’s Legal Warfare Closes a Beloved Tibetan School / The Diplomat, no 119, October 2023: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/chinas-legal-warfare-closes-a-beloved-tibetan-school/> (accessed 27.08.2025).

students are taught in their home language up to Grade 3; after that, the medium is usually English, except in Afrikaans-medium schools. All students must also study two of the country's official languages as mandatory subjects. The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Bill, signed into law in September 2024, has the potential to significantly change the status of languages at the school level. The act re-assigns language policy from local school governing bodies to provincial education officials and changes how schools choose the language of instruction. BELA has been criticized by the Afrikaans community in particular as it is portrayed as undermining the constitutional right to mother-tongue education⁷. Critics suggest that BELA will require single-language schools to adopt dual-medium instruction.

In Egypt, the linguistic policies implemented by the central government are consistently enforced nationwide, allowing negligible space for regional diversity or independence in this domain [Serreli, 2024]. Though spoken informally in different places, local dialects of Arabic lack official recognition and promotion in public policy. Arabic is the medium of instruction in government schools in Egypt. However, English is now a foreign language in Grade 1, and other languages (especially French, German, and Russian) are studied. The Coptic community, a notable religious minority, uses a unique language in religious circumstances. Even though Arabic is the most widely spoken language, Coptic is still taught in Coptic schools and employed in religious ceremonies, demonstrating that, to some extent, different communities have different linguistic strategies. Despite the central government's significant emphasis on Arabic, minority languages such as Nubian, Siwi (a Berber dialect), and Bedouin dialects are spoken by ethnic groups in southern Egypt and the Western Desert. Nonetheless, these languages possess minimal acknowledgement in formal contexts. The presence of these languages in education, media, or public life is limited, indicating that Egypt's linguistic policies do not address regional diversity.

Iran exhibits a high degree of linguistic diversity. Persian (Farsi) is the predominant language spoken by the majority population and the designated official language of the state. In addition to Persian, Iran's languages encompass Azeri, Kurdish, and Turkmen. Furthermore, there is a multitude of indigenous languages and dialects. The linguistic geography of Iran is demarcated. Widely entrenched in historical context, the many languages spoken in Iran have significant importance in shaping the regional and ethno-national identities inside the country; "de-

⁷ One of the more significant post-apartheid changes has been in the status of Afrikaans. While Afrikaans is still one of the country's 12 official languages, its relative status has decreased significantly and there are ongoing concerns about the language rights of speakers of Afrikaans (see [Combrink, 1991; Giliomee, Schlemmer, 2001; Steyn, 1990; 1992; Webb, 2002]).

spite Iran's rich multicultural fabric, its heavily centralized educational system, [is] influenced by conservative factions" [Azizi et al., 2024].

From its inception, the contemporary Iranian state has made efforts to alter the linguistic composition of the country in favor of Persian [Mohammadpour, 2024]. All political and government communication, forms, and signage are in Persian [Mirhosseini, Miryouness Haghi, 2024]. In its pursuit of establishing a uniform "nation-state", the Iranian government has implemented several measures, including a standardized universal education system in Persian. Despite linguistic regional differences, all students in the country are considered to be Persian-speaking. Educational policies emphasize Islamic values, character and morality as well as Iranian Revolutionism [Moharami, Daneshfar, 2022]⁸. Students study English as a foreign language beginning in middle school, and other foreign languages — most notably, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, and Spanish — are also taught [Golchin, Mansouri, 2024].

Ethiopia has a long history of ethnic and cultural diversity, with many different groups coexisting for centuries. Historically, there have been times of relative ethnic harmony, particularly under rulers, who promoted a unified Ethiopian identity. However, the country is currently experiencing significant divisions along ethnolinguistic lines, reinforced by the ethnic basis of its federal structure: "Ethiopia's national unity is greatly influenced by ethnic identity. In the framework of ethnic federalism, the politicization of ethnicity has fueled ethnic divisions, resulting in uniqueness and distinctions that may impede attempts to forge a nation and shared goals" [Birhan, 2024. P. 41].

In Ethiopia, language policy is primarily a federal responsibility, although 12 regional states and two cities also play a significant role. The ongoing disputes over federal versus regional authority are all reflections of the current ethnolinguistic challenges the country faces. There are between 90 and 110 languages spoken in Ethiopia. Since the 12th century, the dominant language in Ethiopia has been Amharic. It is currently spoken by nearly 40 million people as a native language and an additional 25 million as a second language. It served as the sole official language of Ethiopia until the 1995 Constitution granted all Ethiopians the right to use their native language in primary education, as well as giving other languages official status in different parts of the country. Until 2020, Amharic remained the only working language in Ethiopia at the national level, but today, there are five official working languages: Afar, Amharic, Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya [Yohannes, 2021]. At primary school, Amharic, Oromo, and other indigenous languages are used as media of instruction. English has become the language medium at the secondary level (and in universities).

⁸ It is important to note that several scholars have suggested a fundamental tension with respect to the teaching and learning of English in Muslim societies (see [Dewi, 2012; Karmani, 2005a; 2005b; Karmani, Pennycook, 2005; Mohd-Asraf, 2005; Rahman, 2005; Solloway, 2017, 2018]).

