Educating for marginalization: Normative implications of the Malawian medium of instruction policy

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Abstract

In 2014 the Malawian Government amended its education policy to make English the sole medium of instruction from basic primary level to tertiary level. Prior to the amendment, the policy stated that the medium of instruction for the first four classes of basic education should be the dominant vernacular language in the local area, given Malawi's multilingualism. This paper critically examines the normative implications of the current policy. Using Seyla Benhabib's (2011) theory of communicative or concrete universalism, the article argues that this policy preserves and perpetuates a duo-pronged form of marginalization. In the first sense the policy marginalises the unprivileged majority students and communities for whom English is not even a second language, but also have almost non-existent opportunities for engaging the English language outside the school domain. The second form of marginalization occasioned by this policy pertains to the ultimate devaluation and extinguishing of concrete local ways of being human that are expressed through local culture, art and literature in favour of those associated with the English language. It is argued that such systematic forms of marginalization are a result and perpetuation of colonial behaviour that undermines local cultures, literature, and ways of being human as the necessary cost for having globally relevant education. Ultimately, it is contended that an ostensible need for choice for globally relevant education between the indigenous local and the Eurocentric global poses a false dilemma. Instead, ideal globally relevant education ought to centre on both local and global interests as a matter of moral necessity. The paper, therefore, proposes as a remedy to the moral ills caused by this policy, multilingual and translanguaging approaches to both national language and language of instruction policies. In this vein, an argument is made for deliberate, sustained and systematic support from the Malawian government towards the enhancement of local languages and local art and literature.

Keywords: Marginalization, Coloniality, Translanguaging, Multilingualism, Universalism Indigeneity, Global, Local, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we analyse the normative implications of Malawi's language of instruction policy of 2014, particularly, in the first four years of primary education. The policy states that English should be the sole medium of instruction even from lower primary education through post-secondary school education. The central argument in this article is that the policy that exclusively prioritizes English to the exclusion of local languages is normatively problematic and that the policy is informed by and serves to perpetuate coloniality. The paper shows that the policy is problematic in that given that mediums for access to out-of-school domains where English language is used in Malawi are limited to a small number of the population, the relatively advantaged population. For the majority, consistent and active engagement with English occurs in the school domain alone. Majority of the learners are disadvantaged except for the few privileged learners who have wider opportunities for engaging in the language. Secondly, borrowing from Seyla Benhabib's (2011) notions of universalism, we argue that such a policy is founded on and pursues a problematic conception of global universalism that other than exclude, ought to value and centre human difference as embedded in the otherness of indigenous languages. Furthermore, we argue that the marginalization of indigenous languages and their literature in principle undermines the fundamental basis upon which the speakers of the indigenous languages should be recognised and respected as concrete human beings who are part of the global community. To rectify the adverse normative implications of the policy, we argue that education in Malawi, especially at the primary level currently, must embrace a bilingual approach. More particularly education policy should encourage translanguaging so as not to render one language irrelevant for educational domains.

POLICY BACKGROUND: STEEPED IN COLONIALITY

The background of Malawi's language of instruction policy is complicated by different political interferences. European Christian missionaries introduced conventional education to Malawi in around 1858, 33 years prior to the establishment of the British colonial government (Murray, 1932; Pike, 1968). Despite its establishment in 1891, the colonial government only took formal control (though not substantively as reflected in financing the education) of education in 1926 (Hauya, 1997). For the 68 years that education was in principle and in practice managed by the church, the education was meant to serve missionary interests, especially proselytizing Africans and ensuring they are afterwards able to read the bible for grounding into the faith (Pike, 1968; Pachai, 1973). The other motivation was for natives to effectively participate in trade (Rafael, 1980). Such motivations for education providers, therefore, necessitated that the education should prioritize literacy in vernacular languages. As such, when the missionaries settled in different parts of the country with different dominant local languages, they promoted literacy in the dominant language of that particular area (Moyo, 2002). While people were being offered English language as a subject for upward mobility into the colonial government system, vernacular languages were also at the centre of basic education.

