

On Uganda government's commitment to the development and implementation of the mother tongue education policy in post-2015 era

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The year 2015 was set as deadline to realise the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were authored in 2000 by 189 states in the world. Language is at the heart of MDGs (Barron, 2012; Romaine, 2013). Some scholars look at language (development) as a measure and/or determinant of development (e.g. Romaine, 2013). This paper examines Uganda's commitment to the development and employment of mother tongues in education as a way of realising the quality of education in Uganda. It is important to reflect on the trend and level of mother tongue development and employment in education in Uganda to chart the way forward for the post-2015 period. The paper draws from different studies and reports which have focussed on mother tongue education in Uganda. This study faults the government in many ways for failing to sustain the national initiatives of mother tongue education, particularly in terms of poor financing and failure to monitor the implementation of UPE and mother tongue education programmes. The paper proposes a way forward for the realisation of a meaningful Education for All (EFA) in form of Universal Primary Education (UPE) initiative and the mother tongue education policy introduced in Uganda in 1997 and 2006 respectively.

Keywords: commitment, mother tongue education, millennium development goals, Luganda, Uganda

1 Introduction

This paper aims to provide answers to the following two questions: (i) What are the indicators of the Ugandan government's commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals? And (ii) What interventions have other contributors to mother tongue education done and what can be done to further develop theirs and government's actions in order to achieve the benefits of universal and mother tongue education?

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The United Nations Organisation (UNO) and its agencies are responsible for building sustainable development all over the world. The activities of the UNO aim at improving the wellbeing of world communities through the provision of technical and other required inputs that are necessary to ensure a decent life for all. Addressing issues like hunger, extreme poverty and illiteracy are some of the examples of areas handled by the UNO agencies to foster the wellbeing of humanity. Such issues are recognized and regularly reinforced through world meetings and assemblies in which various commitments are reemphasized and new ones generated depending on the challenges affecting humanity at a given time. This has greatly helped citizens to enjoy a certain level of acceptable standard of life depending on the level of government's commitment to achieve the set goals.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000, form one such binding agenda reflecting world commitment to achieve sustainable development and improve peoples' welfare. The countries bound by this agenda are committed to addressing hunger eradication, provision of primary education, and reduction of maternal mortality rate by the end of 2015. The UN thus embarked on stimulating international debate on what ought to be the global development agenda thereafter. This assessment is crucial to determine how committed and ready Uganda is even for the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). In order to achieve this goal, we propose a review of the mother tongue policy in Uganda which is an integral part of the global commitment towards Education For All (EFA). EFA was implemented in Uganda in the form of the Universal Primary Education (UPE), starting in 1997 and mother tongue education, starting in 2006/2007. This article will show the strides taken by Uganda in achieving these two initiatives through which it subscribes to the MDGs.

Following the footsteps of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which conduct regular assessments to monitor the performance of individual goals, assess the level of achievement and identify the gaps, we aim in this article to explore the factors responsible for the status quo and national government commitments to the implementation of the MDGs and the SDGs. The focus of this paper therefore will be on the second goal of the MDGs, i.e., achieve universal primary education and the 4th goal of the SDGs, i.e., ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities – which is the equivalent of goal 2 of the MDGs. This paper also gives the background and context of Universal Primary Education and mother tongue education in Uganda. A theoretical framework involving the role of government in the implementation of policies is presented. The methodology adopted for the study methodology and the analysis of the findings will thereafter be presented. Ultimately, the paper will offer a conclusion and some cursory allusions to a possible way forward.

2 Background and context

Formal education is one of the most important ways for people to move out of poverty and a strong basic education is the first step to realize this goal (UNESCO, 2010). Uganda complied with this goal, when, in 1997, she introduced the UPE Project. The introduction of UPE, followed the Education for All (EFA)

initiative (World Bank, 2011) launched in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtein, Thailand (UNESCO, 1990). The goal of the EFA is to ensure that all children of school-going age in any country have access to education by 2015. In the case of Uganda, this entailed the elimination of primary school fees for up to four children in every family.

The elimination of school fees was an appealing strategy which brought about an immediate increase in school enrollment in Uganda (Grogan, 2008; World Bank, 2002). Before the introduction of UPE, in 1997, the number of school-going children stood at just over 3 million but by 2008, this number rose to 7.4 million (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008b). By 2010, the number of children accessing primary education had increased to 8.4 million (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012). However, these figures do not mean that all children who joined primary schools, necessarily completed this level of education. There are still many challenges affecting the education system in Uganda. For example, one of the challenges at hand is that:

Many children [in Uganda] struggle at school [to interact and conceptualize issues] when they are forced to learn in languages that are not their mother tongue. School systems that do not use learners' own languages or respect their cultures make it extremely difficult for children to stay in school and learn (Barron, 2012, p. 12).

