

Challenging Monolingual Ideology Through a Critical Lens: Multilingual Literacy as a Key Element of Holistic Global Citizenship Education

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the importance of multilingual literacy in the 21st century and, specifically, how adult learners across the globe can develop multilingual literacy skills necessary for successful communication and global citizenship. The paper includes a theoretical (research background, definitions, critical framework) and a practical (strategies and activities for developing multilingual literacy) component and should be useful to both researchers and practitioners interested in successful intercultural communication and the development of multilingual literacy.

Keywords: multilingual literacy, adult learner, global citizen, critical literacies advancement model

Globalization has had a significant impact on all areas of life, including education, increasing the need for continuous educational development. It has influenced educational sectors, educational goals, and educational topics. Sparked by this influence, researchers and practitioners have devoted much attention to how education happens in informal and non-formal settings (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2012), placing focus on non-traditional learners and life-long education, while educating learners for global citizenship (Shultz, 2007). In terms of goals, globalization has emphasized the need for understanding and practicing diversity, equity, and inclusion (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015) at all educational levels, in both teacher and student populations. To support these changes, developing critical literacy skills has also become elemental for global citizenship education.

The traditional and widely known definition of literacy refers to the ability to read and write. As society has evolved in light of globalization, multiple contexts within which we need to read and write, but also understand, analyze, and produce, have also emerged. Such contexts include digital and cyber spaces, visual spaces, and multicultural environments. These new contexts demand that we teach new literacies as a way of developing critically thinking global citizens (Robinson, 2020). Speaking of the need for developing new literacies, The New London Group (1966, p. 60) scholars posited that developing new literacies can foster “critical engagement” and help individuals to negotiate “the multiple linguistic and cultural differences.” In line with this, in this paper, I focus on why developing multilingual literacy is needed for adult learners as global citizens and how it is interconnected with other non-traditional literacy skills.

Although the focus of language literacy education, including multilingual literacy, has started to shift, current research is predominately centered in the field of linguistics and focused on early linguistic development (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Cross, 2011; Dagenais et al., 2006). The research on the development of specific non-traditional literacy skills in adult education settings is still scarce. To start bridging this gap, this paper includes a brief overview of the existing multilingual literacy literature while specifically focusing on adult language learning. I discuss

the importance of developing multilingual literacy from an anti-deficit perspective (Gorski, 2011), using Robinson's (2020) critical literacies advancement model (CLAM). Lastly, focusing on how educators can address adult learners' specific needs, I include practical strategies for developing multilingual literacy skills in adult education settings.

Background and Definitions

Due to multiple definitions of terms *literacy* and *multilingual*, the concept of multilingual literacy may be challenging to define. Considering that the focus of this paper is on developing multilingual literacy as a key element in global citizenship education (which should support social justice), the preferred definition of literacy is that offered by UNESCO (2003, p. 3), which defines it as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts." Such contexts, as stated earlier, are diverse, multicultural, and digital spaces that required a complex literacy skillset.

Expanding on UNESCO's (2003) definition of literacy, multilingual literacy would entail the same ability in multiple languages. Here, in line with the anti-deficit approach, multiple is used to mean more than one, thus including the concepts of bilingualism, trilingualism, and so on, and standing in direct contrast to monolingualism. Further, I agree with Aronin and Hufeisen (2009), who argue that multilingual literacy should not assume equal proficiency in each of the languages. I consider multilingualism as a collective skill (Nevárez-La Torre, 2014) with the focus on the overall linguistic repertoire rather than on each individual language. As adult educators advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, multilingual literacy should be reflected in supporting linguistic diversity, as opposed to achieving the native ideal (Holliday, 2006) in language learning and communication. This means that developing linguistic skills in multiple languages is more facilitative of intercultural communication in a globalized society than "native-like" proficiency.

Theoretical Approach

To frame my analysis and present a more holistic picture of adult literacy development, I used Robinson's (2020) critical literacies advancement model (CLAM). The purpose of the model is to provide a tool for understanding how developing multiple non-traditional literacies can help challenge dominant systems of power and privilege and help work toward a more equitable society (Robinson, 2020). As suggested by its title, the model is based on critical theory and critical literacy, which is, then, interconnected with multiple other categories of literacies and specific literacies within those categories. The CLAM encompasses five literacy categories, namely foundational literacies, sociocultural literacies, technological and informational literacies, psychosocial and environmental literacies, and social justice literacies (see Robinson, 2020 for more details about the specific literacies within each category). The key result of developing these non-traditional literacy skills lies in the practical skillset which helps achieve informed behaviors and actions (Robinson, 2020). The CLAM is, therefore, a complex, linear model for achieving social justice through the development of multiple literacy skills.

The CLAM is a useful model for framing this paper as it offers a holistic framework for understanding multilingual literacy in connection to other literacies in the model, as well as

subsequent behaviors and actions. Based on the CLAM, multilingual literacy is a Sociocultural Literacy, as are global, cultural, and intercultural, among others. Given the focus of the model on critiquing societal inequities stemming from issues of power, as well as its practical orientation, it clarifies how developing multilingual literacy can affect linguistic power and privilege. It is useful in understanding how multilingual literacy, along with other non-traditional literacy skills, can help critically literate individuals make better-informed decisions and, as global citizens, advocate for social justice.

Benefits of Multilingual Literacy

In line with the CLAM (Robinson, 2020), multilingual literacy has specifically emerged as a tool for challenging social inequities while increasing community engagement (Gurnah, 2001). This point is also supported by the idea that adult education cannot be detached from the society (Merriam et al., 2007). The development of multilingual literacy allows easier intercultural communication and understanding, as well as the development of cross-cultural partnerships.