Upon establishment of the colonial government, Nyasaland as Malawi was known then, the government still largely pursued the agenda of primarily achieving literacy among the population with a focus on teaching English for those who were to pick up jobs in the public service. Profound direction of the language policy in Malawi after attaining independence in 1964 are grounded in the three months cabinet crisis soon after assumption of independence on 6th July 1964. Most senior cabinet ministers vehemently challenged the domestic and foreign policies and leadership styles of then prime minister Hastings Kamuzu Banda. In a quest to consolidate his grip on power, Kamuzu Banda systematically dismissed all the dissenting senior cabinet ministers who also happened to be the key drivers of the anti-colonialism movement. The key cabinet ministers and strong members of the movement were generally speaking from the cross-section of the nation in terms of tribal and linguistic origins. In a quest to consolidate power from 1964 onwards, language policies that were aimed at maintaining a hold on the nation aimed at creating a form of nationalism. In 1968 the then sole and ruling party declared Chichewa the national language for mass communication and education in the early years of basic education, while English remained the official language (Moyo, 2002, p. 265). It is worth noting that Chichewa was Kamuzu Banda's mother tongue. Worth noting is also the fact that there were equally other dominant languages such as ChiTumbuka, ChiTonga and ChiYao that were dominant in certain areas where they served both as medium of instruction and as regional lingua francas in the country (Moyo, 2002, p. 265).

The introduction of Chichewa as the sole language of mass communication and for the first four years of primary school was ostensibly aimed at building a nationality that was in principle alienating and exclusionary of other languages. With respect to other local languages and their role in the public domain such as in education, it is apparent that the post-colonial government policies resulted into more injustices and exclusion of the other languages than did the colonial government. Kamuzu Banda's one party government established a Chichewa Board that was ostensibly meant to develop the new national language, institutionalizing it and improving research about the language as well as expanding its lexicon. However, the board did not substantively serve its mandate and contributed very little towards the development of the Chichewa language (Moto, 1999). Besides, a further juxtaposition by the regime then was the national policy with respect to national certification. At the primary school leaving certificate examinations, junior certificate of education and the senior secondary school certificate, a pass in a designated number of any other subjects, with at least a pass in English, qualifies one for an award of the national certificate. On the other hand, a failure in the national language Chichewa is inconsequential in the awarding of a national certificate.

Although it ascended to power on the ideology and rhetoric of anti-colonialism, the one party regime still actively maintained the linguistic structures of coloniality. It is apparent that elevation of Chichewa as a national language was borne out of political ambition rather than ideological conviction. Proof of this is that there was no commitment as alluded to earlier to develop the lexicon of the language so that it meets the incessantly emerging demands of scientific and other forms of

issues that required a relevant language capacity to be expressed. It is ironic that the first vernacular dictionary in Malawi was first published in 2000, six years after Kamuzu Banda was ousted from office (Moto, 1999; Kishindo, 2001). One can easily argue, therefore, that Chichewa was elevated as part of a project for manufacturing artificial nationalism and patriotism, to preserve the one party dictatorship that clearly suffered legitimacy crisis.

Further evidence that the Banda regime actively retained coloniality in its policies is evidenced demonstrated by the dominant attitudes of Banda himself. In 1981 Kamuzu Banda opened a high school named Kamuzu Academy that then cost a minimum of GBP£15 million in construction, modelled on the prestigious Eton College in England (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 139). The school selected the best two primary school performers for each of the then 24 national districts. The European classical languages of Latin and Greek were compulsory subjects at the school. Students were required to recite prayers and grace in Latin (Moyo, 2002, p. 271). No vernacular language was taught in Malawi's most prestigious high school, neither was speaking vernacular languages even outside classrooms acceptable and was punishable (Nyamnjoh, 2012). Furthermore, the policy of the school repeatedly and publicly decreed and emphasized by Kamuzu Banda himself was to exclusively employ British teachers and never to employ a black African (Moyo, 2002, p. 270; Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 139).

As an anti-colonialism movement leader, Kamuzu Banda consistently contradicted the decolonial agenda in his outlooks. Throughout his presidency he never addressed a public rally in a vernacular language. He always addressed the public, even during political rallies, through an interpreter (Kamwendo, 1997). When this is analysed in the context of a dictatorial regime where the word of the powerful leader is law, his consistent public behaviours become model practice all must aspire for.

