

# **Dreams and Realities:** Developing Countries and the English Language

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Paper 6

English education, local languages and community perspectives in Uganda

by Juliet Tembe and Bonny Norton

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## Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing number of researchers who have provided convincing support for the promotion of mother tongue education in the early years of schooling (Cummins 1981, 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; they also argue 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 has a direct influence on the development of proficiency in the second language. For example, in two experimental studies of bilingual education in Guinea-Bissau and in Mozambique (Benson 2000), the students in the bilingual programme performed better when tested in the second language than their monolingual counterparts.

Research in Africa suggests, however, that multilingual language policies have met with limited success, partly due to a lack of appreciation of the context in which such policies are implemented (Bamgbose 2000, Kwesiga 1994, Oladejo 1993, Parry et al. 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). There is a common (though mistaken) belief that African languages are not equipped to deal with scientific and technical concepts (Obanya 1995, Prah 2010).

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 White Paper 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 per cent) is rural based, such that extensive areas may have people who speak the same language living together. However, the increasing rural–urban migrations in search of a better life have resulted in a growing number of urban centres with populations that are highly mixed linguistically. Therefore, against this background, the GWP stipulated that, in rural areas, the ‘relevant local languages’ would be used as the media of instruction from Primary 1 to Primary 4. English then becomes the medium of instruction in Primary 5. Primary 4 is a transition year, in which teachers use both the local language and English. In urban areas, English would be the medium of instruction from Primary 1 onwards, 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 1992:19), would be taught as a compulsory subject in both the rural and urban schools from Primary 4 to Primary 7. See Table 1.

*Table 1: Languages in primary schools in Uganda*

Location	Class	Local language as medium	Local language as subject	English as medium	English as subject	Kiswahili as subject
Rural	1	✓			✓	✓
	2	✓			✓	✓
	3	✓			✓	✓
	4	✓			✓	✓
	5		✓	✓		✓
	6		✓	✓		✓
	7		✓	✓		✓
Urban	1		✓	✓		✓
	2		✓	✓		✓
	3		✓	✓		✓
	4		✓	✓		✓
	5		✓	✓		✓
	6		✓	✓		✓
	7		✓	✓		✓

It should be noted that policy and practice often differ. For example, although Kiswahili is emphasised, few schools are actually teaching it because there are not enough trained teachers or instructional materials.

Although the Education Review Commission, on whose report the 1992 White Paper on education was based, had recommended that the medium of instruction in the first four years of primary schooling should be the mother tongue, the government changed this to 'the relevant local language'. As mentioned above, urban centres had highly linguistically mixed populations. But similar situations were also found in some rural areas, especially where there were no distinct boundaries as one moved from one language group to another. Thus there may be a dominant language in a rural village, but trade with neighbouring villages might lead to the use of other languages. Therefore, it was practical to speak of a local language that would be used perhaps as a lingua franca by people whose mother tongue was different. (See, for example, Mukama 1991.)

In response to the proposals in the GWP, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) developed a curriculum that was eventually introduced into primary schools in two parts, in 2000 and 2002. One of the challenges facing the NCDC was how to address the government language policy in the context of Uganda's linguistic landscape, which includes 63 main languages spoken by 24 million people (NCDC 1999). 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 the 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 chapter reports on a study of multilingual language and literacy policy conducted in eastern Uganda from 2005 to 2006. The two central questions we address are as follows:

- i. To what extent is the local language policy in rural primary schools supported by members of a rural community in eastern Uganda?
- ii. 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 regards to the development of multilingual literacy for their children. 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 chapter is based on recent work in multilingual literacies (Hornberger 2003, Martin-Jones and 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) universalising theory influenced the views of many educators regarding literacy development, which was regarded as involving reading, writing and the mastery of grammar as separate individual skills. It 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 and Hamilton 1998, Baynham 1995, Gee 1990, Heath 1983, Purcell-Gates 2007, Prinsloo and 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. As a result, they have contributed to a theory of literacy as a social practice and collective resource.

Street (1984), for example, argues that the meaning of literacy cannot be separated from the social institutions in which it 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 and Breier 1996). This, 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 and with reference to the social relationships in which speakers, readers and writers find themselves (Barton and Hamilton 1998).

