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## Transitional multilingual education policies in Africa: necessary compromise or strategic impediment?

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### ABSTRACT

Despite advances in multilingual education (MLE) scholarship, education in most African societies remain characteristically congruent with colonial normative monolingual and transitional multilingual policies, which limit the use of native language(s) as media of instruction to early primary schooling. This contributes to poor educational and social outcomes far below the projected benefits of MLE. Convinced that the complex relationships between language and education have been discerned, MLE scholarship has become increasingly advocacy oriented to corresponding policies and practices, with purportedly widespread resistance from parents, policymakers, and educators. This focused ethnographic inquiry into the perspectives of parents, educators, researchers, and policymakers on MLE finds mixed messages in MLE advocacy that foment localized resistance to and disincentivize full native language-based MLE (NLB-MLE) policy changes. Specifically, transitional multilingualism, a compromise with NLB-MLE opposition, entails inherent instrumentality and linguistic hierarchy, which undermines the fundamental principles of linguistic and cultural diversity that is the hallmark of NLB-MLE. Considering the colonial, political, and scientific sources of transitional multilingualism, the findings support a reconfiguration of the intellectual anchorage, social agenda, and discursive scope of MLE scholarship to address the strategic challenge, which transitional multilingualism poses to NLB-MLE policy shift and its pedagogical and cultural promises.

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## Introduction

The expansion of Western-style formal education since the colonial era positions schools as unique sites for managing the linguistic repertoires of increasingly plurilingual African populations and for constituting, resisting, and reinforcing various forms of multilingualism. Plurilingualism—the *individual*-level dynamic interpolations of multiple linguistic practices, often resulting in flexible, immediate, and creative mixing of interdependent repertoires—differs only in scale from multilingualism, the *societal* presence of multiple languages (see Council of Europe 2011; Wilton 2009). Sociolinguistic studies of education in Africa record the systemic disregard for students' plurilingual cultural competence and the entrenchment of early-exit transitional multilingualism from national policies to classroom practices

(Makalela 2015; Bamgbose 2000). Across Africa, language policies require students to begin schooling in their first language(s) and soon switch, often abruptly, to a dominant language (DL) mostly of former colonizers as language of instruction (LoI) (Ouane and Glanz 2011).

In practice, a majority of African students encounter academic learning in a European language (see Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009; Qorro 2009), a phenomenon that baffles scholarly advocates of native language-based multilingual education (NLB-MLE) (Heugh 2011).<sup>1</sup> Not only is exoglossic education, a relic of Europe's empire politics, dissonant with Africa's linguistic reality, foreign LoI demonstrably denies students access to quality education and impairs the social benefits of an educated population (Heugh 2011). Beyond contemporary education, public disinvestment in African languages perpetuates political, economic, cultural, and intellectual influences from Europe and the Islamic world, undermining African civilizations and ushering power asymmetries that enlist Africans in their own linguistic subjugation (see Phillipson 2013; Pennycook 2006; Makoni and Pennycook 2005; Bamgbose 2000).

Critics attribute this predicament to various factors, including enduring myths about intellectual inferiority of indigenous languages, prohibitive costs of NLB-MLE reform, and the complicity of domestic elite politico-economic interests and global hegemonic relations (Koffi 2012; Qorro 2009). While research evidence suggests that educators, parents, and policymakers resist NLB-MLE, little is known about how these groups interpret NLB-MLE advocacy or how such interpretations justify prevailing preference for foreign LoI. Understanding local perspectives is critical for effective NLB-MLE advocacy and for conceptualizing language behaviors, especially given the near absence of language policy implementation and regulatory cultures, which gives parents and educators ample flexibility in LoI decisions.

The first part of this article reviews the discourse on NLB-MLE and transitional multilingualism to situate them within the marked shift from deficit to affirmative orientations toward linguistic and cultural diversity. The second part reports focused-ethnographic evidence from four African contexts, which reveals competing narratives about transitional multilingualism as both a necessary compromise and disincentive to NLB-MLE reform. The pedagogical and cultural implications highlight the need for reconsidering the intellectual and social commitments of current MLE discourse.

## Multilingual education: evidence, benefits, and challenges

Pressures for multilingual African societies to fully embrace NLB-MLE come from various sources, including domestic and foreign scholars, international organizations (e.g. UNESCO) and donor agencies, I/NGOs, and cultural groups. The loose interlinking of these sources permit individuals, especially academics, to interpenetrate education decision-making at local, national, regional, and international levels. These individuals generally share concerns about the educational, linguistic, and cultural challenges confronting minority groups (Trudell 2014). More specifically, they are drawn by the disjuncture between the scholarly celebration of multilingualism as the global sociolinguistic norm (Cummins 2015; Heugh 2015; Ouane and Glanz 2011) and the lackadaisical policy/practice response.<sup>2</sup> Because MLE scholarship has not always been affirmative, NLB-MLE advocacy is itself a response to earlier deficit views of and enduring objections to multilingualism.

Post-World War II language planning approached multilingualism as an obstacle to cognitive, socioeconomic, and political development (Rubin and Shuy 1973; Karam 1974; Neustupny 1974; Fishman 1996), echoing Europe's flawed post-Renaissance nation-building assumptions that monolingualism is both norm and ideal for the individual and nation, and that social cohesion and economic growth requires linguistic homogeneity. The resulting language planning typologies were to guide public policy in solving the 'language problem' of new multilingual nations (see Haugen 1966; Kloss 1966; Fishman, Ferguson, and Gupta 1968; Rubin and Jernudd 1971; Ricento 2000; Hornberger 2006). Since then, a growing body of evidence now unequivocally substantiates the cognitive, psychological, pedagogical, socio-political, and economic benefits of NLB-MLE, ushering a momentous pro-multilingualism activism worldwide (Rodriguez-Fornells, Balaguer, and Münte 2006; MacSwan 2000; Cook 1992). In the pioneering Ife study, Nigerian students taught in their native Yoruba outperformed their English LoI counterparts in all academic and affective measures, including English language (Fafunwa, Macauley and Sokoya 1989). Evidentially, MLE's scholastic benefits are bound to the stylized 'mother tongue', an affirmation that optimal learning proceeds from known to unknown, and that DLs (e.g. English and French) produce greater returns when learned as subjects, not LoI (Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009).