This has proved to be a stumbling block to the achievement of literacy (cf. Hamid, Nguyen, & Kamwangamalu, 2014). Scholars have observed that language is at the heart of education. For example, Wolff (2006, p. 50) states that "language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education". In addition, Barron (2012) spells out the reasons as to *Why language matters for the millennium development goals*. Like Chimbutane (2011) has observed, whenever, children have performed poorly in education, learning in familiar languages has been adopted as a solution. Such a move however, is always to facilitate learners to learn in a second language (English for the case of Uganda). The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine Uganda's commitment to the development and employment of mother tongues in education in relation to the EFA call.

2.1 A historical overview of overarching issues of African Languages in education

Available literature suggests that the nature of mother tongue education in African countries depends on whether the former colonial masters supported local language use in education or not. According to Abdulaziz (2003), Stroud (2002), Bamgbose (1999) and Ssekamwa (2000), the nature of most MT education programmes (in Africa) is related to the inherited colonial education policies and practices. Chimbutane (2011) also offers insightful perspectives for the case of Portuguese in Mozambique. Since the colonial history of many African countries influences not only political but also educational and economic issues, many countries in Africa have chosen their former colonizers' language as the official language of learning and teaching but this has not been done in a systematic manner (Hamid et al., 2014). These languages in Africa are mainly English, French and Portuguese. Uganda and Kenya for example, have English as a formal language of instruction because their colonial master used this language.

Since education was under the control of the colonial governments, they set languages-in-education policies to govern it. For instance, in the case of English speaking countries, prior to independence, there were different language policies in place. Analyzing the case of West Africa, for example, Bamgbose (1983, p. 58) explains that the 1943 Memorandum in African school education provided a model of language use in education as: 1st -3rd year (inclusive) Vernacular only, 4th year English introduced as a subject, 6th year English as a medium in selected subjects, 7th -9th English gradually increased as a medium and 10th year English as a medium.

Bamgbose (1983) observes that there were some discrepancies inherent in this policy. This occurs in instances where the teachers do not speak the language of the learners or where the learners fall short of the required English competence. Where the teacher does not speak learners' language, English is used as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT). "Where the pupils' competence in English fell short of the level required for certain skills, the teacher often resorted to the pupils' language, even when the policy dictated the use of an English medium" (Bamgbose, 1983, p. 59). Furthermore, Heugh, Benson, Bogale, & Yohannes. (2007) observe that since the 1953 UNESCO report on the use of vernacular languages in education, the practice and belief for MT education was limited to 2-3 years only. These years were deemed sufficient for a child to acquire the reading and writing skills in their MT. Again, Heugh et al. (2007) mention that, until 1965, most former British colonies used mother tongues as LoLT for 6 years and a transition to English was initiated afterwards.

We also notice that when most African countries obtained independence (particularly in the 1960s), there appeared to be an almost sudden neglect of mother tongue education in preference for colonial languages starting from the third or fourth year of primary education (Akinnsaso, 1993; Bamgbose, 1983). However, this belief has been overridden by current literature which stipulates that 6 to 8 years of MT education are required for successful transfer of skills from MT to second language (L2) to take place (Cummins, 2000a, 2000b; Dutcher, 2003; Fafunwa, Macauley, & Sokoya, 1989). A quick switch to L2 was and is preferred because L2s appeared to be the key to job opportunities and social status (Ssentanda, 2013; Stroud, 2002; Tollefson, 1991). Nonetheless, from evidence based on current literature, it appears that the teaching of either MTs or foreign languages was not well done because there was a general complaint of educational under-achievement. This dissatisfaction triggered a wave of change coming with a concern from parents that their children were neither literate in their MTs nor in English. This inevitably called for a policy review (Bamgbose, 1983; also cf. Kajubi, 1989 for the case of Uganda). Because of this displeasure, there grew a need to indigenize education. Many mother tongue projects emerged in the 1970s in response to this call. Drawing from the West African region, there were particularly two outstanding mother tongue projects that are well-reported on in the literature. There was the Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP) (Fafunwa et al., 1989) and Rivers Readers Project (RRP) (Fyle, 2003). Scholars like Fyle and Bamgbose have described these two projects as outstanding and as reference points for MT education projects. The SYPP is looked at as having provided a hypothesis that "primary education when given in the child's mother tongue rather than in a second language, is more effective and meaningful" (Bamgbose, 1983, p. 60) while the RRP is considered as a model for providing education in several smaller languages.

