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Translanguaging as inclusive pedagogical strategy in primary schools within Kakuma Refugee Camp, Turkana County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study explored translanguaging as inclusive pedagogy in primary schools in Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana County. The study examined how teachers use translanguaging as inclusive pedagogical strategy in English- medium instruction classrooms. The participants in this study were seven teachers and the refugee students from South Sudan and Somalia. Through a case study research approach, interviews and observation were used to collect data. Thematic data analysis was used in the analysis of the data. The findings indicate that teachers use translanguaging as pedagogical strategy to enhance meaning-making, understanding, communication and engage all students in the teaching and learning activities in the English-medium instruction classrooms. The findings of this study may inform the inclusion of translanguaging in language-in- education policy in Kenya as teaching pedagogy in English – medium instruction classrooms in Kenya and in the refugee campus

Key terms: Inclusive pedagogy, Refugee Education, Multilingual Classrooms

Introduction

Many countries advocate for inclusive education to promote access and retention of learners from a wide diversity of backgrounds. One of the principles of inclusive education is the use of first language (L1) or Mother Tongue instruction in early grades and multilingual or multicultural education designed to ease the transition from home to school and provide education to minority populations (KEMI, 2025). However, refugee students in refugee camp schools across the world face the challenge of studying through a second or foreign language used as the language of teaching and learning (LoTL) in the refugee camp schools. As a result, the refugee students are excluded from the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. As result some learners drop out of school before completing primary education.

Language plays an important role in providing a means to access education but at the same time a barrier if the students find difficulty to infer meaning or concepts disseminated through it because they do not know that language. Dixon (2018) says that language proficiency is a key issue for social integration and social inclusion. However, language barriers are a common experience of refugees across the world. Dryden-Peterson (2015) points out that most young refugee people who settled in the United States have had previous educational experiences in their home countries, their first countries of asylum, or in both; hence, they are faced with continual learning of new LoTL that often prevents content mastery and their active participation in the teaching and learning activities in the school. She also gives examples of successful schools which use translanguaging practices to engage refugees and immigrants who are newcomers in content mastery and social belonging. Refugee students in primary schools in Kakuma refugee camp face the challenge of learning the subject matter through Kiswahili in lower primary and English in upper primary. Along the same line, the language of the catchment area where Kakuma refugee camp is located is Ngatukana. For this reason, this study investigated translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical strategy in primary schools in Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana County in the Northwestern part of Kenya. Kakuma refugee camp was selected because it is multilingual and multicultural. It hosts refugees from South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, and DR Congo. However, this study was carried in Lutheran World Federation (LWF) schools that have students from South Sudan and Somalia. Students from South Sudan and Somalia do not understand English, which is the language of teaching and learning (LoTL), and Kiswahili, which is the language of communication (LoC).

Language-in-education policy in Kenya directs the use of English and Kiswahili as LoTL and language of communication (LoC) in primary schools within Kakuma refugee camp. In this regard, the use of English and Kiswahili as LoTL and LoC leads to an inappropriate pedagogical strategy that constrains effective implementation of inclusive education within primary schools in Kakuma refugee camp.

This study intended to find out if teachers use translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy to foster inclusive education in primary schools within Kakuma refugee camp.

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by translanguaging theory, which originated in Wales, where it was coined as *transieithu* by Welsh educator Cen Williams in 1994, later translated into English as *translanguaging* by Collins Baker. Translanguaging was conceived as a classroom pedagogical practice that facilitated teaching and learning for bilingual learners, in a context where teachers used two languages, one as input and another as output (Lewi, Jones and Baker, 2012). Later, García (2009) extended the meaning of translanguaging as the language practice of bilingual or multilingual use of their full linguistic repertoire to infer meaning and develop deep understanding of academic tasks. As a result, it increases access to education and retention of refugee students in school and supports their transition to the next grade. Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy is used to underpin this study.

Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy has proven to be effective in multilingual educational contexts where the LoTL is not the L1 or second language (L2) of the learners (Li, 2018). It promotes inclusive education by fostering meaning making, deep understanding of the subject matter, classroom participation, equity, and access to education for minorities like refugees (García, 2009; Creese and Blackledge, 2015; Baker, 2006 This implies that translanguaging elicits classroom participation and interaction in teaching and learning activities, fosters deep understanding of the subject matter, and social inclusion of the refugee students.

Most language-in –education policy views language as separate entities by assuming that students are monolingual, yet they are multilingual (Makoni and Mashiri, 2007). Along the same lines, Li (2018) argues that language is a fluid practice that enables people to engage in meaning-making processes by

overcoming boundaries created by language systems and structures.

