

# Teachers' Familiarity with the Language - In - Education Policy: Implications for Translanguaging in Namibian Early Grade Classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

Namibia's Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) aims to promote multilingualism and improve learning outcomes by utilizing indigenous languages in the early grades. However, its effective implementation hinges on teachers' understanding and acceptance of the policy. This paper examines the extent to which Namibian early grade teachers are familiar with the LiEP, and explores the implications of their knowledge (or lack thereof) for the successful integration of translanguaging pedagogies. Underpinned by the Interdependence Hypothesis and Translanguaging theory, through a qualitative case study research design, the study employed semi-structured interviews with teachers and HODs from selected multilingual schools in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. The findings reveal that while most teachers expressed awareness of the policy's existence and its stated goals, they were not familiar with the translanguaging concept. The paper argues that while the LiEP intends to foster multilingualism, a gap exists between policy intentions and teachers' understanding and implementation. Gaps in teacher knowledge of the LiEP and translanguaging practices could lead to inconsistent application, resistance, and a failure to leverage the linguistic resources of learners. This disconnect hinders the effective utilisation of translanguaging, potentially impacting learners' access to quality education. This paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening teacher education and professional development programs, resource development, policy revision and evaluation and ongoing support to promote and ensure greater awareness and effective implementation of the LiEP, paving the way for successful translanguaging practices in Namibian early grade classrooms.

**Keywords:** Language-in-Education Policy, Translanguaging, Early Grade Education, Namibia, Teacher Familiarity, Multilingualism, Linguistic Diversity, Silozi

## INTRODUCTION

Namibia, recognised by its significant linguistic diversity, has adopted a multilingual education policy aimed at promoting inclusivity and supporting the use of learners' home languages in the classroom, particularly at Grade 4 when learners transition to English medium (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MEAC), 2015, 2016). According to MEAC (2015:13; 2016:29), in the transitional grade, namely Grade 4, the mother tongue may play a supportive role to enable learners to understand difficult concepts during the primary cycle. In other words, in educational contexts, where learners struggle to understand subject matter in English (or any given LoTL), learners' comprehension can be facilitated through using translanguaging practices (Shifidi, 2014: 24). Thus, utilisation of learners' familiar languages alongside English helps them learn academic content and the new language, leading to improved learning outcomes. By implication, the use of translanguaging "a pragmatic response to the local classroom context and its practicality may be seen as teachers' and learners' local, pragmatic, coping tactic and responses to the dominance of the English language" (cf. Shifidi, 2014: 24). This policy, however, exists within a complex socio-political landscape shaped by historical legacies of colonialism, apartheid and the persistent power dynamics associated with language. Although the policy officially recognizes the importance of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), its practical application in classrooms remains uneven, dependent upon various factors, including the teachers' level of knowledge and acceptance of the policy's guidelines.

This paper centres precisely on the relationship between teachers' familiarity with Namibia's language policy and the extent to which translanguaging, the flexible and dynamic use of multiple languages in learning and communication (Poudel, 2023), occurs within Namibian classrooms. The concept of translanguaging, initially proposed by Cen Williams (1994), challenges old-fashioned monolingual approaches to education by recognising and valuing the linguistic resources that learners bring to the learning environment to enhance their learning outcomes. It acknowledges that language is not a static entity, but rather a fluid and dynamic tool used by individuals to make sense of their world. In multilingual contexts such as Namibia, translanguaging allows learners to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire, leveraging different languages for specific communicative purposes and enriching their learning experiences. The concept of translanguaging aligns with the language policy of many countries, including Namibia, recognises and promotes bilingualism and multilingualism as valuable resources for learners.

However, the successful implementation of this policy depends on how familiar teachers are with it. Familiarity with the language policy includes understanding the goals of the language policy, as well as the specific guidelines for the use of languages in the classroom. Equally, teachers need to know how to traverse potential conflicts between the language policy and the needs of bilingual and multilingual learners, and how to advocate for inclusive language practices. This means the successful application of translanguaging in the classroom requires not only a supportive policy environment but also teachers who are equipped with the pedagogical knowledge and confidence to facilitate such practices. Thus, for the teacher to function effectively according to the expectations of the government and policy makers, it is important that a teacher is familiar with the language policy. Teachers have a central role in the enactment of language education policy and in determining which languages are used in the classroom (Norro, 2021), ultimately influencing their instructional practices. However, the familiarity of teachers with language policy in relation to translanguaging remains a significant area of interest in educational research in the Namibian context.

