
Interview

The Future of Teacher Education: Embracing Multilingualism, Collaboration, and Cultural Integration

Tasneem Shahnaaz & Veena Kapur in Conversation with Kathleen Heugh

Kathleen Heugh, Professor of Language Education and Multilingualism, is a socio-applied linguist who specializes in language policy and planning, bilingual and multilingual education, and English Medium Instruction (EMI). She uses multilingual pedagogies including translanguaging and transknowledging in her teaching of applied, educational and socio-linguistics. Kathleen Heugh works with several large transnational organizations (including various agencies of the UN, the EU and the African Union; transnational bodies such as the British Council, and international policy think tanks) located in Africa; Central, South and East Asia; Europe; and North America. Currently she focuses on policy and its implementation in bilingual and multilingual education for displaced, migrant and refugee students within mainstream systems.

Professor Heugh has specialist expertise in system-wide and multi-country evaluation studies on languages and literacy in education in sub-Saharan Africa for international governments and development agencies (including UNESCO and UNDP). She was a Ministerial advisor on language policy for the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and was subsequently appointed to two statutory bodies established through the Constitution. As a founding member of the Pan South African Language Board, Kathleen Heugh initiated and led the first Sociolinguistic Survey of South Africa (2000). She also led the design, development and administration of the first system-wide multilingual assessment of students in the world (2006). Her theoretical and field research in multilingual education in more than 30 countries informs

UNESCO and UNICEF language education policy recommendations for countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific, and for minority communities worldwide for the UN Human Rights Council.

Tasneem Shahnaaz (TS): Hello Professor Heugh. Welcome to the *Fortell* journal. At the outset, we would like to thank you for agreeing to this interview. Let us begin right away with our first question. We would like your views on Teacher Education—what it means and what it entails?

Kathleen Heugh (KH): We need to remember that formal teacher education is a recent phenomenon dating back approximately 150 years. For millennia prior to this, education occurred and continues to occur through non-formal educational activities of community groups, and through informal educational practices at the family or local levels. Successful teacher education, in my view cannot be achieved through formal educational institutions alone. We need all three of informal, non-formal and formal if we are serious about sustainable and successful preparation of teachers. It is through informal and non-formal education that we can learn what needs to be brought into formal teacher education which has become entirely dislocated from the real needs and contexts of most school pupils of the world. Some of the best examples I have ever seen have been at the Vidya Bhawan Society in Udaipur, Eklavya in Bhopal, and at Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE) in Kampala and its district offices and village programmes in Uganda.

Veena Kapur (VK): What kind of teacher training and qualifications are necessary to encourage and support multilingual education?

KH: The preparation and professional development of teachers everywhere in the world should be reconfigured to begin with the fundamental principle that all children and adults everywhere have the innate capability of what Professor Rama Kant Agnihotri calls 'multilinguality' (2007, 2010, 2014, 2017). For teacher educators and pre-service and in-service teachers, we know that it is almost impossible to find a classroom of students who are all monolingual in the same language. Multilinguality is present in every classroom and along with multilinguality, students bring diverse ways of being (ontologies) from their local communities, diverse backgrounds of knowledge and knowledge systems (epistemologies), and often also different systems of belief (faith or religion). We need to prepare all teachers with recognition that this means that school pupils or learners bring many different

resources and all these need to be harnessed in ways that advantage and advance learning in the classroom for all students.

Usually, early years education begins with literacy and numeracy. This means that teachers need to know how to work with the literacy practices that come from the children's home or local communities. This could mean different languages, and scripts, but we now also know that this means recognising orality and oral traditions and the knowledge that accompanies these (linguistic, cultural, epistemic, ontological) and where and how these feed into or are embedded in art, dance, music, and song. It means that teachers need to know how to encourage students' engagement with their capabilities and resources and how to expand these—together with their peers. It is almost impossible now to think of literacy in one language only. We need to have a broader view of literacy as including biliteracy as a minimum, and multilingual literacies alongside multilingual oralities.

TS: Is it possible to work with mainstream curricula and forge successful multilingual processes and practices?