In Saudi Arabia, governance is highly centralized under the monarchy, with regional governors directly appointed by the king. The country is divided into 13 administrative regions, but these regions do not have autonomous powers. The Ministry of Education controls the entire educational system, and schools have little autonomy. The vast majority of the population speak Arabic, the official national language. As Almesaar [2024] asserts, “Islam has a place in the Saudi future as long as it is moderate and non-extreme; the preservation of Saudi culture will rely heavily on the preservation of Arabic language, and it will be a carrier of national identity”.

Nevertheless, in 2021, the Ministry of Education introduced English language instruction starting from the first grade of primary school. Under previous policies, English was typically introduced later in the curriculum. The change was part of a process initiated in *Vision 2030*, a roadmap to the Kingdom’s economic development, introduced in 2016. It aimed to reduce the country’s dependence on oil, diversifying its economy, and developing sectors including education.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federation of seven emirates with a population of about 10 million, is “one of the most multicultural and multilingual countries in the world” [Coelho, Khalil, Shankar, 2022. P. 670]. Only about 12% are Emirati citizens, with the remainder comprising expatriates. While the official language is Arabic, English is widely used, and many languages are also spoken [Siemund, Al-Issa, Leimgruber, 2021]. Government schools are Arabic-medium, with all students studying English throughout their schooling. While “there are concerns around <...> Arabic domain loss, and effects on identity and belonging”, the government emphasizes a policy of inclusion towards the expatriate communities [Hopkyns, 2024].

Discussion What we have shown in this article, and what is reflected in the meta-framework, is that the BRIC countries’ approaches to linguistic diversity range from structured accommodation in South Africa and India to an emphatic promotion of state languages in Russia, Brazil, and China. Saudi Arabia also prioritizes the core language but increasingly recognizes English as globally significant. Further, in each state the approach to language reflects broader goals, such as assimilation, political integration, or economic development. This latter aim is particularly evident in Saudi Arabia but also influences linguistic education in India and South Africa. Similar recognition of global economic realities can be seen in other contexts, but the BRICS states collectively aspire to a new world order, so their approach to education is instructive for economically developing countries in particular. In this article, we have presented a meta-framework based on the diverse language policies of BRICS countries that can, indeed, be utilized to classify and understand language policies in other global contexts. Based on the

meta-framework, it appears that the global trend in language policies, at least as demonstrated by the BRICS nations, may be seen as encouraging the local and facilitating the global.

Conclusion Language planning and language policies in general, and in the educational domain in particular, serve a variety of different ends. Language can serve as a tool for empowering groups and individuals, for creating and strengthening national bonds and ties, and for maximizing educational and economic development, but it can also be used to maintain and perpetuate oppression, social class discrimination, or social and educational inequity. Language planning efforts, if they are to be defensible, must entail the active involvement and participation of those for whom they are intended. Only when emerging in such a context can language planning efforts contribute to the creation of more just, humane, and legitimate social and educational policies. As Tollefson argued, “the foundation for rights is *power* and <...> constant *struggle* is necessary to sustain language rights” [Tollefson, 1991. P. 167] (emphasis in original).

The diverse language policies in education among BRICS nations are influenced by their unique political, demographic, and ethnic environments. These distinctions illustrate the intricacies of each nation's internal dynamics and present diverse options that could facilitate effective language policies. As BRICS persists in tackling systemic disparities, language policy will remain a pivotal emphasis, underscoring the necessity for adaptable and inclusive solutions amid worldwide power and influence transitions. The BRICS nations are deliberately collaborating in the face of changing global paradigms by tackling systemic inequalities and promoting the concept of an alternative global order. However, their approaches to language policy, particularly in educational institutions, continue to be varied. These variations stem largely from the political and ethnic attributes of each state.

In this article, we have provided a meta-framework for analyzing the different language policies employed by the BRICS countries to address the challenges posed by the presence of linguistic diversity in society. We believe that this meta-framework has a broader utility as well, and that it could be used more generally in the development, implementation, analysis, and evaluation of language planning efforts and specific language policies in other settings. Unitary states with distinct center/periphery levels of development may also display deep linguistic political divisions. Language becomes politically contentious when it intersects with political cleavages based on ethnicity, class, regionalism, and historical inequity. Conversely, language tends to be less controversial when a political system acknowledges, values, and safeguards linguistic diversity. There is what May [2008. P. 15] has called an “often-difficult balancing act between maintaining cohesion on the one hand and

recognising pluralism on the other within modern nation-states”, a balancing act that Bullivant [1981] described as “the pluralist dilemma”, and which is in one way or another manifested in virtually every case explored here. It is only by acknowledging this “pluralist dilemma” — the reconciliation of “the diverse political claims of constituent groups and individuals in a pluralistic society with the claims of the nation-state as a whole” [Bullivant, 1981. P. x] that the challenges of linguistic diversity can be addressed in different societies. We believe that the meta-framework proposed here may be useful in helping to accomplish this.

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