

IMPACT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MOTHER-TONGUE IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Mother-tongue instruction in multilingual settings significantly impacts teaching and learning. This paper aims to investigate the role of teachers in implementing mother-tongue instruction in multilingual classrooms. A qualitative approach was employed for this inquiry, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. These interviews featured open-ended questions, allowing participants to respond in detail until data saturation was achieved. Participants were purposively selected and included teachers who provided instruction in the mother tongue, as mandated by policy for Foundation Phase teaching in multilingual education (MLE) settings. The study was conducted in schools within the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The findings reveal challenges faced by teachers in implementing and improving mother-tongue instructional materials. Due to a lack of teaching and learning resources, the study concludes that there is a need for libraries in schools. Additionally, the study recommends a thorough examination of innovative teaching strategies.

Keywords: *learning approaches; mother-tongue; multilingualism; teaching and learning resources; translanguaging*

1. Introduction

Alexander (2018) opines that South Africa, with its characteristic of adopting policies that cater to eleven official languages, by virtue is regarded as a phonetically super-different type of country. As these local languages are noted to be harnessing learners from varying linguistic backgrounds, classrooms for the South African context are somehow verbally different as compared to the previous dimensions. For teachers to be faced with the hassles of handling such diverse learners in a single or common classroom is really overwhelming, as argued by Banda (2018).

Oihana et al. (2020) declare that language choice in the education environment seems to slowly diminish due to home language L1 schools that are disadvantaged. In line with this argument, scholars in the likes of Ferreira-Meyers and Horne (2017) reveal that the sense of confidence declines when learners find difficulty speaking English fluently. In addition to that, findings relayed by Hurst (2016) elaborate how regretful learners feel to discover that their own L1 is somehow regarded as minor. It is therefore suggested that integrating L1 can have positive advantages that can help to control the learning process (Lwanga-Lumu, 2020). When the learning environment is considered positive, a strong

identification is fostered, not for learners only, but for all school stakeholders including teachers, the school management team (SMT), parents, and policymakers (Rivera & Mazak, 2017; Hurst & Mona, 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Multilingual Education theory was developed by Shohamy, E., Tannenbaum, M., & Gani, A. (2022). This theory stresses the use of the first language in the child, taking the socio-educational curriculum in the classroom culture and then connecting to the second language. It also encourages the utilization of learners' mother tongue as a method of guidance, particularly in the early years of schooling. Learners obtain information even more genuinely when shown in their first language. A linguistic level point that a bilingual learner must achieve to benefit from bilingualism (Cummins, 1979). The language level for reading is largely based on the vocabulary size of the language. Vocabulary size level is language dependent, meaning that learners who are exposed to another language of learning can ease up some challenges encountered. Studying new languages can change the focus of a learner.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Important resources used in the field of education, such as the lack of a curriculum to accommodate multilingualism and insufficient dictionaries used by students during English sessions, hampered learning, and teaching methods. Furthermore, in both research sites, school principals questioned the government and specific agencies in charge of funding fundamental resources for schools. Espana, C., Herrera, L.Y., & Garcia, O. (2019) emphasize that TL is the moment at which a multilingual individual's whole etymological group gets considered as compared to one language convergence, as advocated by the South African LiEP. Outlined by research findings in this instance is the level of decency brought about by students in their early entry years, with the mother's history of independence.

The research discovered that the terminology utilized for contextualized home languages could not be accessible in the elementary learning phase. Home language learning when blended with additional languages, in this case, the English language, somehow hinders learning and progression as students are unfamiliar with such a foreign language not spoken in a range of communities either. Contradictory to logistics to promote English medium teaching in some schools, the South African Language in Education Policy (LiEP) advocates for the use of Languages of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) for learners registered to learn in the so-called demarcated South African Grades 1–3, specifically.

