Local Languages as a Human Right in Education

Comparative Cases from Africa

Zehlia Babaci-Wilhite

University of California, USA
University of Oslo, Norway

There seems to be general agreement that children learn better when they understand what the teacher is saying. In Africa this is not the case. Instruction is given in a foreign language, a language neither pupils nor the teachers understand well. This is the greatest educational problem there is in Africa. This is the problem this book discusses and it is therefore an important book. The recent focus on quality education becomes meaningless when teaching is given in a language pupils do not understand. Babaci-Wilhite concludes that any local curriculum that ignores local languages and contexts risks a loss of learning quality and represent a violation of children's rights in education. The book is highly recommended.

Birgit Brock-Utne, Professor of Education and Development, University of Oslo, Norway

Zehlia Babaci-Wilhite's illuminating African case studies display a mastery of the literature on policies related to not only language policies integrally related to human rights in education, but to the relationship between education and national development. The book provides a paradigm shift from focusing on the issue of schooling access to the very meaning education has for personal and collective identity and affirmation. As such, it will appeal to a wide audience of education scholars, policy makers and practitioners.

Robert F. Arnove, Chancellor's Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA

A very important and timely book that makes crucial contribution to critical reviews of the policies about languages of instruction and rights in education in Africa. Brilliantly crafted and presented with great clarity the author puts into perspective issues that need to be addressed to improve academic performance in Africa's educational systems in order to attain the goal of providing education for all as well as restoring rights in education. This can be achieved through critical examination of languages of instruction and of the cultural relevance of the curricula. Definitely required reading for scholars of education and human rights in general, in Africa in particular, as well as for education policy makers.

Sam Mchombo, Associate Professor of African Languages and Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley, USA

This book contributes to enlighten a crucial academic as well as a democratic and philosophical issue: The right to education and the rights in education, as it is seen in the dilemmas of the right to use your local language. It offers a high-level research and the work is both cutting edge and offers new knowledge to the fields of democracy, human rights and education. The book is a unique contribution to a very important academic discussion on rights in education connecting to language of instruction in schools, politics and power, as well as it frames the questions of why education and language can be seen as a human right for sustainable development in Africa. The actuality of the book is disturbing: We need to take the debate on human rights in education for the children of the world, for their future and for their right to a cultural identity.

Inga Bostad, Director of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, Norway
Local Languages as a Human Right in Education
COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: 
A Diversity of Voices

Volume 36

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Local Languages as a Human Right in Education

Comparative Cases from Africa

Zehlia Babaci-Wihlhte
University of California, USA and
University of Oslo, Norway
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FOREWORD

Zehlia Babaci-Wilhite has given us a hopeful treatise; it holds out hope that the mother tongues of Africa will survive the current wave of Eurocentric linguistic imperialism that seems to be sweeping the continent. There is a dark side to this otherwise hopeful treatise. The dark side is, of course, the persistence—indeed the growth—of language imperialism in the African continent. And all of this growth in the face of a mountain of research evidence, gathered not only around the world but in Africa itself, showing that when children are taught to read and write in their mother tongue, they acquire the content of the academic disciplines more readily AND they end up later learning the “culturally dominant” official language of the country (usually English or French) better than if they are taught in the dominant official language from the outset. For those of us who are empirically-minded (and I count myself in that number), it is very useful to have compelling data to support the use of the mother tongue as the LoI in the early years of schooling.

But I can reject the use of European languages of instruction just as easily on ethical or cultural grounds. The ethical proposition is simple and clear: children have a fundamental human right to learn key conceptual knowledge in their mother tongue. Yes, it’s a human rights issue! End of story. And the cultural argument is only a slight variant of the ethical argument: To maximize the development of strong cultural identity, all children need to use their mother tongue at the outset of school; furthermore, they need systematic instruction in how to read, write, speak, and listen in that mother tongue throughout their school careers. We know that is true for English speakers in the US, for French speakers in France and so on. So what could possibly prompt any of us to think that it would not hold true for speakers of isiXhosa or Kiswahili. Expertise and sophistication should be the goal of all mother tongue instruction because home languages embody competence in the culture in which the language is used.

This is NOT an argument against second language acquisition or even against the widespread use of Eurocentric languages; indeed, the global world in which we live virtually demands bilingualism if not multilingualism, as well as expertise in languages of commerce and information. But it is an argument against linguistic imperialism—the eradication of home languages in deference to these dominant global discourses. And the irony, of course, is the evidence suggests that strong mother tongue instruction is the best medicine for developing mastery of a second language. But the evidence is consistent with a simple but powerful truth and the interaction of learning language and content. When children in Africa come to school, they have three tasks to learn: A body of disciplinary content, a set of literacy (reading and writing) processes, and a new official (probably European) language. Three unknowns is a lot for a 6 year old. Better to start them out learning the unfamiliar content and the unfamiliar processes (reading and writing) in a familiar
FOREWORD

(mother tongue) language setting. Later, with some content and some literacy tools under their belts, they’ll be ready for the new language. Even better, they can bring familiar content (what they learned about science and social studies in L1) and familiar literacy processes (reading and writing) to the learning of L2.

