

Pedagogical Translanguaging in Multilingual Kenyan Classrooms: A blessing or a curse?

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Abstract:

Language is a primary core in learning. In Kenya (an East African country), the language of instruction policy is fluid in the sense that there is a big disconnect between policy and practice. The stipulated policy that mother tongue (home language) should be the language of instruction in the first three years of school and should also be taught is not adhered to. The push and pull between the policy and various stake holder interests remains a major challenge for effective learning. Learners in rural communities receive instruction in English the official and preferred language in Kenya but which they have very low competency in. The use of mother tongue is frowned upon as being retrogressive and interfering with proper acquisition of English. Hardly any investment goes into the development of mother tongues for academic use as far as learning materials and teacher training are concerned. Consequently, general performance remains poor for most rural learners who are the majority unlike their counterparts in cosmopolitan schools with good command of English. This study explores the merits of pedagogical translanguaging as evidenced by research and how Kenyan educators can tap into this for the benefit of disadvantaged learners striving to learn a language (English) and content simultaneously.

Keywords:

Translanguaging; learning; language policy; language competence.