
Strategies of Teaching English as A Second Language in Multilingual Classrooms in Meheba Refugee Settlement in Kalumbila District of Zambia

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the strategies of teaching English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms at Lower Grades in primary schools in Meheba Refugee Settlement in Kalumbila District of Zambia. The objectives were to establish the strategies employed in teaching of English as a second language in multilingual classrooms; analyze how the strategies are used and investigate materials used with the strategies. To address these objectives, a phenomenological qualitative descriptive design was employed. The study was guided by Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory. Data were collected through interview guide and lesson observation protocol; on a sample of 18 teachers drawn from five selected primary schools. Narrative analysis was employed. The findings indicated that translation, code switching, look and say, group work, class discussions, question and answer, body language and phonemic awareness were the strategies teachers employed in the teaching of English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms. The study further found that the strategies were used in the teaching of different components of English Language such as vocabulary, prepositions, dialogue and comprehension in the multilingual classrooms. The data also revealed that Chalkboard, English Readers (Textbooks) and Flash cards were the most commonly used teaching and learning materials in the multilingual classrooms that were studied. The findings revealed there was over reliance on the use of chalkboard and question and answer in the lessons. The study concludes that variety of strategies and teaching and learning materials are employed in teaching English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms. The study recommends that teaching English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms should involve the use of different strategies that enhance learning among learners. Teachers should think out of the box when deciding on what teaching and learning materials to use besides depending on the usual common chalkboard, textbooks and flash cards.*

KEY WORDS: multilingual classrooms, second language, teaching English, Meheba

INTRODUCTION

One of the social services provided to the refugees in Meheba Refugee Settlement is education. The school aged going refugee children, are integrated in the school system where they are taught school subjects following the Zambian curriculum regardless of whichever time they come (MOE). Since the refugee children come from different countries with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they speak different first and second languages (L1 and L2). These languages become active communicative tools in class. This makes these classes to become multilingual classrooms. Multilingual classrooms are those composed of learners of different ethnicity backgrounds who speak more than two Mother Languages (Paudel, 2020; European Commission, 2015). The teaching of English as a Second Language in such classes where the learners have no English background as it is neither their L1 or L2 nor their Official Language raises concerns for Meheba Refugee Settlement schools, mainly because of inadequate research which has tackled the issues of teaching and learning in the area; at least to our knowledge but also for looking at schools in Meheba like any other ordinarily schools in the country which blinds us from the realities there. It is against this background this study investigated the strategies employed in teaching English in the multilingual classrooms in the Refugee Settlement.

A study by Nyimbili (2021) revealed that the teacher code switched amongst three languages to enable clarify concepts and cater for the learners with language deficiencies in Cinyanja. From the way the teacher was able to translanguage in a classroom, she was able to break the classroom language barriers and enabled the teacher to move from one language to the other in order to facilitate classroom learning. Tembo and Nyimbili (2021) argue that the realized benefits of the use of Nsenga in the teaching to the Nsenga learners provided the learners with the practical understanding of the content the teacher was teaching about. The other benefits were that teachers were forced to use Nsenga in their teaching because learners provided answers in Nsenga instead of the Cinyanja which was not familiar to them. Nsenga was used in the teaching, learners became interested in their local language, and they wrote. Therefore, translanguaging practices like code switching and translation make the learners understand the content being taught to them using their language.

The National and International Migration has made multilingualism a common phenomenon. Paudel (2020) particularly in countries which open their borders widely and refugee settlement communities such as Meheba Refugee Settlement in Kalumbila District in the North-western Province of Zambia. Of interest in this study, was Meheba, which is regarded as a multilingual Refugee Settlement where more than six languages are spoken. Despite multilingualism, English Language has been taught from primary to secondary levels of education as a core subject in schools in Meheba. The teaching of the four language skills, that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing, especially of English as a Second Language in a multilingual classroom context could be made possible when appropriate strategies are employed. To improve on the reading culture,

Kafusha, Mwelwa, Mkandawire and Harrison (2021) recommended the provision of free internet in public places, the creation of public libraries in districts, creation of a reading hour in schools, and encouraging families to develop interest in reading to their children were among the recommendations. Perhaps these can work very well if there is better planning of the type of education which the refugees needed in the Zambian context.

