Harnessing Mother Tongue Diversity for Education in a Globalized Society: A literature review

NTITE ORJI KALU

Abstract: *Diverse cultures and languages traverse borders, including the global educational space, hence the need to create cultural and mother tongue awareness. This paper adopts a theoretical research design, in its review of some articles to discuss the best ways mother tongue diversities can be harnessed in our schools to create a universal system of education that reduces educational inequities and leads to economic growth and cohesion. This review appraises the challenges associated with harnessing mother tongue diversities, and also discusses the benefits of harnessing mother tongue diversities for the students as a preferred solution for maintaining a culturally inclusive learning environment that allows students to flourish in the educational environment by putting their mother tongue into use.*

Keywords: *mother tongue, diversity, language awareness and education*

INTRODUCTION

World educational systems are changing, and this can mostly be attributed to the increased rate of migration around the world, mostly towards the more developed countries. These migrations tend to be for economic and political reasons. This constant flow of individuals has generated the need for the assimilation of immigrants and children of immigrants into the host societies creating a more diverse population varying in culture, ethnicity, race and language (Scanlan, Kim, & Ludlow, 2019). Education in this century should be able to meet the ever-changing needs of a globalized world. Our school systems need to adjust to accommodate the diversities that a diverse society presents. It is important to note that migration is more than just the movement of individuals to new geographical locations but also a movement of culture and identity.

Multilingualism is also a major characteristic of a world shaped by migration and globalization (Kirsch et al., 2020). Mother tongue diversity is not only of educational value, it also has personal and social significance to the users. It is defined as the language a person identifies with, a language other people identify you

with, and the expression of self. Identity is a root of self-awareness and self-pride. Another word associated with mother tongue diversity is multiculturalism, which can be dated back to the 1960s and has attracted diverse definitions, conceptions, and misconceptions. A paper written by Fowers and Richardson in 1996 defined multiculturalism as a social-intellectual movement that promotes the value of diversity, with more emphasis on respect and equality for other cultural groups. For them, multiculturalism was all about seeking recognition and dignity for smaller groups. The beginning of the era of the use of the word "multiculturalism" caused a lot of contention between sociologists who see it as seeking to identify and single out groups as opposed to unifying and bringing every aspect of the society together under one huge umbrella of interculturalism (Hartmann & Gerteis, 2005). However, this lopsided view of multiculturalism will only result in an inability to appreciate our uniqueness and differences, which are more real than an idealistic system of interculturalism. We should acknowledge that every aspect of society has different but yet complementary roles that do not necessarily breed disunity. Multiculturalism, in my opinion, should be seen in the light of Raz (1998), who defines it as the coexistence of sizable cultural groups within the same political society and retaining the ability to maintain distinct identities. Mother tongue diversity can then be explained to mean the linguistic pluralism of society, be it in larger communal groups, or in this case a classroom, as a result of migration.

Language is an aspect of culture and identity and as Rizova, Bekar, & Velkovski (2020) pointed out, in this era of migration, minority languages and language variations are constantly altering largely due to the language connections happening within our globalized societies. Scanlan et al. (2019, p. 83) are of the view that language "expresses, embodies and symbolizes" one's cultural reality. Multilingual classrooms have become a norm for our societies and a lot of educational materials, with the inclusion of all the articles cited in this work, have consensually discussed and agreed with the educational benefits of the mother tongue for the global citizen and society. Having migrant children who have been taught their mother tongue as the first system of communication and expression from birth, means that this aspect of their cultural inclinations is brought into the classroom. Leite (2021) defined education for global citizenship as the form of learning that empowers individuals to function effectively both locally and globally whilst building inclusive and secure societies that are peaceful and tolerant of cultures other than those that are indigenous to the geographical location. Basically, this form of education prepares the global citizen to live together with others. Living together and providing an inclusive form of education demands that mother tongue diversities are recognised and harnessed in our school systems.

