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Abstract: The study problematises language-in-education policies in Zambia which do not favour minority languages. Due to a multiplicity of languages in Zambia, seven Regional Official Languages (ROLs) were arrived at by the government. These are Bemba, Lozi, Tonga, Nyanja, Kaonde, Lunda, and Luvale. Bemba was assigned to be used for initial literacy in the Northern, Muchinga and Copperbelt regions of Zambia where Lungu, Mambwe and Namwanga languages are spoken. However, the language-in-education policy of 2014 hardly takes into account the presence of minority languages which are often ground level languages for child play. Using a qualitative approach, elicitation and document analysis methods, this paper accounts for the similarities in Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages in order to demonstrate the potential need for translanguaging as a pedagogic resource in education. The paper is undergirded by translanguaging, a key theoretical concept which appreciates the role of multiple languages in education set-ups. The results show that the four languages are found in the same region and are often used as amalgams by speakers in different social spaces of communication due to the multilingual nature of the area. The results also reveal that due to a wide array of similarities at the phonological and morphological levels of the four languages, translanguaging can be a useful pedagogic resource during initial literacy, primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. Therefore, embracing translanguaging as a resource in language-in-education policies can enhance multilingualism, language learning, improved communication, and the preservation of linguistic heritage in Zambia particularly for minority languages.

Keywords: BeLuMaNa, education, multilingualism, policies, translanguaging

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the shared grammatical structures of the four languages, Bemba (M42), Lungu (M14), Mambwe (M15), and Namwanga (M22) (Guthrie, 1948), abbreviated for short as BeLuMaNa and translanguaging as a resource to be considered in language in education policies in Zambia. The four languages of interest are spoken in Zambia and are found in the same proximity. Bemba, Lungu, and Mambwe languages are spoken in Northern Province while Namwanga is spoken in Muchinga Province which was once part of the northern region/province of Zambia. Zambia has seven regional official languages (ROLs), namely, Bemba, Lozi, Tonga, Nyanja, Kaonde, Lunda, and Luvale (Nkolola, 2013). Bemba is one of the mandated ROL in Zambia for the Northern, Muchinga, Luapula, Copperbelt provinces and some parts of Central Province (Nkolola, 2013). The 2014 Zambia Language-in-Education Policy recognises Bemba as a language to be used for initial

1	ISSN 2277-3630 (online), Published by International journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 13 Issue: 07 in July-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR
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literacy in education in the communities where Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages are spoken. This means that the three languages are relegated to the linguistic periphery in the overall linguistic repertoire of the communities.

Therefore, this paper problematizes language-in-education planning policies in Zambia which do not favour minority languages, but the major languages called ROL for initial literacy and language education. Due to this policy position, key stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations and research consortiums do not consider the minority languages when engaging with communities where these languages are used. This trend which has continued from the time Zambia gained her independence in 1964 can be attributed to the colonial legacy in which minority languages were relegated for informal functions (cf. Siame, 2022c). Siame (2022c) and Siame & Lubungu (2023) advocates that there is a need to decolonise language-in-education policies predicated on colonial ideologies (see also Banda & Mambwe, 2024). Translanguaging is one of the useful resource in this decolonization process in language and education. The notion of translanguaging will be discussed later in this paper.

It is also important to point out that Zambia has 24 local language clusters (Kashoki, 1990). As pointed out earlier, English is the national official language while seven out of the 24 language clusters are ROLs. Sixty-five (65) languages are regarded as minority. After independence in 1964, the use of English as the only national official language was partially decolonised by mandating and assigning seven local languages as ROLs. This came into force after the change from a one-party system to multiparty democracy in 1991 (cf. Marten & Kula, 2014). The change emphasised the shift towards seven regional local languages which have been mentioned above. It suffices to say, seven out of 24 language clusters spoken in Zambia were granted regional official status in government and language education. However, this declaration could be labelled as partial since there is still inadequate institutional support for the seven ROLs and hardly any for minority languages. This situation calls for further decolonisation of language policies that pay a blind eye to the actual ground level language practices of the people (cf. Siame, 2022c). This paper advocates that further decolonisation of language-in-education policy for initial literacy should be considered by embracing translanguaging of minority languages with the seven ROLs (cf. MoE, 2013; Simachenya & Mambwe, 2023).

The linguistic map below shows the geographical locations of the 72 ‘Zambian languages’ which have been clustered into 24 by Kashoki (1978) which are useful in translanguaging as a pedagogic resources in education:

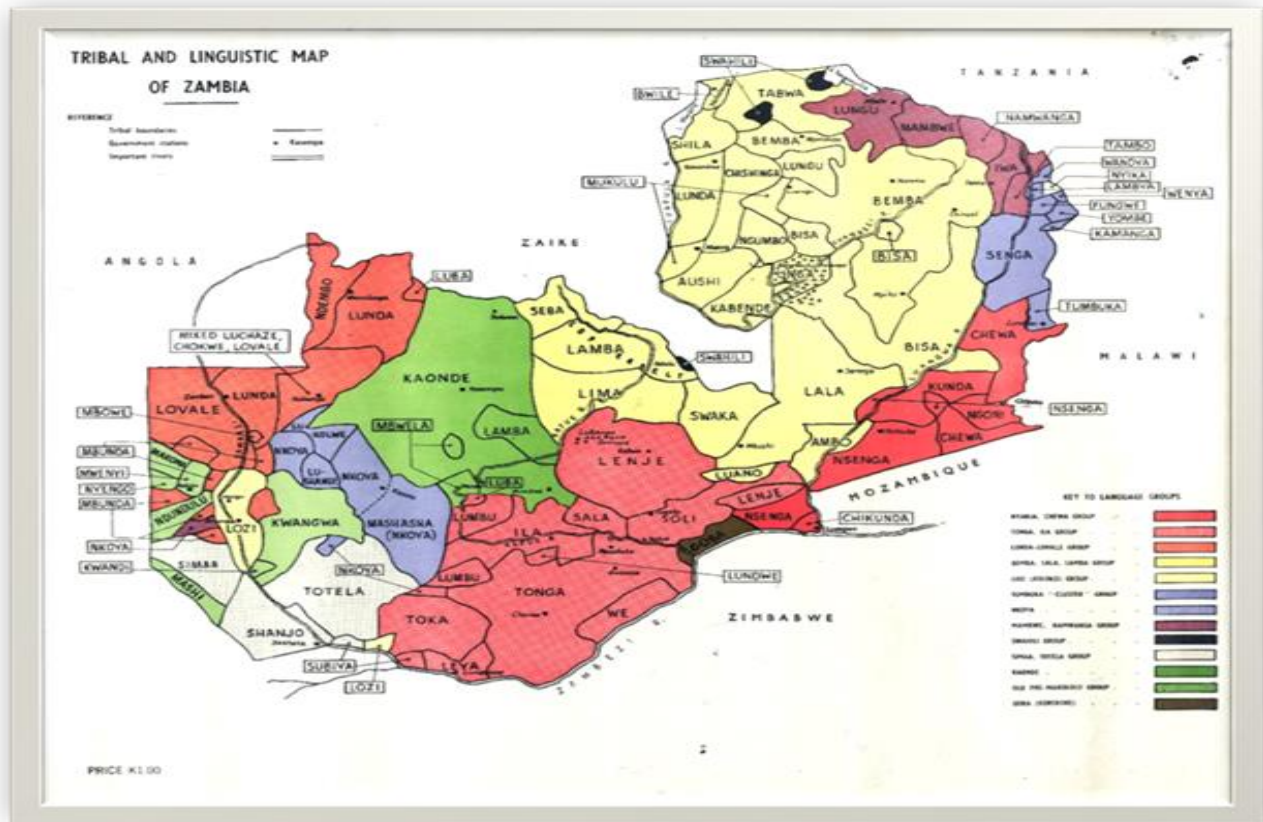


Figure 1: Linguistic map of Zambia (Adopted from Brelsford, 1965:158)

2. A Brief Historical Account of the Language-education Policy in Zambia

The issue of language and education policy in Zambia was fairly straightforward throughout the colonial and much of the Federal period. From 1927, only three years after the Colonial Office took over the responsibility for what was then Northern Rhodesia up to 1963, just before the break-up of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the policy was consistent because the mother tongue was used for the first two years of primary education, followed by a dominant vernacular up to Standard 5, and English thereafter. In 1963, a group of Australian educationists, sponsored by UNESCO, reviewed the education system in what was to become Zambia and recommended that the medium of instruction should be English, from the beginning of schooling; and as soon as possible, a pilot scheme was set up to commence the introduction of English as the medium of instruction (UNESCO, 1964).

In June 1965, in the newly established Republic of Zambia, cabinet deliberated on the issue and, on the advice of the then Minister of Education, Mr. John Mwanakatwe, decided to legislate on the Hardman recommendation regarding the status of English as a medium of instruction, which became enshrined in the 1966 Education Act. For reasons of national unity plus a belief that the earlier a language was started the better, English was formally adopted, for the first time, as the medium of instruction from the beginning of Grade 1 to the end of tertiary education. Considerable resources were committed over the following years to establishing and running what was initially called, the English Medium Scheme, which was later called, the New Zambia Primary Course.

The document published in 1977 contained a complete reversal of the policy proposed in 1966. The case for vernacular languages and their role in ensuring quality in education was made. In 1977, although there was broad agreement that learning through the medium of English was detrimental to educational achievement; educational principles were subordinated to the pragmatic considerations

of political harmony. The final report, 'Educational Reform: Proposals and Recommendations', acknowledged that it was generally accepted by educationists that learning is best done in the mother tongue who decided that the situation was found to be impracticable in multilingual societies, such as the Zambian society (MoE, 1977). The new policy did, however, allow teachers to explain concepts that might otherwise not be understood through the medium of English, in one of the seven official local languages, provided the majority of pupils in a class could understand this vernacular language. This situation satisfied both the educational and political points of view and meant that pedagogical innovation was possible but within an ostensibly stable linguistic context (MoE, 1977).