This paper investigates the crucial link between teachers' familiarity with the Namibian LiE policy and the adoption of translanguaging practices in early grade classrooms. It asks the question: ***How does teachers' understanding of the Namibian Language-in-Education policy influence the implementation of translanguaging practices in early grade classrooms, and what are the implications for student learning?*** By exploring this question, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing a language policy that supports multilingual learners in a diverse educational context.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on two key theoretical perspectives to frame the research: Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis and García's Translanguaging Theory.

### **Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (Common Underlying Proficiency - CUP) (1979)**

Jim Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, proposed in his 1979 paper, suggests that a child's first language (L1) proficiency is crucial for developing competence in a second language (L2), with L1 skills serving as a foundation for L2 learning (Cummins, 1979, 2000). This proposes that cognitive and academic skills developed in the learners' mother tongue are transferable to the acquisition of a new language. Thus, learners possess a common underlying proficiency that supports learning across languages. In the context of Namibian education, this implies that strengthening learners' proficiency in their home languages will ultimately contribute to their success in English, the language of formal instruction from upper primary grades onwards. Therefore, in line with the Namibian LiEP, this theory supports the rationale behind mother-tongue instruction in the early grades, as it is believed to lay a strong foundation for future learning, including proficiency in English. Translanguaging implicitly draws upon this hypothesis by recognizing that learners can leverage their knowledge and skills in all their languages to enhance understanding and problem-solving. Therefore, understanding the CUP allows teachers to see the value of drawing upon learners' entire linguistic repertoire, even if it means using languages in the classroom that the teacher is not proficient in.

## García's Translanguaging Theory (2009)

On the other hand, Ofelia García's Translanguaging Theory (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014) offers a dynamic perspective on multilingualism, viewing languages not as separate, bounded entities but as a single, integrated linguistic repertoire that individuals strategically utilize to make meaning and communicate, and learn effectively (García, 2009; Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). In the Namibian context, translanguaging can be particularly valuable because it encourages learners to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire, regardless of whether it aligns with the formal language of instruction, to understand concepts, express ideas, and engage in learning in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their lived experiences. This approach rejects the notion of linguistic purity and embraces the fluidity and dynamism of language use in multilingual contexts. Translanguaging pedagogy, therefore, encourages teachers to embrace and leverage learners' full linguistic repertoire in the classroom. In other words, this theoretical perspective encourages teachers to move away from restrictive language policies that promote separation and towards inclusive practices that celebrate and utilise the full range of learners' linguistic resources. However, implementing translanguaging effectively requires teachers to have a strong understanding of the LiEP and a willingness to challenge traditional monolingual teaching practices.

By combining these theoretical perspectives, the paper aims to explore how teachers' understanding of the LiEP (premised on the importance of L1 proficiency as highlighted by Cummins) influences their application of translanguaging pedagogies in the classroom (as conceptualized by García). A firm grasp of the LiEP, coupled with an understanding of Cummins' hypothesis, can lay the groundwork for more effective implementation of translanguaging practices that leverage the full linguistic repertoire of learners.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A policy is a statement of what a governing body “intends to do or not to do” (Lehman, 2023: 2). Language policy (LP) refers to the principles and practices that govern the use of languages in educational settings, impacting access, equity, and achievement for language minority learners (Wiley et al., 2014). According to Baldauf (1993: 83), “Language policy represents the decision-making process, formally stated or implicit, used to decide which languages will be taught to (or learned by) whom for what purposes”. Thus, it is through LP that decisions are made with regard to the preferred languages that should be legitimized, used, learned and taught in terms of where, when and in which contexts (Shohamy, 2006). Lehman (2023) contends that a school language policy should detail what, how, and why. The scholar further argues that the language policy should not just be limited to the which, whom, what, how, and why, as indicated earlier, but the where is also of critical importance, as in where learners are to use one language or another or have the freedom to choose. Therefore, a formal written language policy in an English-medium multilingual school should address which, whom, what, how, why, and where of language within the school community.

