



Decolonization and Global Englishes: A sociolinguistic analysis of post-colonial language attitudes and identity formation in East African Nations

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between decolonization movements and the evolution of global Englishes in post-colonial East African societies, specifically examining how language attitudes and identity formation have been shaped by the legacy of colonialism. The research employed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews with 524 participants across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. A standardized Language Attitude Scale (LAS) was administered to assess attitudes toward English, local languages, and colonial linguistic legacies. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed statistically significant differences in language attitudes across age groups ($F(3,520)=8.42, p<0.001$) and educational backgrounds ($F(2,521)=12.67, p<0.001$). Thematic analysis of 128 qualitative interviews identified five dominant patterns: linguistic identity negotiation, language as a marker of post-colonial aspiration, code-switching as pragmatic survival, the persistence of colonial linguistic hierarchies, and the emergence of localized English variants. The findings demonstrate that decolonization has not resulted in the simple replacement of English with indigenous languages; rather, it has created complex multilingual ecologies where English functions simultaneously as a legacy of colonialism and as a tool for economic mobility and global participation. This paradox reflects deeper tensions in post-colonial language policy and identity formation. The study contributes to theoretical understandings of how linguistic decolonization operates in practice and provides evidence-based insights for educational policy-makers in post-colonial contexts. The research highlights the need for culturally responsive language policies that acknowledge rather than suppress the complexity of post-colonial linguistic realities.

Keywords: Decolonization, global englishes, post-colonial linguistics, language attitudes, identity formation, east africa, language policy

Introduction

The relationship between colonialism, decolonization, and the persistence of English in formerly colonized nations remains one of the most contested issues in contemporary sociolinguistics. While the formal political decolonization of African nations occurred during the mid-to-late twentieth century, the linguistic dimensions of decolonization remain fundamentally incomplete ^[1]. English, inherited from colonial administrations, continues to dominate educational systems, governmental institutions, and professional spheres across East Africa, despite explicit decolonization initiatives and language policy reforms ^[2]. This persistent linguistic legacy contradicts the ideological promise of decolonization as a comprehensive process of cultural, political, and linguistic liberation.

The concept of "Global Englishes" refers to the multiplicity of English varieties that have emerged across different geographical and cultural contexts as a result of English's global expansion, particularly through colonialism and subsequent globalization ^[3]. Global Englishes scholarship challenges the notion of a single, standardized English, instead recognizing diverse forms of English that reflect local linguistic systems, cultural values, and communicative practices ^[4]. However, the theoretical frameworks of Global Englishes have been critiqued for insufficiently engaging with the power asymmetries embedded within the spread of English and the historical processes of colonialism that enabled its global dominance ^[5]. A decolonial approach to Global Englishes must grapple with how English functions simultaneously as a tool of continued colonial domination

and as a resource for subaltern communities seeking access to global economic and social systems.

Post-colonial nations in East Africa provide particularly rich sites for examining these tensions. Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania all experienced British colonial rule and subsequently adopted English as an official or co-official language despite independence movements that emphasized nation-building through indigenous languages ^[6]. The subsequent decades have witnessed complex negotiations between English and local languages including Swahili, Kikuyu, Luganda, and numerous others. Language policies have oscillated between promoting indigenous languages and maintaining English, yet English has consistently retained institutional dominance ^[7]. This pattern raises critical questions about the mechanisms through which linguistic hierarchies established during colonialism persist after political independence, and how communities navigate the apparent contradiction between decolonial aspirations and the pragmatic necessity of English proficiency in post-colonial societies.

Previous research has established that language attitudes are crucial indicators of linguistic behavior and language maintenance or shift ^[8]. Studies of language attitudes in post-colonial African contexts have generally focused either on documented policy positions or on isolated community perspectives, with limited integration of individual attitudes into broader frameworks of post-colonial identity formation ^[9]. Furthermore, while substantial scholarship examines Global Englishes as linguistic phenomena—documenting phonological, grammatical, and lexical features of English

varieties—comparatively fewer studies examine the social psychological dimensions of how individuals in post-colonial contexts perceive, produce, and attach meaning to English varieties^[10].