Studies done on strategies of teaching English as a second language in multilingual classrooms had been found. A study closely related to the current is by Castillejo, Calizo and Maguddayao (2018) who determined the influence of code switching to the academic performance of students in English. A total of 40 incoming Grade 10 students participated in this study. The study made use of the qualitative and quantitative research designs. A questionnaire was used to gather the needed data for this study. The attitudes of the respondents towards code switching and towards the English language and the frequency on the use of code switching were analyzed through weighted mean and the students' academic achievement in English through frequency count and percentage. The results showed that the students' attitudes towards code switching and the English language are agreeable. The study also found out that the respondents use code switching frequently during an English class. It also showed that there is a significant relationship between the respondents' frequency on the use of code switching and their English achievement. The current investigated strategies of teaching English in multilingual classrooms in a Refugee Settlement using qualitative approach.

Another study is by Paudel (2020) investigated challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English in multilingual classes of Nepal. The study involved 80 basic school English language teachers from 40 different (2 from each) schools of Kaski district which were selected purposively. The data were collected through survey questionnaires, interview and classroom observation. The study found that the use of translation, use of increasing reading materials, managing rewards to the students, and repetition of the text to be the major strategies teachers employed to cope with the challenges. The current study investigated strategies teachers employed in the teaching of English language in multilingual classrooms in a Refugee Settlement of Meheba in Zambia.

Another related study to the current is by Rasheed et al, (2017) titled 'challenges of teaching English Language in a multilingual setting: an investigation at Government Girls' Secondary school of Quetta, Baluchistan, Pakistan'. The study using data collected through interviews and classroom observations reports that code-switching was commonly used by the teachers to instruct the students. The study is related to the current in that both focused on teaching of English in a multilingual setting. In addition, both studies follow similar methodology. However, while the study by Rasheed and others concentrated on challenges the current was skewed towards strategies used in teaching English language in multilingual classrooms in a refugee settlement setting. Another variation is that the current study was done in Meheba Refugee Settlement in Zambia

targeting Grades 3 and 4 whereas the other was conducted in Quetta, Baluchistan, Pakistan targeting girls' secondary school learners.

A study by Mumba and Mkandawire (2020) revealed that reading challenges by pupils in the primary schools were compounded in class size, pupil's interest and commitment towards learning were other factors that contributed or predicted reading achievements. Class size was reported to be a predictor of reading success and teachers noted that huge classes, as if one was teaching the whole community, was a factor that hindered reading success. In another study by Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa and Manchishi (2023) revealed that teachers in multilingual classes used translanguaging, bilingual materials, remediation and reading interventions strategies to teach literacy among early graders. This help to go round the language barriers in large classes in the Zambian context.

Also, a study by Szelei, Pinho and Tinoca (2019) on 'teaching in multilingual classrooms: strategies from a case study in Portugal', employed a case study qualitative descriptive design, using a typical sample. The study revealed that teachers often used body language and gestures as demonstratives in order for students to understand Portuguese language instruction or teaching content. The study further reports that primary and preschool teachers favored playful activities where students play manipulate objects and learn Portuguese at the same time, as a way of teaching and learning for young learners. The study is related to the current in that both examined teaching strategies developed by teachers to respond to linguistic diversity in multilingual classrooms at Lower primary school.

A study by Dhillon and Wanjiru (2013) on 'challenges and strategies for teachers and learners of English as a second language: the case of urban primary school in Kenya', employed a case study of an urban multilingual primary school in Kenya. Data were gathered through a multi-method approach, using questionnaires and follow-up semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers and learner diaries with a sample of 10 Grade Six pupils. Data from pupils showed that group work-based interactions with their peers and individual reinforcement strategies, such as keeping vocabulary notebooks, are the common learner strategies. The study found that learning by word and doing, group work involving comparative tasks, peer support (mentoring), multi-media approaches, teaching writing skills, teaching language learning strategies, giving English language homework, allowing for learners own language learning initiatives, teaching from the situational context and teaching and reinforcing good English use in all curriculum subjects were strategies teachers employed in the teaching of English as a Second Language in the multilingual classrooms. A study by Lambani & Naphawe (2022) investigated if the question-and-answer method improves learners' proficiency in learning of English prepositions of movement. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers interviewed and observed the teaching of English prepositions of movement by English First Additional Language Teachers. Three rural Grade Six Lwamondo primary school teachers in Limpopo Province, South Africa were sampled depending on the use

