

Kosovar Teachers' Understanding of Literacy Education

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Abstract : Classrooms composed of students with varied linguistic repertoires, in combination with new technologies, have shifted what it means to be literate and how literacy is taught. At the same time, definitions of literacy matter greatly as they shape literacy education curricula, national literacy agendas, and pedagogical choices. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of New Literacy Studies and Critical Literacy, this research investigates how Kosovar teachers make sense of literacy. The study employed a qualitative research design involving classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis in a public school in the capital city of Kosovo, Prishtina. Data was collected from 5 Albanian language teachers. Classroom observations allowed for the documentation of how teachers applied literacy and language pedagogies to their teaching. Teacher interviews provided insights into teachers' understanding of literacy education and the rationale behind their chosen pedagogies. Document analysis, more specifically, lesson plan analysis, further explained teachers' content and instructional choices. The findings suggest that teachers understand literacy as standardized language instruction. They spoke to the challenges of language instruction in standardized Albanian in a Gheg (dialect) dominant society. Teachers' narratives described the tension that students face in navigating standardized language expectations while being unable to use their home (Gheg) literacies. Teachers' narratives were imbued with moral contestation as they explained the lack of an infrastructure that allows students to apply their home language and literacies in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers expressed their insistence on teaching "the words of the book." While this viewpoint on language and literacy is generally aligned with normative and colonial expectations on language, at the same time, it reveals teachers' intention to 'equip' their students with skills and practices that they will be tested on. Some of the teachers also articulated the need for a pedagogy of correction that the work of upholding the standardized language variation necessitates. Here, teachers also utilized discourses of neoliberalism when discussing students' English repertoire and its value in "opening doors" and advancement opportunities in life while further framing students' home literacies, the Gheg dialect, in a deficit manner. If educators and policymakers are to make informed decisions about efforts to improve schools, it is important to improve our knowledge of what informs teachers' pedagogical choices in teaching literacy. This study contributes to and expands the current knowledge base on teachers' understanding of literacy education and their role in shaping literacy education. As schools continue to navigate (growing) diverse forms of literacy, this study highlights the importance of equipping educators with the knowledge and tools to apply literacy pedagogies that reflect the ever-shifting definitions of literacy education.

Keywords : literacy education, standardized language, critical narrative analysis, literacy teaching

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