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Teachers' Perception on Translanguaging in Mother Tongue Based Languages as a Tool for Teaching and Learning in Lower Rural Primary Education in Tanzania: A Case Study of Rungwe District

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ABSTRACT

Globally every organization is facing new challenges regarding exploration of attitudes and the presence of translanguaging practice in lower primary school classrooms. In this regard, this study aimed to examine attitudes and the presence of translanguaging practice in lower primary school classrooms in Tanzania. The study adopted case study research design and followed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study used Slovene's Formula to obtain sample size of 172 respondents from the target population of 301 respondents. Interview and observation methods were used to collect primary data. The data was analyzed using contents analysis and frequencies. Finding of the study concluded that teachers perceived that through translanguaging, child learns more quickly through mother tongue than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. Further teachers acknowledged the importance of mother tongue: "learners are quicker to learn to read and acquire other academic skills when first taught in their mother tongue". The study recommends that teachers should create an instructional space where translanguaging is nurtured without learners having to suppress their linguistic repertoires. Thus, a classroom where learners manifest and utilise their linguistic repertoires constitutes a 'haven' for learners to attain a deeper understanding of the learned material.

Keywords: *Translanguaging, Perceptions, Mother Tongue Based Languages, Rural Primary Education, Teaching & Learning, Tanzania*

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1. Introduction

Translanguaging is said to create more equality in the classroom by employing individuals' full linguistic repertoire in the language learning process (García & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging allow teachers to demonstrate authority by restricting learners to routinized, teacher-led interactions, creating passive learning environments. The use of the first language within IRF sequences is said to improve participation as well as promote more complex student contributions. Modupeola (2013) is of the opinion that translanguaging and code-switching among teachers and learners of different Mother tongues do get problems since some learners may favor a particular language and others may not like that language. This situation creates inferiority complex among learners during learning and teaching process, furthermore some learners become psychological affected. This situation makes teachers not to achieve learning objective. In addition, a

study conducted by Modupeola (2013) in Nigeria on translanguaging and code-switching as a teaching strategy: The study attempted to look at significantly the Code switch occurrence to determine its significance to the teaching and learning of English language and other subjects in Nigeria. The findings indicated that Code-switching has great contribution to the learners during the process of teaching and learning English language at early stage so as to provide learners.

In Tanzania, language policies, whose purpose was and still is said to nurture and promote unity, promote the use of Kiswahili and English as official languages while all other languages, even those whose native speakers are more than one million, are excluded from public use. The policy seems to ignore the role of mother tongue instruction in academic development. The language that is mostly used as a medium of instruction in Tanzanian kindergarten and primary schools



is Kiswahili language; only a few kindergartens and primary schools use English as medium of instruction at these levels. Kiswahili language is the national language to Tanzanians (MOEC, 2014) and the first language in urban areas.

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that is in the mind works automatically for expression and understanding: sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO 1953; Fakeye, 2011).

The learners' home languages should be seen and taken as a resource in the abetment of acquisition of new scientific knowledge and not as a hindrance (Howe & Lisi, 2014; Krause & Prinsloo, 2016; Rogers, 2014; Wei, 2018). Translanguaging pedagogy moves away from monolingual teaching strategies towards a more integrated, less boundaried use of learners' linguistic repertoire in teaching and learning (Henderson & Ingram, 2018), and already features strongly in the daily practices of these learners and teachers.

The poor learning that results from the mismatch between the language of instruction and the language the child speaks is the most prominent in the early grades. This is seen particularly strongly in data from longitudinal studies. The child has had little chance to learn the language of instruction by then, and this significant lack of fluency in the language of instruction is very visible. Studies also show that, where learning in the early grades is poor, the student does not catch up in later grades; rather, the child falls further and further behind as he or she passes from grade to grade (Stanovich, 1986). A mismatch between the language of instruction and the language spoken by the learners is often to blame. When 'reading' takes place in a language that the learner does not understand, comprehension is definitely not a part of the process.

2. Literature Review

A study was conducted in a secondary school in Sweden by Tutunjian (2014) on "the influences of code-switching in the Second Language Classroom in connection to language development. The study revealed that code-switching supports

oral language growth in the second language classroom in a secondary school in Sweden and suggested various criteria that are required to consider when using codes switching in an educational context. The results suggested that learners with low ability benefit from first language usage, whereas high-proficiency learners seem to both prefer and benefit more from an English-only classroom.

There are deferent views about teachers' usage of code switching in classrooms. It is claimed that, code switching is unaccepted practice in classrooms (Simon, 2001). Teachers who use code switching feel guilty of doing so because it has not been considered as a good practice (Wakasa, 2004).

Another view is that code switching is used by weak language performers to compensate for language deficiency. Therefore, teachers use code switching because they have limited vocabulary of a certain language. To some researchers like Lin (1996), this view seems to have less evidence since the use of code switching is a normal thing to bilingual or multilingual speakers.