The government in 1996 produced a comprehensive policy statement for education, called *Educating Our Future*, which incorporated the recommendations of the Reading Forum, stating that initial literacy and numeracy would be developed through a language that was familiar to children. This policy position further enhanced the status of Zambian languages and provided the rationale for future initiatives. The separation of the medium of instruction from the medium of initial literacy allowed *Educating Our Future* to set down initial literacy in a familiar language as a child's right while maintaining English as the medium of instruction. The Ministry of Education designed the Primary Reading Program (PRP), a seven-year program to implement the new initial literacy policy (MOE, 1996).

However, since the new education Act in 1996, the language for initial literacy is one of the seven designated regional official Zambian languages, a situation which disadvantages the minority languages. Worse still, the ROL is offered only for initial literacy during the daily literacy hour. The rest of the subjects in schools are taught in English throughout the education system. In a new departure, *Educating Our Future* states clearly that children must have the right to be introduced to literacy and numeracy through a familiar language. The fact that initial reading skills were taught in a language that was unfamiliar to the majority of children was believed to be a major contributory factor to the backwardness in reading shown by many Zambian children (MoE, 1996). This situation was regarded as a major factor in fostering rote learning, since from the outset the child had difficulties in associating the printed forms of words with their underlying meaning (MoE, 1996). This finding needed to necessitate embracing translanguaging, a pedagogic approach to learning which acknowledges the presence of multiple languages as resources in the process of teaching and learning, in order to avoid hindrances inherent with learning and being taught in a foreign language. We shall return to this concept of translanguaging later on.

The above suggestion is supported by the fact that there was strong evidence that children learnt literacy skills more easily and successfully through their mother tongue, and subsequently they were able to transfer these skills quickly and with ease to English or another language (MoE, 1996). This policy position caused a degree of political unease to some Members of Parliament who protested about the new language policy that forced children to learn in a foreign language and advocated that the literacy policy was to use whatever language resources were available to children.

With 24 local languages cluster, choosing initial literacy in only the seven official Zambian languages of education, still involved a sizable minority of people for whom the language of literacy was familiar but not necessarily their mother tongue. The Ministry of Education encouraged this movement in the belief that while familiar-language literacy was desirable, mother-tongue literacy was the ultimate goal. Since the 1966 policy, children had very little contact with English outside school but were required to learn concepts through the English medium, hence having unsatisfactory experience (MoE, 1996). Muyeba (1998) shows that the 1996 policy from the surface was very concerned with the falling standard of education in schools, which had been brought about by a wrong medium of instruction. Children learn literacy skills more easily and successfully through their mother tongue and subsequently they can transfer these skills quickly and with ease to English or another language. Successful first language learning is believed to be essential for successful literacy

in the second language. This statement does not only support the use of the mother tongue in the initial literacy acquisition but also emphasises successful learning of the mother tongue. This, therefore, may suggest that for any initial literacy program to succeed, the language policy followed must support it (MoE, 1996).

Because of the language policy and the Primary Reading Program (PRP), Muyeba (1998) points out that the 1996 language policy which wanted to correct the confusion brought about by the erroneous 1966 policy made a complete “about turn” by stating that the introduction of a language other than English as the official medium of instruction would encounter insoluble implementation problems and would entail enormous costs born in developing and producing materials and in training teachers to use them (MoE, 1996). However, there is a mismatch between the PRP and the 1996 language policy, for example, children get confused cognitively. You cannot expect to achieve a meaningful initial literacy program through local languages while a foreign language remains in control as the language of learning and teaching at the same level. The mismatch is also seen in the running of the pre-schools. Pre-schools are organised forms of educational provision for children between the ages of three and six and use English as a Language of Instruction and focus much on the teaching of oral English to pupils who learn initial literacy in mother tongues when they start Grade one.

In 2013, the Curriculum Framework policy was enacted and was an integral part of the social system and responded to the requirements of society. This, therefore, means that for the curriculum to be progressive, relevant, dynamic, and responsive, many considerations must be met. These are called education guiding principles or education assumptions. One of the assumptions is called outcomes-based education. The approach seeks to link education to real-life experiences as it gives learners skills to access, criticise, analyse, and practically apply knowledge. Learners are given practical experiences during the teaching and learning processes that help them gain life skills. These aspects are important and apply to the Zambian education system. The quality of general and teacher education, therefore, should not be judged from one narrow perspective but from all three perspectives (CDC, 2013).