However, studies that have shown the importance of the role 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 et al. 2005, Hannon 1995, Kendrick 2003, Wolfendale and 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 (Adejumobi 2004, Lin and Martin 2005, Makoni and Meinhof 2003), but because even in wealthy regions of the world there are communities that have been historically and educationally marginalised (see Garcíá et al. 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, 'an individual's involvement in the interests, aspirations and welfare of the group is the measure of that individual's worth' (Kanu 2006:210). What this suggests is 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 characterised by practices of solidarity, interdependence, co-operation and reciprocal obligations. In our study, therefore, we defined 'community' as those people in the wider community with an investment in the student population of a particular school. We considered, for example, people such as the 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). Further, because we were interested in both rural and urban school communities, we selected communities within the catchment area of Bugagga Rural Primary School (BRPS)<sup>2</sup> 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, with a population of approximately 230,000 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002). Butaleja District is in southeastern Uganda and the people speak Lunyole, one of the Bantu languages. 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 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002). Common languages in this area include Dhopadhola, Ateso, Samia, Lugwere, Lunyole, Lumasaba and Lusoga, the first two belonging to the eastern and western Nilotic language families respectively, while the rest are Bantu languages. In TUPS, while all local languages are represented in the school, the languages used most commonly as lingua franca, according to the headmaster, are 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 is one of the six languages that the colonial government selected to be used 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 the people from Buganda were used as administrative agents by the colonial government. The language was and still is used in churches, the lower courts and health centres. The orthography of Lunyole, in contrast, was only developed in 2003, through the Lunyole Language Association 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, Tembe administered a questionnaire to 18 participants in early October 2005 and held follow-up focus group discussions (FGD) with all of these participants, as well as one additional participant, later in the month. Another focus group discussion was held in June 2006 with nine participants, two of whom had participated in the October 2005 discussions. There were thus a total of 25 participants in the FGD. Because the questionnaires were in English, not all participants were comfortable with the questionnaire format, thus the FGD provided participants with the opportunity to discuss their views in the familiar Lunyole language, also spoken by Tembe. Interviews were then transcribed and translated into English.

*Table 2: Participants who responded to the questionnaire*

	Counsellors	SMC	PTA	LLA	Total
<b>Female</b>	1	1	1	0	3
<b>Male</b>	2	2	5	6	15
<b>Total</b>	3	3	6	6	18

Of the 18 rural participants who completed the questionnaire, three were Counsellors at the sub-county where the BRPS was located, 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 2.)

To ascertain 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 while the remaining five were involved in two focus group discussions. 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, in the questionnaire administered to the rural community, participants were asked the following specific questions regarding the languages used for different purposes and the preferred language for teaching their children:

- i. What is the main language that you use to interact with your children?
- ii. What languages are used for homework for your children in Primary 1–4?
- iii. What languages do you prefer teachers to use in teaching your children the following subjects: social studies, science and mathematics?
- iv. 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 focus group discussions that followed the administration of the questionnaire.

## Findings

### **The rural community as stakeholder**

As mentioned in the Introduction, we raised two central questions to guide our study. In this section, we present the findings of the first of these questions, which was: To what extent is the local language policy in rural primary schools supported by members of a rural community in eastern Uganda?

### ***Language profile and practices of the community***

From the questionnaire and FGDs, we learnt that all participants except one spoke Lunyole as their mother tongue. This latter participant came to live in this 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, for all participants, Lunyole was the language used at home to speak with their children.

However, English and Luganda were the languages commonly used for reading and writing; a few participants indicated that they were able to read and write using both English and Lunyole. (See Table 3.)

Languages used	Lunyole	Luganda only	English only	English and Lunyole	English and Luganda	Other
Language used for writing	1	7	2	4	4	0
Language used for reading	1	5	3	4	5	0
Mother tongue/L1	17	-	-	-	-	1*

\*Lugwere, one of the Bantu languages spoken by the neighbours to the north of Butaleja district

### **Awareness of language policy**

As indicated in Table 4, there was general awareness of the new language policy by most participants. In the FGDs, the participants said they had heard about the new language education policy through school meetings, the media and during burial ceremonies.

Category	Yes	No
Counsellors	1	1
School Management Committee	2	1
Parent Teacher Association	5	1
Lunyole Language Association	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>

However, with respect to their specific understanding of the new language policy, 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.
- Every person should learn and promote his mother tongue to ease learning/communication.

In focus group discussions, participants noted that the purpose of 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<sup>3</sup>) is 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 to the child.*

Some of the participants noted that when a child is first taught in their mother tongue, they would still be able to learn English. After all, as one participant said, many countries that have developed, such as China and Japan, do not teach in English but have advanced greatly technologically.

