

DECOLONIZING UPPER PRIMARY CLASSROOM SPACES: SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE AND LITERACY INTERVENTIONS IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: A SCOPING REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews successful pedagogical interventions in teaching literacy in languages of teaching and learning in the upper primary grades in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and explores how researchers and teachers decolonized classroom spaces to ensure student achievement of learning outcomes. Themes emerging from the analysis of data are biliteracy interventions, interventions in official and national languages, teacher professional development, and ecological interventions. Results of the review indicate that researchers decolonized classroom spaces by using student linguistic repertoires, evidence-based pedagogical strategies student cultural capital and engaging families and communities. The review also reveals that more research needs to be conducted on teaching and learning in upper primary grades. The linguistic diversity of LMICs provides rich contexts for more research in bilingual education and L2 acquisition which could be useful worldwide as stakeholders in the education process explore the best ways to improve learning outcomes in schools.

Keywords: Bilingual education; language of instruction; literacy; content area literacy; reading comprehension; translanguaging; upper primary; interventions; learning outcomes; academic achievement

Global Meaning Making

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For the past 20 years, the goal of stakeholders in international education development has been to ensure children, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), have access to inclusive quality education in effective learning environments (Sustainable Development Goal 4, 2019). This goal has led LMICs, in collaboration with major world donor organizations, to work on ways to expand and improve basic education. Accordingly, children's access to education has increased, and 91% of children in LMICs are attending school; however, the quality of education these children receive continues to need much improvement (Sustainable Development Goal 4, 2019). Stakeholders in international development education call attention to a learning crisis in education in LMICs evident in the fact that children are in school but not learning. Consequently, these children are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy at the end of primary school education (World Bank, 2018). To ensure learning gains made in the early primary grades can be strengthened, built upon and sustained throughout the primary years, leading to high success rates at the end of primary, it is imperative that educational practitioners focus their efforts on strengthening the quality of education in the upper primary grades. The purpose of this study is to conduct a scoping review of the research literature on successful pedagogical interventions in language, literacy, and content area literacy in upper primary grades in LMICs and explore the ways in which researchers engage in global meaning making by decolonizing classroom spaces through research, teaching, and learning that address learner ways of knowing, and engage learners in ways that support their cultures and languages in the teaching of literacy, acknowledging their cultural and linguistic capital (Tierney, 2018).

As a result of the emphasis on improving the quality of education in the early grades, there is a preponderance of research in international education development in LMICs which provide evidence of best practices, successful interventions as well as the challenges of implementing these interventions, particularly in early grade reading (Pflepsen, Benson, Chabbott, & van Ginkel, 2015; Piper, 2017; Piper, Jepkemei, & Kibukho, 2015; Trudell & Adger, 2015). Additionally, there are several studies which use various research synthesis tools to examine interventions in early grades (Conn, 2017; Evans & Popova, 2015; Kim, Lee, & Zuilkowski, 2020; McEwan, 2015; Murnane & Ganiman, 2014; Nag, Snowling, & Asfaha, 2016). In contrast, a thorough review of the research literature reveals a dearth of studies on successful interventions in language, literacy, and content area literacy in LMICs. Furthermore, there are scant studies that use research synthesis tools which explore successful practices in teaching and learning in upper primary grades in LMICs. The following section of this scoping review provides the background, context, and rationale for the importance of exploring this topic and how researchers, teachers, and communities can collaborate to decolonize spaces in classrooms (Tierney, 2018).

Background, Context, and Rationale

The multilingual nature of LMICs contributes to the rich social, cultural, and economic fabric of these nations, but also renders the implementation of language and literacy education a complex issue. The use of mother tongue (MT) languages or children's languages of nurture is viewed by some stakeholders in international development as critically significant in the education of children in early primary grades and overall development of LMICs (Bühmann & Trudell, 2008; Heugh, 2009). Although there has been some success in implementing MT education in the early grades in LMICs (The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2016), it is nevertheless an enormous undertaking, fraught with various challenges. Implementing MT education is complicated due to a variety of factors such as parental and community resistance, linguistic diversity in homes and classrooms, the lack of teacher proficiency in MT languages, the absence of orthographies in some MT languages, and the absence of quality teaching and learning materials in MT languages (Altinyelken, Moorcroft, & Van Der Draai, 2014; Nyaga & Anthonissen, 2012; Piper, 2017; Tupas, 2015).