The mother tongue has been defined by Mizza (2014) as the first language acquired by a child from birth or can be referred to as the child's native language. Every individual has some language of communication initiated by their parents or caregivers, and studies have shown that children who are fluent in their mother tongue develop cognitive and intellectual skills faster (Nishanthi, 2020). All forms of learning are achieved through a means of communication or language, thereby making the mother tongue the principal mode of learning for every child. Mother tongue diversity is as a result ethnic diversity, according to Dotzel, Bonefeld, and Karst (2021), who are of the opinion that the more ethnically diverse a classroom is, the greater the diversity of the mother tongues that are obtainable. Europe has experienced a lot of migration and has therefore welcomed a lot of foreign languages outside the officially recognized languages of her 27 member countries, given the number of non-national languages already existing within the EU and up to half of those languages from immigrants (Cantone, 2020). According to this author, the language policy of the European Union has been formulated to deal with concern about the inclusion of foreign languages in schools, in a bid to harness the diverse population which makes up modern-day Europe. Given that the policy is of great concern to the European Union, how well are schools willing and equipped to harness mother tongue diversities? What challenges are foreseen in the pursuit of harnessing mother tongue diversities?

Bilgin (2017) defines language awareness as regarding mother tongue diversity and learning to includes conscious perception in the knowledge and use of languages, which gets better as more knowledge is acquired and the application of language systems that enable effective teaching and learning. The aim of the article will therefore be to examine the multilingual methods of teaching adopted in the papers reviewed. This review will also bring to light the pluralistic nature of our classrooms in this century and how such multiplicities as mother tongue diversities can be harnessed.

Methodology: The articles reviewed were selected from the Web of Science and ScienceDirect databases. The following keywords were used to select the articles used in this review: mother tongue, diversity, and education. The search was further refined to show materials in Education and Educational Research in the Web of Science, and materials in Social Sciences in the ScienceDirect database. The topics and abstracts were first reviewed to select articles best suited for the review and subsequently the selected articles were reviewed and discussed.

MOTHER TONGUE DIVERSITY AND LEARNING

Diversity provides a stimulating environment for learning (Dotzel et al.,

2021). These authors explain the mental process involved in creating stimulation for learning through diversity, with the cognitive construct for organizing and storing knowledge known as a schema. Encountering multiple mother tongues disagrees with the schema, creating some form of conflict with the original schema, leading to the need to assimilate and accommodate them. This therefore creates a new cognitive stimulus enabling and encouraging students to develop more curiosity and language awareness, higher reading abilities, and the development of new schemata.

Exposure to diverse mother tongues can be achieved in various ways. Different scholars reviewed in this work experimented with various techniques to harness mother tongue diversity in their classrooms as well as create language awareness for the students. Zaidi (2020) carried out an experiment which adopted a ten-week multilingual reading programme that was administered to kindergarteners and first grade children and recruited mother tongue guest speakers who shared with the class their experiences, their culture, and personal stories about multilingualism and how it could promote intercultural growth. By the end of this experiment, the author noted a lot of incredible changes in the learners. They started thinking about languages from other linguistic and cultural perspectives. Delving into the historical backgrounds of mother tongues included in the multilingual reading programme allowed students to under-

stand how these languages originated and were formed (for instance; the Filipino language Tagalog is a mixture of Spanish, Japanese, Malay, and Chinese resulting from changes in the colonization within the territory). This method adopted by Zaidi (2020) is otherwise known as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) which according to Carrió-Pastor and Vallés (2015), combines the lesson content, communication, cognition to develop thinking skills, and culture. It makes different languages functional as they are adapted to the lesson taught. CLIL has been defined by the authors as an educational approach that allows all subjects to be taught using a foreign, second or other additional language, ensuring that the exposure to different languages whilst learning would motivate and stimulate the students.

Cantone (2020) referred to two surveys carried out by the author and four others: Gerhardt, Haller, Olfert, & Romano-Bottke in 2012 and 2017 in a university in North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany. The first, in 2012, was a quantitative research study that focused on future teachers who were undergoing teacher training courses in multilingualism focusing on areas of "language acquisition, language assessment, second language teaching, academic language, and content-based language teaching" (p. 107). This author focused on the training of future teachers, to prepare them to handle a diverse cultural and lingual population in their

classrooms. However, in a study conducted with three Malaysian children studying in the UK, Yamat (2010) observed through interviews and observations, that they acquired language awareness by playing with their friends and classmates, through games, writings, puzzles, and the computer and teacher-monitored activities such as roleplays and group work. The author observed that engaging students in multiple activities that required interaction with others was vital to their language awareness.