The 2013 curriculum framework recognises the use of familiar Zambian languages as the official languages of instruction in Pre-schools and Grades one to four. All the teaching and learning in all areas at the lower primary level are in familiar Zambian Languages. In Zambia, the seven (7) zone languages; Cinyanja, Chitonga, Icibemba, Kiikaonde, Lunda, Luvale, and Silozi as well as the widely used community languages such as Tumbuka and Nsenga in specific schools catchment areas are used for this purpose including learners with Special Educational Needs. Sadly, after 2013, languages such as Tumbuka and Nsenga could not be allowed to be taught using minority languages, instead, Tumbuka learners were asked to learn Bemba as their ROL, and Nsenga was required to use Nyanja for initial literacy (cf. Zimba, 2007) which correlates with Simwinga (2006) who analyses the challenges of minority languages in Zambia using Nkoya and Tumbuka as mirror languages. Due to the above situation, English remains the official medium of instruction beginning in Grade five up to tertiary education (CDC, 2013). It can be argued that while the 2013 curriculum framework reaffirmed the integration of Zambian languages in schools to make life more meaningful in communities, the principles of translanguaging in which multiple languages are an important aspect of teaching and learning were not embraced because only the 7 ROLs were upheld and taught to date.

3. Literature Review

A number of studies have been conducted on multilingualism in the classroom situation in Zambia. Such studies have argued for the inclusion of multilingual discourses in education set ups as these reflect the actual language practices of people which makes it easier to deliver content to learners and allow them to freely express themselves. For this reason, Banda & Mwanza (2018) observe that there

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should be multilingual discourses in classroom practices in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The above argument is in tandem with Williams (1996); Baker (2011); Garcia (2009); Banda (2010); Hornberger & Links (2012) who argue that there is dissatisfaction with monolingual/monoglot, one-language-a-time discourse practices that still pervade language education in many countries.

The above statement is evident in Northern and Muchinga Provinces in Zambia where Bemba as a one-language-a-time is still practiced while sidelining the minority languages such as Lungu, Mambwe, Namwanga, and Tumbuka which are equally important resources available in the linguistic repertoire of speakers. This practice is premised on the colonial ideology of language planning and policies which marginalised the minority languages since 1964 when Zambia gained her independence (cf. Siame, 2022c). Therefore, there is a need to revisit language education policy in Zambia because it does not reflect the multilingual nature of the country which deserve to be embraced in language learning and practices in education (cf. Banda, 2010; Marten & Kula, 2014). Nyimbili & Mwanza (2021) argue that languages and dialects work as stepping stones between the language being taught and the language in which the children are thinking and can express themselves better. It can be argued that when Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga learners are taught using Bemba as their ROL for initial literacy at the expense of other languages in their repertoire, it deprives them of the opportunity to fully comprehend what is being taught to them. Rather, there is a need to allow children to draw on linguistic resources from the different languages at their disposal through translanguaging in the process of learning. Palmer (2013) states that teachers feel that they can translate all linguistic items learners hold in their culture into the second or target language which is not practical and time waste of limited learning time. In addition, Wortham (2006) opines that this leaves teachers complaining that the teaching practice is not practical, yet they do not just understand the process and they cannot just keep time in their lesson because in the use of translanguaging there are no language barriers. The learners translate words for the teacher and the teacher translates for the learners hence learning is a double-sword affair.

Garcia & Lin (2016) argue that the lack of clear multilingual policy formulation entails that schools and teachers do not have guidelines on how to use or support multiple community languages in their classrooms. This statement is in line with the prevailing situation in Zambia where language-in-education policies still possess colonial pedagogical vestiges which do not take advantage of the affordances of other languages as key resources for teaching and learning. In multilingual settings, teachers, sometimes opt to use multiple languages in delivering content to their learners. However, they are not trained to do so appropriately for educational purposes neither does the policy or guidelines allow them to do so. It is, therefore, imperative for teacher training institutions to tap into such existing resources and practices in order to enhance the delivery of lessons as well as the process of learning among learners in classroom situations.

Furthermore, the monologic kind of approach to teaching and learning which the Zambia language education policy is oriented to disadvantages learners from communities who speak languages that are regarded as minority and thus matter the less. Cummins (2008) argues that a trained teacher would understand that learners are not ready to use another language apart from their own in the learning situation in class. However, such a teacher is constrained to fully take advantage of local community languages as resources in teaching and learning. Helot (2014) also reveals that some communities are not ready to learn using another language apart from their first language but their desire to do so is hampered by the government policy direction.

As observed above, language education policies in Zambia do not consider multicultural discourses, but are monolingual oriented in the sense that out of 24 local language clusters spoken in the country, only seven regional official languages are taught during initial literacy. Studies such as Mwanza (2012), and Zimba (2007), provide sufficient evidence to the effect that using monolingual approaches to teaching initial literacy in what are supposed to be multilingual classrooms is a

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contributing factor to the low literacy levels in Zambia. They further contend that the policies on language education do not match with the language practices of the local people (cf. Simachenya & Mambwe, 2023).

4. Theoretical Framework

The paper is undergirded by translanguaging theoretical framing. Translanguaging is a theory of language practice that offers a principled choice between competing interpretations (Wei, 2018). Williams (1996), coined translanguaging as a pedagogical term to describe the natural ways that bilinguals (multilinguals) use their languages in their everyday lives as they make sense of their bilingual worlds. The theory is echoed by Hornberger & Link (2012:262) who describe translanguaging as a purposeful pedagogical alternation of language in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes. Garcia (2009:140) shows that translanguaging is the process performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, to maximise the communicative potential. It can be argued that translanguaging enables children to realise and maximise their potential in the learning of one language using the skills of the already existing linguistic repertoires.