The preceding argument is taken from the well-known contention that it is expensive to provide teachers and materials (cf. Fyle, 2003; Klaus, 2003) to several languages in education. Bamgbose (1983) in reference to the RRP explains that many languages should not be an excuse for the disregard of MT: “the RRP sets out on the premise that cost is not the most important consideration. What is best for the learner and the society is what must be done, no matter the cost (Bamgbose, 1983, p. 61).” Lodhi (1993) explains that in some African countries, there have been attempts to replace the status of the former colonial languages. This attempt has been done in Kenya and Tanzania with the development of Kiswahili. In these countries, Kiswahili has been elevated to both national and official status. Although efforts and resources have been deployed to develop Kiswahili, the language has not yet been developed for use in tertiary institutions. Be that as it may, it is important to remember that Kiswahili is not a mother tongue to all children in Kenya or Tanzania (see e.g. Nyaga, 2013). Such a situation therefore forces children to learn in a language that they do not speak at home and this undoubtedly jeopardizes their educational achievement.

At present, Somalia (using Somali) is the only African country that provides MT education from primary through to secondary school education (Abdulaziz, 2003, p. 107; Heugh, 2011, p. 149). Suffice to add at this point, as Heugh et al. (2007) note, that most countries in Africa operate under an early-exit model, 1-3 years of MT after which a transition to English/French/Portuguese is made. These authors report that to the countries that had earlier disregarded mother tongue, this is a positive change but to the countries which had 6 years of mother tongue, this is a negative change. This means that there is now a trend towards an early-exit model (Benson, 2008). Insistence on practice with this model has resulted in negative gains in education: poor numeracy/mathematics and science achievement; high failure, repetition and dropout rates; and high wastage of expenditure on education models which cannot succeed in Africa (Heugh et al., 2007). It is observable that a number of countries in Africa, being subscribers to the MDGs (and now the SDGs), introduced mother tongue education as well as free primary education. Even as such African countries have language-in-education policies the governments’ commitment to develop the African languages is very minimal and in some cases absent. Governments of African countries have put in place language-in-education policies which have hidden agendas (Shohamy, 2006) and are therefore difficult to implement meaningfully. Many children are struggling to learn to read and write (Trudell, Dowd, Piper, & Bloch, 2012) because of lack of proper approaches to handle this task in mother tongues and English (for example see Ssentanda, 2014 for challenges arising from the use of disjointed approaches to teach reading in mother tongue and English simultaneously). Studying and reflecting on the commitment of African government to develop and employ African languages in education will help to chart the way forward for the post-2015 Development agenda.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Our work on mother tongue education policy in Uganda, with deliberate focus on government’s commitment to the development and implementation of the policy in post-2015, draws heavily on the interaction model developed by

Mackey as discussed extensively in Stern (1983, pp. 39–41). The model shows that language teaching and learning is placed in the broader socio-political contexts that impact on efforts to develop and implement a policy like the one of Uganda.

In Mackey's model, shown in figure 1 below, he identifies five major variables: M (Method and material variables: Texts, tapes and films), T (Teacher variables: What the teacher does), I (Instruction variables: what the learner gets), S (Sociocultural variables: what the environment does); and L (Learner variables: what the learner does) in his framework to enhance an understanding of teaching and learning language and language policy. His conceptual framework indicates how teaching variables (MTI triangle in the diagram) as well as the learning variables (the ISL triangle) are dependent upon political, social, and educational factors which dominate the upper model. Although Mackey does not symbolize the role of the underlying disciplines in relation to the factors identified in the diagram, the accompanying texts make evidence that their presence and importance is assumed. He describes the model as an interdisciplinary framework involving such sciences as psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, education, government, linguistics, and other ancillary disciplines and technologies such as computer science, and psychoacoustics. He strongly contends that the different components of the framework or aspects of them deserve to be treated separately and in-depth. In Mackey's earlier work, *Language Teaching Analysis* (1965), the treatment was intentionally limited to the variables found in the activities of language teaching (the MTI variables) as distinguished from those involved in language learning (the ISL variables). In sum, Mackey adopts a broad theoretical perspective that involves a multiplicity of factors which are relevant to language teaching and learning. It was the broadness of this theoretical perspective illustrated in figure 1 which made our choice of Mackey's model as a theoretical framework to inform our study an irresistible one.

