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### Multilingualism as a Resource for Literacy Acquisition and Development in Primary Schools in Uganda

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*Multilingualism,  
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Development.*

This study explores the notion of Linguistic Citizenship (LC) in multilingual contexts of Uganda, where 65 indigenous languages are spoken, and English is used as the main language of education. The core objective of the study was to find out the level of literacy among Primary school learners in Uganda and thereafter establish how multilingualism can be harnessed as a resource for literacy development at the primary school level in Uganda. Through a document analysis of three survey reports, the study identifies three critical issues that stakeholders must address to improve literacy levels in Uganda. These three issues are: (i) Uganda still has many people with no formal education at all, (ii) literacy rates in Uganda are below 50%, and (iii) teaching and learning of local languages can greatly improve literacy in Uganda. Thus, for literacy rates of the country to improve, education policies should shift from a monoglot mentality to a multilingual one. We conclude that multilingualism is a big resource that can be harnessed for literacy development in Uganda.

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## INTRODUCTION

Uganda has a multicultural and multilingual population of 45,905,417 persons, comprising 69 ethnic groupings (UBoS, 2024). The country is estimated to have 65 indigenous languages (Uganda Government, 1995; 2006). NAPE (2023) and Ladefoged *et al.* (1971) cite some of the indigenous languages of Uganda as: Luganda, Luluuli, Lusoga, Lugisu, Lugwere, Lunyole, Lusomya, Lumasaba, Lubwisi, Lwamba, Lulamogi, Runyankore, Rukiga, Rutooro, Runyoro, Rufumbira, Runyarwanda, Rulundi, Rukhonzu, Rwamba, Langi, Acholi, Alur, Dhopadhola, Kumam, Ateso, Ngakarimojong, Kakwa, Kupsabiny, Lugbarati, and Madi. All these languages can be a big resource for literacy development, and eventually the national development, since the latter is partly measured and greatly impacted by literacy levels. The unfortunate bit is that the many languages of Uganda are seen as a burden and never a solution to national development, including literacy development.

Mc Loughlin (2009) takes multilingualism to have two different meanings; it refers to societal multilingualism or the co-existence of multiple languages in a particular space, but does not necessarily imply that the individual speakers themselves are multilingual, even though many of them might be. Similarly, Prah (2010) defines multilingualism as the ability to speak more than one language belonging to a community of speakers in which two or more languages are used. In other words, multilingualism may refer to an individual's competence in two or more languages, referred to in this publication as individual multilingualism. Mc Loughlin (2009) notes that profound multilingualism is a fact of life on the African continent, particularly in cities that attract a substantial number of people from rural areas who speak minority languages. Multilingualism in African cities is a complex phenomenon that can exhibit contradictory trends towards one type of multilingualism (societal multilingualism) but away from another (individual multilingualism).

In this paper, we do not differ from the understanding of Blommaert *et al.* (2005) on multilingualism, not in terms of what individuals have and don't have in terms of competence, but what the environment enables and disables them to deploy. In addition to Blommaert's view, Aronin & Singleton (2008) go further to say that current multilingualism should be treated as a new linguistic dispensation for the following reasons: 1) Multilingualism is ubiquitous, on the rise worldwide and increasingly deep and broad in its effect, 2) Multilingualism is developing within the context of the new reality of globalization and 3) Multilingualism is now such an inherent element of human society that it is necessary to the functioning of major components of the social structure. Both Blommaert and Aronin & Singleton emphasise the importance of multilingualism and how it cannot be ignored for a society to develop in all its dimensions. The current study takes the same perspective on understanding and interpreting multilingualism in relation to literacy acquisition.

Research in linguistics (Chalmers & Murphy, 2021; Mihut, 2018; De Swaan, 2013; Garcia, 1992) has revealed increasing evidence that multilingualism is a worldwide trend, with rich resources and language-as-resource orientation being one argument to defend linguistic pluralism. The other is linguistic citizenship, which views language as a symbolic, material, global, and intimate resource (Stroud & Heugh, 2004). The language and the languages of minority groups benefit not only the capitalistic trade and global expansion missions of the dominant group, but also the maintenance of the primary languages and cultural identities of minority groups. In this publication, language is seen as an instrument for national development or as a remedy for social problems that are presumed to result from the linguistic mismatch between language minorities and the dominant society. Thus, Ruiz's language orientations, and in particular the language as a resource point of view, are useful in harnessing the rich resources of multilingualism that can be explored in multiple ways in a school to enhance literacy development. It would therefore be