One of the injustices that the democratic dispensation aimed to address immediately after the fall of the one-party regime was re-affirmation of marginalised languages in Malawi. In 1996 the government declared that instruction in the first four of the eight years of primary education should be in the vernacular language dominant in the region in which the school is situated (Moyo, 2002, p. 270). The government also elevated Chitonga, Chitumbuka, Chiyao, Chilomwe and Chisena languages as national languages for mass communication and early basic education instruction (Moyo, 2002, p. 270). However, such policy decisions greatly lacked in terms of the requisite enabling resources and environment. For instance, there was no discernible commitment to ensure production of vernacular textbooks or teacher's guide books in each of these languages to aid teaching and learning as per the ambitions of the policies (Moyo, 2002). This expresses the underlying tokenism that was behind the language of instruction policy shift. More importantly, it shows the resilience of coloniality in education since the colonial ideology remained unchallenged. The lack of deliberate and explicit commitment to develop local languages is an expression of the dominance of coloniality.

While the independence and democratic eras were yet to confront the underlying coloniality in educational policy, the advent of globalization which itself embeds coloniality (Ramose,

2010; Andreotti, 2011; Papastephanou, 2015; Manthalu, 2019) has exerted a different form of pressure on educational policy in Malawi. In 2014 the government through parliament revised the education Act with respect to the language of instruction policy. The revised policy states that English shall be the medium of instruction from the first year of primary school education to the last level of education (Malawi Government, 2004, sec. 76 (2)a). The official justification for the policy shift was that Malawi was supposed to increase its competitiveness on the global arena (Masina, 2014; Nyondo, 2016). Put differently, Malawi was responding to the global demands for competitiveness. The contention being advanced in this paper is that such commitments to globality are normatively consequential for education communities in Africa. This is because globalization and its hegemonic languages of trade, science, and the internet are not value neutral metaphysically and epistemologically speaking. Rather such hegemonic languages, to a large extent, promote ideologies that are consistent with coloniality. In this age of the internet when human life is significantly dependent on the internet, the scanty presence of African and Malawian indigenous languages is not arbitrary nor is it normatively inconsequential. Such an absence also extends to the value and appreciation of vernacular literature. This is what the next sections show. The next section challenges the promotion of the global at the expense of the local, which is the overt characteristic of the prevalent globalization.

Principles of communicative universalism

What is usually at the heart of the debate regarding linguistic hegemony of global languages such as English in teaching and learning is whether such developments are normatively problematic. This section aims at providing the theoretical grounds for determination as to whether linguistic domination that excludes other languages is normatively problematic. The proliferation of global languages such as English and its attendant domination in pedagogy in Malawi and Africa is largely reducible to the question of universalism.

Global interconnectedness is no longer an imaginary reality. As the recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown, humanity across the world is more intensely connected than ever before. Globalization has thrived on the idea of the normative and pragmatic implications of global interconnectedness. The dominance of English language in education in Africa is largely owed to the pragmatic necessity of having a shared world language through which the diverse peoples of the world will interact and understand the other. However, this pragmatic necessity for a global language, has raised normative problems. Firstly, the global, epistemological dominance of English is grounded in a legacy of coloniality. Secondly, it is problematic in that the dominance simultaneously entails an exclusion of local languages.

This section attributes the dominance of global languages in education in Malawi to the influence of coloniality that still drives the education agenda in Malawi and much of Africa. The epistemological decisions about the universalism of English as a global

language, is grounded in a problematic conceptualization of universalism. Such a problematic conceptualization of universalism understands human existence as pertaining to two, generally antagonistic or incompatible, aspects of being: the subjective versus the objective. In education policies, this trend manifests as the particular local versus the universal global. Education policies as the one in Malawi, in the name of pursuit for global relevance and competitiveness, ignores the normative cost resulting from the current inevitable undermining of elements of localness such as local languages, local literature, and local experiences.