According to Baker & Wright (2017), translanguaging represents a holistic and dynamic view of bilingualism with language practices shifting from context to context and relationship to relationship. Scholars such as Baker & Wright (2017), Garcia & Wei (2014), and Williams (1996) attest that the concept of translanguaging has received recognition in the field of education, especially by those that believe that individuals naturally use their known languages to amplify their learning.

Garcia (2014) postulates that practice emphasises the participants' flexible use of their complex linguistic resources to make meaning of their lives and their complex communications. The above quote shows that the theory of translanguaging deals with the language practices of bilingual or multilingual individuals. This understanding of translanguaging incorporates discourses where individuals speak to each other in one language or another. Marrero-Colón (2021) points out that translanguaging involves the simultaneous use of two or more languages and tries to engage all speakers who are in a conversation whether they are familiar with all of the languages represented or not. The above argument befits embracing translanguaging of BeLuMaNa for initial literacy.

Garcia (2009) further shows that in translanguaging, languages are no longer assigned separate territories or even separate functions, but they co-exist in the same space and they are not graded with regard to their importance in the community. It can be argued that translanguaging is an important pedagogical concept in the educational practices of today. Vogel & Garcia (2017) echo that translanguaging represents an approach to language pedagogy that affirms and leverages learners' diverse and dynamic language practices in teaching and learning.

Baker (2001) identifies four educational advantages of embracing translanguaging. These are: Firstly, it promotes a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter. Secondly, it helps the development of the weaker language or languages such as Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages in the present study. Thirdly, it facilitates home-school links and cooperation. Finally, it helps the integration of fluent speakers with early learners. The above advantages are sufficient grounds upon which the concept of translanguaging as a pedagogic alternative in classroom practices in multilingual societies such as the Northern and Muchinga provinces where Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages are predominantly spoken could be adopted and promoted.

5. Methodology

The paper used qualitative research whose findings are holistic, non-numerical, inductive, subjective, and process-oriented methods used to understand, describe, interpret, and develop a theory on a phenomenon (cf. Brink & Wood, 1998; Siame, 2022b; Siame et al, 2023). The findings were obtained

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using the qualitative design and reported using words and sentential expressions (cf. Mutch, 2005; Kapau, 2021; Siame, 2022a).

The elicitation and document analysis methods were used to justify the descriptive objectives using secondary data (cf. Siame, 2019; Siame & Banda, 2024). Chaleunvong (2009) shows that identifying and retrieving secondary sources of data required for the study is the systematic starting point of efficient data collection. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, documents such as language policies that include *Educating Our Future* (1996) and *Education Reforms* (1977) were identified and analysed. The documents were accessed from libraries, the internet, and published works.

In addition to document analysis, eight respondents were identified and a set of questions were asked in one to one oral interviews. These respondents were purposefully selected from the study areas. The criteria was that the selected respondent was a speaker of the BeLuMaNa languages and resident of the area. Two respondents were selected for each language to participate in the interview based on the similarities of the four languages under study and the benefits of translanguaging these languages. The respondents were instrumental during data collection as well as data verification. In line with the notions of Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), data analysis went hand in hand with data collection. Data were analysed thematically using qualitative and tabular approaches. Four themes were identified from the collected data, namely, promoting multilingualism, promoting language learning, improving communication, and preserving linguistic heritage.

6. Results and Discussion

The results of the study on embracing translanguaging involving the four languages under discussion are presented using four major themes. These are promoting multilingualism, promoting language learning, improving communication, and preserving linguistic heritage. The themes provide reasons or justifications why this paper advocates for embracing minority languages in language planning policies and education in Zambia.

6.1 Promoting Multilingualism among BeLuMaNa Languages

As earlier pointed out, Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages are found in the same geographical proximity which used to be called Northern Province before 2011 but has now been sub-divided into Northern Province where Bemba, Lungu, and Mambwe native speakers are found while Namwanga is spoken in Muchinga province. Asked about the co-existence of these languages in the same proximity Respondent A attested as follows:

Bemba as a regional official language, as well as Lungu, Mambwe and Namwanga languages, are found in the same geographical location in Northern Province and Muchinga provinces. The four languages are also spoken along Zambia and Tanzania boarder. Due to their geographical position, people who speak different languages interact with each other in everyday activities. The multiple languages spoken in the same speech community are likely to have relatedness in language usage.

The above statement confirms that BeLuMaNa languages are in language contact situations and are equally used interchangeably by speakers. This means that, in such a multilingual community, speakers are likely to have related language discourses. Such relatedness is further amplified by the fact that these languages belong to the Bantu language family and are thus genetically related in many ways. The current researchers' observation is in tandem with Kashoki's (1999) argument that languages in the same geographical position are likely to share lexical items *which reduce the perceived differences and enhance communication between or among speakers*. Thus, making it easier for speakers to intermingle linguistic features drawn from the various languages at their disposal. While, one could be assigning linguistic boundaries among these languages, the fact is that such boundaries are hardly noticeable when speakers use the languages in a manner that blurs the artificial linguistic hierarchies (Banda & Mambwe, 2024, forthcoming). Therefore, it can be argued

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that when bi/multilingualism are embraced in language-in-education policies for initial literacy and language education in general, they cannot only promote national unity and cohesion but foster the full communication potential in school environments.