Li (2018) claims that translanguaging reconceptualizes language as a multilingual, multisensory, and multimodal resource for thinking and communicating thought. Translanguaging, therefore, makes an individual aware of the existence of the political entities of named language and empowers him/her to make use of some structural features of named language acquired. The issue of named languages like English, Kiswahili, French, Spanish, Portuguese, among others, is largely arbitrary, hence politically and ideologically charged (Li, 2018). In the same vein, named languages have often been constructed in the process of standardization that leaves out the language practice of minorities populations (Otheguy et al., 2015). In addition, translanguaging views language as languaging, an avenue for protecting minoritized communities like refugees and their languages (Otheguy et al., 2015), hence ensuring social inclusion of refugees in the school community

Translanguaging theory helps in understanding the creative and dynamic practices that refugee students engage in the teaching and learning process using multiple languages.

Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy explains how individuals and groups use it to move across space and time. This aspect facilitates our understanding of how refugees use translanguaging to overcome language barriers in classroom participation and interaction (Li, 2011; Blackledge and Creese, 2010).

This theoretical approach of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy helps us show how the use of translanguaging facilitates learning in primary schools within Kakuma refugee camp.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employs qualitative research approach with a focus on a case study to develop qualitative understanding related to translaguaging as an inclusive pedagogical. A case study was chosen to allow a deeper insight into the description of a phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003).

A case study approach was suitable in exploring translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical strategy in primary schools in Kakuma refugee camp. The primary schools in the Kakuma refugee context enabled the study to capture and interpret participants' diverse perspectives and experiences on language choices and use in their natural setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Also, the study had no control over the participants and activities taking place inside and outside the classroom in the refugee camp school (Yin, 2003). Like previous case studies in language education, this case study provided holistic descriptive data on language learning and teaching in the refugee camp (Mackey and Gass, 2015).

A case study uses multiple sources of data to allow researchers to corroborate and augment evidence from multiple sources (Yin, 2003). In this respect, different data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and document review were used to achieve triangulation of data and evidence from multiple sources. Triangulation of data increased the trustworthiness of the study.

Case study is generally exploratory since it enables the researcher to identify themes or categories related to the research questions (Dawson, 2007). The identified themes informed the data analysis. Using case study, I explored students' deployment of their full linguistic repertoires, how teachers draw on refugee students' linguistic repertoires, and how language-in-education policy is approached in the

Kenyan education curriculum and in the refugee camp school in this study.

Lastly, the case study enabled me to relate and test the applicability of translanguaging theory in the data collection and analysis (Mullen, 2006).

Participants

The participants in this study were refugee students in lower and upper primary, teachers of English and Kiswahili, and the headteacher of Fanaka Primary School (pseudonym) in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.

The total number of refugee students who participated in this study was 1,595. From the total sample, 36 students were interviewed. Those interviewed were from the Somali and South Sudanese communities. The Somali and South Sudanese were chosen because their national and official languages are not English or Kiswahili. The refugee students were sampled from the lower primary classes, which consisted of grades 1, 2, and 3, and upper primary grades 4 and 5. The lower grades were selected because the students were the new cohort who had not developed mastery of English and Kiswahili, while those in upper grades had just moved from lower primary and had developed mastery of English and Kiswahili more than those students in lower primary. Also, the choice of students in grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 was informed by the fact that those grades were under the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), which focuses on acquisition of competencies in the subject matter and in this case English and Kiswahili.

Seven teachers teaching English and/or Kiswahili in grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were selected. There were four female and three male teachers. These teachers were chosen based on the language they taught, professional qualification, teaching experience in the school, and their nationality. The names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1: Demographic data of teachers

Name	Gender	Nationality	Qualification	Teaching subject	Grade
Halima	F	Sudanese	P1certificate	English/ Kiswahili	1
Kavindu	F	Kenyan	P1 certificate	English / Kiswahili	2
Emeri	M	Sudanese	Diploma	English / Kiswahili	3
Bahati	M	Kenyan	P1 certificate	Kiswahili	4
Kipande	M	Sudanese	Diploma	English	4
Zubeda	F	Sudanese	P1 certificate	English	5
Zawadi	F	Kenyan	P1 certificate	Kiswahili	5

The headteacher had been teaching Mathematics in Fanaka for 12 years. He was from the host community.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) emerging from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Six analysis phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed to identify reasons for using translanguaging as an inclusive teaching pedagogy in primary schools in Kakuma refugee camp, including facilitation of students' understanding of subject matter, enhancing meaning making in the lesson, activation of classroom participation, and fostering communication from the observation, focus group interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews data. The six phases followed are: familiarising with data, searching for initial codes of the emerging themes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally subdividing the themes. Thematic analysis enabled us to identify, organize and describe emerging themes within the data sets that were relevant to this study.

