

**“We Mix Languages When Teaching Literacy but They Told Us to Use the Official Language for Instruction”: In-service Teachers’ Narratives of Language Practices and Policy in Multilingual Reading Classes of Choma District of Zambia**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study analysed classroom language practices in multilingual primary schools of Choma district of Zambia and was informed by the three-language orientation theory (Ruiz, 1984). The adopted the qualitative mode of inquiry and used the descriptive research design. The study sought to address three objectives: (i). To establish the views of teachers on classroom language practices in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma district. (ii). To analyse classroom language practices by learners and teachers in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma District. (iii). To ascertain the prospects of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms of selected primary schools of Choma district. The sample size was 852 participants comprising, 16 teachers who were teaching grade 1 and 2 classes in the lower primary section and 836 pupils from four lower primary classes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that were gathered through interviews and observations of classroom lessons. The findings revealed that teachers used translanguaging to promote linguistic inclusivity and diversity. Additionally, the study showed that most grades 1 and 2 classes of Choma district were multilingual in the sense that both teachers and learners were able to speak more than one language. Furthermore, the study found that teachers encountered communication difficulties when instructing learners from various linguistic backgrounds in Tonga because learners found it difficult to understand the language of instruction (Tonga) consistently especially first graders. As a result, some teachers had to switch from Tonga to other languages spoken by learners in class to foster their understanding. The study also established that translanguaging was a promising strategy for teaching diverse learners in multilingual classes of Choma district as it improved learners’ participation, cognition and aided the connection of what they were doing in class to their language of play and home language. The study recommended that grades teachers of Choma district needed orientation on how to use translanguaging and code switching in culturally and linguistically diverse classes. In addition, the study recommended that policy makers such as the Directorate of Curriculum Development (DCD) and Ministry of Education should reconsider the use of monolingual practices in primary schools and adopt translanguaging practices for teacher training institutions to reinforce the component in their curricular.*

**KEY WORDS:** Language practices, multilingual schools, translanguaging, codeswitching.

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## INTRODUCTION

Linguistic diversity has been identified as one of the factors contributing to low reading achievements (Tambulukani & Bus, 2011; Mkandawire, 2022; Mwanza, 2012). This was emphasized by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) who claimed that the reason Zambia's literacy levels have remained low is because the country's language policy places a strong emphasis on one language of instruction while simultaneously presenting other languages in the region as a problem. The idea of using regional languages to instruct learners has been questioned by Mwanza (2020) in that the regional languages do not accurately reflect the play and community languages used in the various communities in Zambia.

Despite the presence of multilingual and bilingual learners in classes, if teachers do not support learners' multilingualism, it will be hard for such learners to learn meaningfully. Haukas (2015:3) observed that "learning multiple languages is best enhanced when learners are encouraged to become aware of and use their pre-existing linguistic and language learning knowledge and therefore, in the school setting, the language teacher is the key facilitator of learners multilingualism." If teachers are not very supportive of learners' multilingualism, then "multilingualism in itself, does not automatically enhance further language learning" (p.3). many studies have come to present different views on second language teaching and classroom practices which have to be used in the Zambian primary schools.

A study by Chinyama (2016) found that learners would not respond unless teachers translated into Namwanga when speaking to them in Bemba or giving instructions. Chinyama added that translations have been used to facilitate learning in a non-Bemba predominant region of Nakonde so that teachers can communicate. Meanwhile, Mbewe (2015) discovered that teachers thought utilizing Cinyanja as a language of instruction was advantageous to learners in the early stages of literacy development since it boosted teacher-learner interaction during the learning process. Moreover, the incorporation of familiar languages in the multilingual classrooms led to learners of all levels of proficiency understanding lesson content as boundaries between languages were lessened (Mkandawire, 2018). However, other scholars have argued to the contrary that teachers reported good sentiments about formal English in terms of their attitudes toward formal English (Mwanza, 2016: 183). The grounds for the positive views and thoughts about formal English were that it provided the diversity required to succeed in an exam, get a job after graduation, and be admitted to higher education.