Therefore, in multicultural and multilingual societies such as Namibia, language policies are especially important for ensuring equity and inclusivity in education. However, language policies in educational settings vary widely, and they often have an impact on the ways in which learners are allowed to use their languages in the classroom. In some cases, language policies may limit the use of languages other than the dominant language of instruction, which can create barriers for bilingual and multilingual learners. In other cases, language policies may explicitly support translanguaging and encourage the use of multiple languages in the learning process. Regardless of the specific language policy in place, teachers need to be familiar with it in order to effectively support translanguaging practices.

Namibia's language policy, outlined in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture's (2016) National Curriculum for Basic Education, recognizes the country's linguistic diversity and the importance of multilingual education. The policy encourages the use of learners' mother tongues, or home languages, as the medium of instruction in the early grades, with a gradual transition to English as the language of learning and teaching from Grade 4 onwards (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2015, 2026). This policy alignment provides a fertile ground for translanguaging practices in Namibian classrooms.

Translanguaging is a pedagogical approach that involves the fluid use of learners' full linguistic repertoires, including their home or native languages, in the classroom to enhance their learning outcomes (Poudel, 2023).

It recognizes that learners have a wide repertoire of linguistic resources that they creatively draw upon to make meaning and communicate effectively in different contexts, and it has gained attention in the field of education as a way to support bilingual and multilingual learners. However, the implementation of translanguageing in schools requires teachers to have a clear understanding of the language policies that govern its use.

In response to the growing linguistic diversity in classrooms, as stated earlier, Namibia adopted a language policy that promote the use of all languages that learners bring to school. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture on language of teaching and learning when learners shift from mother tongue to English medium in grade 4 recognizes the importance of learners' home language and encourages its use in education. The policy states “In Grade 4, the mother tongue/home language should be used in a supportive role only, mostly to ensure that learners have understood new content or concepts when they seem to be having difficulty in understanding the English terminology” (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture 2016). Thus, utilisation of learners’ familiar languages alongside English helps them learn academic content and the new language leading to improved learning outcomes. In short, The Namibian LiEP mandates the use of learners' mother tongue or the most widely spoken language in the community as the medium of instruction from Grades 1-3. This aims to provide a solid foundation for literacy and numeracy skills before transitioning to English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards. The policy also emphasizes the importance of promoting multilingualism and fostering a positive attitude towards all languages spoken in Namibia. This language policy aligns with the concept of translanguageing and promotes the use of learners' home languages in the classroom. However, the implementation of this policy depends on how familiar teachers are with it.

The LiEP recognizes the crucial role that teachers play in its successful implementation. Teachers are powerful language-in-education policy (LiEP) implementers (Norro, 2022). Their interpretations of LiEP documents and of LiEP discourse in society affect the way they implement it. Thus, teachers’ knowledge of the language policy is considered to affect teachers’ perceptions, values, and attitudes, hence influencing their (language) practices and how they implement educational language policies. Therefore, teachers' familiarity with language policy is crucial for effective educational practices, particularly in multilingual contexts. Research indicates that while many schools have established language policies, teachers often lack awareness or understanding of these guidelines. This lack of familiarity can significantly impact teaching efficacy and learner learning outcomes.

A study by Lehman & Welch (2020) examined teacher knowledge of language policy in English-medium international schools in East Asia. The results showed that a significant percentage of teachers in international schools reported being unaware of their school's language policy, with many unsure if one exists. Similarly, Poudel (2024) established that policy actors, including teachers, have below-average familiarity with the national policy on multilingual education, suggesting inadequate policy communication and understanding, which hinders effective implementation in Nepal's schools. Moreover, in Nigeria, a vast number of the teachers interviewed in the study could not differentiate between the national and state language policies, indicating a lack of familiarity and understanding of the language policies they were expected to implement in multilingual classrooms.

However, a study by Mensah (2014) in Namibia found that teachers at Windhoek International School are aware of the language policy, which promotes monolingual norms despite the multilingual context. Nonetheless, they are not restricted from using their languages outside the classroom, fostering a polyglossic environment. Heineke (2015) in Arizon also noted that teachers exhibited familiarity with the language policy, recognizing its emphasis on English-only instruction. However, they also expressed the value of bilingualism, indicating a tension between policy mandates and their understanding of learners' linguistic abilities and needs. In Texas, teachers demonstrated familiarity with the district's dual language bilingual education (DLBE) policy, yet their understanding and enactment were influenced by their personal ideologies, experiences, and perceptions of equity, leading to varied classroom practices (Zuniga, Henderson, & Palmer, 2017).