The current studies have underlined the role of the native language as an excellent resource for learning and has been proven to overcome the challenges faced by L2 language learners (Oihana et al. 2020; Omidire 2019). Tian and Macaro (2012) hold that L1 learners to whom an input is provided do better than those not to whom an input is provided. Also, Cummins (2009) sees L1 as a foundation for new knowledge that is to find its way into the head. The fact is the application of L1 might lead to several learning obstacles because learners lack understanding of much of what is administered during teaching lessons. It is from there that this cohort of students can face challenges of decline in academic performance, thus affecting learner progress.

Therefore, the change to a second language, mainly English is necessary as this is the preferred language of communication from a global perspective. In the Republic of South Africa, school authorization is granted which formulates a school governing board (SGB)); there is consensus regarding the adoption of a language with the help of parents. Previous studies have demonstrated that most schools, second to their mother language - English - were selected (Gordon, 2019). The SGB's Umpire's decisions became reviewed with time so that they reached the point of non-stop review. Consequently, at this level, a language integration program should be implemented to have students implement English language learning as the prescribed media for Grade 4 teaching and learning processes.

In that LiEP multilingualism is not incorporated, only the language of instruction is incorporated and thus generated and accepted as a means or a tool for guiding throughout the Foundation Phase. The authors believe that a learner's experience with other languages could be considered a superior resource when he/she is learning to move around a learning space. As outlined in research, this is therefore considered as communication linked with translanguaging (España & Herrera, 2020).

3. Research Method

This research is done by listing all the research procedures and approaches employed throughout this study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). To gather data and make conclusions, the qualitative method proved to be the most reasonable choice, since it helped us when we worked together with participants. As the exchanges improved, we gained better knowledge of the situations and actions met by teachers in their real-life settings in schools.

3.1 Methodological Design

For this investigation, a case study design was employed. This research design assisted a lot in developing in-depth and reflective knowledge of complicated topics and social experiences in real-life situations (Yin, 1999). As a result, we were interested in analyzing how teachers implement mother-tongue teaching imperatives in a multilingual classroom.

3.2 Population and Sampling

Participants in this paper were identified on purpose. Denzin (2018) describes thoughtful selection as finding experienced, relevant, and yet accessible people regarding the subject under investigation. It became critical that the selected participants were the most appropriate to provide the intended results for this investigation, as believed by the authors. The researcher used purposeful sampling. Three Foundation Phase teachers were chosen. They are relevant because they have been teaching in the Foundation Phase for many years.

3.3 Research Instruments

Semi-structured interviews to achieve data for this qualitative study were employed. Participants were allowed to respond thoroughly to all the questions asked because the interview schedule included open-ended questions (Kitzinger, 1995). The questions rotated around multilingual experiences that support teaching and learning processes in rural schools. Further probing led to us asking several follow-up questions that were not originally

planned for in the interview schedule, indicating that for discussions to be this strong and valuable data from participants' responses were picked up (Britten, 1995).

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

All responses from participants were recorded after the information was collected (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2012). This was done to ensure that not a single detail was observed. We then scheduled a sequence of meetings to go over the recordings again and again until the authors were confident that all information had been collected. Many similarities and congruencies were discovered among participants as we combined this process. All related replies were grouped as a single set.

4. Results and Discussion

The study findings suggest that an important asset in pre-service teacher preparation is needed to improve knowledge about the value of integrating learners' first language (L1) into classes. For learning to be considered non-intimidating, there is a need for teachers to develop a positive attitude toward indigenous languages versus home background cultures, and this has to be inculcated into the lessons for inclusivity. The study had three main findings which have been discussed in the form of narratives below:

4.1 Teachers Attitude towards Translanguaging

When the participants were asked the questions about insufficient training, they responded by saying:

Participant 1 *"As Foundation Phase teachers we need to be flexible and open-minded of including L1 into classrooms as potential approaches to language teaching."*

Participant 2 *"As Teachers we are significant role players in the classrooms and should adopt an accommodating approach to alter their teaching methods to scaffold the process of learning".*

