Introduction

Africa is comprised of 54 independent countries, each with their own Indigenous peoples and languages. Of the 7,099 languages spoken in the world, about 2,144 languages are spoken on the African continent (Simons and Fennig 2017). The most populous country is Nigeria (186 million people) with approximately 527 languages; the smallest is Rwanda with 11,883,000 people (Simons and Fennig 2017). There are four languages said to be spoken in Rwanda: Kinyarwanda, English, French and Swahili (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda 2012), and only one of these is Indigenous, i.e., Kinyarwanda. Although other African countries may not have Nigeria’s size, a complexity of Indigenous peoples and languages, which range from one or more million speakers to those which are on the verge of extinction, is typical of most. Multilingualism, whereby in any community more than one language or dialect may be spoken and any one person may be able to use two or three languages, is also typical.

Among the features that have significant bearing on the teaching of English to young learners in Africa is the impact of European colonialism in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. This includes the work of missionaries alongside the colonial powers to create written forms of a few Indigenous languages, mainly for Bible translation. At the same time, African cultures and religions were being stigmatised. After the First World War, Britain, France and Portugal were able to divide Africa among themselves. When countries won their Independence, mostly in the early 1960s, they found themselves retaining the ex-colonial language as the official language for several reasons, not least neo-colonialism. This meant that ex-colonial languages became the languages of government and administration, higher education and law courts, as well as almost all the formal qualifications necessary to attain salaried employment. However, this did not mean that a large majority of the population either spoke or understood the ex-colonial languages. Sadly, this situation continues today, and it is in school that most children learn the official language for the first time, especially in rural areas where 80% of the population typically lives (Nakayiza 2013).

Finally, countries in Africa tend to be classified by degrees of poverty (Beegle, Christiaensen, Dabalen, and Gaddis 2016). On the one hand, this marks the wealth of human skills
and creativity, and of natural resources that exist – a huge potential. On the other hand it is also true that the prestigious schools are few, maintaining an elite, while many government schools are inadequate for basic needs of teaching and learning (Ssentanda 2013) – these last factors are behind some of the significant challenges addressed in this chapter.

While these features form a general background across the continent, we also need to note some important distinctions. First, North Africa is part of classical Mediterranean civilisations, and now Arabic is a significant language of wider communication. In sub-Saharan Africa, some countries were French and Portuguese colonies and therefore have a history of speaking French and Portuguese, while Ethiopia and Liberia maintained their own independence. What is clear, though, is that English has functions in countries that were British colonies, especially as the main official language. It is remarkable how far a conference presentation from Zimbabwe in South Central Africa, Ghana in West Africa or Uganda in East Africa, will reveal the same challenges and opportunities for learning English in education – and for the same reasons. Even post-apartheid South Africa faces issues in common. For the sake of economy, this chapter will draw mainly from examples from East Africa, especially Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

The chapter examines language-in-education policies (LiEP) in Africa and the reasons for them. These policies are highly contested, often ambiguous and do not match realities in the classroom (Nankindu 2015; Ssentanda 2016; Ssentanda, Huddlestone, and Southwood 2016) – with consequences for the quality of learning and teaching, including early English language learning. The main questions we ask include the following: how far are poor results in literacy and numeracy at the national level due to the focus on English? Is it the LiEP or are other factors also involved? We use three case studies to show how the focus on English has created challenges for the acquisition of literacy skills and how teachers are creatively supporting learners by use of scaffolding mechanisms to acquire literacy skills.

We show how the focus on English in LiEPs not only hinders child learning directly, but also creates a negative cycle of disregard for Indigenous languages, failure to write and publish appropriate materials, failure to train teachers effectively in teaching through two languages and lack of connection between home and school (Stroud 2002). Ngugi wa Thiong’o famously wrote that there is need for ‘de-colonisation of the mind’ (wa Thiong 1986). Our first case study illustrates what can happen in an English lesson when teachers do not have adequate training.

