

**FROM KNOWN TO UNKNOWN: LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN UGANDA**

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I INTRODUCTION

The declining enrolment and standards of English language and Literature in Uganda can be attributed to three major factors:

- (i) Communication incompetence due to a colonial language education legacy
- (ii) Disparity between 'nationalistic' and individual students' career goal and objectives
- (iii) Poor feedback and evaluation process

II DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The following definitions, most of them from a widely used dictionary, the New Webster 3rd Ed., will be used for purposes of this paper.

Language: Tongue. The Words, their pronunciation and methods of combining them, used and understood by a considerable community and established by long usage

Literature: Writings of prose or verse... especially having excellence of form, expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest. Knowledge of books and works produced in a particular language.

Learning: The process of acquisition and extraction of modifications in existing knowledge, skills, habits or action tendencies in a motivated organism through experience, practice, or exercise

Teaching: The act, practice, or profession of teaching. It requires intelligence, maturity, and devotion.

Teach: Show, direct, guide, cause to know a subject, cause one to acquire knowledge or skills, importing or receiving incidental information, help and encouragement.

Communication: The establishment of a social unit from individuals, by the shared usage of language or signs. The sharing of common sets of rules for various goal - seeking activities.

Context /Environment: The totality of conditions which affect the behaviour of an organism.

Individual:	Any single element, item or unit falling within a specific universe discourse
Language System:	A set of signs and rules representing in the Meta-language, a description of an Object - language.
Meta – Language:	The language used by an observer for describing an observed Object - language: used for expressing rules, laws and relationships.
Mother Tongue:	The Native Language acquired as First Language
Object - Language:	A language under observation and study.

III SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The Advanced Level Schools' total students' enrolment for 1999 Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) Advanced levels reveal that Literature registered 1,797 candidates compared to History - 20,859, Economics - 29,907, Geography - 18,783, Luganda - 25,432, Mathematics - 4,774, Physics - 5,657, Chemistry - 4,496 and Biology - 3,902, [*The New Vision* April 10, 2000]. Economics registered the highest number of candidates, followed by Luganda and History, with Literature (in English) at the tail.

This reflects the students' personal ambitions to not only succeed economically basing on a clear understanding of their past experiences, but to do so even better through their indigenous language system (akin to Mother Tongue) and ordinary circumstances within their cultural backgrounds. Such an opportunity is provided by History, which is akin to their life story telling, Economics, which is part of their daily practice of buying and selling, Geography, as personal interaction with their environment and Luganda, the most widely spoken and written indigenous language in Uganda. It is important to note that the Luganda syllabus entails the testing of literature and language skills, (some in translation), which is also the pre-occupation of the Literature in English syllabus.

The above scenario reveals that individual students' career objectives are largely influenced by what is knowledgeable to them at first from common experiences of their childhood immediate environment. Having grown up in a local speech community, probably using Luganda as the medium of communication, many students find it appropriate and in fact more interesting to study Literature in Luganda than Literature in English. They also find it natural to study History, Economics and Geography for similar reasons of proximity than they would Physics, Chemistry, and by rules of subject combinations, Biology. We might also wish to observe that children usually take up the careers of either their parents or their most adored teacher because of the deeper interaction and knowledge sharing over the long period of school or home time. If these subjects were to be taught in the common language of the learner, i.e. the Mother Tongue or First Language of the learner, chances are that enrolment and performance in each of the subjects and disciplines would improve tremendously.

Learners effectively acquire formal knowledge basing on what they have already learnt informally, and informal knowledge is predominantly shared in the so-called vernacular of the individual. The child learns most of what it requires in life before the age of three in the Mother Tongue and from within the local environment where its born, and new knowledge largely depends on what is known apriori. Indigenous riddles, songs and proverbs in orate societies or the less literate communities are the commonest memory banks, which serve as springboards for a rewarding teaching-learning process.

According to Locke (19...:262), Human knowledge falls into three categories, and these categories are highly influenced by the cultural context of the individual:

Physica: The knowledge of things as they are in their own proper being, their constitution, properties and operations

Practica: the skill of right applying of our own powers and actions for the attainment of things good and useful.