Participant 3 *"As teachers we allow learners to feel like valued members of the classroom community, enabling them to use all of their resources to participate fully in class activities".*

Participant 4 *"Teacher four supports this approach in that it will give learners a voice to better position, improve, and organize future pedagogical practices that can contribute to equality in education."*

The teachers led the lesson by asking students questions about knowledge-based materials. Bialystok (2018) and Ismaili (2015) agree that instructors from multilingual backgrounds should be open to creating consistent classrooms. Because it was a translanguaging assistance approach, the teacher's interaction with the students aided in the completion of the lesson. This resulted in instructors agreeing that translation assessing techniques improve classrooms because learners were able to assist their learning by employing L1s, which are already a source of life, and applying them to creating direct linkages and comprehension of classroom content. According to Sarker (2019), innovations have a major impact on the learner's experiences.

As part of the semi-structured interview, during interviews with teachers, learners in my lessons were more involved because L1 guided their understanding by code-switching certain words in many languages, as argued by Cummins (2009), who points out that L1 is a support upon which new knowledge has been built, and Gobincgca (2013) said no, it becomes quite stimulating to comprehend my home language sometimes.

Mgijima and Makalela's (2016) findings, in which researchers also cited another L1, will not simplify learners' understanding because they are based on the other language, isiXhosa usage in Africa. Early learners' perceptions helped me to grasp opposing viewpoints; on the one hand, they valued L1 learning incorporated into classrooms while also stating that they understood English subjects. Strauss (2016) draws attention to this perspective by highlighting parents' backgrounds in terms of endorsing the strategy of teaching their children in English rather than making L1 inappropriate in African languages.

Parmegiani and Rudwick (2014) correctly identified this type of skepticism. Their dispute is presented from a different perspective, in which learners were unwilling to use their L1 in a speculative setting because they did not have the opportunity to do so during their school years, as this was never implemented through the provision of skills and strategies required for educationally well-educated individuals in the learner's L1. According to García and Wei (2014), alternative languages do not compete with the majority's languages. However, Fetvadjev, V. H., Meiring, D., van de Vijver, F. J., Nel, J. A., & Hill, C. (2015). found that some parents prefer their children to learn in English schools from Grade 1, which can be challenging for most cultures without their mother tongue. In addition, past historical notions suggested that parents from rural regions desired a school that taught their children English because they believed it was the sole common language spoken by the majority of South Africans (Moodley et al. 2017). It appears that prior language policies may have contributed to the collapse of many learners who are initially extremely dependent on their L1, and secondly, when learning in School Grade 4 begins utilizing English as the language of education from that point on (Makaleka (2018a). It leads to a lack of awareness among learners regarding learning content, which has a detrimental impact on implementation.

4.2 Limited Resources and Time Constraints

When asked about insufficient training, the participants responded by saying:

Participant 1 *"Teaching in a multilingual class is good but it takes more time and needs more resources."*

Participant 2 *"It is a good venture though time-consuming and expensive." – "It's good but a lot of translation has to be done and might be very expensive."*

Participant 3 *"...another problem is that learners don't have dictionaries as teachers we are overcrowded so we can't have all the dictionaries for 90 learners. Learners who are not shy will come and ask mam to explain this word, most of the time I don't like to explain."*

Findings discovered that both locations had a common shortage of resources, which resulted in many students covering each classroom, making it impossible to supply furniture,

few tables, and a lack of teachers. On the other side, a shortage of educational resources, such as the absence of literature to accommodate multilingualism and schools' inability to provide adequate dictionaries for pupils to use during English courses, hampered teaching techniques. Teaching multilingualism is beneficial, but it takes more time, and resources are limited, since learners need dictionaries.

