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Conflicted Worlds of Multilingual Communities in Africa: Literacy Tangled in Words

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ABSTRACT: Drawing from a sociocultural perspective of literacy, with the goal to promote the use of African Native Languages (ANL) in schools, I conducted a Participatory Action Research in one multilingual primary school community in North West Tanzania. For three weeks, 19 teachers, 19 parents and 119- 6th grade students collaborated with each other in a writing workshop to write supplemental books for their school library. Through the findings I show that students wavered to use their native languages. Students preferred their national identity over others while local, national, and international literacy issues conflicted students' language choice for their texts. The study demonstrates how in multilingual nations, language issues in schools cannot be detached from other social concerns. While seeking ways to acknowledge students' diverse linguistic and cultural identities, educators are encouraged to consider students' literacy as well as language ideology based on historical, economic and social contexts.

Keywords: African native languages, Indigenous languages, language of instruction, multilingual, quality education



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In Africa, indigenous education prior to colonial rule was never intended to bring economic and political success but rather, it involved elders teaching the younger generation aspects of life as well as rituals that guide girls and boys in their adulthood (Alidou, 2004). Based on age, various groups within communities would gather and educate each other using a local language. Upon European colonialism and imperialism, such purpose of indigenous education changed to one that would enable a few Africans to help the colonizers run the country; such education system also forced multiple communities to learn together, hence the need for a language to provide a common means of communication as a medium of instruction (Alidou, 2004). After their independence, education in African countries needed to focus on building nation-states that would be economically viable while also competing economically with other countries in the world. However, since African countries inherited the education systems of their colonizers, their education continues to focus more on learning about Europe while also using foreign languages as medium of instruction even after the colonial era (Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010)

The need for quality education to bring positive outcomes in Africa, like food and shelter and to manage their environments to prevent diseases cannot be understated. Education quality can be defined as a learning system in which “the content, method and means work interdependently in ways that positively affect how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits” (Maganda, 2013, p. 820). In order for this to happen, the education system needs to consider the social contexts of the learners.

Based on this background, I conducted this research study. Tanzania’s education devalues African native knowledge; many students don’t see their lives in school. Meaning, their languages, village life, history, environment, and even the knowledge their parents have, get minimal space in their education curriculum. This study was a moral act to show students, teachers, and parents in Tanzania how their lives were filled with knowledge and the relevance of their languages in academia. Besides, learning draws from the cultural, political, social, and historical context of the learner. For that reason, the study draws from the sociocultural perspective of literacy because this stance facilitates literacy practices that lead educators to consider and use different aspects of students’ identity, such as linguistic and cultural in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this research I examine the complexities of using ANL to write supplemental books in one multilingual school community in northwestern Tanzania. I used a Participatory Action Research approach to conduct the study in order to allow collaboration between me the researcher, teachers, students and their parents to address the need for supplemental books, while creating space for them to use their native languages in school (McIntyre, 2008). In general, I wanted to know “*What happens when parents, teachers and students work together to create supplemental books by participating in a writing workshop?*” In this paper however, I focus on one element of this big question: *what language issues would be manifested when students work together in the writing workshop?*

In order to achieve this objective, first, definition of key language terminologies in this study is presented, followed by a brief background that explains Tanzania’s education system. A review of literature on Tanzania’s history of language policy in academia, international efforts and challenges to promote home languages in school come next.

Thereafter, the theory, methods, and findings of this study are discussed.

Language Terminologies

In exploring language matters in multilingual societies, most scholars use different terminologies to mean the same thing. For example, Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) indicated that some languages are sometimes called first, mother tongue, home language, or local languages. Based on the context of the study, these terms refer to languages people have learned from birth, or one they know best; they can also be the ones someone uses the most. In this study, a first language is used synonymously with mother tongue as one that people have learned first after birth. A home language is one that people speak at home and not necessarily in the wider community such as village or town because it may not be necessarily the major language in that community. A local language refers to the language spoken in the homes and marketplaces of a community; in other words, this is a language spoken beyond one household, it reaches multiple families enough to be understood by the majority within a specific community (Harrison, 2008).

Other language terms used in this article include indigenous, native, national, and official language. An indigenous language is synonymous to a native language; it is a language from a linguistically distinctive community that has been settled in a specific region for many generations and is spoken by indigenous peoples (Spolsky, 2002; Roy-Campbell, 2001). All languages of Tanzania, except Swahili, are native languages specific to their people's groups. For example, Chagga is a language

specific to the people from the Chagga community. A native language does not necessarily have to be a person's first language, and some first languages are not necessarily native languages. For example, a person who learned to speak English from birth while in Tanzania can claim English as his or her first language, but English is not necessarily a native language. National language is one spoken by the majority of the people within a nation; it is also unique to the nation (UNESCO, 2003).

An official language is a language that has been declared by a government to be the language of the

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governed nation. This means that people within that nation-state use it for administrative and official purposes such as in the media, school, courtrooms, religious practices, and much more. Linguistic imperialism refers to the transmission of a dominant language to other people (Canagarajah, 2005). An

imperial language is therefore a language spoken by a people based on historical, political and economic dependence from another power. Words such as foreign language, colonial language, as well as imported language, are also used as synonyms to an imperial language.

In this study, I refer to Swahili as a national language. Although I have differentiated between local, first, indigenous and native language, I use the term "home language(s)" to also mean local, first, native, and indigenous language because to the participants in this study, a home language was also their first language or mother tongue, and to some participants, their languages were widely used in their community enough to be considered "local" languages. However, it is important to note that though Swahili is Tanzania's

national language, it is also a native language to some Tanzanians who reside around the coastal Tanzania (Roy-Campbell, 2001), and a first language to some Tanzanians including some participants in this study mainly because their parents didn't come from the same ethnic group.

Background

To bring an understanding on language issues examined in this study, I give an overview of Tanzania's education system.