interesting to explore the features of the LC of a multilingual country to establish the level of literacy and how these can facilitate the development of literacy.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted document analysis which is a systematic qualitative research method used to appraise, evaluate, interpret, and code printed or electronic documents—such as reports, diaries, or records—to understand, uncover meaning, and gain insights around a research topic (Bowen, 2009: 27). Qualitative document analysis allowed us to conduct an analysis from a country-wide surveys we could not otherwise be able to do. Morgan (2022: 64) adds that some researchers may not have the resources to do field research. In this case, these country-wide surveys could not be done by individual researchers with the required resources in the stipulated time. Thus a document analysis of the already authoritative, credible and representative survey reports was ideal. We attained a deeper understanding of the reports, generated information and explored hidden meaning in the data in the reports to be able to achieve the main objective of the study. These reports are: The National Population and Housing Census 2024, UWEZO National Learning Assessment Report 2024: *Are our Children Learning? Learning recovery and challenges for Uganda and the National Assessment of Progress in Education Report, 2023*, which was carried out by the Uganda National Examinations Board. A thematic analysis technique was used to establish the literacy levels among primary school learners across the reports and the associated factors.

## THE THEORY USED IN THE ANALYSIS

The analysis used the lens of Linguistic Citizenship (LC) fronted by Stroud & Heugh (2004) to frame the arguments. They educate us that language is (i) a symbolic resource, which is linked to its role in actor hood; (ii) a material resource, which is linked to political and economic arrangements; (iii) a global resource, where by global and regional concerns are enacted

locally; and (iv) an intimate resource, whereby diversity and multivocal identities are acknowledged and respected. In more detail, symbolic resource is the way in which citizens choose to represent themselves as speakers and members of speech communities in structures of power and resistance in ways that carry political implications.

Material resource highlights the role of language as a political and economic site of struggle, playing an integral part in the reconceptualisation of the role of informal economies in developing contexts. The language as a global resource acknowledges that language is one of the main ways in which more global and regional concerns are interpreted and negotiated locally. Lastly, intimate resource embodies respect for diversity and difference, recognition of multiple and shifting identities, and the deconstruction of localised national and exclusionary regional cooperation and security.

## CURRENT STATUS OF LITERACY AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN UGANDA

Before we can delve into the details of the development of literacy in Uganda, let us briefly explain the education system of Uganda. The current education system in Uganda follows a 3-7-4-2-3+ structure: Early childhood education is three years; Primary Education Seven years, and at the end learners sit for the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE); Secondary Education Ordinary Level (O-level) Four years; Secondary Education Advanced Level (A-level) Two years. O-Level students sit for the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE), while A-Level students sit for the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE). Tertiary and Higher Education include universities, technical colleges, and teacher training institutions offering certificates, diplomas, and degrees with varying durations. Across all levels, English is compulsory as a subject, a medium of instruction (apart from the first 3 years of primary education in rural areas), and a medium of assessment. Primary education,

however, is still largely considered the first official level of formal education since the government has not established any pre-primary schools for children in Uganda.

There are many ways of defining literacy but this publication is grounded in the UNESCO (2006) working definition of literacy as; “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts” and the UBOS (2024: 71) defines literacy as “the ability to read with understanding and write meaningfully in any language”. Both definitions speak to each other with a common agreement that literacy is a skill that requires an individual to be able to read and write in any language. This study has made a scrutiny of three important and recent reports as mentioned above, from which national surveys, to a greater extent, intended to find out the levels of literacy in the country.

- **The National Population and Housing Census 2024**

The Uganda National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) 2024 was conducted in line with international best practices and guided by the need to produce accurate, relevant, and timely data. Covering all households and individuals across the country, this census marks a significant milestone in Uganda’s journey towards data-driven development. One of the objectives of the NPHC 2024 and the one related to this study was to inform policies and programmes aimed at improving the quality of life of all Ugandans (p. 7).