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

This paper employed a qualitative case study research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather data on teachers' familiarity with the language policy situated in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. The research participants included ten (10) Grade 4 English language teachers and eight (8) HODs for language, purposely



drawn from ten (10) selected schools. The selection of teachers was based on their unique position as the sole implementers of the language policy recommending utilisation of translanguageing whereas HODs were directly involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the policy document that guide the deployment of translanguageing at Grade 4. The semi-structured interviews explored teachers' understanding of the language policy in relation to translanguageing pedagogic practice. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to teachers' understanding and implementation of the language policy. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring the confidentiality of all data.

## Findings

### Teachers' Familiarity with the Language Policy in Relation to Translanguageing

The findings revealed that majority of the teachers were familiar with the language policy while a few were not. Those familiar stated that the policy allowed the use of translanguageing although it was not plainly stated. Although recommended by the policy, teachers mentioned that it was supposed to be used appropriately, for instance to clarify concepts and contents that learners found challenging. The following are some of the teachers' responses:

*T1: For grade 4, the policy allows that a teacher can switch... because it is like something which is new to them since they used to learn in mother tongue (Silozi) as medium of instruction from grade 0 to three. So, when it comes to grade 4, medium of instruction is English, which means, where you see that learners did not understand, you switch.*

*T2: You know, we are teaching young ones, so the policy allows us to switch if the learners did not understand. Mostly they don't understand when I teach in English. So, if they do not understand you can switch so that learners are able to follow the lesson.*

*T3: The policy recommends using the mother tongue but only when words are difficult for learners to understand. We cannot code switch the whole lesson, we only code switch when there's a need for instance when a difficult word that needs understanding. The policy recommends the use of English and Silozi only.*

*T4: The policy entails that we must use English to teach, but since they were using mother tongue from junior primary, it becomes a huge challenge when they transition to grade 4. They completely do not understand English. So, in this case the policy says we must code switch where they do not understand.*

*T6: Based on the language policy, we are not really limited to switch to the other language whenever delivering a lesson, but the limit is just that it mustn't be throughout the lesson. So, in cases where you have observed that learners are failing to comprehend what you are delivering in the lesson, you have the right or I may say, you are allowed to switch between languages to trigger the understanding of learners.*

*T7: The policy indicates that for learners in senior primary, it's ok to code switch so that learners may have a clear understanding of the lesson, and that they build background on the topic. Therefore, they would relate the content of the lesson to the background and things they already know. Because they don't necessarily understand English, when we translanguage, they are able to connect their mother tongue with English.*

*T8: Some learners do not understand English when they get to grade 4 where the medium of instruction changes from mother tongue to English. So, the language policy accommodates that the mother tongue be used to help learners understand what is being taught, but it shouldn't be the whole lesson, only when necessary.*

There were also teachers who were not familiar with the language policy. Some teachers explained that they were not sure about what the policy says. Others explicitly stated that they did not know what the policy recommends, reasoning that they have not seen (read) it. However, out of classroom practical challenges, they mentioned that translanguageing cannot be avoided in those classrooms. The following extracts provide evidence of the teachers' responses:

**T5**...I'm not sure what it says...as teachers, we are busy with lesson preparations and other urgent tasks every day, no time to read the policies. But from my understanding... when they get to grade 4, it's a bit challenging to teach everything in English, so we have to translate sometimes where they do not understand, from English to Silozi because it is the language that is being taught in schools. So, there's no way I can translate from English to Mbalangwe or these other local languages like Subia.

**T9:** Haa! I can't remember exactly what it says. I am not sure; it has been long since I read it ... I don't have enough time to read and understand all the policies, we are busy teaching and marking. But you cannot ignore code switching [translanguaging] in these grades because you will end up talking to yourself.

**T10:** The language policy, I don't really know what it says because I haven't seen it here as we are only given syllabuses but what I have seen is that as teachers we do code switch to help our learners since they have challenges when they switch to English in Grade 4.

### **HODs' Familiarity with the Language Policy in relation to Translanguaging**

The heads of department (HODs) were presented with the same question on their awareness of the language policy in relation to the implementation of translanguaging in grade 4. Most HODs were familiar with language policy as they stated that the language policy recommended the use of learners' mother tongue to assist them understand the concepts or contents, they find challenging. Other HODs mentioned that although the policy allowed the integration of translanguaging, it was supposed to be applied appropriately. Here are their statements:

**HOD1:** The use of translanguaging is not plainly stated in the policy, it is not in black and white, so its use is questionable but what it [the policy] says is that when learners transition to English medium in grade 4 their mother tongue should be used to support them where they are lacking, to ensure that they understand the concepts or contents they find difficult.