But enough from me. Zehlia Babaci-Wilhite tells the story much more eloquently, much more powerfully, and in much more vivid detail than I. On with her version of this tricky tale of linguistics, power, and policy.

P. David Pearson, Professor*
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Berkeley

NOTE

* P. David Pearson is a faculty member in the programs in Language and Literacy and Human Development at the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, where he served as Dean from 2001–2010. Current research projects include Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading—a Research and Development effort with colleagues at Lawrence Hall of Science in which reading, writing, and language as are employed as tools to foster the development of knowledge and inquiry in science—and the Strategic Education Research Partnership—a collaboration between UC Berkeley, Stanford, and the San Francisco Unified School District designed to embed research within the portfolio of school-based issues and priorities. He also works with teachers in middle and high schools in New York City to figure out how to promote deeper learning as teachers try to navigate the new Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. Prior to coming to Berkeley in 2001, he served on the faculties of education at Michigan State, Illinois, and Minnesota.

In 2006 the University of Minnesota honored him with the Alumni Outstanding Achievement Award, and in 2010 AERA presented him Distinguished Contributions to Research in Education Award. In 2012, the Literacy Research Association established the P. David Pearson Scholarly Influence Award to be given annually to honor research that exerts a long-term influence on literacy practices and/or policies.

He is the founding editor of the Handbook of Reading Research now in its fourth volume, he edited Reading Research Quarterly and the Review of Research in Education, and he has served on the Editorial Review Board for some 20 educational journals.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am sincerely thankful for the support of my colleague, Professor Macleans A. Geo-JaJa from Brigham Young University, USA. He was instrumental in facilitating my work and supporting my research, which I am forever grateful.

I am also sincerely thankful to Professor Birgit Brock-Utne and Professor Inga Bostad from the University of Oslo, Norway who gave me constructive comments and inspired me all along. Tusen hjertelig takk.

A special thanks to Professor Robert F. Arnove from Indiana University, Bloomington, USA and Senior Lecturer Dr. Azaveli Lwaitama from the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania for wonderful comments which enhanced the quality of my research, which I am sincerely appreciative.

I am extremely grateful to Professor P. David Pearson for his sponsorship at the University of California, Berkeley and for extending my Visiting Scholar appointment, which allowed me to finalize this book. It has been a great pleasure to work with you and your great accomplishments have been of an inspiration.

Thank you very much. A special thanks to Professor Jabari Mahiri from the University of California, Berkeley for his valuable comments. To James Hixon and Victor Wong from the University of California, Berkeley for their final support in formatting this book.

I am particularly appreciative and grateful to all the people from Zanzibar and Tanzania mainland who contributed to the study: the headmasters, the teachers, the lecturers at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA), the government officials, the parents and the students and friends who gratefully gave me their time and support for my research throughout the field work and subsequent email correspondence. A special thanks to Ali Mwalimu from SUZA, to Joyce, a fine head teacher with excellent staff, thank you very much for your wonderful contributions, for your special attention to my work, to all of you Asante sana.

I would like to acknowledge the Deputy Vice Chancellor Professor Makenya Maboko, Professor Joseph Tesha and Dr. Bernhard Sanyagi from the University of Dar-es-Salaam for providing me with my research permits. I am deeply grateful to all those who have read and contributed in different ways on the work: Professor Allan Pitman, Professor Andrew Collins, Professor Johannes Brinkmann, Professor Abel Ishumi, Professor Ali Abdi, Professor Joel Samoff, Dr. Kimmo Kosonen, Dr. LiHong Huang, Dr. Mwajuma Vico, Dr. Maryam Ismail, Editor Virman Man, Dr. William Bright-Taylor, and Joh Ekkolo. Thank you to PhD candidate Jane Bakahwemama for your translations, Asante sana.

Last but not least, a sincere thanks to my family: My grand-mother Fatima n’Saïd’ Ali, who has been an inspiration all my life. The roots of my understanding of the value of African knowledge began in our home in Paris and to my aunt Hamama.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Babaci, for making me aware of the importance of social justice and quality education, ahmekem saha.

To my dearly loved children Kahena Judith, Alexandre Yanis and Paul Kacem, for being great learners, for your interest in sharing your understanding in several languages. Your eagerness to contribute to a better world gives me hope. To my husband Hal Wilhite for your editing and support, thank you very much.

My dearest and beloved sister Louisa Babaci, I am dedicating this book to you for always being here and always believing in me. You are and have been a real gift in my life; there are no word to express my gratitude to you. Merci beaucoup.