Tanzania's Education System

Tanzania was colonized by various dominant groups at different times (Roy-Campbell, 2001). The Germans colonized it in the late seventeen hundreds after which it was under the British colony for 42 years (1918 to 1960). It gained its independence in 1961. Tanzania is a multiparty nation state with a large income disparity. Tanzania follows a 2-7-4-2-3+ system meaning: 2 years of pre-primary education for ages 5–6, 7 years of primary education for ages 7–13 followed by 4 years of ordinary level secondary education for ages 14–17, leading to 2 years of advanced level secondary education for ages 18–19. A Bachelor's degree ordinarily takes three or more years at the university level. The education system is centralized by the government.

Primary school covers 7 years and is called Standards 1 to 7 (equivalent to United States grade levels). 7 years old is the legal primary school entry age. Typically, standard 1 and 2 have classroom teachers but standard 3 onwards have subject teachers. Therefore, students from standard 3 onwards stay in specific allocated classrooms and the teachers move from classroom to classroom to teach any of the 12 subjects in the Tanzanian curriculum namely, Swahili, English, French, Mathematics, Science, Geography, Civics, History,

Vocational subjects, Religion, and Athletics as well as Information and Communication Technology. Pertinent to this study, it is important to note that in Tanzania, students learn writing skills in English and Swahili language classes (Graham & Perin, 2007). Interaction among students is little to none as learning is often teacher-centered. The main focus of writing instruction is mastery of grammar and as a result, literacy activities are often detached from students' lives (Maganda, 2014). On average, public primary school classrooms range from 66 students to about 200 students in a single classroom. The teacher to student ratio is 1:49 in most schools. With the exception of English language classes, where English textbooks are used, all other textbooks are written in Swahili.

Review of Literature

In order to give a context from which to understand the findings of this study, I provide a review of literature on Tanzania's history of language policy in academia. I also highlight international efforts and challenges to promote home languages in school.

Tanzania's History of Language Policy in Academia

The history of language policy in Tanzanian schools is complicated to say the least. According to the World Bank ("The World Bank Data," 2016) report, Tanzania has about 51.82 million people today and about 150 different ethnic groups. Because Swahili crosses ethnic lines and is spoken by more than 99% of rural Tanzanians, it is the only national language in Tanzania from independence to today, while both Swahili and English are official languages (Brock-Utne, 2005; Maganda & Moshi, 2014). English has been the major language of instruction in higher learning. The struggle of switching from English to Swahili in all levels has continued since the 1970s to the 1990's; it came to

an end in 2015, however, when Tanzania finally announced it would drop English in all higher levels of education because students were not performing well (Macha, 2015; Mohammed, 2015).

In all, it is important to note that Tanzania has ignored its other 156 native languages by completely leaving them outside of school and in turn, their status continues to diminish (Gudhlanga, 2005; Muzale & Rugemalira, 2008; Maganda, 2013; Lewis, Gary, & Fennig, 2016). Tanzania's ethnic languages are divided into three major groups: Bantu, Nilotic and Khoisan. Figure 1 below, demonstrates this division. It is also observed that Swahili is one of the Bantu languages. All speakers of the languages in black can understand Swahili and those who speak Swahili can somewhat understand any of the Bantu languages shown in this figure. (See Figure 1)

Muzale and Rugemalira (2008) showed that Tanzania's native languages, also known as Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs), are not allowed in politics, media, or in schools. However, the languages are spread across regions, making it likely for students attending one school to be with students who do not speak the same language.

International Efforts to Promote Indigenous Languages

Recently, there has been an increased effort to restore home language(s) in academia based on two important developments during the last two decades (1985-2005) (Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010). First, the adoption of international frameworks, conventions and charters to protect languages was agreed upon to give "small" languages some degree of support. Such organizations include the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1994); the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1993); the Council of Europe (CoE) which

produced the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992); the United Nations (UN) which drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), and most recently the European Union (EU) which published Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan, 2004-2006 (July 2003).

The second development is the expansion and improvement of formal education. Within this effort, the use of minority languages in formal education is seen as a way to improve the quality of education and to revitalize dying languages (Albaugh, 2007). Such programs include the foundation of so-called language revitalization programs (LRP) (Huss, 1999) such as the Te Kōhanga Reo (McClutchie, 2007; Yaunches, 2004); and the "Aha Punana Leo" in 2006 (Hawaiian language nests) ("Aha Punana Leo"). Consequently, multilingual education has been prominent since 1990 (Albaugh, 2009; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010).

Challenges of Promoting Indigenous Languages in Africa

Bamgbose (2011) attested that various scholars on African educational topics give a wide range of reasons on the unimpressive results of efforts to promote ANL. First, Africa's multiplicity of languages is seen as a problem in facilitating communication across ethnic groups (Albaugh, 2007). Second, African languages lack new and advanced vocabulary in various domains of use (Orode, 2008). The third challenge is that of fostering nationalism by discouraging the growth of ethnic languages by promoting a national language. The last challenge is that of economic development in the age of modernization and globalization. Because language is inherently situated in the daily lives of the learner, using a sociocultural perspective of literacy, this study intentionally

sought to create space for home languages in school by using them in the learning process not as a language of instruction.

Theoretical Framework

I present two theoretical frameworks that guided the interpretation and examination my findings, namely: Social-cultural perspectives of literacy and Postcolonial theory.

A Social-cultural Perspective of Literacy

In order to lay a foundation that will help readers better understand the findings in this study, I explore literacy as social practice mainly pertaining to language and identity because these are the main issues in this study. Sociocultural literacy approaches are important in various fields of learning and have influenced the work of many education scholars such as Vygotsky, Gee, Lewis, Encisco, Moje, Tracey, and Morrow (Vygotsky, 1978; Gee, 2000; Lewis, Encisco, & Moje, 2007; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). While there is no single sociocultural theory on literacy, all of them, however, focus on ways in which people use literacy in context. As Perry (2012) argued,

Because of the differences among the various theories united under the sociocultural umbrella, it is more appropriate to speak of sociocultural perspectives as a collection of related theories that include significant emphases on the social and cultural contexts in which literacy is practiced (p. 54).