African countries tend to have very weak infrastructure in education. The lack of educational facilities impacts learning in schools and teacher training alike – illustrated in our second case study. In such contexts Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE) may not be an immediate panacea. However, in our Current Contributions and Research section we discuss ongoing programmes to introduce MTBMLE and support it with materials. We also discuss research evidence that the learning of English may improve along with literacy and numeracy; research into how teachers may use English and mother tongues in African classrooms through languaging methods; and research into the value of community libraries and digital technology for support.

In Recommended Practices we provide examples of how, even in a congested classroom (Altinyelken 2010) with few resources, teachers find creative means to enable pupils to participate in meaningful language learning. In Future Directions, we present the features of a contextually appropriate LiEP and ask for further research on how the learning of English can build on African children’s linguistic repertoires (additive bilingual development) rather than ‘destroy’ it (subtractive language development).
Historical perspectives: an overview of language and education

Before we move on to discussing historical perspectives on the learning of English in Africa, we need to state that the examples we draw here are mostly from East Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania – all three countries that were British colonies. However, given the multilingual nature of African countries, the issues discussed here are similar in many ways across the continent.

Until the 1900s, the colonialists had not engaged in education, leaving it almost entirely in the hands of missionaries and offering only financial assistance. As alluded to earlier, when missionaries established schools in Africa, they taught in the mother tongues of the communities in which the schools were established. In most cases, they chose dominant languages in the communities (Nakayiza 2013). As time went on, education reviews were conducted to determine the quality and management of education and how to proceed with it. Several commissions were sent to Africa to review education. Although it is pertinent to point out that these were not to promote the interests of the African people, and therefore did not seek to prioritise the African languages. The Phelps-Stokes Commission (1924–1925), the de La Warr Commission (1937) and the Binns Study Group (1951) (Ssekamwa 2000) are good examples. Of all the commissions, the Phelps-Stokes Commission’s recommendations had the most significant impact in various parts of Africa (East, Central and Southern Africa) (Berman 1971; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, n.d.; Ssekamwa 2000).

With the advice of the Phelps-Stokes Commission in Africa, colonial governments began to take a direct interest in education and, as such, established Education Ordinances (Ssekamwa 2000) or laws to govern education. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (n.d.) and Berman (1971) state that the Phelps-Stokes Commission recommended vocational education, with an emphasis on agriculture and religion. Before the arrival of the Phelps-Stokes Commission in Africa, local languages were the medium of instruction (MoI) in the early years (primary 1 to primary 3) of education and English was the MoI in upper classes (primary 4 to primary 7) and then later in colleges. Even though it is not explicitly stated in the literature, it is inferable that the language-in-education policies which colonial governments supported, encouraged and funded were deliberately aimed at promoting English; leaving African languages at the lower level of education and English (or French, German or Portuguese) in upper primary classes, secondary schools and in colleges. This form of language use in colonial education had a hidden agenda, as Shohamy (2006) was later to observe, as the beginning of a creation of an English-speaking administrative class to carry out colonial tasks. As a result of this form of language planning, African languages were portrayed as inferior and only fit for lower-level education. Negative attitudes towards African languages were created, and it is no wonder that even the current language-in-education policies, curricula and pedagogy continue to limit African languages to lower education levels.

According to Abdulaziz (2003), Bamgbose (1999) and Stroud (2002), the nature of mother tongue (MT) education in Africa relates to the inherited colonial education policies and practices: in countries where African languages had been used in education, they remained in such use after independence; and where they had been excluded from use in education or where their use had been limited to the initial three or four school years, this situation also often remained unchanged (also see Chimbutane 2009, 2011; Ouane and Glanz 2010). For example, in the case of Uganda, before independence, MTs were the languages of learning and teaching (LoLT) in lower primary school, the transition to English as LoLT
took place only in the fourth or fifth grade (see Lasebikan, Ismagilova, and Hurel 1964). This was the practice up until the 60s. However, gradually, since Independence, English has replaced MT education and in most cases, it is simultaneously introduced with MTs (Ssentanda 2014a, 2014c). As is well documented in the literature, this is counterintuitive – one would expect African governments to be promoting MTBE and teach English from an additive perspective. The persistence of promoting English at the expense of African languages is largely an inherited colonial practice which portrayed English as the language of affluence – colonial administrators and all white-collar jobs demanded proper knowledge of English. Such colonial structures are present up to today (see Ssentanda 2013 for the causes of failure of implementation of mother-tongue education in postcolonial Uganda).

