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English language in African higher education: A systematic review

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Abstract: One of the features of the internationalisation of higher education is the increasing use of the English language as a medium of instruction and research in higher education. This growing use of English spurs this article's attempt at systematically reviewing literature focusing on African higher education systems. The analysis of the selected literature focuses on assessing the main themes, theoretical assumptions and core findings. As a result, 30 articles accessed through continental and international research databases were included in the final analysis after a five-step selection process using relevant keywords related to the topic and the context of the study. The findings indicate that research on the English language in higher education in African contexts overwhelmingly focuses on the language as a medium of teaching and learning. The other aspects, such as the role that the language plays as a medium of research and archiving knowledge, seem to be overlooked. The findings of the majority of both empirical and review papers seem to present critical and, at times, unfavourable views on the role English plays in the specific contexts studied. In light of these findings, the recommendation is that the role of the English language as a medium of instruction should be expanded to cover issues related to research, publication and archiving knowledge. This indicates that the continent's higher education systems need more research on English language, which suggests that robust and pragmatic theoretical approaches might also be needed in future studies. A further observation is that the findings from the reviewed studies might be the result of using theories that are underpinned in traditions that are already critical of the use of the English language. Thus, more research attention could be given to strengthening the efficacy of using multiple theoretical perspectives to render the African contexts studied more intelligible.

Introduction

The use of the English language as a medium of instruction and learning in higher education is growing rapidly in Africa as noted in its use by 26 of the 54 countries of the continent (Plonski et al. 2013). This reality makes a probing of the use of English in African higher education, which this systematic review focuses on, timely and relevant. This anglicisation of African higher education systems is becoming increasingly visible with countries such as Rwanda and Gabon that traditionally used francophone higher education systems changing to English (McGreal 2009; Hasselriis 2010). The youngest country in Africa, South Sudan, has also opted to use English as its official language (Goldsmith 2011). The use of English is also growing in universities located in lusophone African countries (Plonski et al. 2013). Ethiopia, a country without an English colonial legacy, has been using English in higher education for close to seventy years (Bogale 2009; Negash 2011). Thus, the overview of the growth of the English language in Africa provides a rationale for undertaking this study.

The use of English in Africa, as in the rest of the world, is perceived as both an opportunity and a challenge (Dearden 2014; Martinez 2016; Altbach and de Wit 2020). The increased use of the English language in global higher education could be considered a positive development because the language has become the lingua franca of the global and continental scientific communities (Björkman 2011; Crystal 2012; Altbach 2013). Proficiency in the English language in the contemporary world of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education seems to have the added

advantages of enhancing academics' and higher education institutions' involvement in research networks, collaborations and even access to funding (Coleman 2006; Marginson 2006; Williams 2010; Saarinen 2012; Kuteeva and Airey 2014). Nonetheless, the growing use of the language has been one of the major dilemmas affecting higher education systems around the world as they seek to enhance their global standing and visibility while at the same time maintaining their local identity and relevance. This dilemma seems even more pronounced on the multicultural and multilingual African continent as higher education institutions address two distinct challenges. They contend with maintaining a balance between their aspirations of (1) becoming more active participants of the English language dominated by the internationalisation of higher education, and (2) being expected to Africanise and indigenise the academy by focusing on African languages and re-examining the colonially inherited education systems (see Alexander 2000; 2003; Mazrui 2003; Mbembe 2016). This panoramic systematic review is therefore also motivated by the need to survey the existing body of literature in relation to the above dilemmas.