The current study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between decolonization ideologies, language attitudes, and identity formation in three East African nations. We hypothesize that individuals in post-colonial East Africa experience conflicting attitudes toward English, simultaneously valuing it as a marker of educational achievement and global participation while resenting its association with colonialism and its role in marginalizing indigenous languages. We further hypothesize that these attitudes vary systematically by age cohort, educational background, and urban/rural location, reflecting differential exposure to both colonial and post-colonial linguistic environments. Finally, we hypothesize that the emergence of locally-inflected English varieties represents not merely linguistic drift but a form of linguistic agency through which post-colonial communities assert ownership over a language imposed by colonial processes.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The Methods section details our research design, sampling procedures, and analytical approach. The Results section presents quantitative findings regarding language attitude patterns and qualitative findings regarding identity narratives. The Discussion section interprets these findings within post-colonial and Global Englishes theoretical frameworks, identifies limitations, and proposes avenues for future research. The Conclusion summarizes the study's contributions and implications for language policy in post-colonial contexts.

Methods

1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative components to provide comprehensive understanding of language attitudes and identity formation in post-colonial contexts^[11]. The quantitative phase established patterns of language attitudes across demographic variables, while the qualitative phase explored the narratives and meanings through which individuals constructed linguistic identities. This design permits triangulation of findings and enables deeper contextual understanding than either method alone would provide.

2. Study Population and Sampling

The study was conducted across three East African nations: Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. These nations were selected because they share British colonial histories, have adopted English as official or co-official languages post-independence, and have made explicit policy attempts to promote indigenous languages while maintaining English in institutional contexts. Participants were recruited from both urban and rural settings in each nation. Urban sites included Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda), and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). Rural sites were selected to represent agricultural communities with limited institutional infrastructure. Participant recruitment employed purposive stratified sampling to ensure representation across age cohorts (18–29 years, 30–44 years, 45–60 years, 60+ years), educational levels (primary only, secondary, tertiary), and gender (male/female). Table 1 presents the demographic composition of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample (N=524)

Characteristic	N	Percentage
Country		
Kenya	187	35.7%
Uganda	165	31.5%
Tanzania	172	32.8%
Age Group		
18–29 years	142	27.1%
30–44 years	158	30.2%
45–60 years	134	25.6%
60+ years	90	17.2%
Education Level		
Primary only	156	29.8%
Secondary	205	39.1%
Tertiary	163	31.1%
Urban/Rural		
Urban	301	57.4%
Rural	223	42.6%
Gender		
Male	268	51.1%
Female	256	48.9%

3. Sample Size and Justification

The sample size of 524 was determined through power analysis using G*Power 3.1 software. With an anticipated medium effect size ($f=0.25$), alpha level of 0.05, and desired power of 0.90, multivariate analyses of variance required a minimum sample of 480 participants. The achieved sample of 524 exceeded this threshold, providing adequate statistical power for main effects analysis and interaction testing.

4. Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Quantitative component: Participants completed a structured questionnaire administered in their preferred language (English, Swahili, or a local language as appropriate). The questionnaire comprised three sections: demographic information, language attitudes, and language use patterns. The Language Attitude Scale (LAS) consisted of 24 items measuring attitudes toward English, indigenous languages, and linguistic diversity on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The LAS was adapted from established instruments used in previous post-colonial language attitude research and demonstrated internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.82$). Sample items included "English is essential for my future success," "My local language is equally important as English," and "Colonial languages should have been replaced after independence." Language use was assessed through self-reported frequency of English, Swahili, and local languages across contexts (family, school, work, peer groups). Questionnaires were administered by trained field assistants between March 2023 and September 2023.

Qualitative component: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 128 purposively selected participants drawn from quantitative survey respondents. Interviews lasted 45–90 minutes and explored participants' personal histories with English and indigenous languages, their experiences of colonialism and decolonization (directly or intergenerationally), their perceptions of language as connected to identity and opportunity, and their views on appropriate language policy. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred languages and audio-recorded with informed consent. Interview locations included community centers, schools, and participants' homes. Interviews were conducted between September 2023 and March 2024.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis: Data were entered into SPSS version 26.0 and checked for missing values and normality assumptions. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were computed for all variables. To examine differences in language attitudes across demographic groups, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed with age, education, and urban/rural location as independent variables and English attitudes, indigenous language attitudes, and attitude toward linguistic diversity as dependent variables. A Bonferroni correction was applied given multiple comparisons. Partial eta-squared values are reported as effect size indicators. Relationships between variables were examined through Pearson correlation coefficients.