KH: It is possible to work with a mainstream curriculum by encouraging students to use two or more of their languages in understanding, negotiating understanding of new concepts, writing bilingually (using what I refer to as 'horizontal' translanguaging or multilingualism and that involves language mixing), and redrafting to produce texts that gradually become closer to those assumed to be two or more standardized written languages. I refer to the latter as 'vertical' translanguaging or multilingualism. At the same time, it is important to remember that students are bringing their own perspectives of knowledge and experience into the classroom and students need to be encouraged to share and exchange these in a reciprocal manner—one that I suggest could be called 'transknowledging.' This way students teach each other, and often also the teacher.

Important preparation for teachers is to learn how to develop a disposition that allows for humility—a humility that recognises how much we can learn from our pupils or students, how pupils/students are often much better at teaching their peers than we as teachers are, and how we can learn from other through convivial collaboration. Engaging with parents and community is critical and every effort needs to be taken to ensure that parents and community members recognise

themselves as co-responsible collaborators in their children's education. This may mean finding ways to ameliorate ways in which the school may appear to be an alienating or fearful place for adults. Village schools in Northern Uganda for example offer joint literacy classes for children and adults (parents, grandparents, community members) several mornings of the week. Parents and grandparents often find themselves in playful competition with their children in the early years—and the classes are places of joy and delight for everyone. It is these experiences that encourage teachers to learn how to be successful teachers.

VK: Do you think the regular teacher education programmes are effective?

KH: There are the regular formal teacher-education programmes offered in every context. But unless they get down to the nitty gritty of what happens and how to make things happen in the classroom daily—they are, in my view, of little value. Too often they offer abstract courses on curriculum design and assessment, the latest fad in reading (but not how to teach reading), or latest approaches to administrative duties of teachers.

TS: Do you think officials in government departments need a change in perspective in order to create effective programmes?

KH: My main concern is that it is the education officials in government departments that need professional learning on how to understand what it is that teachers and students need. When officials are moved from one government department to another, any institutional knowledge and expertise that they acquire in relation to education policy, planning and decisions are lost when replaced by novice officials. My next concern is that school leadership, especially the principal and deputy-principals need to be kept up to date and participate in refresher programmes that remind them of why they need to pay close attention to learning and supporting teachers, parents, community, and learners. Too often I see principals hiding in their offices, ignoring what is happening, and ignoring how teaching and learning is not taking place, and ignoring their own culpability in this. So, I advocate for professional learning for educational leaders and officials, including how to encourage the establishment of strong parent-community bodies to support accountability. Again, LABE in Uganda has developed sustainable strategies in which community empowerment has led to village elected

educational leaders who serve as liaison officers between village parents and school leadership.

VK: How should students be assessed in a multilingual class? How can we ensure that these assessments are culturally and linguistically unbiased?

KH: It is entirely possible to assess students bilingually or even trilingually in class, most especially in formative and ongoing classroom assessment. It is also possible to assess students trilingually or multilingually for summative purposes and in system-wide assessment tasks. One way to do this is to present each assessment tasks in bilingual or multilingual format, allowing the possibility for students to read the items or tasks in their preferred language and or in each of the language versions provided.

Students should be given the opportunity to be assessed multilingually and to be able to include knowledge from their home, community, or country background in their responses to assessment tasks. Together with colleagues I have been working on multilingual tasks and assessment as regular daily classroom activities in schools and system-wide assessment in secondary education since the early 2000s. I have also been working with colleagues on formative and summative assessment in undergraduate and postgraduate university programmes, including teacher education and training of teacher educators programmes since the late 1990s in South Africa and since 2010 in Australia.