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that teachers use teaching and learning activities in the classroom as a teaching strategy to keep them engaged in the lesson, hence fostering their understanding of the subject matter.

Enhancing classroom participation

The findings of this study indicate that teachers use translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy to enhance classroom participation. As a result, fosters social inclusion of refugees in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The excerpt below, taken from a Kiswahili lesson, indicates how the teacher uses translanguaging in a multilingual classroom to enhance classroom participation and understanding of the subject matter.

Excerpt # 10: Multilingual discourses in a grade 2 Kiswahili lesson

		Kiswahili	English
1	T:	*Leo tutajifunza kuhusu wanyama pori.*	Today we will learn about wildlife.
2	S1:	*Mwalimu, wanyama pori nini?*	Teacher, what is wildlife?
3	T:	*Nani atatuambia maana ya wanyama pori?*	Who can tell what wildlife is?
4	S2:	[Looking at S1] *Kwa Kidinka ni liaar loorkii.*	It is wildlife in Dinka.
5	T:	Cheetah *anaitwa nduma. Nani atatuambia nduma kwa Kisomali?*	Cheetah is *nduma* in Kiswahili. Who can tell us cheetah in Somali?
6	S3:	*Anaitwa haramcad kwa Kisomali.*	It is called a lion in Somali.
7	T:	*Vizuri sana. Kwa Kidinka nduma anaitwaje?*	Very good. What is cheetah in Dinka?
8	S4:	*Kwa Kidinka ni kuach kor*	In Dinka, it is called *kuach kor.*
9	T:	*Makofi kwake. Mtu mwingine atuambie simba anaitwaje kwa lugha yake.*	Clap for her. Another person to tell me what lion is in his/her language.
10	S5:	*Simba anaitwa kor kwa Kidinka.*	It is called a lion in Kidinka.
11	S6:	*Mwalimu, simba kwa Kisomali ni libax.*	It is a lion in Kisomali.

In this episode, the teacher introduces the lesson using Kiswahili, which is the LoTL for Kiswahili grammar and *Insha* (Kiswahili composition), as mentioned earlier in this study. However, S1 asks the teacher the meaning of *Wanyama pori* 'wildlife'. The teacher throws the question to the whole class to answer. The students use their L1 to help each other infer meaning and give the correct answer (line 4). In the same

vein, the teacher asks students to give answers in their L1 as a way of keeping them engaged in the lesson (lines 5, 7 and 9). As a result, the students gave correct responses in their L1 (lines 10 and 11). This shows that the teacher uses translanguaging in a multilingual classroom to engage students in the lesson, thereby enabling them to develop a better understanding of the content. This resonates with studies that indicate that the use of students' L1 makes students engaged and active in the teaching and learning activity in the classroom (Cummins, 2001; Chambo, 2018).

The interview below elaborates on what was observed in a Grade 2 Kiswahili lesson on the use of translanguaging as a pedagogy in a multilingual classroom.

When I allow my students to use their L1 in the lesson, their participation becomes high, unlike when I use Kiswahili only.

This interview illustrates that translanguaging motivates them to participate in the teaching and learning activity in class and to issue instructions to students who do not understand Kiswahili well. This resonates with studies that indicate that the use of students' L1 makes students engaged and active in the teaching and learning activity in the classroom (Cummins, 2001; Chambo, 2018).

Fostering understanding: the study shows that the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy in a primary school multilingual classroom in Kakuma Camp fosters understanding. This is corroborated in the interview below with the headteacher. The interview reveals that teachers elicit the use of the students' L1 to foster understanding. The interview excerpt below illustrates that the teacher asks students to use their L1 to help them understand the content of the lesson:

I use Kiswahili, but sometimes I elicit the help of some student to explain to their classmates in their L1.

This shows that the teacher leverages students' L1 to enhance understanding of the subject matter in Kiswahili lessons.

The Interview with the headteacher on multilingual discourses and pedagogy in classroom below indicates how translanguaging fosters understanding:

The CBC stipulates that the students' L1 should be used as LoTL in lower primary or Kiswahili in schools with multilingual students. However, in upper primary, English is the LoTL. In Kakuma refugee camp, the teacher may ask one student to explain in L1 to those who do not understand Kiswahili.