In Livingstone, *Simachenya* (2017) claimed that some learners in classes preferred Nyanja while responding to the teacher during lessons. Nyanja could be used as a means of communication between learners and teachers because it allowed for better expression of ideas than the standard means of instruction and communication allow for (Tonga and English for lower and upper

primary respectively. Apart from that, Ndeleki (2015) also established that most teachers were in favour of the practice of codeswitching between Nyanja and English as it enhanced active participation by learners. Similarly, Escobar and Dillard-Paltrineri (2015) noted that it was important to start a conversation inside EFL departments that critically challenges the presumptions, convictions, and behaviors that support the monolingual bias. Nyimbili (2021: 227) defined translanguaging practices as “the teacher's ability to recognise 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.”

Additionally, Zimba (2007) revealed that when learners are taught in a language they are familiar with, they are able to do better than those who are not. This Similarly, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) discovered that teaching literacy using translanguaging practices in a grade 1 multilingual class was accompanied by difficulties such as the incompatibility between the language of instruction and the dominant learner's familiar languages that existed in the classroom and impermeability of the language policy which was premised on monolingualism all through the learner's learning experience. When Nyimbili (2021:227) claimed that classroom translanguaging resulted in “perfect learning,” it was in support of these findings. According to him, “ideal learning” involves leveraging the learner's language to promote the acquisition of literacy in the target language and access to material comprehension in the classroom.

Nonetheless, Mkandawire (2015) confirmed that today's classrooms were multilingual and multicultural cultures and that these variables were mirrored in Zambian classrooms. Mkandawire acknowledged that learners from a variety of cultural and linguistic origins make up classes at all educational levels in Zambia, which results in classrooms that are typically multilingual and multicultural in nature. Additionally, Simachenya (2017) revealed that Nyanja, not the language of instruction, dominated the classroom sociolinguistics in a Livingstone classroom teaching Tonga as a regional language. Later, Mkandawire (2017) discovered that teachers moved between languages to aid in learning. This demonstrated that using regional languages in the classroom today was impractical, thus teachers instead taught their learners using sociolinguistics.

To that end, it can be claimed that what Makalela (2019) refers to as discontinuation continuation is necessary for learners to access learning in multilingual classrooms. Makalela contended that this constituted a persistent disruption of the established order as set forth in the curriculum and language policy, both of which are based on a monolingual/monoglot view of language. However, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) showed that translanguaging boosted learner classroom participation, multiliteracy development, cultural preservation, and learners' identity affirmation. Other scholars (Daka et al, 2020; Kafusha et al., 2021; Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019) stated that translation is a cognitive process that occurs spontaneously and cannot be halted in a bilingual or

multilingual individual because it seems to be normal to rely on translation when confronted with foreign words and/or expressions. In addition, Ngcobo et al. (2016) claimed that translanguaging as a method of teaching and learning promises to promote literacy among students in both their native African languages and English. Additionally, Banda (2018) indicated that a black township school in Cape Town uses translanguaging and English African mother tongues as linguistic adaptations for teaching and learning.

Further, Mkandawire (2015) stressed the importance of teachers' communication tactics reflecting learners' cultural backgrounds. Teachers can adapt or combine teachings to reflect the cultural diversity of the learners in each class. Additionally, Semachenya (2017) discovered that some teachers attempted to hide their lack of proficiency in Tonga by using Nyanja and English. It makes sense why Mungala (2022) claimed that translanguaging was hampered by the usage of the few prescribed languages that are spelled out in the constitution.

Despite Banda and Mwanza's (2017) suggestion to employ various languages in multilingual classrooms as a way to improve grade one learners' access to knowledge, most teachers were not yet conversant with this practice. Multilingualism is acknowledged to be predominant in most cities and towns of Zambia and it has contributed to poor levels of literacy (Iversen & Mkandawire, 2020; Nyimbili, 2020). Studies have shown that teachers face multiple challenges in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse classes (Mkandawire, 2022). This was attributed to Zambia's bilingual language policy, which is based on monolingual language ideologies (p. 7), where learners are taught in a single language until it is assumed that they have acquired the target language and then switch to another language for instruction (Banda & Mwanza, 2017). The inference is that low literacy levels in lower primary schools may affect how quickly learners advance to the next level of education, resulting in learners who lack the necessary skills. The studies cited in this section acknowledges that multilingualism is a problem in Zambian classes despite the presence of monolingual language ideologies. It was not clear how language was practiced in multilingual classes of Choma district amid monolingual language policy, hence, the study examined the language practices in selected primary schools of the Choma district of Zambia in order to establish whether or not they produce better results based on the views of teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to analyse classroom language practices in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma district of Zambia. The study also made propositions on how classroom language practices can enhance teaching and learning.