Against this backdrop, MLE advocates use policy consultations, international campaigns (e.g. UNESCO's annual International Mother Language Day initiative), grassroots programming, and scholarly outputs to sensitize policymakers and educators to the benefits of multilingualism (Jessner 2008; Kroll and deGroot 2005; Maffi 2005; Skutnabb-Kangas 2002). UNESCO and sister UN agencies, following earlier constitutional and normative safeguards for indigenous languages (UN 1948; UNESCO 1945, 1953), support (inter)national MLE initiatives, including expert meetings and publications.<sup>3</sup> There is now near consensus among scholars that learning is most effective through NLB-MLE. Advocates defend indigenous language right (Pupavac 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1995) in response to linguistic imperialism and ascendancy of global languages (Phillipson 2013; Canagarajah 1999). So strong is NLB-MLE support that for many scholars, contemporary language issues are reducible to the technicalities of developing and implementing corresponding policies within multilingual contexts (Koffi 2012; Prah 2009).

The remarkable growing support for multilingualism notwithstanding, we are far from a complete paradigm shift. Even among multilingualism advocates, opinions remain fragmented on the appropriate orientation to MLE.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of each new orientation (e.g. linguistic imperialism, language-as-right, language-as-resource, linguistic ecology) ushers a cycle of enthusiasm, vicious criticisms, and the inertia of conceptual disillusionment (see e.g. Sayers 2011; Wee 2011; Petrovic 2005; Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, and Rannut 1995; Ruiz 1984, 2010). Recent political philosophy debate over the social justice of *prescribing* NLB-MLE shows that MLE's benefits must be weighed against contravening philosophical, economic, and cultural rationales (De Schutter 2007). Indeed, neoliberal apologists reject the reality of linguistic imperialism, arguing that language discrimination and extinction are natural and politically neutral outcomes of macro-level language competition that require no policy/practice intervention (Waters 2009; Donskoi 2006). This claim's historical myopia and insidious logic are outlined elsewhere (Odugu 2015).

Opinions are also fragmented among policymakers and lay masses, as this study shows. Not only has the policy climate of transitional multilingualism remained largely unchanged since colonial independence (Bamgbose 1991), countries like Ghana and Rwanda have

reverted to English-only monolingualism (Albaugh 2014).<sup>5</sup> No African country uses multiple African languages as LoI beyond primary schooling, and only two, Eritrea and Ethiopia, use multiple indigenous LoI throughout primary school (Albaugh 2005). Indigenous LoI is conscribed to the first few years of primary schooling; students switch to exclusively European LoI for higher learning. This widespread support for transitional models is perplexing, as empirical evidence of the normative nature and encompassing benefits of NLB-MLE is unambiguous.

### Transitional multilingualism as strategic compromise

To extend beyond descriptions of persistent widespread support for transitional multilingualism since colonial independence and the accompanying reticence of Africans to NLB-MLE (see Banda 2010; Qorro, 2009; Bamgbose 1991) requires critical re-examination of both MLE advocacy scholarship, which has actively documented these sociolinguistic phenomena, and appropriations of that advocacy by local actors. We interviewed educators, parents, researchers, and policymakers in both urban and rural settings in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda to understand their perspectives on NLB-MLE and transitional multilingualism. Fieldwork data were augmented with a critical review of the discourse and epistemological cues embedded in MLE scholarship. Drawing from an extensive (although non-exhaustive) reading of language policy and planning and MLE scholarship, this review appropriates discourse analysis' ideas that texts, including MLE scholarship, do not neutrally represent reality, identity, and social relations (Howarth 2000) and that language is performative, always doing something with/of consequence, whether intentional or not (see Lester, Lochmiller, and Gabriel 2016). This review also aligns with critical discourse analysis' interest in the implication of knowledge traditions in regimes of power asymmetries, which extrapolates Foucault's (1977/1995, 1989) account of the relation of power and knowledge (see Rogers et al. 2016). Such conceptual bearing permits our data to interrogate MLE scholarship in illuminating semiotic and social interpretations that underpin Africa's sociolinguistic realities.

