

## **The University of Malta's Linguistic Landscape: Policy, Practice and Education**

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**Abstract:** This study set out to explore the linguistic landscape of the University of Malta (UM), in order to find out: (i) To what extent, and in what ways, the linguistic landscape of the Msida campus is aligned with the official language policy of the UM, and (ii) What is the composition of the LL that future teachers are exposed to while studying at UM. The analysis is based on a data set of 2956 photographs consisting of advertisements, notices and other signs, taken inside and outside most of the buildings and open spaces at the Msida campus. The data is presented according to (i) its physical location, (ii) the visibility of languages, and (iii) the type of signs. The results show that although the UM's language policy and guidelines promote the Maltese language, an average of 92% of the signs are in English, irrespective of whether they are official or unofficial. The paper ends with recommendations so that the LL on campus can provide a more culturally and linguistically appropriate milieu especially one that prepares student teachers for a teaching career in a multilingual and multicultural school environment.

**Keywords:** University of Malta, Linguistic Landscape, University Language Policy, Teacher Education

### **Introduction: Linguistic landscape studies**

The term *linguistic landscape* was originally employed by Landry and Bourhis (1997) to refer to the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region. Jaworski and Thurlow (2010, p. 2) define linguistic landscape (LL) as “any (public) space with a visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning-

making”. Specific domains of LL research look at, for example, Cityscapes (Mondada, 2000), Soundscapes (Olszewska, 2020; Backhaus, 2015), Skinscapes (Peck & Stroud, 2015) and Schoolscapes (Szabó, 2015; Laihonen & Tódor, 2017).

Linguistic landscapes are semiotic because they relay messages that are both symbolic and informative. Signs reveal much about the symbolic value of the language/s used on them (Hélot et al., 2012; Niedt & Seals, 2021; Krompák et al., 2022). Furthermore, in institutional settings there is a carryover effect of the LL on language behaviour (Melo-Pfeifer, 2023; Gorter & Krompák, 2024). It is thus interesting to observe the LL of a particular area such as a university campus, and examine its relationship to explicit or implicit language policies and language use (Abongdia & Foncha, 2014; Kadenge, 2015). In fact, a number of studies have brought to light the relationship between the LL and language use by the persons inhabiting the space (Biró, 2016; Harris et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2024).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring the relevance of the LL in education. This is done in two ways: on the one hand the LL is examined in order to unravel the hidden curriculum of an educational institution, and on the other hand the LL is utilised as a language teaching and learning tool. Furthermore, the LL is recognised as a useful tool in teacher education at university level. For instance, Hancock (2012) investigated student-teachers’ response to the LL of Edinburgh. The student-teachers’ reactions to the LL sometimes signalled a disregard toward cultural diversity, and at other times showed evidence of acceptance and respect. On the whole, that activity contributed to raise the student-teachers’ awareness of a multilingual setting around them, a reality they had not been trained to acknowledge. Andrade et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative case study with student-teachers during their initial teacher education studies at the University of Aveiro in Portugal. The LL as an educational resource brought to light an understanding of the student-teachers’ professional knowledge in three dimensions: pedagogical, ethical and linguistic. This case study showed that the LL can be not only a resource, but also a didactic instrument about diversity in education and an “opportunity for collaboration in the construction of didactic knowledge” (Andrade et al., 2023, p. 215).

In parallel, Camilleri Grima (2020) illustrated how the LL was used during a Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) course in Malta. It helped student-teachers to, first of all, notice the LL, then take cognizance of its relevance in education, and finally to create pedagogical material for language teaching. Following this, Camilleri Grima (2024) described a project carried out with initial and in-service teachers whereby the LL formed the basis for the creation of instructional materials for autonomous learning. The materials were implemented at both primary, middle and secondary school levels, and they proved very beneficial. The teachers themselves commented on how the LL helped them to develop professionally. The learners, including some academically challenged ones, worked without a Learning Support Educator during the LL-based activities and developed a number of literacy skills (Camilleri Grima, 2024). Another study involved a comparative analysis of schoolscapes in Malta and Switzerland and proposed a number of initiatives for raising teachers' awareness about the implications of the LL for learning (Krompák et al., 2020). Among significant factors mentioned there are: the school architecture; the positioning of display boards; the use of language(s), font size and colour on charts; and top-down and bottom-up signs in classrooms and school corridors (Krompák et al., 2020).

In this paper we focus on the LL at the University of Malta (UM). We start by reviewing some key studies dealing with the educational turn in LL studies as a context for our research. We compare the UM's language policy to the LL of the Faculties relevant to teacher education. We conclude by putting forward recommendations for the improvement of the LL so that it provides a better plurilingual and multicultural experience. We argue that LL should also reflect the composition of the staff and student body, and the written policy of the UM. Above all, the current LL at UM is challenged because it is accelerating the hegemony of English to the detriment of Maltese, the national language. Furthermore, the UM needs to reflect more deeply on its own identity, and its social, cultural and educational role as an institution meant to foster a critical engagement with power structures.

### **The educational turn in linguistic landscape studies**

The examination of the LL in an educational environment is known as *schoolscape*. Brown (2012, p. 282) defined the linguistic schoolscape as, “a

school-based environment where place and text, both written (graphic) and oral, constitute, reproduce, and transform language ideologies". The following three examples serve as illustrations.

