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LANGUAGE TRANSITION AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES FROM TANZANIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at how language policies for equal access to education in Tanzania and South Africa are implemented in practice as regards the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Using interview and classroom observation data from primary and secondary schools in the two countries, it examines teachers' and learners' experiences of the shift from the home language to English (L2) and argues that this shift constrains learning. It observes that there are many language related challenges which do not support educational priorities in these countries. It concludes that the transition to English as LOLT has linguistic, cognitive and affective implications for the quality of teaching and learning and learners' epistemological access to education in the two countries.

Keywords: Access, transition, experiences, English, second language, language of learning and teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The question of the mismatch between home language and the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) has been at the centre of debate for the past two to three decades in many African countries (Alexander, 1989; Bamgbose, 1991; Alidou and Mazrui, 1999; Mazrui, 2002). In the past decade, language education debates, particularly in Tanzania and South Africa, have focused on the negative effects of the mismatch between the learners' home language and the LOLT (Holmarsdottir, 2005; Nomlomo, 2007; Brock-Utne, 2010; Vuzo, 2012). The marginalisation of African languages and English hegemony in education have similarly received much attention in education research in the past decade (Heugh, 2003; Desai, 2003; Alidou, 2004; Webb, 2004). With this background of debate, and since the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there has been much concern about equal access to education for learners in sub-Saharan Africa. Since the 1990s, education research has prioritised equal access to education to achieve universal primary education by

2015 (UNESCO, 2000; Chisholm, 2004; Ghandani *et al.*, 2007; Shindler and Fleisch, 2007; Motala *et al.*, 2009). Recent research shows that language is one of the factors that affect learners' equal access to and success in education (Pendlebury, 2008; Pinnock, 2009; Sayed & Motala, 2012; Bamgbose, 2013; Brock-Utne, 2013), particularly those who are not taught in their home language. While enrolment rates have improved in many schools in sub-Saharan Africa (Hill *et al.*, 2012;), the quality of education is still a concern in many African countries, including Tanzania and South Africa, as many children access knowledge through the medium of a second or additional language (Chisholm, 2004; Gamede, 2005; Jansen, 2008; Pendlebury, 2008; Bakahwemama, 2010; Brock-Utne, 2012; Vuzo, 2012). There is a big gap in academic performance between children who are taught in their home language and those who are not (MoEVT, 2011; NEEDU, 2012). Most of the latter are from low socio-economic backgrounds (Pinnock, 2009). Tanzania is ahead of other African countries in terms of the number of years of home language instruction. Kiswahili is used as a national lingua franca and the main LOLT for seven years of primary education (Vuzo, 2007). In many countries, among them Zambia and South Africa, learners who speak African languages are taught

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in their home language for the first three years of schooling, shifting to English (L2) LOLT in Grade 4. At this transition stage, learners have grasped only minimal principles of reading and writing in their home language (Chisholm, 2004), and most of them do not have strong enough cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000) to cope with the English LOLT demands in all subjects (Nomlomo, 2007). In South Africa, language related difficulties and poor teaching are evident in the poor literacy and numeracy results in the Annual National Assessment and in international tests such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies, particularly in disadvantaged schools (Howie *et al.*, 2006; DBE, 2011; Modisaotsile, 2012; NEEDU, 2012). This is a matter for concern, as education is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The LOLT is a crucial tool in education as it is a means of both communication and dissemination of information (Bamgbose, 2013).

While the LOLT question and the discourse on access to education have been widely addressed in recent research in Tanzania and South Africa, little is known about how teachers and learners experience the challenges of the LOLT, particularly at the stage of transition from home language instruction to a different LOLT (i.e. English). In this article, we examine the way language practices in selected Tanzanian and South African schools. We focus on teachers' and learners' experiences of the shift from home language LOLT to English LOLT in the transition grades, namely Grade 4 in South Africa and Form 1 (equivalent to South Africa's Grade 8) in Tanzania. We compare teachers' and learners' experiences and ways of coping with the shift to English LOLT when the shift occurs early (in Grade 4) and when it is delayed (in Form 1). We seek to establish the extent to which teacher and learner experiences reflect quality of teaching and learning, and whether equal access to education is being achieved as we approach the 2015 MDG deadline. The article is based on qualitative research conducted in selected primary and secondary schools in South Africa and Tanzania respectively.

LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICIES AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

South Africa and Tanzania have a British colonial legacy (Babaci-Wilhite, 2013), hence they both experience English hegemony despite the fact that their population comprises a large number of African language speakers.

