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Trans-language as a Medium for Creating Home-School Interaction in Early Childhood Education Centres in Turkana County

Edward Lokidor^{1*}

¹ Turkana University College, P. O. Box 69-30500, Lodwar, Kenya.

* Author's Email: lokidorbalozi@gmail.com

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This paper explored how teachers use translanguaging to create home-school interaction in Early Childhood Education Centres (ECDE) in Turkana County. The study was guided by translanguaging theory. The study adopted a case study approach. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and unstructured interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study show that teachers use translanguaging in creating home-school interaction in ECDE in Turkana County. The findings of this study may inform the need to recognise translanguaging as a legitimate medium in creating home-school interaction in ECDE in Turkana, hence filling the gap caused by high parental illiteracy levels.

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a key role in creating the link between home and school interaction in the education of learners in ECDE. This is because language is used to establish, identify and maintain relationships (Githinji & Wanjohi, 2009). As a result, the language spoken at home shapes learners' acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and values in ECDE. However, parents and ECDE learners in Turkana County have a challenge in Kiswahili, which is the language of communication (LOC) and English, which is the language of teaching and learning (LoTL). Unlike other countries with high literacy levels, where parents and learners from high socio-economic classes often use English at home, hence enhancing home-school interaction and interrelationship. In the same vein, the books used in school are written in English and Kiswahili. Therefore, those parents and learners who speak English have good home-school interaction. On the contrary, there is a high illiteracy level in Turkana County, which hinders home-school interaction.

In the field of language education, translanguaging has become a central issue for enhancing communication, teaching and learning in schools. Translanguaging started in Wales as a teaching practice where one language was used as an input and another as an output in bilingual classrooms. This implied that students received information in one and gave their responses in another language (Lewis et al, 2012). The act of students giving correct responses showed that the students understood the instructions of the teacher which was disseminated in a different language. From Wales schools, translanguaging extended to other parts of the world. Along the same lines, the meaning of translanguaging was extended to refer to the uses of all languages by bilinguals in order to infer meaning and meet communicative demands (Gracia, 2009). Furthermore, studies in translanguaging have indicated that translanguaging fosters home-school interaction (Baker 2016, Baker 2011). Translanguaging fosters communication that plays

a key role in enhancing home-school interaction (Chimbutane, 2013; Li and Zhu, 2013; Mazzaferro, 2018; Blackledge and Creese, 2010). Translanguaging also enables learners to connect their school learning experience with their home experience. However, no studies have been carried out on the use of translanguaging in creating home-school interaction in Turkana County.

This study explored how ECDE teachers in Turkana County use translanguaging in creating home-school interaction through the lens of translanguaging theory. The findings of the study indicate that the purpose of translanguaging practice is to communicate with learners and their parents, help learners connect school learning experience with home experience and welcome parents in school.

The findings of this study may inform the suggestion of the inclusion of translanguaging as a legitimate communicative strategy in language-in-education in Kenya and in ECDE in Turkana County. Further, translanguaging practice can be incorporated into teachers' education in the teacher training colleges and in the in-service training of ECDE teachers employed by private schools in Turkana County.

TRANS-LANGUAGING THEORY

The translanguaging theory 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 the teaching and learning of bilinguals, in a context where teachers used two languages, one as an input and another as output (Lewis, 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 a deep understanding of academic tasks. Translanguaging

as a pedagogical and communicative tool is used to underpin this study.

Translanguaging as a pedagogical practice has proven to be effective in a variety of educational contexts where the LoTL is the second language of students (Li, 2018). It offers several advantages such as empowering both the teacher and learners in the teaching and learning activity through meaning-making, experience and identity development (García, 2009; Creese & Blackledge, 2015), encouraging school-community interaction, facilitating deep understanding of the subject matter, improves overall learning of other subjects (Baker, 2016). This study intended to verify these merits in facilitating home-school interaction in ECDE centres in Turkana County. Moreover, translanguaging is viewed as both a practice and a process that goes beyond the language and linguistics of speakers to a linguistics of participation (Li, 2018). This implies that translanguaging facilitation in home-school interaction in ECDE in Turkana County.