In New Zealand, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is valued as a potential driver for the revitalisation of the Māori language. The physical space in one ECE centre studied by Harris et al. (2022) totally reflected the Māori culture. This was achieved by incorporating a garden for food gathering (*mahinga kai*), territorial symbols including written prayers in Māori on the walls, and a Māori performance stage. Such features supported the children's linguistic development, and as Harris et al. (2022, p. 71) explain, in such a setting "the use of Māori was expected, normalised and supported, not only through the visible language, but also through the architecture, cultural symbols, traditional materials, landscape design and processes". Strazser & Kroik (2022) describe a similar context in Saami educational spaces in Sweden. The interior and exterior of the preschool they studied included numerous Saami artefacts such as handicrafts, books, CDs, and Saami toys like reindeer soft toys, motifs, symbols and goods. However, in that case, unlike the Māori one, although the schoolscape was replete with Saami culture, the lack of spoken Saami for everyday communication was an obstacle to the revitalisation process (Strazser & Kroik, 2022). In the USA, in order to maximise the use of the target language within a language institution, in Minnesota a Language Village was created as a residential camp where German was taught at elementary and secondary levels (Quam & Hamilton, 2021). The physical environment in this *Waldsee* Language Village was completely modelled on a European German landscape. It consisted of an assortment of German notices including poetry plaques, directions to the learners around the buildings, questions addressed to the learners about their life and experiences, announcements, grammar rules, and information about daily routines. The latter included the use of Euro coins, and how to open a bank account in Germany. Quam & Hamilton (2021) conclude that the use of authentic language in an environment beyond the classroom, in a decentralized landscape of learning, proved the potential of the LL in language learning.

Like schoolscape studies, university LL studies are mainly aimed at unpacking language ideologies and inequalities (Keles et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2023; Maseko & Siziba, 2023). Motschenbacher (2024) investigated the LL of HVL University in Bergen, Norway, and found a significant discrepancy between the stated

language policy and its implementation in the LL. HVL University marketed itself as international in terms of research and the recruitment of staff and students, and this was emphasised in its language policy. However, on its web-page the researchers found no menu option in English and only a small percentage of signs on campus were in English, namely 2.5% of top-down signs, 5.8% of bottom-up signs. Twenty-three percent of the other signs included some English or were bilingual in English and Nynorsk or English and Bokmål.

Several other studies of university environments focused on the incongruency between stated language policies and the LL. Wu et al. (2023) explored the LL of three universities in an ethnic minority region in China. They found that the majority of signs with an informative function were bilingual in English and Chinese. The local minority language Zhuang only appeared on signs that were trilingual. Zhuang always appeared at the bottom of the sign, and its font was smaller and less attractive. This indicated a hierarchical preference for the dominant languages and a weak environment for Zhuang vitality (Wu et al., 2023). Similarly, Bernardo (2024) took a critical look at the oldest university in the Phillipines to analyse the language ideology projected in the LL. He concluded that the signs on campus were promoting English while ‘silencing’ the local languages due to their absence from the visual landscape.

Maseko & Siziba (2023) investigated the website of a South African university whose policy promoted multilingualism in the four local languages. Maseko & Siziba (2023) considered the university website as an ideal space for the implementation of a top-down policy that was meant to give space to all the four languages. However, they found that the website was dominated by English and Afrikaans. They concluded that the unequal use and promotion of the other two languages was a devaluation of indigenous culture in the cyberspace. Likewise, in Wits University, Kadenge (2015) found that twelve years after the written policy had been issued, the University was still functioning in English, despite the fact that one of the University’s stated aims was to elevate the Sesotho language as a medium of instruction alongside English, and as a field of academic study and research.

Keles et al. (2020) conducted a case study of a Turkish university which claimed to provide eight programmes solely through English. However, the website content for both administrative and academic content was mostly in Turkish.

This put speakers of Turkish at an advantage over the international students, in particular because the use of English was inconsistent and sometimes it was even incomprehensible, unclear, and full of errors. Likewise, in other parts of the world, universities seem to struggle to strike a balance between internationalisation and respect for their respective cultural and geographical environment. Csapó-Horváth & Makkos (2025) looked at the LL of a Hungarian university with an international ambition. They found a lack of a coherent language policy, which exhibited the tension between stated goals and actual implementation. Soler's (2019) study of three universities in the Baltic States identified a number of incongruent facts associated with their goals of internationalisation. Possibly, to solve the net distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* language policies at universities, a number of awareness-raising exercises could take place among scholars to include LL research in the language planning and policy domains.

A different branch of research on universityscape considers the LL as providing opportunities for teachable moments (Andrade et al., 2023; Camilleri Grima, 2020; 2024). Studies have shown that a sustained exposure to the LL on campus impacts the geodiscursive identity of the individual (Niedt & Seals, 2021), and thus it is worth exploring. For instance, Marshall et al. (2024) conducted a linguistic landscaping task with students at their Canadian campus, asking them to engage with the LL using an ethnographic methodology. The students found that their campus was dominated by a Eurocentric culture and monolingualism, and consequently they discussed ways of how the LL could be more inclusive, and challenging toward colonial cultural hegemony (Marshall et al., 2024). We now focus on the language policy of the UM and its LL.

### **The University of Malta's language policy and its linguistic landscape**

The UM's *Strategic Plan 2020-2025* stated that it will "protect and preserve the Maltese language while simultaneously continuing to cherish the English language" (p. 7). This aim was further amplified on page 39, with three bullet points:

- Develop the Maltese linguistic repertoire for both humanistic and scientific subjects;
- Maintain a dynamic language policy for the University;

- Offer international students and international staff the opportunity to study the Maltese language.

On page 37, ‘Strategic Theme 5: National Impact’ included a sub-heading “Honouring the Maltese Language”. The official name in Maltese *L-Università ta’ Malta* “clearly points towards the importance that the University accords to the protection and development of the Maltese language” (p. 37). The Strategic Plan also recommended the continuing promotion of language skills in Maltese in specific settings such as the caring professions, the development of a language policy, and an offering to international students and staff the opportunity to study Maltese. By and large, these goals are being catered for. For instance, courses in Maltese as a Foreign Language are being offered to international applicants in some of the caring professions like nursing and medicine, and to international students and staff at UM. Also, a thirty-page document entitled *Comprehensive Guidelines for the Use of Language at the University of Malta* was adopted by the University Senate in June 2021. This document further detailed language policy guidelines, although it did not mention the LL on campus *per se*. Other goals mentioned were: to promote the publication of both humanistic and scientific scholarly writing in Maltese in a University research journal; and to publish a Maltese version of THINK magazine, where students and researchers share their work with the general public. Unfortunately, these goals have not yet been achieved.