The changing patterns of migration and schooling have necessitated the study of ways of creating some form of inclusive learning (Herzog-Punzenberger, Le Pichon-Vorstman, & Siarova, 2017). These authors considered that although the formerly monolingual language of instruction was perceived to promote active citizenship, it does not, however, truly reflect the nature of a globalized society and may raise questions that challenge its continuing use. The authors in this review explored options of innovative teaching methods and study of the future teacher to check preparedness for the future of the education system. Necessitated by the need to change from the monolingual traditional teaching methods to one that suits the evolving nature of society, educators can view this as an opportunity for educational improvements that will produce multiliterate and multilingual citizens (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017).

ISSUES IN HARNESSING MOTHER TONGUE DIVERSITIES

The authors mentioned in this review all encountered different challenges while studying mother tongue and language awareness. They all adopted different methods of surveys and experiments and consequently obtained different results. Some of the research studies yielded a positive result and successfully accomplished the purpose of the research, while others did not. The study carried out by Carrió-Pastor and Vallés (2015) focused on how effective the teaching resources used to create language awareness are, and what results are achieved using them. These authors observed that Group A (students who were taught with CLIL) improved their language proficiency and had greater language awareness and were not concerned with correct language structuring, whereas the students who were taught with Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) were more conscious of language improvement and structures, resulting in accurate mastery of those languages that were used.

However, Cantone (2020) was concerned with the perception of mother tongue diversities, awareness, and the acceptance these have received in a Western society like Germany. The author observed that despite the linguistic diversity of the globe presently, very little has been done to prepare the teacher in training for it. In multilingual education, efforts are said to be made to address a monolingual form of

education in a linguistically diverse class-room hence the addition of second language learning in education.

The author expressed concern about the underrepresentation of minority teaching staff, though some of them could be found, mainly in pre-schools, where the focus of education at that level does not include the complexities of multilingualism, which is in line with the concerns expressed by the European Union (2020) draft on promoting cultural cohesion in the Czech Republic and Austria. Given the increase in migration to these countries since 2010, it is envisaged that classrooms within these regions will experience more cultural and lingual diversity and should become competent in handling it (Eurydice – European Commission, 2021). Teacher diversity should boost self-confidence and improve students' performance and contribute to cultural awareness for both students and teachers, however, most foreign language teachers are more monolingual experts than promoters of multilingualism, and it has been pointed out that there are no empirically substantiated efforts and activities actively employed to promote multilingualism.

Furthermore, minority language instruction is said to emphasize an appreciation of all languages and help with the acquisition of the majority language. The inadequacies of preparing teachers to face the complexities of a culturally diverse classroom could account for the poor harnessing of mother tongue di-versities in the classroom. In Mägi and Nestor (2013), the authors suggested that the current teacher training model, which does not include systematic preparation for working with migrant students, and therefore does not provide teachers with the skills required to work in a culturally and linguistically diverse learning environment, could be the reason why mother tongue diversities are not harnessed.

In Edgar (2017), the author discussed language policy as having the ability to promote multilingual education, which would mostly be dependent on the opening up of ideological and implementation spaces when societies start to accept and value non-dominant languages. This author tries to question the willingness of host societies to accept the mother tongues of migrants. Whilst Zaidi (2020) implored a joint effort in the author's study to get parents of language minority groups to help students understand the historical backgrounds and structure of their languages, Martin, Minsong, and Larry (2019), however, noted that this might be difficult to accomplish in some communities, given that their study took place in the United States of America. These authors are of the opinion that in recent times, creating such an intentional, supportive learning community in schools has become very difficult, in addition to the isolation of teachers in more diverse schools, thus ensuring a barrier to the collaboration that is beneficial for learning.