Tanzania gained its independence in 1961, and the use of Kiswahili as LOLT up to the end of primary education was formalised in 1967 (Bakahwemama, 2010). The commitment to use Kiswahili was initially contained in the five-year plan published in 1969 (United Republic of Tanzania, 1969), but English dominance in education is still a matter for concern.

Among the language policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education in Tanzania in the 1990s were the 1995 Education and Training Policy and the 1997 Cultural Policy (MoEC, 1995, 1997). The Education and Training policy states that in pre-primary and primary schools the medium of instruction (LOLT) will be Kiswahili, with English as a compulsory subject, and that in secondary education it will be English except for the teaching of other approved languages. This policy increased the number of years in which primary school children would study English, mandating that they start in the first year of primary education instead of the third. The policy does not state the rationale for this increase in the number of years of English. This is the latest policy to be officially implemented in secondary schools in Tanzania despite the fact that the Cultural Policy (*Sera ya Utamaduni*) was issued in 1997 in favour of Kiswahili as the medium of instruction (MoEC 1997). Nothing has so far been done to implement the use of Kiswahili as the medium of instruction in secondary schools.

In South Africa, a number of educational policies which support equality, equity and learners' access to education were released after 1994 (Chisholm, 2004; Pendlebury, 2008). For example, the National Education Policy Act of 1996 emphasises access to schools without discrimination (Pendlebury, 2008) and outcomes based education (OBE) was introduced as a means of redress and to provide good quality education to all South African children. The 1997 Language in Education Policy was intended to redress the discriminatory policies of the apartheid education system. In line with the Constitution (RSA, 1996), this policy conferred official status on nine indigenous African languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi, Setwana, Sesotho, XiTsonga, siSwati, TshiVenda and isiNdebele). These languages had been marginalised by the previous apartheid government as the only official languages were English and Afrikaans. These nine languages are spoken by the majority of the South African population (72%) as home languages. However, none of them are used for learning and

teaching beyond Grade 3 although the democratic Constitution states that 'Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable' (RSA, 1996, 29(2)). Many parents prefer English to be the medium of instruction for their children as they associate it with socio-economic benefits (Nomlomo, 2007), while ignoring the cognitive benefits of learning through a home language.

In this article, we argue that in spite of the progressive educational policies in Tanzania and South Africa, it appears that equal access to education is still a challenge due to the mismatch between learners' home languages and the LOLT. To emphasise the role that language plays in facilitating or constraining learners' access to meaningful learning, we base our argument on Morrow's (2007) concept of epistemological access to education, which distinguishes between physical (or formal) and epistemological access. 'Physical access' refers to enrolling children in school, while 'epistemological access' refers to access to knowledge and the meaningful learning required to achieve learning outcomes (Jansen, 2008; Motala *et al.*, 2009). Pendlebury (2008) points out that epistemological access to knowledge may not be guaranteed for all children in the same school or classroom due to a number of factors such as language, race, gender, poverty and disability.

We are also guided by the social constructivist view that learning is a cognitive and social process which is influenced by language competence (Cook, 1993; Ohta, 2000). Social constructivists believe that the learners' home language plays a vital role in knowledge construction. This implies that a learner who does not have adequate competence in the LOLT is unlikely to be able to construct meaning out of what is being taught (Bell & Freyberg, 1997) or to be able to apply the new knowledge in different contexts (Southerland *et al.*, 2000). The LOLT is therefore a significant factor inhibiting learners' epistemological access to knowledge in contexts where they are taught through an unfamiliar language in which they have limited proficiency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on data collected from two primary schools in South Africa, focusing on Grade 4, where the transition to English begins after three years of instruction in isiXhosa, and two secondary schools in Tanzania, focusing on Form 1 (equivalent to South

Africa's Grade 8), where the transition to English begins after seven years of instruction in Kiswahili. The study investigated how teachers and learners experienced the early and delayed transition to English LOLT in these two grades in their Geography lessons. While we acknowledge that the incongruence between the educational levels Grade 4 and Form 1 is a research limitation, the choice of these two levels was purposeful, as we wanted to investigate how an early or late shift to English (L2) LOLT was perceived by teachers and learners in the two contexts. Thus our chosen methodology consisted of a purposive sample and a qualitative interpretive analysis (Woods, 1986; Henning *et al.*, 2004; De Vos *et al.*, 2005) which would reveal teachers' and learners' opinions of their experiences in the two contexts.