To find out about the UM’s LL, we obtained ethical clearance and then took 2957 photographs during academic year 2024-2025 (for more details see El Raes, 2025). The data analysis for this paper focused firstly on the identification of top-down and bottom signs (following the method used by researchers like Backhaus, 2006, 2007; Biró, 2016; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Top-down signs are officially created or approved, and produced on hard material such as iron, marble or PVC (e.g. Figure 1). Bottom-up signs are those originating from academic, secretarial and technical staff and students, and they are often typewritten or handwritten on paper (e.g. Figures 2 and 7).



Top-down signs sometimes include UM's signature (e.g. Figure 4 and Figure 9), office names (Figure 5), room names (Figure 6) and reference to locations on campus. Bottom-up signs often advertise non-university events or are otherwise commercially produced outside UM. In our analysis we added another category of signs that we refer to as value-added. Value-added signs are those that have been placed officially but have some additional information inserted unofficially (Figures 3 and 6). Figure 3 is a glass door that opens onto one of the international offices. It has an official, factory-produced inscription welcoming students in several languages, and a bottom-up sign on paper stuck above it indicating the closing hour for lunch break. Figure 6 shows an official room sign that includes the room number (111), and two icons indicating that a shower is available for wheelchair users. The unofficially added information, typewritten on paper, specifies that the shower can only be used by staff members.





Figure 5: Office name



Figure 6: Room name (value-added)

Figure 7 is a typical bottom-up informative sign placed outside a secretary's office. Figure 8 is a common top-down commercially produced poster with safety instructions. Figure 9 is a top-down poster in English with an affective message encouraging inclusion, while Figure 10 is a bottom-up sticker in Maltese. The latter was produced commercially some years ago encouraging individuals to literally clean-up the world.



Figure 7: Informative sign

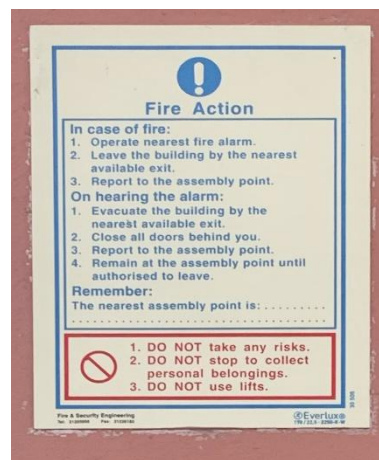


Figure 8: Poster with instructions



Figure 9: Poster in English with affective content



Figure 10: Sticker in Maltese

As shown in Figure 11, at UM 92% of the signs are in English, 5% are bilingual in Maltese and English, and 2% are in Maltese. Figure 12 shows that the majority of the signs (61%) are top-down, 28% are bottom-up, and 11% are value-added. English is the most predominant language visible irrespective of the type of sign.

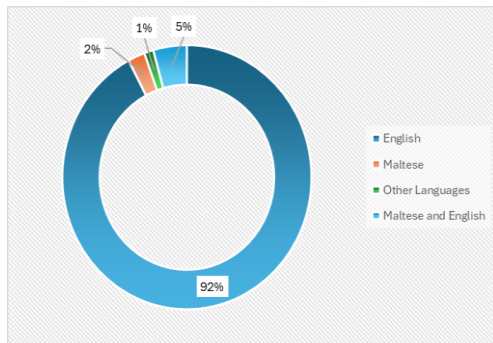


Figure 11: Languages in the LL of the Msida Campus

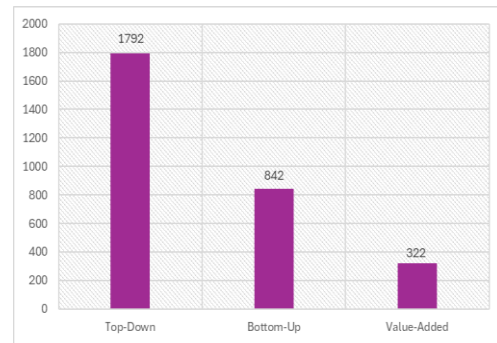


Figure 12: Classification of Signs at the Msida Campus

In answer to our first research question we conclude that the LL at the Msida campus does not reflect UM's stated policy and guidelines. The local Maltese cultural milieu and the Maltese language as a crucial icon of identity are almost absent from sight. The Maltese language seems to be sidelined, and the LL gives the impression that the campus is a monolingual English territory. Furthermore, although the UM boasts an increase of 180% in the number of international students in the last five years (*Strategic Plan 2026-2030*), the

international body of staff and students is not represented in the LL through the use of languages other than English. The door shown in Figure 3 is the only symbolic token of the international character of the University.

We now turn to our second research question: What is the composition of the LL that future teachers are exposed to? We are concerned specifically with the LL found in the Faculties attended by student-teachers which are: Arts, Science, Social Wellbeing, Economics, Management and Accounts (FEMA), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Engineering, Theology, and the Institute for Physical Education and Sport (IPES).

The LL of the Faculty of Arts is particularly significant for two reasons. First of all, it is housed within the same building as the Faculty of Education. Secondly, Education students following language subjects, namely, Maltese, English, Italian, French, Spanish and German, as well as Social Studies, History, and Geography spend three years as undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts prior to two years as MTL students at the Faculty of Education. Music studies, which can also lead to an MTL in Music, form part of the School of Performing Arts, and music rooms are also found in the same building.