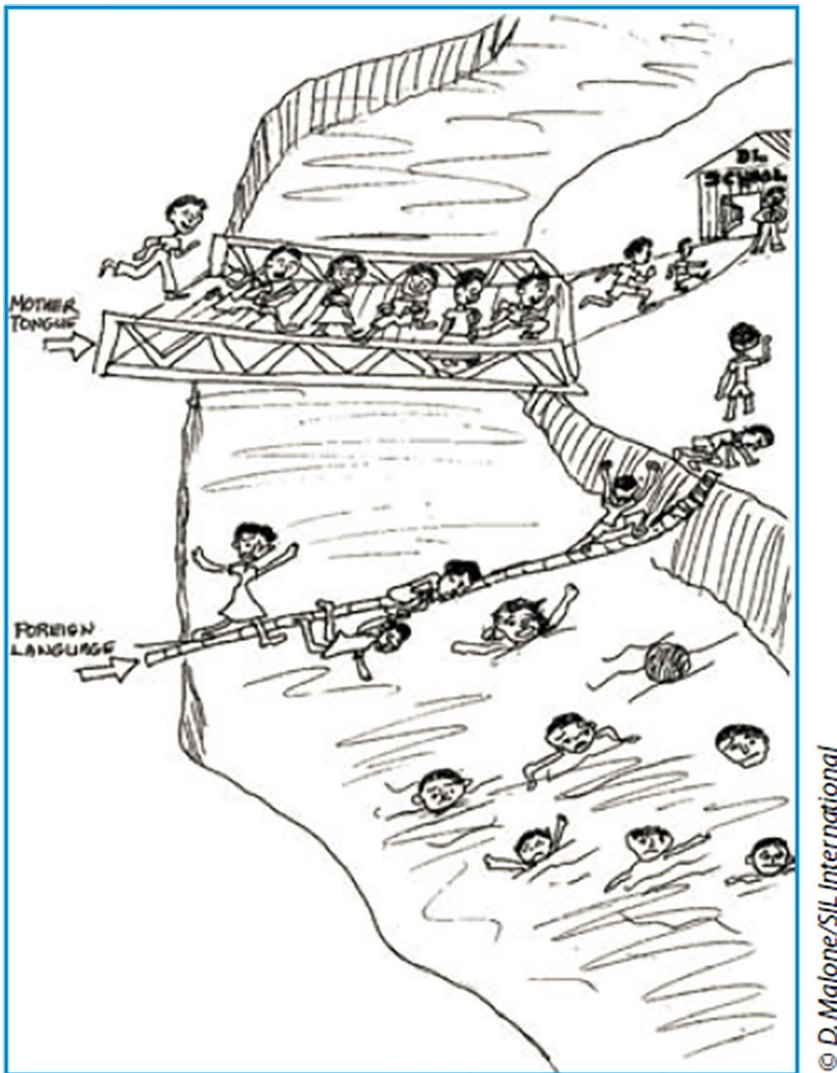
Two overlapping considerations from this review offer the conceptual structure for our analysis. First, NLB-MLE advocacy scholarship often overlooks the inherent instrumentality and linguistic hierarchy in the colonial, political, and scientific origins of transitional multilingualism (see e.g. Ouane and Glanz 2011; UNESCO/UII/ADEA 2010). The colonial provenience of transitional models in the inchoate early-nineteenth century missionary schools is well documented (Odugu 2016, Afigbo 2005, Ajayi 1969). Colonial apologists infer erroneously that colonizers never held any predetermined intention to dominate or control Africans or any other colonized peoples, arguing that it was the colonized who demanded English-only schooling (Whitehead 1995).<sup>6</sup> But it was the exigent linguistic barriers between Europeans and Africans, not notions of linguistic equity that occasioned European interest in African languages, which were abandoned once Africans gained basic proficiency in respective colonial languages. Colonialists were generally contemptuous of the native languages of their colonies (Kamwangamalu 2013), and colonial language policies were part of broader historical shifts in which Europeans deployed violence, religion, and pseudoscience in pursuit of deep and often contradictory ethnocentric ends (see Gott 2011; Falola 2009; Isichei 1997). A 1953 British report on early colonial education in Africa argued that, while native language instruction was necessary because African children came to

school with no prior knowledge of English, an ‘all-round proficiency in English [was] the most important academic aim of the primary course’ (Conference on African Education, 1953: 21).<sup>7</sup>

The volatility of language in the fragile post-independence nation-building politics effectively discouraged radical revisions of colonial language policies (see Makoni and Mashiri 2007, Bamgbose 1991). Fishman (1996) aptly notes that while ‘lowering...one flag and...raising...another may indicate the end of colonial status, these acts do not necessarily indicate the end of imperialist privilege in neocolonial disguise’ (p. 5). Post-independence language policies were, to borrow Austin’s (2009) characterization of India, ‘half-hearted compromises’ that ultimately left intact the assumed superiority and neutrality of European languages. Countries that revised the colonial model eventually reverted to it or fully adopted English.<sup>8</sup> Institutionalized through tentative political compromises, colonial-era transitional models were eventually bolstered by seminal MLE research in Africa (see e.g. Fafunwa, Macauley and Sokoya 1989) and bilingual education in North America (see e.g. Cummins 2000, 1999). In his compelling linkage of the multidimensional benefits of ‘mother tongue’ LoI to development in Africa, Djité (2008) appeals to a large body of empirical evidence from Africa to argue that ‘school performance improves when the mother tongue [*sic*] is used *in the first three years of schooling*’ (p. 74, emphasis added). Even Fafunwa’s pioneering Ife study affirms transitional models, advocating only that ‘mother-tongue’ LoI extend to 12 years rather than three, as most policies prescribe.

Concerning the second corollary consideration, having conceded the fundamental logic of transitional multilingualism, MLE research refocused on scientifically determining the appropriate duration of ‘mother-tongue’ LoI, often appropriating U.S. bilingual research evidence. Although the relevance of Western bilingual studies/programs to Africa is questionable (see Heugh 2011), MLE advocates encourage parents, policymakers, and educators to embrace ‘mother-tongue’ LoI as a means to English/French mastery for higher academic learning and international network. Since literacy skills and knowledge acquired in  $L_1$  transfer and serve as bridges to  $L_2/L_n$  (Figure 1) (Cummins 2000), MLE advocacy was reduced to a calculus of duration of native LoI that maximizes academic success post transition to DLs. This scheme inadvertently voids the inherent goal of multilingualism for one of strategic proficiency in DLs.