### **Research Objectives**

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To establish the views of teachers on classroom language practices in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma District.

- ii. To analyse classroom language practices by learners and teachers in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma District.
- iii. To ascertain the prospects of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms of selected primary schools of Choma district.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What were the views of teachers on classroom language practices in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma district?
- ii. What were the classroom language practices by learners and teachers in selected multilingual primary schools of Choma district?
- iii. What were the prospects of translanguaging in multilingual classes of selected primary schools of Choma district?

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in Choma district due to the diverse linguist composition of the classrooms. The sample size was 852 participants comprising, 16 teachers who were teaching grade 1 and 2 classes in the lower primary section and 836 pupils from four lower primary classes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that were gathered through interviews and observations of classroom lessons in Choma district.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Views of teachers on classroom language practices**

The findings of the study established that the languages spoken in the communities where teachers lived helped them when it came to teaching multilingual classes in that they were able to use them when teaching as these languages were also the languages that their learners were familiar with. This was demonstrated by the teachers' responses, which were as follows:

*Teacher 3 from school A: The languages spoken in my community have helped me a great deal in that I have learnt to speak Tonga, Lozi and Bemba. "So, they have helped me to interact well with my learners in class".*

*Teacher 14 from school C: The languages I hear in my community have helped me in teaching because I can use them to communicate with my learners. Even in the case where I can't speak fluently, I am at least able to understand, so I am able to interact with my learners.*

*Teacher 7 from school B: The languages spoken in my community have helped me because the more I hear them the more I become familiar to them and the easier it becomes for me to use them. In short, they help me even*

*when I have a learner who does not understand Tonga but can understand one of the languages that are spoken in my community. I am able to translate from Chitonga to any of these languages. They have actually made my work easy.*

Following the teachers' responses, it can be stated that teachers in multilingual classes used multiple languages to help specific learners learn. These findings correlate with those of Chinyama (2016), who found that learners would not respond unless teachers translated into Namwanga when speaking to them in Bemba or giving instructions. Chinyama added that translations have been used to facilitate learning in a non-Bemba predominant region of Nakonde so that teachers can communicate. The use of the power vested in Bemba in class was a hinderance to the teaching and learning of literacy while when the power was given to Namwanga, it became a source of learning for learners. Additionally, Mbewe (2015) discovered that teachers thought utilizing Cinyanja as a language of instruction was advantageous to learners in the early stages of literacy development since it boosted teacher-learner interaction during the learning process. This therefore was also realized and used to the advantage of the learners in the classrooms of Choma as teachers used the classroom languages to facilitate learning in many aspects. Moreover, the incorporation of familiar languages in the multilingual classrooms led to learners of all levels of proficiency understanding lesson content as boundaries between languages were lessened (Mkandawire, 2018). However, the study by Mwanza (2016) is inconsistent with these findings. According to Mwanza, the results showed that "all the teachers reported good sentiments about formal English" in terms of their attitudes toward formal English (Mwanza, 2016: 183). The grounds for the positive views and thoughts about formal English were that it provided the diversity required to succeed in an exam, get a job after graduation, and be admitted to higher education. However, the research revealed that teachers had unfavorable attitudes toward Zambian languages when it came to the role and importance of teaching English grammar in Zambian classrooms. In order to avoid obstacles and interference with the goal of teaching English, both official and informal variations, including blended local vernaculars, were deemed inappropriate. What this suggests is that teachers only conveyed favorable sentiments regarding English since it was the variety required to pass an exam, therefore learners needed to be familiar with it.

The study established that languages spoken in the communities where teachers lived also helped to expand the teachers' vocabulary, hence the teachers were able to use them even in explaining concepts to learners who could not understand Chitonga but came from one of the language backgrounds that were present in the community. This was noted from the following responses from the interviews with teachers.