The purposive sample was made up of eight teachers and 40 learners. The teachers were four Form 1 teachers from Tanzania and four Grade 4 teachers from South Africa. The Tanzanian teachers all had diplomas in education, with a specialisation in Geography. Three of the South African teachers had a Primary Teachers' Certificate and were trained to teach all subjects for lower primary education in the 1970s, and one had a Primary Teachers' Diploma, with a specialisation in languages. None of the South African teachers were Geography specialists. At the time of the study none of the participating teachers had taught for less than 10 years. The learners were 22 Form 1 Tanzanians (13 girls and nine boys), aged 14 years on average, and 18 Grade 4 South Africans (11 girls and seven boys), aged 10 years on average. English was a second language to the majority of the learners, and it was also a third language to some who were speakers of other ethnic languages in Tanzania.

The data collection methods were classroom observations, focus group discussion with learners and small group interviews with teachers. The classroom observations targeted teacher-learner interaction and the use of language in Geography lessons in both contexts in order to discover how teachers and learners engaged and coped with English LOLT in this subject. This study reports on two of the Geography lessons that were observed in each context. The lessons were video recorded to capture teacher-learner interaction and language use, and to obtain accurate data for transcription purposes. The small group interviews with teachers were used to triangulate the observation data.

Triangulation was necessary to maintain the stability or consistency of the research results (Mouton, 2001). The teachers' interviews elicited information about their experiences in teaching learners in English (L2) and the pedagogical strategies they used to enhance learners' epistemological access to knowledge about Geography in the two transition grades. The focus group discussion with learners aimed at understanding their experiences of how the shift in LOLT affected their Geography learning.

The collected data were transcribed and analysed qualitatively into themes and categories which corresponded with the broad aims of the study, namely, teacher and learner experiences with regard to the change of the LOLT in Tanzania and South Africa. Ethical considerations such as respect, voluntary participation and anonymity were adhered to throughout the data collection process (Henning *et al.*, 2004; De Vos *et al.*, 2005). Permission to conduct research in schools was sought from the Departments of Education of both countries, and from the teachers and parents of the learners who participated in the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Our findings from our sample of Grade 4 classrooms in South Africa and Form 1 classrooms in Tanzania illustrate the learners' language competence (and the teachers'), the learners' learning styles and the teachers' pedagogical strategies. We discuss these findings in relation to the issue of how English (L2) LOLT affects learners' equal access to meaningful learning in both countries.

Language competence: Interestingly, both sets of learner data revealed low levels of competence in English, despite the Tanzanian learners' later shift to the English LOLT. None of the 40 learners spoke English at home. Nearly all of them (about 85%) said they had limited competence in English, in which they were taught in the transition grades, and were more comfortable in their home languages (isiXhosa and Kiswahili). In Tanzania, Kiswahili was spoken widely at school and at home. When they did speak English at home, it was in relation to matters of school work. This finding seems to align with the linguistic theory that learners need adequate exposure to the target language in order to master it well for the academic and communicative competence needed for learning. It also corresponds with Nel's (2005) observation that many learners in South Africa are hardly exposed to English

outside the classroom. In our samples it seemed that the limited exposure to English input contributed to the learners' low proficiency in this language.

Although the Tanzanian and South African learners were at different educational levels in terms of academic grades, and the former had received seven years of home language instruction, the two groups were similarly challenged by the geographical terminology in English. About three quarters of the Tanzanian learners described a lack of conceptual understanding of geographical terminology similar to that described by the South African learners.

Both Form 1 and Grade 4 learners struggled to understand some of the geographical terms in English, as can be seen in the responses of two South African learners and one Tanzanian learner below. These comments suggest that they understood the lessons better in their home languages (isiXhosa and Kiswahili):

SAL1: There are Geography words that we don't know in English.

SAL2: Because English is not our language, we always speak isiXhosa. We won't be able to know other things – the teacher translates for us in isiXhosa.

Observation data confirmed the above learners' concerns. The South African teacher, for example, tried to explain a weather map to her learners in their home language (isiXhosa), but the key concepts that the learners were supposed to learn and understand were not translated into isiXhosa (e.g. weather chart, knot).

Idolophu nganye inesitishi sayo. Each town has its own station. Kwimephu kubakho **iSynoptic weather chart**. On the map there is a **Synoptic Weather Chart**. Kwisyntoptic weather chart yakho ke, isitishi siyakwazi ukuba sibe lolu hlobo. On your **synoptic weather chart**, a station can be like this.

