

Translanguaging as a pedagogical practice to resuscitate indigenous languages at a South African institution

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Abstract

The status of indigenous African languages is debilitating and demising due to underutilization in university classrooms. Since the death of the apartheid regime, recognition of indigenous languages has been subtle in higher education. Universities in South Africa are grappling with ways to acknowledge the existence of these important languages – this is despite enacted language policies and constitutional imperatives. This issue is fraught with social justice praxis, which its objective is to recognize the realities faced by the subalterns in the multilingual classrooms. Many reports and studies have shown the debilitating status of indigenous languages in universities and their influence on student performance. The recently published language policy for higher education has reported that universities in South Africa have not made strides in advancing these languages. It is against this background, I explore translanguaging as a pedagogical practice or strategy to resuscitate indigenous languages in the multilingual tutorials at South African institutions. This qualitative study is guided by the Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a theoretical framework. The tutors and students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus groups discussion to give their experiences. The generated data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this paper reveal that trans-lingual practice helps advance the status of indigenous languages, helps with the construction of meaning and epistemic access – also suggest this strategy as helpful in reclaiming their identity suffocated by monolingual ideologies. Moreover, tutors unveiled that strategy allows them space to be innovative whilst using their indigenous languages. This paper concludes by providing recommendations that could be advanced to resuscitate indigenous languages.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Practices; Tutors; Indigenous Languages; South African Higher Education