

## **Optimising diverse linguistic capital through translanguaging in a large humanities course**

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### ***Abstract***

*Translanguaging is preferred as a non-deficit pedagogical approach towards tackling a linguistic access issue for diverse students by tapping into their linguistic capital and giving them a chance to be represented by bringing their own knowledge and full linguistic repertoire into their learning space. In the context of South Africa, large classes tend to have diverse language profiles, and adopting translanguaging strategies is a useful approach to enhance student learning, engagement, and sense of belonging. The focus of the paper is to share a good practice example of the use of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy to optimize linguistic capital in a large humanities course - Text in the Humanities. The learning outcome for this large course is for students to have a better understanding of reading and producing texts in the humanities and utilizing translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy to enhance student learning experiences.*

**Keywords:** *translanguaging; pedagogical translanguaging; large classes*

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## **1. Introduction**

In this paper, we approach translanguaging from the field of multilingualism research, as an umbrella term for various means of incorporating the entire linguistic repertoire of an individual language user to achieve communicative goals in varied communicative contexts and modalities (García 2012). In the context of South Africa, large classes tend to have students with diverse language profiles, as well as a range of other differences along the lines of race, culture, ethnicity, nationality, historical heritage, ideological perspectives, disability, geographic location, etc. Translanguaging in these contexts is therefore a useful approach to enhance student learning, engagement, and sense of belonging through valuing their linguistic, intellectual and cultural capital. The focus of the paper is to share a good practice example of the use of translanguaging pedagogy as a strategy in a large humanities course - Text in the Humanities to optimize linguistic capital, and to a lesser extent, the intellectual and cultural capital nested in the languages students speak.

## **2. Description of the Teaching/Learning Context**

The DOH1010S Text in Humanities course is a first-year undergraduate course offered to between 95-110 BA/BSocSci students in the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Humanities Extended Degree Programme. The purpose of the extended programme is to redress historical inequalities by offering government-designated demographic groups, who enter the faculty with lower entrance points, access to a four-year programme rather than the standard three-year programme. The additional year allows students to take a lighter academic load, while receiving supplementary support in the form of introductory courses, plus tutorials and psychosocial support, all of which is geared towards enhancing student success and throughput (Hurst & Mona, 2017, p. 133).

The primary learning objective of the Text in Humanities course is to assist students with reading and producing Texts in the Humanities. The course scaffolds students in the critical analysis of a range of humanities texts (visual, written, and auditory), develop critical argument and produce well-written, well-argued essays (Hurst & Mona, 2017, p. 134).

The course is delivered in a blended mode, with in-person/online lectures, lab sessions, small-group tutorials, and online activities and assessments. Students were required to attend two in-person lectures, one lab session (to complete online activities & assignments) and one in-person/online small-group tutorial, making up a total of four contact hours per week, over 13 weeks. Students were assessed using a continuous assessment model, which comprised four key assignments (80%), and two online tests (10%). They were also graded for their participation and engagement in online course activities (10%). The four main

assessments included: Multimodal analysis (worksheet 20%); Collection of texts (corpus 20%); Analysis of texts (worksheet 20%); and Critical analysis of texts (essay 20%). Support for assessment was provided in small-group tutorials, by course tutors.

The teaching team comprised of one academic lecturer who convened the course, and managed the online learning platform and engagements, two academics who were responsible for in-person teaching and lab facilitation, and five tutors (who are all Post Graduate Humanities Students at MA or PhD level) who facilitated small group tutorials. Tutors were responsible for grading assignments (guided by a rubric) and providing individual feedback, while lecturers would moderate grades across the course and use this to provide general feedback in lectures and labs to maintain continuity.

### **3. Literature Review**

A brief review of the literature generated an analysis of the characteristics of translanguaging as a socially just pedagogical approach for enhancing student engagement and representation in the context of South African post-secondary education. Fovet (2022) contextualises the challenges of implementing socially just pedagogies, particularly in large classroom settings. He argues that even though postsecondary institutions' top priorities right now are equity, diversity, and inclusion because of significant societal movements such as the #MeToo movement, the conversation on social justice is frequently placed in parentheses when revenue, financial sustainability, and admissions growth are prioritized. Pursuing these in large class settings is considered as difficult since it is assumed that including students from different backgrounds requires specific attention and individualised help, which large class lecturers are frequently unable to provide (Fovet, 2022).