Some of the Tanzanian learners explained how they struggled to understand Geography terminology in English:

TAL1: To a large extent, I do not understand the textbooks because I cannot understand a whole English sentence from the beginning to the end of it. Some parts have difficult vocabulary unless the teacher explains to us in Kiswahili.

TAL2: I get stuck, I am forced to cram things I do not understand the meaning of words because of difficult words. If the books were in Kiswahili I would understand them better because we have used Kiswahili in primary education.

The learners' low proficiency in English LOLT and the way it affected their understanding of the lessons was confirmed by one of the South African (SAT) teachers:

SAT1: Everything, the whole book, the whole lesson – if they read in English I must translate because they do not know English. They don't understand what they are learning – I must translate word for word.

Although most of the teachers claimed that they used their home languages to compensate for the learners' low proficiency in English, the group interview and observation data showed that some of the teachers were themselves not very competent in English. In fact, all the eight teachers we interviewed said they had better competence in their home languages (isiXhosa and Kiswahili), and hardly ever used English outside of school. Because they were uncomfortable using English and their proficiency was low, they made frequent use of their home languages, as one teacher from Tanzania observed:

TAT1: Teachers don't use English in class. You find a teacher teaching Physics and Biology in Kiswahili.

Three of the four Tanzanian teachers in the study said they were more comfortable teaching in Kiswahili than in English. They maintained that English vocabulary was more difficult than that of Kiswahili and therefore they gave better explanations and more detailed examples in Kiswahili. One of them highlighted the way the English LOLT limited free expression:

TAT2: In Kiswahili I give better explanations. I give details contrary to English where I read notes from the text books. I am much more free stressing points and giving elaborations in Kiswahili.

Two South African and four Tanzanian teachers said that using English as LOLT was time consuming as they had to go out of their way, teaching English grammar before proceeding with the lessons. Using the home language instead of English appeared to benefit both the teachers and the learners in both contexts, and it facilitated free and relaxed interaction.

Learning styles: When obliged to cope with the difficulties of English LOLT, the learners adopted a variety of learning styles. The observation data in both our samples showed that they did not participate actively when English was used as LOLT and were not spontaneous in responding to teachers' questions. Most of them waited for the teacher to translate the questions into their home language before they attempted to answer, and they remained silent throughout the lesson

if it was in English only. Sometimes they used their home languages to answer questions in written tasks when they experienced difficulties with English. The home language functioned as a linguistic resource that enabled them to cope with the demands of the lessons taught in English, as this learner explained:

TAL4: We discuss in Kiswahili and translate to English but it is difficult to learn like this. I think it would be better if it was possible to use one language.

The learners' descriptions of their behaviour during lessons taught in English were confirmed by the teacher interview data. Five of the teachers (three South Africans and two Tanzanians) said that learners remained passive when they were taught through the medium of English and waited for translations in their home language. The four responses below attest to this finding:

SAT2: Sometimes a child – when it is difficult – writes the question in isiXhosa. You find that he is right. It is better to write in isiXhosa than not to write at all.

SAT3: I see how their faces look – the facial expression. If I was teaching in English and I ask a question, it's only two learners. And now I see that I should ask in isiXhosa. And now you see the whole class answering – they understand.

TAT3: Participation in class sessions is low although students may know something very well in Kiswahili but they cannot explain it in English because of the difficult vocabularies.

TAT4: If I give them tasks to explain in English it is very difficult for them to express themselves. In most cases some of them raise their hands and request to answer in Kiswahili. If you don't accept this they remain silent – I would also give explanations in Kiswahili.

Teachers in both contexts said that learners had difficulty answering questions that required them to write long answers in English. This suggests that either they could not understand the questions or they could not express themselves in English, or that they experienced both difficulties. The following responses illustrate how some Tanzanian and South African learners reacted to the use of English in the classroom:

TAL2: I get stuck – I am forced to cram things. I do not understand the meaning of words because of difficult words.

TAL3: On several occasions where I do not understand at all, I ask questions in Kiswahili. I ask the teacher to translate for me in Kiswahili.

SAL3: I do not understand some things very well but I ask again, and [if] I see that I haven't understood well again, I just keep quiet.

SAL4: I just go out of the class not knowing it, and Miss asks again if there is anybody who wants some clarity again. I feel that I really do not understand this – let me leave her alone because she will get bored with me.

