



## Language in Education in Uganda: The policy, the actors and the practices. A case of the Urban District of Kampala.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper, "Language in Education in Uganda: The policy, the actors and the practices, a case study of the Urban District of Kampala", sought to explore how a monoglot policy is implemented in a multilingual setting within an urban district. The paper discusses the policy, gives views of some of the actors towards the implementation of the policy of English as the medium of instruction (Moi) in primary schools and the actual practices in the classrooms. A case study approach to understanding the current classroom practices was undertaken. It was concluded that the actual practices in the classrooms where, teachers and learners are some of the actors, do not rhyme with the policy.

### KEYWORDS

Uganda, Urban, Multilingualism, Translanguaging, the actors, the practices.

### 1. Background

Uganda is a multilingual nation like many African countries. The language in education policy in Uganda is formulated in terms of a monoglot notion. In rural primary schools the medium of instruction (Moi) is the relevant local language for the first four years of education. After the four years, there is transition to English as a Moi. On the other hand in urban areas, the language policy, recommends English throughout the primary cycle due to the multiplicity of languages in those areas. In all cases the policy targets English as a Moi and language of examination. This hegemony of English relates to a complex range of circumstances including; the country's colonial heritage, the value attached to regional and local languages within public domains and the power of English within the interactive global issues. Some actors treat multilingualism in Uganda as a new linguistic dispensation; on the rise with deep and broad effects, developing within the context of a new reality of globalization and an inherent element of human society that is necessary to the functioning of major components of the social structure (Aronin & Singleton, 2008). The "traditional" actors on the other hand, promote English in Uganda because English is the key to good education, a language of examination which controls entry into successive levels of Uganda's highly competitive education system and the key master to job opportunities. All mentioned above represent English as a "linguistic capital" (Cameron, 2000: 192) in Uganda as Stroud and Wee (2007) affirm that choices of language are made to produce future possibilities.

Like in other countries in East Africa and the rest of the world, English, in Uganda is the language of science and technology, of job opportunities, of cross-border and international communications and business of the state. However, the practice of translanguaging in the district of Kampala, through the use of translation (Canagarajah, 2006) from and to English for purposes of explanation, classroom interaction, integration and elaboration in the teaching of English is somewhat noticeable in primary schools today. Possibly, this is done in recognition of the children's funds of knowledge that could be tapped through familiar languages as well as a useful way to lower their affective filter in order to facilitate learning.

Similar to many Africans, Ugandans are also mobile and do not remain in "tribal" or area land (Banda & Olayemi, 2010). Thus although ethnic groups are dominant in particular regions, they are also found in other areas. Moreover, in terms of language use, multilingualism rather than monolingualism is the dominant dispensation, as has been shown for other parts of Africa (Banda & Omondi, 2009). Since the colonial days English has been the language of socio-economic mobility. Even today, where it is more than fifty years after Uganda's independence, knowledge of English is still a prerequisite for employment in the public sector (Mpuga, 2003; Okech, 2006; Kirunda, 2005; 2006; Stroud, 2007). Thus, for one to advance in life has to have a working knowledge of English. However, Ugandans need to contend with at least three languages which are; English as the official language in Uganda, Kiswahili; an East African lingua franca as the second official language and one local language (Uganda Government, 1992). There are advantages to this multilingual dispensation (Aronin & Singleton, 2008). Prah (2010) elaborates that multilingualism does not create differences but rather facilitates integration on a multilingual and multicultural basis so long as principles of democracy, tolerance and cultural coexistence are accepted as guidelines. This paper, examines the extent to which the current Language in Education policy of Uganda caters for the multilingual status of Kampala District.

Over the past half-century the world over, the study of language policy and planning has grown rapidly, from arguments for one policy or another to the description of specific cases (Spolsky, 2004). This study is framed against the assumption that language diversity can be a resource in schools and society and not a problem as is the case for language policy makers in Uganda (Corson, 1999; Canagarajah, 2006). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which theory is often used by language policy analysts to explore the relationship between texts, discursive practices and events was used to explore policy documents in this study. Such analysts include: Fairclough (1995), Lamke (1995), Wodak (1999), Wodak, Cillia, Reisgl and Liebhart (1999) and Kovacs and Wodak (2003). At the same time, this study used the New Literacy Studies (NLS) framework. NLS views literacy as a situated social practice embedded in a cultural and ideological context (Street, 1984, 2001; Prinsloo & Baynam, 2008).