These approaches see learning as situated in the daily experiences of learners since they are inseparable from their social contexts (Pérez,

2004). Likewise, knowledge, which is the central focus in the learning process, is embedded within socio-cultural practices; meaning occurs when learners participate in the real world, dealing with real-life situations (Gee, 2008). Given the basic principle that learning is never divorced from communication, this approach helps our understanding of the activities that take place in literacy learning, but also, the ways in which educators render instruction with various means of communication, especially language.

Language and identity in sociocultural literacy.

As aforementioned, language is inseparable from learning. Sociocultural perspectives reflect sociolinguistic conceptualizations of situating language within culture (Gee, 1996), differences of language use based on varied contexts (Bakhtin, 1986), how power shapes language use (Bourdieu, 1991), and how ethnicity reflects people's ways of communication (Hymes, 1994). No culture is ever understood apart from language. Language is dependent on the social world because cultural context shapes and situates language. Even more, language is part and parcel of people's values, attitudes, social relations and their perceptions of the world (Gee, 1996). Because language dictates practice, it sometimes portrays the "forgotten or hidden struggle over the symbolic power of a particular way of communicating" (Duranti, 1997, p. 45). In all, when literacy practitioners put emphasis on literacy practices that address issues of power and identity in light of specific sociocultural contexts, they see language through this viewpoint.

I drew from historical and political issues reflected in students' everyday lives to underscore ways in

Educators with students from varied linguistic backgrounds are to take time to understand the social contexts of their students' language use.

which language issues in African schools should not be divorced from students' lives outside of school. In other words, literacy as social practice shows how learning is not confined to educational institutions, but occurs in homes and every place in the community because each of these contexts bring different forms and purposes of literacy (Gee, 1996, 2008).

Postcolonial Theory

Because Tanzania was colonized as previously mentioned, I draw from postcolonial theory, which explores the impact of colonization on cultures and societies. As a researcher, it allows me to situate the cultural discourses of the participants in this study through their articulation of cultural discourses of philosophy, language, society, and economy. It allows me to examine "issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (Western colonizers controlling the colonized)" (Brizee, Tompkins, Chernouski, & Boyle, 2015). As I examine the impact of colonization in Tanzania, this theory gives me the ability to explore two major issues: First, the ways in which European nations subjugated and controlled people in the "Third World" and second, how these people respond and resist the Europeans' infringements (Moore-Gilbert, Stanton, & Maley, 2013). As Gandhi (1998) explained, postcolonial theory essentially examines past and continuous types of political and cultural change that often go through the following stages:

1. An initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonized state.
2. The struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy.
3. A growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity.

This theory will aid the understanding of ideas raised in this study's findings. They include colonial

education- the process whereby an elite group or a large population assimilates to the perspectives and ways of thinking of the colonizing power (Childs & Williams, 2013). Hegemony- a process by which the power of the ruling class use economy, political structure, media, or control of the education system, to meet their needs while persuading other classes that their needs are being met as well (Anderson, 2002). Also, ethnicity- a concept related to people's identity: a blend of qualities that belong to a group's collective principles, views, standards, manners, and experiences (Moore-Gilbert, Stanton & Maley, 2013).

It is critical for readers to understand that postcolonial does not mean what happened in a country after the end of colonization. Rather, as Anderson (2002) argued,

The 'postcolonial' does not imply the end of colonialism; rather, it signals a critical engagement with the present effects of intellectual and social of centuries of 'European expansion' on former colonies and on their colonizers. A postcolonial analysis thus offers us a chance of disconcerting conventional accounts of so-called 'global' techno-science, revealing and complicating the durable dichotomies, produced under colonial regimes, which underpin many of its practices and hegemonic claims (p. 644).

In essence, the ideas examined in this study lend themselves to this theory because they draw from colonization, but do not end there. More specifically, because this study deals with issues of language for example, postcolonial theory, which was highly inspired by Marxist thought in the early 1980s, brings ways to observe "the suppression of local or Indigenous voices (in colonialism or neo-colonialism) (Anderson, 2002, p. 645). Additionally, although there are many postcolonial theorists, Homi Bhabha presented the process of creating hegemony through socio-analysis, and therefore,

deconstructing colonial literary texts to disclose a weakening contradiction within the Western discourses (Moore-Gilbert, Stanton & Maley, 2013). As I will show in the discussion of this study's findings, there is a hybridity of response towards Western ideas and practices; one is distaste while the other is desire, an ambivalence or hybridity that is heightened with culture contact and imitative performance in a once colonial setting. Even more, postcolonial theory is helpful in considering and perhaps challenging those who assume that Western knowledge is neutral and universally applicable.

Methods

In order to preserve the privacy of those involved in this study, all names of participants and places, with the exception of the country and region, are pseudonyms. Revealing the name of the country is important because African countries have varied histories and situating my study in one country is critical to understanding the nature and complexity of this research.

Location

I conducted the study in Tanzania, at the Manyara primary school in the town of Mande. I am also a Tanzanian who comes from a town nearby Mande, and therefore, I also speak the native language spoken by most Mande residents. Mande is a medium sized town in the Mwanza region with a population of 20,593 (8,942 male and 11,651 female). The residents in this town are divided into three main occupations: workers who hold office jobs, businessmen and women, and farmers. The town is known for its rice production. I chose this town because it is not too far from the major city of Mwanza, about 65 kilometers away, making it convenient to get access to the airport, major hospitals, copier machines, and other conveniences.

Most students, teachers and parents speak Sukuma, my own native language. Other ethnic groups in this town include Kerewe, Pare, Haya, Kurya, Jita, Chaga, Ruguru, Nyamwezi, Gogo, Hehe, Nyakyusa, Zalamo and Jaruo. As in all Tanzanian schools, Swahili enables cross-cultural communication at this school. The school has 20 teachers, 16 female and 4 male. It owns one residential house for faculty and staff. All families live within 0- 2 miles from school.