It is evident in this model that the government plays a central role in language policy issues. The government is the overseer and controller of what goes on in society, education and entire curriculum in the country. This also means that it controls the examinations, it determines the language of the examinations (cf. Shohamy, 2006) and scholars have shown that examinations are a big motivator to whether a language will be taught or not. We will show in this article that non-examination of mother tongues in Uganda, which is a unilateral government position, is a disincentive to the teaching of and use of mother tongues in primary schools in Uganda.

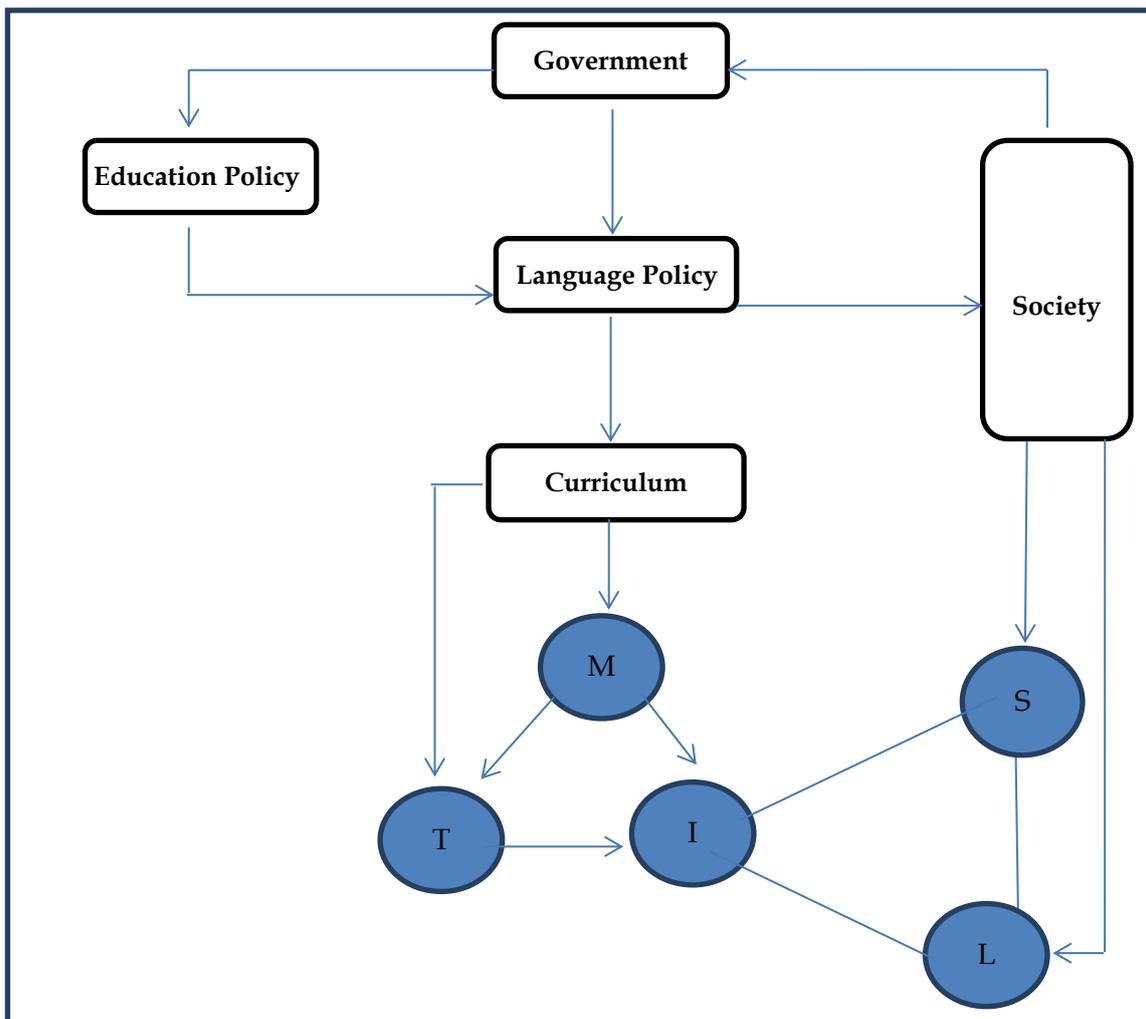


Figure 1. Mackey's Interaction Model of Language Learning Teaching and Policy.

Key

- M = Method and material variables: Texts, tapes and films
- T = Teacher variables: What the teacher does
- I = Instruction variables: What the learner gets
- S = Sociocultural variables: What the environment does
- L = Learner variables: What the learner does

Figure 1, relates effectively to the implementation of mother tongue instruction policy in Uganda and other places with similar environment. It reflects the various efforts of implementing the mother tongue instruction policy to subscribe to all the identified impediments of the policy development and implementation since, all the cited stopovers i.e., the government, society, education policy, language policy, curriculum are irresistible in promoting a sustainable policy.

