

Translanguaging Practices Teachers Use in Teaching English Language in A transitioned Grade 5 Class in Katete District

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to assess the translanguaging practices teachers used to teach English language in grade 5 class in Katete district of Zambia. The study utilised the descriptive research design under qualitative research approach. The sample was 188 grade 5 pupils, 6 and 2 grade teachers. Data were collected using interviews and classroom observations of English language lessons. The findings of the study showed that classes used translanguaging practices to teach English language. The study also found teachers and learners were able to speak Chinyanja, Senga, Tumbuka, Bemba and English which confirmed a multilingual environment in classrooms. Teachers translanguaged in their teaching approaches and used the local language to explain the concepts of the day in the transitioned classrooms. Therefore, monolingual practices were not found to be relevant in the transitioned classes hence teachers translanguaged in grade 5 classed. The study recommended that The Ministry of Education and its stake holders should consider teacher training programs to enhance teachers' knowledge and practices of translanguaging so they can effectively handle the multilingual classes.

Key words: translanguaging practices, teaching English, Katete district

1. Introduction

The Zambian education language policy recognises the use of familiar Zambian languages as the official languages of instruction in the Pre-Schools and early Grades (Grades 1-4). In Zambia, the seven (7) zone languages; Cinyanja, Chitonga, Icibemba, Kiikaonde, Lunda, Luvale and Silozi as well as the widely used community languages in specific school catchment areas will be used as a language of instruction in all learning areas while English will be an

official language of instruction from Grade 5 upwards (Zambian Curriculum Education Framework, 2013:30).

Eastern province uses Cinyanja as regional language and Katete in particular being a peri-urban, pupils speak Cinyanja, Senga, Tumbuka, Bemba, and a few speakers of other languages. At grade 5 pupils would have transitioned from Zambian regional language as a language of instruction to English language as a language of instruction. By this time learners would have not yet broken through to literacy in English. Zulu (2019) stated that teachers transitioned to English at the expense of the learners, as a result some teachers used both English and local Zambian languages to teach in order to help the learners. Teachers seem not to be consistent on how they transitioned from grade 4 to 5. Some teachers would transition directly to English while others would transition slowly into English. As a result, Mwanza (2020) recommended primary teachers should be trained on how they are supposed to transition from grade 4 to 5 in the context of translanguaging.

Other scholars like Mkandawire (2017) stated that local languages empower citizens to participate effectively in economic, cultural, social and political matters of the country as they will be free to express themselves. At classroom level, local languages help a learner express himself freely. Nambisan (2014) contend that teachers firmly believe that translanguaging is a necessary process that aids second-language learners in picking up a second language through the use of their native tongue and other practices. In addition, Setati et al., (2002) and Simachenya (2017) stated that translanguaging through alternation between official and learners' languages facilitated learners' access to information in their local languages.

With regards to the benefits of translanguaging, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) stated that translanguaging improved literacy performance by multilingual learners was characterized by the linguistic freedom and learner speech freedom which accounted to learner understanding of the content being taught in class. Also, Jiménez et al. (2015) add that translanguaging through translating English text into Spanish enabled students to collaboratively construct meanings at the word, sentence, and text levels while developing more understandings of the forms and functions of language.

Rao (2019) stated that authentic materials create interest among the learners since the teachers select them with proper care by taking the needs and interests of the learners. Nyimbili (2021)

also found that the use of authentic visual teaching and learning material enabled the learners to use their languages to describe the concepts in the lesson of the day. Bwalya (2019) argued that teachers democratised their classrooms through the adoption of translanguaging as pedagogic practice, others insisted on monolingual language practices which resulted in symbolic violence with pupils having access to the classroom but not learning. He added that in code switching, teachers used more than one language when teaching. On the contrary, Hungwe and Hungwe (2018) pointed out that translanguaging should not be a tool solely used by English language lecturers. Other faculties need to collaborate with colleagues from English language departments and utilise translanguaging in their teaching, as all content subjects undoubtedly have concepts that students struggle to understand in English.