The headteacher's views show that the use of the students' L1 helps them overcome language barriers and enables them to understand what is taught in class. Therefore, the use of the students' L1 is viewed as translanguaging practice since it is used purposely to enhance meaning making and deep understanding of the students in the teaching and learning of English and/or Kiswahili in the refugee camp school This finding is in consistent with the view of translanguaging practice as a strategy to leverage the fluid language practice of multilingual students to develop deep understanding by identifying which linguistic feature to use for a particular purpose (Kiramba, 2016; Otheguy et al., 2015).

Facilitating communication'

The findings demonstrate that the use of students' L1 facilitates communication in the teaching and learning of subject matter. The headteacher's view below

Most of the time I use some students to explain to those who do not understand the content of the lesson in their L1. This enables the students to overcome the language barrier during the teaching and learning process in the lesson.

The use of the students' L1 to motivate them to participate in the teaching and learning activity in the

classroom supports the argument that translanguaging facilitates communication through deployment of full linguistic repertoires to overcome language barriers. In this regard, it facilitates communication which fosters t participation and interaction in the teaching and learning activity in the classroom (Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Cook, 2001; Wei, 2011).

Peer learning

The findings indicate that translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy is used to enhance peer learning among the refugee students. Peer learning enables students to understand the subject matter, and as a result, no student is left behind. The excerpt of the teacher's interview below shows how translanguaging enhances peer learning:

Students do well when they discuss a passage or assignment in their L1. Remember, the most important thing is for them to write or answer the questions correctly.

This excerpt shows that students use their L1 in peer learning and when discussing assignments, thereby giving correct responses in that assignment. This finding resonates with a study carried out by Karlsson (2018) that showed that science teachers allowed and encouraged students to use their L1 and L2 to infer meaning in the science content.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that teachers in Kakuma refugee camp school use translanguaging in the teaching and learning of English and Kiswahili. The teachers draw on their students' entire linguistic repertoires in the teaching and learning process through codeswitching, use of students' L1, and translations, which are forms of translanguaging practice. However, the teachers do not make full use of translanguaging as a teaching pedagogy. For instance, students are not allowed to use codeswitching in writing. Similarly, teachers do not plan to use translanguaging in their lesson plans since they do not consider translanguaging as a teaching pedagogy. Teachers' claim that translanguaging is not a teaching pedagogy may be a consequence of what they are taught in teacher training colleges. In fact, one of the teachers in this study argued that they were not taught in teacher training college that translanguaging is a pedagogical strategy.

Drawing on translanguaging theory, the findings of this study indicate that teachers and students use translanguaging in the teaching and learning process to enhance meaning-making, deep understanding, and activate classroom participation and interaction (Creese and Blackledge, 2015; García, 2009). Similarly, translanguaging helps students to transcend socially constructed named languages. This supports the tenets of translanguaging theory that languages are fluid and not hermetically sealed units (García, Makoni and Mashiri, 2007). Moreover, students use multiple languages creatively through codeswitching, use of their L1 and translation, which are translanguaging practices, to move across linguistic spaces to shape communication and participate in the teaching and learning of English and Kiswahili (Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Chimbutane, 2013; Wei, 2011).

These findings are consistent with other studies, which advocate the use of translanguaging to help refugee students learn new languages used in education and communication in host countries (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Viegen, 2020; Yilmaz, 2019). It is worth noting, however, that while in most studies carried out outside Africa, refugee students were learning only one language, those in this study were learning two languages, that is, English as LoTL and Kiswahili as LoC.

Conclusion

This study explores how teachers use translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical strategy in primary

schools in Kakuma Refugee Camp. The study has shown that teachers use translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical strategy in the teaching and learning process in primary schools in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, although they do not fully use it as a pedagogical strategy. **Translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical strategy enables refugee students to participate in the teaching and learning process, understand subject matter, infer meaning, communicate, and foster peer learning that enables students to develop the desired competences.**

Suggested Recommendations

The findings of this study may inform the concrete language-in-education policy by proposing the recognition of translanguaging as a legitimate teaching pedagogy and communicative practice in the Kenyan education system and in refugee camp schools. This may benefit refugee students, teachers, and other humanitarian workers in the refugee education sector. Further, translanguaging practice can be incorporated in pre- and in-service teacher education, particularly targeting teachers in refugee schools in Kenya. Along the same lines, this study recommends developing multilingual teaching resources for refugee schools in Kenya and Africa. Further studies are needed to conduct larger-scale studies across primary schools in refugee camps.

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