The 2024 census for Uganda found that 74% of the population aged 10 and above was literate. Nearly 8 in 10 males (76.6%) and 7 in 10 (71.6%) females were literate. (p. 67). Literate persons aged 10 and above are 23,181,629 out of a total population of 45,905,417 persons in the country, that is 50%. The report goes further to indicate that 39% of the population aged 10 and above attained some primary-level education, while 20.2

percent had no formal education at all. Good to note that the country is targeting improving learning outcomes in basic competencies, especially literacy and numeracy for all children (p. 67). Overall, the literacy rate was 74.0 percent, which includes the entire population across all ages. Kampala Capital City had the highest literacy rate (93.9%) while the Karamoja sub-Region had the lowest literacy rate (25.4%). Literacy rate was higher for males (76.6%) than for females (71.6%). On the issue of literacy development, UBOS concluded that there should be improvement in access to education and literacy programmes in the country and specifically, develop and expand education and literacy programmes tailored for refugees, focusing on children and older persons with limited formal education (p. 308). In the same report, literacy is seen as a basic human right and a critical component of personal and national development.

- **UWEZO National Learning Assessment Report 2024**

The UWEZO National Learning Assessment Report 2024, titled “*Are our Children Learning? Learning recovery and challenges for Uganda,*” was carried out by UWEZO Uganda. One of the targets of this household survey was to assess children’s basic literacy, and each child aged 4-16 in each of the surveyed households was assessed in basic reading. Tests were administered, and the English literacy and numeracy items used in the assessment were a product of a carefully designed process of test development, resulting in samples of assessment items with the same level of difficulty for each subject.

To be able to gain an understanding of learning outcomes and learning conditions, the sample of the assessment included 8,608 households, 21,057 children across 435 villages. The survey found that, 10% (1/10) (Primary 3 pupils who could read and comprehend a Primary 2 level English and local language story, 20% (2/10) Primary 3-Primary 7 pupils who could read and comprehend a Primary 2 level story in local language, 23.2%

Primary 7 pupils who had not yet achieved a Primary 2 level competence in English and 51.1% Primary 7 pupils who could read and comprehend a Primary 2 level story in local language. UWEZO summarises that, nationally, learning outcomes have stagnated. Three of the Primary 7 learners had achieved full reading competence at the Primary 2 level, defined as the ability to read and comprehend a short story, and about one-quarter of Primary 7 learners were able to read words but not a short paragraph.

UWEZO suggests that there is a need to boost provision for local language teaching and learning. The learning outcomes suggest that the provision of materials and teacher guidance for the local languages used for teaching in Primary 1-Primary 3 has suffered as a result of the school closures. There are low rates of success in the Leblango and Lusoga assessments, for example. The Government could consider providing more incentives through an assessment of local language literacy at the Primary 7 level. (UWEZO Uganda, 2024: 40). The survey concluded that, continue to prioritise efforts to improve the teaching and learning of literacy at the lower primary level. It is of critical importance that children acquire these basic skills in Primary 1-Primary 3. These skills are fundamental building blocks that shape how kids learn, think, solve problems, and interact with the world. On average, in the sample, there were enough local language and English textbooks for about three-quarters of the pupils in the classroom, but for each learning area, the sample included substantial numbers of classrooms with no textbooks at all (p.38). The levels of literacy were considerably higher in some local languages compared to English.

- **National Assessment of Progress in Education 2023**

Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) conducted the 2023 National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) survey between July and August 2023. This survey was meant to determine the level of the Primary 3 and Primary

6 learners' achievement in Numeracy and Literacy in English, the relationship between the achievement of learners and gender, school location, school ownership, and district. It also set out to determine the perceived best practices for teaching and learning in schools.

The survey was carried out in the whole country, covering all 139 districts of Uganda. The national school sample for the assessment of learners consisted of 1,770 primary schools, and of these, 8 were Special Education Needs schools, for learners who are blind (2) or deaf (6), while 30 were schools hosting refugees (this study has, however, not handled literacy issues for special needs learners and refugee communities). The survey was partly intended to determine the levels of learners' achievement in Literacy in English at Primary 3 and Primary 6 classes. The target population consisted of District Inspectors of schools, Primary 3 and Primary 6 teachers of Numeracy and Literacy in English, Head teachers, and learners in Primary 3 and Primary 6 in the sampled primary schools (both government and private) in Uganda in July and August 2023. The main instruments used were written tests of Literacy in English and contextual tools (focus group discussion and interview guides).