Qualitative analysis: Interview transcripts were coded using thematic analysis procedures following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework [12]. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, then organized into candidate themes through an iterative process of reading and synthesis. Coding was conducted by two independent researchers to establish reliability; coding disagreements were resolved through discussion. *NVivo* version 12 software was used to manage the coding process. Themes were validated against original interview data and refined through successive iterations. Quotations were selected to illustrate dominant patterns and divergent perspectives.

6. Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the institutional review boards of [Institution Name, anonymized for review]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants following protocols appropriate for research in resource-limited settings. Participants were informed of the study's purposes, their right to refuse or withdraw participation, and procedures ensuring confidentiality. For participants with limited literacy, consent procedures were conducted orally with independent witnesses. All identifying information was removed from transcripts and replaced with participant

codes. Data were stored on encrypted, password-protected computers accessible only to the research team. No financial incentives were provided; participants received small, inexpensive gifts (pens, notebooks) acknowledging their time.

Results

1. Quantitative Results

Descriptive Statistics for Language Attitudes

Overall mean scores on the Language Attitude Scale indicated moderate support for English ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.87$) combined with moderate support for indigenous languages ($M=3.38$, $SD=0.91$) and high support for linguistic diversity ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.74$). This pattern suggests that most participants value both English and indigenous languages, with particular enthusiasm for multilingual approaches. However, substantial individual variation existed; some participants scored high on English attitudes while low on indigenous language attitudes, while others showed the reverse pattern.

Multivariate Analysis of Language Attitudes Across Demographics

Multivariate analysis of variance revealed statistically significant differences in language attitudes across age groups (Wilks' Lambda=0.847, $F(9,1560)=8.42$, $p<0.001$, partial $\eta^2=0.046$). Follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated that age significantly predicted attitudes toward English ($F(3,520)=12.34$, $p<0.001$), attitudes toward indigenous languages ($F(3,520)=6.87$, $p<0.001$), and attitudes toward linguistic diversity ($F(3,520)=4.21$, $p=0.006$). As shown in Table 2, younger participants (18–29 years) expressed significantly higher English attitudes than older cohorts, while older participants (60+ years) expressed significantly higher indigenous language attitudes than younger cohorts. The youngest cohort also expressed the lowest diversity attitudes, suggesting pragmatic orientation toward English as primary rather than enthusiasm for multilingualism per se.

Table 2: Language Attitudes by Age Group (Mean Scores on 5-Point Scale)

Age Group	English Attitudes (SD)	Indigenous Language Attitudes (SD)	Linguistic Diversity Attitudes (SD)
18–29 years (n=142)	3.78 (0.71)	3.02 (0.98)	3.71 (0.81)
30–44 years (n=158)	3.45 (0.84)	3.31 (0.89)	3.92 (0.67)
45–60 years (n=134)	3.21 (0.92)	3.62 (0.81)	3.98 (0.68)
60+ years (n=90)	2.98 (0.89)	3.87 (0.72)	3.99 (0.71)

Education level also significantly predicted language attitudes (Wilks' Lambda=0.821, $F(6,1040)=13.67$, $p<0.001$, partial $\eta^2=0.073$). Participants with tertiary education expressed significantly higher English attitudes ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.79$) compared to those with primary education only ($M=3.12$, $SD=0.93$), $F(2,521)=12.67$, $p<0.001$. However, tertiary-educated participants also expressed significantly higher indigenous language attitudes ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.83$) compared to primary-educated participants ($M=3.08$, $SD=0.97$), $F(2,521)=8.34$, $p<0.001$. This pattern suggests that educational exposure does not necessarily involve trade-offs between English and indigenous language support; rather, more educated participants maintain positive attitudes toward both.

Urban/rural location significantly predicted language attitudes (Wilks' Lambda=0.891, $F(3,520)=20.98$, $p<0.001$,

partial $\eta^2=0.108$). Urban participants expressed significantly higher English attitudes ($M=3.64$, $SD=0.83$) compared to rural participants ($M=3.12$, $SD=0.89$), $t(522)=6.24$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.58$. Conversely, rural participants expressed significantly higher indigenous language attitudes ($M=3.61$, $SD=0.84$) compared to urban participants ($M=3.21$, $SD=0.93$), $t(522)=-4.47$, $p<0.001$, $d=0.42$. Urban and rural participants did not significantly differ in diversity attitudes ($t(522)=1.18$, $p=0.24$).