A common assumption is that communication within a nation is facilitated by citizens speaking and writing the same language. Here, information is brought to flow freely in all directions; from the government to the people throughout religions, social and economic institutions such as churches, political parties and nation-wide businesses and among the people themselves (Ricento, 2000, p. 28). However, in Uganda, where not all people can speak, read and write in the same language, communication is not so simple. The 35 million people are divided by more than 65 languages, in that; the average person knows about events outside his own group only through a foreign language English, French, Arabic or Kiswahili, the regional language.

In such a context there is need to establish how multilingualism in local languages can provide a web of resource for all citizens. The central part of Uganda, for example, where the capital city; Kampala is located, is magnet, attracting people to better education, employment, business and the like. Here almost all the languages mentioned above are used. The situation appears complex where children begin school from the city. That is when one can realize that the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) which says that 'English should be used as a medium of instruction in all educational programs from primary one' cannot be effective. In addition, all children have their right to learn in their own languages (Uganda Government, 1995, p. 29), so Uganda has respected that rule and the use of 09 out of 65 local languages is clearly stated in the policy through the use of the Thematic Curriculum which was introduced in 2007. However, there is need to critically look at the language policy of Uganda and explore how the language resources are used for education. This is partly done in this paper.

For this publication the language in education policy referred to is the one in the 1992 Uganda Government White Paper on Education. In Uganda's education system the Primary cycle runs from primary one to primary seven. The focus of this paper is on the use of English only as the MoI from Primary one throughout the primary school cycle in urban areas in Uganda

## 2. Methodology

Two authors in this paper are experienced researchers in the field of language education. The biggest portion is derived from a recent PhD study of one of the authors which used mixed research methods. This involved both qualitative and quantitative strategies of collecting and analyzing data. Data was collected in 2011/2012 from 19 primary schools in the urban district of Kampala. Data was analysed separately; qualitative data was analysed using two theories, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the New Literacy Studies (NLS) while quantitative data was processed using SPSS software and analysed using descriptive statistical methods. This paper is mainly concerned with findings from qualitative data collection techniques. The major question to be answered in this paper is: "How is actual practice in the classroom observation align with official language policy; The major research question is broken further into specific questions which eventually lead to the various sections in the paper: (1) What does the LiEP for the urban district of Kampala in Uganda state? (2) What are the actual practices in the classroom? (3) Are there any similarities/differences in the policy and the classroom observations?

## 3. Research question one: What does the LiEP for the urban district of Kampala in Uganda state?

In order to answer the above research question, a critical discourse analysis of the LiEP for the urban district of Kampala was done. The government gives the following recommendations on the LiEP in section 36 of the 1992 Government White Paper on Education:

- i. In rural areas the medium of instruction from Primary One to Primary Four will be the relevant local languages; and from P 5 to P 8 English will be the medium of instruction.
- ii. In urban areas the medium of instruction will be English throughout the primary cycle.

iii. Kiswahili and English will be taught as compulsory subjects to all children throughout the primary cycle, in both rural and urban areas...

iv. The relevant area languages will also be taught as a subject in primary school; this applies to both rural and urban areas. However, students may not offer this subject for PLE examination. Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) will, nevertheless, provide for examinations in all five Ugandan languages (Luo, Runyakitara, Luganda, Ateso/Akarimojong and Lugbara) in PLE for those who study any of these languages as a subject for examination

v. English will be the medium of instruction from senior one... [The first year of secondary school] onwards (Uganda Government, 1992: 19).

It is clear from the 1992 Uganda Government White Paper on Education (UGWPE) that the unifying language of broad based national development and progress is English. Mother Tongues (MTs) are recommended for use in education, not as a way of acknowledging multilingual diversity but solely as a prop in preparing for better teaching through the medium of English. In all the recommendations in the UGWPE, MTs are to be used as a MoIs up to primary four and the rest of education in Uganda should be provided through English. Kiswahili was given a special status besides English as a national language. A choice between indigenous languages was excluded as these were thought likely to cause problems of division and competition. Their choice of Kiswahili in this capacity again reflects the government pre-occupation of singularity.