The study also reveals that in such multilingual settings, intermingling of linguistic features from different languages is inevitable among languages that co-exist within the same locality. This means that speakers who are in close proximity are un-likely to be monolinguals. This further means that children of such speakers are equally likely to be multilingual and engaged in multilingual practices. This explains why such practices become a hallmark of a school found in a multilingual community because the practice of multilingualism is easily transferable to the classroom for interaction and possibly for learning. This finding agrees with studies by Banda & Mwanza (2018), Baker (2011) Garcia (2009), and Banda (2010) who propose the inclusion of multilingual discourses in classroom practices in multilingual and multicultural contexts. This is because in a multilingual community, speakers have more related discourses and can understand one another quite easily. Therefore, it can be argued that translanguaging can be an alternative pedagogic method in promoting multilingualism as a resource by creating an environment in which speakers of varying languages can freely communicate and engage with each other during lessons. It can also be argued that translanguaging, if applied appropriately, can be used to promote linguistic diversity among related languages and improve communication across different linguistic groups such as BeLuMaNa languages.

6.2 Promoting Language Learning among BeLuMaNa Languages

Given the affordances of translanguaging as a pedagogic tool for language learning, speakers of minority languages can easily exploit linguistic features from other major languages such as Bemba as they interact with others during classroom activities due to shared linguistic characteristics of the language/s in their environment. These shared characteristics are evident in phonology and morphology as presented below:

6.2.1 Phonological Systems

The sound system which include vowel and consonantal segments of Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages are related as shown below as per Respondent B’s response:

The four languages use the same vowels /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/ in their orthography and grammar. Therefore, using more than one language in the learning process of initial literacy and subsequent language education at various levels would not disadvantage any of the four languages. Learners would even have freedom of expression and would learn languages better since they would be using their familiar languages which bear similarities in terms of vowels.

A further review of the sound system of the four languages involved, shows that these Bantu languages have a five-vowel system which is similar in all aspects. For example, the BeLuMaNa languages use similar phonetic and phonemic vowel features (cf. Greenberg, 2001). This shows that the four languages are genetically related and have a vowel system that comprises five short vowels and their long counterparts that are similar to other Bantu languages, such as; Tshivenda (Poulos, 1990), Bemba (Kula, 2002), Shona (Mudzingwa, 2010), Chiikuhane (Mathangwane, 2018) and Swahili (Batibo, 2021). Therefore, speakers of the BeLuMaNa languages would find it easy to translanguage them during interaction in any contexts. It, therefore, follows that the language-in-education policy should be able to appreciate the linguistic wealth available to speakers of these languages and allow them to be used for education purposes without segregating them.

Regarding consonants and semi-vowels, respondents B, C, D, and E confirm the current researchers’ analysis as follows:

Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages have the same number of consonants and semi-vowels. The four languages have eighteen (18) common consonants, namely, /b/, /d/, /v/,

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/z/, /m/, /n/, /l/, /w/, /j/, /p/, /t/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /k/, /f/, /s/, /ʃ/, /g/, /ɲ/ and /ñ/. The languages also use two semi-vowels, namely, /y/ and /w/.

The study shows that the four languages use similar consonantal sounds which are described as follows: a voiced bilabial plosive /b/, a voiced alveolar plosive /d/, a voiced labio-dental fricative /v/, a voiced alveolar fricative /z/, a voiced bilabial nasal /m/, a voiced alveolar nasal /n/, a voiced alveolar lateral /l/, a voiceless bilabial plosive /p/, a voiceless alveolar plosive /t/, a voiceless post-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ realised [c] in common nouns or [ch] in proper nouns, a voiced post-alveolar affricate /dʒ/, a voiceless velar plosive /k/, a voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/, a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/, voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/, a voiced velar plosive /g/, a voiced alveolar-palatal nasal /ɲ/ which is realised as [ny] and a voiced velar nasal /ñ/ which is realised as [ngʷ]. On the other hand, all the four languages have two semi-vowels in their phonotactics, namely, /j/ a voiced palatal approximant which is realised as /y/, and a voiced bilabial approximant /w/. The findings reveal that BeLuMaNa languages use similar phonetic and phonemic features with very minimal consonantal variations in terms of the place and manner of articulation (cf. Mtenje, 2016; Siame, 2022a). These findings further demonstrate the close relatedness of the languages which would make it easier for speakers to translanguage during the learning of initial literacy.