of traditional methods. The study established that the question-and-answer method improved learners' proficiency in the use of these English prepositions. While the study investigated if the question-and-answer method improves learners' proficiency in learning of English prepositions of movement at Grade Six in Lwamondo primary school teachers in Limpopo in South Africa, the current study investigated strategies of teaching English in multilingual classrooms at Grade 3 and 4 teachers in primary schools in Meheba Refugee Settlement in Zambia.

A study by Mwelwa and Mwanza (2020) establish teachers' classroom strategies aimed at developing communicative competence in learners used during English grammar lessons in selected secondary schools in Nakonde District of Zambia. The study employed qualitative design and targeted all secondary schools, all teachers of English language and Heads of Department for Literature and Languages Departments in Nakonde. The sample size was 4 secondary schools, 20 teachers of English and 4 Heads of Departments, and these were purposively selected. Data were collected through interview guides and classroom observation guides. The collected data were analyzed thematically. The study found that teachers used group discussions, sentence construction, and oral presentations, teacher simulations, brain storming, and context-based storytelling as strategies teachers employed in teaching English grammar lessons aimed at developing communicative competence in learners in the studied schools. This study set out to establish strategies of teaching English as a second language in multilingual classrooms in schools in Meheba Refugee Settlement of Zambia.

A study by Mwanza and Manchishi (2022) looked at classroom practices which would facilitate communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools. The study was informed by the social constructivism research paradigm. A descriptive research design was employed. The study targeted all the public secondary schools in Chongwe, all the Grade 11 teachers and learners of English language as its population. The sample size was 26 participants which consisted of 3 Heads of Department for Literature and Languages, 7 English Language teachers, 15 Grade 11 learners of English Language and 1 Standard Educational Officer. Interview data revealed that close exercise, transformation exercise, punctuation exercise, substitution exercise, spelling exercise, choosing a correct sentence, single word prompt (mechanical practices) and composition exercise, situational exercise, reading exercise, and constructing own sentences (meaningful practices) were used in the teaching and learning of English grammar by the participants. While this study searched for classroom practices which would facilitate communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools the current sought to establish the strategies of teaching English as a second language at Grades 3 and 4 in multilingual classrooms in Meheba Refugee Settlement of Zambia. Despite this variation, the study informed the methodology and discussion of results of the current study.

Although substantive research which has investigated strategies of teaching English in multilingual classrooms (Paudel, 2020; Brutt-Giffler, 2017; Nalunga, 2013) has been done; these have mostly targeted the secondary schools in Nepal, Pakistan, New Zealand, Finland, and so on; a context outside Zambia. In Zambia the closest study has been that done by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) on translanguaging with focus on Chinyanja as a familiar mono language of instruction at Grade 1 in Lundazi where classrooms are multilingual. Otherwise, studies that have investigated strategies and related teacher motivating factors for using those strategies in the teaching of English as a Second Language at Grades 3 and 4, in primary schools in a Refugee Settlement such as Meheba had not been found. Therefore, very little was known about the strategies of teaching English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms in primary schools in Meheba. It is against this background that this study was undertaken to investigate the strategies employed.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study employed a phenomenological descriptive design. The target population was all the 8 primary schools with teacher population of 85, located in Blocks A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H in Meheba Refugee Settlement. Meheba Refugee Settlement was chosen because it is a multilingual community. The teachers teaching in this community were targeted as they were likely going to have different perspectives on the strategies of teaching English in multilingual classrooms particularly among refugee learners, since they had that teaching experience in the schools in the area. The sample size for the study was 5 primary schools located in Blocks A, B, C, D and F and 18 teachers who taught in those schools. The sample size was arrived at by the *rule of thumb*. The five primary schools located in Blocks A, B, C, D and F were targeted in this study because these are regarded as resettlement schools. The schools were selected purposively. The 18 teachers were selected by simple random sampling using the ruffle method. The data were collected through interviews using structured interview guide, and lesson observations using observation sheet. To ensure that the correct linguistic data was observed, the study used complete participant. Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2023) stated that the observer should take the role of complete participant so that he or she becomes part of the teacher or learner in the lesson. Observing and understanding linguistic diversity in a classroom needs the researcher to ensure that he or she becomes part of the learners and learn with them as well as from them.

