

# Language Policy and Third Language Learning: The Case of Swahili in Uganda

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## Abstract

The paper examines the role of language policy and planning in teaching and learning a third language, using the case of Swahili in Uganda. In this paper, it is argued that the partial implementation of the language in education policy or lack thereof negates the realization of the national objective of trilingual population that can linguistically function at the local, regional and international levels. Drawing from Tollefson's (2006) language planning framework, the study posits that partial implementation of the language policy and more specifically the language in education policy impedes second or additional language acquisition in a linguistically diverse society. In this paper, we rely on data from a biographical questionnaire, a proficiency test and documentary analysis to draw conclusions on the effect of language policy and language in education policy on the teaching and learning of Swahili as a third language in Uganda.

## Ikisiri

*Makala hii inachunguza dhima ya sera ya lugha na mipango ya lugha katika ufundishaji na ujifunzaji lugha ya tatu kwa kuzingatia hali ya Kiswahili nchini Uganda. Makala inasisitiza kwamba kutotekelezwa kikamilifu kwa sera ya lugha ya taifa pamoja na sera ya lugha ya kufundishia kumekuwa kikwazo cha utimizaji wa lengo la kitaifa la kuwa na wananchi wanaoweza kujieleza vyema kilugha katika ngazi za kitaifa, kikanda na kimataifa. Kwa kuongozwa na msingi wa kinadharia wa Tollefson (2006) wa mtandao wa mipango ya lugha, uchunguzi huu unasisitiza kwamba kutotekelezwa kwa sera ya lugha kunazuia ufundishaji na ujifunzaji wa lugha ya tatu katika jamii yenye lugha nyingi tofauti. Uchunguzi huu ulitegemea data kutoka hojaji, kipima-umahiri na uchanganuzi wa maandishi kudhihirisha namna sera ya lugha ya kitatifa na sera ya lugha ya kufundishia zinavyoathiri ufundishaji na ujifunzaji wa Kiswahili kama lugha ya tatu nchini Uganda.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

The spread of Swahili as a lingua franca in Eastern Africa has promoted the acquisition and learning of Swahili as a second and third language for a large number of East Africans. There are however situations where the Swahili is acquired as a first language especially along the coast of East Africa and in Zanzibar (Sa, 2007). The status of Swahili in Eastern Africa can be related to that of English in Europe for both an individual and a community's linguistic repertoire. For example, Cenoz and Gorter (2005) indicate that the spread of English as a language of international communication has created the need to learn the language for speakers of minority languages. The authors note that this has led to regions with minority languages to use English as the second or third language.

Accordingly, governments have gone beyond bilingualism to promote trilingualism as one of the most important aims in education (Cenoz and Gorter, 2005). To this extent, the notion of a 'repertoire' has been introduced to analyze the number of languages an individual needs in everyday life (Vihlanova, 1996). A repertoire in Africa includes the Mother Tongue, the African lingua franca, and/or the language of colonial contact. Vihlanova further states that Africans seeking middle class urban opportunities and occupational mobility need to have facility of at least three languages. It is at the backdrop of this need that, like English in Europe and elsewhere, Swahili has emerged as the language of choice for individuals and communities in East Africa pursuing the aforementioned trilingual end. Uganda, through its language policy aims at achieving a literate trilingual population that can linguistically function at a local level using a native language, regional level using a regional lingua franca, in this case Swahili, and international level using English.

In the second section, I review the relevant studies on third language acquisition as well as the language policies pursued by colonial powers and how they shaped the current policies pursued by African nations. I then highlight Uganda's language policy and how Swahili features in that policy. Section three gives the main thesis of this study while section four provides the theoretical foundation of the study. Section five explains the methods employed to accomplish the study. Section six presents and discusses the findings, leading to the conclusions given in section seven.

## **2.0 Literature review**

### **2.1 Third Language Acquisition**

Third language acquisition (TLA) has distinguished itself as an area of study in recent times. According to Mesaros (2010), the phenomenon of TLA has sociolinguistic foundations. Using the case of English, Mesaros (ibid) notes that the spread of English as well as the increasing mobility of the world populations

and the recognition of minority languages have resulted in social and educational situations that enhance the learning of more than two languages.