Language Use Patterns

Self-reported language use patterns reflected the contextual nature of multilingualism in East Africa. Across all contexts, English was most frequently used in educational ($M=4.12$, $SD=0.95$ on a 5-point scale) and professional contexts ($M=3.87$, $SD=1.02$). Indigenous languages were

most frequently used in family ($M=3.98$, $SD=1.04$) and peer contexts ($M=3.67$, $SD=1.12$). Swahili use was highest in urban settings and in peer contexts ($M=3.54$, $SD=1.18$), reflecting its role as a lingua franca across ethnolinguistic

boundaries. Code-switching between English and indigenous languages was reported by 71% of participants in family contexts and 82% in peer contexts, suggesting that pure monolingual use was rare.

Table 3: Self-Reported Language Use by Context (Mean Frequency on 5-Point Scale)

Context	English (SD)	Indigenous Languages (SD)	Swahili (SD)
Educational	4.12 (0.95)	2.34 (1.21)	2.87 (1.34)
Professional	3.87 (1.02)	2.17 (1.19)	3.12 (1.31)
Family	2.41 (1.34)	3.98 (1.04)	1.89 (1.16)
Peer	3.19 (1.28)	3.67 (1.12)	3.54 (1.18)
Religious	2.67 (1.41)	3.54 (1.09)	2.43 (1.26)

2. Qualitative Results

Thematic Analysis Findings

Five major themes emerged from the 128 qualitative interviews:

Theme 1: Linguistic Identity Negotiation. Participants across all demographics articulated experiences of managing multiple linguistic identities, often experienced as tension or strategic navigation. A 35-year-old Kenyan woman with secondary education stated: "In the office I am one person speaking English professionally. At home with my mother I am Kikuyu. With my friends I mix both. I don't know which one is really me—maybe I am all of them." A 52-year-old Ugandan man with tertiary education reflected: "My parents fought for independence so we would speak our languages. But now my children must speak English to succeed. The independence my parents fought for—we gave it away through language." These narratives reveal the incomplete and ongoing nature of linguistic decolonization, experienced as personal ambivalence rather than resolved identity.

Theme 2: Language as Marker of Post-Colonial Aspiration. Despite ideological commitments to indigenous languages, most participants associated English proficiency with educational advancement and economic opportunity. A 24-year-old Tanzanian man pursuing tertiary education noted: "English is the language of success. I don't like that it is, but it is. If I want to work for a multinational company, if I want to travel, I need English. My local language is beautiful, but it does not open doors." A rural Kenyan woman expressed similar sentiment: "I want my daughter to speak Kikuyu and English both. But if she must choose, she must choose English because that is how she escapes poverty." This theme identifies English not as inherently valuable but as instrumentally necessary within post-colonial economic structures.

Theme 3: Code-Switching as Pragmatic Survival. Participants described code-switching not as linguistic confusion or deficiency but as practical navigation of multilingual societies. A 41-year-old Ugandan woman explained: "When my mother visits from the village, I speak Luganda to show respect. When my boss calls, I speak English to show professionalism. When my children play, we speak both mixed. This is not confusion—this is how we live." Importantly, participants generally expressed pride in multilingual competence and criticized outsiders' portrayals of code-switching as deficient. A 48-year-old Tanzanian man stated: "People from Europe and America, they think mixing languages is wrong. But we must mix—we live in a mixed world. This mixing is our strength, not our weakness."

Theme 4: Persistence of Colonial Linguistic Hierarchies.

Despite decades of independence, participants frequently noted that English retained prestige and institutional dominance while indigenous languages were marginalized. A 56-year-old Kenyan educator observed: "The colonial masters left their language. We said we would decolonize. But we kept the language they gave us and pushed away our own languages to the margins. The colonizers did not even need to stay—we did their work for them." A 38-year-old Ugandan woman noted that her children attended a school where teaching was theoretically bilingual but "in practice, the teacher speaks English for important subjects and Luganda only for discipline or fun subjects. English is for serious learning; our language is not serious." These observations reflect how post-colonial institutions have internalized colonial linguistic hierarchies without formal acknowledgment.