The expanding use of English in higher education and the opportunities and challenges it brings led some researchers to call for urgent and systematic investigative research on the topic in contexts where the language is a second or foreign language (see Macaro et al. 2018). What makes this review even more urgent is the under-representation of research from even more multilingual African perspectives in recent literature reviews (e.g. Williams 2015; Macaro et al. 2018). Thus, this article is unlike other literature reviews that specifically assess the role of English as a medium of instruction (see Coleman 2006; Williams 2015; Macaro et al. 2018). The article uses Brumfit's (2004) categorisation of the functions of language in higher education to review a broad range of the literature that considers the role of language in teaching and learning, as a medium of research and archiving knowledge, and in linguistics studies that look at the theoretical study of the language. This is done with the intention of providing a broad overview of how issues pertaining to English language use are approached in research in African contexts as the use of the language as a medium of instruction and in other spheres of the higher education space is expanding.

Therefore, this article, which is a part of ongoing research that commenced in 2018 investigating the implications of using the English language in higher education research, is aimed at mapping what has already been investigated on the topic, taking into consideration the previous 10 years. It attempts to make a contribution towards an understanding of the nature of English-language-focused research conducted in African contexts by considering the focus, theoretical underpinnings and the findings from the selected body of literature.

Method

A systematic review approach was adopted for this review to effectively appraise, summarise, synthesise and evaluate relevant research on the given topic (Oxman 1994; Bettany-Saltikov 2012; Tight 2018). This review also considered the idea that a good systematic review minimises error and bias by following a well-defined protocol that indicates objectives, review questions and procedures in advance to arrive at reliable conclusions (Oxman 1994; Littell et al. 2008; Fink 2014). As a result, Fink's (2014) review protocol was adopted. Figure 1 presents the steps followed in conducting this review, along with specific methodological decisions that each step entails.

Defining review questions

This review addressed the following questions in accordance with the motives and objectives stated in the above section:

- What are the main focuses and objectives of research looking at English language use in African higher education?
- What are the major theoretical perspectives used to conduct the studies?
- What are the main findings of research on English language use in higher education in Africa?

Selecting databases and search terms

Data searches were made on Scopus, EBSCOhost and ProQuest to gather a comprehensive dataset for the study. The African Journals Online (AJOL) database that currently includes 526 journals from