Other scholars including Sert (2005) argue that, teachers are not always aware of the use of the translanguaging and code switching in classrooms. Sometimes teachers practice code switching unintentionally (Sert 2005). Similarly, Blom and Gumperz (1972) assert that, code switching may happen unintentionally and may be independent of the speakers' overt intentions. Apart from scholars, learners have shown their constructive position about the use of code switching in classrooms. Abdullah (2010) reveals this in his study that teachers and learners have a stronger desire to using translanguaging and code switching than using one language as a medium of instruction.

Correspondingly, Viriri and Maradze (2013) conducted a study at Great Zimbabwe University concerning the prevalence of code switching in secondary schools where English is the official medium of instruction. The findings showed that there was a widespread tendency of code switching. As a result, they concluded that code switching is an unavoidable practice. Teaching and learning completely depend on language which is understood by both teachers and pupils.

In a research carried out by Mary (2014) about the attitude on the use of

mother tongue, the way teachers felt about the languages they were exposed to within the school setting influenced how they used those languages during classroom instruction. How they used those languages also influenced how their learners used the languages. Basically, when an individual is confronted with more than one language, it leads to a consideration of linguistic attitudes of the individual (Omulando, 2004). The attitude towards a language, the value placed on a language determines the way a language is received and used by an individual or group of individuals. It can therefore, be concluded that the higher the value of language, the warmer the reception and the more the patronage of the language; the lower the value the colder the reception and the less the patronage of the language. Therefore, in relation to the languages teachers are exposed to, evidence from the findings showed that the value placed on English and Kiswahili in relation to Mother Tongue by teachers had a bearing on the attitude they had towards Mother tongue. From the teachers' responses, Mother tongue is disregarded for its lack of instrumental motivations. In Kenyan lower schools, English and Kiswahili were preferred for both their instrumental and integrative motivations. Therefore, teachers discouraged the use of Mother Tongue and would want to dissuade learners from using it because of its lack of utilitarian and economic advantages (Mary, 2014).

3. Research Methodology

This study used case study research design because it helps to gather more information of one particular situation for the purpose of gaining in-depth understanding of issues being investigated (cooper and Shindler, 2003). This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study adopted case study research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study used Slovene's Formula to obtain sample size of 172 respondents from the target population of 301 respondents (Rungwe district Council, 2020). Interview and observation methods were used to collect primary data, data was analyzed using contents analysis and frequencies.

The main indigenous ethnic groups in Rungwe District Council are the Nyakyusa, Ndali, Kinga, Safwa, and Ngoni that occupy most parts of the district council. In this study, the researcher used one classroom observation form as observational guides. The form was

specifically designed to guide the researcher in observing translanguaging strategies (interactional and contextual adjustments) in trying to make their lesson comprehensible to learners. The research attended at least three 40 minutes lessons for each teacher. Teachers were basically interviewed for the purpose of understanding their knowledge and perception about the strategy and also getting their views and opinions regarding the role of translanguaging to their learners. Each teacher whose lesson was observed was also interviewed.

To ensure validity of this research, the researcher used a number of recommended approaches: using multiple sources of evidence, pre-testing the questions and observation guides to ensure its relevance in data collection and conclusion are reached based on the data collected. The study also used the recommended approaches to sample selection and selection of sampling units.

This study ensured the comparability and the consistency of each procedure and was given explicit account of the steps that were taken in each part of the process in collecting the data. Moreover, by referring to each participant of the interview separately as speaker A, B, C and D, and by presenting the statistics from the questionnaire, the distinction between the participants' voices and the researcher's interpretations are made clear.

4. Discussion of the Findings

On the interview with teachers about how they felt about using their mother tongue as a teaching and learning tool for lower primary classes, 75% reported feeling good using mother tongue. The teachers felt proud of themselves as they spoke mother tongues. It was also revealed that the mother tongues were spoken by the local majorities. Teachers also stated that they felt a sense of belonging through speaking of mother tongues which in addition promoted socialization in the society.

Meanwhile, 25% teachers did not feel good speaking mother tongue as it looked like it could lead to segregation of those who did not belong to the mother tongue spoken by the majority. They also claimed speaking mother tongues looked like uncivilized behavior. Teachers stated that asking of a question in class and notices that the entire class is quiet and nobody is willing to participate or few participants signals a need to translanguaging, then the teachers automatically used mother tongue to activate the learners participation as they



had not mastered enough vocabulary words in Kiswahili which is a language of instruction. They also noted that at certain occasions teachers noted that there was need to enable learners pay more attention during lessons, then the teachers would code switch. The teachers also stated that they more often respond to learners questions in mother tongue as much as they see the need to do so as long as they see that responding to them in mother tongue has an impact to the learners.