By definition, Baker (2011:39) defined translanguaging as the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages. In addition, Nyimbili (2021) also defined translanguaging practices as the teacher's ability to recognize the learners' linguistic rights, accept multilingualism and use its advantages as a resource to multiliteracy development while not ignoring the target language developed for unification and classroom prescribed instruction (regional languages) in the Zambian context. This means that in the learning of one language, other languages and dialects work as stepping stones to the providing of a link between the language being taught and the language in which the children are thinking and can express themselves better. This study was conducted in Katete central district which is a multilingual district with dominant languages such Cinyanja, Senga, Tumbuka and Bemba. At grade five English is the language of instruction as shown in the background. Thus, this study was conducted to investigate what translanguaging practices are used to teach English language to grade five pupils.

A study conducted by Makalela (2015) investigated metacognitive reflections of 15 (n=15) student teachers towards their use of discursive language practices in learning Sepedi as an additional language in a teacher education programme. During classroom interactions, the participants' community (home) languages were permitted to offset linguistic fixity often experienced in monolingual classroom contexts. The results of the study revealed a heightened cross fertilisation of transcultural identities and fluid communicative repertoires that extend beyond traditional linguistic codes. Using a translanguaging framework and extend its scope

as an effective strategy to renegotiate African language boundaries based on an ubuntu worldview (i.e., one being incomplete without the other) and highlight cognitive, pedagogical and social advantages of the languaging phenomenon. As a result, this study attempted to review the translanguaging practices that can be used to teach English Language to grade 5 primary pupils in Katete District of Zambia.

Mwanza (2019) conducted a similar study that intended to establish the attitudes of teachers towards unofficial languages and the implications such attitudes would have on the expected teachers' juxtaposition of the horizontal and vertical discourses in selected Multilingual classrooms of Zambia. A qualitative study involving 18 grade 11 secondary school teachers of English were sampled. Data was collected through interviews and participant observation. The findings show that teachers held monolingual purist language ideologies in which their negative attitudes towards unofficial languages resulted into symbolic violence. The study was carried out at secondary school while the current study will be conducted at a primary school. The study showed that the use of monolingual language to teach multilingual learners was not favourable. As a result, this study intended to investigate the translanguaging practices that can be used to teach English language to grade five primary school pupils of Katete district Zambia.

Kleyn and Garcia (2019) stated that Translanguaging as an Act of Transformation Restructuring Teaching and Learning for Emergent Bilingual Students, translanguaging pedagogical design refers to how teachers set up affordances as they construct learning experiences for emergent bilinguals. Attention to how students actually practice language requires consideration of a number of factors. First, teachers have to set up group work with speakers of similar home languages and design collaborative tasks to give students the opportunity to use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire, which includes gestures, pictures, technology, and so on. A translanguaging design also requires the inclusion of a range of resources that are both multilingual and multimodal. This provides students with multiple points of entry to make meaning of the new language features. This entails negotiating the instructional design while also making unplanned changes to best facilitate student learning and understanding.

2. Purpose of the study

The aim of the study was to assess translanguaging practices teachers used to teach English language in grade 5 class in Katete district of Zambia.

3. Methods and materials

The study was conducted entirely in a qualitative approach and descriptive research design is a type of research design that aims to obtain information to systematically describe a phenomenon, situation, or population. The study targeted teachers and pupils in grade five only. This sample size was targeted due to 2013 ministry of education language policy mandates that grade 1-4 should be taught in a regional local language. Two (2) teachers were used and provided required information because of their educational and teaching experience, frequent interactions with their 188 pupils and to get their views on the use of translanguaging to teaching English Language in a grade five (5) classes. A simple random sampling procedure was employed and selected 1 school of Katete district. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select two grade 5 classes and two languages teachers based on the researcher's judgment and knowledge. The instruments used in the data collection were interview guides, and class observation sheets because that is when a researcher got firsthand information from teachers as they are the ones who have educational and teaching experience, frequent interactions with their pupils in their respective classroom. Data collected was analyzed thematically and content coding. This entailed identifying major themes from putting data into identified themes and categories after which interpretation was made easier and themes were then grouped to correspond with specific research objectives. During this study the respondents were assured that whatever information they were going to give was to be confidential. The study also respected and observe the cultural values, traditions or taboos valued by informants. The researcher properly acknowledged the sources used in order to give due credit to the information source.