In the upper primary grades, for various political and economic factors, many LMICs opt to use early-exit models of language education which require children to transition from instruction in MT languages to the use of international languages such as English, French, and Portuguese as languages of teaching and learning starting from grades three or four (Erling, Adinolfi, & Hultgren, 2017; Heugh, 2009). In these countries, international languages such as English are official languages used in government and higher education; therefore, proficiency in these languages is viewed by society as prestigious and critically important for social and economic mobility (Altinyelken et al., 2014; Roy-Campbell, 2015). Additionally, due to the goals of national and social cohesion, and the avoidance of ethnic divisions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, some country leaders found it politically expedient to select these former colonial languages as official languages because they were perceived as neutral (Alidou, 2003). Moreover, these leaders also regarded the new official languages as languages of wider communication and a means of communicating internationally (p. 202). Furthermore, many languages in LMICs do not have the academic language, that is, the scientific, technological, and mathematical vocabulary necessary for teaching in higher grades (Alidou, 2003; Essien, 2018). Several scholars of international education development are frequently critical of the global ascendancy of languages like English, viewing this phenomenon as reinforcing inequities in education, resulting in elite closure, where the elite in countries maintain and perpetuate their power and privilege through language choice and policies. This can lead to the marginalization of MT or local languages (Brock-Utne, 2015; Kamwangamalu, 2016a; Pennycook, 2017; Roy-Campbell, 2019; Rubdy, 2015; Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008).

However, government leaders, parents, and communities in LMICs frequently prefer the international and/or official languages to be the language of teaching and learning (LoTL) in schools starting from the early grades (Ansre & Klu,

2017; Bronteng, Berson, & Berson, 2019; Kamwangamalu, 2016b); Kiramba, 2018; Waithaka, 2017). For parents, this is crucial because high-stakes national and/or regional examinations taken at the end of primary are in the international LoTL. Success in these examinations determines future educational progress and careers of students.

For the purposes of this review, LMICs are countries which are classified as such by the World Bank (2019–2020) and upper primary grades are grades four through to the end of primary, which may be grades six or seven depending on country contexts. Children in these grades are ideally ages eight or nine to 11 or 12 years old, bearing in mind that grade repetition may result in students in these grades being older (Sunny, Elze, Chichana, Gondwe, Crampin, Munkhondya, & Glynn, 2017; Zuilkowski, Jukes, & Dubeck, 2016). Mother tongue, first language (L1), or language of nurture is defined as the language the children speak the most at home. The language of teaching and learning (LoTL) is the language of instruction in schools; these languages may be international as in former colonial languages or national and/or official, as in the case of Kiswahili. Literacy is defined as “a continuum of language skills including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, visually representing, and critical thinking (of texts), applied in a social context to enable a person to function effectively in his or her group and community” (Cecil, Gipe, & Marcy, 2017, p. 5). Content area literacy is defined as the application of the aforementioned skills to learn disciplines such as science and mathematics (Chauvin & Theodore, 2015; Fisher & Ivey, 2005).

Instruction in Upper Primary Grades

The transition to fourth grade can frequently be challenging for learners worldwide because the curriculum becomes more rigorous from this grade with students expected to strengthen their literacy and language skills and apply them to learning content area subjects (August & Shanahan, 2017; Lesaux, Kieffer, Kelley, & Harris, 2014). In the Global North or West, research on teaching language and literacy to English learners in the upper primary grades indicates effective instruction consists of the use of print-rich environments, instructional scaffolds, explicit teaching of academic vocabulary, the integration of oral language, reading and writing, frequent and structured opportunities to read, write, and interact with peers, and teaching targeted skills using small-group interventions (August & Shanahan, 2017; Baker et al., 2014; Cecil et al., 2017; Lesaux, 2012; Lesaux et al., 2014; Percy, Artzi, Silverman, & Martin-Beltrán, 2015; Torgesen et al., 2017). There is however a dearth of research literature on effective instructional strategies in the LoTL in LMICs. In addition to these instructional approaches, current research in bilingual pedagogies in the Global North advocates the use of bilingual approaches for successful achievement of learning outcomes for language learners. These bilingual approaches can be used with the goal of scaffolding learning of the LoTL or developing student biliteracy. Pedagogical approaches described by studies from the Global North and LMICs include

structured systematic code-switching, which entails teachers and learners orally alternating the use of first (L1) and second or additional languages (L2); and translanguaging pedagogy which involves using “both or all languages in a dynamic and functionally integrated manner to organize and mediate understanding, speaking, literacy and learning” (Creese & Blackledge, 2015, p. 26; Gandara & Randall, 2019; Guzula, McKinney, & Tyler, 2016; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012).

Transitioning to Upper Primary in LMICs

Falling behind academically, particularly in grade four renders it difficult for learners to catch up without remediation (Allington, 2013; Miciak et al., 2018; Pretorius, 2014). Fourth grade becomes even more challenging for learners in LMICs who must transition to learning in an official and/or international LoTL. Additionally, the research literature suggests that large numbers of fourth grade students in LMICs have not achieved the levels of language proficiency and academic language needed to learn content area subjects and that teachers themselves very often are not proficient in the international LoTL (Clegg & Afitska, 2011; Erling et al., 2017; Tshuma & Le Cordeur, 2017; Ulla, 2017). Consequently, evidence from research in the upper primary grades in LMICs indicates that language proficiency is a major factor in low levels of achievement of learning outcomes at the end of primary, and in student performance in international assessments like the PIRLS (Erling, Adolfini, & Hultgren, 2017; Howie & Chamberlain, 2017; Pinnock, 2009).