In the implementation of language policy, the participants also raised the issue of the language of assessment, especially to the 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 would continue as a subject up to Primary 6. During this period, the participants were concerned that the language of examination should also be that used as medium of instruction. However, the following quote highlights what often happens in schools, which was a major cause of concern for the 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.*

### **Insights on school language practices**

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

For the other 11 participants in the October 2005 FGDs, however, while they indicated that for mathematics, science and social studies, Lunyole was preferred,

Luganda was the language preferred for reading and writing. The reasons given for their preferences varied. On the one hand, while Lunyole was the language commonly used and therefore facilitated easy understanding, they preferred Luganda for reading and writing because they believed spelling and combining sounds was easier in Luganda than in Lunyole. In addition, their perception was that Luganda ‘integrated’ many of the Bantu languages.

### **Language as resource**

Ruiz (1984) draws a useful distinction between the diverse orientations that a community has towards particular languages, their speakers and the roles that the language plays in society. The three fundamental orientations address language as a resource, language as a problem and language as a right. For this reason, one of the questions the 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’ which the participants wanted their children to be able to speak, read and write. (See Table 5.)

*Table 5: 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

It is interesting to note the different resources that participants associated with each of these languages. Some of the participants felt that there was a need to teach students in English, because for them a child being able 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.*

The issue of learning Kiswahili also came up in the discussions. It was pointed out that while it was good to learn English, there were situations that required knowledge of Kiswahili. The participants cited an example of when one travels to other parts of the country and encounters 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 thus:

*Kiswahili is very important. You may study but if you do not speak Kiswahili, then you have learnt 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.*

Finally, Luganda was also seen to be a useful resource. For many participants, Luganda had been used in their schools for instruction 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 auntie (a common practice) where their mother tongue, Lunyole, was not the majority language spoken, the child would feel isolated. In such situations, some of the participants argued that it was therefore necessary to learn another language like 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 learnt Luganda, then it becomes easy for the child to cope.*

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 to be able to speak English at an early age. The participants also acknowledged that Kiswahili and Luganda were important languages in their community and that their children needed to learn these at school. The former, they pointed out, was particularly important for security purposes; however, some were supportive of Luganda because most participants had learnt it when they were at school and took the position that it was easier to develop literacy in Luganda than in Lunyole.

### **The urban community as stakeholder**

As discussed in the Introduction, according to the new policy for urban areas, a local language was to be taught as a subject from Primary 1, while English was used as a medium of instruction. We therefore sought to gain comparative views from the urban community towards 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. However, they were generally opposed to teaching a local language at school. While a local language was appropriate for use in the home and community, they expressed a preference for the use of English at school. The following examples illustrate this point of view:

- I use my language Lunyole. However, when he goes to school he should begin with English.
- 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.
- 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 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.

The participants noted, in particular, that the multiplicity of languages within their environment made 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 Dhopadhola from the neighbours. So, right now they speak English, Kiswahili, Dhopadhola and a little of the mother tongue, that is Ateso.*

For many of the parents, English provided an enhanced set of opportunities for the future. The following quote 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.*

Recalling their experiences while 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.*

This, according to them, worked well and they were able to learn to speak English. They therefore felt 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.*

### **Ambivalent support for local languages**

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

*There are languages that are 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.*

In addition, as exemplified in the following quote, the participants recognised 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.*

### **Ambivalence towards Kiswahili**

Uganda, together with Kenya and Tanzania, is a member of the East African region. The three countries have a common past in that at one point they 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 had attempted to implement a policy of Kiswahili medium of instruction. However, the participants argued it had not benefited these countries. For example, they pointed out that the Kenyans were unable to make 'good' public addresses due to the fact that, according to these participants, they did 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.*

According to the 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. Consequently, they remarked on the good standard in Ugandan education, which was an attraction to 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.*

Further, the participants were of the opinion that Kiswahili was 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.*

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

*Why not use a national mother tongue like either Kiswahili or Luganda, where it can be general?*

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

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. However, the participants were opposed to the implementation of this policy, saying that the teaching of a mother tongue was the responsibility of the parents at home. The schools ought to be concerned with the teaching of an international language such as English, for the future of their 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 Kiswahili might serve this role. The language problems experienced in the neighbouring countries, which had implemented local language policies, were not desirable and provided lessons that were relevant to Uganda.