4. Findings and Discussion

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4.1 Findings from Interviews

Interviewed teachers were asked to explain what translanguaging is in their own understanding. Teachers were able to explain the meaning of translanguaging in their own understanding. Teachers explained that translanguaging is a process that uses more than one language when teaching in a classroom. One teacher said that *“Translanguaging is using of different language in order to enhance teaching.”* Another teacher explained that *“Translanguaging when a teacher uses more than one language when teaching in his or classroom.”* The other teacher also added that *“Translanguaging is the practice that is used in a classroom in order to help the development of language skills through the use of two languages at the same time.”*

The findings revealed that teachers were able to explain the meaning of the word translanguaging. Responses teachers gave showed that they understood what translanguaging is, because translanguaging is about the use of different languages in order to reinforce teaching and learning in a classroom. These findings are supported by Nyimbili (2021) who defined translanguaging practices as the teacher’s ability to recognize the learners’ linguistic rights, accept multilingualism and use its advantages as a resource to multiliteracy development while not ignoring the target language developed for unification and classroom prescribed instruction (regional languages) in the Zambian context.’ From the foregoing, it is clear that teachers showed that they understood what translanguaging is, because translanguaging is about the use of different languages in order to reinforce teaching and learning in a classroom.

Teachers were asked on the translanguaging practices they use when teaching grade 5 English classes. The findings showed that teachers were using different translanguaging practices in the teaching of English language. These were translation, interpretation, code-switching and authentic teaching and learning materials. One teacher explained that:

“I mostly use code-switching teaching English language and this is because of learners easily understanding the concept being taught as I switch from their local language to English, this because grades from grade one to four learners were learning in their local languages.

Another teacher said that:

“In my class I use interpretation when teaching English language in my grade five class. This is because of children from different school background and

culture s it helps them to realize how different languages can convey a message in vastly different ways.

Another teacher also explained that:

I use when translation teaching English language in my grade five class because it communicates from learner's local language to English as their second language.

From the responses above, code-switching was commonly used by teachers when teaching English grade five classes because it allows the teachers to be flexible in using other languages when teaching English language. These findings are in line with Bwalya (2019) who stated that in code switching, teachers used more than one language when teaching. In his study the classes that were observed, the findings were that most of the teachers alternated between English and local languages such as Bemba, Nyanja and Lenjes. They used the informal familiar languages of the learners to help them learn. Setati et al., (2002) and Simachenya (2017) also revealed that translanguaging through alternation between official and learners' languages facilitated learners' access to information in their local languages. It also enabled learners' active participation in the lessons in terms of answering questions, and that learners were able to connect their classroom experience to their experience during play time as the languages used by teachers correlated to their languages of play. From the foregoing, it clearly shows that code-switching was being used as a translanguaging practice where learners where about to connect the concepts being taught as both the target and learners' familiar language.

Teachers were also asked on how beneficial it is for learners when they use other languages other than English when teaching grade five classes. Findings revealed that learner were able to understand and express themselves during the learning process as they were able to ask questions when not clear in their local language. One teacher said:

"The benefit that the learners get is being familiar with other language and it helps those who do not understand certain words in English to understand better in other languages like Chewa and Senga".

Another participant said:

“The lesson goes very well because the learners fully participate because they can express themselves using other languages and they understand better, hence objectives are always achieved,”

The other teacher explained that:

“Using other languages than English it is beneficial to students because they easily understand the concept being taught”.

From the foregoing, it shows that learners benefited a lot in understanding the concept taught in a classroom because teachers and learners were able to teach and learn in other languages. The other benefit it also helps learners who do not understand most words in the instruction language which is English language as they are helped through another language. These findings are in tandem with Nambisan (2014) found that teachers firmly believe that translanguaging is a necessary process that aids second-language learners in picking up a second language through the use of their native tongue and other practices. As a result, it is imperative to consider the importance of students’ native language as a resource available to students and prepare teachers to use that as they help their students gain proficiency in English. In this case, languages are used as resources which enable learners to access knowledge regardless of their linguistic differences. These practices mean that the classrooms are democratized through the language choices and practices of the teachers. This is in line with Mkandawire (2017) who also stated that ‘local languages empower citizens to participate effectively in economic, cultural, social and political matters of the country as they will be free to express themselves. At classroom level, local languages help a learner express himself freely.’ From the foregoing, we can see that learners felt more comfortable to fully participate and expressive their opinion in the lesson as they were not limited in the target language which is English.