From the foregoing, we learn that the increasing use of English as LoLT and exclusion of MTs has been informed by politics, economics and ideology rather than by educational considerations (Ball 2011; Ferguson 2013; Tollefson 1991a). This practice has generally resulted in very low literacy levels, high dropout rates and low throughput rates (Glanz 2013) as children are required to learn through unfamiliar languages and live in various forms of social inequality in various countries and communities (Ssentanda 2013; Tollefson 2006).

The introduction of English as LoLT as part of the drive to master ex-colonial languages has had negative effects on all people’s lives: in education, political participation, etc. For example, Stroud (2002) explains how the focus on Portuguese and neglect of local languages in Mozambique after independence contributed to the people’s poverty and powerlessness. Over time, educational achievements have declined, and the challenge appears to be at its peak within the last 10 years. Educational review reports, for example, Uwezo (Uwezo 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013), with a focus on East Africa have continuously asked Are our children learning? In addition, studies in Kenya (e.g., Nyaga 2013) and Uganda (e.g., Ssentanda 2014) have revealed that the challenges children experience in learning both content and English language are that English is introduced at a very early age, teaching and learning is conducted in English without prior exposure and so children are experiencing a dual-challenge: acquiring the language as well as learning through a language which they are in the process of learning.

Given this bleak situation, there have been modifications to language-in-education policies and curricula in many countries of Africa with an aim of improving education quality: literacy acquisition and better acquisition of English and children’s MTs. These declining levels of education have triggered calls for, recourse to and advocacy for MT education across Africa. The questions we ask are about how much the low educational outcomes or, for that matter, pedagogical challenges in Africa south of the Sahara are attributable to language policy – with the impact this has on the teaching and learning of English – and how far are they attributable to the generally weak human resources and infrastructure – schools, classrooms, teaching and learning materials, teacher training and so on. This now brings us to discussing some critical issues and topics around the teaching and learning of English in the African multilingual context.

**Critical issues and topics**

**Attitudes to Indigenous African languages**

In the last two to three decades, issues related to linguistic hegemony have become more contentious because of the inescapable reality of their implications (e.g., see Bourdieu 1991;
Tollefson 1991b, 2002). For example, Kwaa Prah (2009) maintains that if Africa were to have a realistic chance of development, African languages needed to become central in all levels of education and all areas of social life across the continent. Kwaa Prah (2009) dismisses the arguments that (a) Africa has too many languages to be able to settle for a few as languages of learning and teaching; (b) the quality of African languages is too poor to carry modern notions of science and technology; (c) the languages hardly have any literature; (d) English and other ex-colonial languages are already in place performing the MoI role; and (e) that Africans do not want to work in their own languages. He points out and demonstrates that implicit in the arguments against the use of African languages is a cultural inferiority complex compared to western languages since no language is incapable of being developed: ‘No language, as is now well understood, by all serious linguists and other social scientists, is incapable of development as a language of science and technology’ (ibid., p. 10).

Above all, the rise of Afrikaans in South Africa as a language of literacy and education following the Anglo-Boer War (1881); the use of Mali to teach physics and chemistry at tertiary level in Banama (Ouane and Glanz 2010); and a recently produced PhD thesis in Xhosa are illustrative examples of struggles to assert the usage of different languages in the face of English hegemony. To make the point about possibilities of developing minority languages into official languages, it is important to observe that after South Africa’s independence in 1994 Afrikaans has remained a language of domination, a language of education up to university level, and many discoveries and innovations in science and technology have been generated in this language.

Attitudes towards English

The historical attitudes towards both English and MTs can still be seen today in the day-to-day school practices and in the linguistic landscape of the school. For example, schools put up posters to ‘encourage’ learners to learn to speak English as fast as they can and parents to admire that their children acquire English as early and as fast as possible. Both teachers and parents believe that when children become proficient in English at an early age, their educational journey becomes lighter and brighter. For example, one school in Uganda had a poster proclaiming ‘Speak English for smart brains’ (Ssentanda and Nakayiza 2017).