Participants

I worked with 119 students who were in standard six (grade six) at the time. All of them lived within 1.5 miles of the school. As discussed before, most of them spoke Sukuma, but others spoke one of the 11 different native languages (see TABLE 1). Their ages ranged from 10 to 16 years. Ranging from ages 20 to 60, 19 teachers participated in the study, although I worked mainly with the Swahili teacher and the English teacher in the writing workshop. The 19 parents whose children were involved in the study also participated by helping their children at home. More than 50% of them were farmers while less than 10% were medical doctors and teachers.

Procedure

I used a Participatory Action Research approach in which the researcher works with community members to identify an area of concern in a community, creates knowledge about the issue, and plans to take action addressing the issue substantively (Glesne, 2006; McIntyre, 2008). The first month was spent inquiring about the major needs or concerns of the school after which all three education stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, and students, chose to address the issue of supplemental books. The second part of the study focused on me and the stakeholders deciding on the most practical, sustainable, and cost

effective strategy to meet the need. Other options included fundraising to purchase books, converting the best essays from previous writing competitions to texts, and having parents purchase tape-recorders to record stories that students would transcribe and turn into texts. Such suggestions were not approved mainly because all of them depended upon financial contributions, which all participants agreed was not sustainable.

After much deliberation with the aforementioned education stakeholders, I shared the idea of using a writing workshop whereby teachers and students would be guided to create their own texts. This suggestion was well accepted because a writing workshop would not require any financial contribution and it would easily be absorbed into language classes. Additionally, students who had never had the opportunity to create texts were eager to try it. Parents also supported this idea as it allowed them to tell their stories to their children or simply share their knowledge in a guided context. Teachers embraced the idea because it would allow parents to participate in their children's education. In addition to creating space for students' home language, the writing workshop model is used in other multilingual classrooms as it gives space for parents to enrich their children's writing (Laman & Van Sluys, 2008). Swahili was the main language of instruction during the workshop although examples of ways in which other native languages could be used to write texts were also given.

The writing workshop. We spent a little over three weeks to conduct the writing workshop. In order to maximize learning, most of the writing was done at school. The two language teachers and I were the main instructors of the workshop while parents worked to enhance their children's writing at home. I gave the major overview of the meaning and structure of the writing workshop, while the language teachers worked with students in their

small groups when they started writing. To take full advantage of the workshop, the 119 students were divided into 16 groups to write at least one book per group in Swahili, English, their native language or a mixture of more than one language.

We gave students the freedom to use any language they wanted in order to remove any linguistic barrier, while allowing parents, most of who were not highly educated, to share their knowledge with their children. Each group completed one book. In their books, students explored various social issues namely: the importance of education, the need to take care of orphan children, condemning the use of illegal drugs, condemning discrimination against victims of HIV AIDs, educating their community about major diseases- AIDs and Malaria, making a case for them to travel in order to expand their worldview, history and wellbeing of their school, calling on their government to end corruption, calling on everyone to address the issue of car accidents in highways, and questioning parents and business people whether it is right to deny children their right to education by making them work instead of letting them go to school.

Data Collection

I conducted focus group and individual interviews in Swahili, served as participant observer, and collected artifacts and documents. Focus group interviews permitted the collection of more data in a short period of time while obtaining collective viewpoints; individual interviews enabled gathering of in-depth information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A friend videotaped my teaching and other classroom interactions (Glesne, 2006). I also collected documents and pertinent literature, artifacts such as syllabi, textbooks, photographs, student-created books, and I videotaped classroom interactions.

After the three-week workshop, I led separate meetings with all participants, i.e., students alone, parents alone, and teachers alone. As mentioned earlier, in this article, I only focus on a small portion of this study's findings pertaining to language issues. The data analyzed was from two group interviews with students alone; each lasted about two hours. Based on the research question: *what language issues would be manifested when students work together in the writing workshop?* The following questions guided the discussion during these two meetings: 1) *Most of you did not use your native languages in your writing. Please talk about that.* 2) *What language did your group use to write your book and why?* 3) *Please share your thoughts about the language (s) you would like to use to write your books in the future.*

Data Analysis

I used a thematic mechanism to analyze data because it helps researchers put information into identifiable patterns (Glesne, 2006). Data was first organized according to how it was collected. After transcribing, I translated the data from Swahili to English. Next, I identified key ideas in my study from the theory and the literature I reviewed. These ideas became my pre-determined themes that guided my initial analysis of the data, namely: language, books and writing. I then formed descriptors that helped me connect each theme with my data. For example, theme-language: descriptors- students' talk about using Swahili in class, students' talk about using home language in school, students' talk about using English in class. Theme- books: descriptors- students talk about reasons for not using home languages to write their books, students identify reasons for using Swahili or English to write their books. Theme- writing: descriptors- students explaining problems or struggles behind choosing a language to use during their writing process.

Upon looking at the data with these a priori themes, I realized the descriptors I used were all interconnected and did not help me answer my research question. I then decided to make a list of words that appeared repeatedly in the data and called them "codes." These codes led me to see patterns between what students articulated and their social contexts. For example: Codes: don't know, don't understand, didn't know, not all of us, don't know how, we don't have, we couldn't choose, would not; these are negative words indicating challenges concerning language choice. Codes: our language, our languages, we know it well, use it a lot, don't know any other language; these are positive words indicating favorable aspects of one or more of the languages in Tanzania. I also labeled the code "don't know any other language" as positive because students used it expressing their high regard towards a language because it was the only one they spoke. The codes: write in, attract, read, all Tanzanians, other countries, books translated, around the world, are all words indicating literacy issues locally, nationally, and globally.

