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Title of Project

Empowering Multilingual Learners through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Arts-Based Learning in Burkina Faso

Research Supervisor

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**TIRF Research Topics Investigated**

Language Planning & Policy
Research on Revitalization of Endangered Indigenous Languages

Bio

Dr. Inoussa Malgoubri received his doctorate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA. His dissertation examines culturally sustaining pedagogy and arts-based learning in English language education for multilingual learners in Burkina Faso. His research seeks to equip teachers with innovative approaches that foster engagement and inclusivity in postcolonial, multilingual settings, promoting equitable learning experiences.

Project Summary**Motivation for the Research**

Burkina Faso is a linguistically diverse country with over 70 languages spoken across various ethnic groups (Kedrebeogo, 1998). Despite the linguistic richness of the country, English language education remains predominantly monolingual and Eurocentric, marginalizing students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Traditional pedagogy, characterized by rote memorization and grammar drills, fails to meaningfully engage students (Somé-Guiebré, 2020). The lack of pedagogical strategies acknowledging linguistic and cultural diversity further complicates English language instruction (Traoré-Moundiba, 2022). Given Burkina Faso's recent policy shift elevating English to a working language, pedagogical strategies are urgently needed to empower multilingual learners by integrating culturally sustaining approaches into the English as an Additional Language (EAL) classroom, therefore empowering them to feel that their “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, as cited in Martin-Beltrán, 2014, p. 208) are welcome and keep them engaged.

This study addressed the above-mentioned educational inequities by exploring the potential of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) and arts-based learning (ABL) to enhance the learning experience in the Burkinabe English language classrooms. Research suggests that CSP fosters learner engagement by integrating students' cultural and linguistic assets into the learning process

(Paris & Alim, 2014). Embedding local cultural elements—such as Forum Theater, slam poetry, and griot-style storytelling—into EAL classrooms can create an inclusive and engaging environment that fosters student agency, cultural appreciation, and linguistic confidence. These inclusive practices align with decolonial approaches to language education and challenge Western-centric methodologies that marginalize African epistemologies (Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Ngũgĩ, 1986). CSP and ABL empower students by making English instruction more meaningful and contextually relevant (Berriz et al., 2019; Catalano & Morales, 2022).

Research questions

This study explored how the integration of humanizing, arts-based, and culturally sustaining approaches can enhance the engagement and success of multilingual learners in Burkina Faso. It will address the overarching question: How can culturally sustaining pedagogy and arts-based education empower multilingual learners of English in Burkina Faso?

This overarching question was further broken down into the following sub-questions:

1. What benefits and challenges do teachers perceive in using CSP and ABL with multilingual students in English classrooms?
2. How do students respond to the integration of CSP and ABL in their English language learning experiences?
3. What elements are essential to effectively implementing CSP and ABL in English language classrooms?
4. In what ways can CSP and ABL empower and enhance learning for multilingual students?

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative arts-informed case study approach, focusing on a public high school in Burkina Faso, where English is taught as an additional language. The methodology captured the nuanced experiences of multilingual learners and educators as they engaged with CSP and ABL. The arts-informed dimension facilitated creative, multimodal data collection, enabling more profound insights into the impact of integrating Indigenous cultural elements into English instruction (Leavy, 2020).

Participants included 7 EAL teachers and 32 students from Première and Terminale classes (11th and 12th grades). The teachers attended professional development workshops on CSP and ABL, exploring strategies such as translanguaging, storytelling, and arts integration. This professional development aimed to familiarize teachers with the pedagogical approach and discuss power sharing. Both students and teachers participated in the three 3-hour sessions workshops.

Data collection

The data were collected through pre- and post-workshop interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, and participants-created artifacts.

Pre- and Post-Workshop Interviews

Semi-structured interviews assessed shifts in students' language confidence and teachers' instructional strategies before and after the workshop. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred languages (French, English, or local languages) and analyzed using thematic coding (Saldaña, 2020).

Classroom Observations

Observations were conducted using the Collaborative, Multilingual, and Culturally Sustaining Engagement Guide (CoMCEG) created for the purpose of this study to assess multilingual interactions, student agency, and pedagogical shifts.

Participants-Created Multimodal Artifacts

Data included student-generated poetry, storytelling performances, and theater scripts, providing evidence of linguistic creativity, cultural integration, and the impact of CSP and ABL on self-expression.

Finally, member checking was conducted to enhance research credibility by allowing participants to validate findings (Bhattacharya, 2017). Thematic analysis using MAXQDA 24 identified key themes related to student engagement, pedagogical transformation, and policy implications (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2021).

Summary of Findings

Pre-Workshop Interviews

Initial interviews revealed significant challenges in English language education, including an overreliance on rote memorization and grammar drills. Students expressed frustration with the lack of engaging, interactive methods. One student, Karah, remarked, "In the classroom, we don't speak a lot of English. It is grammar, grammar, writing, writing" (pre-workshop interview, May 6, 2024). The teachers also expressed difficulties adapting to students' diverse learning needs due to the absence of professional development opportunities and the dominance of grammar-translation methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Even prior to the workshop, the participants perceived arts-based methods as transformative, integrating Burkinabe cultural heritage into English instruction. Samba, a student participant, stated, "It is the promotion of Burkinabe culture; if we integrate this, it is excellent" (pre-workshop interview, May 7, 2024). These perspectives aligned with CSP principles that language learning should validate students' cultural and linguistic identities (Kiramba, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Classroom Observations

Observations indicated increased student participation and confidence through griot-style storytelling, slam poetry, and Forum Theater. Students were more willing to communicate in English, leveraging their home languages and cultures in the creative process. Translanguaging practices enabled seamless language integration, highlighting the pedagogical value of linguistic

hybridity (García & Wei, 2014). Initially hesitant about non-traditional methods, teachers adopted more interactive, student-centered teaching approaches.

Post-Workshop Interviews

Post-workshop interviews confirmed a transformation in student engagement, confidence, and classroom participation as a result of the art-based and culturally sustaining pedagogy workshop. Students reported increased enjoyment and motivation in English learning. One student, Nelly, reflected, "I really had fun. It was very cool... I like that everyone had the opportunity to express themselves and improve their English or any language skills" (post-workshop interview, May 19, 2024). These findings align with research suggesting that multimodal and performative tasks enhance engagement and reduce language anxiety (Krashen, 1982).

The teachers noted notable improvements in student linguistic fluency and participation. One teacher remarked, "For the first time, I saw my students eager to speak English—not because they had to, but because they wanted to share something meaningful" (Mr. Kinta, post-workshop interview, May 21, 2024). This observation underscores the importance of integrating culturally sustaining and arts-based methodologies in teacher training programs to foster responsive and equitable pedagogy (Gay, 2018).

Implications

Policy Makers

The findings underscore the need for curriculum reforms integrating CSP and ABL into national EAL instruction in Burkina Faso. The Ministry of Education should develop policies promoting student-centered, arts-integrated, culturally sustaining pedagogy and provide professional development for educators (Berriz et al., 2019).

Practitioners

Teachers need to adopt multimodal approaches to enhance engagement and linguistic confidence. Schools should encourage teachers to be more creative in using experiential learning and pedagogies that speak to their students and spark their critical thinking and creativity (Greenfader et al., 2015).

Future Research

Further studies may examine the long-term impacts of CSP and ABL in different educational contexts and explore digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool (Leavy, 2020). This research confirmed the transformative potential of culturally sustaining pedagogy and arts-based learning in Burkina Faso's EAL classrooms. Systemic support in teacher training, curriculum design, and policy implementation is crucial to ensure sustainability.

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