As can be seen in Figure 13, English dominates the LL of the Faculty of Arts. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the signs are in English. Three percent (3%) are bilingual in Maltese and English. Only 6% of the signs are in Maltese, and 2% are in other languages, namely Spanish and French. Spanish and French signs are found on the notice boards next to the resource rooms dedicated to the respective languages. Figure 14 shows the type of signs present in the Faculty of Arts, with the most common being posters (40%), and office names (25%). Apart from 99 posters in the Faculty of Arts advertising events, courses, student organisations and manifesting quotes by famous personalities, there are 37 signs giving information about courses, while 64 of the signs refer to office names. Hence, the LL is not as culturally enriching as one might expect or desire.

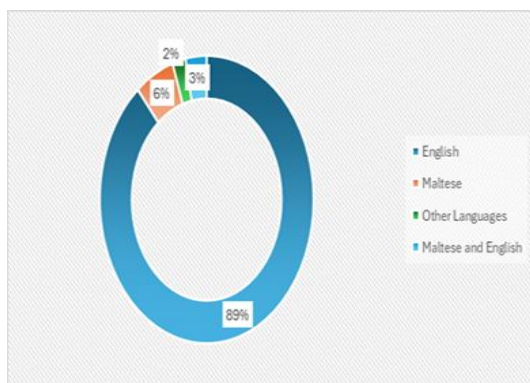


Figure 13: Languages in the LL of the Faculty of Arts

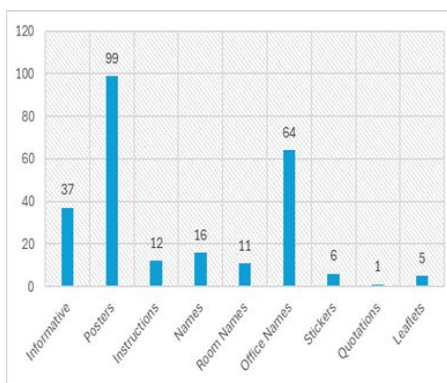


Figure 14: The Signs in the Faculty of Arts

MTL students following Science subjects and Mathematics attend undergraduate courses housed within the Chemistry Building and the Mathematics and Physics Building. Figure 15 shows that 98% of signs in the Chemistry Building are in English, and as shown in Figure 17, 97% of signs in the Mathematics and Physics Building were also in English. Just 2% of the signs are in Maltese in the Chemistry Building, and although there are no bilingual or Maltese signs in the Mathematics and Physics Building, there are 3% showing other languages.

In contrast to the Faculty of Arts where there is a total of 251 signs, in the Chemistry Building there are only 58, of which 29% give instructions and 28% are posters (Figure 16). The posters show aspects like plastic histology and conductometry, and also signal articles about students' theses. In the Mathematics and Physics Building (Figure 18), out of 75 signs, 27% are room names and 25% are office names. There are four posters: advertising an event, an internship, a competition, and advising students how to access their results via an online portal. When compared to the other Faculties, with such a small number of signs, the Mathematics and Physics Building can be described as lacking in a LL in general.

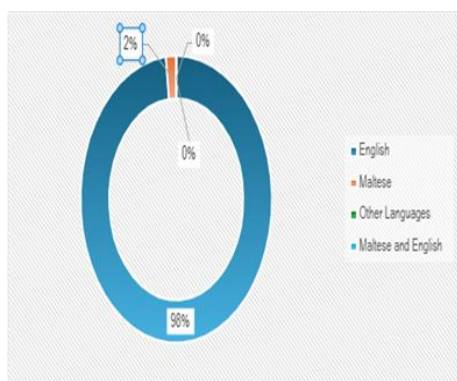


Figure 15: Languages in the LL of the Chemistry Building

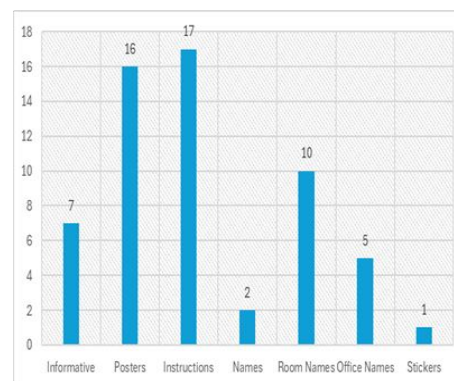


Figure 16: The Signs in the Chemistry Building

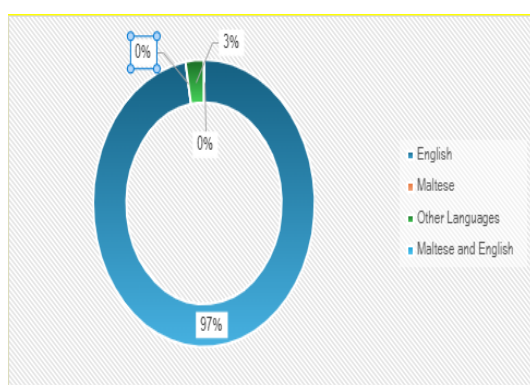


Figure 17: Languages in the LL of the Mathematics and Physics Building

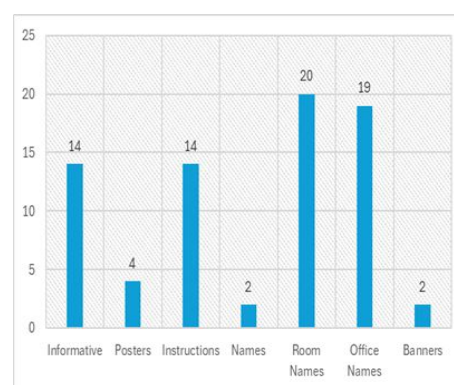


Figure 18: The Signs in the Mathematics and Physics Building

MTL studies in the area of Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) follow on from undergraduate courses in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing (e.g. courses in Psychology, Youth Studies and Social Work). Figure 19 shows that 97% of the LL in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing is in English while the remaining 3% are bilingual signs in Maltese and English. One third of the signs (28 out of 60) are posters, some of which include inspirational lines as in Figure 9, and others advertising courses, or showing instructions and quotations (Figure 20).