Competing recommendations fit within a monolingualism—multilingualism continuum, with early exit (1–3 years) on one end, followed by medium exit (4 years), late exit (6–8 years), very late exit (beyond 8 years) and no exit on the other end (Chumbow 2013; Ouane and Glanz 2011). Most NLB-MLE advocates agree that overall, early exit is preferable to DL monolingual instruction but less desirable than very late exit. Making a ‘case for mother-tongue [*sic*] as medium of education *for at least the first twelve years* of the child’s life’, Fafunwa, Iyabode Macauley, and Sokoya (1989, vii, emphasis added) paradoxically concede the inherent value of ‘mother-tongue’ and the strategic necessity for (delayed) transition in a compromised linguistic gradation. Thus, while not ideal, transitional multilingualism is still recommended for nurturing linguistic diversity. One problematic adaptation of U.S. bilingual studies (Heugh 2011) persuasively projects pedagogical outputs for graduated transitional models, with ‘dual medium of instruction’ promising the largest academic achievement in English literacy (61–62%) compared to the lowest achievement associated with English-only LoI (24% at grade 11).<sup>9</sup> Such projections suggest that transitional



**Figure 1.** A Bridge model of transitional multilingualism. Note: This comparison of transitional models (top bridge) with foreign language monolingualism (bottom bridge) (Smith 2012) offers a powerful illustration of transitional models as a compromise intended to subvert monolingualism, not a desirable strategy by itself.

multilingualism and NLB-MLE differ only in degree, with progressively longer use of native LoI corresponding to higher achievements.

### **Transitionality, instrumentality, and the mixed-messages of MLE**

The scholarly justification for the transitional models outlined above is well established. What is less known, however, is how parents, educators, and policymakers interpret and appropriate transitional models in ways that work to justify, sustain, or resist current school-based language practices. While their roles vary, the overlapping contributions of various stakeholders—through active advocacy, passive compliance, or total neglect—are critical

for understanding the enduring exoglossic education in contexts that lack a systemic implementation culture for national policies. Participants were recruited through local researchers associated with the International Network for Action Research on Education, Language, and Society (INARELS). Parents and educators (teachers and school-level administrators) were randomly selected from schools where INARELS researchers have ongoing fieldwork.<sup>10</sup> Policymakers and researchers were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to identify individuals with interest and/or experience in language and education. Analysis of over 131 hours of semi-structured focused-ethnographic interviews conducted between summer 2014 and spring 2016 with 51 educators, policymakers, parents, and researchers (Appendix A) reveals (a) a disjuncture between the simplistic instrumentality and linguistic hierarchy of transitional multilingualism and the complexity of plurilingual phenomena and (b) that transitional multilingualism is laden with mixed messages that demotivate NLB-MLE policies and practices.

Figure 2 presents summary data on interviewees' self-identification with and support for indigenous non-dominant languages (NDLs) and dominant non-dominant languages (dNDLs) (e.g. Kiswahili in Kenya and Uganda; Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba in Nigeria; and Akan in Ghana) on one hand and English on the other.<sup>11</sup> While variations exist among parents, educators, policymakers, and researchers across countries, there is strong support across the board for both African (d)NDLs and English. This problematizes an important claim of transitional multilingualism, which imposes a zero-sum logic on the popular demand for English in Africa, that investments in indigenous NDLs imply corresponding disinvestments in DLs (Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009; Djité 2009). Indeed, classifying languages in DL-NDL binaries becomes inadvertently evocative of language affiliation as exclusive: to be pro-English/French is to be *ipso facto* anti 'mother-tongue', and vice versa. In reality however, Africans hold multiple linguistic cultural identities, and demand for English literacy is no evidence of low interest in or inferiority of (d)NDLs.

This finding suggests that the overwhelming hostility toward indigenous NDLs often reported by researchers requires more careful empirical reconsideration beyond the scope of this article. For instance, while educators and parents have similar levels of support for both (d)NDLs and English, educators justify their support for English on pragmatic

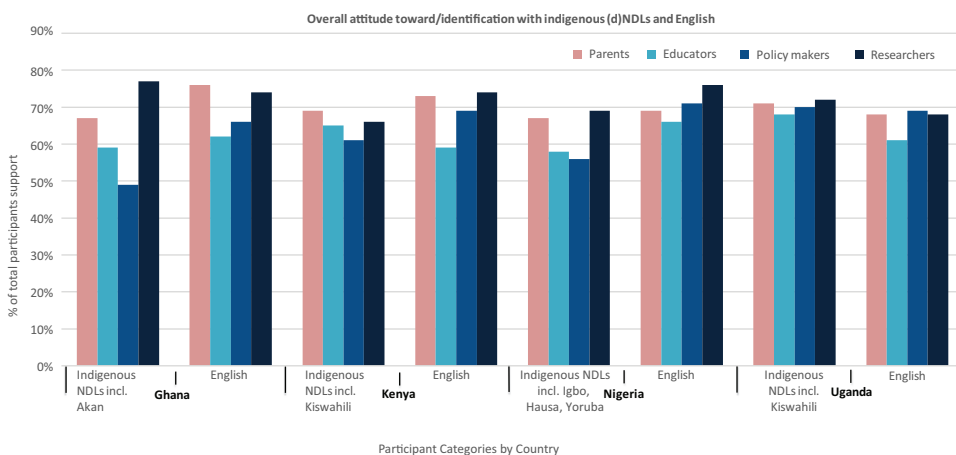


Figure 2. Support for indigenous (d)NDLs and English/French.

purposes conditioned by mostly English-only textbooks, syllabi, and examinations. Parents, however, prioritize access to scarce white-collar career opportunities that formal schooling promises. Notably, some parents consider African languages a strategic tool to redress perceived erosion of cultural identity among youths. For teachers, African languages offer crucial linguistic resources for explicating academic contents complicated by DL monolingualism in plurilingual pedagogic situations (see also Banda 2010). While additional ethnographic data will help to probe these variations further, it is notable that participants express simultaneous support for indigenous (d)NDLs and English, yet their actual linguistic behaviours signal deeper complexity and innovative interdependence of languages. A Kenyan professor of linguistics captures this sentiment:

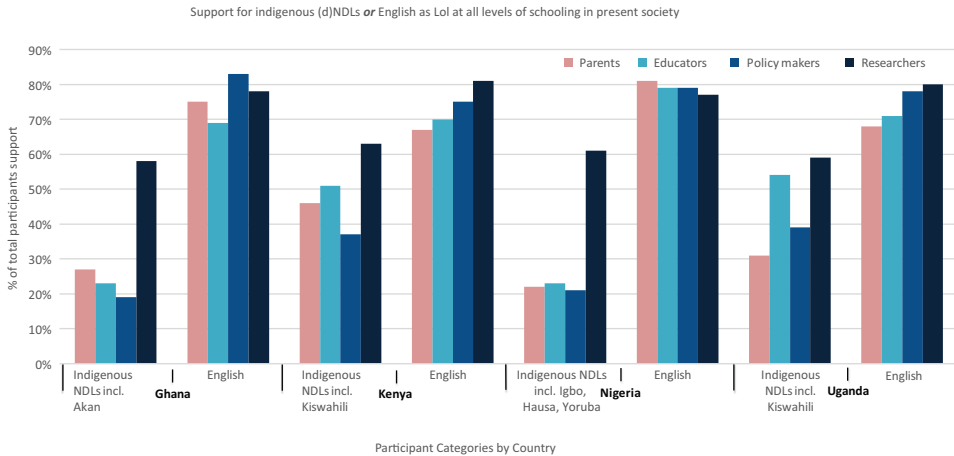
Surely, there is a hierarchy of language: English is associated with elites and formal settings; Kiswahili is for informal communication; mother-tongue is for private and home use. But this is not how people really use language. People mix these languages depending on the audience and situation. *Sheng* is a good example... an interesting blend of English, Kiswahili, Kenyan languages and foreign languages. Even Kiswahili borrows from other languages. Languages borrow naturally... (personal interview, June 19, 2014).

The implication of these overlapping linguistic affiliations is far-reaching. Multilingualism is not merely the additive presence of multiple languages but the plurilingual manifestations described above (see Canagarajah and Ashraf 2013). Linguistically, plurilingualism is more fluid than the di-/tri-glossic mechanics of codeswitching, as it constitutes unique linguistic mind-sets distinct from an accretion of monolingual proficiencies (Ricento 2006; Pennycook 2006). Clarifying the import for transitional multilingual education, a Nigerian critic of the national policy on education notes,

...we inherited from the British a mechanical process of education that is out of tune with cultural realities. Starting [schooling] in native language and switching to English assumes that children actually encounter these languages as isolated systems. Even [your] grandmother in the village who never went to school mixes both native language and English conversationally... (personal interview, July 8, 2015).

Language use in multilingual contexts does not fit the rigidities of the discrete systems implicit in transitional multilingualism. Contrary to earlier assumptions (see e.g. Mansour 1993), multilingual societies are not neat patchworks of discrete languages with distinct boundaries separating contiguous linguistic communities, such that syntactic and linguistic interaction can be clearly delineated (De Schutter 2007). Language in communicative practices blends in fascinating hybrid forms that spur language borrowing (Canagarajah 2013, 2009). The notion of transition (whether early, medium, or late) from NDLs violates this fluid nature of language in communicative contexts.

Although participants' overall language attitudes remain relatively high across repertoires, support for using indigenous NDLs as LoI, including in early grades, is comparably low (Figure 3). Yet, 64% of participants across all four countries clarify that deficit views of NDLs presuppose *current* structure of schooling and the accompanying political and economic reward system as constant. Presented with a hypothetical politico-economic order in which overall wellbeing, wealth, and political power are independent of language background, support for indigenous NDLs LoI increases significantly (Figure 4). While current data do not address this, additional analyses that disaggregate NDLs and dNDLs and various stakeholder interests will further reveal relative support for dNDLs as LoI, especially in



**Figure 3.** Support for indigenous (d)NDLs or English as LoI at all levels in *present society*

countries where dNDLs are regional languages not spoken by majority students from NDL communities.

In African contexts where the lore of pre-colonial life permeates contemporary socialization processes that pit traditional indigenous ‘pasts’ against modern Westernized ‘futures’, classifying languages as indigenous *versus* European metonymically sanctions hierarchies of knowledge imbued with epistemic dilemmas: schools become desocializing institutions for erasing resilient African cultures that continue to define students’ lived experiences and for inculcating improvised accoutrements of westernization. This social schema normalizes views about educated youth as culturally incompetent but professional experts whose formal knowledge requires a new economically-expedient foreign linguistic tool. Indeed, linguistic practices are indicative of tensions among and attitudes to conflicting historical forces undergirding current political and economic cultures, which simultaneously fuel demand for and opposition to both indigenous and foreign languages (Odugu 2015).

It is the indigenous *contra* foreign/Western tension and concomitant linguistic hierarchy that the instrumentality of transitional multilingualism fuels in ways that discourage NLB-MLE, a reality borne out in policy reversals in Ghana and Rwanda. A pro-NLB-MLE Ghanaian policy advocate and educator narrates a parent’s defense of the 2002 policy that eliminated previous early-grade transitional policy and instituted English-only LoI for all grades:

If [MLE advocates] believe mother-tongue [*sic*] and English have equal value today, why switch? Why not use mother tongue up to the university?...What language do they use in parliament...[and for] teaching at secondary schools and university? English! They send their own children to elite [English-only] schools but want our children for mother-tongue...(personal interview, June 26 2015).