One example, the process of developing a system-wide assessment of 75,000 Grade 8 students in the Western Cape of South Africa, involved both language and mathematics. In the language assessment item students were tested on their comprehension of an excerpt from a literary source originally written in their home language (isiXhosa, Afrikaans or English). Each literacy source was carefully selected to ensure lexical and syntactic equivalence in terms of reading level across the three languages. Students were also asked to compose a written response to two questions. One was to write about their views of a well-known figure, Nelson Mandela, from their own perspective, and in their home language. The second was related to a letter in which they were asked to explain how a particular schoolyard incident occurred, again in the students' home language. The students were also tasked with reading a previously unseen text aligned with environmental and geographic

context in a neighbouring country. The original text, produced to suit a reading level of 14–15-year-olds in English, was translated into Afrikaans, used as the medium of instruction for some students, and adapted for use as a text for English second or additional language students who were used to studying through EMI. The adaptations included glossing of complex lexical items, changing passive voice to active voice, simplifying complex sentences with multiple clauses to sentences with no more than two clauses. At the time, speakers of African languages were expected to study and be assessed through EMI in South Africa, this included the speakers of isiXhosa in the Western Cape Province.

Two versions of the mathematics instrument were developed, one with 55 per cent of items in, one with 55 per cent of items in Afrikaans. In each version, 45 per cent of the items were presented to students in three languages, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English. The different language versions were colour-coded so that students could associate their preferred language with the same colour throughout the instrument. Since speakers of isiXhosa studied mathematics through English (mostly) or Afrikaans (occasionally) these students were provided the mathematics instrument version that best matched the regular language of teaching and learning maths. Through a post-assessment survey, most students from all language backgrounds revealed that they read all three versions of the 45 per cent of items presented multilingually. Although this was the first time that a multilingual assessment had been administered across a whole grade cohort, and we had not really expected much difference in achievement scores between the items presented only in one language compared with those presented in three languages, it was clear that there was an increase in overall scores for items presented in the three languages (Heugh et al., 2017).

Bilingual assessment (Chinese and English) is currently being practiced for formative purposes in a primary school in South Australia supported by a team of bilingual teaching and learning specialists from the University of South Australia (Heugh et al., 2024). The use of multilingual assessment for multilingual students studying through EMI at an Australian university has been documented through a longitudinal five-phase series of action research project between 2010 to 2024. Most courses in which teaching staff have tried this pedagogical practice relate to English language programmes for international students and students from bilingual or multilingual communities, and a major in

applied linguistics with students who are bilingual, multilingual and monolingual in the same classes.

Assessment is both formative and summative and includes translation, use of informal or horizontal translanguaging and more formal vertical translanguaging processes. The research has led to recognition of the role of student agency and voice, and students desire to bring and exchange knowledge to which they have access in languages that are different from English. More than this, students who have previously considered themselves to be monolingual speakers of English have to their astonishment realised that they depend on multilingual students to provide them with access to knowledge that is not available in English. This has brought about a pedagogy of reciprocity where multilingual and monolingual students engage in what I have suggested is a process of both translanguaging and transknowledging (see also Heugh & Song, 2017; Heugh et al., 2022; and Heugh et al., 2024).

In my view, these efforts are a series of attempts to show that multilingual assessment is valuable for multilingual and monolingual students alike. Multilingual assessment is possible in the classroom, in schools, at system-wide secondary level, and in higher education. Multilingual assessment supports equal outcomes and offers advantages for all students whether multilingual or monolingual.

VK: What are the ongoing professional development opportunities available to teachers in multilingual classrooms?

These unfortunately are exceedingly rare—inadequate.

I have reported on ones in South Africa from about 1998-2005 for LLT previously but other than these I am unaware of any.

TS: Could you comment on the nature of educational policies that support multilingual education and the way these policies have been effectively implemented in developed nations?

KH: I am not sure what you mean by the term ‘developed nations. In my view there is a problem with the construct of a nation state—in that this is a concept that seems to have emerged in post-Reformation Europe, and subsequently exported through a particular form of colonial enterprise, with a drawing of artificial state boundaries that have often divided people who historically share the same systems of belief, knowledge and language. This has particularly become a problem in Africa where

as a result of European colonial interests, the continent was partitioned at the Conference of Berlin between 1884 and 1885 to suit the imperial interests of European powers rather than the communities of people living in Africa. The result of this partition has been the division of people across geopolitical borders that have divided communities with affiliations of language, belief (faith) and knowledge, and exacerbated cross-border conflict over the last 140 years.