In conclusion, the hegemony of English comes out very strongly from the Government White Paper on education as shown above. The seed of this ideology was planted in the colonial period. This view towards English, held by the government is similar to Webb and Kembo-Sure's (2002) observation that the speakers of African languages generally hold their own languages in low regard. In addition, this attitude reflects the global positioning of English due to its high 'linguistic capital' (Block & Cameron, 2002; Bruthiaux, 2002; Omoniyi, 2003; Benson, 2004b). This confirms what Block and Cameron (2002) observed concerning the impact of globalization and the attitudes people hold towards languages and language learning. While languages were previously valued as symbols of ethnic identity, globalization brought about by the post-industrial economy has resulted in some languages being valued more because of being a symbol of social and political modernization. This is reflected in the views held particularly by parents/guardians given their metropolitan world views, what Phillipson (1992) refers to as cultural imperialism.

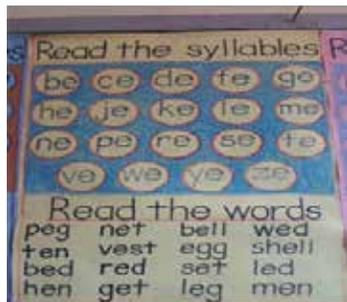
4. Research question two: What are the actual practices in the classroom?

In order to answer the above research question, classroom observations were made to examine how children in primary one are first introduced to reading and writing. The classroom observations documented the instruction methods used, medium of instruction (MoI), reading materials available and the teacher's efforts to prepare for the lesson. Observations focused on prominent literacy events (Street, 2000) like the introduction of new letters, reading and writing those letters, syllables, words and other related instructional interactions. Ethnographic data gathering tools such as audio recordings and note taking techniques were used to document what was going on in the classrooms. The lessons observed were all 30 minutes. Below are some of the findings from classroom observations.

Lessons were observed but the extracts are not presented in this particular paper. However, those lesson extracts showed clear evidence of code mixing and code switching as strategies used by the teachers to help learners understand what is being taught. Although these strategies are not backed up in the LiEP for Kampala, in many post-colonial classrooms as noted by Ogavu (2014), Canagarajah (2006), Martin-Jones (2007)

Martin-Jones & Jones (2000) and Garcia (1997), students and teachers who are expected to adopt English only (or monolingual) pedagogies practice bilingual discourse strategies that enable them to develop more relevant classroom interactions, curricular objectives and learning styles. Below are some of the displays found in primary classrooms at the time of classroom observation.

**Some of the displayed resource materials**



A



B



C



D

The policy is on paper and we have had much training about its implementation but it does not work for me. I am not a native speaker of Luganda but I use the language to be able to teach my Primary One class. Without knowing Luganda, the area language, teaching in the schools here can be very challenging. And all my learners throughout the years understand Luganda better than English. So the languages I use in my class are mainly Luganda and English (Extract from field notes November 2011).

**She added that:**

Probably what I need at the moment is training on how best I can use more than one language in a single lesson. During my teacher training, I was only exposed to use English but now things have changed" (Extract from field notes November 2011).

Another teacher from a peri-urban primary school coded as PU6 said the following about the appropriate LiEP for Kampala district:

The policy which can work for me is the one which does not strain the teaching learning process in terms of communication. The one which allows me and my learners to use all the languages we want to enable communication and free interaction in class (Extract from field notes November 2011).