In the same note, a UNESCO report (1953) indicates the importance of mother tongue education by stressing “educationally the child learns more quickly through mother tongue than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium”. The belief in benefits of translanguaging during instructions is not a new idea (Burton & Rejendram, 2019). The codeswitching primarily follows the intrasentential pattern (Garcia, 2009) where the teacher translates or alternates words, they deem too difficult for the pupils. This systematic use of the different languages to propagate meaning has shown to be often used within the classroom. Often, the L1 is also used to expand on the information given in the L2, which also could constitute translanguaging (Williams cited in Garcia & Wei, 2014).

In all the observed lessons, the use of L1 emerges as a means to quickly make clarifications without disrupting the flow of the lesson. This type of use correlates with what Macaro (cited in Garcia & Wei, 2014) finds to be a useful tool. Although the teachers also reported that they do not allow their learners to entirely use mother tongue, they tried to promote Kiswahili language since it is the national language in which examination is set and answered as stated by the government:

3.2.19. *Lugha ya Taifa ya Kiswahili itatumika kufundishia na kujifunzia katika ngazi zote za elimu na mafunzo na Serikali itaweka utaratibu wa kuwezesha matumizi ya lugha hii kuwa endelevu na yenye ufanisi katika kuwapatia walengwa elimu na mafunzo yenye tija kitaifa na kimataifa.*

3.2.19 Kiswahili as a national language shall be used as a language of instruction at all education levels and the government will facilitate the sustainable use of Kiswahili to ensure proper provision of education that has value both nationally and internationally (URT, 2014:39)

Teachers stated that many learners who enter these primary lower schools from

rural village areas become marginalised because they are not fluent enough to use Kiswahili for communication and for learning school subjects. Therefore translanguaging was one of the strategies used in simplifying the teaching and learning in multilingual communities. The Education and Training Policy specifies that: In pre-primary and primary schools the medium of instruction shall be Kiswahili, and English shall be taught as a compulsory subject.

When interviewees (teachers) were asked whether learners should be allowed to code switch while in class, those who accepted were 75% of teachers and they stated that learners should be allowed because most of them come from deep rural areas where there is insufficient practice of Kiswahili and therefore code switching can aid them to understand better during lessons as it was found to learners from schools NJ, KP and MS. Although Kiswahili is the national accepted as language of instruction in primary school, code switching helps learners to understand difficult vocabularies with the assistance of the teachers and learners among themselves.

The result shows that all the participating teachers perceive their pupils to use L1 during the lessons. In the interviews, the teachers distinctly connected their pupils' use of their L1 with identity and self-confidence. This connection between language-use and self-confidence can be developed within the spectrum of translanguaging (Menken & Sánchez, 2019). Nonetheless, even though the teachers see a strong connection between language and identity they encourage the pupils to speak kiswahili as much as possible, thus viewing the pupils as monolinguals learning a new language instead of emerging multi- or bilinguals (Garcia, 2011). However, there is a strong consensus that the pupils' L1 is of great import, at the same time conflicting with the feeling that the use of too much L1 could be detrimental to their progress in their L2.

75% of teachers claimed to support their learners who used local languages in class positively although they also encouraged them to speak and practice Kiswahili. Teachers believed that accusing a student for asking question in mother tongue could create fear, low self-esteem and lack of confidence among the learners plus lack of socialization. They mainly responded positively to the learners' questions and

responses in both Kiswahili and mother tongue. However the teachers also added that although they translanguaged in Kinyakusa mother tongue, they always encouraged learners to use Kiswahili 'the national language' and the language of teaching and learning.

Many Tanzanian children especially in rural areas are submerged into Kiswahili for the first time at the moment of joining primary school, thus Kiswahili becomes their L2, which they cannot even master. These challenges do happen against the backdrop of a paradigm shift where the use of mother tongue as a mediation tool in language learning and in knowledge acquisition in general has currently dominated debate on pedagogical practice globally.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the study concluded that teachers perceived that through translanguaging, child learns more quickly through mother tongue than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. Further teachers acknowledged the importance of mother tongue: "learners are quicker to learn to read and acquire other academic skills when first taught in their mother tongue". This is because the children have internalized the language to help them to understand what they are taught. The teacher translates or alternates words, they deem too difficult for the pupils. This systematic use of the different languages to propagate meaning showed to be often used within the classroom. Often, the teachers used L1 is also used to expand on the information given in the L2, which also could constitute translanguaging. It is also within this situation; the participants consistently express the added value of their own use of L1 as a tool to scaffold meaning. The study recommended that teachers should create an instructional space where translanguaging is nurtured without learners having to suppress their linguistic. Thus, a classroom where learners manifest and utilize their linguistic repertoires constitutes a 'haven' for learners to attain a deeper understanding of the learned material.

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