As seen in this flow chart, the government plays a very important role in managing and financing the education policy. We assume that EFA is an international policy but, it reaches communities and countries through the respective governments which later informs the education policy. The education policy itself relates to other policies, language policy inclusive through the provision of regulatory mechanism and guidance. At the same time, the

language policy relates to the society for the necessary social input. The society, through the sociolinguistic concerns, directs on the issues that it deems relevant to it. All these impediments generate critical concerns to be blended into the general curriculum with its key players outlined as methods, teacher, instruction, sociocultural, and the learner. In our analysis, we looked up the role and position of government in implementing the mother tongue education programme in Uganda.

3 Methodological approach to the study

The study used documents as source of data. These were in the form of reports from various organizations which are working on improving literacy levels in Uganda. For example, the Uwezo report on children's achievements, the Ministry of Education and Sports reports on enrollment of children, World Bank and UNESCO reports on performance of the MDGS, the Uganda Education Review Commission Report, etc. Others included research reports, and four declarations on EFA and the use of MT as a medium of effective learning. This type of data accessing made our study to fall into the category of Quality Content Analysis (QCA) which essentially uses any kind of record and written documents in general for data generalization (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). Such methodology is linked to qualitative paradigm of data presentation and analysis.

The data which is factual on the contribution of the government of Uganda to the use of MT education was easily accessed from the documents. The documents were also helpful in accessing contribution of various organizations in providing literacy through the development of mother tongue education.

Through participant observations, we closely followed the activities of the various organizations through seminars and conferences organized by different associations which work on and advocate for mother tongue education in Uganda. The observations were done between 2012 and 2014. Through the Multilingual Education Network (MLEN) in Uganda, organisations arrange to present activities of their work to stakeholders in which they seek views on and share challenges of their activities. It was at such gatherings that interactions and interviews with personnel working with organisations were held. The meetings of these organisations are held every after three months. Simultaneously, critical participants were identified to solicit views on organizations working in mother tongue education and to gather opinions on the government's role.

The interviews were organized for the officials of the Luganda Teachers Association (LTA) and District Language Boards (DLB) of four (4) regions. Annually, LTA, which is a national umbrella for Luganda Teachers, convenes a week long National Conference with over 300 participants drawn from various parts of the central region, to discuss and propose practical measures on issues associated with the teaching of the language in their various schools. In the same vein, the DLBs organize meetings with various stakeholders including publishers, authors, teachers, researchers and policy makers, to share challenges and to seek possible intervention and support in the implementation of the local language development. Formal and informal interviews were scheduled for the two groups. These were helpful in providing information on operations in their region and to

give general opinion on factors hindering robust implementation of MT education policy in Uganda. The findings were analyzed through a triangulation manner. This means that findings obtained from one method were double-checked with those from another method to reveal connections and/or disconnections. By so doing, the data becomes richer.

4 Study findings

4.1 Introduction

This section concurrently discusses the findings, the analysis and discussions of the study data. Other findings from document analysis focus on the performance of government and other organizations contributing to MT education in Uganda. The interview data and observations of various activities which relate to mother tongue education development in the country are also discussed.

4.2 Ugandan government's commitment to the development of mother tongue education

In 1990, Uganda was one of the countries that sat in Jomtien, Thailand to declare that education is indeed a human right. Moreover, the same country is one of the many countries that have also agreed to the fact that learning through a familiar language is both a human and a linguistic right. As previously explained, in 1997, Uganda introduced the UPE programme in which four children in every family study free of charge. By so doing, Uganda complied with goal number 2 of the MDGs. For the EFA goals to be meaningful, education should be accessed in children's familiar languages (see e.g. Barron, 2012). As there are more than 41 indigenous languages in Uganda, the government of Uganda resolved to reintroduce mother tongue education starting in 2006/2007. It declared that all rural schools should choose a dominant language in the school and use it as a language of learning and teaching from Primary 1 to Primary 3 and teach such a language as a subject through to Primary seven. In addition, all urban schools were to choose a dominant local language and teach it as subject all through the primary school years (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008a). The decision to have children taught in their mother tongue from Primary one to Primary three is a sign of support for children learning through a familiar language. Continued inclusion of the mother tongue on the school curriculum this time as a subject from Primary four to Primary Seven also supports the importance of teaching children in their mother tongue. At the same time, a proposal to have the same language as an examinable subject during the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) was mulled by government but this is yet to be realized.

