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SINK OR SWIM? CHOOSING TO SWIM THROUGH TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGIES IN A CULTURALLY DIVERSE NATURAL SCIENCES CLASSROOM

ПАИ ИЛИ ПРОПАЛ? ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ ТРАНСЛИНГВАЛЬНОЙ ПЕДАГОГИКИ ПРИ ПРОВЕДЕНИИ ЗАНЯТИЙ ЕСТЕСТВЕННО - НАУЧНОГО ЦИКЛА В СРЕДЕ КУЛЬТУРНОГО РАЗНООБРАЗИЯ

Abstract:

In spite of all language regulations and statutes South Africa has put in place to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity of her citizenry, education in the country still follows the ‘one school, one language’ monolingual approach. Consequently, this has resulted in the systematic segregation, devaluation, and eventual extinction of some languages. This is exacerbated by the accentuation placed on globalization in our curricula and the expansion of English as the preferred global language of instruction and communication. This approach neglects the requirements of learners while culturally impoverishing third-world nations through the degradation of their linguistic ecology. Analysis of both national and international assessment results suggest language of instruction plays a crucial role in the academic achievement of South African science learners. The current study followed a semi- systematic review design which relies on qualitative data collection methods. We reviewed studies conducted between the years 2020- 2023 on the use of translanguaging in fourth to sixth-grade Natural Sciences classrooms in South Africa. Findings suggest great efficacy of translanguaging as a culturally and socially just pedagogy that also enhances epistemic access among learners taught through a language different from their home language. We therefore recommend the use of translanguaging pedagogy in Natural Sciences classrooms.

Keywords: Cultural diversity; monolingualism; translanguaging; linguistic repertoire, science education

Introduction and Background

Since the beginning of time, there have been populations in South Africa that speak a variety of languages. Nevertheless, multilingualism has not been widely accepted in the science classroom [1] which has fostered the use of English and encouraged assimilation and monolingualism [2]. As a result, many communities have witnessed the systematic eradication, segregation, and devaluation of their native tongues [3]. Though scripted in the [4] that all eleven official languages (IsiNdebele, isiZulu, English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, Sepedi, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, and isiXhosa, even South African sign language) can be employed as a medium of instruction, monolingual pedagogies still dominate South African science classrooms [5]. This indicates that the policy has not been successfully implemented in many educational settings. As a result the education system is negatively impacted as the majority of learners are disadvantaged, specifically those emerging bilinguals for whom English, which happens to be their weaker language, is the language of instruction. In this paper, we refer to students as emerging bilinguals to emphasize their linguistic strengths and emphasize how the process of becoming bilingual is dynamic [6].

Emergent bilinguals arrive in science classrooms with the abilities and resources necessary to take advantage of their cultural and linguistic affordances, which could help them learn. However, they require an environment that enables them to take advantage of these affordances [7]. Most language programs in South African educational system that help emergent bilinguals frequently have English-centric ideology and monolingual prejudices that fail to perceive these potential affordances [8]. Their linguistic resources and bilingualism are actually underestimated in mainstream classrooms, and the acquisition of the "standard" language is given priority to hasten their transition to monolingual mainstream programs [9]; [10]. Additionally, administrators and teachers contribute to disparities in the education of emergent learners by neglecting their bilingualism and presuming that their educational demands are the same as those of other students. The academic success, matric pass rates, and general outcomes of learners are negatively impacted by restricted access to content if instruction is through a language learners have limited proficiency in.

In the past 3 years (from 2020 to 2022) the twelfth-grade pass rate of students who scored 50% and above for Physical Science in South Africa stood at 26.3%; 27.3%; and 30.4% respectively [11]. Twelfth-grade comprises of students generally aged 19 and is the last grade in the South African high school education, therefore students in this grade sit for school leaving examinations at the end of the year. Achieving a basic pass in science according to the South African education assessment standards requires a student to achieve a score of at least 30% in the school-leaving examination [12]. At first glance the results of those who scored this minimum mark for the past 3 years (2020-2022) seem 'pleasing' as it stand at 65.8%; 69.0% and 74.6% respectively [11]. This means high school graduates were able to accurately answer at least 30% of the questions on the test, which begs the question of what they would do with this 30% grade. With such academic results, the majority of South African high school science graduates essentially follow a learning trajectory that ultimately leads to poor access to tertiary education and poor labor market outcomes [13].

In response to the aforementioned circumstances, multilingual pedagogies have been proposed with translanguaging fronted as a potentially effective language practice, educational tool, and lens that can assist solve these social and cultural injustices by questioning monolingual and standard language ideologies [14].