Findings from Primary 3 were as follows: more than half (53.9%) of the Primary 3 learners were rated proficient in Literacy in English. The proportion of girls (57.4%) rated proficient in Literacy in English was significantly ( $p=0.000$ ) higher than that of boys (50.6%). The proportion of Primary 3 learners rated proficient in Literacy in English in Government schools (46.7%) was below the national achievement of learners in Literacy in English (53.9%). In Literacy in English, twenty-five (25) out of 136 districts in Uganda were categorised 'green' ('green', implying that at least three-quarters (75%) of their Primary 3 learners were rated proficient), and twenty-six (26) districts were categorised 'red'. These districts are: Alebtong, Apac, Bukedea, Kibuku, Kwania, Lamwo, Moyo, Namutumba, Nebbi, Obongi, Otuke, Pader, Yumbe, Abim, Amolatar, Amuria, Bulisa, Dokolo, Kapelebyong,

Kole, Namayingo, Oyam, Pakwach, Pallisa, Serere, and Soroti. More effort is needed to increase the proportion of learners rated proficient in the districts categorised as 'red'. red', implying that they had less than a quarter (25%) of their Primary 3 learners rated proficient.

Findings of proficiency of Primary 6 learners in literacy in English by district were indicated as follows: Four (4) out of 136 districts were categorised 'green' in Literacy in English, and forty-eight (48) districts were categorised 'red'. The proportion of Primary 6 learners rated proficient in Literacy in English in private schools (73.2%) was significantly ( $p=0.000$ ) higher than that of learners in government schools (35.9%). About 1 in 5 of the P-6 learners in schools hosting refugees were rated proficient in Literacy in English. The proportion of Primary 6 learners rated proficient in Literacy in English in schools in urban areas (67.5%) was significantly ( $p=0.000$ ) higher than that of learners in schools in rural areas (26.2%). The proportion of girls rated proficient in Literacy in English (70.6%) was significantly ( $p=0.017$ ) higher than that of boys (63.5%) in schools in urban areas. However, there was no significant ( $p=0.622$ ) gender difference in the proportion of learners rated proficient in Literacy in English in schools in rural areas. The overall proportion of Primary 6 learners rated proficient in schools in rural areas was slightly more than half of the national level of achievement of learners in Literacy in English (42.7%).

The survey concluded that there is a need for interventions to increase the proportion of learners rated proficient in the 41 districts categorised as 'red'. These districts are: Alebtong, Amuru, Bukwo, Buyende, Kaliro, Kwanja, Namutumba, Butaleja, Butambala, Butebo, Kakumiro, Kapelebyong, Kibuku, Kole, Kween, Kyenjojo, Lamwo, Luuka, Madi Okollo, Manafwa, Mayuge, Namayingo, Namisindwa, Ngora, Otuke, Oyam, Pallisa, Rubanda, Serere, Yumbe, Abim, Bukedea, Kalaki, Katakwi, Pakwach, Sironko, Soroti, Zombo, and Napak. The learners, however, cannot achieve the full potential out of

the perceived best practice because some of their teachers give them limited guidance, and they also have inadequate reading materials.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Uganda still has a big population of almost a quarter with no formal education at all, for example, UBoS puts that at 20%, although the country sees the need to improve basic competencies, including literacy, which is also seen as a basic human right. Considering the number of years Uganda has had formal education, since 1877 (Ssekamwa, 1997), one would think that all citizens now know the benefits of education. Incidentally, this is not the case. Benefits such as character formation, acquiring specific knowledge and skills, personal development, communication abilities, productive skills for national development, and the like are either not known to some of the population or else they know but have other reasons which limited them from acquiring formal education. Either way, with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) since 1997 and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007, it is mainly a duty of the population to search for education since it is a human right as broadly indicated in the general social and economic objectives of the 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda (as amended). The constitution states therein that "all Ugandans enjoy rights and opportunities and access to education (p. 22). At the same time, it is the role of the government to encourage the population to acquire formal education.

Literacy rates in all the reports are below 50%, mainly due to a lack of learning in the foundation years of lower primary school (Primary 1-Primary 3), limited attention and guidance from the teachers, and a lack of learning/reading materials like textbooks. Those challenges impede literacy acquisition and have been mentioned in all the reports. Two critical and sensitive issues that cannot be ignored from the all the reports but which study further study are; (i) the low literacy levels in both lower and upper primary (Primary 3

and Primary 6) are from the same geographical regions of the country and (ii) the number of districts marked red increased at the primary 6 level, possibly meaning that, learners are promoted to upper classes without having required literacy skills in any language.