Third language acquisition is a common phenomenon all over the world both in natural and formal contexts and takes place in a large number of diverse sociolinguistic situations. For example, in European contexts, there are established linguistic minorities that have achieved status and support for their languages (e.g. Cenoz and Valencia, 1994; Mesaros, 2010). According to Mesaros (2010), the Netherlands, Spain and Finland have language policies that include bilingual programs as well as foreign language programs which encourage the acquisition of a third language starting at primary school level. This can be the case with Catalan in the Valencian Community and Basque in the Basque county in Spain (see Jessner and Cenoz, 2007; Munoz, 2005). In most cases, the third language acquired is English because it is considered the language with the greatest international currency; making it a desirable language to learn (Mesaros, 2010). In the East African region, English enjoys a similar status as in Europe, although this is rather limited to the elite. Swahili is the language that has distinguished itself as a language with the greatest regional currency, and therefore making it a useful and desirable language to learn, often as a second or third language.

Various studies have emphasized how bilingualism and bilingual education facilitates third/additional language learning, mediated by other external sociolinguistic factors such as additive and subtractive<sup>1</sup> bilingual situations (Lambert, 1974, 1981; Cenoz and Valencia, 1994; Swain et al., 1990; Sanz, 2000). For example, Cenoz and Valencia (1994) and Swain et al. (1990) found out that L1 literacy facilitated L3 proficiency in immersion schools in the Basque county (Spain) and Toronto (Canada). Therefore, the language in education policy is crucial to this realization. For example, Cenoz and Gorter (2005) note that education is important in maintaining and revitalizing minority languages, since the relationship between education and society is bidirectional. They emphasize that education contributes to the development of proficiency in minority languages by teaching these languages and through these languages.

The acquisition of English as a second or third language in Europe indicates a conscious language planning and policy that is implemented to develop the minority language to a privileged status alongside the acquisition and learning of English. Such conscious language planning targeted at developing and promoting a local language is exhibited in two examples of languages that have

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<sup>1</sup> The concepts of additive and subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1974) refer to a situation when the first language is valued, and when acquisition of a second language does not replace the first language (additive bilingualism), bilingualism is associated with positive cognitive consequences. The opposite situation is subtractive bilingualism.

been developed through government intervention by way of policy formulation, planning and implementation; Catalan in Spain (Sanz, 2000) and Swahili in Tanzania (Vilahlova, 2007). These are presented in section 4 in this study. In the next section, the study examines colonial language policy and its role in shaping the language in education policies in post-colonial Africa.

## **2.2 Colonial Language Policy in Africa**

A common educational dilemma in multilingual African countries is the choice of a language of instruction in the school system, where, in the absence of an ethnically neutral lingua franca, any choice will be seen to favor certain ethno-linguistic groups at the expense of the rest (Sa, 2007). As a result, the formal acquisition and learning of an African language as a second or third language in Africa faces enormous challenges. This can be attributed to both historical and planning variables. Historically, inasmuch as the different colonial powers pursued different colonial policies, their common underlying feature was that they did not promote the teaching/learning and official use of indigenous languages (Awobuluyi, 2013).

On the first hand, the French, Portuguese and Spanish did not tolerate the use of any indigenous African languages at all in the public domain through their total assimilation policy in their respective colonial territories in Africa (Awobuluyi, 2013). To this extent, no indigenous African languages were ever taught in school or used as media for instruction. The effects of such a language policy have had far reaching effects on language planning until today.

On the other hand, in the British colonial territories, indigenous African languages were allowed, though their use was restricted. Awobuluyi (2013) points out that indigenous language were officially used during the first three or four years after which instruction was strictly in English. Then, selected indigenous languages were allowed as subjects on the school timetable thereafter, but not allowed to be spoken within the school. In fact, a learner would be liable to corporal punishment if and when caught speaking their indigenous language while at school. By and large, not being taught one's native language at all as the case was under the French, Portuguese and Spanish colonial rule, or restrictions to its learning and use as it was under British colonial rule, equally led to the same outcome. According to Awobuluyi (2013), the outcome was such that the young African school child regarded his native language as inferior to the colonial language taught to him, a feeling later reinforced by the choice of the official language made by his/her newly independent country. It can therefore be argued that historical factors directly influence(d) language policy and planning in post-colonial Africa, sparking off an ongoing official, national and language of instruction debate in Africa alluded to in Mazrui (1996). In the next section we

discuss two cases in which a local language has become a lingua franca at the expense of the colonial language through the language in education policy.