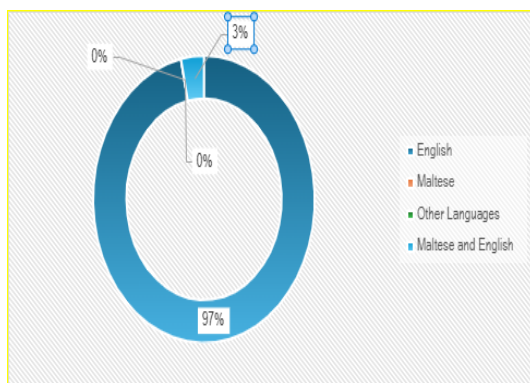


Figure 19: Languages in the LL of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing

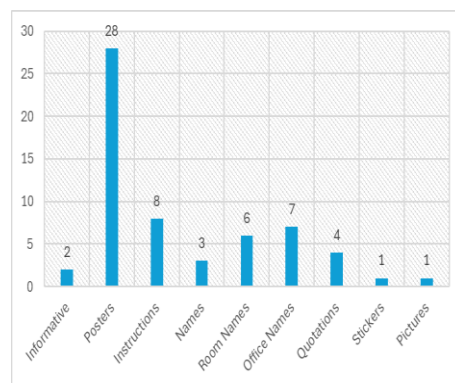


Figure 20: The Signs in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing

The entry requirement to the MTL in Business Management is an undergraduate degree from the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy (FEMA). In this Faculty, English absolutely dominates the LL where 99% of signs are in English and the remaining 1% is bilingual in Maltese and English (Figure 21). The signs are of a varied nature, and the majority are categorised as Informative, Posters and Office Names (Figure 22). The posters advertise courses, and promote green travel. The informative ones are mostly explaining procedures such as, how to conduct research, and about the UM's ethics policy and procedure.

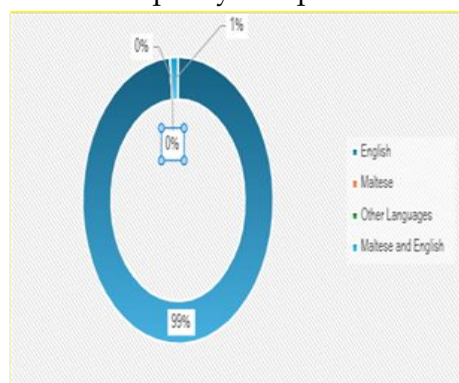


Figure 21: Languages in the LL of FEMA

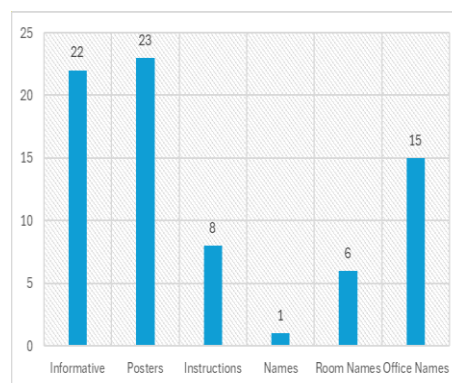


Figure 22: The Signs in the LL of FEMA

For an MTL in Computer Science, student-teachers are required to present an undergraduate degree from the Faculty of ICT. There, 98% of the LL is only in English, 1% is bilingual in Maltese and English, and 1% in other languages (Figure 23). More than half the signs are room names and office names, and the

rest are either providing information or instructions (Figure 24). The posters illustrate students’ theses, and some provide humour relief related to the computing field. Other posters advertise events and internships.

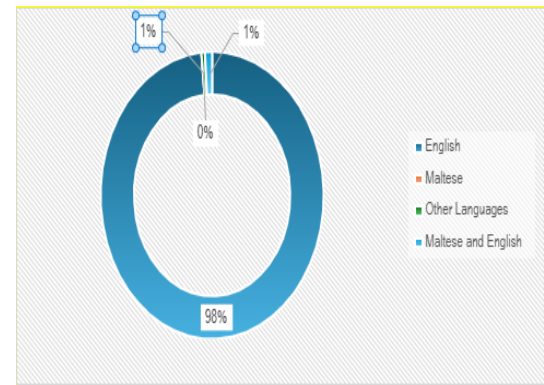


Figure 23: Languages in the LL of the Faculty of ICT

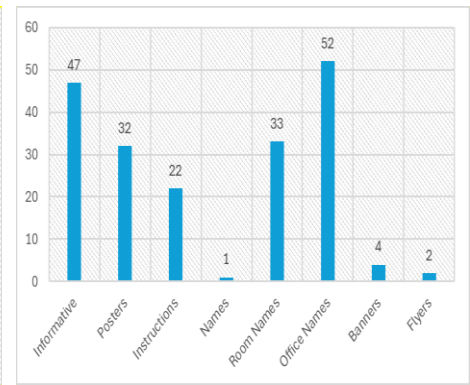


Figure 24: The Signs in the Faculty of ICT

For an MTL in Technical Design and Technology applicants may present an undergraduate degree from the Faculty of Engineering. In this Faculty, 99% of the signs are only in English, and 1% are in Maltese and English (Figure 25). Most of the signs are informative or commercial posters (Figure 26). The informative signs provide details about students’ theses, projects and subject-related illustrations. The posters advertise student organisations, optional certificate-level qualifications and Faculty departments.