There may be more challenges leading to such low literacy levels in Uganda. This publication, however, is going to deal with the three mentioned right here and as derived from the three reports: Firstly, lack of learning in the foundation years of lower primary school is very deadly, leading to poor quality citizens and a suicidal incident in the education system. The foundation years of education form the basis for further education for any individual. It is in these years that a learner acquires critical and sensitive life and academic skills; however, much efforts are put in later, little may be achieved. In relation to literacy acquisition and development, especially in the early years of education, Cummins (2005) identifies five types of transfer that may occur. These are: transfer of conceptual elements, of metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies, the pragmatic aspects of language use, transfer of specific linguistic elements, and transfer of phonological awareness. Without learning, a learner cannot achieve such skills of literacy. All three reports analysed above indicate the importance of literacy for purposes of development, and as literacy is fundamental in shaping learners' levels of thinking problem solving, which problems cut across other sectors like health and economic development.

Secondly, limited attention and guidance from the teachers is another serious problem in primary schools in Uganda. This is true because primary teachers in Uganda have many publicly known challenges which affect their performance, some of the examples of these challenges are: low salaries, high pupil-teacher ratio, poor welfare, and lack of resources. In relation to literacy acquisition, Asiimwe & Ssentanda (2020) found that teachers' attitudes and practices, lack of school materials, poor school conditions, and large learner numbers per class affect literacy acquisition. Primary teachers have unfavourable

terms of service, including very high pupil-to-teacher ratios, limited access to instruction materials, and low career growth opportunities, among others (Amanya-Mushega, 2025: 78).

Thirdly, a lack of learning/reading materials like textbooks cuts across between teachers and learners in primary schools, but this is worse with reading materials in any language for learners in primary schools. Nankindu (2014) recommended that to be able to develop literacy in Uganda, large-scale materials like books and other learning support materials in local languages should be developed, and Nankindu (2020) and Commeyras & Inyega (2007) added that policies are put in place with no proper arrangements for study materials to be used in the teaching of the languages.

In the above reports, where literacy is rated in other Ugandan languages, other than English, the rates are a bit high, thus need to boost the teaching and learning of local languages. This means that if local languages were taught well, especially in the foundation years, used as a medium of instruction and as languages of assessment, the rates of literacy in both local languages and English in Uganda would be much higher. Where the classroom language is not L1, learners may have difficulty learning since L1 is a powerful resource for learning. It is unfair to the learner and the system to be judged based on a foreign language only. From a psycholinguistic point of view, which has been developed mainly by Cummins (1996), it postulates that a child's second language competence is partly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the first language. The more developed the first language, the easier it will be to develop the second language. In addition, Cummins' (1993, 1996) 'threshold hypotheses and 'interdependence hypothesis suggest that children must attain adequate levels of competence in their L1 as this enables them to experience relative, cognitive, and linguistic transfer in second language (L2) learning. Consequently, once students have basic literacy skills in the L1 and communicative skills in the L2, they can begin reading and writing in

the L2, efficiently transferring the literacy skills they have acquired in the familiar language.

Apart from UBOS, the other reports measured learners based on their literacy in English. There are many challenges to literacy acquisition in English in a multilingual country. Uganda is a multilingual nation like many African countries, with a LiEP that is formulated in terms of a monolingual paradigm. However, the extreme multilingualism in the country is such that trying to manage such a multilingual situation through a monolingual LiEP that recognises multilingualism only as serial or multiple-monolingualism is fraught with problems. Based on the above argument, in the section, I explicitly show how other scholars have looked at multilingualism as a resource, especially for literacy acquisition and development, rather than seeing it as a problem.

### **Scholarly Understanding and Interpretation of Multilingualism as a Resource for Literacy Development**

Clyne (2017) argues that multilingualism embraces the study of the language systems in contact, the functions of the languages in society, the groups or communities in contact, and the speech of individuals using more than one language. This means that with multilingualism in place, communication can be peaceful, and eventually literacy can be acquired. From Clyne, we pick two paradigms: (i) language contact, which is referred to as language as a system taking into account sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors, and (ii) language shift, which explains shifts from the use of one language to that of the other. Clyne adds that multilingualism leads to lexical and grammatical transfers and code-switching from one language to another.