BENEFITS OF HARNESSING MOTHER TONGUE DIVERSITIES IN EDUCATION

Educational polices and curricula should be constantly reviewed to make room for the changes within society, and hence education in this century must be culturally relevant. As was mentioned before, the transnational state of education and migration levels have ensured that our classrooms are culturally diverse. Engaging in culturally responsive education ensures that the cultural knowledge, characteristics, and experiences of students from migrant families are harnessed to achieve a more relevant and effective learning outcome (Lim, Tan, & Saito, 2019). Lim et al. (2019) also found that harnessing cultural uniqueness and heritage such as the mother tongue could be used as educational resources to achieve a more meaningful learning experience whilst engaging the students actively. This, these writers believe will empower these students to constructively criticize, challenge and transform social injustices and inequalities. Kirsch et al. (2020) opine that harnessing mother tongue diversities is essential for developing language and cultural awareness in students and helping them develop social skills.

The study carried out by Zaidi (2020) with a multilingual reading programme was efficient in teaching the students about the interconnectedness of people across language and culture and was able to identify cross-linguistic ties. Every participant in the DLB project learned something new about their languages because of the conversations brought about by the lessons. The guest speakers were able to further appreciate their mother tongue and put their language identities into perspective. This helped to build pride in their mother tongue, as more students became encouraged to talk about their mother tongue, teach others in their groups to further enrich their access to the languages being studied, and foster their confidence in reading and writing among their peers. To be able to harness mother tongue diversities to create a culturally stimulating learning environment in schools, school boards and administrations have to consciously work toward including multilingual studies in the school curriculum. This supports the views of Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2017) that creating more intense and coherent support for mother tongue diversities throughout the student's educational career will lead to greater academic benefits. Tove (2002) tried to answer the question about the importance of mother tongue diversity and was of the opinion that it is connected to cultural diversity and biodiversity. Being able to accommodate and harness mother tongues will ensure that our unique cultures are not lost within the crowd of homogeneity. It will ensure a culturally rich and friendly learning environment.

For native multilingual societies such as Papua New Guinea which has

about 839 living languages, Nigeria, with about 526 languages (Ndiribe & Aboh, 2020), and Eritrea, with more than nine recognised languages and 30 varieties (Asfaha, 2020), the benefits of harnessing mother tongue diversities in education are mostly political, for maintaining unity in diversity and ensuring that the students have a lot of opportunities within such societies. Harnessing mother tongue diversity in these regions is to ensure that this unique aspect of culture is maintained especially for former Western colonies, and possibly transmitting these languages through generations.

An inclusive form of education that harnesses the mother tongue diversities of the learners is an indication of respect and value for the learner's distinctive characteristics and will have a massive impact on their self-worth and motivation towards schoolwork. Every learner is given an opportunity to teach and improve their social and communication skills. Harnessing mother tongue diversities will expose the students to peer-based collaborative learning methods which will not only improve their linguistic skills faster but will enable the students develop a sense of accountability to themselves and their peers (Tsai, 2019). Inclusive methods of teaching have recorded greater success rates for students than teacher-centered learning methods and could see the teacher being consulted rather than being the sole custodian of all the learning experiences.

RECOMMENDATION

Those responsible for implementing educational policies who include the school board, administrators, and teachers, may find it challenging and exhausting to broaden the scope of existing learning strategies, maybe because of class size or the race to finish the syllabus in time. The focus, however, should be on the student and new ways to achieve the purpose of learning, which is to create the desired change in learners, to handle life as independently and successful as possible. Importantly, the issue of teacher preparedness and the use of appropriate teaching resources are major concerns for the authors in this review, as they are the essentials for harnessing mother tongue diversities in the classroom. This review therefore recommends strongly that teachers be trained in multicultural and multilingual competence in order to be able to take full advantage of a diversified classroom and to provide stimulating learning experiences in the classroom, not just training to implement learning activities but being trained for their own benefit to fully understand the nature of the globe presently and the need to harness and preserve mother tongue diversities. This paper would also recommend commitment from the stakeholders in education to this cause, given the benefits of harnessing mother tongue diversities for the students. There should be provision of more dual-language learning materials and the creation and implementation of

language policies that will protect and establish mother tongue diversities in the classrooms.