October 12th, 2014
Zehlia Babaci-Wilhite
# ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADEA</td>
<td>Association for the Development of Education in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Committee on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>Dar es Salaam International School</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EMP</td>
<td>English Medium Primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Education</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GPS</td>
<td>Government Primary Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICCPR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICESCR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IKR</td>
<td>Institute for Kiswahili Research</td>
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<td>LDC</td>
<td>Language Development Center</td>
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<td>LHR</td>
<td>Language as a Human Right</td>
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<td>LIC</td>
<td>Language of Immediate Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>LWC</td>
<td>Language of wider communication often cross border languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoI</td>
<td>Language of Instruction (synonyms: MoI/MoE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOITASA</td>
<td>Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWC</td>
<td>Language of wider communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoECS</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoEVT</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Vocational Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>NECTA</td>
<td>National Examinations Council of Tanzania</td>
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<td>NERDC</td>
<td>Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NPE</td>
<td>Nigerian Policy of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTTC</td>
<td>Nkrumah Teacher Training College</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSC</td>
<td>Orientation to Secondary Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>PITRO</td>
<td>Programme for Institutional Transformation and Research Outreach</td>
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<td>PPS</td>
<td>Private Primary Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSLE</td>
<td>Primary School Leaving Examination</td>
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<td>RFA</td>
<td>Radio Free Africa</td>
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<td>RTD</td>
<td>Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam</td>
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<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Committee</td>
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<td>SYPP</td>
<td>Six-Year Primary Project</td>
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ACRONYMS

SPINE  Student Performance in National Examinations
S/R  Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading
SR1  School in Rural 1
SR2  School in Rural 2
SU1  School in Urban 1
SU2  School in Urban 2
SUZA  State University of Zanzibar
TAP  Teacher Advancement Programme
TBC  Tanzania Broadcasting Cooperation
TC  Teacher Centers
TEN-MET  Tanzania Education Network - Mtandan wa Elimu Tanzania
TIE  Tanzania Institute of Education
ToT  Training of Teachers
TVT  Televisheni Ya Taifa
UDHR  Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UDSM  University of Dar es Salaam
UK  United Kingdom
UN  United Nations
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF  United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
URT  United Republic of Tanzania
USA  United States of America
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WAEC  West African Examinations Council
WB  World Bank
WW  World War
ZABEP  Zanzibar basic education of improvement project
ZEDCO  Zanzibar Education Development Consortium
ZEDP  Zanzibar Education Development Plan
ZEMAP  Zanzibar Education Master Plan
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Language is not Everything in Education, but without Language, Everything is nothing in Education. (E. Wolff, 2006)

This book explores the consequences of linguistic choices for quality education, self-determined development and children’s rights in education. Many African countries are struggling with the question of whether or to choose a local or foreign language as a language of instruction (LoI) in schools from elementary to university. The aims of this book are first of all to underline the urgency of acknowledging local languages and local knowledge in order to achieve quality education and self-development, which I define as a right in education. I realize that there are an increasing number of books and journal articles that draw attention to achieving human right to education, defined as access to education. However, there has been insufficient attention given to the broader concept of rights in education, which encompasses right to schooling but also includes the quality of the education. This book reviews and assesses the debates on LoI and their consequences for quality learning and cultural identity.

Another aim of the book is to underline the importance of acknowledging human rights in education, drawing on theories addressing formal and informal education, local versus global education, education for self-reliance, freedom and development. The book draws heavily on an analysis of a recently initiated curriculum change in Zanzibar. Nonetheless, the scope is intended to be broader, encompassing other African countries such as Nigeria and ranging further afield to global trends and the specific educational changes in Malaysia. I draw into the analysis the results of research on language and learning issues on the mainland of Tanzania and a review of literature on the debates on choice of LoI in several parts of the world. The cross-national comparisons allow for an analysis of why some Asian and African countries continue using colonial languages in their educational systems, while others have chosen a local LoI. I discuss the role of privatization of education in language choices and question whether this trend in Africa contributes to improved learning or even to economic growth and inclusive development. I examine the implications of the choice of LoI for local identity, work prospects and participation in the global economy. The comparative study argues that education is critical to development and that both education and development should accommodate the broader context of human rights, in order to explore the links between languages, education and development in Africa. I believe that the analysis in this book will advance our understanding of why and how to improve and implement the best choice of LoI for quality learning in Africa and why this ought to be a right in education.
CHAPTER 1

This book puts forward the argument that quality learning must be related to educational rights and that quality learning in African countries will not be achieved without curricula that are based on the use of a local LoI. This emphasis on the importance of a human rights framework places this book squarely on the forefront of academic and political agendas on the future of education in Africa.