### **2.3 Indigenous Languages as Lingua Franca: Catalan and Swahili**

Despite the linguistic challenges compounded by the colonial language policies in Africa, this study argues that conscious government planning through language policy and the implementation of a language in education policy that considers the development of a local language alongside the colonial or majority language yields the desired linguistic goals. As earlier noted, such linguistic goals include the development of a trilingual population that can function locally, regionally and internationally (Vihlanova, 2006). This section presents two cases of conscious language planning through the language in education policy that has enabled the development of a local lingua franca alongside a majority language in a linguistically diverse society.

#### **2.3.1. The Case of Catalan**

Sanz (2000) states that although Catalan, a minority Romance language which is a native language of over six million people in Catalonia (Spain), shared co-officiality with Spanish since 1976, the population of Catalan speakers kept reducing, with the language strictly banned from the public arena. On the other hand, Spanish was used in formal contexts by Catalan speakers. In the 1980s, the new Catalan autonomous government created a General Secretariat of Linguistic Policy which implemented the Catalan Normalization Law that was passed by the Catalan Parliament. The language policy in Catalonia, according to Munoz (2005) is premised on the guiding principle that Catalan is the language of Catalonia and must have preferential use in all situations. Munoz (ibid) further points out that in the policy, three fronts were identified: linguistic awareness, the media, and education. As a consequence, Catalan was declared the language of instruction in all Catalan schools and also as a subject, taught for 3 hours per week. Spanish is introduced in grade 1 as a subject for three hours per week. English is also introduced as a subject in grade 3 for two and a half hours per week.

Catalan immersion programs were implemented in schools as well especially for immigrant communities. Sanz (2000) notes that although Catalan was still a minority language compared to Spanish especially in the Barcelona metropolitan area, the number of schools with Catalan as the language of instruction increased to the extent that by 1992, all High School graduates in Catalonia graduated with language skills in Catalan that would allow them to conduct administrative and educational tasks in both Catalan and Spanish. According to Munoz (2005), the increase was mainly due to the influence that the educational system has had on the

young population. In general, Catalonia has a trilingual program implemented in the education system where, after Catalan, Spanish and its literature are taught in Spanish for 8 hours a week while English is taught for 4 hours a week, all aimed at providing students with equal proficiency in the respective languages.

### ***2.3.2 The Case of Swahili***

Tanzania, like many other African countries is linguistically diverse with over 127 languages (Gordon, 2005). According to Sa (2007), Tanzania differs from some of its neighbors in the sense that Swahili is spoken as a second language (and a first language to some people in the coastal areas and islands) by a vast majority of the population. It is both the official and national language. Gordon (2005) states that approximately, 30 million rural Tanzanians speak Swahili as a second language. The National Swahili Council (2004) also indicated that at least 99% of all Tanzanians spoke Swahili at least as a second language. It therefore may be not surprising that Swahili is the medium of instruction in primary schools, with Ethiopia as the other only country to achieve a similar feat on the continent (Alidou, 2004, cited in Sa, 2007). According to Sa (ibid), Tanzania's choice of Swahili as a national language and language of instruction in schools was not an obvious choice and neither was it achieved easily. He for example notes that despite the achievement, Swahili was not native to most Tanzanians, and also English is still the medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher institutions of learning.

During the colonial period, the Germans allowed Swahili as the medium of instruction until after World War 1 when the British took over the administration of Tanzania from the Germans. Rubagumya (1990) notes that during the British rule, the last three years of primary schooling as well as post primary education was conducted in English, which also became the language of administration. After Independence in 1961, Swahili was included in the national building plan as a language of public life and transforming the educational curriculum of government schools to focus on Tanzanian national experience. However, English remained the language of instruction in secondary schools (Miguel, 2001 cited in Sa, 2007). It was not until 1985 that there was a change from English to Swahili in secondary schools. This move was not without controversy. According to Sa (2007), the most prevalent argument against a switch to Swahili was that to remove English from schools was to remove Tanzania from participation in the international academic, scientific and financial communities. The current policy statements underlying the language of instruction in Tanzania are drawn from the Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1995) and *Sera ya Utamaduni* (Cultural Policy) (MoE, 1997). It states Swahili as the medium of instruction at primary

level while English is a compulsory subject. At secondary level, English is the medium of instruction while Swahili is a compulsory subject.

