

Benefits and Challenges in Implementing Translanguaging in Sub-Saharan Primary Schools

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Abstract: This study was a desk review which explored four articles that looked at benefits and challenges of translanguaging from sub-Saharan Africa. A number of articles were explored using the google scholar engine. Out of the articles which were found, two from Zambia and two from the region were selected on the basis that they looked at 'translanguaging' as the key word. From the studies, it was found that translanguaging is a more progressive teaching and learning pedagogical practice who evidence to multilingual teaching and knowledge impartation has been proven from the teacher's and learner's perspectives. There was need for language policy changes in African countries to help teachers respond to the sociolinguistics of the classroom and provide equal benefits to language learning for every learner in the sub-Saharan Africa. Such policy amendments will enable the dying African languages to be maintained and improve the identity of the African minority language speakers in the community and a country as a whole. To this end, translanguaging has to be used to teach literacy in the sub-Saharan school through effective policy changes in order to cut the linguistic barriers in knowledge acquisition across cultures.

Keywords: Translanguaging, benefits, challenges, sub-sahara

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of language and literacy in the African countries has been characterised by the use of an official language which is not indigenous. Many southern African countries use English language as an official language while selected local languages are also used to teach in the schools. Zambia has been good at policy formulation, yet implementation has been a setback. The Educating Our Future policy documents gives the advantages of using local languages in the teaching and learning in the Zambian schools, yet this never materialised in implementation. The reason lies in the Zambian constitution which recognises seven languages as languages to be used in the regions for teaching and learning alongside English language. In south Africa, the country decentralised the language choice to the local councils hence regions have many languages being used as official languages alongside the regional languages. this is also coming into play in Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. The benefits have been seen to outweigh the rigid monolingual policies. These include local language maintenance, cultural preservation and language development amongst the minority languages which Zambia has to learn from. This has given rise to studies which have investigated benefits and challenges in the local language use and integration in the teaching of linguistic diverse communities. This paper synthesises the different challenges from different countries and their unique benefits so that a general conclusion is drawn on how the African schools are supposed to benefit from the studies conducted in the region. The study was a desk review which explored four articles that looked at benefits and challenges of translanguaging from sub-Saharan Africa.

2. BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING TRANSLANGUAGING IN SUB-SAHARAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) conducted a study which aimed at establishing the quantitative and qualitative benefits of translanguaging pedagogic practice among first graders in multilingual classrooms of Lundazi district in Zambia. The study was meant to prove one hypothesis that there was there is a difference in literacy performance between a translanguaging and a monolingual grade 1 multilingual classes of Lundazi District. While the question was what are the benefits of using translanguaging practices in a monolingual grade 1 multilingual classes of Lundazi District?

The study sample was 41 pupils and 1 teacher in a controlled experimental grade 1 class of Lundazi district. Classroom observation, interviews and tests were used to collect data for a period of three months in the classroom. The study involved two classes where one was an experimental class which used translanguaging practices to teach literacy for a full term while the other grade one class was a control class. The researcher was in the classes conducting observations for a full term and was also part of the classroom learning and teaching processes. A pre-test and post-tests were administered to test whether translanguaging would lead to improved performance.

The study found that the performance between experimental group was significantly different from the control group [$t(52.960) = 4.454, p < 0.001$]. The average mean scores for the experimental group ($M=15.10$) while the control group was lower ($M=11.71$). The Cohen's $d=0.98$ for the post-test which showed the large effect size of above .8. Therefore, the intervention in the experimental group (translanguaging) led to improved learner performance in literacy as evidenced in the post test results. From the results, the findings reject the null hypothesis (H_0) which stated that there is no significant difference in literacy performance between a translanguaging and a monolingual grade 1 multilingual classes of Lundazi District. Therefore, the results confirm the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that there is a significant difference in literacy performance between a translanguaging and a monolingual grade one.

On the benefits the study found that translanguaging improved learners' participation in class as learners were able to use their languages to contribute to the lesson. The other benefit was that learners became literate in their various local languages as they were able to read in Tumbuka and Cinyanja. The learners were also able to write their local languages and they were able to identify linguistic and phonological differences and similarities between their local language and the language of instruction. The study also found that the learners were developing linguistic proficiency in both languages (Tumbuka and Cinyanja).