To clarify, the aforementioned notion that linguistic skills and knowledge transfer across languages, while well documented elsewhere (Cummins 1999), disincentivizes NLB-MLE because it endorses the supposed inferiority of NDLs. Therein lies the mixed messages: collapsing NLB-MLE and transitional multilingualism into one pro-MLE strategy imposes the logic of language hierarchy on NLB-MLE and inadvertently denigrates African

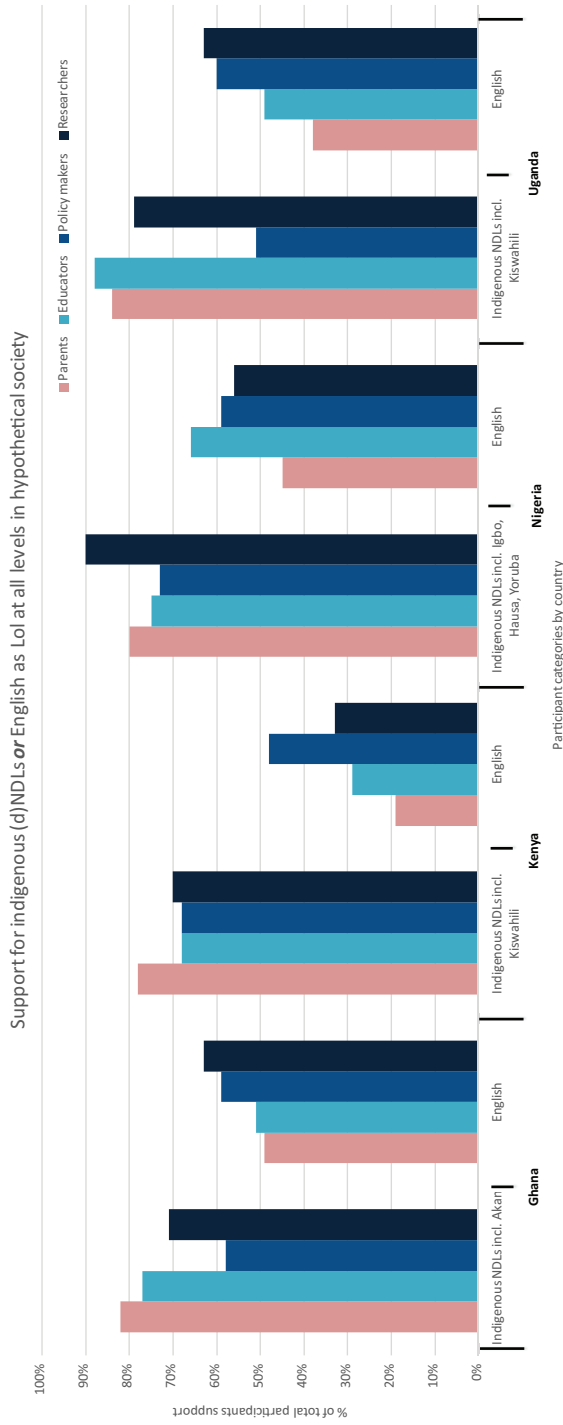


Figure 4. Support for indigenous (d)NDLs or English as Lol at all levels in hypothetical society

languages. To illustrate, Heugh (2011) reviews colonial era and international reports on language in education, and asserts,

...what these commissions and reports on education in Africa have advocated for 100 years is the use of the first language (L1) home language/mother tongue [*sic*] as both a medium of instruction and a subject of learning in school. Seldom, if ever, has there ever been a suggestion in these reports that the first language/mother tongue is *sufficient* or that children should be *limited* only to the first language. The first language/mother tongue is always advanced alongside the principle of additional second language (L2) education, both as subjects from early on and, later, as an additional medium of learning and teaching (p. 107, emphasis added).

The rationale that developing adequate linguistic and academic skills in native language(s) facilitates success at advanced levels of English/DLs schooling concedes this logic of instrumentality and necessitates transition/transfer, thus failing to challenge the inherent language hierarchy. Instrumentality requires that we characterize the child's first (read 'African') language(s) as *insufficient*, and their pedagogical appropriations, a *limitation*. Transitional policies are always about shift from NDLs to, or addition of, DLs, not vice versa. There is no corresponding clamor for a shift from English or French to NDLs for advanced functions, even among those students for whom English is L<sub>1</sub>. One might note that while Heugh's assessment accurately represents scholarly orthodoxy, seldom, if ever, has it been suggested in Western bilingual discourse that German or French is pedagogically *insufficient*, or that an English-only schooling is a *limitation* for an American student until s/he adds Spanish-medium schooling in the U.S. where Spanish is a dNDL. Thus, foisting transitional multilingualism as a compromise pathway to NLB-MLE undermines its purpose by reinforcing, or at least leaving unchallenged, the entrenched myths about the relative inferiority of African languages. What transitional models seek to uphold through basic and academic proficiency in NDLs, they undermine by reinforcing the pervasive notion that African languages are self-insufficient and, therefore, less desirable.

### ***Pedagogical, conceptual and cultural considerations***

The pedagogical implications of the foregoing are damning for NLB-MLE advocacy. The logic of transitional multilingualism virtually denigrates indigenous worldviews, scientific traditions, and cultural values as valid sources of rigorous academic scholarship at all levels. In most African contexts, formal schooling is burdened with a crisis of relevance characterized by externally-driven curricula and structures antedating colonialism (see Abdi, Puplampu, and Sefa Dei 2006). Any tension between native NDLs and 'foreign' DLs mirrors persistent tensions in the broader quest to undo historical denigrations of African worldviews without rejecting adaptable Western intellectual and cultural values.