***Teacher 3 from school A:*** *The languages spoken in my community have helped me a great deal in that I have learnt to speak Tonga, Lozi and Bemba. "So, they have helped me to interact well with my learners in class".*

**Teacher 14 from school C:** *The languages I hear in my community have helped me in teaching because I can use them to communicate with my learners. Even in the case where I can't speak fluently, I am at least able to understand, so I am able to interact with my learners.*

**Teacher 7 from school B:** *The languages spoken in my community have helped me because the more I hear them the more I become familiar to them and the easier it becomes for me to use them. In short, they help me even when I have a learner who does not understand Tonga but can understand one of the languages that are spoken in my community. I am able to translate from Chitonga to any of these languages. They have actually made my work easy.*

The teachers' responses meant that the teachers were able to learn the languages of the community and bring them to the classrooms for the benefit of the learners. This however equates with the findings of Simachenya (2017), who claimed that some learners in Livingstone classes preferred Nyanja while responding to the teacher during lessons. Nyanja could be used as a means of communication between learners and teachers because it allowed for better expression of ideas than the standard means of instruction and communication allow for (Tonga and English for lower and upper primary respectively). Both times, it was evident that learners preferred Nyanja because it gave them the freedom to answer freely to their teachers' oral questions during class. The foregoing is also supported by Ndeleki (2015) who established that most teachers were in favour of the practice of codeswitching between Nyanja and English as it enhanced active participation by learners. Similar findings were also reported by Escobar and Dillard-Paltrineri (2015), who discovered that it was important to start a conversation inside EFL departments that critically challenges the presumptions, convictions, and behaviors that support the monolingual bias. Their findings also demonstrated that monolingual bias disadvantages people who speak other languages. The inference is that when teachers have a wide vocabulary, they will feel more comfortable instructing learners in their native tongues. As a result, the whole class will participate in the teaching and learning process. This leads to the conclusion that teachers were utilizing their social intelligence in the classroom to encourage learners to pick up and use the available languages. Additionally, it can be said that at the multilingual primary schools of Choma district, the teachers' native languages had a role in fostering relationships with their learners.

The study findings also indicated that teachers were able to adapt their use of language in the classroom to accommodate learners' needs. All of the sampled schools shared these practices, which were justified on the grounds that they assisted teachers in imparting knowledge to learners more effectively than if only one language practice were used. This was evident from the responses the teachers gave during the interviews

**Teacher 5 from school B:** *the languages I hear in my community have helped me to teach because if a child doesn't understand when I teach using Chitonga, I can use one of these languages that are spoken in the community to explain to them. The child will not completely miss the point because I am using a language which they hear from their community.*

**Teacher 9 from school C:** *the languages I hear in my community have helped me because if a child can't understand what I am teaching in Chitonga, I will use the Cinyanja or Bemba words which I hear in my community to explain what I am teaching.*

**Teacher 13 from school D:** *the languages spoken in my community have helped me to make the learners understand what I teach because I use the same languages they hear in the community.*

From the monologue, it meant that the teachers were able to recognize the learners' languages and use them to their advantages in the classroom. These results are corroborated by Nyimbili (2021: 227), who defined translanguaging practices as "the teacher's ability to recognise 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." The study suggests that Choma's teachers were able to respect the linguistic rights of their multilingual learners by using the language of the classroom to facilitate teaching and learning. In order to acquire voice, authority, and control in their classrooms, multilingual learners can do so by incorporating additional languages that they are already familiar with.

The results also showed that transitioning from the primary language of instruction to other languages presented difficulties, such as learners not correctly pronouncing and writing words. This was demonstrated in the teachers' responses as shown below:

**Teacher 8 from school B:** *Languages are too many therefore it would be better if we just got back to using English as a medium of instruction it would be easier because when pupils reach grade 7 it is all English. Looking at the current language policy, learners are taught in the regional language from lower primary and in upper primary they are taught in English, so if one looks at the foundation and what learners are taught at grade 7 it does not build up on what they are having at lower primary. In short, using Chitonga at the lower grades and then finding English at grade 7 is really disadvantaging because even when English is introduced at grade 3, they will mostly then start translating the Chitonga words into English for example 'JANUALI' so their English is not the real English, "I don't know if there is a new English being introduced.*