When making a case for a socially just pedagogical approach, in this instance, translanguaging, Hurst and Mona (2017) argue that an approach to social justice first identifies obstacles to students' learning outcomes and then employs equitable teaching and assessment methods. A socially just pedagogical framework should not adversely affect students through prejudice based on gender, language, culture, race, religion, or disability (or socioeconomic position and geographic location).

Similarly, Solorza (2019) when explaining the value and descriptive understanding of translanguaging contends that translanguaging as an approach teaches us that the various ways a student uses languages both inside and outside of school are all part of a single, dynamic linguistic system. To truly respect a student, we must define all of their language activities as resources.

For the purposes of this paper, the definition of translanguaging is drawn from these two scholars who have located translanguaging as not a mechanical concept of bilingual flexibility, but as reconstructive and transformational pedagogy that seeks to establish a socially just higher education context in South Africa.

### **Translanguaging: A Pedagogy for a Socially Just Higher Education Landscape**

Pedagogical translanguaging”, according to Cenoz and Gorter who write from a schooling context:

“is learner centred and endorses the support and development of all the languages used by learners. It fosters the development of metalinguistic awareness by softening boundaries between languages when learning languages and content” (2021, p. 24).

Further, translanguaging, which involves the integrated use of multiple languages in teaching and learning, can be a powerful pedagogical practice that challenges monolingual ideologies to promote inclusivity and equity in education. For example, Hurst and Mona (2017, p. 129) writing about their experience at UCT contend that translanguaging has potential to challenge the dominance of English in South African higher education. They further problematize the monolingual use of English in the multilingual South African society and argue that it tends to reproduce notions of the superiority of Western knowledge and language, which “ is inappropriate within a highly multilingual African university.” (Hurst & Mona, 2017, p. 130)

There are potential benefits of pedagogical translanguaging in education. For instance, using students' native languages alongside the target language can enhance comprehension, engagement, and academic achievement. Pedagogical translanguaging can also support the development of metalinguistic awareness and positive language attitudes (Prilutskaya, 2021). Addressing social justice challenges in the context of higher education is one potential spin-off in the utilisation of translanguaging as a pedagogy. For example, translanguaging can deliberately contribute to social justice by challenging dominant monolingual ideologies and empowering individuals who have been marginalised due to their language backgrounds (García & Leiva, 2014).

García and Leiva (2014) propose three interrelated theoretical dimensions of translanguaging for social justice: language-as-resource, language-as-social-practice, and language-as-right. First, the language-as-resource dimension emphasises the recognition and valuing of individuals' linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging views all languages and language varieties as valuable resources that can be drawn upon to enhance communication and learning. By acknowledging and affirming the diverse linguistic backgrounds of

students, educators can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Second, the language-as-social-practice dimension highlights the social nature of language and the importance of context in language use. Translanguaging recognizes that language is not simply a cognitive tool but a social practice embedded in specific sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting the language practices and identities of multilingual individuals. Finally, the language-as-right dimension emphasizes the right of individuals to use their full linguistic repertoires in educational contexts. Translanguaging advocates for the promotion of linguistic human rights, by challenging language policies that restrict or devalue certain languages. It recognizes that language is closely linked to identity and that denying individuals the right to use their languages can perpetuate social inequalities (García & Leiva, 2014).

Curriculum materials are often monolingual, but students in the class are not always, therefore promoting cross-linguistic comprehension is exceptionally crucial. When no linguistic alternatives are accessible, information is highly restricted for new learners of the dominant language or students of academic language (CAST, 2018). Additionally, Solorza (2019) suggests that translanguaging allows students to create their own linguistic identities and can foster a sense of belonging in the classroom. This is especially important for students who may feel marginalized or disconnected from their school environment. Overall, Solorza (2019) argues that "translanguaging" is a valuable approach to bilingual education that can help students build strong language skills, create a sense of belonging, and achieve academic success.

