

Promoting Local Languages in Ugandan Primary Schools: The Community as Stakeholder

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Abstract: The community is an important stakeholder in language education, and community views are critical for the successful implementation of new language policies. This article reports on a study on multilingual language policies conducted in two primary schools in two communities in eastern Uganda, one rural and one urban, from 2005 through 2006. The study focused on community responses to the new language education policy, which promotes the teaching of local languages in the first four years of schooling, using questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus-group discussions to collect data from the two communities, each linked to a local primary school. The findings show that in both communities, although participants were generally aware of the new local-language policy, they were ambivalent about its implementation in their school. They recognized the importance of local languages in promoting identity and cultural maintenance, but a higher priority was their children's upward mobility and the desire to be part of wider and more international communities. Further, while area languages such as Luganda and regional languages such as Kiswahili were perceived to have some benefits as languages of wider communication, it was English that received unequivocal support from both communities. The study concludes that parents and communities need to be better informed about the pedagogical advantages of instruction in the local language and that communities need convincing evidence that the promotion of local languages will not compromise desires for global citizenship.

Keywords: literacy, language policy, mother tongue, second language

Résumé : La communauté est un partenaire important dans l'enseignement des langues, et les points de vue partagés par les divers membres de la communauté jouent un rôle fondamental dans le succès de l'application de nouvelles politiques linguistiques. Cette étude a examiné les politiques linguistiques multilingues en vigueur – en 2005-2006 – dans deux écoles primaires de l'Est de l'Ouganda, l'une située en région rurale, l'autre en zone urbaine. L'étude s'est concentrée sur les réactions de la communauté concernant une nouvelle politique linguistique qui encourage l'enseignement des langues locales pendant les quatre premières années d'école. Les données

ont été recueillies à partir de questionnaires, d'entrevues individuelles et de groupes de discussion avec des membres des deux communautés auxquelles appartenaient les deux écoles primaires. Les résultats révèlent que, dans les deux communautés, les participants étaient généralement au courant de la nouvelle politique linguistique locale et qu'ils étaient ambivalents concernant son application dans leur école. Ils ont déclaré qu'ils reconnaissaient l'importance des langues locales dans la promotion de l'identité et le maintien de la culture, mais qu'ils accordaient la priorité à la possibilité d'ascension sociale, pour leurs enfants, et avaient un plus grand désir de faire partie d'une communauté plus vaste et plus internationale. De plus, bien que les participants aient jugé que des langues locales telles que le Luganda et des langues régionales comme le Kiswahili présentaient un certain potentiel pour élargir les possibilités de communication, c'est clairement l'anglais qui a reçu l'appui des deux communautés. La conclusion de cette étude est que parents et communautés ont besoin d'être mieux informés concernant les avantages pédagogiques de l'apprentissage de la langue locale et qu'il est important, en particulier, de démontrer aux communautés que la promotion des langues locales ne se fait pas au détriment de l'accès à une citoyenneté globale.

Mots clés : littératie, politique linguistique, langue maternelle, langue seconde

Over the past two decades, a growing number of researchers have provided convincing support for the promotion of mother-tongue education in the early years of schooling (Cummins, 1993, 2000; Klaus, 2003; Obondo, 2007; Williams, 1996). These researchers make the case that knowledge and skills gained in the mother tongue can transfer across languages and that multilingual children perform well at school when the school teaches the mother tongue effectively. Literature on literacy development attests to the benefits of using a child's mother tongue even when the goal is learning a second language. Further, research in second language acquisition has shown that the level of proficiency in the first language (L1) has a direct influence on the development of proficiency in the second language (L2). For example, in two experimental studies of bilingual education in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique (Benson, 2000), the students in the bilingual program performed better than their counterparts in monolingual programs when tested in the L2.

Research in Africa suggests, however, that multilingual language policies have met with limited success, partly because of a lack of appreciation of the context in which such policies are implemented (Bamgbose, 2000; Kwesiga, 1994; Oladejo, 1993; Parry, Andema, & Tumusiime, 2005; Stein, 2007). For example, many African parents

assume that mother-tongue policies have been imposed for political rather than sociolinguistic or demographic reasons (Muthwii, 2002). In addition, parents want their children to master the official language, or the language of wider communication (LWC), early in the education process (Bergmann, 1996), and there is a common, though mistaken, belief that African languages are not equipped to deal with scientific and technical concepts (Obanya, 1995; Prah, 2008).