Literature Review Rethinking Culturally-responsive Pedagogy: The positioning of languages in the Intermediate Phase Science Classroom

It is apparent that English predominates in many schools' language policies in South Africa. English continues to be the language of learning and teaching in many contexts in South Africa, many school policies do not allot enough time for teaching English as a First Additional Language (EFAL), despite the fact that many of these policies claim to value

diversity. In the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6), the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) allots just a little amount of time for EFAL. The language policy's hegemonic use of English is a blatant example of bias in action [15]. There are no defined methods to guarantee that emergent bilingual students get the assistance they need to learn efficiently. Many students are acquiring knowledge in a language other than their mother tongue. Typically, this language is English.

Current school language regulations frequently favor one language over others, and although it is not stated officially, learners whose first language differs from the language of learning and instruction are compelled to utilize English. Prior to the advent of democracy, schools in SA were divided into groups based on language and culture. For the first four years of their academic careers, students were required to receive instruction in their native tongue, however, after that, either English or Afrikaans instruction was required. This approach discriminated against students whose first language was not Afrikaans or English.

Due to the fact that people now have the freedom to choose their language of instruction within the bounds of fair practice and linguistic rights, South Africa's post-apartheid education system gave rise to a number of multilingual classrooms. But in reality, it is not always feasible due to ineffective and limited resource deployment. The learner's mother tongue or home language may therefore differ from the language of teaching and learning in a multilingual classroom in the SA context [16]. Even though English is the learners' mother tongue, they may speak more than three distinct languages at home and the difficulty of trying to accommodate a group of students who speak different languages is highlighted to the teacher. Second language learners who are learning through a language medium other than their home language are present in many multilingual classes and the majority of parents, however, prefer English (due to its superior status) as a language of instruction rather than learners' home language, so this still remains a sensitive topic.

While many primary schools in rural areas of South Africa start teaching in African languages in Grades R-3 and then switch to English after that, many schools in urban areas like Johannesburg, where African languages are not the first language of many students, start teaching in English in Grades R [5]. These monoglossic ideologies, which shape the Language in Education Policy and are pervasive in classroom practices in both monolingual and multilingual contexts (in SA and around the world), restrict learners' capacity for meaningful engagement. As a result, these learners lose their ability to express themselves, which leads to an epistemic injustice. Education must dismantle the assumption that languages are "pure and bounded entities" in order to avoid and correct these linguistic injustices by giving all languages equal respect. In order to give learners an equal opportunity to learn in a linguistically diverse classroom and a socially just educational system, this calls for a post-structuralist shift through the adoption of pedagogies or approaches to learning that accommodate and include emergent bilingual learners.

Theoretical framework: Cultural and Linguistic Funds of Knowledge

South African schools teach according to the curriculum that is shaped at the national level. The aim of the curriculum is to arrive at some level of parity, to be able to rationalize and compare data across cohorts and to create equal opportunities for all students within the education system [13]. The top-down approach embraced by the South African curriculum planners makes stakeholders question its appropriateness as it is according to [17] designed on a deficit model which insinuates that it is constantly defined by those who do not meet certain criteria. This research study therefore, employs [18]'s theory of funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge theory argues that learners do not enter school with no prior experience, they carry funds of knowledge with them that they have gleaned through social and cultural interaction with their close relatives and community.

[19] Assert that the funds of knowledge approach build on a social development and learning theory. This implies that social interaction, the more knowledgeable other and the

zone of proximal development are the three foundational ideas [20] of the funds of knowledge hypothesis. Together these principles advocate for a social approach to learning, where there exists a kind of apprenticeship [21], and enabling students to bring their own experiences into the natural science classroom and among these is language.

The concept of funds of knowledge recognizes the enormous academic potential connected with tons of knowledge that result from students' everyday active engagement in intergenerational, multicultural, and multilingual school activities [22]. What this theory alludes to is the fact that linguistic and cultural difference should be used as resources and not obstacles. The failure to support ongoing and constructive use of students' languages as additional resources for scientific sense-making represents further evidence of a deficiency within such systems. According to the funds of knowledge theory, academic education should be connected to all students' lives [23], and the specifics of good pedagogy should be connected to the local history and social context that students are from [18].

Communication, both in general and in science class, involves the use of a range of resources, all contributing to the students' learning in specific ways. This has received particular attention in the subject of social semiotics, where researchers have made significant contributions about the opportunities provided by various resources for scientific students to learn [2]; [24]; [25]. In social semiotics, learning resources are defined as modes and the concept multimodality is used to draw attention to the use of several instructional resources in a certain academic situation [26]. According to [18], the households where students come from are 'repositories of knowledge' and these types of knowledge can be translated to a natural science classroom, providing opportunity to connect students' real-world experiences with their academic environment. In the current study, the theory of translanguaging is used to examine and explore its effectiveness in being an '*academic swimming pool float*' in the South African Natural science classroom.