There is however an ongoing debate relating to Swahili versus English as the language of instruction at post-primary school level in Tanzania (Campbell, 1997). Regardless, the country stands as one of Africa's success stories with regard to the development and promotion of an African language as a lingua franca and language of instruction. Sa (2007) notes that in Africa, only Tanzania and Ethiopia use their national languages rather than their colonial languages throughout their primary school system. According to Tollefson (2006), the Tanzanian government achieved this by pursuing a policy that led to the association of acquisition of Swahili with Tanzanian nationalism. The next section explores Uganda's language policy from the colonial era to the present, highlighting the place of Swahili within the language in education policy.

## **2.4 Swahili in Uganda's Language Policy**

### ***2.4.1 The Colonial Period***

The colonial period in Uganda was characterized by an inconsistent language policy that saw the promotion and development of Swahili in Uganda to lag (Vihlanova, 1996). Vihlanova further states that this inconsistency by the British administration was one of the most important factors that influenced the language situation and the position of Swahili in Uganda.

In the early period of the Uganda protectorate (1884 to early 1900s), the European settlers and the business community preferred Swahili while the missionaries, who were in charge of education at the time, used both Swahili and local languages as media for instruction in schools (Hansen, 1984). In 1925, the colonial administration took over control of education by setting up the Directorate of Education. Ssekamwa (1997: 245) notes that the Colonial Office was the source of policies on language and the medium of instruction from 1925. In its policy of 1925, the Colonial Office in London stated that vernaculars were to be used in education while English was to be taught in the top classes of the primary schools so that in post primary classes, students would have a fair knowledge of English to benefit by instruction through that language. Swahili was later introduced in the above policy when it turned out that Uganda would be administered politically as part of the East African Federation, which necessitated a reversal of the earlier policy. Ssekamwa (1997) observes that the reversal created controversy from 1927 to 1937 prompting the colonial office to setup a commission to advise on the matter. The controversy was mainly steered by missionaries who associated Swahili with Islam. They argued that the language belonged to no native people in Uganda, and also feared that, as in the case of Tanzania, the language would lead

to the demise of the local vernaculars which the missionaries had invested a lot of time and resources to develop. Despite the opposition, the commission advised that Swahili should begin to be used in government business and as a medium of instruction in schools, an issue that had been shelved in 1912.

A new policy statement was issued in which Swahili would replace Luganda<sup>2</sup> in government business and in schools at the lower level as a medium of instruction in those areas. The governor reasoned that since 1912, the favor given to Luganda in preference to Swahili had not helped Luganda to develop quickly in all parts of Uganda while Swahili, though set "at a disadvantage", was developing on its own. Besides, Swahili belonged to no tribal group in Uganda, giving it the advantage of arousing no animosity among the different ethnic groups.

In 1935, the Colonial Office stated that its original language policy of 1925 should be reverted to in which vernaculars were to be the media of instruction while English would then become the language of instruction in the post primary educational institutions. To emphasize this policy statement, the de La Warr Commission from the Colonial office in 1937 cautioned that delaying the teaching of English in primary schools for the sake of Swahili would be a mistake. This then meant that English became a taught subject early in primary schools so that students proceeding there could learn through it as medium of instruction at post primary level. By the time the de La Warr Commission ceased its activities in Uganda in 1937, Swahili was only taught in Police and Army schools as well as a few primary schools in the northern and eastern provinces. Since Swahili was dropped from the curriculum as a result of the new policy, there was a dwindling number of teachers who were involved in teaching Swahili. The status quo remained until 1962 when Uganda gained her independence.

#### ***2.4.2 The Post-Colonial Period***

Uganda gained independence in 1962. The colonial language policy still abounded until the government set up the Castle Committee to look into the language question for an independent Uganda (Mukama, 1994). A report was produced in the following year, proposing English as the official language and six indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in primary schools. In 1965, the government adopted the Castle report but never implemented it (Mukama, *ibid*). In 1967, the president noted that Uganda's identity was at stake because of its national language problem, arguing that the then language policy was committed to teaching more English in schools, not mindful of the disadvantages such a policy

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<sup>2</sup> Luganda is a Bantu language from the Niger-Congo language family and a native language of the Baganda, a group of people from Buganda, in central Uganda. Luganda is spoken widely in the central and southern part of Uganda.



presented. Nevertheless, the continued emphasis of English at the expense of local languages remained until the regime change in 1971.