The Organization of the Book

The introduction in chapter one elaborates the book’s rationale, purpose and organization. In chapter two I undertake a literature review on language issues in Africa and policies in education, which encompasses debates on choice of language, education and learning. The analysis of the policy change addressed in this chapter builds on a solid foundation of evidence from Africa that learning in a local language is critical to quality learning and important in the reinforcement of cultural identity. In chapter three I discuss the theoretical framework for the study. The central theoretical focus in the chapter has been on the explanatory power of theories related to development and human rights to explore the change of LoI in curriculum reform and its consequences. The theoretical framework incorporates the importance of local context, using a local language and emphasizing the development of local capacity on local terms. Such a multiple approach emphasizes the importance of indigenous concepts, articulated in their natural environment. Any local curriculum that ignores local languages and contexts risks a loss of learning quality and a violation of children’s rights in education. I review and assess the debates on LoI and their consequences for quality of learning and cultural identity. In chapter four I present the geographic, demographic, historical backgrounds in Zanzibar and the rational behind the curriculum change in 2006, when Zanzibar endorsed the new Educational and Training policy. This policy will change important aspects of the curriculum in primary and secondary education, including a change in the LoI from Kiswahili to English in Standard five and six in the subjects of Mathematics, Science, Geography and ICT. The theoretical framework forms a platform for the analysis of why Zanzibar ignored this evidence on the relationship between choice of LoI and quality learning and reversed its policy of using Kiswahili throughout primary education. In chapter five, I compare the recent changes in LoI in Zanzibar and Malaysia, in the light of the results of fieldwork in Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar and a review of the literature and official documents on the debates on choice of LoI in Malaysia. The cross-national comparison allows for an analysis of why some Asian and African countries continue using colonial languages in their educational systems, while others have chosen a local LoI. I examine the implications of the choice of LoI for local identity, work prospects and participation in the global economy. I also compare language-in-education policies between two African countries, mainly Tanzania and Nigeria. In chapter six, I do a comparative study on public versus private schooling in Tanzania mainland and analyze the private education as a promoter of English. I draw on my research in Dar es Salaam in which I examined public versus private primary schools.
with its transformational objectives to promote quality education but ignoring the
fact that what makes a difference is the resources given to schools and not English
as a LoI. The conclusion in *chapter seven* discusses my main findings and provides
recommendations for language-in-education policies for sustainable development.
I argue that education is critical to development and that both education and
development should accommodate the broader context of human rights. I explore
the links between languages, education and development in Africa. Education, with
its transformational objectives, contributes to both economic growth and inclusive
development. I emphasize the evidence that the choice of local LoI has a positive
effect on the multi-dimensionality of poverty. I draw out the distinction between
rights to education versus rights in education and argue that quality education is
crucial to rights in education. I conclude this book with suggestions for further
research and reiterate the argument that the use of a local curriculum and a local LoI
are critical to bringing African development on African terms and that indigenous
knowledge, including local languages is indispensable for inclusive development. I
propose that linguistic and cultural rights should be integral to the education systems
as they are critical to freedom and social justice.
Africa is a continent with a very high linguistic diversity. Of these official, national and spoken languages, four main groupings can be distinguished:

1. Afro-Asiatic covering Northern Africa (including the horn of Africa, Central Sahara & the top Nile).
2. Nilo-Saharan encompassing approximately millions speakers scattered in Central and Eastern Africa.

Figure 1. Map of Africa

Africa is a continent with a very high linguistic diversity. Of these official, national and spoken languages, four main groupings can be distinguished:

1. Afro-Asiatic covering Northern Africa (including the horn of Africa, Central Sahara & the top Nile).
2. Nilo-Saharan encompassing approximately millions speakers scattered in Central and Eastern Africa.
3. *Niger-Saharan* (Niger-Congo) covering the two third of Africa, includes the Bantu languages of Central, Southern, and Eastern Africa.

4. *Khoisan* encompassing languages in Western part of Southern Africa (see endnote above).

   Any local African language that the children already know is still better compared to the use of a foreign language. (Makalela 2005, p. 165)

The analysis of the new Zanzibari educational policy addressed in this book builds on a solid foundation of evidence from Africa that learning in a local language is critical to quality learning and important in the reinforcement of cultural identity. In this chapter, I review and assess the literature on language, learning and identity in Africa.
In the 18th and 19th centuries, colonial linguists and missionaries recorded African languages and classified them into differing dialects (Makalela, 2005). In sub-Saharan Africa, African languages were either related to, or were derivatives of Bantu. The shared communicative base was much broader than that assumed by missionaries and language scientists who have written about African languages from the 1830s to the present, for example, missionaries Isaac Hughes (1789-1870), who transcribed seTswana, and Andrew Spaarman (1747-1820) who transcribed isiXhosa in South Africa. These transcriptions led to the linguistic separation of these closely related languages. Leketi Makalela (2005, p. 151) calls this process the “de-Africanisation through displacement of African languages.” Furthermore he argues that “African languages are not so different as to impede communication, as it is canonically assumed” (2005, p. 166) and a harmonization, rather than a segmentation of languages ought to be made. However, he notes that:

The notion of harmonisation is often misinterpreted to mean that some African languages will be killed and that people will lose their languages and identities …. But as Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000) rightly put it, this process of harmonisation does not take anything away from the speakers, but rather adds … a core written Standard for literacy, which learners from different languages acquire at school while retaining their home or spoken varieties. (2005, p. 168)