### **Pedagogical translanguaging as a strategy throughout the entire curriculum**

Although translanguaging is often thought of as a pedagogic strategy that takes place during the teaching phase, it is actually part of the entire curriculum development, course design, materials development, learning, teaching, assessing and evaluating process. Following the enabling accessible blended learning for equity (ENABLE) framework developed by the Redesigning Blended Courses project at UCT, it can be seen how translanguaging commences long before the teaching starts, as the conceptualisation of the course needs to anticipate how translanguaging is going to be operationalised throughout the process. The ENABLE framework draws upon traditional learning design processes (Branch 2009) of planning, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating six key elements in curriculum development and course design (i.e., Outcomes, Materials and Technology development and selection, Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Evaluation). At the same time, it endeavours to embed the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST<sup>1</sup>) to make learning accessible to all, irrespective of language, culture, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, age, ability, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

*Optimising diverse linguistic capital through translanguaging in a humanities course*

During the Outcomes phase, lecturers are recommended to create personas of the prior cohort of students or survey the current cohort to, amongst others, ascertain what home languages they speak and how confident they are in understanding, reading, speaking, and writing in the predominant language of teaching and learning. This can assist lecturers to make more informed and proactive choices about the resources upon which they draw as there are likely to be slightly different ideological perspectives on the topic embedded in the various languages spoken. Lecturers can then select tutors that are able to converse in languages with which the students are most familiar and approach the topic at hand from multiple perspectives.

During the Materials and Technology phase, which includes the development of custom-designed materials such as the course website on the institutional learning management system, the course outline, possibly frequently asked questions (FAQ) and glossary, lecturers or tutors can provide translations for key texts in the languages with which students are most comfortable. Tutors and/or students can also be involved in assisting lecturers to use various technological tools such as Google Translate or AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT or Bing, to generate and check translations. The same processes can be followed for creating learning materials (e.g. guidelines, course manuals, teaching materials such as lecture notes, slide presentations, as well as assessment briefs and rubrics). Proactively designing materials that are accessible to students with some challenge physically, sensorial, intellectually, etc., as well as providing multi-perspectival, multilingual materials and selecting open educational resources wherever possible, can strongly promote accessibility, affordability, equity, inclusive materials for diverse students in large classes.

During the Learning phase students can be encouraged to work in language affinity groups, at least initially, to assist them to express themselves as easily as possible with their peers. Active learning is a useful strategy to encourage student engagement especially in large classes (Hornsby 2020). Students can undertake activities in-person or online in the language of their choice and/or read related resources in the language of their choice and contribute their insights back to the class. Students can also be invited to clarify uncertainties in the language of their choice as there is likely to be someone in the large class who can translate for the lecturer.

During the Teaching phase, depending upon the lecturers' linguistic competence and fluidity, they can translate key terms and concepts or draw upon tutors and/or students in the class to do so. To optimise translanguaging students will need to feel comfortable. Pedagogic strategies such as building a "Community of Trust" (Mackey, 2020), where lecturers consciously create a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable engaging in open and respectful discussions can be adopted. Other useful pedagogic strategies include "Culturally relevant teaching" (Ladson-Billings,

1995), “Culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2002) or “Culturally sustaining pedagogy” (Paris, 2012) which all seek to maintain and nurture students' cultural and linguistic identities. Lecturers can also structure learning activities that deliberately maximise multiple perspectives by having students read and report their findings based on existing resources in the language of their choice. Tutorial sessions can be translanguaging spaces where language usage is dependent upon the fluency of the tutors and the comfort of the students. de Matos Ala (2022), writing about large classes in a global south context, suggests that tutorials provided a more intimate learning space by eliminating the intimidation that many students felt in speaking in front of a large class.