The above responses show that, because of their limited proficiency in the LOLT, some learners did not understand the lesson at all and left the classroom without having learnt what they were supposed to learn. English appeared to be a barrier to their epistemological access to the lesson content, and it also affected their self-esteem and confidence.

Their low competence in English also influenced their learning styles. The observation data showed that the majority of them asked their teachers for meanings of terms, repetitions and translations. As a result, well over half of the learners claimed that they learnt some of the Geography lessons by memorizing, and some of the teachers confirmed this. Memorization is common in classrooms where the language of instruction differs from the teacher's and the learners' home language. As language use and knowledge construction are interrelated, memorization inhibits learners' resourcefulness and creativity in knowledge construction (Vuzo, 2007). It is hardly possible to engage in problem solving and discussion when one does not understand the LOLT. For example, the use of a second language is a challenge in subjects like mathematics which has specialized terminology, where learners are required to solve mathematical problems, and in literature where learners have to make convincing discussions and arguments.

Pedagogical strategies and learners' conceptual development: The observation data showed that code switching was the most common strategy used by the teachers to facilitate teaching and learning in their classrooms. In both contexts code switching was regarded the normal way to compensate for the learners' low proficiency in English. The teachers used this method, switching from English to give directives and instructions in the learners' home languages (isiXhosa and Kiswahili). They also used it to elaborate on or clarify the lesson content. Observation data, however, showed that in most cases teachers taught the key concepts in English, with no explanation. Some classroom studies show that code switching is a useful

communicative resource where there is a mismatch between the learners' home languages and the LOLT (Adendorff, 1996; Holmarsdottir, 2005). In the present study, code switching appeared to be a useful coping strategy for teaching and learning in both samples, but some of the teachers had mixed feelings about its use, given that examinations were conducted in English. Although both the teachers and the learners claimed that switching between languages improved understanding and participation in the classroom, it did not always seem to help learners understand key concepts, because the teachers often did not translate these into the learners' home languages. Some of the teachers justified this by claiming that not translating the concepts would increase the learners' understanding and prepare them for higher classes:

SAT4: When I teach in isiXhosa I pronounce other words in English so that they can know them in both ways. I use both of these languages. When they get to Senior Primary or High School, it won't be said in isiXhosa only – that's why I switch over.

TAT4: When you teach in Kiswahili most students enjoy the lessons. However, it affects their performance in final exams which are in English. When you use English only, students do not get the intended content and most of the students are forced to cram rather than understand. In English classes students are silent – I am compelled to code mix Kiswahili and English for the students to understand and to participate.

Observation data also showed that teachers in both contexts used fewer interactive and teacher-centred strategies and more 'teacher talk' when they were explaining in their home languages. This finding aligns with classroom research in South Africa and Tanzania which has found that, in many disadvantaged and under-resourced classrooms, either teacher-centred strategies or teacher talk will dominate (Rubagumya, 2003; Holmarsdottir, 2005; Nomlomo, 2007; Vuzo, 2007; Brock-Utne, 2010). Teacher talk leads to less student participation, which often results in silence in the classroom, prompting the teacher to talk even more (Tsui, 1996). This kind of interaction is often characterised by 'safe' talk which encourages chorus answers, repeating phrases after the teacher and copying notes from the blackboard (Rubagumya, 2003). Such interaction may not provide adequate access to meaningful learning, and may result in rote learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that learners experienced difficulties with the shift to English (L2) LOLT at Grade 4 and Form 1 levels in South Africa and Tanzania respectively. While the findings of this study are familiar in contexts where the learners' home language is not used in the classroom, it is interesting that the experiences of Tanzanian learners, who had had seven years of home language instruction, with exposure to English in all these years, were similar to those of learners who had had only four years of home language instruction. Given that strong home language skills are regarded as a good foundation for second language learning (Cummins, 2000), we assumed that the Form 1 Tanzanian learners would display better proficiency, understanding and confidence in English than the South African Grade 4 learners.

It could be argued that the Grade 4 learners' language skills and competence were underdeveloped or limited in both their home language and their second language. If we explain this in terms of Cummins' (2000) basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), we can say that learners at this age may display good BICS, but may not be able to cope with challenging academic tasks. Cummins (2000) says it takes five to seven years for learners to develop CALP, but this was not the case for our South African and Tanzanian samples, given the limited English input they were exposed to, both in the classroom and at home. Madiba's (2010) claim that learners gain adequate access to educational concepts through their home language helps explain the problems our sample were experienced.