If local languages were harmonized, this would help to protect traditions through stories, myths, and songs (see Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012, Geo-JaJa, 2013). Languages with a colonial legacy, such as English, French, Portuguese and Spanish (to a smaller extent) continue to be used as official languages in many developing countries today. Africans were forced to use European languages, and this constituted a form for colonialization of the mind (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1994). English is a particularly powerful globalizing language that is influencing debates on choice of LoI in many developing countries. Ayo Bamgbose (2003, p. 421) notes that “language has a pecking order and English has the sharpest beak.” It carries with it a cultural context foreign to the local contexts for education (Bamgbose, ibid). The use of English embedded in education is a form for dependency (discussed in the next section) through the institution of European languages, metaphors and curricula. In recent years, the use of English as a LoI in postcolonial countries has been a subject of debate and research. Many scholars argue that English intervention in learning promotes and prolongs neo-colonialism and that its expansion should be halted (Mulokoz, 1991; Phillipson, 1992; Mazrui, 2003; Qorro, 2004; Alidou & Brock-Utne, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012).

Today, English is used as an official or semi-official language in over 60 countries in the world and has a prominent place in a further 20, the most learned language in the world (Majhanovich, 2013a; 2014). Globally, it is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic
conferences, Science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music and advertising (Mazrui, 1997). Brj Kachru (1990) describes the spread of English as three concentric circles to explain how the language has been acquired and how it is used. The first inner circle represents its use as a mother tongue or/and a first language. The second circle comprises countries colonized by Britain where non-native speakers learn English as a second language in a multilingual setting, as is the case in Tanzania. The outermost circle consists of countries, which dedicate several years in primary and secondary education to the teaching of English as a foreign language, such as Norway and France. Some scholars, namely (Kadeghe, 2003) regard English as a valuable asset for global business and cross-cultural communication. Many language policy makers have adopted this view both in wealthy nations like the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), where large amounts of ‘foreign aid’ moneys are spent on promoting English, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where English is now often the sole official LoI at all levels of education (Mazrui, 2003). These perspectives ignore the issues of quality learning and cultural identity. Robert Phillipson (2000) argues that this increasing global influence of English constitutes “linguistic imperialism” and counterposes the preservation of native languages as “linguistic human rights” in line with Skutnabb-Kangas (2000).

THE EAST AFRICA LINGUA FRANCA

Efforts to promote Kiswahili began in the 1930s. The first President of Tanzania Julius K. Nyerere (his presidency extended from 1962–1985) had a strong vision of education and social action initiated efforts to make Kiswahili a pan-Tanzanian language. He faced several dilemmas associated with reunifying African languages. One problem is that cultural subgroups champion their own local languages (mother-tongues) at the expense of a national or regional language. However, what can be learned from his strategy is that African languages have the same potential to serve as a pan-national language as any other language, and unification can be made to happen if there is political will to create and enforce the necessary policies and strategies. The promotion of Kiswahili had begun in Tanzania long before Nyerere’s efforts. It was given the status of the official language for the inter-territorial East African Language Committee in Tanganyika⁴ (Tanzania), Kenya, and Uganda.

In Tanzania, the National Kiswahili Council, in Kiswahili Bakita (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa) was founded in 1967 by a government act. It was given a budget and a staff with the mandate to develop Kiswahili and make sure the language is used properly in the media. After independence, the work of promoting the language was continued at the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR) at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). In 1967, the Tanzanian constitution was amended and Kiswahili became formalized as the LoI for primary school grades within the education system. Kiswahili has since been used in Tanzania as both official and national language.
A competence in English is also important, since English links Tanzania and the rest of the world as the global language of technology, commerce and administration (URT, 2009). Even so, in most official and legal discussions, Kiswahili is the language of choice. Othman (2008, p. 6) a Zanzibari scholar gives us an example that conveys the tension between English and Kiswahili within the legal system:

I remember an incident in 2007 at the General Meeting of the Zanzibar Law Society where members argued for some time whether the meeting should be conducted in English or Kiswahili. Later the President of the Society ruled that it should be in English since it was the official language of the High Court. Half an hour after the decision was made, nobody was talking in English, and no one protested.

Kiswahili is often used as the intra-family language after marriage in Tanzania. About 80 million people in 14 countries in East and Central Africa speak Kiswahili (URT, 2009). Kiswahili is a language widely spoken in Eastern Africa and adjacent islands, but also in other parts of Africa and Arabia, and is taught in many institutions of learning in Europe, Japan, Korea, USA, England and Canada, among others (Ismail, 2013). Kiswahili is one of the five official languages of the African Union alongside English, French, Portuguese and Arabic. Kiswahili has been occasionally used as working language in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meetings as far back as 1986. It was however, never made
an official working language of the UN or UNESCO. Othman (2008, p. 7) argues that:

Kiswahili is no longer the language of Tanzania or East Africa; it is the language of the entire African continent, having been adopted by the African Union as one of its official languages. When former Mozambican President, Joaquim Chissano (and not the President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa), addressed the African Heads of State Summit for the first time using Kiswahili, the audience warmly applauded.

