


## Chapter 20

# Using Translanguaging to Promote Social Justice in South African and Zimbabwean Primary Schools

William Chakabwata

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4224-5239>

University of South Africa, South Africa

### ABSTRACT

*The chapter analyses the use of English as an official language in South Africa and Zimbabwe primary schools, at the expense of the children's home language. The literacy levels of children in South African primary schools are dismal, a factor which may partly be attributed to the challenges associated with using a language of instruction that is different from the home language. Government officials, parents, learners, and stakeholders from industry continue to uphold the superiority of English over indigenous languages, in spite of the evidence that bilingual/multilingualism has numerous benefits for learners. The chapter uses decolonial and postcolonial theory to illuminate the discussion on the use of English as official language of communication. Finally, translanguaging is advocated as the appropriate policy response to promote social justice in primary schools in South Africa and Zimbabwe.*

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background of the study is presented. An overview of the practices regarding the use of official language of instruction in schools in South Africa and Zimbabwe is submitted. The chapter averred that the use of English as official language of instruction among non-English speaking communities tends to obfuscate the learners access to the curriculum leading to dismal performance in schools as shown by poor literacy levels. The background of the study is followed by a discussion of the concept of bilingual practices in schools, which is associated with practices among students who used English and were struggling to learn Welsh. The subsequent sections probes the issue of translanguaging and social

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justice. The cases of South Africa and Zimbabwe are scrutinised in order to illustrate the evolution of the current language policy and its accompanying challenges for learners who are already on the periphery of the education system, due to various intersecting forces. The chapter also submits the importance of language, decolonising education, postcolonial theory, discussion, recommendation and conclusion.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In this chapter it will be argued that the translanguaging agenda is intended to promote social justice. Zimbabwe and South Africa are both situated in southern Africa. Both countries suffered from the burden of colonialism and its corollary coloniality. Zimbabwe just like South Africa, inherited an education system that was based on race, ethnicity and that was gendered. The official language of communication prior to political independence in Zimbabwe was English and for South Africa English and Afrikaans held sway. Consequently, after political independence in Zimbabwe in 1980, English is still predominant and for South Africa, which attained majority rule in 1994, Afrikaans and English continue to experience superiority in the country's linguistic hierarchy. South Africa also suffers from the same challenge of racial, gendered, ethnic and linguistic hierarchy due to the historical policies of apartheid.

Consequently, children who hail from working class family backgrounds and are not able to converse in the English or Afrikaans become excluded from participation in the learning process due to the language barrier. Although official pronouncements in both countries tend to uphold at a constitutional level, the equality of all languages spoken in each of the two states, coloniality by parents, school administrators, ruling elites still favour foreign languages over indigenous languages. In this chapter, it will be submitted that the use of translanguaging has potential to enhance equality in the school system, provided systemic changes are effected which can transform the attitudes of parents, administrators, politicians and educators in both countries towards indigenous languages. Finally, the chapter will submit how praxis and consciousness can lead to real transformation in schools through translanguaging in order to enhance social justice.

Educators around the world have been grappling with the demanding task of instructing linguistically and socially diverse learners. In practice most school governance was built on the premise that schools are the same for all learners and educators and that all learners must engage in taking assessments that are inflexible in order to demonstrate academic achievement (Krause & Prinsloo, 2016; Charamba, 2020). Department for Teacher Education (2020) explains that TIMSS is a global contrast of learners performance in mathematics and science facilitated by International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The intention of the survey is furnish participating countries with collation of data on the performance in mathematics and science and attitudes together with a contrast of the curriculum and didactic praxis in these subjects in primary and secondary schools. The first survey was conducted in 1995 and data has been collected on a cycle of four years ever since. The countries that took part in TIMSS in (2020) were Egypt, Morocco and South Africa.

TIMSS (2020) reflected an ethnocentric bias towards white learners in primary school with the following distribution state funded schools whites displaying 67,0% for whites, 6,2% for whites other, Asians 11,3%, mixed 5,5%, blacks 6,0%, other, 1,9% and Chinese 0,4%. Students in England assessments in elements such as cognitive domains and curriculum content. There scanty acknowledgement that a learner experiential knowledge of school can vary in terms of socio-economic status, socio-cultural and linguistic patterns. Krause & Prinsloo, 2016 averred that at local institutions, usually adopt a rigid ap-

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