The concept of language has attracted debate in understanding translanguaging. In translanguaging studies, language is viewed as something fluid instead of hermetic. In this regard, Li (2018) argues that language is a fluid practice that transcends socially constructed language systems and structures to engage diverse meaning-making systems and subjectivity. Makoni & Mashiri (2007) argue that languages are not hermetically sealed units, but they leak into one another through seamless multiple identity and language performances. The view of language as fluid and not hermetic underpins the suggestion of this study of recognition of translanguaging in the language-in-education policy in Kenya.

Li (2018) claims that translanguaging reconceptualises 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 the named

language and empowers him/her to make use of some structural features of the named language acquired. The issue of named languages like English, Kiswahili, French, Spanish and 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 standardisation that leaves out the language practice of minoritised populations (Otheguy et al., 2015). In addition, translanguaging views language as languaging, an avenue for protecting minoritised communities like the refugees and their languages (Otheguy et al., 2015).

Conservatives in the field of second language acquisition for many years have advocated for schools and teachers to separate languages used as LoC and LoTL. For instance, in Kenya, students are not allowed to speak their first language in English or Kiswahili lessons. In addition, teachers mostly use English or Kiswahili when communicating with parents or explaining homework to ECDE learners. This approach holds the belief that mixing two languages tends to confuse students, hence hindering their learning progress. Further, conservatives in the second language acquisition believe that strict separation of language use is the only way to avoid language contamination (Jacobson and Faltis, 1990). However, García (2009) argues that languages of bilinguals should not be treated as separate entities but should be seen as one linguistic repertoire that bilinguals draw on fully to meet communicative needs. Again, bilinguals or multilinguals in everyday social interaction move dynamically between named languages, language varieties, styles, registers and writing systems to fulfil specific strategic and communicative functions (Li, 2018). In the same way, translanguaging leverages the fluid language practice of bilingual students to learn deeply and also empowers them to identify when to use what feature and for what purpose (Otheguy et al., 2015). Translanguaging as a practical theory helps understand the creative and dynamic practices that

ECDE teachers engage in using multiple languages and semiotic and cognitive resources in creating home-school interaction in Turkana County (Li, 2018).

Translanguaging as a transformative communicative practice explains how individuals and groups use it to move across space and time. This aspect facilitates the understanding of how ECDE teachers use translanguaging to overcome language barriers when dealing with learners and their parents (Li, 2011; Blackledge and Creese, 2010). This theoretical approach of translanguaging as a pedagogical and communicative strategy helps us show how the use of this strategy can facilitate home-school interaction in ECDE centres in Turkana County.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach with a focus on a case study. A case study gives a complete description of a phenomenon or intervention within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). This study is a case study because it was an investigation of translanguaging as a medium of creating home-school interaction in ECDE in Turkana County. The case study design was suitable for exploring translanguaging practice as a medium for enhancing home-school interaction. Using a case study, the researcher explored how teachers use translanguaging as a medium of creating home-school interaction in ECDE in Turkana County.

Participants

The participants in this study were ECDE teachers in Turkana County. The teachers were sampled from Turkana South, Turkana West, Turkana East and Turkana North. The total number of teachers who participated in this study was 8 teachers which included 2 males and 6 females. The criteria for selecting the participants were as follows: 2 teachers from Turkana, 2 teachers from Turkana

West, 2 teachers from Turkana East and 2 teachers from Turkana North. It is expected that ECDE teachers use English or Kiswahili only in communicating with parents of ECDE children in Turkana County.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were used 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.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic approach for identifying, analysing 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 the motivation for the use of translanguaging in Kakuma refugee camp as 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 of themes, and finally subdividing the themes. Thematic analysis helped us identify, organise and describe emerging themes within the data sets that were relevant to the research question and objectives.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in the public ECDE run by the Turkana County Government. This meant it was not possible to include private ECDE teachers

in Turkana County. In the same vein, there are few teachers in public ECDE in Turkana County.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that teachers use translanguaging to create home-school interaction in Early Childhood Education Centres in Turkana. Teachers use codeswitching, first language (L1) and translation, which are forms of translanguaging to communicate, connect and welcome parents in school. The findings of this study show that ECDE teachers in Turkana County use translanguaging to establish school-home interaction as follows:

Communication

The analysis of data reveals that ECDE teachers in Turkana County use translanguaging to communicate with parents. This is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Teacher 1: *I use a mixture of languages to make communication easier. Most of our parents cannot read or write in English, hence it becomes hard to communicate in English.*

Teacher 2: *Most of us teachers use L1 or translation to explain to parents about their children's progress in school.*

In order to communicate with parents about the performance and behaviour of their children, she also uses Kiswahili or seeks the help of other staff or students to translate her messages into the L1 of her interlocutors.