Methodology

A conceptual research approach was used allowing the researchers to use already published materials. This method was chosen because there is a lot of existing work on the topic, and the researchers sought to examine and explore these concepts in a deeper and more comprehensive way so as to synthesize the ideas to develop a more refined understanding of the topic. In order to fully engage with the idea of translanguaging pedagogy, several forms of data were gathered from a wide range of studies in diverse multilingual educational environments internationally and nationally to establish legitimacy. Researchers were able to establish a thorough picture of the kinds of translanguaging practices that take place in multilingual classrooms by gathering a variety of data types from various studies.

Research Design

The current study followed a semi- systematic review design which relies on qualitative data collection methods. It is a useful study design because it enables the researchers to look at how the field of study has developed in terms of research. It is a flexible strategy since it allowed the researchers to construct inside the focus area, query about unorthodox concepts, and investigate those ideas while doing the research to collect rich data [27]. Researchers used this flexible architecture to synthesize the existing evidence so that reasonably clear conclusions about what is and is not known can be reached.

Data collection methods

Data was collected from various electronic databases including Google Scholar, and texts to gather information and explore the efficacy of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in the teaching and learning of Natural science in South African Intermediate phase classrooms (Grade 4-6). The data was collected from the years 2020-2023 because it is relevant, have undergone academic examination and current making them relevant and

reliable to use in the study. The key research words were cultural inclusion, translanguaging, multilingualism, science education.

Data analysis

The data that was collected from the seven studies was thoroughly reviewed and coded. Thereafter, through a thematic analysis process, the data was analyzed systematically. According to [28], a thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing and exploring recurring themes within the data. The researchers identified common strategies that were employed across translanguaging studies that lead to successful outcomes as well as unsuccessful outcomes. Data was then examined closely and emerging patterns and correlations were identified across the studies to inform application in the South African multilingual Mathematics and Science classroom [29].

The data analysis process was ongoing and interactive. Thematic analysis was the preferred analysis approach as it was effective and useful in organizing data to identify emerging themes across the studies, interpret the data, prepare a detailed presentation of the findings and lastly to achieve the study objectives. In sum, the analysis process was informed by [28]'s six-step process to gain further insight into analyzing the data and identifying themes. These six phases of the thematic analysis process include (i) Familiarization with data (ii) coding (iii) Identifying themes (iv) Reviewing themes (v) Defining and naming the themes (vi) Producing the thematic analysis report. The themes and the sub-themes that emerged will be discussed in the next section.

Research Findings

After analyzing the data, several themes emerged:

The effect of translanguaging pedagogy in the multilingual science classroom

Basing on interview responses of the 5 studies reviewed most of them indicated that learners did not do well in their prior assessments due to their inability to fully comprehend the concepts taught to them as well as the questions since the language of instruction, English was predominantly used. To most learners in the studies English was their second language with varied South African official languages being their first language. It was discovered that there is a relationship that exists between the language of instruction and learners' academic performance in science [30]; [31]; [32]. This was echoed by [33] in his recent study at a primary school in South Africa where he explored the role language plays in the academic performance of fifth-grade multilingual science students: 'participants who were allowed to use their entire linguistic repertoire performed better academically...' This highlights the influential role played by the language of instruction in the learning of science.

Rejecting bilingual learners' use of their native tongue means that they are only able to employ a small portion of their resources to comprehending concepts [6]. People are seen as social actors who use a variety of socially created languages [34] and construct connections between their native languages and the languages they learn in school [35]. Everyday conversation can be described as relatively simple and concrete which is often supported by non-verbal communication (Cummins2008) while the language of the class-room especially in science classrooms tends to require more complex grammar structures, more technical vocabulary, and more abstract use of language often with far less paralinguistic support [31]. This explains why reviewed studies advocate for the use of translanguaging as it bridges the gap between abstract and everyday knowledge, deepening learners' epistemic access.

Learners taught in a language different from their home language tend to under-achieve in science because they are likely to be trying to learn through the medium of English without being equipped with the English language skills they need to cope with the demands of the science curriculum [19]. This according to [13] can result in school failure from an early age, with failure breeding failure, rather than success breeding success which is the reason why our matric results highlighted above are poor. South Africa does not have a strong foundation in their science education and this ripples to higher education where learners grow with their

misconceptions that never get to be explained at the level they fully comprehend due to the use of a complex language.