Like many countries in Africa, Uganda, which gained independence from Britain in 1962, has been struggling to develop and implement effective multilingual policies in its schools. English is the official language of the country, but there is as yet no national language, because none of the Ugandan languages has been considered demographically strong enough to take on this role. After a period of political turmoil in the 1970s and 1980s, the government appointed an education review commission to carry out a comprehensive analysis and suggest a blueprint for the future. The report of the commission culminated in the publication of a government white paper (GWP) on education (Government of Uganda, 1992). One of the major curriculum-related changes introduced by the GWP was the language education policy, which distinguished between policies in rural and urban areas. It was noted that the majority of the Ugandan population (90%) lives in rural settings, a context in which people who speak the same language live in close proximity. However, increasing rural-to-urban migration in search of a better life has resulted in the development of urban centres with populations that are highly mixed linguistically. Against this background, the GWP stipulates that in rural areas the 'relevant local languages' would be the medium of instruction in Primary 1–4 and that English would be taught as a subject until Primary 5, when it becomes the medium of instruction; in urban areas, English would be the medium of instruction from Primary 1 onward, with the 'local language' taught as a subject. Kiswahili, 'as the language possessing greater capacity for uniting Ugandans and for assisting rapid social development' (GWP, 1992, p. 19), would be taught as a compulsory subject in both rural and urban schools from Primary 4 to Primary 7. Although the Education Review Commission, from whose report the 1992 GWP on education was drawn, had recommended that the medium of instruction in the first four years of primary schooling should be the mother tongue, the government changed 'mother tongue' to 'relevant local language.' As mentioned above, while urban centres were highly mixed linguistically, a similar situation did sometimes prevail in rural areas, especially because there were no distinct boundaries as people

moved from one language group to another. Therefore, it was practical to speak of a 'local language' that would perhaps be used as a *lingua franca* by people who did not share the same mother tongue (see, e.g., Mukama, 1991; Okech 2001).

In response to the proposals in the GWP, the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC) developed a curriculum that was eventually introduced into primary schools in two parts, in 2000 and 2002 respectively. One of the challenges of the NCDC was to consider how to address the government's language policy in the context of Uganda's linguistic landscape, which includes 63 main languages spoken by 24 million people. Exacerbating the challenge of deciding which language constitutes the most dominant 'local language' in any given area was the acute shortage of funding and human resources to support materials development and teacher education. The primary curriculum review of 2004 drew attention to low literacy levels in both English and local languages, especially outside Kampala and in rural areas, and stressed the need to promote mother-tongue literacy to address this perennial concern (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2004).

Against this background, this article reports on a study on multilingual language and literacy conducted in eastern Uganda from 2005–2006. The two central questions we address are as follows:

1. To what extent is the local-language policy in rural primary schools supported by members of a rural community in eastern Uganda?
2. To what extent do urban perspectives on the local-language policy resonate with the perspectives of the rural community?

The community was included in this study because, ultimately, the community is the beneficiary of the language policy, especially with respect to the development of multilingual literacy for children in the community. As Bamgbose (1991) and Muthwii and Kioko (2004) have observed, implementation of language education policies can fail if the targeted population is not supportive of the policy.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this article is based on recent work in multilingual literacies (Hornberger, 2003; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Street, 1984, 2001), which is centrally concerned with the intersection of research on multilingualism, on the one hand, and literacy, on

the other. For many years, Goody's (1977) universalizing theory influenced the views of many educators on literacy development, which was regarded as involving reading, writing, and the mastery of grammar as separate individual skills. Goody's theory was also viewed as an autonomous technology of modernity, leading to the rational, psychological, and cultural transformation of people. However, a growing body of literature posits a divergent view of literacy embedded within a cultural context (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995; Gee, 1990; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Stein, 2007). These studies have examined the literacy practices of individuals and groups, including people's uses and meanings of literacy and the value it holds for them, and have contributed to a theory of literacy as a social practice and a collective resource.

Street (1984), for example, argues that the meaning of literacy cannot be separated from the social institutions in which literacy is practised or the social processes whereby literacy is acquired. In Street's ideological model, the focus on literacy development shifts from individual, discrete skills to reading and writing as cultural practices. This formulation is concerned with the extent to which literacy tasks are jointly achieved in the context of collaborative activities in particular social circumstances (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996) and, therefore, calls for a conception of literacy that takes into account the people involved and the places in which it occurs. We need to understand literacy both locally and historically, as well as with reference to the social relationships in which speakers, readers, and writers find themselves (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

However, studies showing the importance of community and parental support to children's early literacy development have hitherto been mostly associated with the print-rich cultures of the Western world (Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers, & Smythe, 2005; Hannon, 1995; Kendrick, 2003; Wolfendale & Topping, 1996). The present case study was carried out in two under-resourced schools in two communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Such research is relevant to a wider international audience not only because there are complex relationships between unequally resourced global communities (Adejunmobi, 2004; Lin & Martin, 2005; Makoni & Meinhof, 2003) but also because even in wealthy regions of the world there are communities that have been historically and educationally marginalized (see Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; May, 2001).

The theory of 'community' that we brought to this study is drawn in particular from the work of Kanu (2006), who defines

'communalism' as one of the central tenets of African social philosophy. In this view, as Kanu notes, 'an individual's involvement in the interests, aspirations, and welfare of the group is the measure of that individual's worth' (p. 210). This suggests that the success of the wider society is of paramount importance and that the meaning of an individual's life is constructed with reference to the group. In this spirit, communalism is characterized by practices of solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocal obligations. In the context of language planning and policy, the notion of communalism is relevant to the 'realities on the ground' (Ramanathan, 2006, p. 90) that affect the implementation of language planning, particularly in non-Western communities. As Ramanathan notes, 'language policies are living, dynamic forces that find their viability and articulation in the most local of places' (p. 89). In this spirit, she argues, scholars need to consider the ways in which vernacular practices are implicated in medium-of-instruction policies.