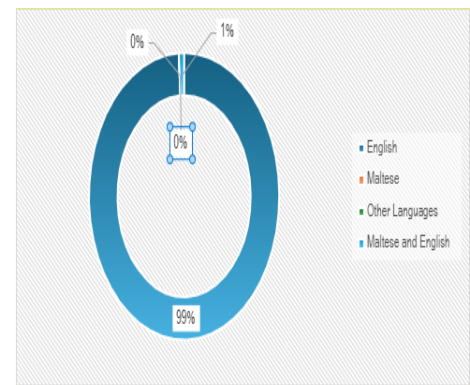


Figure 25: Languages in the LL of the Faculty of Engineering

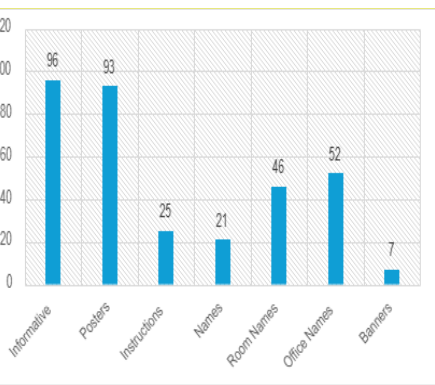


Figure 26: The Signs in the Faculty of Engineering

For an MTL in Religious Studies, an undergraduate degree from the Faculty of Theology is required. In this Faculty there is a noteworthy contrast with other Faculties because in addition to the 85% of signs in English, there are 5% in Maltese and 10% in other languages (Figure 27). The other visible languages are Italian and Latin, mainly presenting quotations from Catholic Church documents. The distribution of the types of signs is also more varied than in the other Faculties, and especially noteworthy is the exhibition of books in different languages, including Maltese. The posters advertise courses and books, show captioned photographs, inspirational messages and affective quotations by well-known religious personalities such as Pope Francis (Figure 28).

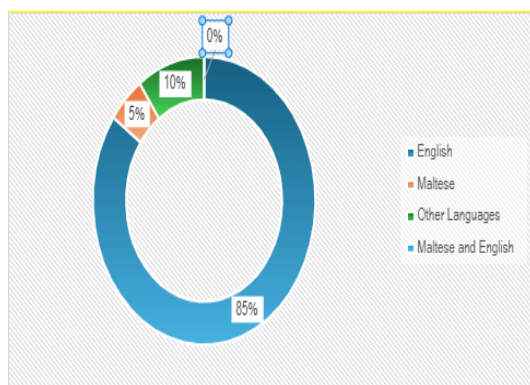


Figure 27: Languages in the LL of the Faculty of Theology

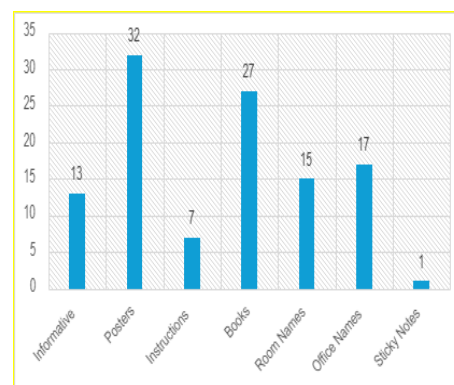


Figure 28: The Signs in the Faculty of Theology

To obtain an MTL in Physical Education, the students spend a lot of time in the Institute of Physical Education and Sport (IPES), which is adjacent to a national swimming pool and a gym that are open to the public. As shown in Figure 29, in the IPES building which also hosts the national Olympic committee, there is the highest percentage of bilingual signs in Maltese and English (18%) from all the Faculties, and the lowest percentage of English-only signs (78%). Four per cent (4%) of the signs are in Maltese. Most of the signs are informative (Figure 30), promoting a Sport Leadership Programme and other UM courses. This is probably due to the fact that the IPES is frequented by a higher number of non-UM students and staff than other Faculties.

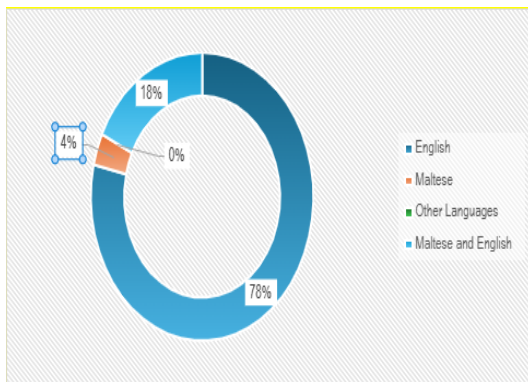


Figure 29: Languages in the LL of the IPES

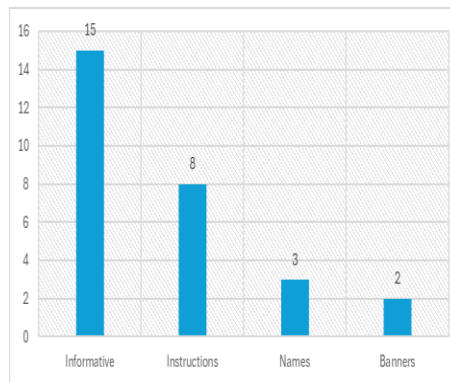


Figure 30: The Signs in the IPES

Apart from the Faculty buildings, students also frequent the canteen and the chaplaincy. In the canteen, a surprising third (33%) of the signs are in Maltese, while 67% are in English (Figure 31). The signs are, however, few in number (Figure 32). The canteen is managed by a private company and the signs are mainly invitations to help oneself to food.

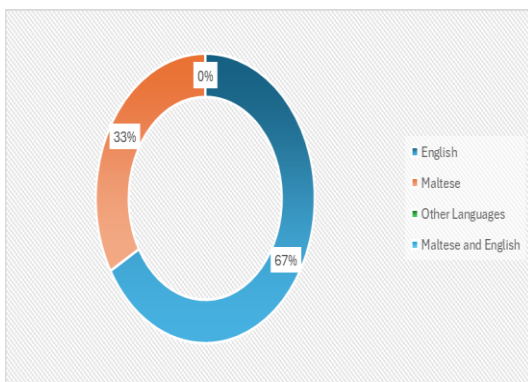


Figure 31: Languages in the LL of the canteen

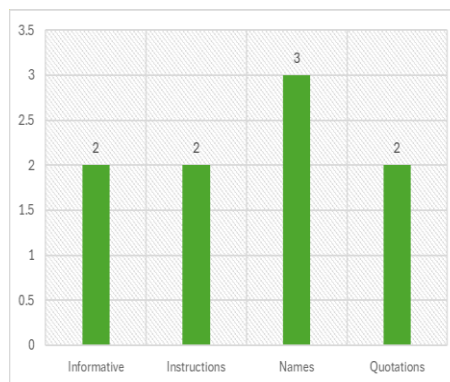


Figure 32: The Signs in the canteen

The chaplaincy presents an interesting scenario where bottom-up signs consist of Sticky Notes placed there by students. As shown in Figure 33, 45 out of 66 signs are Sticky Notes. The Sticky Notes (with varied information that can't be grouped under one heading) are also written in English. In the chaplaincy, 98% of the signs are in English, and 2% are bilingual in Maltese and English (Figure 34). The LL in the chaplaincy is managed by a team of ordained and lay ministers, and the posters advertise the chaplaincy's services and events,

