

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical and research basis supporting bilingual education and first language (L1) development is summarised in this chapter. It is grounded by major L2 theories such as the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978), the Interdependence Hypothesis by Cummins (1986) and the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis from Krashen (1982) with the intention of providing a theoretical framework for understanding how Wolof can be beneficial to the learning of English. This chapter also addresses prior studies on language policy and bilingual pedagogy in comparable multilingual settings and identifies limitations that the present study attempts to amend.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This sub-section briefly discusses the major concepts underlying bilingual/mother tongue education:

In addition, this study is theoretically grounded in prominent SLA models. Culture Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory underscores the role of cultural tools, among which language stands out, in learning and development. According to Cummins' (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis, skills available in a student's dominant language can transfer and facilitate the acquisition of a second language. Krashen's (1989) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis stresses the importance of learners comprehending the language they are exposed to. Together, these theories underlie the pedagogical rationale for Wolof as a bridge to English instruction for early-grade learners.

2.2 English in The Gambia

The official language of The Gambia is English, and it is the language of instruction in schools. However, most school children especially in the countryside English is not spoken at home, and is picked up exclusively through schooling. Most of the population speaks Wolof and other indigenous languages as their first language (Sanneh 2015; Mbow 2001). This home school language gap constitutes a hindrance in academic success and necessitates linguistically inclusive educational practices.

2.3 The English Teaching in Primary Schools in The Gambia

The primary school English as a second language programme in The Gambia is designed to develop basic literacy skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. On the other hand, it is assumed that students have a certain degree of pre-primary exposure to English. This presumption creates a problem particularly for Wolof-speaking learners, who are torn between the objectives of the curriculum and the realities of their environment.

The educational policy has been aggravating this problem by stipulating instruction in English at all levels. However, it also has little ability to handle local languages which in turn restricts teachers' ability to adapt to their learners' language. To offset it, longer-term policy changes that facilitate the use of students' first languages in schools, especially in the early years, make the move to English less jarring, and lead to more equitable education policy and practice.

English as a medium of instruction in primary education aims at developing the students' English proficiency to get them ready to have a

rewarding school life. In exploring the possible part played by Wolof in this educational attainment, this research is consistent with those aims, advocating teaching approaches that acknowledge and build upon learners' linguistic repertoires. But because many of the teachers in rural areas are not trained in bilingual education, they face challenges supporting these kids. The need for professional development in bilingual pedagogies seems clearly to be necessary; this way teachers would be better situated to bridge the language gap that may exist and provide better learning experiences for their students.

Apart the curriculum information and policy guidelines, teachers in “the field” are met with several challenges. Living in a linguistically isolated situation and poor training and support from the institution have also had a negative impact on their bilingual teaching. These barriers thwart their efforts to teach and affect students' attentiveness and ultimate learning.

Thus, in this study, English proficiency is considered as the competence of memorizing vocabulary, understanding of reading, and speaking ability. By targeting vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension and spoken fluency, the study intends to gauge students' progress, and the impact of Wolof integration on the development of their English. In so doing, it highlights the necessity for an education that is more broadly based by its recognition and support of the multiplicity of linguistic realities of all students.

Yet, Resource poverty is a major constraint to bilingual education in rural areas. This research suggests that affordable teaching aids such as Wolof-English dictionaries, bilingual storybooks, and communication design can be produced

for schoolchildren. The use of local resources (e.g., to produce visual aids and NGOs to provide funding) can help to overcome these barriers. As illustrated by UNESCO's (2021) report, resource expertise in low resource environments is a critical factor for promoting inclusive education.

2.4 Teacher Perceptions of L1 Use

Three studies found that teachers' beliefs that the L1 was useful in the English language classroom for young learners were important. For example, Tiwari (2024) investigated the importance of L1 as a means of connecting previous knowledge with new L2 content, increasing vocabulary knowledge, and explaining difficult concepts from the perspectives of Nepali teachers. Also, Motbaynor (2024) found that the teachers showed support for the use of L1, however contextual factors would affect when and how this use of L1 was employed. Discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and classroom practice are common. Yigzaw and Beshir (2018) revealed that in the Ethiopian setting L1 practice exceeded L1 theory. But despite teachers' belief that Amharic and English in the classroom were synchronic and co-equal, 80 percent of elementary school teachers agreed that Amharic should be used in English classrooms, and classroom observations indicated that teachers voiced Amharic more than was appropriate. This suggests a trend whereby teachers agree that L1 can be beneficial in teaching, but struggle to negotiate when. Borg (2003) highlights the significance of teacher cognition, exploring the way in which teachers' beliefs affect pedagogical activity in the classroom.

Taşçı and Aksu Ataç (2020) also supported that the use of L1 by teachers was frequently employed in their teachings, especially in the lower classes. However, certain research show that teachers' beliefs do not necessarily match their practices. Teachers have mixed feelings about using L1 in L2 classrooms, as has been indicated in other researches. Widia Nanda et al. next higher academic teachers were three Indonesian high school teachers who were interviewed to see their perception of the use of L1 in English instruction. According to the study, teachers' attitudes to L1 use were mixed. Usage of L1 As a dominant trend, several teachers refrained from using L1, while others made limited strategic use of it for designated purposes. This implies that the use of L1 in English classes may not be a pedagogically agreed-upon issue among teachers. Alfi (2023) found that teachers in Thailand also considered it important to take students' needs into account when making decision on whether or not to use L1 in the class. They also emphasized the need to balance L1 use and English exposure. Insight into the extent to which Gambian teachers perceive Wolof integration as possible and appropriate could be of value.