In our study, therefore, we defined 'community' as those people in 'the most local of places' (Ramanathan, 2006, p. 89) with an investment in the student population of a particular school. We considered, for example, community elders and opinion leaders interested in issues of development, as well as members of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the School Management Committee (SMC), and the Lunyole Language Association (LLA).¹ Further, because we were interested in both rural and urban school communities, we selected communities within the catchment area of Buggaga Rural Primary School (BRPS)² and Tiriri Urban Primary school (TUPS), both in eastern Uganda. However, given that the local-language policy targeted rural schools, we focused our data collection on the rural community, drawing on data from the urban school community for comparative purposes.

Methodology and data collection

The rural community where the research was undertaken is located in the newly formed Butaleja District, which has a population of approximately 230,000 (UBOS, 2002). Butaleja District is in southeastern Uganda, and the people speak Lunyole, a Bantu language. The urban community selected for comparative purposes was Tororo Municipality in Tororo District in eastern Uganda. Tororo District has a population of approximately 400,000 (UBOS). Common languages in this area include Dhopadhola (eastern Nilotic), Ateso (western Nilotic), and the Bantu languages Samia, Lugwere, Lunyuli,

Lumasaba, and Lusoga. In TUPS, while all local languages were represented in the school, the languages most commonly used as *lingua franca*, according to the headmaster, were Luganda and Kiswahili.

It is important to note that although Lunyole is the dominant language in Butaleja district, formal education was first introduced using Luganda as the language of instruction. Luganda is one of the Bantu languages spoken in central Uganda and one of the six languages that the colonial government selected for use in education, the others being Runyakole/Rukinga, Ateso, Luo, Runyoro/Rutooro, and Ng'akirimojong. The use of Luganda in Butaleja District goes back to the period when people from Buganda were used as administrative agents by the colonial government.³ The language was and still is used in churches, the lower courts, and health centres. The orthography of Lunyole, in contrast, was developed only in 2003, through the LLA in partnership with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). In 2004, calendars were published in Lunyole, and to date some primers have been developed through the efforts of this community language association. However, there are as yet few literacy materials that can be used in schools to promote mother-tongue literacy in Lunyole.

Tembe collected the data for the study between October 2005 and June 2006. In the rural community, she administered a questionnaire to 18 participants in early October 2005 and held follow-up focus-group discussions (FGDs) with all these participants, as well as one additional participant, later in the month. Another FGD was held in June 2006 with nine participants, two of whom had participated in the October 2005 discussions. There was thus a total of 25 participants in the FGDs. Because the questionnaires were in English, not all participants were comfortable with the questionnaire format; the FGD gave participants the opportunity to discuss their views in the familiar Lunyole language, also spoken by Tembe. The interviews were then transcribed and translated into English. Of the 18 rural participants who completed the questionnaire, three were councillors for the sub-county in which the BRPS was located,⁴ three were members of the SMC, six were members of the PTA, and six were members of the LLA. Three of the participants were female, and 15 were male (see Table 1).

To obtain comparative views from an urban community, Tembe also interviewed nine participants in the Tororo district in June 2006 (six women and three men). Four of these participants gave individual interviews, and the remaining five were involved in two FGDs.

TABLE 1
Participants who responded to the questionnaire

	Councillors	SMC	PTA	LLA	Total
Female	1	1	1	0	3
Male	2	2	5	6	15
Total	3	3	6	6	18

The languages spoken by these participants were Dhopadhola, Ateso, Lusamia, Lugwere, Lunyole, Lugbara, and Somali. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, with the occasional use of translators. The participants had diverse occupations in the community, including farming, housekeeping, teaching, business, and administration.

Our research sought to investigate the extent to which participants, both rural and urban, were aware of the new language policy and the extent to which they supported it. In addition, the questionnaire administered to rural participants asked the following specific questions about the languages used for different purposes and the preferred language for teaching their children:

1. What is the main language that you use to interact with your children?
2. What languages are used for homework for your children in Primary 1–4?
3. What languages do you prefer teachers to use in teaching your children the following subjects: social studies, science and math?
4. What other language would you like your children to be able to speak, read and write?

Responses to these questionnaires were tabulated, but additional insight was gained through the FGDs that followed the administration of the questionnaire.

Findings

The rural community as stakeholder

As mentioned above, two central questions guided our study. In this section, we present the findings of the first question we addressed: To what extent is the local-language policy in rural primary schools supported by members of a rural community in eastern Uganda?

TABLE 2
Language use by participants

Languages used	Lunyole	Luganda only	English only	English and Lunyole	English and Luganda	Other
Language used for writing	1	7	2	4	4	
Language used for reading	1	5	3	4	5	
Mother tongue/L1	17					1*

*The other language was Lugwere, one of the Bantu languages spoken to the north of Butaleja district.