During the Assessment phase, students can be offered options for assignment submission. Depending upon the lecturers and tutors' linguistic breadth and depth, assignment tasks can be explained in a selection of languages so that the task is well understood even if the students need to write the assignment in the dominant language. More frequent low stakes assessment can assist students to succeed and cheat less (Holmes, 2018), for example quizzes in large classes. de Matos Ala, (2022) mentions how students were able to present their knowledge in alternative formats during tutorials and given the opportunity to revise. Ideally feedback on more high-stakes assignments, especially formative assessment where the student can still make changes, can be conducted in a language that the student understands best so that informed revision for summative purposes is maximised.

During the Evaluation phase, mid-course evaluations can be written in more than one language to optimise the students' opportunity to provide incisive feedback for changes to the second half of the course. End-of-course evaluations can employ the same strategy to optimise the adaptations recommended for another iteration of the course.

#### **4. Empirical Methodology/Data**

This paper draws on the experience of the academic teaching team involved in the designing and teaching of the Text in Humanities course. Through a reflective and reflexive approach, it explores the impact of using translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy in large classes to optimize linguistic diversity and enhance student engagement. As a reflective prompt, the authors used the in-development ENABLE framework from the RBC project to highlight translanguaging strategies throughout the entire process of course planning, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. To this end a table summarizing the key steps of the ENABLE framework were mapped against the activities in the Text in Humanities course (Appendix A).

## **5. Analysis of/Reflection on/Implications for Practice**

As a large introductory course in the extended programme, the Text in Humanities course has a wide range of student language profiles. Even though all the students speak English (a high school pass in English is a requirement for entry to UCT), there is a broad range of proficiency (Hurst & Mona, 2017, p. 133), and because of this most students informally utilize translanguaging in their own capacity, to access and negotiate meaning in their various course engagements. This diverse language profile (of most of the students) therefore necessitated a more responsive and inclusive pedagogical approach that acknowledges and takes into consideration the various forms of capital students bring to the classroom, such as their linguistic capital and recognizes it as a valuable learning resource that should be prioritized, particularly in large classes where active student engagement, sense of belonging and inclusivity can sometime prove difficult. In line with this, from 2015 onwards, the course, and its subsequent iterations, began to intentionally incorporate translanguaging pedagogies in lectures, tutorials, online forums, and assessments.

Because of its multilingualism intent, the course previously catered for three languages which included English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa. Following English, Afrikaans was the largest second language profile and then Xhosa and after that probably Zulu or Sesotho. Another contextual consideration is the location of UCT, with Xhosa as the predominant language in the Western Cape. Additionally, through research into the students' multilingual backgrounds as well as the data based on students' own reflections on their multilingualism, it was established that most Afrikaans speakers were bilingual, and English was at first language level of competency. Xhosa was then prioritised as it also provided access to students who speak other Nguni languages such Zulu, Ndebele and Swazi (Redesigning Blended Courses, 2021, p. 43).

One of the ways in which teaching about texts in the Texts in the Humanities course aims to enhance student engagement with the course content, is through linguistic inclusivity. For example, the course offers isiXhosa translations to some of the main course elements such as theme overview, unit level intended learning outcomes and unit learning activities. The translations were contributed by one of the course tutors. Offering translation not only optimizes student linguistic diversity but also that of the teaching team, most notably its tutors' who play an important role in facilitating translanguaging pedagogies and providing student teaching and learning support. This also reinforces the important role collaboration plays in adopting effective translanguaging pedagogies. Collaboration is needed not only to effectively manage large course cohorts, but is of value between tutors, lecturers, and students in creating and sustaining inclusive and accessible classrooms.