The 1970's saw the revival Swahili in Uganda's language policy. This followed the overthrow of Obote's administration by Idd Amin in 1971. At the time, Swahili was the language of the armed forces. In 1972, through a Bill in Parliament, Swahili was made a national language. Despite this status, there was no systematic effort made to teach it in schools so that it would eventually become a medium of instruction for the next fifteen years.

In January 1986, the National Resistance Movement took over power in Uganda. A National Education Policy Review Commission (the Senteza Kajubi commission) was appointed in 1987 by the National Resistance Council. The commission recommended a language in education policy that would consider Swahili and other indigenous languages; a policy that was similar to that which existed between 1931 and 1962. In 1992, The Government White Paper (henceforth GWP) on the implementation of the recommendations of the Senteza Kajubi Commission was published. The GWP provided for the compulsory teaching of both Swahili and English as compulsory subjects to all children throughout the primary cycle, in both rural and urban areas. Following the 1992 GWP, the amended constitution of Uganda of 1995 provided for the adoption of Swahili as the co-official language with English. Later in 2006, the language in education policy was also announced based on the GWP (Rosendal, 2010). Swahili was to be taught from Primary 4 and examined at Primary 7 with 50% of the exam in local languages and 50% of the exam in Swahili according to the 2005/2006 curriculum review. It was however dropped from the list of subjects by the NCDC/MoE in 2008 when the subjects were reduced to 7. Swahili would not be introduced in school until Senior 1 and would be presented as an option subject.

### **3.0 The Study**

This study examines the failure of Uganda to promote the acquisition and learning of Swahili as a third language in Uganda through the language in education policy. Previous studies have attributed the situation of Swahili in Uganda to the negative attitude towards Swahili because it is not native to Uganda as well as the sociopolitical environment (cf. Mukama 1994; Ssekamwa, 1997; Nakayiza and Namyalo, 2015). However, there are case studies elsewhere that show that such factors notwithstanding, a language can be consciously promoted by government through the education system as a second or third language and be elevated to an official status through language policy and planning. Examples are Catalan in Spain (Sanz 2000; Munoz 2005) and Swahili in Tanzania (Rubagumya, 1990; Sa, 2007). In this study, I hypothesize that the failure to implement a language in

education policy that provides for the teaching of Swahili as a compulsory subject from primary school level has denied Uganda the opportunity of having an African language as a lingua franca, as well as achieving the national objective of promoting a trilingual population that can linguistically function locally, regionally and internationally.

#### **4.0 Theoretical Framework**

Tollefson (2006) proposes a framework of second language acquisition (henceforth SLA)<sup>3</sup> that incorporates planning variables. He posits that language planning is a variable of second language acquisition and learning whereas language policy is a particular area of language planning. Accordingly, language policy follows two processes: formulation of plans and implementation of plans. He indicates that the aim of researchers studying a particular SLA setting should be to delineate the extent to which these variables have been affected by planning. The variables are:

- a) Input variables: the major decision to teach or not to teach a particular language;
- b) Learner variables: motivation can be manipulated by government decisions to reward language proficiency, language criteria in job descriptions, language learning scholarships, and opportunities for overseas study. Additionally, is the creation of attitudinal and ideological motivation;
- c) Learning variables: facilitation of overseas study, informal contact with native speakers, high quality instruction by teachers with native fluency, availability of a wide range of reading materials, and films. Others are current texts written by native speakers with formal linguistic training, use of motivating media such as popular songs and current cinema;
- d) Learned variables: curricula evaluation mechanisms and instruments that measure knowledge of the fixed order of structures.

Tollefson (2006) states that these variables are subject to planning both at the micro and macro levels. This study will measure each variable against Uganda's language in education policy by highlighting the place of Swahili and the level of its implementation to determine whether it meets the required effort necessary to effectively teach and learn a second or third language in a linguistically diverse society.

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of Second Language is used in the sense of Hammarberg (1998) to refer to any language acquired after the first language, excluding the language currently under acquisition. The definition incorporates all other languages learnt after the first/native language, allowing an individual to have multiple second languages (L2s).