Language profile and practices of the community

From the questionnaire and FGDs, we learned that all participants except one spoke Lunyole as their mother tongue. This last participant came to live in the area after getting married to a Munyole man, and spoke Lugwere as her mother tongue. As indicated by all participants, Lunyole was also the common language spoken in the villages they came from. Furthermore, Lunyole was the language all participants used at home to speak with their children; however, English and Luganda were the languages commonly used for reading and writing, and a few participants indicated that they are able to read and write both English and Lunyole (see Table 2).

Awareness of language policy

As indicated in Table 3, there was general awareness of the new language policy on the part of most participants. During the FGDs, participants said they had heard about the new language education policy through school meetings, via the media, and during burial ceremonies.

With respect to their specific understanding of the new language policy, however, there was some uncertainty. For example, four members of the LLA responded as follows in response to the question, 'Are you aware of the government's language education policy? If yes, what does it say?'

It says Kiswahili language should be taught as a national language.

Go to school all of you.

Mother tongue should be taught as subject in primary or as a medium of instruction for P1-4 [i.e., Primary years 1-4].

Every person should learn and promote his mother tongue to ease learning/communication.

TABLE 3
Awareness of the new language education policy

Category	Yes	No
Councillors (only 2 responses)	1	1
School Management Committee	2	1
Parent–Teacher Association	5	1
Lunyole Language Association	6	0
Total	14	3

During FGDs, participants noted that the mother-tongue policy was aimed at facilitating easy understanding, identity, and maintenance of their culture, which are objectives associated with schools in wealthy regions of the world. As one of the participants pointed out,

You see we normally say that the English (*oMuzungu*⁵) are intelligent. Why is this? This is because right from the beginning, the child is taught in his language. In this way they learn quickly. But for us here, we want to teach English to our children and at the same time they are learning Lunyole. It becomes a bit of a problem for the child. (male participant, FGD, rural community; original statement in Lunyole)

The participants argued further that a child who is first taught in his or her mother tongue will still be able to learn English. After all, as one participant noted, many developed countries, such as China and Japan, do not teach in English but have advanced greatly in terms of technology.

In the implementation of language policy, participants also raised the issue of the language of assessment, especially for children being taught in Lunyole. According to the policy, when the mother tongue ceases to be used as a medium of instruction in Primary 4, it continues to be taught as a subject up to Primary 6. Participants were concerned that the language of examination should also be that used as medium of instruction during this period; the following statement highlights what often happens in schools, which was a major cause of concern for participants:

There are some teachers who try to teach in Lunyole and Luganda. But at the time of examinations, they examine in English. So the child who would have performed well, but because the examinations are in English, which he may have not quite grasped well, that child performs poorly. Therefore,

examinations should be in the language in which they would have been taught, that is from P1–4, this should be Lunyole. (male PTA member, FGD, rural community; original statement in Lunyole)

Insights into school language practices

With respect to languages used for homework in Primary 1–4, we learned from the questionnaires that for 15 participants, the language in which homework in science and social studies was set for their children in Primary 1–4 was English; two participants reported homework in both Lunyole and English, and one in English and Luganda. With respect to the languages parents preferred teachers to use in teaching social studies, science, and math, there were varying opinions. Eight of the 19 participants in the October 2005 FGDs indicated that Lunyole was the preferred language to use for teaching all subjects to their children in the lower primary years, as children would then be able to learn concepts in their own language. As these parents reasoned, science begins with things that are near, those children see and know in their mother tongue. Therefore, when Lunyole was used in teaching, the children were able to apply their knowledge and share it with their parents. The same would apply in social studies. The parents further explained that when Lunyole is used to teach reading and writing, children are able to write what they read, learn about their environment through reading, and then explain it to others through writing.

The other 11 participants in the October 2005 FGDs, however, while they indicated that for mathematics, science, and social studies Lunyole was preferred, preferred Luganda for reading and writing. The reasons given for their preferences varied. On the one hand, while Lunyole was the language in common use and therefore facilitated easy understanding, they preferred Luganda for reading and writing because they believed that spelling and combining sounds are easier in Luganda than in Lunyole. In addition, according to them, Luganda integrates many languages.

Language as resource

Ruiz (1984) draws a useful distinction between the diverse orientations that a community has toward particular languages, their speakers, and the roles that the language plays in society. The three fundamental orientations address language as a resource, language

TABLE 4
Language preferences other than mother tongue

Language use	Luganda	English	Kiswahili	Not definite	Total
Speak	2	9	4	3	18
Write	1	11	1	5	18
Read	1	10	2	5	18

as a problem, and language as a right. For this reason, one of the questions participants were asked concerned their preference for languages other than the mother tongue. Although Luganda and Kiswahili were mentioned, English was the predominant 'other language' the participants wanted their children to be able to speak, read, and write (see Table 4).

It is interesting to note the different resources that participants associated with each of these languages. Some participants felt there was a need to teach students in English because, for them, a child's ability to speak English is proof that learning is taking place. As one parent said,

If you get a child of P2 speaking English, it pleases you, or a P1 child speaking English. Then you actually prove that the child is actually learning.