The researcher ensured that the linguistic data was well documented from both the learners and teachers. Validity of the data collection instruments was ensured by testing them on a trial sample. Reliability was ensured by making sure same questions were posed to all the teacher interviewees in the study. Content and narrative analyses methods were used to analyze the data. Prior to undertaking the study, verbal permission was sought from School Head teachers. Also, informed consent was obtained from all the teacher participants before they were involved. The teacher participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they would

be kept anonymous. Confidentiality has been adhered to by ensuring anonymity of all the participants throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What strategies are employed in teaching of English as a Second Language in multilingual Classrooms?

This question was addressed by data gathered through 18 interviews with teachers of English Language and nine lesson observations. The following findings emerged. According to the interview, the strategies employed in teaching of English as a second language in multilingual classrooms were: code switching, group work, question and answer, role play, look and say, individual work, and translation. The following verbatim speak to these findings. One interviewee said, *“In my class I use code switching strategy to help my learners understand. When I see that they do not understand what I am teaching them in the English language, I code switch”*. Another interviewee said, *“I deploy group work strategy in my class. This is one way of organizing learners so that they teach one another and learn from one another.”* Another participant stated that: *“I employ discussion, expository and question and answer techniques in teaching of English language”*.

These findings are supported by Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa and Manchishi (2023) revealed that teachers in multilingual classes used translanguaging, bilingual materials, remediation and reading interventions strategies to teach literacy among early graders. These practices were common in the multilingual classes, and it was just a possibility for learning to take place. In addition, Kafusha, Mwelwa, Mkandawire and Harrison (2021) who recommended the provision of free internet in public places, the creation of public libraries in districts, creation of a reading hour in schools, and encouraging families to develop interest in reading to their children were among the recommendation. The teaching of English should not end in the classroom but should also be practiced at home with their parents. The brining in of parents in the teaching and learning of English in the Zambian schools would help learners realise the need for them to use the official language in school for learning.

Data from classroom lesson observations revealed that translation, oral drills, question and answer, code switching, group work, pair work and phonemic awareness as strategies employed in teaching of English in the multilingual classrooms. The study findings are supported by Tien & Liu (2006) who found that students considered code switching English Foreign Language classes as beneficial towards gaining better comprehension, especially when providing equivalent comprehension as well as giving classroom procedure. Some see code switching as an opportunity for language development as it allows effective transfer of information from the senders to the receivers, in this case, teachers to learners (Skiba, 1997). The finding is supported further by Paudel (2020) and Daly and Sharma (2018) who reported that teachers commonly used code switching to instruct the

students. Daly and Sharma (2018) found that teachers employed code switching as a strategy in teaching English in multilingual classrooms in New Zealand. (Paudel, 2020; Daly & Sharma, 2018) reported that the learners could not understand the instructions given in English language only. Therefore, teachers and learners both constantly used code-switching in the classrooms to break the barrier. For that reason, code switching was a way of making learners understand what should be done in the lesson since the linguistic proficiency in the second language was not effective. Through code switching, learners were able to learn with easy in such classrooms.

The findings from interviews and observations further revealed that question-and-answer language strategy was commonly used among the teachers. This strategy was used when teachers were teaching the linguistic component such as structure. The finding is supported by the language policy emphasizes that; the teaching of English should be eclectic so as to include various approaches such as question and answer (MoE, 2013). This finding resonates well with the scenarios reported by Mwanza (2020) of how question and answer strategy was used in the teaching of English. Further, Lambani and Nephawe (2022) question and answer strategy is mostly used by teachers in the classroom to develop learners' skills in forming concepts.