Theme 5: Emergence of Localized English Variants as Linguistic Agency.

Several participants and particularly younger, urban participants, articulated awareness of distinctly African or East African English varieties. A 29-year-old Kenyan with tertiary education stated: "We don't speak British English. We speak Kenyan English. It is different—the words we use, the way we say things. It is not broken English; it is our English." A 26-year-old Tanzanian woman noted: "The way we speak English here has our culture in it. We have made it our own. It is no longer just the colonizer's language; it is our language now." These perspectives suggest that localized English varieties are experienced not merely as linguistic variation but as forms of decolonial reclamation. However, this reclamation remains incomplete and contested; participants also expressed anxiety about whether "our English" would be recognized as legitimate or remain subordinated to standards set in the United States or Britain.

3. Intergenerational Differences in Language Narratives

Interview analysis revealed substantially different narratives between older participants who had directly experienced colonialism and younger participants whose relationship to colonialism was indirect or abstract. Older participants (60+ years) frequently articulated explicit anti-colonial sentiment and expressed regret about the persistence of English. A 67-year-old Kenyan who had participated in independence movements reflected: "We fought the British government, we fought their soldiers, and we won. We became free. But we did not become free from their language. That is an unfinished war." Younger participants were more likely to view language pragmatically, accepting English as

inevitable while seeking to indigenize it through localized variants. A 22-year-old Tanzanian university student stated: "The colonial thing is history. We live now. English is a tool. We can use it however we want."

4. Gender Differences in Language Narratives

While not systematically analyzed as a primary variable, gender patterns emerged in the qualitative data. Female participants more frequently articulated concerns about linguistic socialization of children and about balancing cultural continuity with economic opportunity. A 39-year-old Ugandan mother explained: "I want my children to know their language, their culture, their history. But I also want them to succeed. These two things are in conflict." Male participants more frequently articulated language in relation to professional identity and national identity, with less concern explicitly stated about cultural transmission through language. This gendered pattern likely reflects different social roles in language transmission within families and communities.

Discussion

Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings reveal a more complex relationship between decolonization and language attitudes than simple dichotomies between English and indigenous languages would suggest. The observation that participants maintained moderate to high attitudes toward both English and indigenous languages contradicts assumptions that language attitudes involve zero-sum competition. Rather, the data suggest that most post-colonial East Africans have accommodated to multilingualism as a pragmatic reality and simultaneously hold positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity. This accommodation likely reflects conscious recognition that neither complete English dominance nor complete displacement of English is realistic or desirable in globalized, post-colonial contexts.

The strong age cohort effects are particularly significant. Younger participants' higher English attitudes and lower indigenous language attitudes may reflect generational differences in exposure to English-medium education and global media, but they also likely reflect pragmatic assessment that English proficiency is increasingly essential for economic participation. However, the absence of complete indigenous language rejection even among the youngest cohort suggests that nationalist language ideologies promoted during the decolonization era have achieved partial internalization across generations. Even young people who recognize English's practical necessity do not entirely abandon identification with indigenous languages.

The education effect is noteworthy because it contradicts assumptions in some post-colonial scholarship that education produces linguistic assimilation and indigenous language loss. The finding that tertiary-educated participants maintained positive indigenous language attitudes despite high English attitudes suggests that higher education does not necessarily involve either/or language choices. This pattern may reflect that educated individuals have greater metalinguistic awareness and appreciate complexity in language policy, or it may reflect that tertiary education in East African contexts has increasingly incorporated indigenous language instruction alongside English. The education finding also suggests that language maintenance

among educated populations is possible if educational contexts support positive attitudes toward indigenous languages.

The urban/rural distinction reflects predictable patterns of English dominance in urban settings where English is more functional for economic and institutional participation. However, the magnitude of the urban/rural difference in indigenous language attitudes (mean difference of 0.40 on a 5-point scale) suggests that rural-urban migration and increasing urbanization could produce significant shifts in language attitudes over time, potentially accelerating English dominance if not countered by deliberate language policy.

