English Language and Career Development in African Higher Education: An Overview

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Abstract

The internationalization of higher education in most countries is linked to the "global interests" that supplement the supremacy of the English language above academic research functions including conventional research and publications. This paper aims to (1) describe the rationale behind the adoption of the English language in higher education, and (2) to understand the relationship between the English language and career development at African universities. This overview article analyzed relevant resources sourced from databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science from January 2022 to July 2022 using the PQRS framework as an analytical tool. The analysis of the academic resources identified five main reasons for the adoption of the English language adoption in African universities: ideology, institutional integration, the knowledge society; globalization, and financial dependence. However, there are diverse views about the effect of the English language and career development in universities in Portuguese-speaking countries such as Mozambique. The paper concludes with challenges of English adoption and improvement of language policy schemes for research and publication in a Portuguese-speaking university.

Keywords: higher education, English language, career development, internationalization, language policy

1. Introduction

Language is pivotal to knowledge production as it promotes scholarly engagement and knowledgeable academic discourse (Altbach et al., 2019). The existing definitions of Language encompasses (Badger & Malcolm, 2007; Bourdieu,1991; Lemberg, 2018; Miller, 2004; Spolsky & Shohamy, 2000). The demographic composition of language varies across different regions of the world. Relatedly, Africa is endowed with a complex and diverse language demography but broadly categorized into French, English, and Portuguese with at least 160 indigenous languages often employed in day-to-day conversations or communal interactions (Moti, 2019; Plonski et al., 2013; Rabiah, 2018). The complexity of languages in Africa is exacerbated by the footprint of colonial influence such that languages are imposed by European colonialists (Kamwangamulu, 2013; Adejunmobi, 2008). The limitations of previous studies on Language in Africa often refer to the colonially imposed language structure that has been attributed to the elitist status in the various systems of government and by extension being the acceptable *lingua franca* including the print and electronic media (e.g. French, English, and Portuguese) (Maatta, 2018; Ramaswamy et al., 2021). In academia, African languages due to their lack of uniformity (Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014) have not enjoyed the same status as the colonially imposed languages and have been substituted with

the promotion of the English language under the concept of the "internationalization of higher education" (HE) (Baker, 2017; de Wit, 2019; Lau & Lin, 2017; Postel et al., 2020).

The advent of colonialism resulted in the introduction and imposition of a new language policy in African HE for communication, teaching, and learning (Garcia & Otheguy, 2020; Elyas & Picard, 2018). Universities in Africa were mostly established by colonialist Europeans hence the default language of teaching and learning is delivered in a colonial language (Mijts, 2021; Altbach et al., 2019). However, in Africa's HE, approaches to the English Language have been reported to exhibit disparities in comparison between British universities and non-British colonizers (Gradim & Pineiro- Naval, 2019; Engelberg-Stolberg, 2017). For instance, Mozambique is one of the African countries with more than 20 native languages spoken in 11 provinces, plus Portuguese, the official language, and English, the third- language (Liphola, 1989; Lopes, 1998). This is due to the growth of language policy for knowledge production and international scholarly engagement factors (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Macedo, et al., 2015).

Academic institutions in Africa especially those within the category of non-English speaking have been reported to experience limited global opportunities in scholarly information dissemination. This is because the footprints of colonial influence concerning the language of teaching and learning as well as the non-alignment of such language against the globally acceptable language of communication have been a career restriction for emerging scholars within non-English speaking institutions (Nygaard, 2017; Teferra, 2008). In the case of Mozambique which is a Southern African country, the language of teaching and learning is Portuguese (Langa, 2013; Lopes, 1998), and this is due to Mozambique being a former colony of Portugal. The existing institutions of higher learning in Mozambique have in recent times aimed to position themselves in the global domain of scholarly engagement through research collaboration and outputs (eg. Bilateral research cooperation program funded by Swedish International Development Cooperation-SIDA: 2017-2025) (Universidade Eduardo Mondane, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the English language and career development in African HE, with a particular focus on Mozambique. In essence, this study will seek to understand the role of international language policy as a governance tool concerning Portuguese as the medium of research and instruction in Mozambique HE The focal question to be answered in this study is *"How does international language policy promote research career development among academics in Mozambique and the impact of international language policy on governance among HE institutions in Mozambique"?*