For many rural parents, then, knowledge of English represents progress and justifies the many financial sacrifices they make to send their children to school. In addition, participants hoped that their children would be able to speak English at an early age, like their counterparts in urban areas. For example, one of the participants commented,

I usually admire children who come from outside this area; you can see a child of P1 speaking English. Therefore, they should teach more of English first, then the other languages after that. (male SMC member, FGD, rural community; original statement in Lunyole)

The issue of learning Kiswahili also came up in the discussions. It was noted that while it is good to learn English, there are situations that require knowledge of Kiswahili. Participants cited the example travelling to other parts of the country and encountering security personnel. During such times, they pointed out, people have had problems because they could not speak Kiswahili, the

lingua franca of the army and the police force. One of the participants explained,

Kiswahili is very important. You may study, but if you do not speak Kiswahili, then you have learned nothing. Because when travelling you might meet someone in the security [police, army] who may ask you something in Kiswahili, and if you happen not to understand – my friend, you are in trouble, because you have not understood what he has asked. My friends, there are times when knowing Kiswahili is helpful. (male participant, FGD, rural community; original statement in Lunyole)

Finally, Luganda was also seen as a useful resource. For many participants, Luganda had been used for instruction in their schools and therefore, according to them, was easier to use for reading and writing than Lunyole. They noted further that if a child went to live with a relative, such as a paternal uncle or aunt (a common practice), in an area where Lunyole was not the majority language spoken, the child would feel isolated. In such situations, some participants argued, it is therefore necessary to learn another language such as Luganda. As one participant remarked,

My reason is that a child may leave this place and travel to another place, like to Buganda, where Luganda is spoken. So if a child has learned Luganda, then it becomes easy for the child to cope. (male participant, FGD, rural community; original statement in Lunyole)

In summary, then, the community of Bugagga Rural Primary School was aware of the new language education policy; while they were happy that the new policy would promote language and literacy in the mother tongue, they had a strong desire for their children be able speak English at an early age. The participants also acknowledged that Kiswahili and Luganda are important languages in their community and that their children need to learn these languages at school. Kiswahili, they pointed out, is particularly important for security purposes; however, some participants were supportive of Luganda because most had learned it when they were at school and took the position that it is easier to develop literacy in Luganda than in Lunyole.

The urban community as stakeholder

As discussed above, according to the new policy for urban areas, a local language was to be taught as a subject from Primary 1 onward, while

English was used as a medium of instruction. We therefore sought to gain comparative views from the urban community on the teaching of a local language. To this end, the question we raised was, 'How do urban perspectives on the local-language policy resonate with the perspectives of the rural community?' Our findings are discussed with respect to participants' preference for English, their ambivalent support for local languages, and their general resistance to Kiswahili.

Preference for English

In the urban community, all nine participants had heard about the new language education policy, but they were generally opposed to teaching a local language at school. While they considered a local language appropriate for use at home and in the community, they expressed a preference for the use of English at school, as the following examples illustrate:

I use my language, Lunyole. However, when he goes to school he should begin with English. (female participant, FGD, urban community)
 For me I say as the child grows, from two to five years, it should use the mother tongue, but at school – no, it should be English. Because a child knows where it belongs by learning the mother tongue at that age, and then adopts another one. (female participant, FGD, urban community)
 For me, we are not from the same language background with my wife. So we use English right from childhood for my family. I am Lugbara [from the Central Sudanic language family] and she is a Musoga [from the Bantu language family]. I have told my wife to let the children learn whatever language, Kiswahili, Luganda, Lusonga, etc. These are for communicating to our people in the village. But I say English is preferable. (male participant, FGD, urban community)

Participants noted, in particular, that the multiplicity of languages in their environment makes the choice of a designated local language at school extremely difficult. Consider, for example, the following participant's linguistic history:

We speak – both of us speak Ateso. I am from Soroti and my husband is from Tororo. However, we moved to Kenya and the children picked up Kiswahili from the house help we had, so they forgot the mother tongue. After three years we came back to Uganda, they again picked up Dhoadhola from the neighbours. So, right now they speak English,

Kiswahili, Dhopadhola and a little of the mother tongue, that is Ateso.
(female participant, FGD, urban community)

For many parents, English provided an enhanced set of opportunities for the future. The following statement captures the views of these parents:

Children [...] should learn a language which helps them in the future. Not put them in brackets of second community. (male participant, interview, urban community)

Recalling their own experiences in school, the participants were happy that they had been encouraged to use English and had not resisted punishment for speaking the mother tongue:

We used to carry a badge in primary schools for speaking the mother tongue so that at the end of the day if you had the badge you would be punished. So this was used to encourage us to speak English. (female participant, FGD, urban community)

This method, according to them, worked well, and they were able to learn to speak English. They therefore felt that the same practice should still work for their children. Indeed, there were some who felt that parents could support their children by introducing English in the home. As one said,

Try to introduce English even at home. The emphasis here we are saying that let mother tongue be taught from home. Meanwhile the child is picking English from home partly from parents. However, at the school level let it be English. (female participant, FGD, urban community)

Ambivalent support for local languages

Although there was much resistance among this group of parents to the use of the mother tongue in school, some ambivalence was detected as community members continued to debate the relative merits of local and international languages. For example, one participant observed,

There are languages that are [more] international than our own local languages as Ugandans. Learning our own languages would not matter. However, at the same time we need to know the future of the child.