**HOD3:** Since Grade 4 is a transition year where learners transition from mother tongue to English medium... English is a foreign language, which they are not familiar with. So, the policy allows a mix of languages to help learners understand the lesson for as long it is applied appropriately.

**HOD5:** ...the policy allows the use of mother tongue to help learners, because it's a transition grade, they are new to the language.

**HOD7:** The policy allows the use of translanguaging in our lessons because these learners don't understand the medium of instruction, English. So, it states that we can assist learners by using their mother tongue which is Silozi here Zambezi region. So, the policy is not restricting us, for as long as it is used to help learners make meaning of the lesson.

Some HODs were not familiar with the language policy regarding translanguaging implementation. The HODs explained their classroom language practices but were not sure about the policy requirements. Other HODs claimed to know what the language policy recommended but could not explain its explicit provisions, thus, they were not familiar. Consider the responses provided:

**HOD2:** Basically, Grade 4 is a transition grade where learners are moving from the use of mother tongue to English. We normally use or switch over to mother tongues in some other aspect, because these learners have not yet mastered the use of English as a medium of instruction which I think is required by the policy.

**HOD6:** The policy states that if it is English, it should be English and if mother tongue, it must be that way, No translanguaging.

The other HOD explicitly stated that he did not know what the policy says. In short, while some HODs were not sure about the policy provisions, other did not know its recommendation regarding translanguaging implementation in grade 4 classrooms. The HOD stated:

**HOD4:** *I don't know what the policy says but when learners transition to Grade 4, they are required to change from mother tongue medium to English.*

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that while most teachers expressed awareness of the policy's existence and its stated goals, they were not familiar with the translanguaging concept. However, they indicated that the policy did not restrict them to using English as the sole medium of instruction, especially during the initial stages of transitioning learners to English medium because learners were not familiar with the target language of instruction. They demonstrated a clear understanding of the policy and stated that it recommended the utilisation of learners' home languages to support learning and enhance understanding. However, they expressed concern that due to the multilingual nature of the Zambezi region, the language policy restricted them to using English and Silozi exclusively since they were the only recognised school languages. This suggests that teachers may fear to use other languages other than the recognised ones in the classroom considering that it may be a violation of the language policy and could result in repercussions. Consequently, teachers stick to the prescribed language of instruction and refrain from using translanguaging in its totality.

These findings are similar with those of Uugwanga (2023) who reported that the majority of the teachers were aware of the language policy for schools in Namibia; they had access to the document either as individual copy or at the school. Moreover, the findings align with those of Obeng (2020) in Ghana and Ohanga, Odeo, & Abenga (2021) in Kenya who also reported that teachers were familiar with the policy recommendations and felt that they ought to be free to select the language of instruction based on their particular pedagogical needs. By implication, when teachers are familiar with the language policy regarding translanguaging they can design instructional strategies that promote language integration. Teachers can promote cross-linguistic understanding, raise learner engagement, and foster a sense of belonging and identity by skilfully leveraging their multilingual resources. Lehman & Welch (2022) established that teachers who had knowledge of the language policy had higher self-efficacy levels when teaching English language learners than teachers who had no knowledge of a language policy. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers who are familiar with the policy's goals, guidelines, and expectations are more likely to adopt translanguaging practices in their classrooms. Moreover, when teachers are familiar with the various languages and cultures represented in their classrooms, they can better understand and meet the diverse needs of their learners by integrating culturally responsive teaching practices such as translanguaging. This positively affect the academic success and well-being of the learners as they develop a stronger sense of cultural and linguistic continuity.