Further, in supporting critical thinking, multilingual literacy serves as a tool for accessing information in multiple languages (Okech, 2002). This works in conjunction with the development of other non-traditional literacy skills needed in contemporary society (Robinson, 2020), such as digital and media literacies. More so, Aronin (2019) argued that accessing diverse social media platforms and engaging in other ways of virtual communication would not be possible without multilingual literacy, as the availability of resources depends on the language. Thus, while computer- and internet-mediated communication opens the door to information for around the globe, to use this medium of communication, one needs to develop literacies such as digital, information, cyber-security, multilingual, and so on.

Multilingual literacy has also been deemed important for cognitive and affective dimensions. Examining the effects of lifelong bilingualism with a sample of 184 patients, Bialystok et al. (2007) determined that bilingual literacy can maintain cognitive functioning and decrease risks of dementia. Similarly, a study with multilingual elderly patients in Canada found that multilingual literacy can delay “the diagnosis of Alzheimer disease by almost 5 years” (Chertkow et al., 2010, p. 118). These show connections between multilingual literacy and cognitive health. Further, in a study which included speakers of four languages, Keysar et al. (2012) found that using a foreign language in decision-making can reduce decision making biases. In this regard, multilingual literacy is also connected to emotional intelligence and literacy. Considering the importance of multilingual literacy for different areas of an adult’s life, learning how it can be developed and promoting it within the area of adult learning is vital.

Discussion and Implications for Adult Education

“[D]ominant ideology of monolingualism in multilingual societies raises questions of social justice, as such an ideology potentially excludes and discriminates against those who are either unable or unwilling to fit the monoglot standard” (Blackledge, 2000, p. 25). As adult learning is based on the premise that, by promoting critical thought, education should serve as a system for fighting injustice and inequity (Robinson & Stojanovic, in press), it should also provide an avenue for developing multilingual literacy by challenging dominant linguistic ideology. To

support this goal, this paper provides a list of sample activities that adult education practitioners may use in developing multilingual literacy and, parallelly, other Sociocultural Literacies (Robinson, 2020).

In facilitating adult multilingual literacy development, adult educators should bear in mind Knowles' (Knowles et al., 2014) principles of andragogy: internal motivation and self-directedness, using life experience and knowledge in learning, goal orientation, relevancy, practical nature of knowledge, and need for respect. With developing multilingual literacy, these tenets are highly interrelated; internal motivation will come from the relevancy of knowledge to life experiences and the ability to use personal experiences in learning; goal orientation will be supported by the importance of developing the skills for functioning in multicultural settings; and self-directedness will be developed as learners apply other non-traditional literacy skills for developing multilingual literacy.

To foster internal motivation, adult language educators should engage learners in sharing their personal experiences, which should, in turn, be used to develop and/or modify curricula. In formal settings, this may include an introductory class in which learners would discuss their routines, preferences, as well as hobbies. Learning about these would help the educator tailor course activities (inclusive of target vocabulary) to the learners' daily needs. Such activities would strengthen learner engagement and support the transfer of knowledge.

While intrinsic motivation is related to goal orientation, if we consider the goals set by the learners themselves, developing an understanding of the need for multilingual literacy in a globalized society through understanding diverse cultures and interculturality may support motivation and goal orientation, and promote learner engagement. The task of adult education in this regard would be to develop cross-curricular experiences for learners to engage in developing multilingual, cultural, intercultural, and equity literacies. Recognizing and valuing diverse individuals' experiences would support the development of a growth mindset, turning away from a monolingual perspective, and set multilingual literacy as a goal. A selection of activities and other resources to be used in cross-curricular settings is included in Table 1.

Lastly, it would be remiss not to mention multiple innovative language learning platforms and online tools designed specifically having in mind the needs of global citizens. Both formal and non-formal multilingual education may make use of social networking sites for engaging learners further. Popular language learning apps include the following:

- Duolingo, <https://www.duolingo.com/>
- Babbel, <https://www.babbel.com/>
- Memrise, <https://www.memrise.com/>
- FluentU, <https://www.fluentu.com/en/>
- Busuu, <https://www.busuu.com/>
- Rosetta Stone, <https://www.rosettastone.com/>

Note that this is not an extensive list as digital resources for developing multilingual skills continuously emerge. In addition to using digital apps for self-directed language learning, other online resources suitable for adult language learning include news articles and podcasts in the target language, as well as educational videos, such as TEDtalks.

Table 1. *A Selection of Resource for Developing Sociocultural Literacies*

Activity	Target literacy	More available information
British Council--Teaching English - A compilation of activities for adult English learners categorized by proficiency	Language literacy	https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/resources/adults/activities
John Corbett (2010) Intercultural Language Activities - A resource book with activities	Intercultural literacy Language literacy	https://www.cambridge.org/rs/cambridgeenglish/teacher-development/intercultural-language-activities
Cultural and intercultural literacy... What is it? - Activity available in four languages	Cultural literacy Intercultural literacy	https://www.digilanguages.ie/cultural-and-intercultural-literacy-what-is-it/#/roles?_k=xnkhag
UNESCO (2010) Education for Intercultural Understanding - Activities available on pp. 43-65	Cultural literacy Intercultural literacy Equity literacy	https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000189051

With a vast number of resources digitally available for developing multilingual literacy, it seems that the goal of developing a multilingual society should be easily achievable. However, considering that much is yet to be done to achieve this goal, adult educators have a vital role in promoting and supporting the development of multilingual literacy. This paper posits that, in doing so, a holistic approach, based on the critical literacies advancement model (Robinson, 2020) should be followed, with the goal of equipping individuals with relevant, critical thinking and global citizenship skills.

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