This poster is representative of the many others in school compounds which ‘encourage’ learners to speak English all the time. The message on this poster paints a bad picture of African languages for the learners; they regard their MTs as inferior and of little help in their quest for knowledge.

Current language-in-education policies: arguments and misconceptions

A critical look at the current language-in-education policies in Africa reveals that there are misconceptions and practices towards the teaching and learning of English and African languages which have clouded the proper employment of African languages in education. These misconceptions have played in favour of English. Firstly, countries limit MT education to only the early school years, citing the seemingly overwhelming linguistic diversity in African communities. Policy makers argue that it is difficult and expensive to train and deploy teachers who can teach all MTs in various communities.

Another common misconception held by people in multilingual contexts is that if a language is not used as an MoI and if it is not taught as early as possible (including kindergarten), it cannot be acquired successfully (Benson 2008; Dutcher 1997; McLaughlin 1992).
This belief has affected many African children, who are experiencing a dual challenge as they struggle to acquire the language of the school (English, French or Portuguese) and at the same time acquire the concepts and academic content of the curriculum in the language in which they have no knowledge. In this regard, Benson (2002, p. 308) argues that there is ‘failure to apply established principles of bilingual education to local practices’. Research shows that it is vital that children who are attempting to acquire oral and written proficiency in English need first to have a solid foundation in their MT both orally and in writing (see examples below).

There are cases of very successful MT projects which have demonstrated that learning is very possible in MTs. For example, the Ife Project in Nigeria (Fafunwa et al. 1989); the Rivers Readers Project in Nigeria (Fyle 2003); the Kom Project in Cameroon (Walter and Chuo 2012); the use of Somali language for up to 12 years in formal schooling (Abdulaziz 2003; Ouane and Glanz 2010); and the use of Ethiopian languages in primary schools for up to eight years (Heugh et al. 2007). These projects have demonstrated that subject matter learning not only improves with learning through MTs but that learners who are in the MT projects learn English better than those in the English-only medium.

**Consequences of the LiEP: classroom practices**

In the classrooms where the LiEP does not match with the linguistic repertoires of learners and teachers, teachers try to negotiate the interactions. In most cases, such classrooms are full of translanguaging as a strategy to meet learners’ communicative needs (e.g., see Chick 1996; Chimbutane 2011; Hornberger and Chick 2001). In many contexts translanguaging is a powerful learning device and a scaffolding mechanism that is usually employed to support the transition from MT education to English medium and/or in contexts where children are not conversant in English (e.g., see Garcia 2009; Velasco and Garcia 2014). However, in some cases, such classrooms are constrained because of fear of non-compliance with the LiEP (Ssentanda 2016).

Herewith we present cases of classroom vignettes to show how teachers strive to negotiate learning amidst lack of joined up approaches to teaching and learning of English and MTs.

**Case study I**

One of the problems is that teachers in Uganda have little understanding of phonics and children are taught to recite the spellings of words from the board by letter name either in English or in the MT. Furthermore, teachers are not always comfortable with literacy in MTs. However, there cannot be any training in how to use both languages productively as the Uganda Ministry of education and Sports guidelines do not allow teachers to do so in the same lesson. But teachers certainly ‘stealthily’ do it through their creative means in order to enhance learning (see Ssentanda 2014b).

In what follows below, we reproduce a classroom interaction in which Ssentanda (2014b, p. 9–10) reports on the challenge that exists in a classroom where the teaching of sound letter names is not joined up in Luganda (MT) and English, yet this would be possible.

Traditionally, letters and sounds have been taught differently in Luganda and English. Luganda shares an alphabet with English except for two letters, /η, ɲ/, which Luganda employs in its orthography. In English, sounds/letters have names e.g., [bi] for /b/, [em]
for /m/, [kei] for /k/, etc. In Luganda similar sounds are assigned different names e.g., [ba] for /b/, [ma] for /m/, [ka] for /k/, etc. In sum, all letter names in Luganda have /a/ added on to every consonant. Therefore, as teachers teach Luganda and English, they need children to remember that the letters in each language have different names, even though the letter looks the same in the orthography.