**Teacher 16 from school D:** *There are also words that are not there in Chitonga, for example 'Kkompyuta in Chitonga again in English we use computer, Mausii for mouse, Tabbuleti for Tablet and Laputopu for Laptop so we only differentiate the pronunciation and the spellings. So, for a child to change from Kkompyuta to computer in English it becomes a challenge. This is not right because learners will have difficulties learning how to write words in English accordingly.*

The above responses meant that teachers had to juggle between languages which were dominant in class if they were to teach effectively. These results are consistent with the research by Zimba (2007), which revealed that when learners are taught in a language they are familiar with, they are able to do better than those who are not. The findings showed that pupils from Katete performed better than those from Lundazi because Katete's Chewa was mutually intelligible with Nyanja whereas Tumbuka was not. The results of this study showed that many Tumbuka-speaking learners had problems understanding Nyanja. It was determined that when learners attempted to speak, read, or write Nyanja, they frequently made mistakes. These results imply that there was a challenge with the local dialect being used during the teaching and learning process at the lower primary level. In other words, the learners' linguist demands were not being met by the language of instruction. Owing to this, learners were unable to obtain the information they needed to advance in reading, speaking, and writing. This suggests that learning occurs when information is conveyed in a language that learners can understand as opposed to when they are instructed in a language they are unable to understand. With this in mind, teachers must ensure that the language of instruction in their classrooms satisfies the linguistic needs of the learners.

The study also found that, despite oral English being taught in grade 3 in multilingual primary schools of the Choma district, the languages of instruction at lower primary and upper primary were not harmonized due to the employment of a familiar language of instruction at lower primary as may be seen from the following Excerpt:

**Teacher 8 from school B:** *Languages are too many therefore it would be better if we just got back to using English as a medium of instruction it would be easier because when pupils reach grade 7 it is all English. Looking at the current language policy, learners are taught in the regional language from lower primary and in upper primary they are taught in English, so if one looks at the foundation and what learners are taught at grade 7 it does not build up on what they are having at lower primary. In short, using Chitonga at the lower grades and then finding English at grade 7 is really disadvantaging because even when English is introduced at grade 3, they will mostly then start translating the Chitonga words into English for example*

*'JANUALI' so their English is not the real English, "I don't know if there is a new English being introduced.*

**Teacher 16 from school D:** *There are also words that are not there in Chitonga, for example 'Kkompyuta in Chitonga again in English we use computer, Mausii for mouse, Tabbuleti for Tablet and Laputopu for Laptop so we only differentiate the pronunciation and the spellings. So, for a child to change from Kkompyuta to computer in English it becomes a challenge. This is not right because learners will have difficulties learning how to write words in English accordingly.*

The implication is that learners were not gaining from the oral language instruction as the language of instruction was not familiar to all the learners. There is need to make learners respond and learn in their local languages as available in the community. This conforms to the findings of Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020), who discovered that teaching literacy using translanguaging practices in a grade 1 multilingual class was accompanied by difficulties such as the incompatibility between the language of instruction and the dominant learner's familiar languages that existed in the classroom and impermeability of the language policy which was premised on monolingualism all through the learner's learning experience. These findings have the implication that instructional language in the classroom needs to be appropriate in order to meet the linguistic demands of the learners. Additionally, language practices that draw on multilingual teaching methods enable learners to use cultural resources that heighten the value of their academic work on a personal level.

### **Classroom language practices by teachers and learners in Multilingual Classes**

The study found that teachers translanguaged to accommodate linguistic inclusiveness depending on the classroom circumstances and the type of learners they were working with; in other words, they needed to make sure that all of the learners understood what they were being taught by incorporating their native languages into instruction. The following were the justifications by the teachers:

**Teacher 11 from school C:** *I look at the kind of learners I have and if one doesn't understand Chitonga then I chip in with the language they understand not until they get used to the language which they are required to be taught in.*

**Teacher 6 from school B:** *As a teacher depending on the type of pupils I have, I have to mix languages because sometimes you find that some don't understand Tonga, so I have to get a bit of their language to mix with Chitonga so that they understand.*