2. Methodology

The process of searching for scholarly resources in the form of articles was conducted for seven months from January 2022 to July 2022 using a preview, question, read, and summarize (PQRS) approach (Ekaningrum et al., 2017). The choice of using the PQRS approach is informed by its versatility and capability to streamline scholarly resources through a pre-screening process prior to searching in various databases. As such the design of questions being anticipated to be answered constitutes the core of the PQRS approach. The reviewed resources were selected using criteria through identification, analytical assessment, and synthesis (Machi & McEvoy, 2021). The scope of scholarly articles being searched entails all published articles in peer-reviewed journals within the field of hegemony of the English language, career development, and languages as the medium of research and instruction in African Universities. Additionally, the eligibility criteria of the searched articles were considered based on the following: (i) Keywords, (ii) Year of publication, (iii)

Language of publication (only English), (v) Africa HE, and (iv) Language Policy. Also, the scholarly search utilized main databases that are discipline-specific and multi-discipline oriented such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. The search was not limited to peer-reviewed articles but book chapters, and books. The scholarly resources that did not follow the above characteristics were rejected based on an unrelated subject matter, being different from the research course. The analysis of scholarly resources obtained was conducted using the content synthesis method supported by Ekaningrum et al., (2017). Through this method, key discussions and conclusions were captured.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, presented as data that approach and critique the use of the English language in Portuguese-speaking universities by assessing the career development process of academics, and the ones that present the critique based on supremacy, language policy, and ideological bases of the English language.

3.1. Career Development

A career refers to "the totality of work-paid and unpaid one does in his/her lifetime" (Walker et al., 2019, p.10). It also means job, occupation, or vocation which cannot be used interchangeably. Career focuses on individuals' various paid roles but, also recognizes volunteer or unpaid roles as part of careers (Walker et al., 2019). Savickas' career construction theory revealed that career development is a socially constructed process (Bloch, 1995; Savikas, 2013, 2005). It allows for individual personality types and varying interests, individual styles and adaptations when handling work transitions, and the use of individual users to impose meaning on work (Bloch, 1995; Savikas, 2013, 2005). According to Bloch (1995) and Savickas (2013, 2005), career adaptability is dominant to achieve career satisfaction. It suggests five steps for helping individuals construct their story: construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, construction, and action. Career development for research collaboration and outputs could be explained in a multi-layered context such that academics within HE are expected to explore opportunities that will enhance career growth. This includes skill capacitation through language learning especially for countries such as Mozambique with marginal English language usage. This approach can foster individual language knowledge enhancement, and consequently overall research dissemination through scholarly publications. In essence, career development when aligned with research engagement, collaboration, and outputs has the potential to increase scholarly footprints for individuals and the affiliated institution.

3.2. English Language and Career Development

English language in Africa encloses several influential elements, namely foreign scholarship allocations to the higher education sector, and the mechanisms utilized to assess academic career development (Smitherman, 2021; Mazrui, 2019). Regarding the current language of universities, analysis by AL-Khalil (2015), Altbach (2007) and Zinchenko (2020) reported that the adoption of the English language resulted from the internationalization of higher education specifically for African universities from countries where English is a foreign language. Regardless of this process, human resources management has significantly influenced international higher education standards. However, the English language dominates higher education and sets disadvantages for academic researchers' career development in African countries whose first and second languages are not English (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Sperduti, 2017). Some studies in the post-colonial context argued that post-

colonial low-income countries use English in tertiary education (Kalyanpuri, 2020; Milligan &Tikly, 2016). A mitigating strategy could be to develop institutional capacity development initiatives that are milestone-oriented and targeted at academics. This is a viable pathway in demonstrating institutional support and promoting internationalization. In addition, stakeholders' engagement, and participation through robust interaction in the form of a bottom-up approach can be explored as well as inter-institutional collaborations through Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) and the design of the program for academic and postgraduate mobility to conduct exchange programs between institutions especially from global South to global North.