Semeiotica: the doctrine of signs to consider the nature of signs the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others

The use of indigenous language and cultural perspectives in the teaching-learning process would therefore, demystify the mystical appearances of 'Literature' and the 'Sciences', thus making knowledge, a personal asset to the native individual learner. The use of the English language in the teaching-learning process of Literature and other subjects in Ugandan schools has complicated the students' perception of elementary things, hence, distancing them from the desired knowledge and truth hidden in the veiled language.

Language constitutes the moral code, human identity and justifies an individual's self-esteem. When someone speaks to you, the interpretation that you make depends upon the mental state you are in, your knowledge, feeling, attitudes and mood, which are the consequences of your experience, and your reply will be formulated on the basis of this mental state. Similarly, the students' choice of subjects is influenced by this code simply because, they have a life goal which must be pursued.

The 'nationalistic' objective of making English the national, official and language of instruction in schools, with the view of causing national unity is actually, an anti-nationalistic legality (or should we call it a policy), because it negates the very principle that it sets forth to advance. Nationalism depends on each and everyone's degree of love for his or her Motherland or Nation. Moreover, a people who speak a common language evolved by them over a period of time make a nation. There cannot, therefore, be nationhood without a Nation first being created, and a nation is identified by its unique culture whose carrier is the language.

The false belief that if Ugandans used their native indigenous languages, it would create disunity among them can be challenged on the strengths of nations like China, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Russia, which embraced their indigenous languages during the renaissance period and have since then become super powers. These nations

continue to propagate their languages and culture to Africa in a new wave of imperialism known as cultural friendships, hence, the importance of the British Council, Alliance Francaise and the like. The programmes of these associations are obviously to promote the language and cultures of their respective nations in order to strengthen their human-economic influence in the world. They even go to the extent of sponsoring translations and productions of important cultural materials from African languages to their own, and rarely, if at all, do they sponsor the reverse.

While we in Africa are limiting ourselves to 'international languages' as the official languages of instruction, communication and trade, the European Union (EU) has accepted as official languages all 11 languages commonly spoken in the 15 nation block. According to the EU Secretary General, "there is little prospect for the block reducing the number of working languages" (*The Monitor*, Saturday, Nov. 06, 1999:29) because, the linguistic diversity has strengthened rather than weakened the economic, socio-cultural and political might of the EU.

Africa at large, has sadly adopted four official languages for the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Sadly because all of them are not of African descent i.e. English, French, Portuguese and Arabic. Uganda adopted English as official language leaving out the fifty-six indigenous languages. DR Congo also uses French instead of the over three hundred indigenous languages. Might this not be the major reason for our continued surge in the doldrums of poverty and instabilities? Do these negative language legacies enhance the individual career objectives and goals of the children of Uganda and Africa at large?

In Nigeria, for example, Literature has been made compulsory for all Human Medicine students and languages like Yoruba enjoy official status just like in Eritrea where all their eight indigenous languages are official and Mother Tongue teaching in schools is emphasized. In South Africa, eleven of the indigenous languages are official Languages. In all these countries, Literature is studied and used by the people the way we eat and talk here in Uganda. They have written and published widely while here in Uganda we keep crawling.

The social-linguistic background among other considerations has a great impact on the learning-teaching environment The Americans rightly observed way back in 1976 that their teaching methodologies were wanting and they worked hard to change.

In a highly verbal culture there are obvious advantages for all children to speak, read, and write well ... teaching methodology now enjoys popular discussion because we are discovering that we have too little knowledge of how to teach language and thought, especially to the children of the poor...." (Ceucs, 1967: VII)

Language is a pre-requisite of human society and its significance varies from group to group. Teachers should use Sociology of Education skills in motivating the learner. The knowledge that high status and low status children have different learning abilities calls for their being handled differently. Even the Sciences should become more attractive and

easily perceptible to the candidates as Literature in Luganda has become. The teaching-learning process should start from the known social-cultural primary level of knowledge to the unknown secondary and tertiary levels both in terms of acquisition and practice with Mother Tongue as the primary code of communication.

The Government of United States of America revolutionized their education system after learning that the social-cultural background of the learner was obviously vital.