This is undoubtedly a promising move provided that it is implemented. But, from the interview results, all respondents indicated a lot of reservations claiming that, it is not the first time the government is proposing the teaching in mother tongues in primary schools. Every time it is suggested, it fails at the implementation level. For example, the vernacular scheme failed in the early 1970s. The 1989 Education Review Commission Report (Kajubi, 1989) also suggested the use of mother tongues after compiling national-wide views on the education system, but very little was effected. The respondent's view also

suggests that the community (society) is not convinced about the government's move to support mother tongues in education. It is looked at as a move to hoodwink the public (e.g. compare Acemah's, 2014, article titled "Is thematic curriculum a panacea or a gimmick to hoodwink the wananchi?").

For any language to be employed in education, it should be developed. Lewis, Simons, & Fennig (2015, p. 1) define language development as "the result of the series of on-going planned actions that language communities take to ensure that they can effectively use their languages to achieve their social, cultural, political, economic, and spiritual goals". There are more than 41 languages in Uganda; sometimes some are clustered as local languages and regional languages depending on the level of mutual intelligibility between communities. Various efforts have been put in place to develop them, but especially with an aim of employing them in the education system. Most of such actions are done haphazardly. Our interaction with critical respondents indicates that there is a consensus that due to influence of politics coupled with sectarian syndicate within the responsible officials who are at the helm of implementing the development and use of the mother tongue, the policy is affected. This explains why the mother tongue education sometimes is not given the due support from some educated people due to political or sectarian influence. We are that due to the gains accruing from the mother tongue education as earlier discussed, the implementers should work towards the realization of the enormous advantages of mother tongue education.

Motivated by the MDGs, Uganda set out to achieve the second MDG of achieving universal primary education. As such, since the MDGs demand teaching and learning through familiar languages in order to improve literacy acquisition, Uganda re-introduced mother tongue education (in 2006 /2007) to achieve the same goal as will be elaborated in the forthcoming sections. Uganda's efforts to increase school enrolment began in 1997 under the UPE program. Through the UPE program, the government sponsors four children from every family. Despite the increase in school enrolment and the employment of MTS as LoLT, which is a good move for Uganda, learner literacy assessments have continuously been found to be below expected levels (National Curriculum Development Centre, NCDC, 2006). Prior to the concretization of UPE in the Uganda Education system, the Uganda government set up a commission to review the Uganda's education system. The reports (popularly known as the Kajubi Report 1989), which climaxed into the Government White Paper on education (Government of Uganda, 1992), recommended the use of mother tongue in Primary and secondary schools. This was an energized commitment which set political scene in support of the mother tongues in Uganda (see Uganda constitution of 1995). However, we have observed that little is done to implement the Kajubi Report (1989) as earlier noted. If the commitment of government of employing mother tongue education was certainly given the due consideration and support, given the fact that the proposals by Kajubi (1989) were reflected in the Government White Paper (1992), 28 years ago, a lot should have already been achieved. Unfortunately, international reports name Uganda as one of the 16 African countries that lag in the achievement of the EFA goals. Again, it is absurd that Uganda is one of the countries that cut their budgets to fund education (UNESCO, 2014). This means that many educational actions and initiatives are not funded and cannot be worked upon and operationalized.

Summarily, Uganda government's commitment to support mother tongue education can be gauged from the following scores:

- 1) The introduction of the Thematic Curriculum for Primary Schools in 2007 is seen as a major breakthrough for the mother tongue education. The Thematic Curriculum is principally implemented in the mother tongue. Many activities involving development of the instructional materials, sensitizing the masses on the advantages of using MT in schools and the training and retraining of old vernacular teachers is ongoing throughout the country. Previous scholars have underscored the importance of training and preparation to indicate that any programs success depends of teacher education and preparation (Dutcher, 2004; Pryor, Akyeamong, Westbrook, & Lussier, 2013).
- 2) The formation of the Regional Local Language Boards, District Language Boards to help and give guidance to the use and the development of various languages in the country is another attempt to make mother tongue education functioning in all parts of Uganda.
- 3) An office for the local language expert was put in place at the National Curriculum Development Centre to help in the advancement of various plans meant to support mother tongue education in the country. In the same way, an expert in mother tongue education was appointed to run and coordinate the activities of the regional and district language boards.
- 4) Training of teachers in the production of the local/mother tongue instructional materials are ongoing but, at a low pace.
- 5) Early Grade Reading (EGR) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) are conducted in Uganda. These assessments are funded by USAID with supervision from the Ministry of Education and Sports.
- 6) The government also supports the development of language orthographies for the languages that have none. SIL International is key in this activity and has utmost support from the Ugandan government (Nannyombi & Rempel, 2011; Nzogi, 2011).
- 7) The inclusion of the mother tongue/local language in the New Lower Secondary School Curriculum is yet another positive step of supporting the use of mother tongue in Uganda's education system. Furthermore, mother tongues are also taught at higher institutions of learning at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in both government and private university.