One of the challenges facing universalism is the question of cultural diversity across the globe. Often, there is fear of cultural imperialism. While traditionally, the idea of universalism is grounded in the fact that human beings have several fundamental rights, Seyla Benhabib holds that the most fundamental and free non-variant right, unlike other human rights, is the right to communicative freedom. Universalism must be anchored in how we understand what being human is. For Benhabib (2011), much of the discourse on human rights, human equality and moral universalism is grounded in a generalized conception of human nature. Under this conception, universalism is based on the generalities about human beings, in other words, what is common about all human beings. Such a conception of universalism, informed by Cartesian objective versus subjective dualism only values commonalities, deemed to be objective, across human beings whilst it undermines subjective experiences as being non-universalizable (Code, 2012). The foundation of this universalism is that it prizes impartiality as a means of eliminating particular differences which are ostensibly an inappropriate basis for objective values. The challenge with this 'Generalized' conception of universalism for Benhabib is that it ignores what actually individuates an actual concrete human being.

What makes a human being feel fully recognised and respected by others lies beyond mere similarities in the common possession of common faculties, capacity to exercise freewill, and having rational self-interests (Benhabib, 1992; Held, 2006; Code, 2012). Rather, the elements of individuation recognition of which makes the individual feel recognised as a particular human being not one of many resides in the differences and peculiarities one has which set one apart from the rest. Thus, what individuates people and makes them feel recognised by others is more than the common possession of reason and ability to self-determine as autonomous moral agents. While possession of reason is a common and shared property of being human, for Benhabib it is the product of the exercise of the reason, results of exercise of self-determination that are constitutive of who one is. As she holds, individual identity does not refer to one's "potential for choice alone, but to the actuality of my choices, namely to how I, as a finite, concrete, embodied individual, shape and fashion the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as my life's story" (Benhabib, 1992, pp. 161–162). Unlike the generalised form of universalism that is founded on an abstraction of commonalities, the concrete form of universality is grounded in difference other than mere commonality and therefore "does not deny our embodied and embedded identity" as concrete other than abstract human beings (Benhabib, 1992, p. 153).

While the predominant universalism grounded in Cartesian dualism of the objective versus subjective grounds our respect of the other as an obligation of universalism based on abstract projections about possession of rational capacities, concrete universalism on the other hand in its difference-centric approach does not project what makes the other human and worth of equal moral respect. Rather it demands engaging the other, for the other to self-define, which is a concrete, as opposed to abstract, expression of the possession of reason and autonomy (Benhabib, 1992). At the centre of this approach therefore is that the other self-articulates who they are, as an embodied being. One should respect not only the ability of the other to self-determine or self-express. Rather one only respects them when one acknowledges and respects the value they attach to the ideals of their self-definition.

The most crucial nature of a concrete universalism standpoint is that it is essentially interactive. It is communicative because what makes the other an individual, does not pertain to the realm of the objective. It pertains to the subjective realm. Since it pertains to the subjective realm, it cannot be predicted or assumed. One has to engage the other in such a manner where the other self-defines, in order to comprehend what makes the other to be fully recognised as a moral person.

Human communities just like the individual have social, cultural, historical and economic situatedness (Miller, 1995; MacIntyre, 2002; Papastephanou, 2015). Such communities share certain metaphysical, epistemological, cultural and normative values even though such values are always under contestation for refinement (Taylor, 2003; Papastephanou, 2013). What this entails is that at the global level both the individual as well as communities need to be understood from a concrete universalism standpoint other than merely a generalised standpoint. More profoundly, while acknowledging the value of common interests or rights for all humanity, the concrete universalism standpoint demands that universalism must primarily be grounded in differences across human communities of the world.

The language policy and students' marginalization

One of the challenges of the Malawi language of instruction policy is that it assumes that English is merely a neutral medium of communication that everyone can acquire and easily use purely for communication purposes only. In Malawi 84% of the population live in the rural areas (National Statistics Office, 2018, p. 11). Furthermore, 89% of the population does not use electricity for lighting in their houses (National Statistics Office, 2018, p. 33). Furthermore, 52% of households had access to mobile phones, 16 % had access to the Internet while television access is at 12% (National Statistics Office, 2018, p. 37). Literacy rate in Malawi stands at 69% (National Statistics Office, 2018, p. 21). While the 2008 and 2018 census reports did not include questions of mother tongue and commonly used home languages, the 1998 population census reported that 70% of the population used a local language Chichewa for home communication while 0.2% also use English as a home language (National Statistics Office of Malawi, 1998, p. 33). What all these statistics reveal is that the majority of Malawian household domains do not use English as language of home communications. More significantly, the

majority of the population does not have access to consistent and adequate means of exposure to the English language that would facilitate its acquisition given that language learning does not occur in a vacuum. Looked at this way, there is a glaring gap for most learners between the language of instruction in the school and the language of the home. Before attempting to make sense of subject content, learners have to firstly struggle with English language comprehension and expression for effective learning to take place.