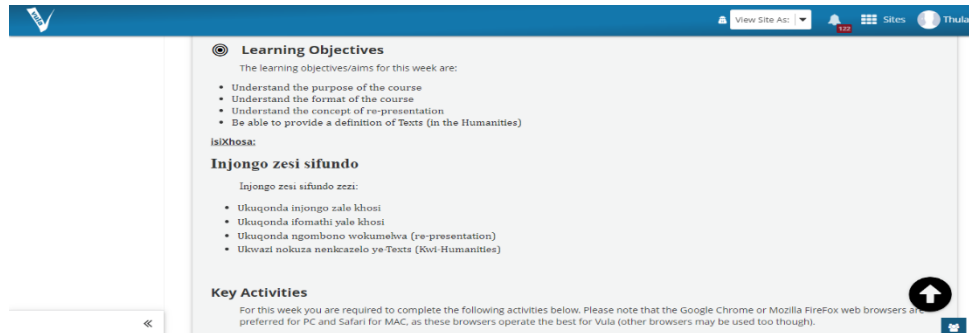


Figure 1. A screenshot example from the Text in the Humanities course site

Another example of effective translanguaging pedagogies in a large course can be seen in the weekly computer lab sessions, which required students to complete various online tasks using the courses' online learning platform (Vula). These online activities included a range of learning tasks, such as reading and responding to a text or video clip, undertaking a visual, discourse or genre analysis, and engaging in an online class discussion by contributing and responding to a discussion forum. Although tasks and instructions for these activities were set in English, students could utilize any language they preferred, and were encouraged to do so.

For example, in the first week of the course, students were required to watch a YouTube video clip of the famous cultural theorist Stuart Hall discussing the concept of 'Re-presentation' in texts and media. Students were then asked to provide their own definition of re-presentation in another language other than English, and to engage with other students' definitions. To encourage full participation and translanguaging play, those who only spoke English, were advised to use Google Translate (see screenshot below) to partake in the discussion and respond to other students' contributions.

This exercise saw students leverage their linguistic repertoire to negotiate understandings across languages and co-construct meaning, whilst strengthening their own comprehension and understanding of complex course concepts in a large class setting. Furthermore, the activity allowed for a transformation of power, as it saw students disrupt the monolingual ideologies and practices of the academy and affirm their own identities as knowledge contributors and producers.



*Figure 2. An example of an online discussion task from Text in the Humanities course site*

Weekly Tutorials was another learning area where translanguaging pedagogies were actively utilized. The course tutorial sessions are intended to be small-group teaching and learning spaces which allow for in-depth discussion, group work and assessment support (Hurst & Mona, 2017: 139). In line with this, a key component of the course and its pedagogical approach is the employment and training of multilingual tutors to facilitate translingual tutorials; hold discussions (in-person and online), provide individual consultations, as well as marking and providing feedback on assignment submissions. While most tutors indicated that students often used English as the “base language”, the opportunity to engage in translingual and multilingual activity when discussing course concepts and readings often resulted in more inclusive and engaging discussions and allowed the tutor to learn from and alongside the students (Hurst & Mona, 2017; Redesigning Blended Courses, 2021, p. 27).

Overall, the end-of-course evaluations and feedback indicated that most students appreciated the inclusion of African/other languages in the course, especially in tutorial spaces which are more amenable to explaining troublesome concepts through multilingual exchanges. The flexibility to use translanguaging and potentially multilingualism not only in small-group tutorial spaces, but also embedding it in multiple forms of formal course

*Nicole Isaacs, Sibusiso Maneli, Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams*

engagements and assessments, allowed students to tap into their own cultural and linguistic capital - and essentially bring their authentic voice into the academic space. This inclusiveness not only enhanced engagement through connecting linguistic repertoire, but also affirmed their identity and voice in a space where one can often feel intimidated, alienated and given large class numbers, overlooked. This pedagogical strategy therefore provides space for students to feel both seen and heard, demonstrating its effectiveness for large class teaching, learning and engagement.

Considerations for future development of the course include. using texts in languages other than English for analysis and response, surveying and using the current cohort language profiles to inform learning design choices instead of only using prior years, strengthening team collaboration through investment in on-going tutor training and development to create learning materials and resources repositories (ie. referencing and plagiarism guide, or FAQs) informed by translanguaging pedagogies and the ENABLE framework. Specifically, the translation of lecture video recording transcripts, as well as that of the course evaluation would include the opportunity for the student to read and respond in their language of choice. Recommendations for the RBC team developing the ENABLE framework is to better articulate the value of translanguaging in large courses in co-creation, prompt lecturers to consider appointing multilingual tutors and highlight the knowledge-building value for tutors themselves.