6.2.2 Morphological Aspects

The study shows that the four languages under consideration have shared grammatical features which also enhances the seamlessness among the languages and in turn facilitating easier ability among speakers to translanguage the four languages. Based on the analysis and the responses of Respondents F, G, H, and I, below is an outline of the relationship of Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga in terms of nominal morphology:

Table 1: Noun prefixes with examples in BeLuMaNa languages

Noun Class	Augment	Noun Prefix				Examples of Nouns	Gloss
		Be	Lu	Ma	Na		
1	<i>u</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>u-mu-ntu</i> → <i>umuntu</i>	person
1a	<i>∅</i>	<i>∅</i>	<i>∅</i>	<i>∅</i>	<i>∅</i>	<i>yaama</i>	uncle
2	<i>a</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>a</i> (<i>ya</i>)	<i>a</i> (<i>ya</i>)	<i>a</i> (<i>wa</i>)	<i>a(ba/ya/wa)-ntu</i> → <i>a(ba/ya/wa)ntu</i>	people
2a	<i>∅</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>ba/ya/wa-ndume</i> → <i>ba/ya/wandume</i>	brothers
3	<i>u</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>u-mu-twe</i> → <i>umutwe</i>	head
4	<i>i</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>i-mi-twe</i> → <i>imitwe</i>	heads
5	<i>∅</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i-tete</i> → <i>itete</i>	reed
	<i>i</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>i-li-nso</i> → <i>ilinso</i>	eye
5a	<i>∅</i>	<i>lii</i>	<i>lii</i>	<i>lii</i>	<i>lya</i>	<i>lii-namaayo</i> →	huge woman
						<i>liinamaayo</i> <i>lya-maama</i> → <i>lyamaama</i>	
6	<i>a</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>a-ma-tete</i> → <i>amatete</i>	reeds
7	<i>i</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>i-ci-ntu</i> → <i>icintu</i>	thing
7a	<i>i</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>cii</i>	<i>cii</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>i-cii/ci-mutwe</i> → <i>icii/cimutwe</i>	big/huge/ ugly head
8	<i>i</i>	<i>fi</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>i-fi/vi-ntu</i> → <i>ifi/vintu</i>	things
8a	<i>I</i>	<i>fii</i>	<i>vii</i>	<i>Vii</i>	<i>vii</i>	<i>i-fii/vii-mitwe</i> → <i>ifii/viimitwe</i>	big/ugly heads
9	<i>i</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>i-n-koko</i> → <i>inkoko</i>	chicken

10	<i>i</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>i-n-koko</i> → <i>inkoko</i>	chickens
11	<i>u/i</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>u-lu-se</i> → <i>uluse</i> <i>i-n-kumbu</i> → <i>inkumbu</i>	mercy
12	<i>a</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>a-ka-nu-a</i> → <i>akanwa</i>	mouth
13	<i>u</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>u-tu-nu-a</i> → <i>utunwa</i>	mouths
14	<i>u</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>wu</i>	<i>wu</i>	<i>wu</i>	<i>u-bu/wu-ntu</i> → <i>ubu/wuntu</i>	humane
14a	\emptyset	<i>bu</i>	<i>wuu</i>	<i>wuu</i>	<i>wuu</i>	<i>bu/wuu-</i> <i>kateeka</i> → <i>bu/wuukateeka</i>	presidency
15	<i>u</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>u-ku-fwa</i> → <i>ukufwa</i>	to die
16	<i>a</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>apa-tali</i> → <i>apatali</i>	on top, on high
	\emptyset	<i>pali</i>	<i>pali</i>	<i>pali</i>	<i>pe</i>	<i>pali/pe-motoka</i> → <i>pali/pemotoka</i>	at, near, on the car
17	\emptyset	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ku-mushi/zi</i> → <i>kumushi/zi (BeLuMa)</i> <i>ku-kaya</i> → <i>kukaya (Na)</i>	in the village
17a	\emptyset	<i>kuli</i>	<i>kuli</i>	<i>kuli</i>	<i>kwe</i>	<i>kuli-(wi)so</i> → <i>kuli(wi)so</i>	to your father
18	\emptyset	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu-ilindi</i> → <i>mwilindi (BeLuMa)</i> <i>mu-nkungwe</i> → <i>mu nkungwe (Na)</i>	in the grave

The above findings show that the four languages have eighteen (18) noun classes with their corresponding class prefixes. The table reveals that there are more similarities than variations in the noun class prefixes which should be the basis upon which translanguaging of the four languages in a multilingual classroom context should be predicated. This finding is supported by Banda & Mwanza (2018) who argue for multilingual discourses in classroom practices in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The continued use of teaching initial literacy using Bemba only as a ROL even in areas where native speakers use Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages is not in tandem with scholars such as (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009; Banda, 2010; Hornberger & Links, 2012) who argue that there is dissatisfaction with monolingual one-language-a-time discourse practices that still pervade language education in many countries. To overcome challenges associated with monolingualism in language education, the Zambian language policy for initial literacy should be decolonised through embracing translanguaging as a readily available resource (cf. Siame, 2022c; Siame & Lubungu, 2023).