In this case, translanguaging despite not being prescribed in the Zambian curriculum, it should be realised that the practice was used in the classrooms for meaning making with learners. When Nyimbili (2021:227) claimed that classroom translanguaging resulted in "perfect learning," it was

in support of these findings. According to him, “ideal learning” involves leveraging the learner's language to promote the acquisition of literacy in the target language and access to material comprehension in the classroom. This also fits well with his definition of translanguaging as pedagogical practice in the context of Zambia, where he stated that it is “the teacher's pedagogical knowledge to utilize the learners’ emergent literacies (community languages) to aid content/knowledge achievement in a multilingual classroom in in order to foster multiliteracy development in every learner's language.”

The study also showed that teachers encountered communication difficulties when instructing learners of various linguistic origins in Chitonga because learners continuously struggled to understand the language, forcing teachers to transition to other languages that the learners could understand. This was seen during classroom observations as shown below:

Teacher: *Ino nguni utimwambile ncho ndamba?* (English: who can tell him what I have said?)

Teacher: *kwambaula anguwo* (English: talk to him)

Pupil L: *Mwekala nanshimbi zyan'gahi kweenu?* (English: what laws do you have at your home?)

Pupil H: *Kosi kwiya, kosi kukanina akalumpi neyi anakuchumi* (English: You should not be stealing)

Teacher: *Wamba ati buti?* (English: what did he say?)

Pupil L: *Kunyina kubba, kunyina kukakila bapati na bakutuma.* (English: there is no stealing, there is no refusing when you are sent by adults.

This meant that classroom communication is not limited but diverse and teachers with their learners should understand this. If the learners are coming from different communities, their linguistic collection is also diverse. Mkandawire (2015), who confirmed that today's classrooms were multilingual and multicultural cultures and that these variables were mirrored in Zambian classrooms, supports these findings. Mkandawire acknowledged that learners from a variety of cultural and linguistic origins make up classes at all educational levels in Zambia, which results in classrooms that are typically multilingual and multicultural in nature. These findings coincide with what Simachenya (2017) revealed, which was that Nyanja, not the language of instruction, dominated the classroom sociolinguistics in a Livingstone classroom teaching Tonga as a regional language. Later, Mkandawire (2017) discovered that teachers moved between languages to aid in learning. This demonstrated that using regional languages in the classroom today was impractical, thus teachers instead taught their learners using sociolinguistics.

The study has demonstrated that when both teachers and learners are using unfamiliar language in the classroom, it causes them to purposefully code switch and communicate. It was observed that the majority of teachers mostly used Tonga and Nyanja to teach in their classes since these were the languages that the learners usually spoke. This was clear from their comments, as shown below.

**Teacher 10 from school C:** *When teaching here I use Chitonga and Nyanja since this is southern province. But sometimes I change to another language if there is a learner who doesn't understand Chitonga. Otherwise, it is mostly in Chitonga.*

**Teacher 9 from school C:** *When teaching I use Chitonga and Nyanja, but for the sake of the learners who don't understand Chitonga I use simple English because they can understand. For example, I have a boy in my class who doesn't understand Chitonga, so I use English to explain to him after explaining in Chitonga.*

The foregoing, can be seen through the principle that code switching aids learning and learners must learn and communicate with the teacher through code switching which should be encouraged. To that end, it can be claimed that what Makalela (2019) refers to as discontinuation continuation is necessary for learners to access learning in multilingual classrooms. Makalela contended that this constituted a persistent disruption of the established order as set forth in the curriculum and language policy, both of which are based on a monolingual/monoglot view of language. This disturbance was discovered at the same time as translanguaging recreated new information. This means that for learners to access knowledge, teachers must have the authority to negotiate meaning in their classrooms. As a result, learners can gain epistemic access through discontinuance continuation.

### **Prospects of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms**

Findings also indicated that learners could comprehend lessons when teachers combined the regional language of teaching with other tongues that were common among all learners.