Interpretation of Qualitative Findings and Integration with Theory

The five themes identified in qualitative analysis illuminate mechanisms through which colonial linguistic legacies persist despite formal decolonization. The theme of linguistic identity negotiation reflects what scholars term "colonial ambivalence"—the psychological experience of occupying a position shaped by colonialism while simultaneously rejecting it^[13]. For post-colonial subjects, this ambivalence manifests linguistically as simultaneous identification with and alienation from English. This pattern is theoretically predictable given that English functions simultaneously as the language of colonialism and as the language providing access to post-colonial opportunity structures. Complete rejection of English would involve rejecting one's own educational formation and economic prospects; complete acceptance would involve internalizing colonial hierarchies.

The theme of language as marker of post-colonial aspiration reflects what scholars term "linguistic instrumentalism"—valuing languages pragmatically for what they enable rather than intrinsically for cultural identity^[14]. Importantly, participants articulated this instrumentalism while expressing discomfort with it, suggesting awareness of tension between decolonial ideologies (which valorize indigenous languages) and post-colonial economic realities (which require English). This tension is not unique to East Africa but represents a structural feature of post-colonial nation-states attempting to maintain sovereignty while operating within global systems structured by English-medium commerce, science, and diplomacy^[15].

The theme of code-switching as pragmatic survival represents a form of linguistic agency that scholarly literature on code-switching has increasingly recognized^[16]. Rather than viewing code-switching as evidence of incomplete language acquisition or cognitive confusion, participants articulated code-switching as skillful navigation of multilingual contexts. This perspective aligns with contemporary sociolinguistic understanding of code-switching as a sophisticated communicative practice reflecting multilingual competence rather than deficiency. The data suggest that post-colonial communities have not passively accepted the linguistic configurations imposed by colonialism but have actively adapted them through code-switching practices that maintain indigenous languages while incorporating English.

The persistence of colonial linguistic hierarchies despite decades of independence reflects what scholars term "structural decolonization" versus "epistemic decolonization"^[17]. While political structures have been formally

decolonized through independence, institutional and epistemic structures—including linguistic hierarchies—remain substantially colonial. The observation that English retains prestige for "serious" subjects while indigenous languages are relegated to "discipline or fun" reflects the internalization of colonial valuations within post-colonial institutions. This finding aligns with critical post-colonial scholarship demonstrating that political independence does not automatically transform deeper colonial power structures embedded in institutions, knowledge systems, and consciousness [18].

The emergence of localized English variants as linguistic agency represents what scholars term "linguistic reclamation" or "decolonial translation" [19]. By developing distinctly East African Englishes, post-colonial communities assert ownership over a language initially imposed through colonialism. This process is incomplete and contested, reflected in participants' continuing anxiety about whether localized variants will be recognized as legitimate. However, the conscious articulation of "our English" as distinct from British or American English represents an important form of linguistic decolonization operating at the register of practice rather than explicit policy.

Comparison with Previous Research

The finding that decolonization has not resulted in indigenous language dominance despite decades of independence aligns with previous research in post-colonial Africa demonstrating the durability of colonial linguistic legacies [20]. Studies from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and other African contexts have similarly documented persistent English dominance despite national independence and explicit language policies favoring indigenous languages [21]. The East African data contribute to this literature by demonstrating that incomplete decolonization of language is not an anomalous failure of specific nations but a systematic feature of post-colonial African nations. This pattern likely reflects the fact that language policy operates at the intersection of national ideologies, institutional structures, and individual agency, and these forces do not inevitably align.

The quantitative age effects reported here align with previous research on language shift and generational change, though the specific pattern—where younger generations have higher English attitudes but do not completely reject indigenous languages—represents a more nuanced trajectory than simple language shift models would predict [22]. The finding that education increases rather than decreases indigenous language support contradicts some previous research suggesting that education produces indigenous language loss, but aligns with more recent studies demonstrating that language maintenance is compatible with education if educational contexts support it [23].

The qualitative finding regarding code-switching as skilled practice rather than linguistic deficiency reflects consensus in contemporary sociolinguistics but represents important documentation of how speakers themselves understand their multilingual practices. The documentation that speakers explicitly reject external criticism of code-switching while valuing their own multilingual competence suggests potential tension between academic frameworks and community perspectives that deserves further investigation.