Language is not a neutral vehicle of communication that conveys impartial ideas only. Rather, language acquisition requires a fair familiarity with the cultures associated with the language. As Gay (2000, p. 79) holds, "culture is the rule-governing system that defines the forms, functions, and content of communication". This is so because language is the means through which a person ciphers, analyses, classifies into conceptual categories and interprets experiences (Gay, 2000). Furthermore, "languages and communication styles are systems of cultural notations and the means through which thoughts and ideas are expressively embodied" (Gay, 2000, p. 81). As early as the first four years of basic education in Malawi, disadvantaged learners from a radically different language and socio-cultural background are in principle compelled to discard the communicative reference frames of their community which means discarding or unlearning protocols for different procedures, etiquette rules and discourse systems of the language they are so familiar with in order to embrace aspects of English, the language of education. What this entails is that in principle, to be educated, is to unlearn your local language in preference for the international. However, the use of mother tongue instruction in the early 4 years of basic education has been the edifice upon which Malawian education has been, arguably, successfully built for about 50 years. This is, despite this local language policy not being as linguistically just as it ought to have been. Besides, had local languages been developed to manage to express modern developments, it would have been possible to have the entire basic education taught in vernacular languages.

More often than not, reasons of local languages being incapable of serving official roles are blown out of proportion. There are many roles that local languages can play alongside English. In a study inquiring the use of local languages in Malawian parliament, Matiki (2003) established that more than 70% percent of interviewed legislators indicated they are restrained from participating in debate due to limited proficiency in English and more than 60% indicated they would participate if deliberations were in vernacular. It is normatively unjustifiable for a country, 70% of whose population use a major vernacular as a home language, to be conducting parliamentary deliberation exclusively in English that is spoken by less than 40% of the country's population (National Statistics Office of Malawi, 1998). Kishindo (2001) also indicts the legal profession in Malawi for its adherence to use of English when it can use vernacular languages too though not exclusively. Affirming the value of local languages in the legislative and legal domains is not tied up to international interests. In other words, the Malawian government has the mandate of effecting a multi-lingual official language policy. The question is why can the governed not effect a multilingualism policy in the official domains without necessarily waiting for the development of the

languages' lexicon in the long term? The answer is reducible to the fact that the colonial denigration of the local from official domains endures.

A commitment to international and global relevance is coming at the cost of the local. The concrete experiences of the learner are deemed as irrelevant if not inimical to learning for modern progress. The quest to have universal values in our education system is simultaneously and necessarily extinguishing localness. Ultimately, for a Malawian learner to learn, the ignition precondition is that they must extinguish what individuates them as a concrete person. Their communicative being must be dropped and must embrace a common one, a generalised one. To be educated in this case necessarily requires one to marginalise the linguistic sources of one's concrete being as a particular embodied being situated in a given linguistic community that provides a lens through which one can make meaning of reality and one's own existence.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE POLICY ON LITERATURE AND INDIGENEITY

Apart from marginalizing the disadvantaged learners who have no consistent access to domains where English as a language is used, the language of instruction policy has fundamental normative implications on being human, Malawian and African. As Benhabib (1992, pp. 161–162) argues, sources of individual concreteness include such socially embedded elements that are reasonably constitutive of my being "as a finite, concrete, embodied individual" who shapes and is fashioned by "the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as my life's story". It is, however, worth noting that the sources of individual concreteness are generally collectively shared and preserved by the community (Kymlicka, 2002; MacIntyre, 2002; Miller, 2002; Taylor, 2003; Benhabib, 2011).