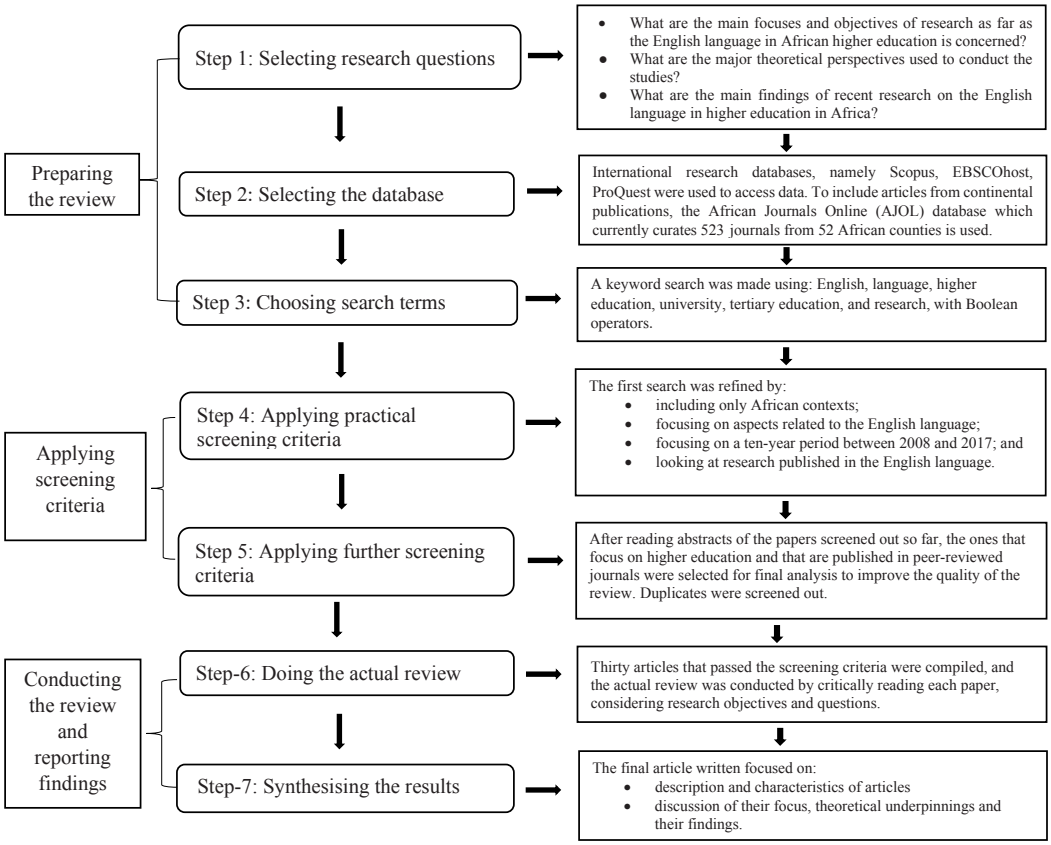

Figure 1. The methodological steps followed in conducting the review, adapted from Fink (2014)

32 African counties was searched in order to include research from Africa that might not be available in international journal databases. Finally, the keywords 'English', 'language', 'higher education', 'tertiary education', 'universities', 'education', 'research', which are drawn from the aims of this article, were used with Boolean operators such as 'and' and 'or' to conduct the search.

Applying screening criteria

The articles included in this study were in line with the review objectives, questions and scope for the final analysis based on the criteria that they:

- were conducted in African contexts;
- focused on aspects related to the English language;
- were published between 2008 and 2017;
- were published in peer-reviewed journals;
- focused on issues related to higher education; and
- were published in the English language.

An entry of the keywords in the databases followed a filtering of the articles that focus on African countries and universities using the analytics provided by the databases or after reading the titles and abstracts established from the keyword searches. A ten-year time span was used to survey the literature since the expansion of English in African higher education systems seems to be more pronounced in the past decade, and also because the article reviews relatively recent literature. Finally, articles from peer-reviewed journals are included in the review as a way of ensuring quality in the study. The filtering of articles using the inclusion criteria resulted in 36 articles being chosen for

further analysis. In the second round of the screening process, six of the 36 articles were excluded from further analysis because they either did not focus on issues pertaining to the English language from a higher education perspective or were found to be duplicates of articles found in other databases. The final analysis was done after a thorough reading of the 30 articles in accordance with the questions that guided the study.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study in four parts. The first part of the section consists of an overview of the articles reviewed, while the next three parts focus on assessing the themes, theories and findings from the reviewed articles as stipulated in the research objectives and questions. We present the themes and focus of the reviewed articles in two subsections as articles that focus on the role the language plays in teaching and learning, and the role it plays in research and archiving knowledge. We then present the categorisation of the theoretical perspectives adopted in the studies as theories of second language acquisition and theories belonging to the critical traditions of investigating language from ideological, power, policy and identity related viewpoints. The findings from the studies reviewed are presented as studies that approach and critique the use of the language by assessing proficiency levels and the ones that present the critique based on power, policy and ideological grounds.

Overview of articles reviewed

The articles included in the final analysis were published in 23 journals, half of which (n = 12) focus on educational research. None of the articles was published in journals that specialise in higher education studies. This finding is in line with Haggis' (2009) observation that critical and often sociological perspectives are limited in mainstream higher education journals, and in cases like sociolinguistics, such works are published in specialist journals of each field. The majority of the type of articles reviewed (n = 23) were found to be based on empirical research (see Mohamed and Banda 2008; Kamwendo 2010; Nel and Müller 2010; Cloete 2011; Posel and Casale 2011; Halvorsen 2012; Webb 2012; Grosser and Nel 2013; Jha 2013; Abongdia 2014; Bouazid and Le Roux 2014; Mendisu and Yigezu 2014; Ngcobo 2014; Obioha and Obioha 2014; Parmegiani 2014; Seabi et al. 2014; Hurst 2015; 2016; Ezema 2016; Sibomana 2016; Uwambayinema 2016; Dako and Quarcoo 2017; Twagilimana 2017). Review articles accounted for 20% (n = 6) of the reviewed papers (see Brock-Utne 2010; Nabukeera 2012; Qorro 2013; Kamwendo et al. 2014; Sibomana 2014; Koosimile and Suping 2015). It was also noted that one of the papers (Kamwendo 2016) was a research note based on a larger research project.