## **Analysis and discussion**

Batibo (2005) observes that speakers of minority languages are in a dilemma, particularly in relation to choice of language of instruction. On the one hand, there 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 international level is equally strong. Okombo and Rubagumya (1996) make 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. 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 revitalised. At the same time, however, Bamgbose (2000) observes that because language policies in Africa tend to ignore minority languages, it leads speakers of these languages to devalue them and assume that they are not useful for social and economic advancement. Perhaps, as Batibo (2005) points out, this is because the

minority languages are used within the confines of their speakers' territories and speakers are forced to learn and use one of the dominant area languages or the respective 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 regard 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 that there was ambivalence in both the rural and urban school community. The community of Bugagga Rural Primary School was concerned that a local language policy was a regressive step to the past, rather than a progressive step to the future. Because of their past, in which Luganda and English were promoted, the participants in the study had mixed feelings towards the implementation of a language policy that would promote the minority Lunyole language. While some appreciated it, there were those who were concerned about using it as a language of instruction. Similar sentiments as those expressed by the rural community were prevalent among the stakeholders of the urban school. Indeed, the participants observed that because of the many languages spoken by the pupils in the school, selecting only one to be taught as a subject would be difficult. Therefore, for these participants, there was no place in their school for the local language policy. The participants were adamant that it was the role of parents, not the school, to teach the mother tongue to their children.

However, the issue of identity and cultural maintenance was also an important consideration for parents in both the rural and urban communities, though the rural community held stronger views in this regard. To the 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, for example, Norton 2000). From this point of view, the participants did appreciate that the government had sanctioned the teaching of their language. Not only would it promote their language, but their culture as well, something they considered to be of great significance for their children and for development in their area (see Kramsch 1993).

Nevertheless, and this is our second major finding, both the rural and urban communities were particularly concerned about the need to expose their children to an international language and to English in particular. They had observed problems with local language policies in other countries within the region, which now faced the challenge of reversing negative effects associated with this policy. In the literature, Bamgbose (2000) has observed that using African languages as a medium of instruction has been notoriously unstable in several African countries. He identified dissatisfaction with the practical outcome 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 to the use of African languages in education.

This view that the stakeholders have towards the value of English was also observed in a study on the returns on English language skills in India (Azam et al. 2010). The researchers observed that in India, from an individual's perspective, there are several economic incentives to learn English. For example, English has value as a lingua franca. Knowledge of a common language facilitates communication. A common language is especially useful in linguistically diverse places, where the chances of meeting someone with the same native language are relatively low. In India, there is considerable variation in languages spoken even within narrowly defined regions, such as the district. A common language is also useful for international trade.

Participants in our study also argued that due to ongoing globalisation in terms of technology, there was no need to insist on using their mother tongue; to catch up in this fast-moving world, children needed to start with an international language, which was English. The place for the mother tongue was the home and the parent was the rightful person to handle that. Further, English was also viewed by these participants as a lingua franca within the country, given the multiplicity of languages in Uganda. It was a necessity and therefore an advantage that the colonial administration decided to promote English in the country. This is undoubtedly a common perception expressed by many in multilingual communities. In Nigeria, as Adedimeji (2004) points out, English plays an integrative role. It is a language of nationalism concerned with political integration and efficiency (Bamgbose 1991:20); and also a language of nationalism.

Our third major finding addresses the relationship between local languages and more dominant 'area' or regional languages. As we mentioned above, the colonial government used Buganda agents as administrators in eastern Uganda. Consequently, when formal education was introduced in the eastern region, Luganda, in which the Bible had already been translated, was used as the medium of instruction. Thus in Butaleja district, Luganda continued to be used up until the launching of the new policy. This confirms what Batibo (2005) observed as the fate of minority languages in the face of the area languages used in education. The community from the rural school preferred the use of Luganda to teach reading and writing, arguing that this was the language that had been used in the past and that they were now accustomed to. When many participants were growing up, there was no orthography available for Lunyole while the only reading materials that were available were in Luganda. Some participants therefore struggled to conceive of Lunyole as a medium of instruction.

Like the community of the rural school, the use of Luganda was often mentioned among the urban community stakeholders at TUPS. As the participants pointed out, they were taught in Luganda as the local language in 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 a local language was to be enforced. As with the participants from the rural school, Luganda was preferred because it had been used in the past. As Batibo (2005) notes, a historical legacy of domination by the dominant area languages tends to make speakers of minority languages feel inadequate in comparison to those

who speak the widely used languages. This observation applies to the speakers of Lunyole as a minority language, given the experiences narrated by some of the participants. However, although speakers of Luganda account for 17 per cent of Uganda's population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002), Luganda has failed to attain national status. Nevertheless, its hegemonic influence now seems to constrain the implementation of the new policy, especially within the communities in which minority languages had hitherto not been used in education and therefore did not have written resources.