I then looked at each code and went back to find the context around the data. This is where I realized each set of codes was connected to a particular interview question. The first set of codes, which indicated challenges concerning language choice, came from my first question when students talked about using or not using their home languages in their writing. The second set indicating favorable aspects of one or more languages used in the study was linked to the question "what language did you use to write your book and "why"? And the last group of codes dealing with local, national, and global literacy issues answered the question, "Share your thoughts about the language (s) you would like to use to write your books in the future."

From then on, the interview questions, the codes, social context and the new themes as indicated above helped me reflect on ways in which this information was informing my understanding of ways in which language issues were manifested during the study. The new themes guided the naming of my three key findings I discuss hereafter.

Findings and Discussions

First, I identify three key findings of this research. Second, I present a discussion of each finding in light of the literature I reviewed as well as the theoretical frameworks aforementioned.

Findings

As a researcher and an educator with a passion and excitement over the idea of finding a way for students to be able to use their home languages in school, I initially expected them to be thrilled to finally be able to write in their home languages. I thought the only reason students in this study and perhaps in most African countries don't use their native languages in school is because they are prohibited to do so. The results, however, were quite contrary.

Based on the thematic analysis shown above, findings show that students wavered to use their native languages. Students preferred their national identity over others. Local, national and international literacy issues conflicted students' language choice. Readers should note that the responses that will be displayed in Tables 2, 3, and 4 represent all of the students' responses collected on the topic of language. These responses were obtained within the 16 "groups" as expressed earlier. In presenting students' responses, students address me- the researcher as "teacher" because I was the one leading the discussion but also because I was among the teachers who taught and led the writing workshop.

Students wavered to use their native languages. Students in this workshop came from varied ethnic groups and when asked why they did not use any of their native languages to write their texts, it became apparent that language choice was difficult based on their social contexts outside of school (see Table 2). Most of them spoke different languages while some felt they did not know their home languages well and they felt most people (in Tanzania) do not understand home languages nowadays. In addition, a number of the students did not know how to write in their home languages; some felt it was easier to use Swahili and just a few did not know it was possible to use more than one language to write.

Multilingualism hindered cross-cultural communication in the workshop. Among the 16 groups, six could not use their home languages because they spoke different home languages. One additional group had students with parents from different ethnic groups so they felt unable to choose. Below is a sample of typical reflections from two students among the six groups.

Mandago: Teacher, this town has people from different ethnic groups. In our group for example, Mwajuma speaks Hehe, I speak Sukuma, John speaks Haya, Anna and Kahinde speak Chaga and so on. You see, we could not use our native languages because **not all of** us in this group speak the same language. Don't think we don't like them, we just couldn't.

Juma: When you said we could use any language to write, I was excited but I wondered how this is going to happen because in my group, most of us speak Sukuma but we have Asha, Jumanne, Ng'washi and Agatha who don't speak Sukuma. We even thought of splitting the group so that Sukumas would write their own books while others use their own

language as well. Teacher Kasheshe said that was not going to work because we have more Sukumas than all other languages and doing so would leave some students working alone while others end up in big groups. So you see, **not all of** us come from the same ethnic group.

These statements disclose an internal conflict between students' desire to use their native languages and the multilingual context that discourages them from doing so. Another group argued they could not do so because their parents are from different ethnic groups, they essentially don't have just one language so they were unable to choose. A student from that group, Anna, explained,

Thank you teacher for letting us speak so freely today. On this matter of using our home language, I had a very big struggle in my heart. My parents don't share the same language. My father is a Jaruo but my mother is a Chaga. I personally don't know both of those languages. Because I was born here in Mande I know Sukuma and Swahili. I felt bad because even if I wanted to, **I couldn't** choose because my parents are from different ethnic groups- **I don't** have just one language, so I couldn't choose.

Another student, Shilikale added,

I have the same problem. My mom speaks Nyaturu but my father speaks Zinza. At home, my parents talk to me in their own language so I speak both languages very well. If I choose to write in my mother's language, my father will not be happy with me. So teacher, we just couldn't use our home languages here, it is too complicated.

Although the students knew they had permission to use their home languages, because their fellow students came from different ethnic groups or their parents did not share the same language, it was difficult to do so.

Limited historical use of native languages confined their usage in school. Three groups stated they didn't know how to write in their home languages and found it difficult to do so because they do not write in them for other reasons either (see Table 2). Shindika, one of the group leaders, mentioned illiteracy in his home language as a reason for not using it. He said,

Shigala, Masudi and I speak Hehe but we don't know how to write in Hehe. When you said it was okay to do so, it was a struggle for me to write in this language because I have never done it before. Where in the market or shops do you see things sold with labels in any ethnic language? We have never needed to write in our language and therefore don't know where to begin here. Our lives don't require we write in our languages.

Two additional students reflected on the same struggle of not knowing how to write in their native languages.

Kapembe: Our dear teacher, I am telling you the truth that in my own life, I have never written anything in my home language, except for the names of the people in my ethnic group. I feel bad because one day I met a person from Dodoma with a small bible written in Chaga but I didn't even know how to read it leave alone to write. I wish I could learn but I don't know who would even want to teach me to read in my language.

Debora: Greetings teacher, this opportunity you brought to us is very good but where do we start. Even in this town where you see many people who speak more than one language, you don't see a bus calling customers in any other language than Swahili here. The Vitenge, Kanga and even food labels are all in Swahili. In our group we said it is very hard to find a big

reason to learn to write in our home languages because we hardly use them to write but we use them in our homes or with others who know them. I am sorry teacher.

All of the three students, Shindika, Kapembe, and Deboral spoke of not knowing how to write in their own languages. In fact, they all said that they do not see their languages written anywhere in their home town whether be in food labels, clothing such as Vitenge and Kanga or even bus conductors who often call on people to board buses. Their illiteracy, combined with the lack of contextual application of literacy skills in their home languages, made it difficult for them to use them in the writing workshop. The above answers show students struggle with the relevance of their home languages for cross-cultural communication and for literacy matters.