While a generalised conceptualization of universalism regards differences across communities as normatively inconsequential, the concrete universalism standpoint values the ideals, perspectives, values, and shared way of life of the community, though usually under incessant contestation in order to rid them of any oppressive elements. In this context, language is therefore regarded not as a mere values-neutral mechanical instrument that only relays ideas. Rather, language is an individual's and peoples' medium of experiencing and expressing reality (Coetzee, 2003, p. 208). Through "[d]iscourse logic and dynamics, delivery, styles, social functions, role expectations, norms of interaction, and non-verbal features" (Gay, 2000, p. 79), a particular language embeds and expresses individual and collective values as well as perspectives of reality that may not always be conveyed by another language without compromising the values. A language is inseparable from and indeed intertwined with the shared cultural and historical embeddedness of an individual. The concrete individual is situated in this historical, cultural, and linguistic context, from which she or he derives self-identity by among others contesting and reconstituting these values.

One of the fundamental and shared features of human communities is that they are historical in nature. Human communities have a historical origin that starts from a distant past characterised by events and memories that not only

bond different individuals into the community in which they are, but the people today are obliged to preserve the history and the culture it creates for the future (Miller, 1995). Shared histories of communities highlight both the accomplishments and failures of the forebearers which current members of the community recognise, take pride in, are ashamed of and or draw lessons from (Kymlicka, 1997, p. 21). Such histories and shared cultures though always going through contestations, are expressed through the language of the community (Coetzee, 2003). It is in this vein that language is constitutive of the concreteness of the individual as well as the community. The problem with educational policies that marginalise local languages is that in principle they exclude and undermine local sources of concrete being. This is consistent with the colonial ideology whose landmark feature is that it undermines indigeneity.

Origins of national groups are traceable to a very distant past whose events and memories not only bond different individual members, but also urges them to keep preserving the historical past for the future. The nation's history captures both the accomplishments and failures of the ancestors, which the present members of the nation recognize, take pride in, and where necessary feel ashamed of (Kymlicka, 2002). Language is the form which captures the histories, culture, art and literature of a people (Wa Thiong'o, 1987; Nkeokelonye, 2019). This being the case the more indigenous languages are systematically marginalised from educational domains, the more their cultures and histories die (Wa Thiong'o, 1987; Seema, 2016). In principle the marginalisation of indigenous languages extinguishes the sources of the people's concreteness as individual human beings and as global communities. One, therefore, infers that the language of instruction policy in Malawi is founded on and promotes a normatively problematic form of universalism for globalisation that undermines and devalues indigeneity. By systematically marginalising people's concreteness this type of universalism denies the people recognition as particular individuals and particular communities.

Denial of the concreteness of others through extinguishing their literature is consistent with coloniality. Colonialism systematically undermined local cultures and literature. In as much as African literature can as well be presented in English, it is still worth bearing in mind that there is some form of authenticity and peculiarity in literature that can hardly be translated in another language without diluting its force (Wa Thiong'o, 1987; Shitemi, 2012; Mphande, 2020). The exclusion and extinguishing of indigenous languages are so consistent with coloniality that expressed itself through colonialism. Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). It is "an invisible power structure, an epochal condition, and epistemological design, which lies at the centre of the present Euro-North American-centric modern world" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 488).

At the global level it expresses itself through domination and control, typically structuring phenomena in epistemic hierarchies of the relevant vs the irrelevant or the superior vs the inferior (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 487). This hierarchical ranking is

ultimately reducible to the Cartesian objective versus objective binary. In this sense African literature which is part of indigeneity gets marginalised as lacking literary superiority and in principle expendable. The language of instruction policy is therefore eliminating sources of concrete being in its pursuit of a generalised form of universalism. The policy is undermining the value of indigeneity which is so different from the mainstream. As things are, the language of instruction policy in Malawi that ought to enhance the concreteness of being human and its possible free becoming, is in principle promoting deletion of what constitutes individuality.

Bilingualism: Extinguishing false dilemmas

What this article has managed to show is that the language of instruction policy in Malawi marginalizes students who are disadvantaged, undermines their concreteness which ought to be the ideal basis for universalism, it undermines the sources of concreteness for the people especially their literature and culture. This article has shown that what is particularly problematic about this policy is not merely its utility towards effective and efficient teaching and learning in the school. More importantly it is the normative implications arising out of denying Malawian and African concreteness. We have argued that this policy has implications on the sustenance and development of Malawian literature in vernacular languages. What is happening in principle is that being educated is reducible to eliminating localness and indigeneity. Extinguishing the normative value of local literature and history through exclusion of indigenous languages is the ultimate cost a learner has to pay to access education that is globally relevant and competitive. The assumption of the policy is that vernacular languages are inferior and irrelevant in as far as the global domain is concerned. Putting phenomena in a hierarchy of relevance or superiority is the typical nature of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). A critic would retort by claiming that the preference for English over indigenous languages is necessitated by the pragmatism of globalization, and that the exclusion is not a statement approving of the normative implications of the policy. Rather it is only that both goods cannot be had at the same time.