Use international language so that the world can get closer to you by communication, French, Arabic, and English. Nevertheless, at the same time we should also encourage them with our own culture, local languages. We should not say we do not need our own languages. No, we need them. (male participant, interview, urban community)

In addition, as exemplified in the following comment, participants recognized that a child's mother tongue is an important mark of identity:

[The mother tongue] puts them to where they belong in the community. They come to know about their roots, who they are. They do not go back and start looking for our roots after 40 or so years of our life. (male participant, interview, urban community)

Ambivalence toward Kiswahili

Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania together form the East African region. The three countries have a common past in that at one point all were linked to Britain, leading to the adoption of English in commerce, government, administration, and education. Given this past, the participants were aware that both Kenya and Tanzania have attempted to implement a policy of Kiswahili as the medium of instruction; they argued, however, that such a policy has not benefited these countries. For example, they stated that Kenyans are unable to make 'good' public addresses because, according to these participants, they do not speak good English:

Look at Kenya, Kiswahili is their [basic right] from childhood, so it is easier for them to learn. But it has brought them problems – they cannot address people properly because they have been brought up in Kiswahili. (male participant, FGD, urban community)

According to participants, Uganda was privileged in comparison to the other East African states, particularly Tanzania, in that the colonial administration introduced the use of English in schools. They remarked on the high standards of Ugandan education, which attract people in other East African states:

Even our standards in east Africa are the best – Kenyans and Tanzanians are coming to Uganda because of the language we are speaking. (male participant, FGD, urban community)

Further, participants were of the opinion that Kiswahili is not a sufficiently international language to be taught in schools. As one noted,

For me I prefer English. Kiswahili is like a local language the way I see on my side. (female participant, FGD, urban community)

At the same time, however, participants also noted that both Kiswahili and Luganda could serve as national languages in their school community:

Why not use a national mother tongue like either Kiswahili or Luganda, where it can be general. (female participant, FGD, urban community)

Further, they recognized that the use of a local language had helped to unite Tanzanians of different linguistic backgrounds. Nevertheless, according to these participants, Tanzanians were now struggling to catch up with the rest of the world by learning English. It was therefore advisable that children in Uganda be taught English right from the beginning. As one participant said,

They say we are Africans and we should speak our African languages, but now it is also causing them problems. Those are practical examples from Kenya and Tanzania. Why don't we go straight to something that is international?

The other East African countries had made the mistake of teaching in the local language. Therefore, Uganda should take heed and not fall into a similar trap. (male participant, FGD, urban community)

In summary, the findings from the urban school community suggest that, in general, community members were aware of the education policy promoting local languages in primary schools but were opposed to the implementation of this policy, saying that teaching a mother tongue is the responsibility of parents in the home. The schools ought to be concerned with teaching an international language, such as English, for the future of the children. The fact that many languages were spoken in the community further complicated the possible implementation of the policy. The government, for example, had not been able to decide on a national language to unite the country, though it hoped that Kiswahili might play this role. The language problems experienced in neighbouring countries that had

implemented local-language policies were not positive, and were seen as providing lessons relevant to Uganda.

Analysis and discussion

Batibo (2005) observes that speakers of minority languages are in a dilemma, particularly in relation to the choice of language of instruction. On the one hand is the desire to maintain their linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identity; on the other hand, the wish to access education in a language that will enable them to interact at an international level is equally strong. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa working group makes the case that if European children are faster and more assertive in learning than African children, this is due not to race or culture but to linguistic and economic conditions (ADEA 1996). As Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) and Phillipson (1992) contend, it is the responsibility of education to boldly advocate the use of indigenous languages and to offer practical strategies. Similarly, Fishman (2000) and Tsui and Tollefson (2003) argue that the medium of instruction is the means by which languages and culture are maintained and revitalized. At the same time, however, Bamgbose (2000) observes that because language policies in Africa have historically tended to ignore minority languages, speakers of these languages have been led to devalue them and to assume that they are not useful for social and economic advancement. Perhaps, as Batibo points out, this was because the minority languages were used within the confines of their speakers' territories, while speakers were forced to learn and use one of the dominant area languages or an ex-colonial language for purposes of wider communication. Our findings, as outlined above, support Batibo's assessment of the ambivalence of minority language speakers. In this section, we explore this ambivalence in greater detail, highlighting our findings from both rural and urban school communities with respect to Lunyole as a local language, English as an international language, Luganda as an area language, and Kiswahili as a regional language. We conclude with a consideration of the role of assessment in language planning.