The extract below comes from an English lesson in P1 in a government school (School A). There were 34 learners in this class. As the teacher was teaching English, she expected learners to respond to questions ‘in English’ not ‘in Luganda’. In this lesson the teacher asked the learners to spell the words that they had been learning about that day. There were learners who pronounced the letter names ‘in Luganda’ rather than ‘in English’. The teacher’s response to this is revealed in the following extract. The teacher turns are indicated with T and the learners’ turns with L. A singular L shows a turn taken by one pupil and the plural form (Ls) shows a turn taken by several pupils. K stands for the learner, Kaweesi (pseudonym). The Luganda text is in bold, the translation is in italics and the English text is in normal typeface.

**Extract (1)**

1 T: Ok, sit on your desk. Can you spell, let us spell this word. We are going to spell the word bananas. Let us spell it. Letterˆ .

2 Ls: ‘bi’ [Some learners say ‘ba’]

3 T: Letter .

4 Ls: ‘bi’ [Some learners say ‘ba’]

5 T: This is letterˆ .

6 Ls: ‘bi’ [Some learners say ‘ba’]

7 T: Bannange Kaweesi, [Friends, Kaweesi] is this letter ‘ba’? We are in English. We are not in Luganda Kaweesi. Owulidde Kaweesi? [Kaweesi. Have you heard, Kaweesi?] This is letter ‘bi’

8 Ls: ‘bi’ [there is one child who still says ‘ba’].

9 T: Kaweesi come. Kaweesi come. Letter ba yo gy’oyogerako, olwo Luganda, owulidde? [Your letter ba is in Luganda but we are now in English. Have you heard] But now we are inˆ .

10 K: English.

11 T: We call it letter ‘bi’. Letterˆ .

12 K: bi


14 Ls: Saanukula, saanukula omuwe. [Open, open, give him]

This extract clearly illustrates how learners can be confused about the two ‘names’ given to the same letter in the two different languages which they are in process of learning to read. The case study shows that teachers are not prepared for using English and the MT for
children to learn to read in either language. Teachers want to keep English and the MT separate and this can be confusing to the learners. If teachers could use phonics (as in the RTI SHRP project) the problem would be reduced, as the letter \(< b >\) represents the same \(/b/\) in both English and Luganda. Moreover, the case study shows how the English-only policy is transgressed for the sake of communication (Nankindu 2015).

**Consequences of the LiEP: teacher training**

Another challenge that constrains the learning of English relates to teacher training. Pryor, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Lussier (2013) have studied teacher preparation and professional development in Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda and found that there are many discrepancies between teacher training and what their actual demands in practice are. For example, the training of teachers did not match the demands of the curriculum to be taught. Similarly, in a study conducted to explore how teachers understand and manage the process of transitioning from MT education to English-medium education, Ssentanda (2013) found that out of the 36 languages listed as LoLT at the primary level, only six were examinable at senior four. In Uganda, Primary Teachers’ Colleges (PTCs) admit senior four leavers to be trained as primary school teachers. So many candidates for and graduates from PTCs have no background in the MTs that they later encounter in their practice. Moreover, there is no training for teaching in the MTs in PTCs in Uganda. At the policy level, when teachers are being transferred, no attention is given to which teacher will be teaching which language where, so teachers may be in a context where they do not share a MT with their learners. Accordingly, the implementation of MT education is negatively affected with poor teacher transfers.

**Consequences of the LiEP: writing and publishing**

One of the biggest challenges facing MT education in Africa is the inadequacy of teaching and learning materials (e.g., Bamgbose 2004; Dutcher 2004; Stroud 2002). While the materials for teaching and learning English may not be entirely adequate, the situation for the MTs is dire in many contexts with, for example, very limited publishing in the MTs, and hence reading materials for pupils and teachers are not readily available.

Moreover, as reported by Ssentanda et al. (2016), the provision of these materials involves influence peddling: teachers do not receive the materials they request from the publishers they consider as producers of quality materials; they instead receive those from other publishers which teachers consider to be poor quality, and the materials do not arrive on time.