Such an argument, however, is reducible to a wrong comparison between goods belonging to radically distinct categories: a category mistake. The normativity of indigenous languages and literature as sources of individual and social concreteness cannot be compared with the global utility of English. The two are distinct. Furthermore, this criticism in principle promotes what is common about human beings in the global arena while deleting what is subjective to particular communities yet the subjective is constitutive of the people. It is in a sense promoting generalised form of universalism over the concrete form of universalism that centres difference. It is in this vein that this article contends that the two languages can exist simultaneously without comprising the normative value and utility of either language.

This paper dismisses the choice between global-ness and localness in education as a false choice. It is worth emphasizing that the position of this paper is not that vernacular languages should substitute English, nor that English should be removed from education. Rather the point is that commitments to global life should not undermine commitments to local life. The position of this paper is that

just as Benhabib's (2011) generalised universalism is incomplete but must acknowledge its limitations and give room to a concreteness grounded universalism, so too should the utility of English be understood in terms of its limitations in education which necessitates centring of indigenous languages too.

In this paper we, therefore, contend that Malawi and other African countries in a similar education policy context should embrace translanguaging. Translanguaging "creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience." (Wei, 2011, p. 1222). Translanguaging enables translation of cultures between traditions take place … where different identities, values and practices [do not] simply co-exist, but combine together to generate new identities, values and practices" (Wei, 2011, p. 1222). Translaguaging is founded on the assumption that languages of bilinguals have no clear-cut boundaries between them (Garcia, 2009). Translaguaging therefore eliminates the exclusion of indigeneity and concreteness constituted in local languages. Demands for the centring of African languages ought not to be conceived as a repulsion of Euro-centric epistemology. Rather the centring is an effort aimed at challenging the subtle but systematic subordination, by hegemonic epistemological paradigms, of African languages in education, in order to ultimately promote a mutually respectful cultural hybridity of ostensibly non-coexistent approaches to knowledge for a globalised world (Mungwini, 2016, p. 529).

More importantly, Malawi and other African governments must exercise the reasonable authority global forces have left them which can have impactful effects. There is a need for deliberate policies to affirm the value of local languages. This can be achieved by, among others, according some official status to local languages. For instance, enacting a bilingual policy which allows local languages to be used throughout the 8 years of primary school alongside English. Arguably, most of the concepts being taught at the primary school level are not as sophisticated as the other upper levels such that local languages cannot have the capacity to convey them. All this ultimately points to the need for the Malawi government to purposefully develop local languages as an incessant project.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the current language of instruction policy in Malawi is influenced by a globalization that is grounded in a wrong conceptualization of universalism. The policy marginalizes disadvantaged students. Besides, in principle it also requires as a necessity for modern globally relevant education, extinguishing the normativity of indigeneity as expressed through language. By necessarily and systematically excluding aspects of localness such as local literature, history, and culture, as the cost for having globally relevant education, the policy serves coloniality. The policy therefore undermines and renders as inferior sources of indigeneity. An ideal universalism that ought to inform globalization must start with and centre on what differentiates the different people of the world. What differentiates them is what individuates them as

individuals and communities. Ignoring what differentiates them is denying them recognition and respect as equal human beings of the diverse global community. There is an urgent need to revise not only Malawi's language of instruction policy, but the national language policy as well. Both policies ought to centre indigeneity which can partly be achieved through having bilingual multilingual official language policies so that indigenous languages should be used in domains where they can be but are not being used. Apart from the long-term project of developing and building the capacity of local languages for use at the higher education level, educational domains should employ translanguaging approaches to pedagogy, so that there should be no domination of one language by another and that both languages should interactively contribute to teaching and learning.

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