First, with respect to the promotion of local languages, we found ambivalence in both rural and urban school communities. The community of Bugagga Rural Primary School was concerned that a local-language policy was a regressive step toward the past, rather than a progressive step toward the future. Because of their past, in which Luganda and English were promoted, participants in the study

had mixed feelings about the implementation of a language policy that would promote the minority Lunyole language. While some appreciated the policy, there were those who were concerned about using Lunyole as a language of instruction. Similar sentiments were prevalent among stakeholders of the urban school. Indeed, these participants observed that because of the many languages spoken by pupils in their school, selecting only one to be taught as a subject would be difficult. Therefore, for these stakeholders, there was no place in their school for the local-language policy. Participants were adamant that it is the role of parents, not the school, to teach the mother tongue to their children.

However, identity and cultural maintenance were also important considerations for parents in both rural and urban communities, though the rural community held stronger views on this issue. For rural participants, it was important that they spoke Lunyole and identified themselves as such. Therefore, to have their children learn in Lunyole was one way they could be proud of their language and identity, a position supported by much current research (see, e.g., Norton, 2000). From this point of view, the participants did appreciate that the government had sanctioned the teaching of their language, thus promoting not only their language but also their culture, something they considered to be of great significance for their children and for development in their area (see Kramersch, 1993).

Nevertheless, and this is our second major finding, both rural and urban communities were particularly concerned about the need to expose their children to an international language, and English in particular. They had observed problems with local-language policies in other countries in the region, which now faced the challenge of reversing negative effects associated with this policy. In the literature, Bamgbose (2000) has observed that the use of African languages as a medium of instruction has been notoriously unstable in several African countries. He identifies dissatisfaction with the practical outcomes of a particular policy as one of the reasons for this instability. Furthermore, such factors as the status of English as an international language, internal and external migrations, and the need for economic survival are raised as constraints on the use of African languages in education.

Participants also argued that because of ongoing globalization in terms of technology, there is no need to insist on using their mother tongue; to catch up in this fast-moving world, children need to start with an international language, specifically English. The place for the mother tongue is the home, and the parent is the right person to teach it.

Furthermore, these participants saw English as a *lingua franca* within the country, given Uganda's multiplicity of languages. They considered it a necessity and therefore an advantage that the colonial administration had decided to promote English in the country.

Our third major finding concerns the relationship between local languages and more dominant 'area' or regional languages. As mentioned above, the colonial government used Buganda agents as administrators in eastern Uganda. Consequently, when formal education was introduced in the eastern region, Luganda, into which the Bible had already been translated, was used as the medium of instruction. Thus, in Butaleja district, Luganda continued to be used until the new policy was launched. Our findings confirm what Batibo (2005) has observed to be the fate of minority languages in the face of area languages used in education. The rural school community preferred the use of Luganda to teach reading and writing, arguing that this language had been used in the past and that they were now accustomed to it. Participants failed to see their own language assuming a similar position once introduced in schools as a medium of instruction.

Like the community of the rural school, urban community stakeholders at TUPS often mentioned the use of Luganda. As participants pointed out, they were taught in Luganda as the local language during their time at school. It was therefore interesting that even for TUPS, where the spoken languages within the municipality were predominantly from the Nilotic language family, Luganda was regularly mentioned as a possible compromise if the policy of teaching in a local language was to be enforced. Like participants from the rural school, urban participants preferred Luganda because it had been used in the past. As Batibo (2005) notes, a historical legacy of domination by the predominant area languages tends to make speakers of minority languages feel inadequate in comparison to those who speak more widely used languages. This observation applies to speakers of Lunyole as a minority language, given the experiences narrated by some of the participants. However, although speakers of Luganda account for 17% of Uganda's population (UBOS, 2002), Luganda has failed to attain national status. Nevertheless, its hegemonic influence now seems to constrain the implementation of the new policy, especially within communities whose minority languages have not previously been used in education and therefore do not have written resources.

Our fourth major finding relates to the ambivalent status of Kiswahili, which is used extensively within the Great Lakes region

(Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) and is a national language in Kenya and Tanzania. Between 1903 and 1971 several attempts were made to develop Kiswahili in Uganda, both as a national language and as a medium of instruction, but, as Kasozi (2000) explains, there were no strategies for implementing such policies. Thus, the use of Kiswahili in Uganda was mainly confined to the security forces. It also became a language of commerce, as result of its use with traders from the coast of Kenya, and developed into a *lingua franca*, particularly among the poorly educated, just as English is for the well educated. Thus, while Uganda has no national language, the new policy has introduced Kiswahili as a subject in both rural and urban schools, with a view to eventually developing it as a national language. It is against this background that the community of the rural school acknowledged that although it is good to learn English and the mother tongue, Kiswahili is also a useful resource. Some of the stakeholders in the urban community, however, regarded Kiswahili as a local language and therefore not acceptable to be taught to their children. Others supported the teaching of a local language designated as a national language (either Kiswahili or Luganda).

Our fifth major finding, particularly with respect to the rural school community, relates to the issue of assessment. The community was greatly concerned about the language used to assess their children. It would defeat the objective of teaching in the local language if assessment were carried out in another language, but as long as the available materials are in English, and the teachers translate these when teaching in the mother tongue, there is a concern that examinations will be conducted in English. Furthermore, while the policy was being implemented in the lower primary grades, there was no mention by the school administration of continuing to teach local languages in the upper grades, as stipulated in the policy. Continued teaching of the local language as a subject in the upper grades would require the administration to work out appropriate strategies for assessment.