No one in his right mind would plan an educational program without taking into account the age of the pupils, their levels of maturity, intellectual and emotional, their interest and of course, their social background. (Bernstein, 19..: 89-100)

If the Uganda Curriculum Development Center (UCDC), together with the Uganda National Examinations' Board (UNEB) and the Ministry of Education and Sports were concerned about the falling standards or quality of education in Uganda, this indicative scenario would be analysed further to not only change the syllabi, examination system and imperial legacies in the education system, but to mandate the indigenous Ugandan languages to become the official languages of instruction and communication at all levels, not just primary. The problem of deteriorating standards in Literature in English, in particular; the Sciences and Arts in general would be understood more clearly once and for all once the language question is addressed.

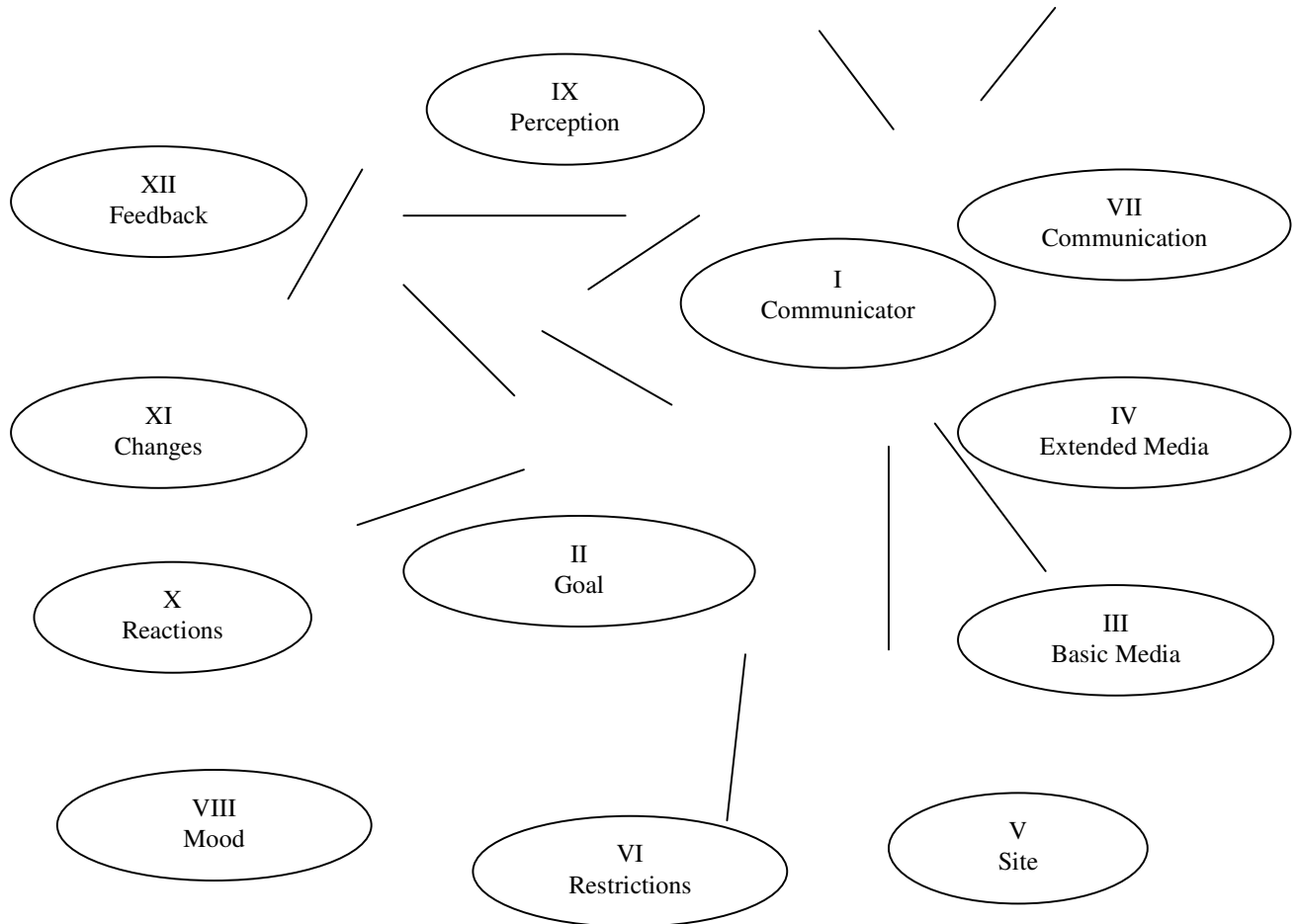
The feedback process that is as flawed as the examination criterion used to evaluate the students' potentialities at all the levels of our 'education system,' needs to be reviewed, and it is debatable if we have evolved a system as yet. There needs to be a clear understanding of the national goal for education, and language education in particular. In the first instance, the purpose of language is communication. Unless language achieves this purpose, then it is worthless for the students to study language and literature as subject.