Multilingualism is important for social integration. It helps to check tendencies towards inter-group tensions and misunderstandings. Prah (2010) elaborates that multilingualism does not create differences but rather facilitates integration on a multilingual and multicultural basis so long

as principles of democracy, tolerance, and cultural coexistence are accepted as guidelines.

Prah (2010) further puts across many advantages of knowing many languages, such as; for interaction, free communication in other parts of the country, trading purposes, omitting language barriers, scope for a greater sharing of literature, and job acquisition. He says that Africans should be able to benefit from this growing multilingualism and use it to their advantage in education, science, and technological development. We are yet to ascertain whether Africans, Ugandans inclusive, understand and utilise the advantages of the multilingualism Prah talks about.

Such views are supported by Batibo (2005), by explaining how more African languages are a resource. African languages are used for cultural transmission by way of narration of stories, fables, proverbs, idioms, sayings, riddles, songs, poems, and verbal education. The most important form of transmission is through education, whether formal or informal. Human beings are social beings. It is difficult to stay together silently. They use languages to socialise, and language facilitates the instinct for socialisation. Language can be a means to foster solidarity/ cohesion among its speakers and to mark social relations. Batibo adds that it is through language that people base thought and the thinking process. This way people conceptualise ideas, organise thoughts, and systematise memory. With all that in mind, language is a very important resource, and the more languages one knows, the more resourceful that person can be to others and the entire community.

More so, the spread of languages outside the tribal boundaries has helped to create a complex relationship between ethnicity, language use, and linguistic grouping. The languages and chunks are drawn on as resources for their different meaning and potential within different contexts (Banda & Olayemi, 2010). The authors add that there is a need to see speakers as legitimate and active participants in the creative use of different codes,

which is typical of multilingual societies in Africa. They conclude that hybrid forms should not be discarded as illegitimate forms of expression; they are legitimate forms and means of interaction in the increasingly urbanising, multilingual, and multicultural context of Africa.

Furthermore, recent developments in the examination of linguistic justice show that granting a privileged status to natural languages gives its native speakers a considerable advantage. For example, they can translate and interpret, edit, teach, and produce various educational materials in this language. This amounts to a considerable saving of costs, which is a common argument in multilingual issues. Chumbow (as cited in Braam, 2004:13) points out that “the languages of a nation are its natural resources on the same level as its petroleum, minerals and other natural resources”. More so, other researchers point out that there is a need for cross-linguistic and cross-border status and corpus planning to take advantage of multilingualism as a linguistic resource for socio-economic development in Africa (Djite, 2008; Banda, 2009). Those statements show how languages are important to the various countries, so the more languages, the more resourceful a country can be, for example, in achieving national enrichment and economic advantage.

For educational purposes, knowing more languages is a big resource. A study conducted in the greater Toronto area (Cummins & Schechter, 2006) demonstrates the instructional possibilities that emerge when bilingual students' first language and prior knowledge are acknowledged as important resources for learning. The study informs how Madiha Bajwa, with two of her friends, Kanta Khalid and Sulmana Hanif, authored a bilingual Urdu- English book entitled *The New Country*. The three girls collaborated in writing the book with the help of the teacher. While Madiha's English was minimal, her Urdu was fluent; Sulmana and Kanta were fluent and reasonably literate in both Urdu and English. In composing the story, the girls discussed their ideas primarily in Urdu but wrote the initial draft

in English with feedback and support from their teacher. The fact that instruction was conducted in English and the teacher did not know Urdu or the other home languages of students in her multilingual classroom was not a barrier to the implementation of bilingual instructional strategies (Cummins, 2008). Cummins recognises that extensive use of the target language within second language and bilingual programs is a useful and important instructional strategy. However, the strategy should not be implemented rigidly or in an exclusionary manner. So, the L1 is a powerful resource for learning, and bilingual instructional strategies can usefully complement monolingual strategies to promote more cognitively engaged learning.

More so, Djite (2008) believes in the fundamental value of multilingualism as an amazing world resource that presents us with different perspectives and insights. Thus, enables us to reach a more profound understanding of the nature of the human mind and spirit. Despite the complexities of multilingualism, Prah (2010) educates us that where there is democratic dispensation with equality of status and role for all the languages, the democratic ethos and culture of the society is also robust.