The well-known Six Year Primary School Project conducted in Ife Province in Nigeria in the 1970s found that delaying the switch to English (L2) LOLT led to better proficiency in English. Learners also coped well at the secondary and tertiary levels after six years of home language instruction (Bamgbose, 2005). The present study, however, found the opposite for Tanzanian learners, suggesting that delaying the shift to English (L2) did not necessarily prepare these learners for a smooth shift to English LOLT. This could be attributed to a number of factors, such as the extent of these learners' exposure to English, their teachers' pedagogical strategies and the linguistic distance and terminology difference between Kiswahili and English.

The social constructivist paradigm views learners as

active individuals who should be stimulated to construct their own knowledge by interacting with the world and society around them (Leach & Scott, 2000). This is possible if learners are taught in a language they know well (Pluddemann *et al.*, 2010), and if the teachers make use of pedagogical approaches that promote active rather than rote learning. In our study, code switching was a useful and convenient strategy to compensate for the learners' low proficiency levels in English. However, it appears that it did not provide them with adequate access to the key geographical concepts, which were not well translated by teachers during code switching. In this case, it may be argued that while code switching is a popular strategy that facilitates teaching and learning where the teachers and learners speak the same language, it could also block learners' access to meaningful learning if it is not well planned and systematically implemented (Diwu, 2010).

Although the findings of our study cannot be generalised due to the small sample that was used, they can help to explain the complexity and challenges of early or late LOLT transition. They are consistent with the findings of other studies that focus on language practices where the LOLT is different from the learners' home languages (Holmarsdottir, 2005; Nomlomo, 2007; Vuzo, 2007). The teacher and learner experiences described in this article illustrate the way learners' limited exposure to English (L2) affects their proficiency in this language and their learning styles. They show how these teachers' pedagogical practices tended to promote passive and rote learning, which impedes learning. They also show that the transition from home language to English (L2) LOLT remains a challenge for teachers and learners in negotiating meaning in English (L2) in the classroom. This has implications for learners' epistemological access to knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study found similarities between experiences of the change from home language instruction to English (L2) LOLT in primary education in South Africa and secondary education in Tanzania, for both teachers and learners. The change from the home language to English (L2) LOLT can cause linguistic, cognitive and affective difficulties, as neither the teachers nor the learners have been shown effective ways of managing this transition. Teachers often try to facilitate learning through code switching, but it appears that they struggle to manage the transition in a manner that provides learners with adequate access to meaningful learning.

A significant problem identified in this article is the lack of correlation between the global discourse on Education for All (EFA), which promotes equal access to education, and the language practices in Tanzanian and South African classrooms. As we approach the 2015 MDG deadline, the findings of this study do not present a promising or optimistic picture of learners' equal access to meaningful learning in the two countries. In both countries, the majority of learners affected by the English (L2) LOLT are from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in black township and rural schools in South Africa. This is evidenced in the NEEDU Report (2012), which shows that Afrikaans and English home language speakers performed better in national assessments. However, there are other barriers to learners' equal access to education, such as poverty, gender inequality and racial inequality (particularly in South Africa), but the LOLT issue remains a major concern for achieving the MDGs and EFA goals in both countries. This aligns with Bamgbose's (2013) observation that the African countries lag behind in achieving the MDGs due to language barriers in education. English (L2) LOLT remains a barrier to learners' epistemological access to learning (Sayed & Motala, 2012) in many African countries. The evidence from this article suggests that more work needs to be done in order to suggest appropriate and practicable ways of managing the LOLT transition in order to give learners equal access to meaningful learning. Teacher education (pre-service and in-service) is one of the sectors that could be targeted for proper management of the LOLT transition through theoretical and practical means that involve the use of indigenous languages in their training. As many studies show that code switching is a popular strategy in classrooms where the home language is not used as the LOLT, it is imperative to build on this resource in a way that will foster learners' access to knowledge. This could entail bilingual and biliteracy strategies to enhance teachers' understanding of the use of two languages (home language and L2) in teaching. Such strategies could also involve the use of bilingual glossaries, particularly in subjects with specialised terminology such as Geography, in order to offer learners equal opportunities to participate and succeed in education, in response to the EFA agenda. If the MDG and EFA aims are to be achieved in the near future, the role of the LOLT in providing access to education has to be recognised and re-evaluated.

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