Attempts to articulate the place of language in this tension have polarized constitutivist and instrumentalist appropriations of MLE (see De Schutter 2007). Constitutivists view language as intrinsic to all cognition and identity. Instrumentalists however, consider language a tool for non-linguistic ends, such that any language is dispensable when the calculus of function so dictates. Wolff's (2011) provocative echo of constitutivists—'[l]anguage is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education' (p. 92; see also Djité 2008)—addresses strategic instrumentalists, such as a Nigerian policymaker who argued, 'we all know language is important...but government has more serious problems in education. We're under pressure on the Special Education policy and the HIV/

AIDS-Education policy...’ (personal interviews, July 4, 2015). Probed on whether these educational agenda could be addressed in isolation from LoI, he insists metaphorically, ‘you can’t put all fingers in your mouth at once....you have to prioritize’.

The idea that linguistic considerations are secondary to more primary needs (e.g. infrastructures, enrolment/attendance, curricula development) underscores the disjuncture between the mechanical post-independence model of schooling and holistic traditional African education (Omolewa 2007; Fafunwa 1974). Although NLB-MLE appeals fundamentally to constitutivist claims, constitutivism does not exhaust the ideals of linguistic diversity nor does it resolve the many legitimate concerns of instrumentalism. NLB-MLE advocacy therefore needs a refined approach that retains constitutivist appropriations without indulging instrumentalist’s inferential logic that African languages are dispensable.

Certainly, NLB-MLE advocacy is cognisant that language policymaking in Africa is saddled by larger social forces, but it often treats these forces as mere caveats worth no more than a brief mention. Ouane and Glanz (2011) recognize that

an educational system which emphasizes the use of African languages will only be viable if the socioeconomic environment values these languages so that people with a diploma obtained through schooling in an African language will find challenging positions where they can continue to grow professionally. *It is recommended that any kind of language policy be based on the vision of the society it is designed and implemented for, as well as the political economy and the sociolinguistic reality of the country* (p. 24, emphasis added).

For any country whose political economy and sociolinguistic reality is hijacked by self-serving elites, it might appear that there is little compelling rationale for alternative courses that undermine elite interests. For language stakeholders who are not card-carrying research experts, current mixed messages can deepen the impact of pre-existing social hierarchies, which considers the subjugation of African languages a *fait accompli*.

If, as constitutivists suggest, linguistic considerations pervade all aspects of education, NLB-MLE advocacy must also concern itself immediately and continuously with other scarce requirements for academic success, such as specialist teachers of DLs, small class sizes, and adequate resources, including textbooks and instructional materials in NDLS, which researchers have long argued are necessary for NLB-MLE to be beneficial (Heugh 2011, 2002). It also needs to explore curricular and administrative innovations that address concerns about the prohibitive cost of NLB-MLE implementation. Additionally, NLB-MLE advocacy needs to re-examine enduring colonial-style social hierarchies and modernization visions of society that pervade schooling and wider socio-political realities underlying instrumentalist concerns at the levels of policymaking, classroom practice, and individual choice.

To illustrate, NLB-MLE advocates link Africa’s poor development indices to the use of European languages in education (Ouane and Glanz 2011; Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009). Ouane and Glanz (2011) develop a language-education-development ternary to argue, ‘various deficits in language and development planning and implementation in Africa “conspire” to impede advances and serious progress of development in general, and of education in particular’ (51–52). By suggesting that Africa is indeed not developing adequately, this commentary manifests the long-rejected equation of development with Westernization (Breidlid 2013). Indeed, NLB-MLE advocacy is embedded in global educational agendas, such as Education For All with loaded modernization assumptions (Nguyen 2010) that

effectively abandon the possibility of evolving uniquely African civilizations, despite ample anthropological evidence of such past civilizations often ignored in formal schooling (De Graft-Johnson 1986; Van Sertima 1983). A Ugandan professor elaborates this:

...language is part of a bigger problem with education and society. We tell children to work hard in school so they fit into predetermined careers...and to measure their success by how much material things they can buy...[but] they can't tell you the local name for the tree behind their house or medicinal plants that helped their forefathers live to be a hundred years... (personal interviews, February 10, 2015).

NLB-MLE advocacy undermines its capacity to nurture culturally relevant social change to the extent it propagates unilineal social evolution. If NLB-MLE scholarship appeals to radical shifts toward autochthonous social conditions built on unique African experiences, then efforts to adapt linguistic practices to present-day narrow educational ideals remain problematic.

## Conclusion

The discontinuities between the fixities implied in transitional multilingualism (and by association, NLB-MLE) and the indeterminacy and fluidity of linguistic practices spur suggestions to substitute multilingualism for plurilingualism, because, '[w]hile multilingualism treats the different languages as having their separate systems, enjoying autonomy, plurilingualism perceives these languages as meshing with each other to form hybrid grammatical and communicative practices' (Canagarajah and Ashraf 2013: 275). Makoni and Makoni (2010) use the term 'vague linguistique' to articulate a similar conceptual shift. While terminological adjustments can usher new interpretations, they are unnecessary if multilingualism detaches itself from the discreteness, instrumentality, and hierarchy of languages that it concedes by its association with transitional multilingualism. As a linguistic character of a society, multilingualism differs from individual-level plurilingualism only in scale and structure (Byram and Parmenter 2012).<sup>12</sup>

To address the hierarchy of languages and assumed inferiority of African languages prevalent in current MLE discourse, multilingual scholarly advocates need a broadened vista that simultaneously extends beyond language *per se* and underscores the ways linguistic considerations pervade all other social realities. A starting point is to eschew the tempting reductionism of measuring the value of NLB-MLE against narrow scholastic outcomes (e.g. English proficiency or test scores in school subjects) and economic indices such as GDP/GNP, which remains the dominant style of scholarship since the 1960s (Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009; Fafunwa, Iyabode Macauley, and Sokoya 1989).

In addition to the persistent use of European LoI, an adequate treatment of NLB-MLE in Africa ought to be equally concerned with corollary phenomena, such as the colossal negligence of African knowledge systems, near total censure of African religious traditions, beliefs that development is a *status* (hence the distinction between 'developing' and 'developed' nations) instead of an ongoing process, and supremacy of capitalist state institutions over African cultural polities.