The findings on teachers' lack of knowledge about translanguaging, are consistent with those of Niazi (2022) in the United Kingdom, Bolkvadze (2023) in Georgia, Mungala & Mwanza (2024) in Zambia and Norro (2024) in Namibia. Niazi (2022) reported that although teachers had a heteroglossic language ideology and an assert view toward bilingualism, however, the concept of translanguaging as a new pedagogy was unfamiliar to them. Bolkvadze (2023) pointed out that teachers are hardly familiar with the concept of translanguaging, which eliminates the chance of using it consciously and following the trends blindly becomes a norm. According to Mungala & Mwanza (2024), the familiarity of lecturers at a selected university in Zambia with translanguaging practices is limited, despite training efforts aimed at enhancing their pedagogical approaches in multilingual contexts. Their study established many still adhere to the belief that university students (teachers) are proficient in English, leading to a reluctance to implement these practices. This also implies that the prospective teachers graduating at the institution are unfamiliar with the pedagogic practice because they are not trained how to implement it in multilingual classrooms. Similarly, Norro (2024) in Namibia noted that the notions of 'multilingual practices' or 'translanguaging' were not familiar to the participants, as they do not figure in curricular documents or in-service trainings.

Namibian teachers' unfamiliarity with translanguaging can be attributed to several factors, chief of them is the language policy itself. Norro (2022) claims that, the Namibian language policy, while advocating for multilingualism, the covert emphasis remains on English, which undermines teachers' confidence in using translanguaging strategies. Thus, teachers' familiarity with the LiEP is influenced by the ambiguity surrounding its interpretation and implementation. The current policy document, despite its emphasis on multilingualism, lack clarity on specific pedagogical approaches, leaving teachers to navigate the complexities of multilingual

education with limited guidance. The LiEP states familiar languages should be used in supportive role to aid learning understanding but does not provide clear guidelines on how to integrate learners' home languages into the classroom, leaving teachers to determine the best approach. Additionally, the policy does not address how to handle language diversity within a classroom, leading to inconsistent practices across schools and regions. Consequently, teachers in different schools or regions interpret and implement the LiEP differently, leading to confusion and uncertainty. This inconsistency impact the effectiveness of the LiEP, as learners may receive varying levels of multilingual education depending on their school or region (MEAC, 2015; Norro, 2022), leading to unequal access to multilingual education and perpetuating educational disparities. In short, the ambiguity in the interpretation and implementation of the LiEP significantly impact teacher familiarity and the overall effectiveness of the policy.

Therefore, the disconnect between policy awareness and practical knowledge of translanguageing among teachers raises critical questions about the efficacy of professional development programs and policy implementation in Namibian classrooms. The findings highlight that while policies may outline theoretical principles, mere exposure does not guarantee understanding or competence in application. Thus, while teachers may comply with the language policies established, their lack of awareness about translanguageing risks limiting the effectiveness of these policies in actual pedagogical practices.

The findings of this study highlight that teachers require not only theoretical knowledge of the policy but also the practical skills and confidence to implement translanguageing strategies effectively. Moreover, the findings underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of translanguageing within the policy framework itself. The policy should clearly articulate the principles of translanguageing and provide guidelines for its implementation in different classroom contexts. This would require a shift away from a purely prescriptive approach to language policy towards a more supportive and collaborative approach that empowers teachers to make informed pedagogical choices. Thus, the findings indicate the need for continuous professional development training that not only addresses the theoretical aspects of translanguageing but also provides practical strategies for its integration into lesson plans. The study also points to the importance of addressing societal attitudes towards language. The continued dominance of English and Silozi in many aspects of Namibian society and Zambezi region in particular presents a significant challenge to the implementation of the language policy. Mashinja and Mwanza (2020) and Mashinja (2020) argued that the exclusive use of Silozi as medium of instruction in the early grade classrooms is not a realistic view of the linguistic realities both inside and outside the multilingual classroom, thus it is not appropriate. Therefore, changing societal attitudes towards language requires a multifaceted approach, involving not only changes in education policy but also broader societal efforts to promote the value of multilingualism and effective implementation of translanguageing.

Nevertheless, familiarity with the language policy does not inherently translate to favourable support. Studies have demonstrated that teachers may disagree with language policies in their classrooms for a variety of reasons, including perceived inequalities, ideologies or personal experience with linguistic discrimination. Mbaka, Peter, & Karuri, (2013) established that although Kenyan teachers were aware of the policy, they did not always implement it in the classroom because its objectives were not clearly outlined. Equally, Mungala & Mwanza, (2024) pointed out that even with intensive training on translanguageing, it is impossible for some teachers in Zambia to apply translanguageing pedagogy in the classroom due to anecdotal ideological assumption that all university students are proficient in English. In Namibia, Hashoongo (2022) noted that some teachers ignore the policy guidelines and continue to incorporate familiar language (Oshiwambo dialects) to communicate with learners during teaching as they believed that it was not necessary to teach in English because they all belonged to one speech community. This means that despite teachers' awareness of the language policy in this study, they can still challenge it during actual application in the classroom based on their views, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies towards other languages. Thus, they can either implement language-in-education policy without question or create new implementational space by creating their own policies, depending on their beliefs. This imply that teachers as language-in-education policy implementers may not just receive and implement policies because they are from central state. Instead, they will question and negotiate changes that will not only be beneficial to them but enhance and mediate learners learning. In other words, teachers can work towards more equitable educational policies and practices that support learner agency and can open up spaces for multilingual approaches, even within a primarily monolingual language policy (Norro, 2021).