Students preferred their national identity over others. As expressed earlier, Swahili is a lingua franca in Tanzania and has been given a special place in nation building since independence. When asked which language they used for their books and why they chose it, five groups out of 16 chose Swahili because it is their national language while three groups did so because they know it well and use it a lot (see Table 3). Two groups used Swahili because it is their language; English is not theirs. Just one group mentioned using it because their group does not share the same home language and in another group, students did not know any other language except Swahili.

Students defined themselves through a national lens rather than their ethnic groups. I give three examples reflecting this sense of national identity. One student named Upendo said,

I think our lives at school are not different from our lives in town. I say this because each of us has our own native languages but when we meet other people in town, we

always speak to them in Swahili. I think my fellow students would agree with me that we see Swahili as **our language**. When we speak Swahili, we feel like one big family. Swahili makes us one.

In addition to Upendo, another student also expressed the same idea. Mwanashomari observed, Me and my friends hardly speak our languages when we are together. When I use my native language in the midst of others who don't understand it, I feel like separating them from those that speak my native language. I feel very comfortable talking to my friends in Swahili because it is **our language**. When thinking about our book, all of us in this group chose Swahili because it is **our language** and we all love it. Teacher, please don't forget that this is the language that makes our country feel united. Swahili is our unifier.

Both Upendo and Mwanashomari give a sense of togetherness through the Swahili language. A close look at their comments indicates a deep feeling of unity, one that seeks to honor their sense of nationalism. In fact, a number of students from two groups went further in expressing their feelings about Swahili in contrast with English. Emma said,

Dear teacher, I am honored to call Swahili my language. Even though my parents speak two different languages, I always feel happy when they both use Swahili because it is our language. One day my father insisted that I speak in English and I said I will try. I told my father that Swahili is **our language**, English is not ours. I know he means well. Even in our group we all agreed that we will use Swahili because it is **our language**; English is not ours.

What students said regarding Swahili clearly demonstrates a positive attitude towards it. In fact, by them calling it, "our language" they express not only a reason but also its relationship to them considering they also have other home languages.

Although other reasons were given for using Swahili, as indicated in Table 3, most of them fell into this category. In other words, the reason for choosing Swahili is mainly associated with its status as a national language. Another prominent reason given is that students know Swahili well and use it a lot. This is a practical reason but as seen in the responses, it was not the major reason. By examining the students' responses, it is clear that they have a strong connection with their national language and that they feel very strongly about their national unity.

Local, national and international literacy issues conflicted students' language choice. As seen in Table 4, four groups wanted to use Swahili and English to enable Tanzanians and other countries to read their books. While three groups wished to write in English, Swahili, and local languages, three other groups showed a desire to use their home languages and Swahili but wanted to be sure their book would be translated to English. The reasons they give communicate a great awareness that their literacy is not limited to their immediate contexts but rather, it needs to transcend it.

Students wanted their books to be read by others beyond their immediate community. Below I highlight two examples reflective of students' desire to transcend their local contexts with their books. Hamisi said,

My dear teacher, we live in a different world today. Things are changing and me and my friends know that we have to think beyond our Mande town. We would like to write our books in our native languages to show where we come from; we would like to write in Swahili to show the greatness of our national-unity but mainly so that *all Tanzanians would be able to read* our books. We have to write in English so that *other countries* would read them too.

In addition to Hamisi, Rwakatare made a similar comment, she said,

Nowadays, education is not just about what you do at your own school, it is about you and the world. You see, our group wants to write in our native language and in Swahili but if we do that, we are leaving out the rest of the world. We would like our books to be *translated* into English. Our books are not just for us, they are for our world.

Clearly, students were thinking beyond their home town. Others thought of their immediate context but were more concerned of reaching everyone in Tanzania than the entire world. Two students from two groups reflected what the majority in their group expressed. Imani said,

Even though my language Sukuma is spread in this country, not everyone knows it well. I would like our book to reach everyone in Tanzania. I will feel bad if I write a book and only Sukumas would read it. But if the book can be read by even the Gogo in Dodoma or the Nyakyusa in Mbeya, then I feel good about it because all Tanzanians are my family.

Subsequently, Mirembe said something similar as she praised the efforts of mwalimu Julius Nyerere for allowing all Tanzanians to have one language. She explained,

I know it is good that we write in the home languages we know well and I really hope one day we can do that. I just think how terrible it would be if we all just speak these languages and we are not able to understand each other. I praise our late president mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere for making it possible for us to have Swahili. Just like him, I want all Tanzanians to be able to read it. I actually don't care too much if everyone else reads it, just my fellow Tanzanians. I may not get a lot of money or become a global figure but I

honor my people and our great president Nyerere.

Both Imani and Mirembe still sought to reach others nationwide. However, one particular group had a desire to write in a local language but still wanted to make sure the book would be translated in both Swahili and English. Furthermore, another group wished to use English only but pleaded for help with spelling. Lastly, students from a particular group expressed a global understanding of the status of Swahili. Two students in that group said essentially the same thing. Juma said, "I know my friend Shukuru said that Swahili is now a big language and even people in the Unites States are learning it. I believe what she said and therefore, we should just write our book in Swahili because it is understood beyond our Mande town". Seremani also added, "I like to listen to radio stations and one day I was surprised to learn there is a station known as Voice of America which broadcasts in Swahili but located in America. I am now thinking it would be a good idea to write about book in Swahili because it is spoken around the world and many countries are learning it." Through these statements, students revealed a sense of awareness of their language status locally, nationally and globally.

Discussion

Drawing from the literature I reviewed as well as the theories guiding this study, below I give a brief discussion of each finding.