provide information about the UM's Christian community and some contact information.

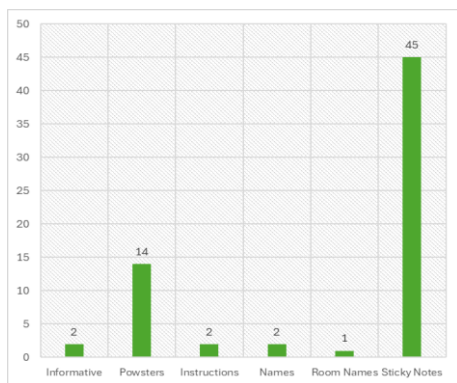


Figure 33: The Signs in the Chaplaincy

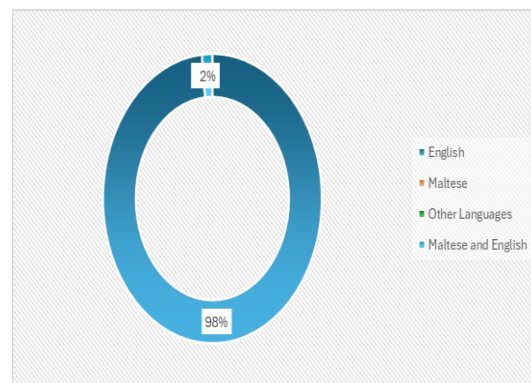


Figure 34: Languages in the LL of the Chaplaincy

In the next section we focus on the LL within the Faculty of Education and we discuss the significance of the UM's LL in teacher education.

### The linguistic landscape and teacher education

The Faculty of Education offers a number of undergraduate degrees in addition to the MTL courses mentioned above, and some other part-time, evening courses. Among the full-time, day courses for which students are present on campus for three years, are the BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care, the BA (Hons) in Facilitating Inclusive Education, the BA (Hons) in Primary Education, the BSc (Hons) in Home Economics, the BSc (Hons) in Science Education and Communication (with specialisation in one of Biology, Chemistry, Geoscience, and Physics), and the BSc (Hons) in Technical Design and Technology.

As shown in Figure 35, most of the signs in this Faculty are office names and posters. The posters advertise events and courses, and the publication of books by Faculty professors. The information is mainly related to UM structures. There is one interesting exception to the rest of the campus, which is an art work by a group of Art students with inscriptions of personal philosophies of education, all of which, except two, are in English (Figure 37). The majority of the signs are bottom-up (53%), while 40% are top-down and 7% are considered as having added value (Figure 38).

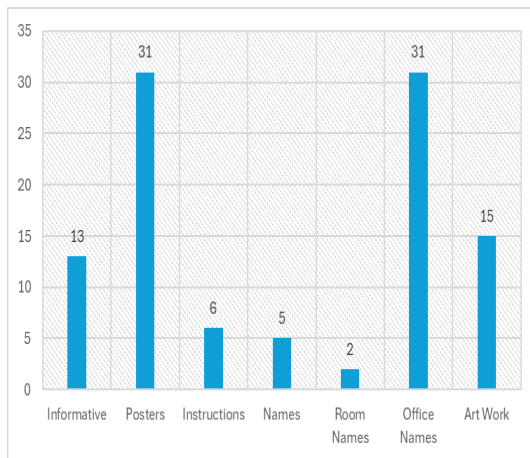


Figure 35: The Signs in the Faculty of Education

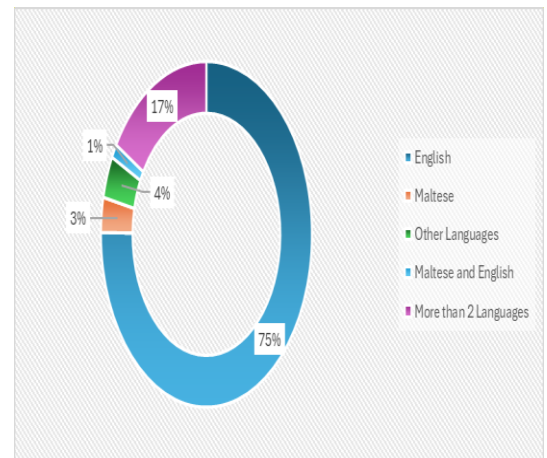


Figure 36: Languages in the LL of the Faculty of Education



Figure 37: Art work by student-teachers

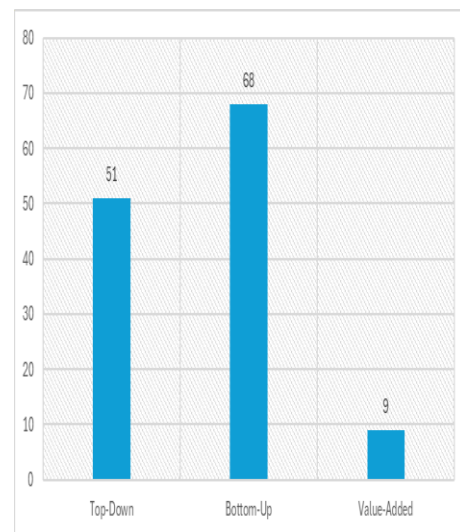


Figure 38: The Classification of the Signs of the Faculty of Education

The visibility of languages is also more varied in the Faculty of Education than in other areas of the UM campus. As shown in Figure 36, 75% are in English, 17% are in more than two languages, 3% are in Maltese, 4% are in languages other than Maltese and English, and 1% are bilingual in Maltese and English. The visible languages and other signs indicate a more representative and democratic climate in the Faculty of Education when compared to other areas

of the campus. However, the visibility of the Maltese language is especially lacking, and the range of other languages is restricted to a few European languages. Thus, we do not consider the LL in the Faculty of Education as adequate, neither in view of the Maltese context and the international staff and student body, nor as a reflection of the UM's policy.