Translanguaging as a cultural and pedagogic tool for bridging discourses in science classrooms

South Africa is largely known as a 'rainbow nation' a term intended to encapsulate the unity of multi-culturalism and the coming together of people of many different nation. This has been reflected in the many cultures as a result there has been a replication of different languages in South African classroom which has posed a threat in the pedagogical choices teachers choose. It is often argued that while it takes about two years to acquire conversational skills, it takes five to seven years or more to acquire a second language to a level sufficient to cope with the full curriculum [1]. This has recently been validated by much publicized research and though there is a general improvement on yearly basis on the areas of access, redress, equity, efficiency, quality and inclusivity. South Africa still lags behind in international assessments as indicated in the PIRLS 2021 results. The results indicate the pivotal role language plays in the comprehension and subsequent academic performance [30].

Despite the fact that the South African constitution recognizes 11 official languages, only English and Afrikaans are accepted as the official languages of instruction in South African schools [20]. For second language English speakers a monolingual pedagogy is introduced in grade 4, where the curriculum abruptly switches from using the learners' native language as the medium of instruction during the foundation phase (grades 1-3) to English/Afrikaans for the remainder of their academic careers. For the majority of students, learning has been a challenging experience because it is done in a language other than their home tongue.

Although a variety of variables may contribute to learners' difficulty to comprehend scientific concepts the use of monolingual practices that tend to uphold the notion that monolingualism is the standard in learning and teaching greatly contributes to the scientific development issue South Africa is facing. The employment of a single language in the classroom might make it challenging for students to reach a certain level of academic ability and can stifle their desire to study in a creative way, according to research on the subject [32]. Academic progress is hampered when science teaching and learning is done without comprehension or understanding because monolingual practices do not give students the chance to use words from other languages to make meaning. This disrupts their 'authentic way of communication' and they fail to ask for clarity as they sometimes cannot express themselves fully in English which calls for translanguaging pedagogies that enable both learners and teachers to use their whole linguistic repertoire in a science classroom and enables learners to learn freely.

Discussion of Findings

The term "translanguaging," was originally coined by [36] to refer to a pedagogical strategy used in Welsh classrooms, it has since come to mean the full utilization of idiomatic repertoires without regard for named linguistic boundaries [37]. Scholars such as [6] have also advocated for language to function as a single system of meaning creation for emergent bilingual speakers. For communication, meaning making, and knowledge construction, emergent bilinguals utilize all of their linguistic repertoire regardless of the identified languages [38]. Translanguaging is a type of pedagogy that embraces the complexity and richness of a student's entire linguistic repertoire [39]. It gives teachers the chance to use learners' language practices to foster deeper comprehension and engagement in the creation of new knowledge.

In order to challenge the conventional beliefs of first and second-language native speakers and move toward a more modern understanding of multilingualism, researchers and educators must critically examine their language ideologies via the lens of translanguaging

[39]. In addition to creating opportunities and utilizing learners' affordances, translanguaging as a pedagogical practice also recognizes and honor the complexity and richness of learners' complete linguistic repertoires [13] to create spaces for linguistic justice.

While translanguaging has gained wide acceptance and drawn much interest in the literature it has not been widely accepted in South African intermediate phase science classrooms. Since translanguaging has the ability to enhance academic performance, epistemic access as well as reduce socioeconomic injustices among emergent bilinguals, it is crucial to comprehend how its philosophies and practices are being applied in classrooms. This article, therefore, suggests that South African teachers need to transcend beyond the notion of languages as independent entities within an assimilationist framework to help students succeed within an unjust system.

Conclusion

The sole use and rapid change of having an additional language as a Language of Learning and

Teaching (LoLT) can be problematic as the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) of the mother tongue have not yet been properly mastered. To redress the cultural and linguistic injustices of the past and acknowledge the linguistic diversity within the country, an adoption of a multilingual pedagogy with a goal to ensure that all learners have equal access to education in a language they were able to comprehend and relate to is a must.

The use of monolingual pedagogies in South Africa have made inclusive education a myth, as they have failed to accommodate majority of EFAL learners. These monolingual pedagogies, that prioritize English as the primary language of instruction marginalize non-English-language speaking learners, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, and violates the language policy that was put forth to address the issues of linguistic diversity, cultural inclusion and most importantly the issues of language that rose during the apartheid period, leaving the education system with the same issues of a triglossic three-tiered system having Afrikaans at the centre, English at the top, and all the other African languages at the bottom.

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