Teachers were asked on how well teachers’ lessons go for them when they are using translanguaging during their teaching. Teachers were able to explain how well their lessons are done and this was because learners were fully participating in the learning process. One teacher responded that:

“In my classroom the lessons go very well because the learners fully participate, because they can express themselves using other languages and they understand better which helps in meeting the objectives”.

The other teacher added that:

“Lessons in my classroom are better than when I only use language of instruction, since previous learners only learnt in local language.”

The study findings are in line with Kleyn and Garcia (2019) who stated that focusing on standards, curriculum, and materials, created with English monolinguals in mind, without consideration of how bilingual students learn in the moment, will ultimately be harmful to them and most likely reproduce negative outcomes for minoritized students. Instead, an educator who is able to shift in response to the students’ dynamic languaging practices shifts toward an education that liberates and gives space to students’ voices. From the forgoing teaching English using translanguaging helps learners to smoothly from known to unknown as learners with limited understand of English are helped through their own local language. Similarly, the current study attempted to investigate the use translanguaging practices that would help learners’ performance in English.

Teachers were asked on the learners’ participation when other languages are used in literacy lessons. Findings showed that there was full participation from the leaners in the classrooms as other languages were used during teaching and learning process. One teacher explained that:

“In my grade five English class when teaching English language using other languages, almost 100 percent participations, because everyone would have understood what is expected of them. Learners easily understand what is being taught.”

Another teacher explained that *“The participation becomes very good because learners are able to use other languages which they are familiar with.* Finding in this study from the teachers indicated that learners fully participated during teaching and learning process because they were allowed to use language, they were familiar with.

These findings concur with what Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) when they stated that ‘Improved literacy performance by multilingual learners was characterized by the linguistic freedom and learner speech freedom which accounted to learner understanding of the content

being taught in class. The findings were also supported Jiménez et al. (2015) who found that translanguaging through translating English text into Spanish enabled students to collaboratively construct meanings at the word, sentence, and text levels while developing more understandings of the forms and functions of language. Learner achievement increased from the pretest scores to better scores in the post test. Clearly, there is a link between translanguaging, learner participation, motivation and understanding of the content which eventually results into improved learner performance. From the foregoing, it can be stated that learners fully participated during the teaching and learning process because they were allowed to use language, they were familiar with.

Teachers were asked on what was so interesting about translanguaging from their classrooms experience. Teachers indicated that it was so interesting teaching English language in grade five classes because no learner was left behind as some English words which learners were not familiar of were explained in their local language for better understanding. One teacher explained that:

“The most interesting thing is that the learners have deeper understanding of the lesson because the lesson involves the use of local languages.” Another teacher added that *“Learners easily understand what is being taught”*.

The findings indicated that translanguaging practices were being used in a grade five (5) class to teach English language. These practices were code-switching, translation, interpretation and authentic teaching and learning materials. Through translanguaging the lesson were made in such a way that learners could fully participate in the lesson and understand the concept being taught. These findings are supported by Hungwe and Hungwe (2018) translanguaging should not be a tool solely used by English language lecturers. Other faculties need to collaborate with colleagues from English language departments and utilise translanguaging in their teaching, as all content subjects undoubtedly have concepts that students struggle to understand in English. Consequently, if students are allowed to use translanguaging, they will have a deeper understanding of such concepts which are taught in such classes since the language barrier is broken. In this case, translanguaging practices may be an effective way of teaching learners for easy understanding or grasp of intended concepts in not only English but any other case being taught in unfamiliar language.

4.2. Findings from the classroom observation

The teacher had content of the subject as they had an understanding that translanguaging is the process which makes meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge as it uses two languages in a classroom. In grade five classes, the teacher used translanguaging practices which included interpretation as well as authentic teaching and learning materials. It was observed that translanguaging practices were effective in the teaching and learning of English in a grade five classroom. This finding is supported by Rao (2019) who stated that authentic materials create interest among the learners since the teachers select them with proper care by taking the needs and interests of the learners. Nyimbili (2021) also found that the use of authentic visual teaching and learning material enabled the learners to use their languages to describe the concepts in the lesson of the day. As a result, the learners can participate with more enthusiasm in the given tasks and try to perform the tasks with utmost care and concentration. Authentic materials are abundantly used in the teaching of English by the teachers to attain better results while teaching the learners in the English language classrooms.

In these classes it was observed that learners were able to participate fully as they were able to express themselves in both English and their local language in one response.