Additionally, teachers should make the effort to know the students, cultures, and languages represented in their classrooms. From the work of Zaidi (2020), it is worthwhile to note that in situations where teachers of the language intended for multilingual learning are not accessible, schools can improvise and bring in parents and adult members of the society, creating a richer and more stimulating learning environment for the children. Experimenting in the short term and the adoption of confirmed methods for engaging students in multilingual learning can be considered stimulating and innovative. An adage in the Igbo tribe in Nigeria is interpreted to mean that it takes a society to raise a child. Involving the members of the society in the learning process will motivate the child and provide historical and cultural perspectives on bilingual education (Zaidi, 2020). Given the virtual nature of education nowadays, getting native speakers of the mother tongues that are to be studied in our classrooms should be easy and have a good chance of being successful. The countries cited in the research articles reviewed, have either experienced a large-scale immigration as in the case of Germany, or have a multilingual society, like Nigeria, providing them with firsthand experience and knowledge of multi-lingual classrooms that may be beneficial to other societies embracing similar changes in education.

CONCLUSION

A more culturally diverse learning environment will include students with diverse mother tongues and cultures, which will be stimulating for the students while allowing them to experience cultures outside their own. The reason why issues such as the inclusion of mother tongue diversities in the classroom are of concern is based on the fact that giving these students a social sense of belonging in the classroom would influence certain dimensions of their academic progress, such as their motivation and participation in classroom activities, encourage their cultural practices, enhance better cognition, and build ideal value systems that will overall lead to a successful learning process (Scanlan et al., 2019).

Additionally, Tove (2002) is of the view that for Europe to become more creative and also support linguistic diversity, it must be able to "grant maximal support to indigenous and minority languages, including immigrant and refugee minority languages which represent the only way to increase linguistic diversity in Europe". Harnessing mother tongue diversity will be of benefit to the European educational system because in addition to the United States and the United Kingdom, a lot of migration is directed towards mainland Europe. Having members of the workforce who are creative and active, and who have mastered critical thinking and reflective abilities will be beneficial to the

economy in building and maintainable sustainable development.

Finally, part of the UN agenda for Education in 2030 is to achieve global citizenship, and this can only be achieved when educators start to rethink and restructure education to meet the demands of a constantly changing world (Leite, 2021). This restructuring will begin from classrooms where individual characteristics of students are taken into consideration when planning learning experiences. To achieve this, education should be able to connect with the learn-ers on a personal level, such as through their mother tongue, seek to understand the minds of the learners, unlearn bias and discrimination, and teach appreciation for everyone irrespective of race, gender, language, colour, culture, and religion. In that way we can fully say we have achieved this goal. Lastly, Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2017) maintain that not placing value on or even devaluing students' own culture and language, will have a negative influence on their motivation and overall academic performance.

REFERENCES

Asfaha, Y. M. (2020). Multilingual language policy discourses and superdiversity at the peripheries: Exploring language policy and practice in Eritrea. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 15*(4), 404-421.

Bilgin, S. S. (2017). Language awareness: Are pre-service English teachers aware of "language awareness" and its implications? *International Journal of Language and Linguistics, 4*(3), 65-70.

Cantone, K. F. (2020). Immigrant minority language maintenance in Europe: Focusing on language education policy on teacher-training. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 14*(2), 100-113.

Carrió-Pastor, M. L., & Vallés, I. T. (2015). A comparative study of the influence of the mother tongue in LSP and CLIL. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 178*, 38-42.

Dotzel, S., Bonefeld, M., & Karst, K. (2021). The impact of linguistic diversity on students' reading comprehension using different diversity measures and its' differential effects depending on students' migration background. *International Journal of Educational Research, 109* (101796).

Edgar, R. E. (2017). Mother tongue based multilingual education challenges: A case study. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology, 1*, 10-23.

European Union (2020). *Promoting cultural cohesion through language learning in Austria, Czechia.* Available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Austria/promoting-cultural-cohesion-through-language-learning-in-austria-czechia.