3.3   The Hegemony of the English Language

It was discovered that linguistic hegemony is a consensus, standardization, and normalization created by dominant groups on the choice of language to be adopted by minority groups (George Mwangi, 2021; Langum & Sullivan, 2017; Tsuda, 2007; Uekusa, 2019). Language hegemony refers to the acceptance and usage of specific language by dominant groups against minority groups (Bamberger et al., 2019; Karim et al., 2021; Mayo, 2022; Uekusa, 2019). This concept sets a philosophical framework whereby the power relations between dominant and minority groups deserve exploration, specifically focusing on how the dominant group secures its power and position (Bourdieu, 1991; Marco et al., 2018; Zeng & Guo, 2019). The subject of linguistic hegemony and language dominance has been raised in many studies in the twentieth century. The common denominator among these studies appears to be the linguistic hegemony of English as a global language and the survival of the other languages of the world (Akujobi, 2019; Bamgbose, 2019; Muhammad, et al. 2018; Zarei et al., 2019). Although language hegemony is not synonymous with the dominance and safeguarding of scholarly languages (English, French, among others), the choice of specific languages for scholarly communication implies that non-speakers of such scholarly languages will require a wholistic strategy in the forms of policy formulation and implementation including institutional governance mechanism being developed and operationalize as a standardized practice of such English language among academic and other relevant stakeholders.

3.4   English Language as the Medium of Research and Instruction in African Universities

The concept of internationalization in higher education has become a crucial educational issue within global higher education institutions (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Knight & De Wit, 2018). Studies pointed out that, the adoption of an international language, i.e. English, has rapidly increased worldwide, particularly in Africa (Ding & Bruce, 2017; de Wit et al., 2017; Tsui et al., 2017). For example, when Hokkaido University was established in 1876, an American professor developed its first curriculum, and all classes and research were conducted in English (Yamanaka & Shimamura, 2017). Introducing English programs with scholarship incentives is a deliberate initiative to attract academically competent international students (Robson &Wihlborg, 2019; Manakul, 2007). In most graduate schools of Engineering, for instance, English as a medium of instruction in its graduate program has played an important role in the internationalization of higher education.

4.   Discussion

Studies investigating the internationalization of higher education reveal that the English language is a major concern as it imposes a universal academic system for career development, including its adoption in non-English speaking African universities (Fishman,

2017; Huang & Curle, 2021; Seeber, 2022; Sooryamoorthy, 2018). This focus on the English language and the role it plays in career development shows a continuity from the previous literature exploring the topic of the effects of policy on English-medium instruction in Africa and worldwide (de wit & Altbach, 2021; Huo, 2020; Lau & Lin, 2017; Macedo, 2017; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2017; Kamwangamalu, 2013). Therefore, it could be argued the need to investigate the role of a structured agreement of the language policy in practice for English language learning, research, and publication as applicable in Portuguese-speaking universities (Henry, 2017; Leibowitz, 2015; Langa, 2013; Wiley & Garcia, 2016). Nevertheless, this is not a ″hot potato″ to European and American systems. Also, it has become imperative to investigate other associated factors such as sociolinguistic, socioeconomic, language diversity, and inclusion and interpretation of HE internationalization mechanisms (Robson & Wihlborg, 2019; Ushioda, 2017; Valcke, 2020; Verbik, 2007; Yevudey & Agbozo, 2019). As postulated by Kathleen Heugh et al. (2017); Popescu (2015); Tusting et al. (2019) and Yeung (2020) language factors impacting career opportunities in HE need to be considered in the context of the country and the composition of language diversities including ethnic groups.

5. Conclusion

One of the major outcomes of this overview research is that the majority of the investigation on the use of the English language and career development in African universities focuses on African English-language-speaking universities. The findings indicated that the English language has generally been established as a medium of instruction in post-colonial countries and as the language for research and knowledge production at the international level. The key finding of this study shows that the use of post-colonial language which is exclusively in Portuguese language is responsible for non-utilization or limited use of English language for scholarly communication in Portuguese-speaking African universities. This in itself is self-limiting because it denies the prospect of internationalization of Mozambique's Higher Education Institutions' global integration.

In conclusion, the future of higher education for Portuguese-speaking sub-Saharan African universities is unpredictable. Nevertheless, several possibilities exist, including significant growth in academic researchers' failure to write and publish in peer-reviewed journals and failure to apply for grants, and scholarships from English language sponsors and to establish academic networks at the international level. Future studies can explore the use of institutional framework and language policy modification as a benchmark for academic career development. Also, future studies can experiment on the use of robust inter-institutional mobility exchange programs for academics and a feasibility study on the initiation of postgraduate programs that are exclusively in the English Language could be investigated.

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