In total, 44 authors (an average of 1.47 authors for each paper) were identified. The majority of the research (93.2%) was from African contexts and affiliated with African universities, with 56.1% of these affiliated with South African universities. 36.36% of the authors were affiliated with departments and faculties of education in their respective institutions, while 20.45% of them belonged to departments of language and linguistics. Nineteen of the papers (63.3%) have single authors, while nine (30%) have two authors. Only two articles have more than two authors. The predominance of papers with sole authorship could be related to the fact that collaborative research in humanities and social sciences is relatively less common than in fields such as medicine and the natural sciences (Becher and Trowler 2001; Shin et al. 2013).

Finally, forty per cent of the publications (n = 12) came from South Africa (see Nel and Müller 2010; Cloete 2011; Posel and Casale 2011; Webb 2012; Grosser and Nel 2013; Abongdia 2014; Kamwendo et al. 2014; Ngcobo 2014; Parmegiani 2014; Seabi et al. 2014; Hurst 2015; 2016). Seven other countries on the continent accounted for the other 60% of the articles. Among these, four articles focused on English language issues in Rwanda (Sibomana 2014; 2016; Uwambayinema 2016; Twagilimana 2017). Three focused on Tanzania (Mohamed and Banda 2008; Halvorsen 2012; Qorro 2013), while two articles focused on Ethiopia (Jha 2013; Mendisu and Yigezu 2014). In addition, two articles were based on Malawi (Kamwendo 2010; 2016) and another two on Nigeria (Obioha and Obioha 2014; Ezema 2016). Dako and Quarcoo (2017) and Bouazid and Le Roux (2014)

investigated issues related to English in the Ghanaian and Algerian contexts respectively. Three of the articles (Brock-Utne 2010; Nabukeera 2012; Koosimile and Suping 2015) had a continental and transnational scope.

An assessment of the focuses and themes of the reviewed articles

The article's broad objective of mapping the literature on the use of the English language influences the categorisation in this section, which is based on three lenses focusing on the study of English language use in African higher education contexts. According to Brumfit (2004), language in higher education (English for the purpose of this review) has three main functions. First, it functions as the primary medium of teaching across all disciplines in lectures, seminars, reading groups and private study. Second, it is the primary means for storing records and data in libraries, in archiving results from theoretical analysis and empirical study, and for reference material in books, theses and reports. Third, language has been an object for scientific study in linguistics or for skilled performance. Therefore, the following two subsections present a thematic categorisation of the articles using Brumfit's ideas mentioned above. It has to be noted, however, that the categories are not mutually exclusive and that there might be articles that could belong in the grey area between categories.

English medium instruction

It was discovered that the majority (80%, *n* = 24) of research on English language in higher education in Africa investigated issues related to the language from the vantage point of teaching and learning or as a medium of instruction. The articles in this category focused on contexts from South Africa, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria and Algeria. The three articles that have a continental scope (Brock-Utne 2010; Nabukeera 2012; Koosimile and Suping 2015) also focus on this aspect. Table 1 presents a list of the articles belonging to this category. For convenience and clarity of presentation, the theories and findings of the papers, which are discussed in separate sections of their own, are presented along with the names of the authors and study objectives.