Taking into consideration U1, PU4 and PU6 school teachers' responses, she confirms what has been discussed earlier that the policy is not 100% implemented of which the MoES is already aware. Also important to think of is that even teachers who are non-native speakers of some area languages can learn the languages and are able to teach through them. Their ability to learn and use the area languages may be enriched by provisions of the environment. The major issue to consider here is about how language attitudes can change if one knows the importance of a particular language in a given situation. The teacher also voiced her need for training in bilingual education, which is already an issue of concern raised in the findings presented in this paper. By way of summary as critical analysts, we have derived the issues below from the observations and the interviews with teachers

- The monoglot policy recommended in the UGWPE is not followed 100% by the teachers in almost all the schools observed. There is evidence of another language, Luganda (common language) being used.
- Most classrooms in primary schools especially government schools are large; 70-120 learners to 1/2 teachers with learners from different language communities.
- Sometimes learners have one common language, area language/ other times not the case.
- Some teachers and parents have negative language attitudes towards local language, for example teachers who are not competent enough in English and parents who are not/ less educated.
- Some teachers cannot interpret the curriculum and cannot teach English competently.

It is clear from the above presentation of the classroom practices that teachers are not hundred percent following the LiEP as stipulated in the white paper. It is evident that the teachers use more than one language. They use Luganda in addition to English which recommended in the policy. The mixture of both languages helps the teachers to facilitate the teaching-learning process. So the classroom observations have been very helpful in sourcing information about the actual classroom practices.

**5. Research Question three: Are there any similarities/ differences in the policy and the classroom observations?**

So as to answer the above research question, the findings discussed in this paper show that the LiEP on paper is somewhat different from what is implemented especially during the learning process. The teachers of literacy are code-switching and mixing English and other local languages to facilitate literacy instruction and eventually acquisition. The identified cause of this is that learners come to Primary One with no or not enough English proficiency for the teaching/ learning process to take place. Canagarajah (2006, p. 587) notes, the classroom is a powerful site of policy negotiation. The pedagogies practiced and texts produced in the classroom can reconstruct policies ground up. He adds that the classroom is already a policy site; every time teachers insist on a uniform variety of language or discourse, they are helping reproduce linguistic hierarchies. However, teachers mentioned a challenge of lack of enough skills for bi/ multilingual education and insufficient

teaching/ learning materials for local languages. Those challenges were areas identified for further research in this paper.

## 6. Discussion

The practice of teachers building on what learners come with is not in a gap, it is manifested in NLS where scholars, have emphasized the need to search for and build on the positive literacy aspects children bring with them as they enter school (Fishman, 1989, p. 467; Heath, 1982; Gregory, 1994, p. 49; Hall, 1994, p. 17; Barton, 2001; Street, 1996, 2000; Gregory and Williams, 2000, p. 39). The belief is that those positive aspects can enhance the learning process, because the children would have a concrete foundation on which to build as they deal with the new concepts. It was for this reason that an effort was made in the current study to consider the literacy events and practices in children's homes in order to determine the kind of circumstances in which the learners live.

Much in these findings are in line with what other studies (Heath, 1982; Street, 1996; Canagarajah, 2006; Stroud, 2001; Ogavu, 2011; and Nankindu, 2014) have found in language, literacy and school success. It should not be surprising that privilege in a form of social, economic, symbolic (multiple languages) capital can be transferred onto the cultural capital relevant to school success (Bourdieu, 1990). What, however, does seem of interest from this data is how the practice of multilingualism and the use of translanguaging, rather than the use any one single language contributes a significantly capital

advantage and compensates for other social variables such as income and occupation. This suggests an approach to language policy that should take the notion of multilingualism as a point of departure and the every day practices of translanguaging.

## 7. Conclusion

A LiEP formulated in terms of a monoglot notion for a multilingual situation has been proved inappropriate by this publication. Such a scenario calls for a review of the LiEP for Uganda and Kampala urban district in particular to find a more appropriate model which can foster classroom literacy practices and a model relevant to a multilingual situation. At the same time, a multiplicity of languages should not be seen as a problem but rather a resource and that English should not be used to hinder development of other languages but should be used with other languages to promote their development. Different actors: politicians, parents, teachers and learners have different intentions in relation to the LiEP. For example policy makers/politicians divert from the teachers who are implementers.

To conclude, issues of language planning cannot end but just change according to time. As Blommaert (1999b) said, the terms 'end' or 'closure' are not particularly suitable in the context of ideological debates and language politics because what we might perceive as the stupendous conclusion of a debate may instead prove to be a temporary moment of stasis that preludes future uptakes. There is need to consider actors and the actual practice at various levels of policy implementation.

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