

Chapter 14

Unleashing the Power of Multilingualism Through Pedagogical Translanguaging in Foundation Phase

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ABSTRACT

For over a decade, scholars in the Global South have focused on the language of instruction, advocating for an inclusive approach towards language. The fundamental idea has been that through the incorporation of African languages, learners are afforded significant influence over what and how they learn. However, most South African schools have remained adamant and are dominated by monoglossic pedagogical practices that are detrimental effects to most multilingual learners. Drawing on 10 studies between 2019 and 2024, this chapter sought to explore the benefits of pedagogical translanguaging in foundation phase classrooms and the different strategies that can be used to effectively implement it in the classrooms. It argues that pedagogical translanguaging as an approach enables more effective meaning-making and supports pedagogic shifts that enhance participation and overall academic performance while promoting cultural awareness and social justice to linguistically marginalised learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Incorporating home languages (HL) alongside English into the classroom has been a topic of much debate in the Global South. The upsurge in diversity, in tandem with the global growth in immigrants and refugees is making the issue of learning in a second language more and more pertinent globally (Carnes, 2019). This prevalence of diversity in the classroom compels mainstream teachers to assume more responsibility for fulfilling the language and literacy needs of learners whose HL is different from the medium of instruction (Schoeman, Geertsema, le Roux, & Pottas, 2023). Given the prevalence of multilingualism, many scholars have argued that linguistic diversity among educators and learners in the classrooms needs to be viewed as an asset rather than a drawback (see for example: Carrim & Nkomo, 2023; Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021; Murphy & Chalmers, 2022; Sefotho, 2022).

For over a century, South African primary schools have been multilingual, nevertheless, until 1994, African languages were not regarded as being on par with English and Afrikaans (Charamba, 2021). Following the inauguration of South Africa's democracy in 1994, the South African government enacted the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), which authorized multilingual activities including code-switching and translation and granted official status to eleven languages: isiZulu, Sepedi, isiXhosa, Tshivenda, Afrikaans, English, Sesotho, Setswana, Xitsonga, Siswati, and isiNdebele (Department of Education, 2010) and South African sign language. This was inspired by the idea of diversity in the post-Apartheid era and the realization that the country has one of the most uneven learner populations in the world, with greatly varying levels of English proficiency (Makalela, 2017). Notably, most of the learners who learn through the medium of English are HL speakers of one or more indigenous African languages (Zano, 2019).

The recent 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) demonstrates that not everyone receives equal education under the submersion approach which according to Robertson and Graven (2020) aimed at immersing learners in a second language (L2) which is predominately English in South Africa. PIRLS is an international assessment and research study that measures reading achievement at the fourth-grade level, and school and teacher practices related to instruction (Taylor, 2023). The study is conducted every five years, and the latest cycle of the study was conducted in 2021 following the 2016 study. In South Africa, PIRLS 2021 marks the fourth cycle of participation in the study and still learners perform dismally with about 5% decrease. PIRLS enables participating countries to track trends and growth indicators in the early stages of learners' education as well as conduct cross-national comparisons across educational systems (Braun & Singer, 2019). With a centre point of 500 and a standard deviation of 100, the PIRLS international scale has a range of 0 to 1,000 (Marôco, 2021).

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