The study concluded that translanguaging practices bring about increased learner achievements in multilingual literacy classes while monolingual practices did not improve learner performance. Translanguaging practices in multilingual classes also leads to multiliteracy development, cultural preservation, cultural building and builds learner's individual linguistic repertoire while also building literacy in a target language. The study conclusion imply that the Zambian multilingual classes need to be taught using adaptive pedagogical practices like translanguaging which is linguistic fluid instead of the rigid monolingual practices. As for teachers, they have to ensure that they maximise the benefits of translanguaging by not suppressing the learner's languages in class, they should use the learner's emergent literacy to teach new linguistic skills in the classrooms.

Makalela (2015) also conducted a study which was guided by two questions as follows: what the effects of translanguaging techniques on reading comprehension in primary schools are and, what is the role of translanguaging techniques in the teaching of African languages to speakers of African languages in south Africa. Participants in the primary school translanguaging case consisted of 24 university student who were 15 females and 9 males enrolled for Sepedi class at an additional language level. These were mother tongue speakers of Isizulu, Siswati, IsiXhosa and IsiNdebele language varieties. They were without prior exposure to reading and writing three Sotho languages: Sepedi, Seswana and Sesotho. Oral and text-based approaches were used. Only grammatical errors were corrected through cultural content teaching. Concepts were compared and contrasted between languages used in the classrooms. The main language of communication was Sepedi and English in the first semester. Sepedi and an additional language was used at a rural school was used to translanguage in 60 grade learners. The study followed a three-phase experimental procedure (pre-test, treatment and post-test). The procedure involved bilingual vocabulary contrast, text comprehension, oral reading proficiency (read aloud) and print environment.

The study findings indicated that using translanguaging techniques where input in one language is purposefully juxtaposed to the language of output is an effective way of teaching language in a multilingual context. The study has shown that students preferred the translanguaging approach which gives room for changing negative perceptions towards African languages, investing in their multiple linguistic identities, enhancing multilingualism as a norm and making language learning a positive experience. The translanguaging offered an alternative to language learning through bypassing monolingual practices in the two cases. It was also noted that translanguaging classroom situations

mirrored a constant disruption of orderliness and a simultaneous recreation of fluid communication practices that are concomitant with this ancient value system. Translanguaging as a pedagogical practice ensured that deeper understanding of the content and identity formation becomes an important pillar for a positive schooling experience.

3. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING TRANSLANGUAGING IN SUB-SAHARAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Mwanza and Bwalya (2019) conducted a study which analysed the teachers' language practices in selected multilingual classrooms of Chibombo district regarding the question of democratisation or symbolic violence in Zambia. The study was guided by the concept of symbolic violence which helped to analyse the teachers' language practices and the learners' involvement in classroom activities.

The study found that the classroom sociolinguistics was that majority of the teachers at 40%, have Bemba as their first language followed by Tonga at 23%. The rest, in descending order, are Nyanja at 15%, English at 10%, Lenje at 7% and others at 5%. The "other languages" mentioned in the interviews with teachers were Namwanga, Lozi and Kaonde. As for pupil, it was established that 29% of the learners used Lenje at home, 23% used Bemba, 22.5% used Nyanja, 16% used Tonga, 7% used other languages and 2.5% used English. In other words, the home languages spoken by most of the pupils were Lenje, Bemba, Nyanja and Tonga while the least spoken home language was English. From the findings, it was noted that language zoning is problematic as it does not really reflect the language/s spoken in an area. In addition, the zoning of language turns to assume that languages are static and that the linguistic situation of an area is static.

A study by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) focused on the challenges which teachers and learners faced in first-grade multilingual literacy classrooms in Zambia. The research study was conducted in a grade one experimental class on 41 learners and 1 teacher. The learners ranged from five to eight years in Lundazi district urban school of eastern province. Learners were assessed on the literacy skills which were hindering effective implementation of translanguaging practices in the classrooms. Classroom observations, interviews and document analysis were used as tools for data collection in the class.