Finally, scholarship attuned to bold vision of social change in line with linguistic diversity needs an accompanying critical historiography that can challenge legacies of the past that persist in MLE discourse. The belief that European DLs (e.g. English) are key to accessing international resources and national communication (see Ouane and Glanz 2011), while

descriptively defensible, needs more critical engagement with the historical fact that colonial Europe did not need to adopt the languages of their colonies as official languages in European mainland to expropriate resources from the colonies. The view that Africans need European languages to tap Western resources accepts current global socioeconomic configuration as fixed and its history, unproblematic. A critical historiography can help raise questions about who is legitimately responsible for enacting visions of society, as current top-down development agents of state and international organizations are intolerant of NDLs and bottom-up grassroots development discourse (see Wolff 2011; Robinson 1996). NLB-MLE scholarly advocacy oriented toward social change needs refined strategies for simultaneously *speaking with* local communities, the academe, and the state. In addition to the dialog implied in 'speaking *with*', each mode of 'speaking' will be accompanied by an appropriate language, text, and theory of evidence. Hopes about radical social transformations in African societies, and indeed, world societies, in consonance with the current dicta of linguistic diversity can only be hatched through such retooled scholarly engagements.

## Notes

1. Using 'native language' in NLB-MLE acknowledges the conceptual inadequacies of popular terms like 'mother tongue' and 'first language/L<sub>1</sub>' for delineating a person's foundational linguistic repertoire (see Benson and Kosonen 2013), which may not be the mother's language, the first language, or a single language, even if geographically and culturally native to the person/people.
2. Albaugh (2014) finds significant increases (40–80%) in the use of African languages in education since independence, but this conflates transitional policies with NLB-MLE practices, thus illustrating the issue of this study.
3. For details on UN/UNESCO conventions and declarations, see UNESCO (2003).
4. Albaugh (2014) argues that Francophone linguistic research community is united in support of MLE, and that scholarly fragmentation is more characteristic of Anglophone academics. The fact that Francophone scholars support MLE only as a means to expand French language dominance in Africa (Albaugh 2014) vitiates the import of this distinction.
5. Rwanda's shift to English-only LoI in 2008 is complicated by post-genocide anti-French social reconstructionism (Samuelson and Freedman 2010). Indeed, all language policy changes are bound to their society's unique histories, steeped in complex non-linguistic social and political transactions.
6. Other historical revisionists challenge critiques of European imperialism (see e.g., Lefkowitz 2008 and D'Souza 2002). For contemporary African perspectives on European colonialism, see Boahen (2011) and Taiwò (2010).
7. Colonial support for native languages was widespread but never uniform or consistent across the odd half-century of colonialism. In Ghana, the 1882 *Ordinance for the Promotion and Assistance of Education in the Gold Coast Colony* required instruction of, and in, English. In 1925, the Guggisberg Ordinance reversed this decree, mandating native LoI during the first three years of schooling and transition to English LoI subsequently (Andoh-Kumi 2002; see also Clermont 1985). Similar policy applied to Nigeria (Fafunwa, Macauley and Sokoya 1989). In Kenya, few students were exposed to English (Gorman 1974). In nearby Uganda, successive colonial governors unsuccessfully advocated for Kiswahili LoI. Because missionaries were already using several native languages and associated Kiswahili with Islam, they resisted and ultimately defeated administrative support for Kiswahili (Kasozi 2000).
8. See Lugongo (2015) and Roy-Campbell (2001a, 2001b) on Tanzania, and McGregor (2000) and Mazrui & Mazrui (1995) on Uganda. For more on comparative colonial, independence and contemporary language policies in Africa, see Albaugh (2012).

9. The idea of ‘dual medium’, an extrapolation from U.S. bilingualism, permits a distinction between mainstream and minority languages. However, multilingualism in African contexts represents rich textures of overlapping sociolinguistic phenomena that are hardly reducible to simplistic binaries. Consequently, Heugh (2011) erroneously equates ESL students in two-way bilingual programs with African students from ‘2 language backgrounds’, and ESL/English-medium instruction excluding L<sub>1</sub> instruction with English-only instruction (Thomas and Collier 2012).
10. INARELS facilitates research collaboration among African researchers and their counterparts in the diaspora who are mutually interested in action research on language, education, and society ([www.inarels.com](http://www.inarels.com)).
11. Distinguishing dominant European languages from ‘dominant non-dominant’ languages/language varieties (e.g. Arabic in North Africa; KiSwahili in East Africa; Akan, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba in West Africa) underscores the additional threat to less-dominant local languages/varieties when more dominant regional varieties are privileged for educational and political purposes (see Benson and Kosonen 2013).
12. For more details in the various ways scholars distinguish between multilingualism and plurilingualism, see Martin-Jones, Blackledge, and Creese (2012) and Council of Europe (2011).

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## Appendix A: Participants disaggregated by country and category\*

Country	Urban/ Rural	Parents	Educators	Policy makers	Researchers	Total
<b>Ghana</b>	Urban	3	4	2	1	10
	Rural	2	3	0	0	5
<b>Kenya</b>	Urban	3	4	1	2	10
	Rural	0	2	0	0	2
<b>Nigeria</b>	Urban	3	4	2	2	11
	Rural	2	2	1	0	5
<b>Uganda</b>	Urban	2	2	1	1	6
	Rural	0	2	0	0	2
		15	23	7	6	51

\*Following a summer 2013 exploratory fieldwork, participant interviews were conducted in Kenya and Uganda (summer 2014), Ghana and Nigeria (summer 2015) and Nigeria (early spring 2016).