In addition to academic challenges, issues such as gender, student age, conflict, and crisis are all reasons why learners in LMICs fall behind and drop out of school in the first two years of upper primary school (Zuilkowski et al., 2016). The complexity of teaching and learning in upper primary grades in LMICs also point toward the need to include holistic and ecological strategies which will take into account the social, economic, and cultural contexts of these children and their well-being, especially children who are entering adolescence and live in low-income environments and fragile contexts (Biraimah, 2016; González, Moll, & Amanti 2006; Jukes et al., 2018; Sinclair, 2018; Salzburg Statement, 2018, p. 1).

This scoping study, which maps successful interventions in language, literacy, and content area literacy, is vital because literacy, in the broadest sense of the word, is the cornerstone of all communication. Without these skills, no matter the LoTL, upper primary grade students will struggle as they progress through and beyond the primary grades. Furthermore, exploring successful interventions in the upper primary grades in LMICs through a scoping review will help inform stakeholders in international education of possible pedagogical interventions and strategies which decolonize classrooms. Strategies which use student linguistic repertoires, social and cultural capital, could help improve the quality of teaching and learning in these grades and sustain learning across basic education. The

review may also provide education practitioners in LMICs with the research-based evidence needed to influence decisions about policy, curriculum, teacher preparation, and professional development. The next section of this review describes the scoping review methodology and framework used for this study.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Analysis

A scoping review of the existing research literature is best suited for this study which explores pedagogical interventions in literacy and language in upper primary grades in LMICs and how researchers and teachers decolonize classroom spaces to ensure student achievement of learning outcomes. Scoping reviews are a type of research synthesis tool which serve to map the research on a topic or field which has not yet been comprehensively reviewed (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), by exploring "the field in terms of its nature, features and volume" (Peters, Godfrey, McInerney, Parker, & Soares, 2015, p. 141). Accordingly, scoping reviews map studies by providing an overview of the existing evidence base by identifying the gaps in the body of research as well as summarizing and disseminating the available evidence. The purpose of scoping reviews is to inform practice in the field, regardless of the quality of the studies (Peters et al., 2015, p. 141). In this regard, scoping reviews are different from systematic reviews which synthesize and assess the quality of research studies as well as aggregate study findings. This scoping review adheres to Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Peters et al.'s (2015) methodological framework for conducting systematic scoping studies. The five parts of this framework are (i) identifying the research question, (ii) identifying relevant studies, (iii) selection of studies, (iv) charting or mapping the data, (v) summarizing and reporting the results.

To explore the breadth of literacy and language interventions in upper primary grades in LMIC, and examine how researchers and teachers decolonized classroom spaces to help learners achieve learning outcomes, the exploratory research questions which guide this study are:

- What is the range and volume of successful pedagogical interventions in language, literacy, and content area literacy in research studies on upper primary grades in LMICs?
- What are the types and characteristics of these interventions?
- In what ways do the researchers and teachers decolonize classroom spaces in teaching literacy and language?

The following section describes the first step of the scoping review framework which is the process of identifying and selecting relevant studies.

Identifying and Selecting Relevant Studies

The research questions helped to identify the criteria for inclusion and exclusion so relevant studies were selected for this scoping review. Selected articles were all empirical studies which evaluated the impact of pedagogical interventions on students' academic achievement in literacy and language learning. This means the studies demonstrated observable, measurable improvement of learning outcomes using evidence-based teaching practices, with clear evidence of measures taken to ensure reliability and validity. Moreover, selected research studies needed to focus on upper primary grades from four through to six or seven which typically mark the end of the primary years. Research conducted with more than five children, and studies of multigrade upper primary classes, were included in the review. Articles were included if they incorporated literacy and language interventions in content areas such as science and mathematics. To review current literature in the field, selected studies were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and chapters from edited books published in English from 2009 to 2019. Excluded studies comprised those with interventions which did not demonstrate an improvement in learning outcomes. Similarly, articles which focused on upper-income countries as defined by the World Bank, private schools, early primary grades (1–3) and secondary or high school grades were excluded. Grey literature, such as reports, working papers, technical documents, and doctoral dissertations were also excluded from the review.

Terms used to conduct the search for research studies were *Bilingual education, translanguaging, English, English medium instruction (EMI), literacy, reading comprehension, language of instruction, content area literacy, language of teaching and learning*, combined with key words such as *learning outcomes, interventions, achievement, improvement, upper primary/elementary, foreign countries, developing countries or low- and middle-income countries, and improving literacy*. Research databases searched included African Journals Online, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SCOPUS, Springer Link, and Taylor & Francis Online. These key search terms generated a total of 794 references. The references lists of the studies were also searched, but added no new articles.

In the second phase of selection and identification, all abstracts of the studies were read. If the abstracts did not contain needed information to ascertain that it met the criteria, the article itself was retrieved and read. After reviewing the titles and abstracts, a full text screening was conducted on the remaining articles. A further number of irrelevant articles were eliminated leaving 18 articles which were selected for the review. The flow chart below (Fig. 1) illustrates the selection process. The next section describes the process of mapping the data.