On the hand, the findings of this study also established that some teachers were not familiar with the language policy. While some teachers were not sure about the policy provisions, others did not know its recommendation regarding translanguaging implementation in grade 4 classrooms. Teachers said that they were not aware of the policy because it was not distributed to them. Some mentioned that they had limited time to read and understand the policies that applied to their work. Others claimed that they did not have time to read the policies because they were busy with lesson preparations and other urgent tasks. Chukwuemeka et al., (2023) reported that teachers in the Christian schools in Zaria (Nigeria) were not aware of language policy stated by the government. Lehman & Welch (2020) emphasise that teachers can be unaware of the language policies in schools, even when there is a formal policy in place. In their study of teachers in English medium international schools found that a significant number of teachers reported that their school did not have a formal written language policy. The findings of this study are also in line with Ahmad & Khan (2011) who also found that teachers failed to achieve the policy aims because they lacked awareness of the language policy. Thus, despite the availability of the language policies in schools many teachers lack awareness and their implications.

Teachers' unfamiliarity with language policy can have significant implications on educational outcomes, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings. This unfamiliarity can lead to ineffective implementation of language policies, which are crucial for the education of emergent bilinguals and second-language learners. Teachers play a pivotal role as interpreters and implementers of these policies, and their lack of understanding can hinder their ability to effectively support language learners.

Firstly and foremost, teachers' limited proficiency and understanding of language policy can constrain pedagogical approaches, as seen in Kenyan primary schools where teachers struggle with the medium of instruction due to unfamiliarity with language policies (McCoy, 2017). Thus, when teachers are not familiar with the language policy they may struggle to provide appropriate instructions to their learners. For instance, if the school's language policy mandates multilingual instructions or the use of a specific language for certain subjects, teachers who are unaware of these recommendations may unintentionally deviate from them. This may result in discrepancies in the provision of instruction, with some learners receiving instruction in accordance with the language policy and others not. Consequently, learners may not have equal access to educational opportunities, and their academic outcomes could be affected. In other words, teachers' unfamiliarity with language policy can hinder effective implementation, leading to misinterpretation of guidelines and reduced support for bilingualism. This lack of understanding may result in ineffective teaching practices, limiting learners' linguistic development and undermining the intended goals of language education policies (Wiley & García, 2016; Wang, 2019). Therefore, involving teachers in policy-making processes can bridge the gap between policy and practice, making policies more implementable and relevant to classroom realities.

Furthermore, teachers' unfamiliarity with the language policy may lead to instability and ambiguity in policy implementation, affecting their decision-making processes and professional roles, especially in states with shifting language education policies. According to Brown (2010) teachers' unawareness of the language policy can lead to their portrayal as disempowered policy actors, limiting their ability to make informed choices regarding regional-language instruction. This lack of understanding contributes to the marginalization of lesser-used languages, as teachers may inadvertently reinforce existing ideologies that prioritize other languages as reported in this study. Consequently, their efforts to promote other languages like Sifwe, Subia, Mbukushu and others may be undermined, perpetuating language imbalance and hindering revitalization efforts within the educational system. In other words, teachers may perpetuate monolingual practices, limiting the effective implementation of translanguaging strategies in their classrooms. As a result, learners may hesitate to express themselves fully, constraining their cognitive development and impeding their language acquisition.