IV LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

In this section, we discuss the issue of communication competence. Doob conceived that communication starts when a communicator, deliberately or not, seeks to communicate because he or she would achieve a goal (Doob 1961:12). The communication goal of teaching Literature in English, as opposed to any other Literature must be fully justified and understood by both the teacher and learner in order for change to occur.

Any developmental learning-teaching process of any Literature should have change of attitudes as one of its basic goals. Children or students should be encouraged or helped to become language users up to the required levels of competence if they are to use that language to great benefit. Although Literature is not about linguistics, the two cannot be put to so much distance apart without great damage to performance.

According to Doob's Attitude Change Model (1961:11), the goal of the communicator (II) depends largely on himself and his position in society (I) as well as upon what he has learned about the audience in the past (XII). The site at which an audience is located (V) influences the kinds of basic media to be employed (III) and may or may not require extending media (IV). The contents of a communication (VII) are affected by all sorts of taboos or restrictions (VI) and by the mood of the audience (VIII) whether or not changes occur in people (XI) can be traced on the way in which they perceive (IX) and react to (X) the communication.



Communication competence that relies on one's knowledge and appropriate use of the signs and symbols of a language (Semiotics [Hartmann 1972: 205]) demands that the student develops the ability to interpret the foreign signs and symbols. The possibility of one's communication competence in a foreign language depends on their interaction with the speech community and culture of the object language for a long time before they possibly become accepted as masters of such a language. Since the Ugandan students are only introduced to English Language and its literature late in life, and they do not even live in England or among the native English, they possibly would never become

competent enough to fully articulate or even understand the secrets and full knowledge of this language.

Communication competence entails at least four major fields, namely:

1. Grammatical competence (masterly of the language code)
2. Socio-linguistic Competence (appropriateness of utterances with respect both to meaning and form)
3. Discourse competence (masterly of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve unity of a spoken or written text)
4. Strategic competence (masterly of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies used to compensate for breakdowns in communication, and to make communication more effective. (Canale 1983: 9-10)

Therefore, Literature like any other subject should become productive in terms of being a household discipline of interest to warrant increased students' enrolment for it. As long as there is continued disparity between the students' acquisition of grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence in English language and literature in English, and their career goals and objectives, they will put this mode of the discipline aside. The mentally colonised have been critical on this matter saying that the Education standards have lowered because the students no longer get high grades in English and Literature in English and they have opted for what they have termed as 'simple useless vernacular subjects like Luganda'. This debate could be brought to a logical conclusion by asking another question.

Why The Poor Communication Competence?

The essence of man lies in his awareness of his Being and the Being is "Authentic" only when he is concerned about his motivation for doing so, when stormed by anxieties and conscience, when moved by awareness of the incommunicable, the unshakable (Heideggers 19...:366).

The semiology of the English language is far too foreign to any Ugandan child or student. Despite the many years this language has been within the country, it is not a predominant household or family language of communication. Learning to cope with its grammar, semiology, semantics and the Lexis becomes definitely far too much for a nursery, primary post-primary student, who would be expected to answer long questions about common things but in a foreign language. Having to think in one's native tongue and writing or answering in a foreign tongue is disturbing, confusing, dissatisfying and counters productive to human development. Foreign language interference is therefore, one of the main reasons for lowered educational standards and communication incompetence.