As highlighted by (Amaah P., 2014; Myende, 2014, and Gobingca, 2013), many schools are described as having insufficient resources and a lack of fundamental resources such as adequate classroom space or other features such as power, water, etc. These schools frequently lack furnishings for students, such as tables and chairs, congested classes, and the teacher-to-student ratio is also irritating. This is the primary worry in the literature, where comparable courses are recognized in the works of Ebersöhn et al. (2017), who highlight the restricted access to adequate energy, transportation, and education as key problems impacting performance, which are heavily stressed in my study.

4.3 Lack of Multilingual Teaching Strategies

When the participants were asked the questions about insufficient training, they responded by saying:

Participant 1 responded: *Overcrowding in classrooms is one of the biggest challenges, this leads to difficulties in giving individual attention to the learners”.*

Participant 2 *had a different opinion that was not in line with the previous participant:*

The problem comes in because our children are from rural areas and narrate that their place was not electrified, and they will therefore tell you that they didn't have electricity to do an assignment or study the whole night. Consequently, we try to help them 30 minutes before school ends to try and catch up. Helping with revision exercises stimulates interest to study further in a library.”

Findings demonstrate that all instructors working in settings that are multilingual in nature are conversant in the present literateness confronting learners in South African schools. Nonetheless, they are much more dissatisfied with their inability to teach information and skills that appear to be ahead of learners' achievement and competency. Nagy (2018) also observes that instructors are constrained by diverse language use as a means of facilitating teaching instruction due to being schooled for practices that are monolingual in nature.

The second problem is that they relocate from squatter settlements where there is no power. You will hear students complain, "I didn't have electricity to do my homework." Overcrowding is one of the issues, and it might be difficult to focus on an individual student at times. Teachers endorse the use of translanguaging as a policy to help students toward literacy development. Recognizing L1 language inclusion in the school curriculum and providing help with an asset-based strategy appropriate for educational battles. In a similar vein, Myende (2014) suggests that to address these obstacles, schools should adopt tactics such as reviewing their existing resources and utilizing them efficiently.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that there should be a significant investment in pre-service teacher preparation to increase awareness about the necessity of incorporating learners' L1s into lessons. The necessity of learning in a non-threatening, pleasant atmosphere, as well as developing the proper attitude toward learners' native languages and cultures, must be incorporated into the instruction. Capacitation needs to emphasize on successful methods for educating students from diverse language backgrounds and equipping instructors with tools for working in bilingual settings. Training that offers Professional Development programs for directed teachers must be implemented to accommodate that sense of a multicultural school community. Processes that are dynamic and transformational should be closely considered by policy implementation, with close consideration of inculcating various L1 technologies in their existing ways.

This study examined the benefits and challenges that come with utilizing learners' home languages to minimize the existing linguistic and cultural gaps in multilingual classrooms. This way home languages became gateways to developing both L1 and English language skills within an approach to multilingualism. The study aims to obtain a detailed view of the teachers' approaches to translanguageing in their classes, as a means of providing the required background in gaining knowledge about the efficient implementation of translanguageing.

Educational and linguistic blending in the South African education system is commonplace. Therefore, it becomes a language problem for those who cannot speak in their mother tongue. This research used translanguageing as a tool to explore the facilitators and limits faced by teachers when they decide to use the different languages of their choice in primary school classrooms. The results of this study show that understanding the learners and making them feel welcome led to an atmosphere that was non-threatening and amicable. Another reason that made teachers have favorable views about translanguageing was that the combination of such techniques made it easier to implement, and the students were more likely to try new measures. After all the pros, we still think that there will be problems in engaging in translanguageing to improve pedagogy and facilitate learning in multilingual environments. I mean that the language challenges would be problematic as well as the difference of opinions there. This research proposes that schools' resource scarcity and the reluctance of teachers to use translanguageing as a method of support may be considered a barrier to integrating translanguageing in primary schools. Another weakness is that few instructors were trained to teach in bilingual settings. Finally, existing social problems have not been completely addressed yet.

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