Mapping the Data

Mapping the data consisted of sorting the 18 articles selected into country of origin, year of publication, participants and sample size, research methodology and design, type of intervention, languages used in the interventions, and outcome measures through qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Mapping the data facilitated the following descriptive overview, which provides a brief narrative of the selected studies.

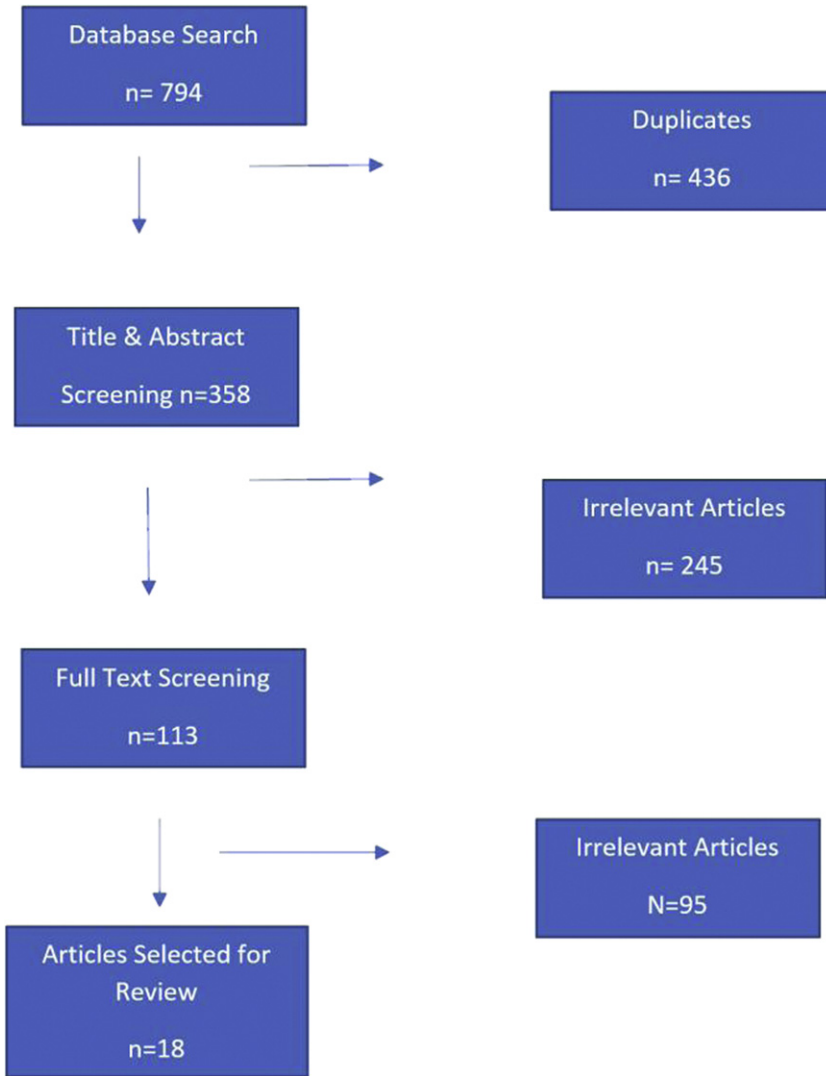


Fig. 1. Flow Chart of Article Selection Process.

Descriptive Overview

Eighteen studies met the noted criteria. The studies were conducted in seven LMICs. Two were book chapters and the rest were journal articles. Twelve of the 18 studies were conducted in South Africa, and one study was conducted in each of the following countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Indonesia, Jordan, Lesotho, the Philippines, and Rwanda. The largest number of studies ($n = 6$) were published in 2016, which indicates a growing interest in research in

this area. The 18 studies were published in 12 journals with the majority published in the journal *Perspectives in Education* ($n = 3$), followed by *Language and Education*, *Per Linguam*, and the *South African Journal of Education* with two each. The two chapters were published in the books *International Perspectives on Teaching English to Young Learners* and *Teaching and Learning Mathematics in Multilingual Classrooms* (Halai & Clarkson, 2016). The numbers of student participants ranged from five in one school classroom in a qualitative study in South Africa (Malebese, 2019) to 5, 510 in 100 schools in the random controlled trial (RCT) conducted in the Philippines (Abeberese, Kumler, & Linden, 2014) (See Table 1).

The duration of the studies ranged from one week (Kerfoot & Van Heerden, 2015) to three years (Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Pretorius & Currin, 2010). Peters et al. (2015) note that scoping reviews may include how research has been conducted and recommend “a variety of study designs” to give the reviews greater breadth (p. 142); therefore, the studies in this review comprise a variety of qualitative and quantitative research designs. The following section presents a substantive overview of the scoping review, which discusses the themes which emerged from the content analysis.