Language plays a major role in Tanzania’s robust media. Most newspapers in Tanzania are in Kiswahili. The public broadcasting television service Televisheni ya Taifa (TVT) or Tanzania Broadcasting Cooperation (TBC) sends most of the programs in Kiswahili. The radio networks of Radio Tanzania Dar-es-Salaam
(RTD) are also State-run and use Kiswahili. It is important to note that from 2007
the Tanzanian State has owned both TVT and RTD. They are both very popular
and are both under the umbrella of Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation. However,
privately owned media are more important, since they control more than 11 daily
newspapers, over 6 television stations and more than 6 FM radio stations. All of
these are published or conducted in Kiswahili. One of them, Radio Free Africa
(RFA) reaches the Great Lakes Region - the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC),
Rwanda and even Burundi. This shows the importance of Kiswahili as a cross border
language (URT, 2009).

The language dilemma continues to be a subject of intense debate among language
and education scholars. Othman (2008, p.6) formulates the central question this way:

Why is a country like Tanzania, which was in the forefront of Africa’s
liberation struggle, which proclaimed the Arusha Declaration that ushered in
its own development path and which in its policy documents and proclamations
wanted the people to be the masters of their own destiny, unable to resolve this
language problem?

Adama Ouane and Christine Glanz (2006) wrote that Tanzania, in comparison to
Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and Zambia was the only of these countries that
went beyond experimentation and implemented a policy that promoted the effective
use of a national language in formal and non-formal education and administration.
Its success can be traced back to Nyerere’s concept of “Education for self-reliance”
which perceives education as the means for laying the foundations in the present for
future development (Nyerere, 1968).

LOCAL LANGUAGES FOR KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION
AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

African linguists and educationalists such as Babs Fafunwa (1990); Mugyabuso
M. Mulokozi (1991); Casimir Rubagumya, (1991); Zaline Roy-Campbell and
Martha Qorro (1997); Justinian Galabawa (2002); Ali Mazrui (2003); Azaveli
F. Lwaitama (2004); Ayo Bamgbose (2005); Maryam Ismail (2007), Mwajuma
Vuzo (2009); Moshi Kimizi (2012), all argue for the advantages of the use of
an African language as the LoI. Children taught in any of the language varieties
similar to their mother tongue will have better learning comprehension than those
taught in an adopted foreign language such as English, and, furthermore mother
tongue education leads to more effective teaching of Science and Mathematics
(Mwinsheikhe, 2002).

An effective language policy takes care that the languages taught in education
reflect everyday communication patterns (Alidou, 2003). According to Brock-Utne
(2002) and Senkoro (2004), it would be demotivating for learners to learn how
to read and write in languages that are neither promoted nor used as language in
schools. Hardy (1931, p. 445 quoted in Brock-Utne, 2002) writes that:
The European languages are said to have logic and a level of abstraction that the indigenous languages do not have... Of all the subjects taught in the indigenous schools that of the European language is the one which demands the most time, the most trouble, and which yields the least result.

Scholars such as Sunil Loona (1996); Azaveli F. Lwaitama and Rubagumya (1990); Mulokozi (2000); Zubeida Desai (2004); Bamgbose (2005); Birgit, Brock-Utne, 2007; Kimmo Kosonen (2010); Kathleen Heugh (2011) all conclude from their research that learning in one’s mother tongue allows for better learning of all subjects including the learning of a second language. The language that a child masters best is the language used at home and in the local surroundings; however, the choice of language for a local school is complicated by the fact that in many African contexts there are several languages used in the community. There is not always an obvious choice of local language and this has led to many local debates on whether one of the local languages should be used or whether a pan-African language such as Kiswahili should be used as a LoI. The cost of using multiple mother tongues in differing regions is high and there are also debates on whether this separation is feasible. I acknowledge the importance of this debate and the difficulties involved in the choice of a local or pan-African language, but derive from the literature that due to the fluency of Zanzibari and Tanzanians in general in Kiswahili, and because it is a locally constructed language that is related to the vast majority of East African languages, that it is an obvious choice for primary schooling in Zanzibar.

An important issue in choice of a local LoI such as Kiswahili is its reinforcement of local identity. Identity is strongly connected to parents’ beliefs, to the language spoken at home and to local culture. The overwhelming message from research in Africa is that using a language that learners use in their everyday lives will improve learning and help to maintain the connection to the local cultural context. The use of a local language in education will contribute to literacy and strengthen cultural identity (Aikman, 1995; Alidou, 2009). According to Kimizi (2012), the use of a local language as a teaching medium will also affect a child’s self-esteem. The learning process can be done effectively only if a child feels that her or his identity is acknowledged. The best learning environment will be created when a child feels that their language has value. If the local language is rejected this is equivalent to the rejection of local identity. Research shows that this sense of rejection is affecting children’s sense of identity in several African countries (Mazrui, 2003, Prah & Brock-Utne, 2009).