It is however, encouraging that there are initiatives on the African continent to provide reading materials. For example, there is the African Storybook Project (www.africanstorybook.org) which provides reading materials under a Creative Commons licence – these materials are being translated into many languages including English. This will further be elaborated in the Current contribution and research section.

**Poor school conditions?**

Another potential challenge that complicates the teaching and learning of English is the nature and availability of conducive learning environments. We refer to two cases of schools, one government and one private school in Kenya and Uganda, to illustrate how the school and classroom environment can negatively affect the learning process.
First, climate is a factor affecting classroom conditions. For example, Tanzania is a hot country year round, which means that classrooms need to be kept cool and well aerated. This explains why many of the classrooms have open doors and windows with no latches or locks. Consequently, the room is open to the elements and is very dirty and dusty. In some extreme cases teaching goes on in partially collapsed buildings, exposing both teachers and students to great danger. In other contexts, the school structures are semi-permanent. Of course, conditions vary greatly; in some countries, private schools have admirable permanent buildings and government schools have relatively poorer structures (for example, South Africa), while in other countries the opposite is true.

Such conditions are not suitable for reading and writing activities, since teachers cannot use the chalkboards or store any teaching and learning materials in these classroom structures. Moreover, classrooms lack furniture. In some classrooms, half the pupils sit on desks while the other half sits on the floor. In other contexts, all pupils are forced to share the fewer desks in the classroom, something that compromises the effective development of writing skills. In other contexts, the learner numbers are very large (Altinyelken 2010) with few resources, so teachers have to be very creative in getting learners to learn.

A comparative study carried out in Uganda (Ssentanda 2014) found that challenging conditions similar to those described above, together with the shortage of literacy texts (charts), storybooks or any reading materials, severely limited literacy development opportunities for children in these contexts.

Although the situation regarding infrastructure facilities appears extremely challenging, teachers work out ways to ensure that children learn even amidst such constraints. Teachers are commended for being creative and for getting learners to begin to learn to write and read amidst such challenges. We are hopeful that the conditions will eventually improve.

Current contributions and research

An overview of research work in the 1970s and 1980s reveals that languages were kept separate – developing first proficiency in the MT; then later English in the fourth year of schooling was initiated and continued to the tertiary level. A number of studies were conducted, and children were assessed as doing better than those who were immersed in English right from the start. For example, see the Ife Project in Nigeria (Akinnaso 1993; Fafunwa et al. 1989), the Rivers Readers Project of 1970 (Fyle 2003) in Nigeria and the Mozambique bilingual education study in Mozambique (Benson 2000, 2002). Unfortunately, these studies do not appear to have been replicated elsewhere in Africa.

That aside, numerous research projects by individuals and NGOs have inquired how best children can learn English without having to lose proficiency in their MTs (e.g., see Walter and Chuo 2012 in Cameroon). In addition, governments in East Africa (and others elsewhere) have put in place language-in-education policies that support the teaching and use of MTs as MoI owing to the advantages which come with this practice. Below is some of the current research in various parts of Africa to show efforts that scholars are making to understand how best MTs and English can be taught.

This section is premised on the fact that in multilingual contexts (the whole of Africa), it is common to attribute academic failure to poor proficiency in the language of instruction, which is often the learner’s second or even foreign language (Chimbutane 2011). We want, therefore, to reiterate the bilingual education theory and international practice that initial literacy and academic development can only be better achieved when the child’s first language is used as a medium of instruction. This is why we highlight that research around
Africa recognises the fact that African children grow up to be multilingual rather than monolingual (Banda 2009, 2010; Brock-Utne 2004; Glanz 2013; Makalela 2016). For that reason, we reiterate that the manner through which they learn English should be different from that of children in the global north. Most communities in the global north are monolingual, so children in fact begin to learn and continue learning through their MTs. Makalela (2016) has argued that it is wrong to consider African communities as though they are similar to those of the Western world, while Makalela (2016) and Nkadimeng and Makalela (2015) have also argued that classroom interactions should be reflective of the linguistic repertoires of learners rather than assuming that learners are purely monolingual (cf. Banda 2010). Nkadimeng and Makalela’s (2015) study revealed that children in the Soweto town in South Africa speak about six languages by the time they are six years of age, and by age 13 they can freely and easily converse with these languages in a single sentence, and that they carry this practice with them into the classroom environment. Makalela (2016) is of the view that the notion of mother tongue, first language or third language have little meaning in a context where one grows up speaking many languages and all can be equated to ‘mother tongue’. It is therefore wrong, as Banda (2010) observed, to keep the languages in class separate (Garcia 2009), as this practice is not reflective of the learners’ identity (Makalela 2016).