Students wavered to use their native languages. Based on the sociocultural theory, students drew from their daily lives in making decisions that impacted ways in which they participated in the learning process. The dilemma of not wanting to use their native languages demonstrates how learning is situated in the daily experiences of learners because learners are

inseparable from their social contexts (Pérez, 2004). Because language is situated within a cultural context (Gee, 1996), students decided not to use their home languages based on their group contexts; meaning, when they are in school, culturally speaking, they are to treat one another as a family. As Gee (2008) explained, meaning occurs when learners participate in the real world, dealing with real-life situations. The everyday situations of the students in this study informed their language choice within a literacy experience.

Also, as discussed previously in the literature, multilingualism poses a challenge in terms of communication across ethnic groups (Bamgbose, 2011). Even more, in light of postcolonial theory, the colonial legacy is once again revisited here because Tanzania's native languages were suppressed through a denial to be used in the education system or even the media (Childs & Williams, 1997). This oppression shows ways in which European nations subjugated and controlled people in the third world. Even more, once Tanzania received its independence, that control continued as was manifested in this study as students showed awareness of their social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a formerly colonized state that has destined them in local spaces only. For example, Mandago's statement "we could not use our native languages because *not all of us* in this group speak the same language. Don't think we don't like them, we just couldn't," shows students know the limitation of their language's applicability and that they just couldn't even if they wanted to. As Anderson (2002) explained, there was and continues to be a suppression of local or Indigenous voices during and after colonialism. Thus, this study shows that when students worked together in the writing workshop, they manifested a struggle towards their home languages based on the position they were given since colonial era.

Students preferred their national identity over others. I expected students to refer to their native languages as theirs but I was surprised that most of them identified themselves through a national lens. In other words, Swahili seemed to mean more to them than their home languages. Their reasons reflect the long status given to Swahili as a national language and its use in primary schools. Students choosing Swahili in this study illustrates how power shapes language use (Bourdieu, 1991), and how ethnicity reveals people's ways of communication (Hymes, 1994). Particularly, choosing Swahili based on national identity reveals students' attitudes towards their country and how this identity affects their social relations, not only at home but also in school. Students' positive attitudes towards Swahili is a clear demonstration that language is part and parcel of people's values, attitudes, social relations, and their perceptions of the world (Gee, 1996).

In addition, given Swahili's background in Tanzania, we see the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy. More specifically, students choosing to use Swahili reflects most language policies in African countries, which are intended to nurture a sense of patriotism (Bamgbose, 2011). Students calling Swahili "our" language demonstrates a blend of qualities that belong to a group's collective principles, views, standards, manners, and experiences (Moore-Gilbert, Stanton, & Maley, 2013). As students showed a reverence towards Swahili as a "unifier," they reveal and complicate the durable dichotomies that were produced under colonial regimes, which support many of its practices and hegemonic claims. Furthermore, in showing their strong ties to Swahili, they went further to show that English is

not "their" language. Such statements indicate a hybridity of response towards Western ideas and practices. On one hand, they desire to learn English for a global participation while on the other hand, they show a distaste of it. This ambivalence or hybridity that is heightened with culture contact and imitative performance in a once colonial setting clearly shows that students working together in the writing workshop manifested that Tanzania's national efforts to unify the country succeeded at the expense of its other native languages.

Local, national and international literacy issues conflicted students' language choice. It is undeniable that we live in an age of modernization and global transaction. Even in the

Whether we like it or not, students are global citizens with concerns on the relevance of their education beyond their local contexts.

small remote hometown of Mande, this reality shapes students' literacy practices because language sometimes portrays "forgotten or hidden struggle over the symbolic power of a particular way of communicating" (Duranti,

1997, p. 45). In deciding which language they would like to use for future writing, students made their language choices based on their immediate contexts but more importantly, based on national and international participation.

As Gee (1996) put it, language shapes people's social relations and their perceptions of the world. To them, writing books to be read in their local areas was a good thing but was not enough; they were concerned about making their books accessible to the whole country and the entire world. A close look at these comments shows how students' language choice demonstrates ways in which language use reflects different forms and purposes of literacy (Gee, 2008). To students in this study, the books they were to create were commodities that would need a market beyond

their local areas. They could not divorce their writing from their knowledge of the modern world; they situated language choice within a global market that shapes and is conversely shaped by language use.

Furthermore, as highlighted earlier, the limited participation of local languages in the global village is a major challenge that cannot be undermined. African leaders are not the only ones to blame for this, African citizens such as students in this study push for the use of imperial languages without realizing that by doing so, they render African languages unusable and undesirable. As Anderson (2002) argued, colonialism did not really end, but rather, there is a critical engagement with the present effects of intellectual and social of centuries of 'European expansion' on former colonies and on their colonizers" (p.644). Such effects are visible today because students in this study still made their literacy decisions in light of language global status. By doing so, they underline ways in which an elite group in Tanzania assimilated to the perspectives and ways of thinking of the colonizing power especially by making an official language in Tanzania (Childs & Williams, 1997). In turn, a hybridity of thought towards language choice in this study reveals the colonial legacy of placing imperial languages on a high level. On the other hand, the group of students who indicated they will need help with spelling in order to use English is a testament that perhaps Western knowledge is not neutral and not applicable universally. As a result, students working together in this study manifested ways in which political and education system can be used to undermine people's social and political status through language use.

Implications

Language issues are extremely complicated especially when examined in light of identity matters. I note a few implications of the ideas

presented in this study pertaining to educators and researchers.

For Educators and Researchers

Language issues in education, particularly in Africa and other multilingual nations such as the United States cannot be detached from social contexts. Educators with students from varied linguistic backgrounds are to take time to understand the social contexts of their students' language use. I suggest that teachers ask the extent to which such students know and wish to use their native languages because some of them may have no desire to use their native languages in school based on the historical, political, and sometimes economic background.