## **Recommendations**

Scholars have discussed the emotional and cognitive effects of the linguistic landscape on persons who spend a significant amount of time in that environment (Dyers & Abongdia, 2014; Biró, 2016; Bernardo, 2024). The cognitive effects are related, for instance, to motivational issues in language learning by raising one's curiosity about the existence of other languages, what they look like and how they function (Candelier et al., 2012). The LL also produces emotional effects. The visibility of one's language normally leads to positive energy due to a sense of inclusion and pride. On the other hand, the absence of one's language begets a sense of alienation (Hancock, 2012; Kadenge, 2016; Gorter & Krompák, 2024).

A university's role is not simply to teach and generate new knowledge, but also to foster social well-being and prosperity in the community. It should act not only as a promoter of social mobility and as a repository of culture and wisdom, but also as a leader of democratic and cultural values. It is therefore crucial for the UM to strike a balance between being responsive to globalisation in education and safeguarding the cultural and linguistic dignity of the Maltese. The UM needs to interrogate itself about whether its LL is indicative of a linguistic imperialism, a reproduction of English language hegemony, as opposed to its responsibility as a Maltese national institution to foster the Maltese language, culture and identity. In the long term such hegemony might lead to an epistemicide, i.e. a destruction of knowledge by dominant colonising forces (Mayo, 2024), of a Maltese civilization. Furthermore, as Borg (2025) argues, Malta's evolving landscape "demands educational dialogue that is inclusive, participatory and reflective of a wide range of lived experience (p. 39), and the values of equity, inclusion and social justice "are essential to the cultivation of a democratic and compassionate society (p. 41).

Given the poor representation of languages other than English on UM campus, we make some suggestions for a more appropriate LL environment with a view

to an improved education. The empty spaces might be utilised in the following ways:

- To advertise student initiatives that could be academic, artistic or creative. Staff and students could be allowed to showcase their research and studies, in any language they prefer;
- As a dedicated area for posters with cultural information about life in Malta, and about other languages and cultures, especially those that represent the international staff and students;
- For making Maltese Sign Language visible. Maltese Sign Language is an official language in Malta, and it is taught on campus, but it is otherwise absent;
- To increase the number of posters with slogans that emit positive messages of encouragement, especially toward language learning and intercultural competence.

Furthermore, we believe that more attention needs to be dedicated to the LL as part of teacher education. The emotional effects of the LL are also related to how it influences one's personal and professional identity (Malloy, 2023; Garvin, 2010; Camilleri Grima & Krompák, forthcoming). In view of the multilingual and multicultural school context (Cefai et al., 2019) that student teachers will be working in, we think that the following might be helpful:

- Multilingual lists of terminology relevant to teacher education and the pedagogical register;
- Qualitative research involving student-teachers. This can be done using the 'tourist guide methodology' (Krompák, 2022) whereby the researcher conducts an ethnographic study by walking together with one or more participants who react to the LL while being recorded digitally or on paper. This would give useful information about the effects of the LL on the individual;
- A study based on interviews with student-teachers and qualified teachers about their understanding of the LL. They could be asked for suggestions regarding the inclusion of an LL study component during their training courses, given their experience in multilingual and multicultural schools.
- A programme on material development based on the LL.
- Online collaborative meetings between student-teachers in different universities for them to compare the LL and its impact on education.

## Conclusion

As we have shown, well-intended language policies at university level are not always implemented, especially in the LL. This can be the result of a number of factors. On the one hand, linguistic ideologies are shaped by many years of colonisation and the resulting marginalisation of indigenous languages (Dyers & Abongdia, 2014; Abongdia & Foncha, 2014). On the other hand there is the growing academic internationalisation of knowledge through the English language (Keles et al., 2020). We conjecture that at the University of Malta English retains a visibly predominant place notwithstanding its stated policy and language guidelines for these two reasons, i.e. the British colonial past and the internationalisation process.

We have found a few positive pointers in the direction of democratisation in that in some Faculties (like Arts, Education and Theology), and Spaces (like the canteen) other languages than English are visible, and a sizeable number of bottom-up and added-value signs are also present. The UM's linguistic landscape can be further improved by making the Maltese language and culture more visible. Furthermore, in order to be more representative of the increasing number of international staff and students, a larger variety of languages needs to be placed around the campus.

We have provided a number of recommendations for a more linguistically varied landscape. A multilingual LL can help users of the campus feel included, welcomed and at home. Plurilingual signs can also support the development of a teacher identity in preparation for a multicultural and multilingual school environment in Maltese schools.

To conclude, the UM's attempt in its Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 to focus on the use of languages on campus is laudable. Unfortunately, there is no indication that this plan will be further developed or implemented because in the Strategic Plan for 2026-2030 launched in January 2026, there is only one reference to language, stating that the UM aims to "Foster the linguistic heritage through the active use and development of the national official languages" (p. 11). There is no reference to the Maltese language as the local heritage language and the national official language. This almost feels like a silencing and devaluation of the national language by its absence. We hope that

by raising awareness about the significance of the LL on campus, the administration, the policy experts and the staff and students of the Faculty of Education will give more attention to this authentic, rich and free educational resource.

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