As underlined by UNESCO as early as in 1953 and later in 1990 and echoed in research by Bamgbose (2000), Cummins (2000b, 1991) and Hornberger (1988), the second or foreign language should never be the medium used for children in learning. Therefore, all possible innovations towards promoting effective ESL are welcome. One recent such innovation has been the African Storybook Project (www.africanstorybook.org; see Tembe and Reed 2016). This project involves producing reading materials through a Creative Commons licence. The project is currently running in South Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Lesotho. These stories are freely accessible online, they can be downloaded or printed out for use and individuals are free to translate and/or translate them in any African language and English. What is more, most of the stories available at the website in African languages have been translated into English. If children and teachers are well prepared to make use of the materials at this website, the transition from MTs to English medium will be supported.

There are also studies into reading methodologies that are meant to improve learners’ levels of reading fluency. As indicated in section 3.4, the practice of teaching reading has been problematic and this has been observed as a challenge to the mastery of reading. The School Health and Reading Program in Uganda is out to study and address this challenge. The practice of phonics is yet to be embraced by all teachers across the country (NORC at the University of Chicago 2015). It is hoped that these efforts will greatly enhance the acquisition of reading fluency in both the MTs and English and eventually improve literacy acquisition.

**Recommendations for practice**

The issues discussed above point to useful action points which can be handled both nationally and locally to make teaching and learning meaningful. In addition, the learning of English in the context of multilingual education will greatly be enhanced when such challenges are considered. At this point in time we want to recommend a shift from the general sweeping narrative in African governments’ language policy that MT should be used in the first three years followed by the introduction of L2 from Grade 4 onwards. We specifically want to recommend that different countries come up with more specific policies based on specific case studies about bilingual English teaching and learning in their own contexts. This
will ensure that language policies become more ecological by being framed by linguistic ethnography (see, e.g., Chimbutane 2011). The relationships that people establish between language and social and economic mobility should become a part of the basis of policy decisions that can ensure effective language pedagogies.

We say this believing that if the learning of English is to make sense and remain relevant to school learning, children in the African context ought to be taught English in a manner that builds on their specific linguistic repertoires but does not promote English only. For example, Banda’s (2010) and Makalela’s (2016) studies speak about language realities in African communities and schools. Classifying learners and teachers as monolingual speakers of particular languages prior to school entry is misleading and denies children and teachers of their identities. The learning of English should be approached from an additive point of view (learning a language to add to those already known by the learner and to further develop those they already known prior to school entry; see Cummins 2000a, 2000b). With this approach, the learning of English will become more beneficial and exciting to learners.

Banda’s study feeds in well to that of Makalela (2016) in advocating for a learning of languages that is reflective of learners’ linguistic repertoires. The practice of translanguaging (some scholars refer to it as codeswitching) is widespread across Africa (see, e.g., Merritt, Cleghorn, Abagi, and Bunyi 1992; Ncoko, Osman, and Cockcroft 2000; Nkadimeng and Makalela 2015; Nyaga and Anthonissen 2012; Yevudey 2015). Learners who join school are proficient in many languages ranging from two to six. So, the teaching of these languages, including English, should be handled in a complementary or unified manner to reflect the linguistic practices of the learners – this is how learning will be meaningful and beneficial to the learners. In sum, translanguaging should be developed further to support language learning and mastery of classroom content. Moreover, translanguaging as a practice on the part of teachers has revealed that the classroom interactions become lively, interactional and participatory (Chimbutane 2011; Ssentanda 2016; Yevudey 2015) when teachers attempt to employ the realities of learners’ linguistic repertoires in the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, research has revealed that teachers are ‘policy makers’ (Johnson 2009) themselves. In situations where the language-in-education policies are far removed from the school and/or classroom realities, teachers create environments in which learning is negotiated through language means (Garcia 2009) familiar to learners. This then means that meaningful and beneficial language policies should involve studies involving classroom interactions.