For example, in this study we see ANL placed at a low social status, in turn, it is likely that, students with limited competency in English have low self-esteem and could have a negative self-perception based on the status of their indigenous languages. It is important to think about how it would feel if you see other languages in every corner of your own community but you do not see yours. How would it feel if there is no book or even food labels written in your own language within a country you call your own? Most students in this study could not express themselves through the languages they learned first; such prohibition is likely to conflate their understandings and perspectives of the world. The following questions are important for educators to reflect upon:

- What do you do in order to honor students' linguistic identity especially if they do not want to use their native language in school or if they are not literate in that language?
- What role should teachers and other literacy practitioners play in valuing students' linguistic identity when their language ideology conflicts with their students' language ideologies?

Conclusion

International trends regarding the global dominance of English are not to be underestimated. Whether we like it or not, students are global citizens with concerns on the relevance of their education beyond their local contexts. More research needs to be done to explore ways to promote the use of ANL in school and particularly in literature. Most language scholars see raising the status of ANL to language of instruction as the major battle; however, literacy scholars are to look beyond this option because logically, some languages cannot be used as such.

Limitation

Although I am a native Tanzanian, I don't speak even a small portion of the languages in Tanzania. This in itself presented a challenge on ways to help students use their own languages to write their texts because I could essentially use only three languages- Sukuma, Swahili and English. Additionally, I wish to see ANL used in all of Tanzanian classrooms however, the possibility of using such languages is difficult mainly because students have never learned to use them in school. To insist they become part of the academy requires a process whereby teachers will need to be trained and a plan that makes sure each school has a teacher who speaks the native languages representative of the school's demographics. On the other hand, it is possible for teachers to find ways to allow students to use their languages even on a small scale as teachers do in the United States. The limited time I had was also a challenge as it allowed for minimal interactions among parents, teachers, and students. If I had more time to think with them, we could envision a long-term plan or strategy to promote the status of ANL within Tanzania's current education curriculum.

Educators often wonder whether literacy practices ever mean much to the lives of the students they teach. This study is a testament that literacy practices draw from and thus impact students' lives. I highlight historical contexts that situate the language dilemma present in many multilingual education institutions. Efforts to promote indigenous languages as a way to raise the quality of education in Africa have helped greatly to advance the status of a number of such languages. However, many challenges are still in place and need to be addressed if ANL are to be part of the literacy journey of many children in Africa.

This study shows students' social contexts wavered to use their native languages, meaning, although the value and presence of those languages in their lives was indisputable, their need to communicate with one another in a multilingual context prevented them from using their diverse languages. Therefore, literacy scholars who advocate for ANL to be used in schools need to consider factors that may prevent students from doing just that. Also, students preferred their national identity over others. The students' linguistic identity was tied to the language that unified them. In other words, their language choice reflected the historical emphasis on Tanzania's long political mandate of a unified Tanzania at the expense of ethnic identity, especially its native languages. As seen in this study, students displayed a sense of love and admiration towards Swahili by calling it "our language" even though for many it was not their native language. Their statements reflect how Swahili has become part of their "unified" selves in a multilingual Tanzania. This study's finding is evidence that language status in any society is tied to historical, political and social systems that need to be considered in literacy practices.

In addition, local, national, and international literacy issues conflicted students' language choice for their texts. This means, no matter where students live, their language choices are not limited to their immediate social contexts; they still see themselves beyond their local space. Their literacy perceptions and lives in general transcend their

local boundaries. While pursuing ways to recognize students' various language and cultural individuality, educators are encouraged to explore students' historical, economic, political and social contexts that shape their language use within school and beyond.

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Figure 1
Major Languages of Tanzania



Table 1
Ethnic Diversity of Students at Manyara Primary School

Language (s) spoken	# Students speakers as their home language	# Students who speak this and other language(s)
Sukuma	63	65
Chaga	11	10
Jita	12	8
Haya	10	10
Ruli	1	2
Hehe	4	5
Zinza	4	2
Iraq	3	3
Nyiramba	2	6
Nyaturu	3	6
Matta	1	2
Swahili	5	All
Total:11	Total:119	Total: 119

Table 2:
Challenges of Using Native Languages in a Writing Workshop

Question	Response	# of groups
Talk about using or not using your home languages in your writing. Most of you did not choose to use them in your writing, talk about that.	<i>We don't know our home languages well</i>	2
	Most people <i>don't understand</i> home languages nowadays	2
	We didn't know we could write the book with a mixture of different languages (Swahili and mother tongues)	1
	<i>Not all of us in the group speak the same language</i>	6
	<i>We don't know how to write</i> in our home language	3
	Our parents are from different ethnic groups- we don't have just one language, so we couldn't choose	1
	Using Swahili is easier	1

Table 3
Reasons for Using Swahili, a National Language in the Writing Workshop

Question	Response	# of groups
What language did you use to write your book and why?	We used Swahili because it is our national language	5
	We used Swahili because we know it well and use it a lot	3
	We used Swahili because we can't write in English	2
	We used Swahili because it is our language; English is <i>not</i> ours	2
	We used Swahili because our group does not share the same home language	1
	We don't know any other language except Swahili	1
	We used English because we wanted our book to be read around the world not just here in Mande, or just here in Tanzania	1
	We used Swahili and some Sukuma because they are both our languages	1

Table 4
Reasons and Language Preferences for Future Writing

Question	Response	# of groups
Share your thoughts about the language (s) you would like to use to write your books in the future.	We would like to write in <i>English, Swahili and local languages</i> in order to attract <i>many Tanzanians</i> to read	3
	We would like to write in all those three languages (English, Swahili, local languages) in order to improve our writing	1
	We would like to <i>use Swahili and English</i> so all <i>Tanzanians could read</i> it but also so <i>other countries</i> can read our book	4
	I wish we could write in our languages and have the books translated into Swahili and English	1
	We want to use <i>our languages</i> - home language and Swahili but the book can be <i>translated to English</i>	3
	We would like to <i>write in English</i> but you have to <i>help us with spelling</i>	1
	We prefer writing in Swahili only so all Tanzanians will read the book and understand it well	2
	We should use <i>Swahili</i> because it is <i>now spoken around the world</i> and many countries are learning it	1