According to Aronin & Singleton (2008), multilingualism in terms of scale and significance is comparable with and assimilated to political-economic aspects of globalisation, global mobility, and postmodern modes of thinking. The researchers add that multilingualism is the ineluctable concomitant of all dimensions of globalisation. They conclude by saying that, although multilingual individuals and societies have existed throughout the history of humankind, the present stage of global sociolinguistic arrangement is in fact a novel development.

This situation is further elaborated on by Djite (2008), who says that, if multilingualism is an enduring feature of Africa, it is not limited to Africa, and it is far from chaotic. The assumptions underlying the rhetoric behind the marginalisation of African languages are not always based on

facts, and the little evidence there is, it is plagued with errors or truncated to fit some preconceived theoretical framework or economic or political agenda. These myths, old and new, must be corrected in order to gain a valuable insight into multilingualism in Africa, and for the management of language diversity to succeed.

In their study entitled; style, Repertoire and Identities in Zambian multilingual discourses, Banda & Olayemi (2010) outline how Zambians systematically (re) construct the linguistic representations to codify their multilingual and multicultural experiences and African realities. They focused on how Zambians, through an extended code repertoire that includes hybrid code, enact social roles and identities (rural, urban, modern hybrid) in transformative multilingual discourses. The study also focused on the production and re-contextualization of identities (rural, urban, modern, and traditional) through online, that is, web-based multilingual discourses. The authors believe that, apart from trans-local, trans-tribal, and trans-national mobility resulting from inter-ethnic marriages, socioeconomic and political factors, the new global dispensation, including the onset of information technology, has also influenced the kinds of interaction and the way Zambians use their multilingual repertoire. This makes for a very complex sociolinguistic situation and makes linguistic performativity of identities in multilingual contexts a very creative endeavour. They concluded that the English they analysed was inseparable from the accompanying African languages. It would not make sociolinguistic sense to discuss English in use as orienting towards the British norms without accounting for the African languages that accompany it.

In multilingual educational situations, decisions have to be made not only about how to teach literacy, but also about which languages children should learn (Stroud & Heugh, 2011; Mesfun, 2009). Stroud & Wee (2007) say that it is by “tapping” the strategies displayed by the students that teachers may help them engage in critical literacy and language acquisition. Sensenbough

(1990) also points out that Graffi’s position on literacy may be the most constructive for the future. “What is needed is a broader view of reading and writing that integrates and emphasises the many human abilities in a context of a changing world that requires their development and use. Educators need to know how African L1 children who bring a different highly developed language from that of the teacher to school, one that is often as good as invisible, fare with literacy learning in a language they do not know well (Bloch, nd). However, Bloch goes further to state that many teachers are not confident, are ill-equipped with poor language backgrounds, and have a resigned attitude. Though Bloch’s study was carried out in South Africa, the issues raised may not be different from the rest of Africa, and Uganda in particular.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study, we have made an analysis of 03 reports from surveys done recently in Uganda, partly focusing on literacy levels of the population in the country, among other things. These reports are: The National Population and Housing Census 2024, UWEZO National Learning Assessment Report 2024: *Are our Children Learning? Learning recovery and challenges for Uganda and the National Assessment of progress in education report, 2023*. From the analysis of the above reports, we have established the following conclusions:

- Uganda still has a population of almost a quarter with no formal education at all.
- Literacy rates in Uganda are below 50%, and
- Where literacy is rated in local languages, the rates are a bit high. So, English should not be the only language for measuring literacy rates in Uganda.

Looking at the summary above, considering the nature of multilingualism in Uganda and the literature reviewed in this paper, there is no way the literacy levels of the Ugandan population can improve without teaching the Ugandan languages and using them as media of instruction. It is high

time the many languages of Uganda were seen as a resource rather than a problem. A resource that can solve challenges of specifically low literacy levels in the entire country, challenges of access, and quality of education in Uganda. We want to attach our arguments to those of Stroud & Heugh (2004) who front multilingualism as a resource. We take up their notion of Linguistic Citizenship. We therefore conclude that the notion of linguistic citizenship, which views language as a resource, can open possibilities for raising literacy levels and commonality across ethnic borders without bias or attitude.

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