In concluding this section, it is worth noting that the government has put in place policy frameworks to support mother tongue education as indicated above. However, a lot remains to be done. For example, the investment in education in the form of funding needs to be revised to match the needs and demands of the current developments.

4.3 Actors supporting mother tongue education and its development

Having observed the deplorable state of education in Uganda, NGOs and individuals have come out with various sets of efforts and strategies to develop literacy in Uganda especially through advocating MT education in the early years of learning. Many of these NGOs and civil society groups are asking a pertinent question: "Are our children learning?" (see Mango Tree Lanjo Literacy

Project, 2010; Uwezo, 2010, 2011, 2012) Reflecting on various organizations, civil society and various NGOs, we can note some positive strides taken in Uganda towards the development and the use of mother tongues in formal and informal settings. But, all these are basically voluntary efforts and are not financed by the government. However, we are aware that there are government frameworks through which these organizations work, and all should be permitted and/or licensed. Below are some of the groups and their actions towards mother tongue development and use in education.

First is the Multilingual Education Network Uganda (MLEN): this is an informal group of Ugandans with a mission of “providing a forum for interested individuals and organizations to promote home language –based multilingual education in Uganda” (Multilingual Education Network, n.d.). This network was formed in October 2009 and comprises of individuals interested in the promotion of MT literacy, linguists, Language Boards, local language publishers, NGO representatives and representatives from the government bodies, e.g. from NCDC and Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Participation in this network is voluntary. The major work for this group is advocacy particularly in the area of language education. This group of persons meets about 4 times each year to discuss pertinent issues in language education in Uganda. This network has for instance been so instrumental in the formation of some DLBs and also giving advisory work to the activities of DLBs and NCDC as regards language teaching. Another organization is LABE (Literacy and Adult Basic Education). This is an indigenous national organization established in 1989 (see www.labeuganda.org). LABE targets pre-school children, primary school going children, teachers of Primary (P) 1 to P3, parents with pre- and primary school children, women and out-of-school girls. LABE operates in over 10 northern Uganda districts. To concretize their work, LABE, in conjunction with civil society groups initiated the writing and publication of an implementation strategy for advocacy of local languages in Uganda (Tumwebaze, 2012).

There is also the Leblango Literacy project whose objective is to “develop simple assessment tools for parents, teachers, and administrators and teach them to use the tools so that they easily measure pupils’ attainment of well-defined literacy benchmarks in Leblango” (Mango Tree Laŋo Literacy Project, 2013). Among other activities that this project has set out to achieve are capacity building among teachers of Leblango; teaching methods of reading and writing in Leblango; production of simple literacy materials; guiding teachers in continuous assessment and sensitizing the community about values of MT education (Mango Tree Laŋo Literacy Project, 2013). This organization also works together very closely with the Language Board to boost literacy in this region.

SIL International has also been instrumental in producing and developing language orthographies, literacy materials as well as grammar books in Ugandan local languages for the last 14 years. SIL International works on applied linguistic research, orthography development, MT literacy and Bible translations in Uganda (Nzogi, 2011). Save the children Uganda is also one of the organizations working in Uganda to develop literacy through supporting MT education in the early years. Among her activities, this organization has developed a strategy to promote literacy in MTs known as “Literacy Boost in Uganda”. This initiative’s major goal is to see to it that learners’ literacy abilities are continuously developed in these 5 skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and comprehension. This organization largely works in northern Uganda.

Other organizations include Luganda Language Association (Ekibiina ky'Olulimi Oluganda) and the District Language Boards (DLBs). One of the activities of the Luganda Language Association is writing literacy materials and act as a consultancy Board in areas of culture. The Luganda Teachers Association (LTA), an umbrella of secondary school Luganda Teachers, is committed to promoting the teaching of Luganda at secondary school level. LTA also gives technical and professional support to organizations and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) about lower primary mother tongue education concerns. Several regional and national conferences are organized by the LTA to help teachers of MT towards modern teaching methods and assessment aspects.