Eurydice – European Commission. (2021). *National Reforms in School Education.* Available at https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-17_en.

Fowers, B. J., & Richardson, F. C. (1996). Why is multiculturalism good? *American Psychologist, 51*(6), 609-621.

Hartmann, D., & Gerteis, J. (2005). Dealing with diversity: Mapping multiculturalism in sociological terms. *Sociological Theory, 23*(2), 218-240.

Herzog-Punzenberger, B., Le Pichon-Vorstman, E., & Siarova, H. (2017) *Multilingual education in the light of diversity: lessons learned*. NESET II report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Kirsch, C., Aleksić, G., Mortini, S., & Andersen, K. (2020). Developing multilingual practices in early childhood education through professional development in Luxembourg. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 14*(4), 319-337.

Leite, S. (2021). Using the SDGs for global citizenship education: Definitions, challenges, and opportunities. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*.

Lim, L., Tan, M. & Saito, E. (2019). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Developing principles of description and analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 77*, 43-52.

Mägi, E., & Nestor, N. (2013). *Students with different mother tongue and cultural backgrounds in Estonian schools: Attention, awareness and support at school level*. Tallinn: Poliitikauuringute Keskus Praxis [Center for Policy Studies].

Martin, S., Minsong, K., & Larry, L. (2019). Affordances and constraints of communities of practice to promote bilingual schooling. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 4*(2), 82-106.

Mizza, D. (2014). The first language (L1) or mother tongue model vs. the second language (L2) model of literacy instruction. *Journal of Education and Human Development, 3*(3), 101-109.

Ndiribe, M. O., & Aboh, S. C. (2020). Multilingualism and marginalisation: A Nigeria diversity approach. *International Journal of Multilingualism*.

Nishanthi, R. (2020). Understanding of the importance of mother tongue learning. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development, 5*(1), 77-80.

Raz, J. (1998). Multiculturalism. *Ratio Juris, 11*(3), 193-205.

Rizova, E., Bekar, M., & Velkovski, Z. (2020). Educational challenges of Roma minorities: The case of the Republic of North Macedonia. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education (IJCRSEE), 8*(3), 113-122.

Scanlan, M., Kim, M., & Ludlow, L. (2019). Affordances and constraints of communities of practice to promote bilingual schooling. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 4*(2), 82-106.

Tove, S. (2002). *Why should linguistic diversity be maintained and supported in Europe? Some arguments*. Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe from linguistic diversity to plurilingual education. Strasbourg: DGIV Council of Europe.

Tsai, I. I. (2019). The effect of peer collaboration-based learning on enhancing English oral communication proficiency in MICE. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education, 24*, 38-49.

Yamat, H. (2010). Managing linguistic diversity through informal and non-formal education. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 7*(C), 707-713.

Zaidi, R. (2020). Dual language books: Enhancing engagement and language awareness. *Journal of Literacy Research, 52*(3), 269-292.

Ntite Orji Kalu
Ph.D. student, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Czech Republic;
email: 454586@mail.muni.cz

NTITE, O. K. Využití rozmanitosti mateřského jazyka pro vzdělávání v globalizované společnosti: přehled literatury

Různé kultury a jazyky překračují hranice, včetně globálního vzdělávacího prostoru, a proto je třeba vytvářet povědomí o kultuře a mateřském jazyce. V tomto článku jsme aplikovali teoretický výzkumný design, v němž se na základě přehledu vybraných článků diskutuje o nejlepších způsobech, jak lze využít rozmanitosti mateřských jazyků v našich školách k vytvoření univerzálního vzdělávacího systému, který snižuje nerovnosti ve vzdělávání, vede k hospodářskému růstu a soudržnosti. Představený přehled literatury hodnotí výzvy spojené s využíváním různorodosti mateřských jazyků. Text také diskutuje o výhodách využívání diverzity mateřského jazyka jako preferovaného řešení pro udržení kulturně inkluzivního vzdělávacího prostředí.

Klíčová slova: *mateřský jazyk, rozmanitost, jazykové povědomí a vzdělávání*