Eleven of the 24 articles are from South African research settings where the language serves as a medium of instruction. These articles focus on raising issues about English language policies and questions related to language and identity (see Webb 2012; Abongdia 2014; Kamwendo et al. 2014; Ngcobo 2014; Parmegiani 2014; Seabi et al. 2014; Hurst 2015; 2016) and levels of language proficiency (see Nel and Müller 2010; Posel and Casale 2011; Grosser and Nel 2013). Reflecting on matters related to language policies, Webb (2012) examines the concept of multilingualism and multilingual universities and the type of research that should be carried out to create a multilingual space in South African universities. In a similar vein, Abongdia (2014) examines the implications of an English-only language policy for students from multilingual backgrounds at the University of the Western Cape. Finally, Kamwendo et al. (2014) focus on practices and challenges associated with the implementation of isiZulu as a medium of instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Regarding language and identity in South Africa, Ngcobo (2014) discusses the relationship between bi/multilingual education involving English and Bantu languages on the one hand, and the struggle to maintain identity on the other. Parmegiani's (2014) exploration of the roles that English and isiZulu play in the identity construction of a group of black South African university students from disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled in a bridging programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal also falls into this category. In addition, Hurst's (2015) article, related to teaching and learning and the English language in South Africa considering recent debates on decolonisation and transformation of the university, focuses on student perspectives on language support at the University of Cape Town. Hurst (2016) further investigates the strategies and transitions relating to what she refers to as the 'colonial wound' in South African education that she discussed in her 2015 paper. Finally, Seabi et al. (2014) investigate students' perceptions of the challenges they face and factors that facilitate and impede transformative teaching and learning at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The implications of English language proficiency are also considered in the medium-of-instruction-themed articles that approached the issue studying South African contexts. Grosser and Nel (2013) investigate the relationship between critical thinking skills and the academic language proficiency of prospective teachers among first-year students working towards a Bachelor of Education degree,

Table 1: Summary of articles that explore issues related to English from the vantage point of medium of instruction

Theme	Context	Author(s)	Focus	Theory	Main findings
English as a medium of instruction	South Africa	Abongdia (2014)	Investigates the impacts of a monolingual (English) medium instruction at the University of the Western Cape.	Theories of language ideologies, language policy and planning	English speakers are being taught in their language and thus have a significant advantage over most students who do not speak English as their first language.
		Grosser and Nel (2013)	Investigates the relationship between critical thinking skills and academic English language proficiency of prospective teachers at a South African university.	Theories borrowed from critical thinking appraisal	There are significant correlations between students' poor academic (English) language proficiency and the challenges they face in making inferences and demonstrating critical thought.
		Hurst (2015)	Assesses student perspectives on language support as at the University of Cape Town where English is the medium of instruction.	Bourdieu's cultural capital	39% of the student respondents identified English language competence as one of the areas that they would need support with. The study indicated that there is some support that the university provides, but this might not be accessible to all who would need it.
		Hurst (2016)	Investigates strategies students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the University of Cape Town use to navigate the English-dominated higher education system.	Decolonial perspectives	Strategies for educational success described by students include mobility and language shift. However, students find these transitions traumatic. They experience feelings of inferiority in terms of their own languages and social practices.
		Kamwendo et al. (2014)	Focuses on analysing practices and challenges faced in the implementation of a South African language (isiZulu) as a medium of instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal where English is the primary medium of instruction.	Perspectives from African scholarship, Africanisation of higher education, the African Renaissance, and transformation	While there are some challenges in using isiZulu as a medium of instruction, the authors suggest that the practice deflates the myth that indigenous African languages can only serve in lower levels of education.
		Nel and Müller (2010)	Focuses on the use of English as medium of instruction and its impact on the language development of English as second language student-teachers and learners at the University of South Africa.	Krashen's perspectives on second language acquisition	The findings indicated that respondents perceived that they accommodated ESL learners during assessment. This was, however, contradicted by the evidence found in the students' portfolios that revealed ill-defined aims and teaching methods, and inconsistent marking of learners' work.