It is therefore clear from the above elaborations that the efforts of language development have largely been promoted by civil society organizations and churches. As we pointed out at the beginning of this section, poor literacy acquisition levels among learners motivated these organizations and groups to mobilize efforts to boost MT education in Uganda. The organizations have mostly focused on sensitizing the public on the values of MT education especially in the areas of their operation. Much of the work of these organizations has been concentrated in the northern part of Uganda, a region that has suffered political turmoil for last 26 years. In fact, remarkable success in terms of acceptance, appreciation and employment of MTs as LoLT has been registered in this region. The little success registered towards MT in the central region, is largely on the Luganda language, which is the majority language in the central part of Uganda. Our observation on the foregoing submission is that government ought to actively be involved in promoting and supporting mother tongue education efforts through financing the activities.

The picture portrayed by the Luganda language positive development trend may be because, it is the dominant local language in areas surrounding the Ugandan capital, Kampala and other areas with Bantu grouping. It is a dominant MT and its level of development is higher compared to other MTs in Uganda. Being in the centre of the country, and in the major business districts of Uganda, Luganda is used on several FM radio stations, in theatre and cinema halls and social gatherings like churches and markets. Therefore, the commitment to develop and use it is rather influenced by the geographical location of Buganda, the native speakers, who are the inhabitants of the Central Uganda. There are several rural schools which are hardly employing Luganda in education. It is important to point out that much of the work of these organizations and groups of individuals has been greatly constrained by both logistical and financial resources. Moreover, as observed from the efforts of these organizations, much work is being done in the northern part of the country and the rest of the areas are largely neglected, and we assume this would have been the work of government to give guidance and resources to all the language whatever the geographical location, since they serve an important role in achieving literacy for all.

The institutions and organizations which have shown interest in the development of various MTs in the country have contributed greatly to their use in schools. Nonetheless, many of these require government support to give further assistance in this area Government has the capacity to mobilize and coordinate all such institutions since the work they offer is meant for national development, hence supplementing government efforts. But, little attempt is made by government to follow up such efforts.

5 Conclusion

The findings as analyzed and discussed have portrayed the government of Uganda as a slow mover regarding mother tongue education. There are scanty endeavors of government to give credible support to mother tongue education even after realizing mother tongue education's input to the improvement of literacy in the country.

All the cited success towards the development of MT and its use in education has been precipitated by the global call for literate societies by 2015 and the research findings related to literacy levels and achievement in Uganda. It is true that the development and use of MT in education during the early years of schooling makes learning easier and faster but the challenges are still enormous. Unless such challenges are checked in time, research findings will continue to reflect poor reading, writing and numeracy achievements. This thus puts Uganda on the spotlight about MDG 2 and the promise of EFA. Earlier scholars have also found that communities are indifferent about children learning through their MTs (see e.g. Ssentanda, 2013; Tembe & Norton, 2008). Thus, there is an urgent need to work on the negative attitude of Ugandan society towards MT education. Fortunately, the NGOs' work discussed has helped to educate some communities about the value of Mt education. Great work remains to be done in the rest of other parts of the country. The success of MT developments and its use in education requires a lot of resources to develop orthographies and other reading materials, the training of teachers and the development of mother tongue suitable curriculum. Injection of funds by the government of Uganda to cater for such requirements would be an impetus to the MT development.

6 Way forward

We have shown in our discussion that the achievement of the EFA is largely dependent on the swift implementation of the use of MT as medium of instruction in early years of schooling. Since MT based education is pivotal in reducing alienation and conflicts and equips children to learn other languages, and since children experience frustrations, failures and higher dropouts when they are exposed to formal education using an L2, it is prudent for all stakeholders to address the challenges at its earliest. We propose the following action points as necessary for the achievement of the SDGs (the post-2015 goals):

- 1) The government of Uganda should rely on the available research evidence to institutionalize mother tongue education in the education system without referring to its cost as an inhibiting factor to the use of mother tongue in education. In this regard, we learn from Fyle (2003), who is against African governments' argument that the use of the mother tongue in education is expensive. The cost is certainly not comparable to the potential benefits.
- 2) Development partners should be encouraged to promote the use of mother tongues in Ugandan schools as one way to enhance education access to education quality (UNESCO, 2014).
- 3) All organizations which have committed time and resources to work on the various mother tongue projects should be supported to give further

direction to attitudinal challenges since it has been reported as one of the aspects affecting the progress of mother tongue development and employability in schools.

- 4) Finally, as indicated in Mackey's model (figure 1), the government plays a central role in the implementation of diverse national programmes. The government has a task of educating societies about the value of mother tongues/familiar languages in the achievement of SDGs.

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