6.3 Improved Communication

As has been demonstrated above, drawing linguistic features from different languages within a communicative event during teaching and learning through translanguaging enhances communication among people who speak ‘different’ languages. This is augmented in the response Respondent J:

Teaching initial literacy using the ROL only, such as, Bemba shows that Bemba is superior and hinders enhanced communication for languages that are in the same proximity. On the

other hand, the minority languages where learners are subjected to learn the major language(s) tend to feel inferior which is another hindrance or barrier to communication.

The above statement shows that translanguaging in such contexts helps to enhance the quality of communication as speakers have a wide range of linguistic resources to draw upon during their engagements. The statement also reveals that translanguaging helps to reduce inferiority and superiority complex often associated with the speaking of minority languages and ROLs, respectively. Siame (2023) describes an inferiority complex in language speaking as a situation where the speaker of a minority language feels less important as compared to those that speak the seven ROLs, which include Bemba. It must be pointed out that due to colonial influences on matters of language, speakers of the minority languages would often feel inferior speaking their languages while those that speak or use major languages or officially recognised ones such as Bemba would feel superior. This often would create serious communication barriers between those that speak the two separate languages. Subsequently, low literacy levels among minority language speakers would be evident. Such scenarios are compounded by language in education policies that impose the use of ROLs in areas where minority languages are part of the linguistic repertoire of the communities which equally ought to be recognised as part and parcel of the communicative repertoire of the speakers. To this effect, Mwanza (2012) and Zimba (2007) argue that monolingual practices in Zambian multilingual classrooms is a contributing factor to low literacy levels. The scholars further state that the policies on language-education do not match with the language practices of the local people where minority languages are spoken. It can be argued that due to non-recognition of the minority languages, speakers of these languages (Lungu, Mambwe and Namwanga) feel inferior to speak the languages in contexts where ROL is to be used thereby hindering effective communication.

It is envisaged that the language education policy does not recognise the communication potential inherent in minority languages. However, Nyimbili & Mwanza (2021) contend that languages and dialects work as stepping stones to the provision of a link between the language being taught and the language in which the children are thinking and can express themselves better. Therefore, allowing children to be taught initial literacy in their mother tongues such as Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga as well as the ROL which they pick during their formative years, through translanguaging in a classroom situation would enhance communication.

6.4 Preserving Linguistic Heritage

Minority languages form a part of the cultural heritage of a particular community which requires recognition through a responsive language-in-education policy which embraces linguistic diversity. Respondent K had this to say:

When minority languages are not protected, there is a likelihood of losing them. This is so because the young generation shuns using their minority languages and are interested in speaking or using the prestigious major languages.

The above finding suggests that language policies should be deliberately designed to embrace the linguistic diversity which include minority languages in order to enhance their use as languages of communication in education settings (cf. Simachenya & Mambwe, 2023). Instead of designing a policy that pits one language against the other, language policies must be inclusive in order to avoid a situation where the ‘dominant’ languages displace the ‘weaker’ or minority languages. Brenzinger (1998), Banda (2010), and Siame & Banda (2021) have pointed out that small African languages are currently still not endangered by ex-colonial languages but risk being replaced by other major African languages such as Bemba in the Zambian context against Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages. Language shift and subsequent language death and dearth situations are sociolinguistic phenomena which are often compounded by language policies that are aversive to the realities of actual language practices. In this case, they tend to promote dominant languages at the expense of

12	ISSN 2277-3630 (online), Published by International journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 13 Issue: 07 in July-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR
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minority languages. In multilingual contexts such as those in Zambia and in particular in the northern part of the country, translanguaging can assist in the challenges of language shift, dearth, and death. In this regard, it can be argued for the embracement of translanguaging as a pedagogic resource that would ensure the inclusion of Bemba, Lungu, Mambwe, and Namwanga languages in the process of teaching and learning. It can also be argued that, if translanguaging is applied appropriately, it would help to preserve and at the same time promote minority languages while facilitating increased understanding between different language groups in a particular speech community.

7. Conclusion

The study has shown how the Zambian Language Education policy tend to isolate minority languages by preferring ROLs for use in education. This is despite the languages being part of the linguistic repertoire of the speakers involved. However, drawing on examples on the phonological and grammatical similarities shared between the ROL (Bemba) and the minority languages (Lungu, Mambwe and Namwanga), the study has demonstrated that these languages possess the communicative potential that can easily be leveraged in education settings through translanguaging as a pedagogic resource. The paper has argued for a language education policy which takes into account the language practices of the communities and regard them as resources for both teaching and learning as these have shown to enhance communication while preserving linguistic and cultural heritage of the people. It has further been argued that by acknowledging the important role that minority languages may play in education, the policy may inadvertently enhance the status of the languages involved and ultimately leveling the linguistic hierarchies among the languages. This would in turn wade off the inferiority complexes associated with using minority languages in the formal contexts such as education. In addition, the study has shown how the notion of translanguaging plays an important role in promoting national cohesion or unity among people believed to belong or speak certain languages whose statuses may vary and in turn affect power relations among the speakers.

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13	ISSN 2277-3630 (online), Published by International journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 13 Issue: 07 in July-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR
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