Theme	Context	Author(s)	Focus	Theory	Main findings
		Ngcobo (2014)	Examines the relationship between language identity and bi/multilingual education.	The main theory that informs this article is linguistic anthropology	The findings of this study also indicate that a high percentage of respondents acknowledged the constructive role played by their first language (isiZulu) in developing their second language (English), while 86 % stated that the formal use of isiZulu in course materials was helpful.
		Parmegiani (2014)	Explores the role that English and isiZulu play in the identity construction of a group of black South African university students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.	The theoretical framework draws on post-modern, feminist and post-colonial conceptions of identity	Though some students claimed ownership and affiliation with English as the basis of their 'expertise' and their language practice, the findings indicate that the students expressed an inseparable link between their mother tongue (isiZulu) and their identity.
		Posel and Casale (2011)	Explores new data from 2008 focusing on language proficiency and labour market outcomes in the context of South Africa's language-in-education policy.	Not specified	The paper states that the National Income Dynamics Study data show a positive correlation between adults who self-reported a good level of English language proficiency (reading and writing) and higher earnings.
		Seabi et al. (2014)	Explores how students experience life, learning and teaching transformation at the University of the Witwatersrand.	Not specified	For black students who do not speak English as a first language, English medium of instruction is mentioned as a hindering factor to learning achievement. This finding, however, contrasts with previous literature that suggests that students who speak English as a first language have greater advantages than students whose mother tongue is not English.
		Webb (2012)	Discusses fundamental aspects of multilingual higher education in the South African context focusing on historically (white) Afrikaans universities.	Not specified	The paper concludes that the current dominance of English and limited role played by African languages in South African universities demands various strategies that will create multilingual universities.
	Malawi	Kamwendo (2010)	Explores the Malawian language policies since independence and the implications of the privileged status of English on Malawian languages.	Underpinned by discourses on the African Renaissance	The article argues that Malawian languages have had inferior status, and that it is possible to use English without 'denigrating' local languages.

Theme	Context	Author(s)	Focus	Theory	Main findings
		Kamwendo (2016)	Presents a critique of the results of the Malawian language policy.	Not specified	This research note argues that the country's language policy stands on a shaky foundation and that learners are likely to neither develop Malawian languages, nor learn subject matter, nor learn English well.
	Rwanda	Sibomana (2014)	Explores constraints, challenges, possibilities and promises regarding the acquisition of English in the Rwandan sociolinguistic context including higher education.	Grounded theory	The article suggests that Rwandan peoples' motivation to learn English has increased due to the improvements in the teaching of the language and other factors. The paper states that limited use of the language in daily communication and learners' lower capacity to 'produce enough input and output' in the language undermine the ability to attain English communicative competences.
		Twagilimana (2017)	Examines the extent to which the use of feedback practices as strategies of assessment of students' academic writing in English act as meaningful processes in learning.	Perspectives drawn from the development of student writing, teacher feedback practices and academic literacies in English as a second language	The findings indicate that students are unlikely to benefit from instructors' feedback because of a lack of clarity regarding the lecturers' expectations, and what is academically required of them.
	Tanzania	Mohamed and Banda (2008)	Problematises academic writing among students for whom English is a foreign language, considering lecturers' discursive practices.	Critical discourse analysis	The researchers presented a critical view on Tanzanian lecturers' and universities' failure to utilise opportunities associated with a bilingual mode of teaching and learning.
		Qorro (2013)	Reviews studies conducted on language of instruction in Tanzania from 1974 to 2013.	Linguistic imperialism	The article concludes that studies unanimously agree that both the students' and the majority of teachers' English language proficiency is extremely low. The author suggests why the government policies ignore research findings.
	Algeria	Bouazid and Le Roux (2014)	Examines the challenges experienced by Arabic-speaking university students and lecturers in their attempts at meeting proposed learning outcomes in English literature.	Not specified	The researchers identified three obstacles, inappropriate teaching strategies, inadequate language proficiency, and poor student self-efficacy, as hindering student success in English language courses.