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*Nicole Isaacs, Sibusiso Maneli, Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams*

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## Appendix A

### ENABLE Framework recommendations and Humanities case study translanguaging activities

Selected recommendations from the ENABLE Framework		Humanities case study translanguaging activities
<b>Conceptualising</b>	<p><b>Student profile</b> Create personas of the prior cohort of students or survey the current cohort to ascertain what home languages they speak and how confident they are in understanding, reading, speaking, and writing in the predominant language of teaching and learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Language proficiencies of students based on prior cohorts of students to decide upon English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa</li> <li>● Research into the students' multilingual backgrounds</li> <li>● Students' own reflections on their multilingualism</li> </ul>
<b>Materials &amp; Technology</b>	<p><b>Translations for custom-designed materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lecturers or tutors can provide translations for custom-designed materials such as the course website on the institutional learning management system, the course outline, frequently asked questions (FAQ), course glossary, course guidelines, course manuals, lecture notes, slide presentations, assessment briefs, rubrics, etc.</li> <li>● Tutors and/or students can also be involved in assisting lecturers to use various technological tools such as Google Translate or AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT or Bing, to generate and check translations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● isiXhosa translations of some of the main course elements such as theme overview, unit level intended learning outcomes and unit learning activities</li> </ul>
<b>Learning</b>	<p><b>Listening &amp; watching</b> Students can undertake activities in-person or online in the language of their choice.</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> Students can work in language affinity groups initially to assist them to express themselves as easily as possible with their peers</p> <p><b>Reading &amp; responding</b> Students can read related resources in the language of their choice and contribute their insights back to the class</p> <p><b>Writing</b></p>	<p>Learning tasks could be undertaken students' preferred language, and they were encouraged to do so. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read and respond to a text or video clip, and undertake a visual, discourse or genre analysis.</li> <li>● Watch a YouTube video clip provide their own definition of re-presentation in another language other than English</li> <li>● Advised to use Google Translate to contribute to discussions</li> <li>● Contribute and respond to a discussion forum</li> </ul>

	Students can also be invited to contribute to the class glossary and translate key concepts	Co-creation of meaning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students leverage their linguistic repertoire to negotiate understandings across languages and co-construct meaning</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching</b>	<p><b>Pedagogic strategies</b> Lecturers can deliberately enact pedagogic strategies such as building a "Community of Trust" (Mackey, 2020) where students are comfortable to engage in open and respectful discussions; employing "Culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) or "Culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2002) which seeks to maintain and nurture students' cultural and linguistic identities.</p> <p><b>Tutor role</b> Tutorial sessions can be translanguaging spaces where language usage is dependent upon the fluency of the tutors and the comfort of the students.</p>	<p>Tutors play an important role in facilitating translanguaging pedagogies and providing student teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Student and tutor engagement in translingual and multilingual activity when discussing course concepts and readings often resulted in more inclusive and engaging discussions, and also allowed the tutor to learn from and alongside the students.</p>
<b>Assessing</b>	<p><b>Assessment briefing</b> Assignment tasks can be explained in a selection of languages so that the task is well understood</p> <p><b>Feedback on assignments</b> Assignment feedback or verbal translanguaging of feedback, especially formative feedback, can be conducted in a language that the student understands best to optimise informed revision</p>	<p>Multilingual tutors mark and provide feedback on assignment submissions</p>
<b>Evaluating</b>	<p><b>Informal course evaluations</b> Mid-course evaluations written in more than one language can optimise the students' opportunity to provide incisive feedback for changes to the second half of the course</p> <p><b>Formal evaluations</b> End-of-course evaluations written in more than one language can optimise the students' opportunity to provide incisive feedback for changes for the next student cohort</p>	<p>End-of-course and feedback reported that most students appreciated the inclusion of African/other languages in the course, especially in tutorial spaces</p>