### 5.0 Methods

Using a biographical questionnaire designed according to Daller’s (2002) model “Language Acquisition Biography”, background information of Swahili learners at Makerere University was obtained in 2016. The questionnaire included items on learners’ linguistic background, that is, the languages in each learner’s linguistic repertoire, their order of acquisition and time of acquisition. Participants were undergraduate Swahili “Advanced” students at Makerere University who studied Swahili from Form One. The aim of the questionnaire was to establish a homogenous group of Swahili learners from whom objective data could be obtained. The homogenous group would enable the control of several confounding variables such as age of exposure, exposure to other languages, and order of acquisition among others. A total of 159 learners answered the questionnaire, out of which 48 (30%) were in first year, 46 (29%) in second year and 65 (41%) in third year. Out of the 159 learners, 88 (55%) were female and 71 (45%) were male as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Participants that Answered the Biographical Information Questionnaire

<b>Year of study</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Year 1	22	26	<b>48</b>
Year 2	23	23	<b>46</b>
Year 3	26	39	<b>65</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>160</b>

**Source:** Data from the field

The questionnaire was analyzed manually by reading the participants’ responses. Data from the questionnaire enabled us to determine the linguistic background of the learners. This was necessary to select a homogenous group of participants from whom the study could rely on to obtain objective results.

### 6.0 Results

Data from the questionnaire indicated that the learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. We were able to establish the different languages spoken by the learners in this ethno-linguistically diverse classroom as shown in the table 2 below.

Table 2: The Ethno-Linguistic Shape of the Swahili Classroom at Makerere University

Country	Number of learners	Languages represented
Uganda	145	Runyankore/Rukiga, Luganda, Lugisu, Acholi, Aringa, Lutooro, Ruhororo, Lubwisi, Lukosa, Kitagwenda, KupSabiny, Rufumbira, Runyabwisha, Lukhonzho, Lusamia
Kenya	5	Kisii (Gusii), Kimeru, Sabaot, Kikuyu
Tanzania	6	Kiswahili, Kichagga, Kihehe, Kikuria, Kizaramo
Rwanda	2	Kinyarwanda

**Source:** Data from the field

Table 2 indicates the language combinations that characterize Swahili students at Makerere University. Students come from diverse geographical and ethnic backgrounds across the East African region. Geographically, learners come from four countries namely Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda.

From the analysis of the questionnaire, 58 learners were selected. These were learners that had a relatively similar sociolinguistic background with regard to when and at what age they were exposed to Swahili language. The learners also shared the same first language and possessed the same literacy level in Runyankore<sup>4</sup>, their first language which was used as the language of instruction for the first four years of primary school learning, and never as a subject or language of instruction after that level. The 58 participants then answered a proficiency test in the three languages, that is, the native language (L1), English (L2) and Swahili (L3).

Tollefson (2006) posits that planning variables have both direct and indirect effect on language learning. One key aspect in the evaluation of language learning is the level of proficiency attained by the language learners. In table 3 we present results from a proficiency test administered to Ugandan students learning Swahili as a third language at Makerere University.

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<sup>4</sup> Runyankore, spoken in the western part of Uganda is often cited with Rukiga with which it bears considerable similarities. It is a Bantu language from the Niger-Congo Interlacustrine sub-group, and is classified as E13 (zone (E.10) in Guthrie's (1967) referential classification. It is closely related to a number of other languages spoken in Uganda, in particular Runyoro and Rutoro, Haya in Tanzania, Kikerewe, Zinza and Kinyambo.

Table 3: Proficiency Levels of Participants in their L1, L2 and L3

Language	Low	Intermediate	High	Total
L1 (Runyankore)	9 (16%)	35 (60%)	14 (24%)	58
L2 (English)	4 (7%)	25 (43%)	29 (50%)	58
L3 (Swahili)	22 (38%)	29 (50%)	7 (12%)	58