Our fourth major finding addresses the ambivalent status of Kiswahili, a language that is extensively used within the Great Lakes region (Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo) and which serves as a national language in Kenya and Tanzania. Several attempts were made from 1903 to 1971 to develop Kiswahili in Uganda both as a national language and 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 in the security forces. It also became a language of commerce as result of its use with traders from the coast of Kenya and it was developed into a lingua franca, particularly among those poorly educated, just as English is for those well educated. Thus, while Uganda has no national language, according to the new policy Kiswahili has been introduced 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 was good to learn English and the mother tongue, Kiswahili was also a useful resource. However, to some of the stakeholders in the urban community, Kiswahili was also regarded as a local language and therefore not acceptable to be taught to their children. Others, however, were supportive of the teaching of a local language that was designated as a national language. In this regard, the two possible languages were Kiswahili or Luganda.

Our fifth major finding, particularly with regard to the rural school community, was the issue of assessment. The community was greatly concerned about the language that was used to assess their children. It would defeat the objective of teaching in the local language if assessment were carried out in another language. However, as long as the available materials are in English – which the teachers translate when teaching in the mother tongue – there is a concern that the examinations will be conducted in English. Furthermore, much as the policy was being implemented in the lower classes, there was no mention by the school administration of continuing to teach local languages in the upper classes, as stipulated in the policy. Continued teaching of local languages as a subject to the upper classes would compel the administration to work out appropriate strategies for assessment since they would have to ensure that assessment of local languages as subjects was done through the local languages themselves and not through English.

## 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*, are

illustrative of 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. As he said:

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

Kamanzi, on the other hand, focused on economic considerations, particularly with regard to the Kyeyo sector (Ugandans in the diaspora), who are a major contributor to Uganda's national income. The local language policy, according to Kamanzi, was 'inward looking' and 'cannot sell', because:

*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. (Kamanzi 2006)*

This is confirmed by Coleman (2010) in his discussion of the English language in development. Coleman identifies many roles that English plays in development, one of which is international mobility of workers. Indeed, the fact that English is taught as a second language in Uganda has enabled many young people to seek employment at international level with ease. As mentioned earlier, the participants did recognise the fact that the world has become a global village, therefore it was necessary to learn an international language. While there were languages like French or Arabic that can also play this role, they singled out English as the most important. Within Uganda, a good command of English is a prerequisite to getting professional employment. Azam et al. (2010) too observe that in India, to be a government official or teacher (other than at low levels), one needs to be proficient in English.

In this article, we have 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 and Hamilton 1998, Hornberger 2003, Martin-Jones and 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, there was 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 opportunity for employment. In this regard, learning an international language such as English was considered very important; there was concern that learning a local language was a regressive step, compromising childrens' progress. In addition, many participants, especially 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. In the rural area, unlike the urban area, the community shared a common mother tongue and so there was little problem regarding the selection of a relevant local language for instructional purposes. However, the community appreciated that the learning of 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 community, the linguistic diversity prevalent in the Tororo District was a major challenge for the community, as no one language could be identified for instructional purposes. Indeed, English served as a lingua franca in some contexts. Further, the urban community tended to be more mobile and cosmopolitan, looking beyond local borders for personal and professional advancement. Hence they were in favour of their children learning languages of wider communication like English, French and Arabic.

During the colonial period in Africa, the acquisition of literacy in the colonial language was the main tool for upward mobility and economic gain; this view has survived the colonial 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 the colonial education system gained access to European languages. As a result, it placed them in a better position in their own society (Alidou 2004, Wolff 2006), 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.

The new language policy empowers rural communities to select a relevant local language to use as a medium of instruction while urban communities can teach local languages as subjects in their schools. However, from our case study, it was clear 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 developing their children's literacy. 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 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 needs to 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. Without adequate resources in the local language, as well as appropriate teacher training, however, local language policies are greatly compromised. Further, it is clear that parents and communities need convincing evidence that instruction in local languages will not compromise desires for global citizenship.

## Notes

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2. Pseudonyms are used for schools, places and people.
3. Muzungu is the common word used in Lunyole and other Bantu languages in Uganda to refer to a European.

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