

Language-in-education in Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia: harnessing learners' multilingual repertoires

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Abstract:

This talk presents emerging findings from a collaborative research project looking at the challenges associated with monolingual language-in-education policies in primary schools in Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia. In all three countries, as across much of the continent, learners and their daily interactions are characterised by multilingualism. However, the multilingual practices found outside of the classroom are often at odds with the monolingual language-in-education policies that the three countries have adopted.

We explore this tension between language policy and learners' linguistic realities by drawing on the growing body of work examining language use from a 'translanguaging' perspective (Canagarajah 2011; Lewis, Jones & Baker 2012; Garcia & Wei 2014). Those working in the field of translanguaging argue that imposing monolingual norms onto multilingual students makes classrooms inequitable spaces in which some students are freely able to express themselves in familiar ways, while others are expected to work in and through less familiar language and literacy practices. This talk draws on ethnographic classroom interaction data and interviews that reflect contrasting patterns of interaction between official languages, regional languages and community languages. We ask:

- 1) What language and literacy practices are promoted, valued and expected in schools and classrooms?
- 2) How can translanguaging pedagogies/practices be employed in schools and how can they enhance teaching and learning?

Findings highlights the potential for language-in-education policies that harness the diverse linguistic repertoires of learners and classroom interactions to foster more equitable spaces of knowledge creation and engender literacy practices that resemble learners' own language practices. We explore the role that multilingual classroom practices play in developing positive educational experiences that are conducive to successful completion of schooling and the transfer of appropriate skills, looking at the potential impact in these three countries and beyond.

References:

Canagarajah, Suresh. 2011. 'Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy.' *Applied linguistics review* 2. 1-28.

García, Ofelia, and Li Wei. 2014. 'Language, bilingualism and education.' *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Pivot, London.

Lewis, Gwyn, Bryn Jones and Colin Baker. 2012. *Translanguaging: developing its conceptualisation and contextualisation*. *Education Research and Evaluation*. 18:7.