FINDINGS

Using content analysis, the selected studies were coded and analyzed for emerging patterns and themes according to the types of pedagogical interventions. The description and discussion of the themes include types of interventions and the languages used to conduct the intervention (see Table 2). The themes are biliteracy interventions, interventions in official/national languages, teacher professional development, and ecological interventions. Some studies were broad in scope and therefore categorized under more than one theme. The next section of this study explores these themes which emerged from the data analysis.

Bilingual Interventions

Articles categorized under the theme of bilingual interventions are those which use interventions with the goal of student biliteracy in their MT and the LoTL. All studies under this theme ($n = 5$) were selected based on having conducted pre- and posttests in MT languages and the LoTL, which in these studies is English, to determine student learning outcomes in both languages (Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Makalela, 2015; Mgijima & Makalela, 2016; Pretorius & Currin, 2010; Webb & Mayaba, 2010). The review of studies under this theme revealed student baseline scores in pretests in these studies in grade levels four (Makalela, 2015; Mgijima & Makalela, 2016) and seven (Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Pretorius & Currin, 2010) were below grade level in both their MT and English, necessitating the inclusion of teaching basic reading skills students should have already have acquired. The types of bilingual interventions comprise translanguaging strategies and fostering a reading environment in schools.

Table 1. Descriptive Findings.

Author	Year	Journal/Edited Book	Country	Language	Participants
Abeberese, Kumler, and Linden	2011	Journal of Human Resources	Philippines	Filipino, English	<i>n</i> = 5,510 4th grade students
Aber, Torrente, Starkey, et al.	2017	Journal of Research in Educational Effectiveness	DRC	French	<i>n</i> = 4,465 2nd–4th grade students
Alhabahba, Pandian, and Mahfoodh	2016	Issues in Educational Research	Jordan	English	<i>n</i> = 66 5th grade girls
Botes and Miji	2010	South African Journal of Education	South Africa	English, Afrikaans, IsiZulu, Setswana, Sesotho	<i>n</i> = 2, 348 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students
Currin and Pretorius	2010	Reading & Writing: Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa	South Africa	Northern Sotho, English	<i>n</i> = 227 7th grade students
Diem	2011	TEFLIN Journal	Indonesia	English	<i>n</i> = 200 5th grade students
Kerfoot and Van Hardeen	2015	Language and Education	South Africa	English, MT	<i>n</i> = 72 6th grade students
Makalela	2014	International Perspectives on Teaching English to Young Learners	South Africa	English, Sepedi	<i>n</i> = 60 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students
Makalela	2015	Per Linguam	South Africa	English, Sepedi	<i>n</i> = 60 6th grade students
Malebese	2019	South African Journal of Education	South Africa	English	<i>n</i> = 6 4th grade students
Mgijima and Makalela	2016	Perspectives in Education	South Africa	isiXhosa & English	<i>n</i> = 61 4th grade students
Milligan, Clegg, and Tikly	2016	Comparative Education	Rwanda	English and Kirawanda	<i>n</i> = 1,241 4th grade students
Pretorius	2014	Perspectives in Education	South Africa	English	<i>n</i> = 44 4th grade students
Pretorius and Currin	2010	International Journal of Educational Development	South Africa	Northern Sotho, English	<i>n</i> = 227 7th grade students
van Staden	2011	Perspectives in Education	South Africa	English	<i>n</i> = 288 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students.

Table 1. (Continued)

Author	Year	Journal/Edited Book	Country	Language	Participants
van Staden	2016	Per Linguam	Lesotho	English	$n = 72$ 4th grade students
Webb and Mayaba	2010	African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education	South Africa	English, isiXhosa	$n = ?$ 6th and 7th grade students
Webb and Webb	2016	Teaching and Learning Mathematics in Multilingual Countries	South Africa		$n = 337$ 7th grade students

Translanguaging. Two studies described how researchers and teachers decolonized classroom spaces using translanguaging interventions which consisted of the teaching of targeted literacy skills in student MT and English to improve the biliteracy of grade four students. These researchers found that using translanguaging helped learners not only to improve their reading comprehension, but also made language learning a positive experience because it supported learners in making “sense of the world” and “enhancing epistemic access to learners and students” by tapping into student cultural capital (Makalela, 2015, p. 2). Examples of these skills teachers and researchers used to support biliteracy include decoding, oral reading, explicit comparisons of phonemes, syllable structures, consonant clusters and spelling in both languages. Additional pedagogical interventions included lessons in writing stories, summarizing, and reading comprehension strategies (Makalela, 2015; Mgiijima & Makalela, 2016).

Fostering reading environments. Studies using this intervention ($n = 3$) had fostering reading environments in classrooms and schools as a critical component of their interventions. The studies described the development of print-rich environments through teacher and/or student creation of bilingual literacy corners in classrooms (Makalela, 2015; Pretorius & Currin, 2010; Currin & Pretorius, 2010) with independently published books as well as teacher-, student-, and parent-created texts (Makalela, 2015). Replenishing school libraries in MT languages and English were also another method of fostering a whole school reading environment (Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Pretorius & Currin, 2010). The researchers point out that using these strategies, paying particular attention to students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds to cultivate reading and reading motivation also led to improvements in student reading in both languages. The following section of this scoping review discusses the theme of interventions in official or national languages.