**Teacher 9 from school C:** *Sunu tuyanda kulanganya "Manda" (English: today we want to look at houses)*

**Teacher 16 from school D:** *Lelo tifuna kuyangana pa shani? (English: today we want to look at what?)*

**Pupils:** *Manyumba (English: Houses)*

**Teacher:** *Ino bakainkide kumunzi before bali bongaye? (English: how many have been to the village before?)*

**Teacher:** *Bamwi timwakainka? Imwe benangu simunayendeko? (English: Some of you have never been there?)*

One of the learners shouts *"ise sitinayendeko? (English: Us we have never been there)*

**Teacher:** *Simunayendeko kumunzi, why?(English: You have never been there)*

This implies that teachers embraced learners' languages by using them when giving instructions. In this sense, teachers should not be rigid in terms of language use when teaching. Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020), who showed that translanguaging boosted learner classroom participation,

multiliteracy development, cultural preservation, and learners' identity affirmation, provide support for these findings. According to the study, learning outcomes increase and the classroom is liberated when learner's languages are acknowledged in teaching. This suggests that rather than inflexible monolingual methods that do not incorporate the learners' languages, the multilingual classrooms in Zambia should be taught using adaptive pedagogical techniques like translanguaging, which is linguistically fluid. As a result, teachers must make sure that they maximize the advantages of translanguaging by considering the learners' native tongues in class. In other words, teachers should exploit learners' emergent literacy to teach new linguistic abilities in the classroom because doing so provides greater confidence in their understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, it may be stated that “ translanguaging enables teachers and learners to work with pedagogies that fully utilize learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge and practices. In this way, cross-linguistic knowledge and meanings of the lesson material were accomplished. However, in multilingual classrooms, languages were not seen as confined entities.

The study went on to prove that translation is a cultural phenomenon because it bridges cultural divides and mediates cultures in a way that fills in any gaps that may already exist. This was evident in the classroom observations as shown below:

Teacher: *Nanga milawo buti njo mujisi kung'anda kwanu?* (English: What laws do you have at your homes?)

Teacher: *Nanga kwanu muli na milawo bwanji?*

Pupil: Remains quiet. Later on, responded that: no stealing, no insulting, no refusing to be sent by adults. After observing that some learners were silent, the teacher picked on....and asked him on the kind of laws which they have at their home. The learner remained silent because he could not understand Tonga.

The presented findings are in line with (Daka et al, 2020; Kafusha et al., 2021; Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019). Leonardi continued by stating that translation is a cognitive process that occurs spontaneously and cannot be halted in a bilingual or multilingual individual because it seems to be normal to rely on translation when confronted with foreign words and/or expressions. These findings seem to indicate that it is important for teachers to comprehend the full multilingual repertoires of their learners, including the practices they use in other discursive contexts. Therefore, to effectively impart content information, teachers must be fully aware of the linguistic backgrounds of their learners. Essentially, according to linguistic demand, teachers should think about translating instructional content from the target language to other well-known languages because this fosters critical thinking.

The study also demonstrated that the use of teaching and learning aids increased learners' literacy abilities in both English and Tonga, as seen by the fact that learners were able to learn the names

of the days of the week in both English and the language of instruction (Tonga). The following chat was used to demonstrate the days of the week.



*Figure 1: Days of the Week in Chitonga*

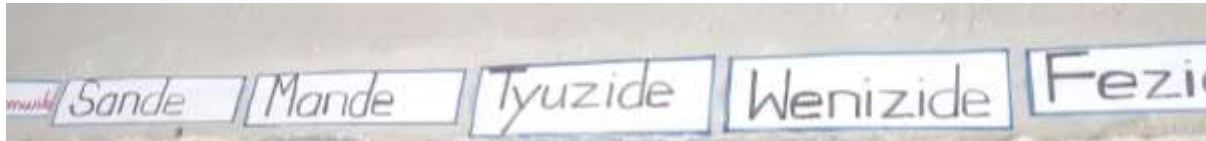
In figure 1, the teacher asked the learners on what they could see on the picture, and they responded in different languages which existed in the classroom. The responses included:

*House, ing'anda, ng'ombe, mwana, kadoli and pig.* The progression of the lesson was sparked by the teacher's emphasis on the names of the toys in the photo (Munsondo and Muvvulo). The students were being taught about these weekdays in Tonga, their native tongue. However, it was found that learners who did not speak Tonga were unable to participate in naming the things in the chart since the words in the chart did not correspond to the images that were displayed.