Many schools around the world use English as the LoI in the expectation that it will bring better academic success for their students. As Kathy Webley (2006, p. 1) states, “Yet it is now well established that when a child begins learning in his or her first language (also known as a home language or mother tongue) a child is more likely to succeed academically and is better able to learn an additional languages.” Webley, as well as several scholars in the study directed by Ouane and Glanz (2006) leave no doubt that the use of mother tongue facilitates the learning processes in schools.
Scholars such as Qorro (2003), confirm that there is a belief in Tanzania that learning in English will improve the learning of the language; however, she points out that the LoI has another important function, in that concepts are communicated to children in the language they understand best. Bamgbose’s (1984) study in Nigeria and Bunyi’s (1999) study in Kenya confirm this point, showing that when Science instruction was conducted primarily in English as opposed to a native tongue, students were unable to apply concepts they had learned in class to practical situations at home. Loona (1996, p. 3) reinforces the point on the power of local language to communicate concepts when he writes, “Learning a second language does not imply the development of a totally new perspective, but rather the expansion of perspectives that children already possess.” It is important to make the point that learning in a language and learning a language have two different functions, and to combine these functions will slow and possibly stop the process of learning (Qorro, 2004). This difference has to be understood and acknowledged in the curriculum.

Identity is strongly connected to parent’s attitudes, to the language spoken at home and to cultural understanding. In Tanzania, the policy of switching from Kiswahili to English midway through the schooling process gives the impression that Kiswahili is inferior to English and that the local language is somehow inadequate in engaging with complex concepts. This reinforces the sense of inferiority of local culture and at the same time is disadvantageous for those who have had little exposure to English at home. Education has been seen as a means to achieving equality in order to recognize each and through the promotion of all through education for all. This choice has contributed to the formation of a national identity and cultural identity. Whichever context a child is in, s/he can hardly achieve quality learning when there are identity problems. Identity is strongly connected to parent’s attitudes, to the language spoken at home and to cultural understanding. If this is ignored, children can become drop-outs or “outsiders” in the society, and on top of that, the society will blame them as being responsible for their own difficulties. Moreover Kosonen (2010) argues that improved quality is substantiated in the better learning results in all school subjects, including the dominant national/official language. He states further more that improved quality also reduces repetition and dropout. Various researchers have shown that when people feel that they are outsiders, social problems often develop, which means that the cultural identity and sovereignty is important (Prah & Brock-Utne, 2009; Mahjanovich, 2013a, 2013b; Ismail, 2013).

The use of a local language in the educational system also contributes to self-respect and to pride in local culture. By reinforcing the importance of local languages, one reinforces the interest in local knowledge and culture. Ideally, one would choose a non-dominant local LoI, but in cases in which this is expensive and practically difficult to implement, a local language such as Kiswahili, with local roots and widely used in public spaces is a good second choice (Babaci-Wilhite, 2010). The policy of switching from Kiswahili to English midway through the schooling process, gives the impression that Kiswahili is inferior to English and that the local language is somehow inadequate in engaging with complex concepts. This reinforces the sense
of inferiority of local culture and at the same time is disadvantageous for children of
the lowest socio-economic strata who have had little exposure to English at home.

I agree with Brock-Utne (2007) who questions what does it mean for the
development of self-respect and identity that the language one normally
communicates in does not seem to be deemed fit for a language of instruction in
school. Language is part of one’s identity and part of one’s culture and should be a
right to use in order to develop oneself through schooling. This is consistent with
Rwantabagu’s (2011, p. 472) argument based on a study in Burundi where he argues
that “The possession of one’s language and culture is at the same time a right and a
privilege and members of the younger generation should not be denied their native
rights and advantages, as provided for in article 27 of the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights” (UNDHR, 1948). Furthermore he points out that after a series of
education reforms, there is still a debate in Burundi over the use of French or Kirundi
as LoI. He argues for the importance of local LoI as a basis for better knowledge
acquisition and that policy makers should take evidence research based on language
and education into consideration. He also points out that African languages will
enable African cultures to expand and will ensure the survival of African languages,
referring to Senghor (1976, p. 10) that Culture is growth and this entails that our
school systems should aim both at cultural authenticity and openness to foreign
influences said “the humanism of the new millennium.” Furthermore he concluded
that within the context of globalization “giving prominence to African languages and
cultural values could be based on “interdependence and complementarily between
cultures and nations” to the challenges of the 21st century.