Table 2. Selection of Interventions and Outcomes.

Intervention	Duration	Outcome Measures	Results
Systematic Functional Linguistics. (genre-based Pedagogy)	One week 10 hours	Writing	Learners made substantial gains in organization, terminology, and key linguistic features.
Read -a-Thon	32 days	Reading, motivation	Reading test scores and reading ability increased. Propensity to read in and out of school increased but declined after read-a-thon.
Translanguaging	8 weeks	Bilingual vocabulary contrast, silent reading in first language (L1) and second language (L2), oral reading proficiency (L1 & L2). Writing and print-rich environment in L1 and L2.	Production of blended bilingual texts. Creation of multilingual reading corners and improved reading comprehension gains in L1 and L2.
Concept-oriented Reading instruction	16 weeks	Reading comprehension, Motivation, metacognition	Increased scores in reading comprehension, intrinsic motivation, and metacognition.
Print-rich environments, Cultural responsiveness (parent engagement), contrastive literacy	Three months	Reading Skills: word recognition, lexical discrimination	Statistically significant improvement in word recognition and lexical discrimination.
Language-supportive textbooks and pedagogy	Four months	Comprehension, vocabulary	Improved learning outcomes in comprehension, and vocabulary in math, science, and social studies.
Exploratory Talk	Nine months	Mathematical Reasoning	Increased scores in mathematical reasoning and numeracy skills.
Teacher materials: Learning to Read in a healing Classroom, Learning Math in a healing Classroom.	One academic year	Reading (EGRA), Mathematics (EGMA)	Marginally significant improvement in geometry but not in addition/subtraction. Marginally significant impact on reading.
Teacher materials: learner Companion	Nine months	Mathematics	Mathematics scores for the treatment group improved.
Instructional Model: literature, Literacy, and Library (3-Ls)	n/a	Literacy, Reading habits	Informational Text structure and literature circles contributed to improved reading habits, but students still reading below grade level.

Interventions in Official/National Languages

The goal of studies in this theme was to improve student achievement in official or national languages. There are two subthemes within the theme of the use of official or national languages as interventions. These are interventions which used student MT to scaffold teaching and learning in the official or national LoTL, and studies which used the official/national LoTL only, with no use of MT languages. Unlike the pretests conducted for bilingual interventions, assessments conducted in the latter category were only in the official or national LoTL.

Mother tongue languages as a scaffold. Interventions in six studies included a range of oral language, reading, and writing strategies which facilitated the use of student MT languages as scaffolds to learning English, or French and content area subjects (Botes & Mji, 2010; Kerfoot & Van Heerden, 2015; Makalela, 2014; Milligan, Clegg, & Tikly, 2016; Van Staden, 2016; Webb & Webb, 2016). These studies described oral language strategies which encouraged students to speak in their MT as needed, to express themselves and demonstrate their understanding. Examples of oral language strategies included aiding students in developing metalinguistic awareness of sounds and phonological systems, student use of MT and the LoTL during small group activities and discussions, Socratic dialogue, and code-switching by teachers and students (Botes & Mji, 2010; Kerfoot & Van Heerden, 2015; Makalela, 2014; Milligan et al., 2016; Webb & Webb, 2016). In these studies, the use of oral language in MT and the LoTL was considered an important feature of the interventions, which contributed to the improvement in student learning outcomes.

Reading and writing interventions described included use of student MT to support vocabulary development, spelling, reading comprehension, and writing informational texts (Kerfoot & Van Heerden, 2015; Makalela, 2014; Van Staden, 2016; Webb & Mayaba, 2010). Similar to the bilingual interventions, these studies also revealed learners had to be taught basic reading skills to bring them up to grade level.

Three studies focused on the use of MT in content area literacy interventions for mathematics, science, and social studies (Botes & Mji, 2010; Milligan et al., 2016; Webb & Webb, 2016). In addition to the oral use of MT languages, these three studies also emphasized the importance of developing and using language supportive teaching and learning materials to support student learning in the content areas. Language supportive resources are materials which incorporate visuals, glossaries, and accessible vocabulary. These materials were an integral part of the interventions, and researchers emphasized the crucial role of these resources in improving student learning outcomes. Examples of these teaching and learning materials include developing glossaries with mathematical terminology translated into five South African languages, big books in the LoTL, language-supportive textbooks, and mathematical reasoning cartoons (Botes & Mji, 2010; Milligan et al., 2016; Webb & Webb, 2016).