As the world is intensely moving into mobile technology, there is need to invest in and conduct studies on how technology can be tapped to enhance language learning not only in schools but also at home. For example, many homes have mobile technology and therefore investment into digital educational resources is a welcome idea as many children are technologically literate even before they join school. One thing remains sure, however – that ‘reading, writing, and use of print and screen texts are now crucial means of getting things done in the world of work and education, as well as in local life worlds’ (Martin-Jones 2011, p. 249).

Finally, studies into language and work are mostly lacking in East Africa and Africa at large. The languages of the school do not match the languages required for work outside of the school. Children become proficient in English and graduate as engineers, doctors and lawyers who can only practice their professions in English and yet the community in fact demands that they communicate in their mother tongue. Therefore, graduates from school must struggle to ‘reconceive’ the knowledge they have and find ways to practically render it into their mother tongue. This means that the learning of English in the African context has
to be tailored to the needs of children and look beyond life after school. Consequently, the
learning of English has to be rethought and replanned.

Future directions

As we reflect on the future directions of teaching and learning and research into the use of
English in Africa, we would like to draw on Heugh’s (Heugh 2006, pp. 57–58) observations.
There is consensus in the recommendations about

- A need for further development and use of African languages in education systems
  across the continent.
- The better provision and teaching of an ILWC (international language of wider
  communication) in each case.

Here is where there is not yet consensus:

- The point at which the medium should change from MT to ILWC; whether a change in
  medium is necessary if the ILWC is taught efficiently as a subject.
- Whether it is possible to use both MT and ILWC as complementary mediums of instruc-
  tion through the school system.

Given these observations, a joint effort for the development of all African languages at all
educational levels would be beneficial for the future. All stakeholders ranging from parents,
teachers, politicians and all educators to publishers need a greater understanding of child
learning and language learning. Furthermore, as there should be a motivation for learners to
learn their MTs, today MTs are not examined at the end of primary school in many African
countries, which has been a big excuse for dropping MTs from the school system. There is a
need to manage these examinations because they are a source of negative attitudes towards
the learning of MTs, especially in the early years of schooling.

In addition, there is a need to collect information about pertinent language-related issues
on the distribution, dialects and level of development of languages as well as individual
linguistic repertoires in schools and communities. This information is imperative in the
formulation of local school language policies. In addition, this information can be useful
in national teacher allocation and deployment. Useful and beneficial language-in-education
policies emanate from ethnographic research, as observed by Johnson (2009) and Horn-
berger and Johnson (2011).

Last but not least, there is a need to conduct more research and respond to calls of
classroom-based linguistic research that aim to understand how teachers negotiate learning.

Further reading


This chapter discusses how teachers understand and manage the process of transition from MT education to English-medium education in Uganda. It illustrates how teachers grapple with language policy stipulations of MT use and English to negotiate learning in the classroom environment, though at different levels of compliance with policy in government and private schools.

In this chapter, Nankindu discusses the status of English in Uganda and how such official status holds the language in high regard compared to the local languages in the country. In addition, she shows how the status of English dictates its use throughout the education system in Uganda.


In this article, Nyaga and Anthonissen describe how teachers struggle to handle teaching and learning in linguistically diverse classrooms. The authors discuss how English is given prominence in the language-in-education policy in Kenya, in classrooms and how teachers give it emphasis because it is the language of examination. The article shows that English is in fact a second language to the majority of learners in schools.

Related topics
Policy, difficult circumstances, contexts of learning, critical pedagogy

Note
1 Research Triangle International runs a project in Uganda called the School Health and Reading Project whose primary aim is to enhance reading fluency through a phonics approach.

References