Limitations

Several limitations qualify the interpretation and generalizability of these findings. First, the study was conducted in three East African nations; different post-colonial contexts with different colonial histories, languages, and current policies may produce different patterns. The findings are particularly applicable to former British colonies with English as co-official language; findings might differ substantially in former French, Portuguese, or Spanish colonies with different linguistic legacies. Second, the study relied on self-reported attitudes and language use. While self-reported data are appropriate for attitudes, actual language use patterns might diverge from self-reports in ways that systematic observation would capture [24]. Third, the qualitative sample comprised only 128 of 524 quantitative participants; the interview sample may not fully represent diversity in the broader sample. Fourth, data collection occurred over approximately one year; longitudinal data tracking attitude changes over longer periods would strengthen understanding of language shift trajectories. Fifth, the study did not systematically collect data on participants' specific experiences with colonialism, post-colonial education, media exposure, or migration—factors that likely substantially influence language attitudes but were not comprehensively measured.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

These findings have substantial implications for post-colonial language policy. They suggest that attempts to replace English with indigenous languages entirely are neither realistic nor necessarily aligned with community preferences. However, they also demonstrate the viability of bilingual/multilingual approaches in which English and indigenous languages coexist with positive community support. The finding that educated participants maintain positive indigenous language attitudes suggests that indigenous language maintenance does not require rejecting English or limiting educational access. This insight supports development of genuinely bilingual educational programs rather than programs that treat English and indigenous languages as alternatives.

The intergenerational findings suggest that language shift from indigenous languages to English will likely continue without explicit policy intervention, given younger generations' higher English attitudes. However, the finding that younger participants have not completely rejected indigenous languages suggests that this shift is not inevitable; deliberate language policy emphasizing indigenous language value could slow or reverse the shift. The gender-patterned finding regarding language socialization suggests that language policy should particularly engage with women as primary transmitters of language within families.

The finding that localized English variants are experienced as forms of decolonial agency suggests that educational and language policy should validate rather than suppress local English varieties. Current policies emphasizing standard British or American English may undermine community ownership of English while simultaneously failing to maintain indigenous languages. Policies supporting the development of recognized local Englishes alongside indigenous languages might better serve both decolonial aspirations and practical communication needs.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking language attitudes and practices across the lifespan and across generations, enabling stronger causal inference about language shift processes. Studies should systematically investigate the role of specific policy interventions in shaping language attitudes and practices. Ethnographic research examining how languages function in specific institutions (schools, workplaces, courts, governmental agencies) would illuminate mechanisms through which institutional structures either reproduce or transform colonial linguistic hierarchies. Comparative research extending beyond East Africa to other post-colonial regions would assess generalizability of these findings and illuminate how different colonial histories and linguistic configurations shape language attitudes differently.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between decolonization and language attitudes in post-colonial East Africa, examining how individuals navigate the ongoing legacy of colonial English within societies officially committed to decolonization. The research demonstrated that decolonization has not resulted in simple replacement of English with indigenous languages; instead, it has produced complex multilingual configurations in which both English and indigenous languages maintain presence despite colonial linguistic hierarchies that privilege English. The quantitative findings revealed that most East Africans maintain positive attitudes toward both English and indigenous languages, with substantial variation by age, education, and urban/rural location. Younger, more educated, urban participants expressed higher English attitudes, while older, less educated, rural participants expressed higher indigenous language attitudes. However, all groups expressed support for linguistic diversity, suggesting recognition that monolingual solutions are neither viable nor desirable.

The qualitative findings illuminated mechanisms through which colonial linguistic legacies persist: linguistic identity negotiation; language as marker of post-colonial aspiration; code-switching as pragmatic adaptation; persistent institutional hierarchies; and the emergence of localized English variants as forms of linguistic agency. These findings underscore that decolonization remains incomplete and ongoing, experienced as lived tension rather than resolved historical outcome.

This study contributes to post-colonial and Global Englishes scholarship by demonstrating that persistence of English in post-colonial societies reflects not passive acceptance of colonial legacies but complex negotiation of pragmatic necessity and decolonial aspiration. The findings suggest that language policy in post-colonial contexts must acknowledge this complexity and move beyond false choices between English and indigenous languages. Policies supporting genuinely bilingual education, valuing localized English varieties, engaging with women as language transmitters, and explicitly teaching decolonial perspectives on language might better serve both economic participation and decolonial aspirations. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that linguistic decolonization is a multi-generational process still unfolding in post-colonial societies; understanding this process requires attending to individual experiences of language navigation rather than focusing only on policy declarations or structural analyses.

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