Conclusion

When Uganda's new policy promoting local languages was launched, it generated much debate in the media, and there was general concern that the policy was misguided. Comments by the journalists Mbekiza and Kamanzi, whose 2006 articles appeared in one of Uganda's leading daily newspapers, the *New Vision*, illustrate the Ugandan public's concerns. Mbekiza, for example, attacked the policy on the

grounds that parents, rather than schools, should be the guardians of the mother tongue:

Mother tongues are vital, but they should be developed independently. And this lies primarily on parents. (2006)

Kamanzi's critique, on the other hand, focuses on economic considerations, particularly with respect to the 'Kyeyo' sector (Ugandans in diaspora), a major contributor to Uganda's national income. The local-language policy, according to Kamanzi, is 'inward looking' and 'cannot sell':

In order for one to qualify for a 'Kyeyo' job, he or she must be fluent in one of the three international languages. These are English, French and Spanish. (2006)

Our study sought to determine to what extent the participants in two Ugandan school communities, one rural and one urban, supported the new local-language policy. Our research was framed by theory supporting the view that literacy must be understood both locally and historically and with reference to the social relationships in which speakers, readers, and writers find themselves (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hornberger, 2003; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Street, 2001). In this view, a language policy needs to be supported by families and communities if it is to be successful. Although the findings indicate that the participants were generally aware of the new local-language education policy, we also found ambivalence concerning the implementation of local languages in the school context. The participants' desire to have their children learn a local language for purposes of identity and cultural maintenance was often overshadowed by factors considered to be more urgent. Among these was the parents' desire that their children be part of the international community and thereby increase their opportunities for employment. For this reason, learning an international language such as English was considered very important, and there was concern that being educated in a local language was a regressive step, compromising children's progress. In addition, many participants, especially those from the urban community, took the view that the mother tongue should be relegated to functions in the home.

There were important differences of orientation in the two school communities, however. The rural community shared a common mother tongue, and so there was little difficulty in selecting a relevant

local language for instructional purposes. However, the community appreciated that learning other, more widely spoken languages would facilitate mobility across the country, observing that they would not be able to communicate easily outside of their area if they spoke only their mother tongue, Lunyole. In the urban setting, the linguistic diversity of Tororo district was a major challenge for the community, as no one language could be identified for instructional purposes. Further, the urban community tended to be more mobile and cosmopolitan, looking beyond local orders for personal and professional advancement. Hence they were in favour of their children learning languages of wider communication, such as English, French, and Arabic.

During the colonial period in Africa, acquiring literacy in the colonial language was the main tool for upward mobility and economic gain, and this view has survived into the postcolonial era. The views of the urban community, in particular, can be traced back to the colonial education system, in which only a tiny minority of Africans who attended colonial schools gained access to European languages. Such access placed them in a better position in their own society (Alidou, 2004), creating sharp divisions within African communities. Further, Benson (2004) notes the inequalities in schooling, within the development context, between rural and urban areas and between elite and subordinate social groups. These inequalities, as she demonstrates, correspond to ethnolinguistic heritage and conditions of language access.

Uganda's new language policy empowers rural communities to select a relevant local language to use as a medium of instruction, and urban communities to teach such a language as a subject in urban schools. Our case study makes clear, however, that the community was not adequately informed of the pedagogical advantages of using a mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction, particularly in the first years of their children's literacy development. Further, the lack of instructional materials in the local language was a major impediment to the success of the policy. Indeed, materials in English were often translated by teachers and were frequently used for assessment purposes. There was some support for the use of Luganda and Kiswahili as languages of wider communication, but it was English that received unequivocal support. We conclude with the observation that the community should be adequately informed about research that demonstrates not only that mother tongue literacy promotes effective learning but that it enhances second language acquisition as well. Furthermore, without adequate resources in the

local language, as well as appropriate teacher training, local-language policies are greatly compromised. Finally, it is clear that parents and communities need convincing evidence that instruction in local languages will not compromise their desire for global citizenship for their children.

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Notes

- 1 The Lunyole Language Association (LLA) is a not-for-profit organization that is translating the Bible into Lunyole, and therefore developed the Lunyole orthography. The rural school in our study is located within the community served by the LLA. Similar associations also exist for some other local languages in Uganda.
- 2 Pseudonyms are used for schools, places, and people.
- 3 In eastern Uganda, which includes the Tororo district of which Butaleja district was a part until July 2005, agents of Baganda origin (an ethnic group located in Buganda, in central Uganda, whose language is Luganda) were used as administrators. Because the Eastern region, and Tororo

district in particular, has different linguistic groups, Luganda was chosen as the language of instruction there, using these Baganda agents.

- 4 Under Uganda's local government structure, each district comprises a number of sub-counties; a sub-county councillor is thus an elected representative in the local government.
- 5 *Muzungu* is the common word used in Lunyole and other Bantu languages in Uganda to refer to a European.

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