Hence, the relationship between the incidental knowledge and what is known is lacking the necessary motivation due to language inhibitions. Actualization of learning is as a

result not complete because what the child knows determines what they will learn is greatly suppressed. Our education system attempts to uproot the child right from home and makes little or no effort to plant them anywhere afterwards, hence, leading to massive unemployment, urban-rural migrations, negative attitude towards work, especially, at home and moral decay since the moral fibre (indigenous language) has been cut. Their environment universals that play a big role in what will be learned are the most ignored, therefore, leaving the individual empty and without hope except in returning to the roots.

V CONCLUSION

The 1999 'A' Level Candidates were naturally attracted to subjects like Literature in Luganda, History, Geography and Economics, which are familiar and address common life issues that are close enough or contextually relevant to the personal lives of the learner. Uganda's language legacy, which has put English above all the native languages of Uganda has crippled and in other circumstances killed the learners' abilities to be creative, imaginative and original. The declining enrolment and performance of students in Literature in English, therefore, is a development in the positive direction.

Uganda's indigenous languages should be used in the learning - teaching process for all the subjects and activities and at all levels in school and outside school through translations and interpretations. We have postponed our nationhood for too long. The price we shall continue to pay is reflected in the increasing levels of brain-drain, rural-urban migrations, disguised employment, white-collar job-seekers as opposed to self-made citizens who can interpret their acquired knowledge to harness their national cultural heritage and environment for human and economic development.

Such a legacy should be scrapped and replaced with a policy that promotes all the native languages of a nation like Uganda as official national languages to be freely used as tools of communication and instruction. I have not come across any Language Policy for Uganda, so I use the term 'legacy' for what seems to be taken for granted as 'policy'.

The inarticulate status quo of Uganda's elite on matters of national interest is grounded in the fact that they have been uprooted in all that humanly matters. Their self-esteem and love for this country (nationalism) is maladjusted towards the West through the English Language and the cultural influences it has come along with and this is called inferiority complex. The challenge does not, therefore, end at the falling standards and levels of enrolment for Literature in English. It translates into the declining moral standards, leading to gross abuses of children, women, office, life; corruption, lawlessness, recklessness in driving and sex life; irresponsible speeches, domestic violence, military dictatorships, political manipulations; rampant diseases and poverty to mention just a few.

Uganda Vision 2025 i.e. "Prosperous people, Harmonious Nation, Beautiful Country" will only be achieved if we get back to the known in order to seek the unknown. Our native languages and cultures for that matter, are the powerful tools with which this self-

knowledge, re-discovery and renaissance can become possible. The transcendence of Uganda's students and their teachers from the abyss of imperialism and poverty entails their affirmative denunciation or pronouncement, through their enrolment for 'A' level Literature in English or Luganda, that Mother Tongue and culture is supreme.

VI RECOMMENDATIONS

Ugandan children should be freed from the slavery of English. They should be free to speak, think perform and express themselves at all levels in their mother tongue for all communicative and evaluation purposes

All native languages in Uganda should be accorded the status of official languages without exception.

For purposes of wider communication, translations and interpretation should be offered as part of the national curriculum and at all levels of society

Literacy (reading and writing) of Mother Tongue must become priority in the literacy campaigns

Inter disciplinary language use / discourse should be encouraged e.g. using scientific facts in language / literature teaching in order to demystify the language of science and literature

Make mother language and Literature in L1 compulsory especially; using original literature texts and translations from English and other languages as part of the course.

Pupils must not be punished for speaking their mother tongue or any native language.

Instead, they should be encouraged to learn and master more native and foreign languages in addition to their own Mother Tongue.

Public speaking / oratory should be promoted through elocution, drama, riddling, proverbial discourse at all levels.

The examination syllabus for language and literature must have as the goal of examination, the testing of communication competence and eloquence, especially, to primary / local audiences

Learning and teaching should lay more emphasis on oral communication competence and eloquence than written examination as the case is at the present. UNEB should set the correct standards for this purpose.

The learner should be helped by the language / literature teacher to appreciate and identify with their own culture, vis-à-vis their career objective in order to specifically prepare them to serve their society better

Writing in Mother Tongue must become part and parcel of the language course.

Literature in separate or integrated subjects should become compulsory at all levels of our education system. They should enable every citizen to become deeply entrenched in their cultural background.

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