Official/national LoTL interventions. Under this theme, English and/or Filipino were the LoTL used in the interventions. Five articles used English-only interventions (Alhababha, Pandian, & Ali Mahfoodh, 2016; Diem, 2011;

Malebese, 2019; Pretorius, 2014; Van Staden, 2011). These studies used English as a second language strategies which targeted proficiency in oral language skills, reading, and writing. Pedagogical interventions used in these studies included: total physical response, listening comprehension activities, syntactic awareness lessons, cloze procedures, reading children's literature, using literature circles, concept-oriented reading instruction (CORI), which is a method which integrates the teaching of reading and science, and targeting basic reading skills such as decoding, and word recognition, and vocabulary building (Alhabahba, Pandian, & Mafoodh, 2016; Diem, 2011; Malebese, 2019; Pretorius, 2014; Van Staden, 2011). The intervention by Abeberese et al. (2014) was a read-a-thon supported by daily reading activities, silent reading, and student reading reflections conducted in Filipino. All five studies within this theme emphasized the importance of students having access to books, and of using a variety of instructional supports to improve student learning outcomes. These supports include scaffolding, explicit instruction, accessing student prior knowledge, a focus on integrating the four language domains of reading, listening, speaking and writing, and giving students plenty of opportunities to practice. These factors were seen as leading to improvements in student learning. Like studies discussed under the theme of bilingual interventions, these studies called attention to the fact that students were not performing at grade level in English or the national language of instruction.

Teacher Professional Development

Nine studies incorporated various kinds of teacher professional development to build the capacity of in-service teachers and provide teachers with guidance regarding their use of teaching and learning materials. Forms of teacher professional development described in the research studies included workshops (Abeberese et al., 2014; Alhabahba, Pandian, & Mafoodh, 2016; Milligan et al., 2016; Pretorius, 2014; Webb & Mayaba, 2010; Webb & Webb, 2016), coaching by researchers, specialist and/or support teachers (Makalela, 2015; Mgijima & Makalela, 2016; Pretorius, 2014; Van Staden, 2016), and teacher learning circles (Aber et al., 2017). Two studies (Diem, 2011; Van Staden, 2011) used graduate preservice teachers who attended training workshops to help them implement the interventions. Of significance in these studies is the fact that teachers participated in professional development which helped them tackle the challenge of teaching students lacking basic skills in reading. Furthermore, as stated above, for some interventions, teachers were taught how to use bilingual strategies to support the transition into the international LoTL, and strategies for teaching content. The studies demonstrate the challenges teachers in the upper primary grades have and the need to prepare quality teachers to plan and implement teaching and learning in these grades. Consequently, whether the intervention comprised one teacher or several hundred, the studies in the review noted the importance of teacher training and/or professional development as well as teachers' ability to effectively implement the interventions as a vital factor in achieving successful learning outcomes.

Ecological Interventions

Ecological interventions are interventions which consider the social and emotional well-being of students and factors outside of the classroom such as the whole school, family, and community which influence and can support student learning. [Currin and Pretorius \(2010\)](#) state that an ecological approach to literacy and language is one which is embedded in a system that includes “the family, the community and the broader culture (p. 24).” The ecological approach perceives literacy to be more than “a set of mechanical skills (p. 24)” and is important for all children, but especially for children who attend high-poverty schools in the poorer rural and/or urban areas of LMICs. [Currin and Pretorius \(2010\)](#) posit that ecological approaches to teaching and learning are also vital in the development of effective school systems which can and should lead to the improvement of student learning outcomes. As part of their interventions, three studies noted improvements in student learning outcomes because families and communities were engaged in supporting their children’s learning and strengthening home literacy environments ([Currin & Pretorius, 2010](#); [Makalela, 2014](#); [Pretorius & Currin, 2010](#)). Moreover, these studies point out that engaging family and community can lead schools to be culturally responsive because it can help schools to tap into communities’ ways of knowing. Through home visits and family literacy workshops, parents were encouraged to participate in activities such as reading to and/or listening to their children read, writing books for their children to read, and joining the school library.

Four studies incorporated interventions which emphasized the importance of student access to books. The interventions sought to promote student motivation to read, and improve their reading habits ([Abeberese et al., 2014](#); [Aber et al., 2017](#); [Alhabahba, Pandian, & Mafoodh, 2016](#); [Diem, 2011](#)). These studies demonstrated that access to books, for example, through a read-a-thon or literature circles, coupled with various pedagogical supports, led to an increase in student reading habits and motivation to read. One study focused on student social and emotional well-being and the development of student social and emotional learning skills ([Aber et al., 2017](#)). Teaching and learning materials which integrated social and emotional learning principles into the reading and mathematics curriculum were used as an intervention to improve math and reading skills. The researchers found that student reading and math improved but did not report on improvement of student social and emotional skills ([Aber et al., 2017](#)).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this scoping review was to explore the range, types, and characteristics of successful pedagogical interventions in literacy, language, and content area literacy in the upper primary grades of LMICs and how teachers and researchers used interventions which decolonized classroom spaces to ensure learner academic achievement. Selected articles were empirical studies which evaluated and reported measurable and observable improvements in student

learning outcomes. The 18 selected articles had varying research designs and levels of scale. They were categorized into the four themes of bilingual interventions, interventions in official or national languages, teacher professional development, and ecological interventions. All 18 studies were conducted in areas with high poverty rates, and many used various approaches, which included collaboration with teachers, families, and communities to address social inequities which led to low student achievement (Tierney, 2018). Most of the studies demonstrated global meaning-making by using pedagogical approaches which used student lived linguistic experiences, and “their cultural understandings and ways of knowing (Tierney, 2018, p. 1).” In doing so, the educational actors in these studies created spaces for students to use their cultural capital to make meaning (Tierney, 2018).