**Source:** Data from the field

According to Tollefson (2006), the decision to teach or not to teach a language in the language planning process is an input variable that is subject to planning. The results of the proficiency test in table 3 above indicate a poor performance in L3-Swahili by learners that have so far learnt the language for 7-8 years. Whereas the decision to teach Swahili in the school system may be regarded as a major decision, the results allude to a planning gap with regard to its implementation. Previous studies on second or additional language learning indicate that additive bilingual contexts provide incentive for second and third language learning (Lambert, 1974, 1981; Cenoz, 2005). The learners poor proficiency at their level is related to the inconsistent colonial and post-independence language in education policy as pointed out by Vihlanova (2006) as well as the partial implementation of the current policy as pointed out by Ssentanda (2014). The teaching and official use of English was consistent throughout the colonial period while the colonial administration was not decisive in selecting Swahili or the local vernaculars as language of instruction. As noted by Awobuluyi (2013), African learners viewed African languages as inferior to the colonial language when they were banned from schools and other public domain. It is therefore no wonder that the level of proficiency in L1-Runyankore and L3-Swahili was low, with only 24% and 12% of the learners scoring High proficiency respectively compared to 50% in L2-English.

Teaching a third language must adhere to specific principles and procedures that result from language planning. For example, research has indicated that proficiency in the previously learned languages facilitates the learning of a third language (Cenoz, Hufeisen & Jessner, 2001). Therefore, Swahili students would benefit from proficiency in L1-Runyankore and L2-English to easily learn L3-Swahili. Results indicate that only 24% of the learners exhibit a high proficiency in the L1 compared to 50% in L2. Lack of proficiency in the L1 affected their learning of L2 already. This thus means that at the outset of L3 learning, learners were already at a disadvantage. What we see then is a trickle-down effect of inadequate Runyankore planning, where second and additional

language learning is taking place in a subtractive linguistic context (see Lambert, 1981), a context that is associated with negative language learning outcomes.

The learning of Swahili was also introduced at secondary school level (from senior one) instead of primary school as the policy provides as noted by Rosendal (2010). Studies have indicated that younger is better, that is, younger learners tend to acquire a new language much easier and are able to attain near native or native proficiency compared to older learners (cf. Odlin, 1989; Falk, 2010). And indeed, the language in education policy states that Swahili is to be a compulsory subject from primary school. However, this policy has never been implemented. It is therefore no wonder that learners are more proficient in English which was introduced in the school curriculum in Primary one as opposed to Swahili that is introduced later at secondary school. In cases where the second or third local language has been successful such as in Catalonia and in Tanzania, the language is introduced early in school as a compulsory subject. According to the input variable (Tollefson, 2006), to teach a language is a major decision that is subject to planning which Swahili learning in Uganda seems to lack.

Swahili is introduced in school as an option subject (Rosendal, 2010). This is contrary to the policy that provided for Swahili as a compulsory subject. Catalan in Catalonia (Sanz, 2000) and Swahili in Tanzania (Sa, 2007) were able to attain the status of a lingua franca in their respective societies because they were compulsory subjects in the school system as the language in education policy provided. As an option subject in Uganda, few hours are dedicated to its teaching on the school syllabus, and is also more likely to be dropped by learners as they approach levels where they begin to specialize by selecting subject combinations at Senior 3 and Senior 5. This therefore defeats the whole notion to developing a trilingual population by teaching Swahili as a third language in Uganda.

Swahili is taught in an ethno-linguistically diverse environment. As results indicated, the Swahili classroom at Makerere University comprised of learners from 25 different ethnic backgrounds both from within Uganda and also from across the region. Some of the learners had prior exposure to Swahili both formally and informally. For example, in Rwanda, Swahili is introduced at primary school level (Rosendal, 2010; Niyomugabo, 2016), as well as in Kenya where the language is also an official language and language of instruction in urban primary schools and also is acquired as a second language (Mbaka et. al., 2013) and is acquired as either the first or second language in Tanzania where it is both the national and official language, and language of instruction in primary schools (Sa, 2007). Learners from border communities such as Busia (Uganda/Kenya), Mutukula (Uganda/Tanzania) and Bundibugyo (Uganda/Congo) are also in contact with Swahili speaking communities. All these learners meet in a Ugandan classroom from Senior 1 up to University, are exposed to similar classroom

experiences and are expected to learn Swahili at the same pace. According to Tollefson (2006), learner variables such as motivation and facilitation for language learning as well as creation of attitudinal motivation are key and subject to government planning. Learners from such diverse linguistic backgrounds ought to be subjected to a biographical questionnaire and a placement test before joining a second or third language classroom so as to understand their previous language exposure so that they are appropriately placed in language classrooms (Halimi, 2011). In the Ugandan Swahili classroom, such contrasting linguistic backgrounds that are not considered by language policy planners create negative attitudes especially when learners feel that they have been placed in a wrong classroom that is too advanced or too ordinary for them because of prior exposure to Swahili or lack thereof. This in turn affects learners' motivation to learn the language.