2.5 Previous Studies

A few earlier studies have an interest in translanguaging and L1 use. Translanguaging, pedagogical practice that employs the full repertoire of Students languages (Garin, 2013; 2016) is a crucial strategy in multilingual learning.

García and Wei (2014) describe translanguaging as the act in which bilingual students use their languages flexibly to construct meaning from their

learning experiences. This mode of instruction correlates closely with the integration of Wolof into English instruction, students switching between languages to facilitate a fuller understanding and sense of involvement.

Blackledge (2010) stated that studies have shown that translanguaging and teaching in parallel languages leads to cognitive flexibility, improved understanding of subject matter, and proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing for languages in both languages. An example is provided in the UK where students were able to access challenging content between L1 and L2 in a British classroom context.

Correspondingly, Canagarajah (2011) maintains that translanguaging serves to strengthen students as it allows recognition of their language identities and gaps in language in educational contexts. These findings provide evidence in favor of Wolof-English translanguaging as potentially beneficial to the promotion of English as a second language in the Gambian primary school system.

García and Li Wei (2018) underscore the role of teacher agency in designing such translanguaging spaces, in which students are motivated to employ their linguistic repertoires. In The Gambia, teachers who are trained in the use of translanguaging techniques are able to draw upon the Wolof language for scaffolding as they teach English, which is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, that emphasizes the importance of cultural tools in learning.”

Khateb (2013) in his research demonstrated that by involving L1, that is Wolof, an atmosphere of validation and inclusiveness can be created for the

students. This is highly consistent with the purpose of the present study, which is to develop a culturally responsive teaching practice that respects and recognizes student identities. Likewise, Kramsch and Thorne (2002) also describe the relationship between language and culture values, and the need for inclusion of Wolof in order to close language and cultural gaps. Their words affirm the aim of the present study of developing a culture-sensitive learning context, in which the cultural experiences of the students are acknowledged and appreciated.

Garcia (2009) offers an extensive description of bilingual programs around the world, which is useful for placing local practice into a globalised research overview. Garcia's examination of problems and success stories both supports the possibility and merits of Wolof-English instruction in The Gambia, and thus serves to provide a solid rationale for the research design.

Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar's (2010) position is that learning in mother tongue tends to achieve positive literacy results for disadvantaging students; and the use of Wolof might promote equity as well as increase academic performance of students in The Gambia.

Sanneh (2015) analyses language education policy in The Gambia, and the ways in which English and local languages are used in the curriculum. His results demonstrate that the inclusion of Wolof is consistent with the evolving policy context in the country and attitudes that increasingly value the use of local languages. Tollefson (2002) addresses language policy in a more generalized framework and argues for fair language policies in support of students' L1 in

schools. These are the policy implications for Wolof integration putting education inclusivity and equity at the forefront.

A cross-cultural view is taken by Abdellah and Chawki (2014) who studied the impact of L1 (Arabic) on Moroccan EFL classrooms, in which it was found to be a key factor in comprehension and student engagement. This case draws comparisons with Wolof and proposes that an amount of L1 use could be healthy for Gambian students learning of English.

Together, the collected studies provide an insight into the multi-dimensional gain obtained from incorporating Wolof in the teaching of English in the Gambia. Existing studies all highlight the merits of L2 (L1-L2) when teaching L2, from the theoretical perspectives to the practical cases. Nevertheless, the research on long-term effects on academic achievements and development of language transgression has longer contrasts of longitudinal influences of L1 in various educational circumstances. The purpose of the present study is to fill this gap by investigating context appropriate mechanisms for the facilitation of the integration of Wolof in the English classroom as a way of enhancing the education standard of Gambian students.

The literature review will discuss the importance of L1 in education and in a variety of contexts, with my research focus on the use of L1 (Wolof) in the teaching of English at the primary level in The Gambia. One such case includes Tiwari's (2024) investigation on Nepali in the classroom, and Mbow's (2001) analysis of the language situation in Senegal, both of which provide valuable insights that have shared concerns of my study. These works highlight the

efficacy of L1 as a bridge for the acquisition of other languages and provide cross-cultural perspectives that are relevant to the situation in The Gambia. But my study is distinctive in that it focused on the particular role of Wolof, a language that encapsulates the culture of the people of The Gambia, in the acquisition of English.

While some of the previous studies have generally taken up the idea of L1 use, none of them has really explored how the Wolof L1 is incorporated in the curriculum with regard to English. This emphasis on Wolof adds to the conversation on bilingual education and highlights its unique cultural and linguistic context in The Gambia.

2.6 Research Novelty

The current study is unique compared to previous studies in that it is specifically dedicated to the integration of Wolof in the teaching of English as a second language among a unique population of first through third grade students at Ngayen Sanjal, The Gambia. Although prior research has proven the advantages of bilingualism and the contribution of the first language to early stages of second language acquisition, little research has focused on preschool where children develop early language skills. By focusing on Wolof as a mediational means for young children, this study contributes to encompassing understanding of how local linguistic and cultural conditions may be used to maximize the learning potential of local/global classrooms. The focused exploration of the potential role of Wolof in bridging understanding and facilitating brain development of young learners meaningfully complements what

is known about early childhood education, and offers implementation-based suggestions on addressing the unique educational challenges facing Gambian children during their most critical early life, education and learning period. Emphasis on early childhood education suggests that Wolof can be vital in enhancing the acquisition of both language and other academic skills.