While the current study found translation to be reliable in making pupils understand, other scholars argue that translation is not always beneficial or reliable as it might not reflect the exact meaning (Schleppegrell, 2011; Daly & Sharma, 2018). In the current study, translation proved helpful in making pupils understand, which is contrary to the argument that it is not beneficial and reliable. The finding by this study is supported by Paudel (2020), who found translation to be helpful and reliable strategy of teaching English Language in multilingual classrooms in Nepal. Nyimbili (2021) also found that translation of specific content from the second language into the first language brought about learner understanding hence teachers used translation mostly. In this study, translation was effective and so its use in multilingual classrooms could be encouraged for content understanding.

What teaching materials are used with the strategies in multilingual classrooms?

The study established from interviews that Flash cards, English readers (textbooks), key word RAPs were the common materials used in teaching of English in the multilingual classrooms. The following verbatim speak to the findings. One interviewee said that: *"I use flash cards to teach sounds and vocabulary in linguistic structure and comprehension."* Another interviewee said that *"I use English Readers text books when teaching reading comprehension and picture composition in my English lessons in my class."* Another participant indicated that: *"I use the Manila paper or chalk board to write some words in local language and translate them into English"*.

The findings on the common teaching and learning materials employed in the multilingual classrooms revealed that chalkboard was the most used resource; flash cards were observed only in 1 class while English Readers were observed in 3 classes. The findings from both interview and

classroom observation reveal that chalk board was mentioned and also used in almost all the classes which were observed. A similar finding was made by Mwanza (2020) where he reported that chalkboard was commonly used in all the multilingual classrooms. This could be indicative of over reliance on chalkboard, and could point to poor preparations in the area of teaching and learning materials for lessons by teachers. These findings could also be indicative of weak pedagogical content knowledge and skills by teachers to make own teaching and learning aids. Teaching and learning materials have been referenced to be an issue in the multilingual classrooms in other related studies (Nyimbili & Mwanza, 2021). They argued that teachers lack teaching and learning materials which needs to be used for better teaching in the Zambian classes. This reduces learner participation in class and hinders effective language development in schools amongst learners.

The findings also revealed that flash cards were used in teaching English as a Second Language in multilingual classroom. Similar findings were reported by Atmaja and Sonia (2020) in their study titled, “Using Flash Cards to Improve Students’ Vocabulary”, who used flashcard in teaching vocabulary to improve learners’ English vocabulary mastery. The dual found that the teacher prepared the material to support learning and teaching activities such as flashcards and concluded that the use of flash cards could improve learners’ vocabulary. So, the use of flash cards could be encouraged in multilingual classrooms.

Other scholars, Murati (2015), which ascertained the factors that contributed to high literacy levels, found that teachers were free to choose the teaching methods and materials they wanted to use and that, pupils were involved in choosing the reading materials used in instruction such as youth literature, magazines, and media texts. While teachers were also free to choose the teaching materials in the current study, the use of magazines and newspapers was absent. This could be because the current study targeted lower grades where the use of magazines and newspapers may not be so pronounced.

CONCLUSION

The study established that translation, code switching, look and say, group work, whole class (discussions), question and answer, body language, phonemic awareness, pair work and individual work were the strategies employed in teaching of English as a second language in multilingual classrooms. Inferring from this finding the study concludes that variety of strategies are employed in the teaching of English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms at Lower primary school in Meheba Refugee Settlement. The study established that that chalkboard, flashcards, word cards, pictures and English Readers (Textbooks) were used alongside strategies such as whole class, demonstration, and question and answer to enhance learning. This study concludes that the teaching and learning aids which are used are the same ordinary ones (chalkboard, textbook/English Readers and flash cards). This study, therefore, makes a general conclusion that

the very usual strategies and teaching and learning materials are employed in the teaching of English as a Second Language at Lower Primary School in Meheba Refugee Settlement. The study recommends that teachers in multilingual classes should be free to use the available translanguaging practices to enable learners learn from the available classroom language resources. Also, the government should consider making translanguaging a policy in the near future so that teachers are able to use the pedagogical practices freely in classrooms to help learners.

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