Swahili lacks the ideological drive that is necessary to enhance the teaching and learning of a second or third language. The language is in fact listed among the foreign languages in Uganda, in spite of the fact that Swahili is a Bantu language that shares a lot in common with most Ugandan languages with some good measure of mutual intelligibility (Polome, 1967). Among the learning variables, Tollefson (2006) asserts that ideological motivation is crucial to second or addition language learning. In fact Vilahlova (2006) attributes the success of Tanzania with regard to promoting Swahili as a lingua franca to Tanzania government policy that led to the association of acquisition of Swahili with Tanzanian nationalism. Similarly, Catalan was able to attain its status because of the ideological motivation attached to it by both the language planners and the language learners. According to Munoz (2005), the language policy in Catalonia is premised on the guiding principle that Catalan is the language of Catalonia and must have preferential use in all situations. Therefore, the lack of such ideological motivation that lacks in the kind of policy being implemented has negatively affected the learning of Swahili as a third language in Uganda.

Language scholarship funding, according to Tollefson (2006) is one of the key variables to second and addition language learning. Such funding includes among others, language learning scholarships and opportunities for overseas study. Such activities would allow for immersion programs for third language learners. Sanz (2000) and Cenoz & Valencia (1994) indicated that Catalan and Basque immersion programs contributed to the increased proficiency among Catalan learners especially among immigrant communities. Similarly, Swain et al (1990) noted that French immersion programs in metropolitan Toronto (Canada) led to high literacy levels in French. The same approach is seen among English and French learners funded under the British Council and Alliance Française respectively where learners travel overseas for short and medium term stays, and

are immersed in the native communities. In Uganda, such arrangements are limited to individual universities and language learners to take initiative to fund their own students, and are always constrained by resources. The lack of a conscious plan to effect Swahili scholarship as well as Swahili immersion programs continue to negatively affect its acquisition as a third language in Uganda.

Tollefson (2006) states that curricula evaluation mechanisms and instruments that measure knowledge of the fixed order of structures are key variables to second and additional language acquisition. He refers to these as learned variables in the language planning framework. Tollefson points out that such curriculum that defines successful learning in structural terms may be established by decisions at either the macro or micro-implementation level. In Uganda, the mother tongue teaching policy and the subsequent curricula developed (MoE, 2006) cannot be evaluated when they have not been implemented. For example, until 2014, the teaching of Swahili in secondary schools did not follow any formal curriculum, but rather, a Uganda National Examinations Board guideline for setting and examining students. The primary school Swahili curriculum cannot be evaluated as well since the teaching of Swahili as a compulsory subject is yet to be implemented. It is at the backdrop of such planning gaps that the learning of Swahili as a third language in Uganda faces challenges as manifested in the proficiency levels of Swahili students at Makerere University.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

This study focused on role of language policy and planning in the acquisition of a second or additional language, using the case of learning Swahili as a third language in Uganda. The study findings supported previous findings that the inconsistent colonial language policy pertaining to the use of African languages as languages of instruction in schools, and the consistency with which English was promoted continued to affect the promotion of a local language as a lingua franca in post-independence Uganda (Ssekamwa, 1997; Rosendal, 2010). However, using case studies from elsewhere showing a local language rising to become a lingua franca through government conscious planning and an implemented language in education policy, this study finds its point of departure from previous findings. The rise of Catalan in Spain and Swahili in Tanzania clearly indicate that language planning and implementation of language policy can go a long way in breaking the colonial language jinx and promote a local language as a lingua franca. The study therefore concludes that Swahili in Uganda has failed to be promoted as a lingua franca because of the non-implementation of the language in education policy that states it as a compulsory subject at primary school level as well as a future medium of instruction. The partial implementation of the Swahili learning policy has led to the production of mediocre learners of Swahili as a third language whose level of



proficiency does not align with their level of education. Education planners and policy makers must consider Tollefson's (2006) language planning framework to design a Swahili learning plan as a third language in Uganda alongside the mother tongue and English so as to achieve the national objective of a trilingual population that can function linguistically locally, regionally and internationally, short of which, such an objective only remains a pipe dream.

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