As indicated in the research literature, most of the studies reviewed revealed students were not reading at grade level in their MT nor did they have sufficient mastery of the LoTL (Clegg & Afitska, 2011; Erling, Adolfini, & Hultgren, 2017). Strengthening oral language and reading skills were considered as fundamental by all the studies whether they used bilingual, MT as a scaffold or ESL approaches. Authors of the studies in content area literacy also emphasized the critical role of using student linguistic repertoires to scaffold learning in the LoTL and providing students with bilingual teaching and learning materials. The review of these studies reveals the need for LMICS to move away from monolingual ideologies in language and literacy education toward heteroglossic or multilingual perspectives of language and literacy teaching and learning (Kiramba, 2018; Meier, 2017; Prada & Turnbull, 2018).

No matter the grade level of students, interventions in most studies used a variety of evidence-based strategies for teaching basic reading skills determined to be vital for the development of fluent readers, bilinguals, and English learners in the Global North (August & Shanahan, 2017; Baker et al., 2014; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Percy et al., 2015). Researchers found that strategies like the use of explicit instruction, targeted use of quality small-group instruction, translanguaging, and language-supportive teaching and learning materials were applicable and relevant for teaching and learning in LMICs and were key in supporting the improvement in student learning outcomes. Similar to approaches in early grades, other approaches and strategies from the Global North that researchers found to be relevant to literacy development included the development of print-rich environments, access to books, and reading volume (Allington, 2013; Lesaux, 2012; Percy et al., 2015). The studies also demonstrated that in the upper primary grades in LMICs, there is the need to ensure that textbooks and learning materials are culturally relevant, language supportive, and help scaffold language and content so students can successfully acquire the necessary academic language, knowledge, and skills needed in upper primary, through secondary school and beyond. While colonial languages hold a place of power and prestige in education systems in these countries, researchers and teachers in these studies decolonized classroom spaces by adapting and fusing ideas (Tierney, 2018) from the Global North with the sociocultural and sociolinguistic contexts of students to support their learning.

Students need trained, qualified teachers who are supported throughout their careers to implement quality education (Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor, & Westbrook, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Teaching quality is essential to the achievement of student learning outcomes in all levels of education, but it is imperative for upper primary teachers. These studies in the scoping review demonstrate that this group of teachers need to be well equipped to handle the critical transition to upper primary, be proficient in the LoTL, teach language, literacy, and content area subjects, and in addition, differentiate instruction such that children who are reading below grade level are supported to be successful.

Given the large number of LMICs, as well as the multilingual contexts of these countries, this scoping review revealed the dearth of studies on successful interventions in the upper primary grades in LMICs. However, this does also indicate that more studies are needed from LMICs in Latin and Central America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Northern Africa. More interventions in content area literacy are needed in LMICs particularly in countries where language policies require students to transition to international LoTL. The sample sizes of the studies were small. Only three studies had a sample size of over 1,000 participants. This indicates that there is a need for the smaller interventions to be scaled-up to determine how successful they might be. Additionally, more research is needed that focuses on the implementation of new projects by donor organizations in the upper primary grades that are conducted at scale. Another gap in the literature are studies on successful interventions in all four language skills, that is, listening, speaking, reading, and particularly writing, as well as the use of technology. This review also uncovered the dearth of literature regarding infusing social and emotional learning skills into teaching and learning, and how equipping students with these skills can contribute to student academic achievement (Salzburg Statement, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This scoping review provided an overview of successful pedagogical interventions in literacy, language, and content area literacy in upper primary grades in LMICs and how the success of these interventions were due in part to decolonizing classroom spaces through the use of student linguistic repertoires and funds of knowledge. The review reveals the need for education stakeholders in LMICs to rethink traditional ways of thinking about language teaching and learning and move toward integrating multilingual perspectives. Without a solid foundation in literacy and language, quality teaching which uses student lived linguistic experiences, the involvement of school communities, and teaching social and emotional learning skills, students, particularly those in low social and economic contexts, will find it a challenge to be successful in school at the upper primary level and beyond. The review makes evident the fact that there are a variety of successful interventions which could help improve student literacy and/or biliteracy in the multilingual contexts of LMICs. However, the paucity of

interventions in language and literacy in the upper primary grades which the scoping review revealed also demonstrates that it is imperative to conduct more studies on this topic. The linguistic diversity of LMIC provides rich contexts for exploring the acquisition of additional languages and biliteracy which could be useful worldwide, as stakeholders in international education development explore the best ways to improve learning outcomes in schools.

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIALS

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