Nevertheless, the best examples of system-wide implementation of multilingual education are in postcolonial countries, sometimes referred to as countries of the 'South' and that are linguistically complex or heterogeneous. The best examples of systemwide development and implementation of multilingual education, and the lessons we learn from these that may be relevant in countries elsewhere (for example in South and Southeast Asia) are in Ethiopia and South Africa. Attempts towards multilingual education systems in Europe and North America, which I prefer to call countries of the North-Atlantic (following Raewyn Connell, 2007) are few and insubstantial compared to those of countries of the South.

VK: Professor Heugh, you have experienced a rich academic life and we would be happy if you could share your insights on the evolution of language policies in different countries and the key takeaways that have evolved in the process?

KH: In Ethiopia, after a change of government in 1994 and a loosely configured centralised language policy was implemented through regional differentiation. This policy was supportive of the development and use of regional and local languages, the national working language (Amharic) and English as an additional (international) language of wider communication. In some of the regions, for example Oromo, Tigray and Somali regions, implementation meant, the use of Oromo, Tigrinya and Somali (one regional language each) as the medium of instruction for between six and eight years of primary school, plus the teaching and learning of Amharic, regarded as the 'working language' of Ethiopia, and English. A switch to English medium followed through secondary school. In other more linguistically complex regions, like the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Region, differentiation meant that several languages within this region were developed and used as the mediums of instruction for up to six years initially, and later reduced

to four years, although continued to be taught as subjects to secondary school. Lastly in the Amhara Region, students were only expected to learn Amharic and English (a bilingual system for these students), and this system has also been implemented in the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa.

What we learned from this system-wide implementation of multilingual education is that:

It is possible for a low-income country to implement multilingual education successfully, by differentiating the range of languages on a regional basis, and that this increases the potential for social justice while reducing socio-economic inequality.

Students with six to eight years of home or local language medium of instruction, plus a national language plus an international language—are likely to remain in and complete secondary school, and have the best chance of entry to higher education.

Decentralization to regions and even local education authorities encouraged civil society agency and contributions to education.

What this example also demonstrates is that a change of government policy in the early 2000s allowed foreign advisors, mainly from the UK, promoting earlier introduction of EMI in teacher education and in primary school, led to the decline in literacy and school achievement in secondary and primary school, increased foreign debt, and undermined multilingual education (Heugh, et al., 2012).

The South African history of system-wide implementation of multilingual education offers several lessons. The first is that during the apartheid period (1948-1990) multilingual education was implemented at low-cost in seven languages. This was a highly centralized system and rapidly put in place to ensure an uneven socio-economic and segregated society. What we learned from this example is that:

It is possible to develop dictionaries and textbooks in multiple languages rapidly and to grow an educational publishing and translation industry at speed.

However, since this policy was not intended to foster economic or racial equality—it spawned socio-political conflict and eventual dismissal of the apartheid system in 1994.

A renewed attempt to implement multilingual education policy based

on the principles of democracy and equality was formulated (DoE, 1997), but based on a highly centralized system has served to curtail regional (provincial) differentiation.

However, an exceptionally strong lobby from those with English-language/-speaking interests (although only 8% of the population claim English as L1), together with English-speaking academics in higher education institutions, policy implementation has been delayed despite numerous national ministers of education promising to adhere to the 1997 language in education policy (Heugh, 2013).

The current Minister of Basic Education in South Africa, who announced the incremental implementation of the multilingual policy in 2014 has re-announced her commitment to this policy in June 2024—although it remains to be seen whether this will after 27 years see actual implementation.

The take-home message from the South African example is that the influence of the strong English-language lobby coupled with the current resurgence and expansion of global interest in EMI assiduously promoted by organizations such as the British Council, the Cambridge English language industry, and international English language testing regimes, including IELTS, is that the primary challenge for multilingual education has become a powerful transnational English language industry. The speed at which countries that were never colonised by Britain, or any other English-language dominant power have succumbed to the advance of EMI in higher education with inevitable washback to school education is astonishing. It is certainly not to the advantage of most citizens of low-income countries. Instead, it brings about or increases debt-trap diplomacy, and a reproduction of coloniality. Several authors have written a great deal about this, and I recommend the work of Robert Phillipson and Ruanni Tupas in this regard.

TS: Thank you once again for sharing your insights with us.

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