In short, the teaching and learning aids brought about multiliteracy development in that learners were able to name the days of the week in both English and Tonga. These findings are confirmed by Ngcobo et al. (2016), who claimed that translanguaging as a method of teaching and learning promises to promote literacy among students in both their native African languages and English. Additionally, according to Banda (2018), a black township school in Cape Town uses translanguaging and English African mother tongues as linguistic adaptations for teaching and learning. This implies that when learning materials are used in teaching, learners are able to identify objects by their names as they are called in the communities where they come from, hence they can easily grasp the new concepts.

The study's results also showed that translanguaging enabled teachers to instruct even when they were illiterate in the target language since they could localize English words into Tonga vocabulary to make up for their linguistic deficits.

This can be depicted in figure 2 below:



*Figure 2: Days of the Week in Chitonga Different Site*

In another class, the following words were used to teach the learners on the weekdays in class: Sande, Mande, Tyuzide, Wenizide, Fezide, Fryde and Satade. The weekdays were written by the teacher using a borrowed system so they would sound like Tonga. The teacher simply translated the days into Tonga by writing them after the aspirated syllables in the English sentences. What this means is that when the teacher is not proficient in the language of instruction, learners literacy abilities will not improve in the language of instruction. It can therefore be noted that translanguaging using learners' familiar languages would be the only way to remedy this situation. These results concur with those of Mkandawire (2015), who stressed the importance of teachers' communication tactics reflecting learners' cultural backgrounds. Teachers can adapt or combine teachings to reflect the cultural diversity of the learners in each class. Additionally, Semachenya (2017) discovered that some teachers attempted to hide their lack of proficiency in Tonga by using Nyanja and English. It makes sense why Mungala (2022) claimed that translanguaging was hampered by the usage of the few prescribed languages that are spelled out in the constitution. There are weaker barriers between languages, therefore teachers should be able to draw from their own linguistic repertoire to aid learners' comprehension, the inference being. In this instance, teachers translanguaged to accommodate the linguistic needs of their multilingual learners, establishing a learning space where learners may freely utilize any language at their disposal.

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings suggest that in order to promote learning, teachers should incorporate other languages (classroom languages) into their classroom instruction. Additionally, the study found that, despite oral English being introduced in grade 3 in multilingual primary schools of Choma district, the employment of regional and familiar languages at lower primary created a disparity between the language of instruction at lower primary and upper primary. This implied that teachers were alive to the fact that their classrooms were multilingual, and they were multilingual as well. Therefore, the schools are no longer isolated from the multilingual influences which were present in the communities. Therefore, multilingual practices must influence teacher's pedagogical engagement in classrooms. With regards to the language usage in the classroom was the second research objective. The study concludes that Choma District's grade 1-2 classes were multilingual since both teachers and learners were able to speak two languages or more. The teachers were fluent in several languages, including Nyanja, Bemba, and Tonga. This influenced the teachers to adapt their teaching methods to other languages. Therefore, it is time the language planners realized that the use of zonal languages was not the right idea at this point in time since the learners of today were multilingual and so were the communities. The 1965 zoning should, therefore, be

discarded and language teaching should be considered from the multilingual point of view. On the likelihood of translanguaging in Choma district's multilingual primary schools. The study concludes that learners' ability to integrate their language of play with the school language was increased through translanguaging. The study also concludes that translanguaging enabled teachers to teach even when they were illiterate in the target language because they could localize English words into Tonga vocabulary to make up for their linguistic limitations. This implies that the classrooms of Choma district were fertile for translanguaging, and this should be evidence for pedagogical changes in multilingual classrooms.

### Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusion of the study, it was recommended that an evaluation of teacher training programs to enhance teachers' knowledge and practices of translanguaging should be considered by the Ministry of Education and teacher training institutions to use the current sociolinguistics situation to inform classroom practices. **Secondly**, the policy makers such as the Directorate of Curriculum Development (DCD) and Ministry of Education should reconsider the use of monolingual practices in primary schools and adopt translanguaging practices for teacher training institution to reinforce the component in their curricular. **Lastly**, the teachers, head teachers and district officials should conduct frequent continuous professional Development meetings on the use of diverse languages in early grade classes of Choma.

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