In addition, teachers who are not familiar with the language policy may struggle to effectively assess learners' language proficiency and learning outcomes. Language policies often dictate the language in which assessments should be conducted, and they may also provide guidelines for accommodating learners with diverse language backgrounds. If teachers are not aware of these provisions, they may inadvertently create assessment tasks that disadvantage learners who are not proficient in the dominant language or who require language support. This can result in inaccurate assessments of learners' abilities and may lead to their underachievement, further exacerbating educational disparities (Razavipour & Rezagah, 2048). In summary, teachers' unfamiliarity with the language policy may affect the quality of instruction, perpetuate language-based discrimination, and hinder

the fair assessment of learners. However, while unfamiliarity with language policy poses challenges, it also presents an opportunity for educational systems like in Namibia to rethink teacher preparation and involvement in policy-making. By enhancing teachers' policy literacy and involving them in the policy-making process, educational outcomes for language learners can be significantly improved. Therefore, it is essential for educational institutions to ensure that teachers are well-informed about the language policy and are provided with the necessary training and support to implement it effectively. By doing so, schools can uphold the principles of equity, inclusivity, and educational quality that are essential for the success of all learners.

## FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study highlight the complexities of implementing the LiEP in Namibian early grade classrooms. While the policy aims to promote multilingualism and mother-tongue instruction, its effective implementation is hampered by factors such as varying levels of policy awareness among teachers, and a limited understanding of translanguaging pedagogy.

The varying levels of policy awareness suggest a need for more effective dissemination of information and ongoing professional development for teachers. Teachers require a deeper understanding of the rationale behind the LiEP, its specific guidelines, and the theoretical underpinnings of multilingual education. Equally, the limited understanding of translanguaging pedagogy highlights the need for targeted training in this area. Teachers need to understand the theoretical principles of translanguaging and be equipped with practical strategies for implementing it in their classrooms. This includes learning how to create classroom environments that value linguistic diversity, how to leverage learners' linguistic resources to facilitate learning, and how to assess learners' progress in a linguistically responsive manner.

This paper argues that a deep understanding of the LiEP is crucial for teachers to confidently and effectively employ translanguaging strategies in the classroom, ultimately fostering improved literacy and cognitive development in young learners. Gaps in teacher knowledge of the LiEP and translanguaging pedagogy can lead to inconsistent application, resistance, and a failure to leverage the linguistic resources of learners.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis presented in this paper, the following recommendations are offered to enhance the implementation of the LiE policy and promote effective translanguaging practices in Namibian early grade classrooms:

**Revise and update the LiEP:** The LiEP should be regularly evaluated and revised based on empirical evidence and feedback from teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Thus, the LiEP should be reviewed and updated to explicitly address the concept of translanguaging and to provide clear guidelines for its implementation in the classroom. This will ensure that the policy remains relevant and effective in addressing the evolving needs of Namibian learners.

**Develop and provide adequate resources for multilingual education:** The Ministry of Education should invest in the development of bilingual textbooks, teaching and learning materials, and other resources that align with the language policy that explicitly support translanguaging practices in the classroom. These resources should be available in a range of Namibian languages.

**Enhance Teacher Training and Professional Development:** The Ministry of Education should provide comprehensive and ongoing professional development for early grade teachers that focus on the LiEP, translanguaging pedagogy, and practical strategies for implementing translanguaging in the classroom. These programs should provide teachers with opportunities to develop their own translanguaging skills and to reflect on their own language ideologies.

**Community Engagement:** Efforts should be made to engage parents and the wider community in discussions about the importance of multilingualism and the benefits of translanguaging. This can help to address potential

parental concerns about the prioritization of indigenous languages and foster a more supportive environment for multilingual education.

**Conduct Further Research:** Invest in further research to explore the effectiveness of different translanguaging strategies in the Namibian context and to identify best practices for supporting multilingual learners.

The Namibian Language-in-Education Policy represents a significant commitment to promoting linguistic diversity and ensuring that all learners have access to quality education. However, the successful implementation of the LiEP and the realization of its full potential hinges on the level of understanding and commitment of teachers. By investing in comprehensive teacher training, providing ongoing professional development, and strengthening the policy framework, Namibia can empower its teachers to effectively utilize translanguaging strategies and create inclusive, linguistically responsive learning environments that benefit all learners, particularly those in the early grades. Only then can the promise of equitable access to education for all Namibian children be fully realized.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The study also focused on selected schools in a specific region of Namibia, which may not be representative of all schools in the country. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from the interviews may have been subject to social desirability bias. Future research should address these limitations by using larger and more representative samples, employing more objective measures of teachers' practices, and conducting longitudinal studies to track the impact of translanguaging interventions over time

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