Connecting School-home Experience

The findings reveal that teachers use translanguaging to help students connect school learning with home experience. This is elaborated by the following excerpt of the ECDE teachers' interview transcript :

Teacher 3: *I usually ask students to name some things in their L1 or ask for translation, and that makes them relate learning in school with what they do at home or in the community.*

Teacher 4: *When I ask students to tell me something in their L1, they feel happy to tell and to contribute to the lesson.*

In this way, she uses translanguaging to create school-home interaction (Baker, 2016).

Explaining Homework to Students

The teachers use translanguaging to explain homework to students in order for them to seek help from their parents.

Teacher 5: *CBC English syllabus calls for parents' involvement in students' learning of English, yet most of our parents or guardians are illiterate. They are unable to help their children do homework or even monitor their progress in English. This creates a challenge to the teaching and learning of English in this school.*

As indicated in this excerpt, illiteracy among parents or guardians of ECDE students in Turkana County makes it hard for teachers to engage them in English or Kiswahili only. As a result, they cannot help their children with homework at home. Parents play a key role in the education of their children; hence, their support in issues like homework helps their children in creating an everyday routine of learning at home (Ceka and Murati, 2016). In order for the teacher to engage the parents or guardians in helping their children with English homework, she uses Kiswahili. According to the teacher, this is meant to enable the students to understand the homework so that they can easily seek assistance from their parents at home.

DISCUSSION

ECDE teachers use translanguaging to create home-school interaction because learners and parents are not proficient in English or Kiswahili. CBC require parents to take an active role in the academic development of their children in ECDE. However, the illiteracy level hampers communication, which makes ECDE teachers resort to translanguaging in order to explain homework to students so that they

can seek help from their parents. This finding is consistent with studies that indicate translanguaging enhances communication (Chimbutane, 2013; Li & Zhu, 2013; Mazzaferro, 2018). In this regard, translanguaging enables teachers to overcome the language barrier when talking with parents. In the same vein, the teachers use translanguaging to communicate with parents about their children's academic progress. Translanguaging as a communication strategy helps them use multiple languages creatively to move across linguistic space to shape communication and participate in the teaching and learning of English and Kiswahili (Li, 2011; Blackledge and Creese, 2020). Along the same lines, this finding corroborates the ideas of Baker (2006), who showed that translanguaging fosters home-school interaction. As a result, parents of ECDE children are able to take an active role in the education of their children (Ceka and Murati, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The approach taken in this study builds on the tenets of translanguaging theory as a communicative and teaching pedagogy. The findings of this study indicate that ECDE teachers in Turkana County use translanguaging to create home-school interaction because learners and their parents are not proficient in English or Kiswahili. As a result, teachers use translanguaging to communicate with learners and their parents in ECDE. This is consistent with studies on translanguaging as a communicative strategy in multilingual classrooms (Macaro, 2005; Chimbutane, 2013).

The findings of this study provide important evidence that teachers use codeswitching, L1 and translation, which are forms of translanguaging to communicate, connect and explain homework to learners so that they can seek help at home. This study points towards the need for ECDE in Turkana County to use translanguaging practices to enhance home-school interaction.

Recommendations

Therefore, the suggestion of the inclusion of translanguaging as a legitimate communicative strategy in language-in-education in Kenya and in ECDE in Turkana County. Further, translanguaging practice can be incorporated into teacher education in the teacher training colleges and in the in-service training of ECDE teachers employed by private schools in Turkana County.

Consideration for Future Studies

Further studies could be conducted to determine the effectiveness of translanguaging in the teaching and learning of English and Kiswahili in ECDE in Turkana County. Another possible area of future study would be to investigate the use of translanguaging in ECDE in Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana County and other refugee camps in Kenya.

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