The study findings indicated that teachers and learners faced challenges in the light of using translanguaging practices in the primary school. Firstly, there was a mismatch between the language of instruction and the language of play for learners in the teaching of literacy. The language of instruction was a challenge which hindered the acquisition of literacy by the learners in the translanguaging class because the learners were forced to write in a different language which was not theirs. The language policy was not flexible enough to allow teachers to use translanguaging. The rigidity of the policy means that monolingual is the expected practice thereby making implementation of translanguaging difficult. Translanguaging was also perceived to be time consuming, assessment was monolingual based and there was inadequate teacher teaching and learning materials. The classroom linguistic environment was not favouring multilingual development and so was the school environment.

The study also found that the monolingual ideologies embedded in the curriculum were a hinderance to the teaching of literacy using translanguaging practices in the primary school. It was found that the one language instruction was not the way to teach literacy as it hindered learner's literacy development in their emergent languages. The other challenge the teacher faced was regarding the management of time in the translanguaging class. In the first week of introducing the teaching practice, the teacher did not manage time very well and the observation was that learners were given more time to express themselves which was good on one hand yet turned out to be a challenge as the lessons were not concluded early enough to allow another teacher into the class. The other challenge which was observed regarding the teaching of literacy using translanguaging practices was that assessment was administered in standard Cinyanja which was read for the learners. This means that assessment and instructions would be different.

4. DISCUSSION

From the studies regarding challenges, it can be argued that African languages are no longer confined to the linguistic boundaries which the earlier planners thought would be restrictive and be of benefit to such regional communities. Mwanza and Bwalya (2019) argue that this limited and colonised

mentality has brought about linguistic discontent in the classrooms of today. From the studies, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) argued that the teachers and learners faced challenges which were not pedagogical oriented in the classrooms of today but were as a result of the monolingual policies which were used to teach literacy to early graders in the primary schools. Makalela (2015) stated that the implication of the study in the sub-Saharan children in primary schools is that the education system needs to respond to the changing social and linguistic classroom environment to suit the learners of today. The studied implies also that the use of the few prescribed languages as enshrined in the constitution was a hinderance to the implementation of translanguaging as these practices calls for classroom decolonialisation and linguistic liberalisation. This has manifested in the classrooms through the multilingualism which is existing today.

From the foregoing, the benefits can be seen that translanguaging is a more progressive teaching and learning pedagogical practice who evidence to multilingual teaching and knowledge impartation has been proven from the teacher's and learner's perspectives. From the Zambian experiences which is not unique to other sub-Saharan countries, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) contends that translanguaging has provided enough evidence as to why the Zambian education system should consider changing its police direction and move away from the monolingual practices and use the current classroom languages to teach. This will then foster the policy change and adopt translanguaging in the Zambian schools. From the studies, it should be mentioned that translanguaging practices are better practices which have to be embraced in order to provide relevant teaching content which is cultural cutting and relevant to every multilingual learner in class. It is from this point that Nyimbili (2021) redefined translanguaging as 'the teacher's pedagogical knowledge to utilise the learners' emergent literacies (community languages) to support content/knowledge acquisition in a multilingual classroom in order to promote multiliteracy development in every learner's language.' Therefore, the benefits outweigh the challenges hence the need for such inclusive pedagogical utilisation in the multilingual classes.

5. CONCLUSION

Therefore, linguistic knowledge should be broadened to other languages through policy amendments which will help to recognise and use any community language to provide knowledge to every learner. Through this policy change, teachers will be helped to respond to the sociolinguistics of the classroom and provide equal benefits to language learning for every learner in the sub-Saharan Africa. Such amendments will enable the dying African languages to be maintained and improve the identity of the African minority language speakers in the community and a country as a whole. It should be emphasised that translanguaging has to be used to teach literacy in the sub-Saharan school through policy changes in order to cut the linguistic barriers in knowledge acquisition. Once this is done, we shall have learners who will be learning and appreciating their culture which will be used by the teachers in class. The issue of learners not breaking through will be the thing of the past because every child will break through in his or her language independently and then as a class in the language of instruction. The articles in this case agreed that translanguaging was more progressive in the teaching and learning in linguistic diverse school environments.

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Citation: Mungala Ruth. "Benefits and Challenges in Implementing Translanguaging in Sub-Saharan Primary Schools" *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol 10, no. 2, 2022, pp. 39-43. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1002005>.

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