In sum, the complex implications of education for Africa and the need for a new
strategy as highlighted in this chapter, is well documented in previous publications
(Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2003; Geo-JaJa, 2004). Education must be centripetally
oriented, and based on the principles of respect for human rights and cultural dignity.
It must give consideration to local realities and direct its intellectual efforts and
curriculum towards the achievement of freedoms that are consistent with education
as a human right (Babaci-Wilhite & Geo-JaJa, 2011). According to Skutnabb-Kangas
(2000), the most important Linguistic Human Right in education for indigenous
peoples and minorities (if they want to reproduce themselves as peoples/minorities)
is an unconditional right to mother tongue medium education in non-fee state schools
as Imo States intend to start from 2014. Moreover she argues that binding educational
Linguistic Human Rights are more or less non-existent in African countries. Brann
report (ADEA, 2001) states a pessimistic but realistic estimate that 90-95% of today’s
spoken languages may be very seriously endangered or extinct by the year 2100. This
means another round of colonization of the mind through cultural assimilation of non-
local language and culture. Since much of the knowledge about how to maintain the
world’s biodiversity is encoded in the small indigenous and local languages, with the
disappearance of the languages this knowledge, is more accurate and sophisticated
than “western” “scientific” knowledge, crucial ecosystem knowledge will also
disappear if we do not acknowledge local LoI as a right in education.
The LOITASA project, which addressed the question of LoI and learning in Tanzania and South Africa compared learning in classrooms that employ a familiar language versus those in which learning takes place in English. The results clearly demonstrated that not only does the use of Kiswahili improve teaching and learning, but also that it has significant subsidiary benefits for the society.

In addition to the results from LOITASA and many other studies cited above that English as a LoI hinders educational development at the primary level, there is also evidence that it reinforces social inequity. A result of the transition to English LoI could be a diminution of “cultural capital” in poor and socially excluded groups (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Pierre Bourdieu (ibid) the ability to function well in school and in society will be dependent on certain surrounding factors such as parental education, the number of books in the home, the amount that a child is read to, and the amount that a child is talked to. Loona (1996, p. 6) writes “Children do not arrive at school with equal amounts of knowledge of the world… Differences in experiences in homes and in their daily lives can lead to some children having lesser or greater amounts of knowledge in some knowledge-domains than other children.” Language is used in the learning process inside and outside of the house. Children of elite parents are more likely to have access to English literature and films, and to have travelled, and thus to have been exposed to the use of English in differing contexts. Therefore the use of English as LoI gives advantages to elite families and reinforces disadvantages for others. In effect, the skewed cultural capital will be reinforced and institutionalized in the education system (Loona, 1996; Bourdieu, 1977). As discussed above, cultural context is crucial for learning; however today, the classroom education does not take advantage of the immense learning opportunities available at home, in communities and in workplaces (Samoff, 1999; Erstad et al, 2009; Geo-JaJa & Azaiki, 2010; Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012).

Martin Carnoy (2007, p. 95) argues, “How much pupils learn in school depends greatly on what concepts they are exposed to, how much time they spend studying these concepts, and how effective their teachers are in communicating them.” A review undertaken by a joint research team from UNESCO and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) concluded that the interconnectedness between language, communication and effective teaching and learning is generally misunderstood outside expert circles (Ouane & Glanz, 2006). Using a foreign language as a LoI makes the language a barrier rather than an aid for both teachers and students.

James Cooke and Eddie Williams (2002) cite numerous studies (Nkamba & Kanyika, 1998; Machingaidze et al., 1998; Nassor & Mohammed, 1998) conducted in several African countries to show that “the vast majority of primary school pupils cannot read adequately in English, the sole official language of instruction” (p. 307). Cooke and Williams (2002) go on to state, “If children in developing countries have little exposure to the LoI outside the school, and if teaching the LoI is ineffective
inside the school, then low-quality education is inevitable” (p. 313). As the majority of these students leave school with no literacy and a low competence with a language they use very little outside the classroom, to propose that receiving their education in English disadvantages them is a severe understatement.

English language education is put further into question when examining the inequities it perpetuates between its immediate benefactors (the relatively wealthy) and those for whom it has no practical use (the severely impoverished). In addition to possessing the means to access larger markets and coveted white-collar jobs, the relatively wealthy urban groups also have better educational opportunities leading to greater levels of English proficiency than the more disadvantaged urban and rural poor are able to acquire. English then becomes an upper-class language, which the poor hold in great esteem but cannot effectively access because of the low quality of their education and their disadvantaged economic status.

CONCLUSION

Learning to read and write in a local language is directly correlated with the improvement of a student’s abilities to think critically about their own conditions and about the world. Using local languages as LoI provides a sustainable benefit in national cohesiveness for nation-building and cultural identity. Children of all backgrounds will be able to perform better in school with local languages. This path forward will contribute to our understanding of quality education and children’s confidence in their community as well as social equity.

NOTES

1  http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/af.htm
2  http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/african_languages.htm
3  Kiswahili is a Bantu language, part of a group of African languages. The technical term Bantu, simply meaning “people,” was first used by Wilhelm Heinrich Immanuel Bleek (1827–1875), as this is reflected in many of the languages of this group.
4  Tanganyika originally consisted of the British share of the former German colony of German East Africa which the British took under a League of Nations Mandate in 1922, later transformed into a United Nations Trust Territory after the World War II. On 26 April 1964, Tanganyika joined with the islands of Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, a new state that changed its name to the United Republic of Tanzania within a year.
5  https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+east+africa
6  https://www.google.no/search?hl=en&q=map+of+tanzania&meta
7  Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (See www.loitasa.org).