FOR EXAMPLE:

TEACHER: From the passage we have read; who can tell us what they have heard from the story?

LEARNER 1: Bibiana built a house on the middle of the road then ...

TEACHER: Continue *mchitundu unga kwanise kukamba*

LEARNER 1: Then *kunabwera* snake, *infutsa ana kuti* “*ndani anamanga nyumba pakati pa njira?*” Then *bana* answered, Bibiana.

LEARNER 2: Bibiana left the children home *kuti akathebe nkhuni*.

LEARNER 3: I heard *kuti* elephant *inabwera* then it swallowed *bana ba* Bibiana.

Through observations it observed that teachers were encouraging their learners to use the language they were familiar with when they got stuck with English when they were giving feedback.

FOR EXAMPLE

TR: What did the Elephant do?

LR 1: *inapeza nyumba panjira* then *inafusa ana kuti ndani anamanga nyumba panjira? ana anayanka kuti ni Bibiana* the Elephant swallowed them. (The elephant found a house on the road then asked the children that who built the house on the road? The children responded it was Bibiana the Elephant swallowed them).

LR 2: Elephant *inamedza ana a Bibiana*.

This enabled a lot of learners to fully participate as they were able to interact and translate each other's views in both languages.

From the dialogue, the teacher was able to democratize the classroom languages by asking learners to explain using the language they were comfortable with. From this, we can see that learners were able to code switch between English and Cinyanja and at times use a mixture of Chewa and English to explain. From the statement, 'I heard *kuti* elephant *inabwera* then it swallowed *bana ba Bibiana*' it is evident that dealing with a multilingual class you cannot run away from translanguaging in such classes just as the learners have demonstrated.

The finding showed that the teacher was able to democratize the classroom languages by asking learners to explain using the language they were comfortable with. This finding is in with Bwalya (2019) who stated that teachers democratized their classrooms through the adoption of translanguaging as pedagogic practice, others insisted on monolingual language practices which resulted in symbolic violence with pupils having access to the classroom but not learning. From the findings, we could see that learners were able to code switch between English and Cinyanja and at times use a mixture of Chewa and English to explain. From the statement, 'I heard *kuti* elephant *inabwera* then it swallowed *bana ba Bibiana*' it is evident that dealing with a multilingual class you cannot run away from translanguaging in such classes just as the learners have demonstrated. From the foregoing, we can tell that teachers were giving learners equal opportunities to express themselves, participate fully and ask questions in class were necessary without language being a barrier. This also shows that learners were able to integrate their language of play with the school language which gave them the zeal to learn and confidence to participate in class. This helped the teachers to teach using translanguaging practices to make up for linguistic limitations some learners were facing in class.

The findings are in line with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory which states that 'children's daily social linguistic influences in the communities become their mental resources which finally enable them to acquire meaning and make the words they use into their own cognitive resource (Mercer, 2000). For instance, they have a home language which they are fully acquainted to before they even enrolled in their first-grade education (pre/primary school), this language if utilized by the teacher can be used as their mental resources which finally would enable them to acquire meaning and make the words they use into their own cognitive resource. As it can be seen this theory is in agreement with the use of translanguaging practices that teachers are using to teach English language in a grade five (5) multilingual class.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the translanguaging practices teachers use in teaching English language in a grade 5 in Katete district varied from code switching, translation, authentic material uses and code mixing. This was possible because the learners were able to speak Chinyanja, Senga, Tumbuka, Bemba and English which confirmed a multilingual environment in classrooms which were perceived to be monolingual by policy. With the use of these practices, it was concluded that teachers were giving learners equal opportunities to express themselves, participate fully and ask questions in class were necessary without language being a barrier. To make learning meaningful, teachers translanguaged in their teaching approaches and used the local language to explain the concepts of the day in the transitioned classrooms due English language inefficiencies amongst the learners in the grade 5 class. Therefore, translanguaging in a transitioned class is a catalyst to providing a deeper understanding of taught concepts in such classes so as to break the language barrier. To this end, monolingual practices were not found to be relevant in the transitioned classes hence teachers translanguaged in grade 5 classed. The study recommended that The Ministry of Education and its stake holders should consider teacher training programs to enhance teachers' knowledge and practices of translanguaging so they can effectively handle the multilingual classes.

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