Theme	Context	Author(s)	Focus	Theory	Main findings
	Ethiopia	Jha (2013)	Explores the uses of English language teaching methods and major linguistic and non-linguistic impediments to mastering English in post-secondary institutions.	Not specified	Seventeen linguistic and non-linguistic impediments were found as serious impediments to mastering English. The paper argues that English language teaching methodologies are often ineffective.
	Ghana	Dako and Quarcoo (2017)	Discusses attitudes towards the English language and English-medium education.	Not specified	Students at the University of Ghana did not seem to give the English language issue much consideration. The researchers note that the largely positive attitude showed by the students showed can be attributed to their perception of English as the only language that can 'push them through the university'. Despite this favourable response towards English, the researchers observe that the majority of students, especially male students, at Ghanaian universities hardly ever speak English in informal contexts.
	Nigeria	Obioha and Obiohaa (2014)	Investigates the effects of bilingualism in English and Nigerian languages and its implications on learning, mentorship and entrepreneurship.	Speech act theory	The findings of this study indicate that bilingualism has a positive impact on mentorship and the entrepreneurial development of students.
	Cross-national studies	Brock-Utne (2010)	Reflects to what extent research on the impacts of English as a medium of instruction inform language policy in Africa.	Not specified	The researcher notes that recommendations from only one of the fours studies/consultancies covered in the study were thoroughly followed up on.
		Koosimile and Suping (2015)	Reviews the influences of globalisation on science education in anglophone sub-Saharan Africa. The English language emerges as a theme.	Not specified	The researchers state that two diametrically opposing views emerged in the literature regarding English: one views it as a language of oppression, and the other as the language of globalisation.
		Nabukeera (2012)	Reviews recent literature on the challenges faced by non-native English speakers who teach English language.	Not specified	The researcher argues that teachers who are non-native speakers of English face discrimination and marginalisation.

whereas Posel and Casale (2011) explore 2008 data on language proficiency and labour market outcomes. Finally, Nel and Müller (2010) study English as a medium of instruction and its impact on the language development of ESL student teachers.

Focusing on the Malawian context, Kamwendo's (2010) literature-based paper 'Denigrating the local, glorifying the foreign: Malawian language policies in the era of African Renaissance' presents the argument that it is possible to develop English without disregarding or undermining African languages. In another article, Kamwendo (2016) presents a critique of the policy on English-medium language instruction in Malawi, laying out the devastating impact of English as the medium of instruction from the first year of primary school to higher education.

Sibomana (2014) builds on the factors which are perceived as affecting second language acquisition in an exploration of the constraints, challenges, possibilities and promises enshrined in the attainment of the English language in Rwanda. Still taking the case of Rwandan learners, Twagilimana (2017) critically examines the meaningfulness and efficacy of feedback practices in the learning process used in assessing student work at the former National University of Rwanda.

Taking the Tanzanian situation into consideration, Mohamed and Banda's (2008) qualitative study investigates student writing from the perspective of lecturers' discursive practices that include the use of English as a medium of instruction. The authors seek to make lecturers take responsibility for their pedagogical and linguistic practices, which have implications for students' unsuccessful writing practices. Qorro (2013) reviews 18 studies conducted on language and education in Tanzania from 1974 to 2013. She focuses her analysis on questions such as why research findings and policy recommendations on the language policy of the country are ignored, and what factors influence the choice of language of instruction.

Bouazid and Le Roux (2014) examine the challenges experienced by Arabic-speaking students and lecturers at a university in Algeria as they attempt to meet proposed learning outcomes in English literature. Dako and Quarcoo (2017) discuss attitudes towards the English language and English-medium education in the workplace, in commerce and in higher education in Ghana. Their paper includes an analysis of interviews with higher education students. In addition, Jha's (2013) study investigates what he called 'the dismal' state of English in post-school institutions in eastern Ethiopia with the objectives of exploring English language teaching methods and major linguistic and non-linguistic impediments to mastering the language. Finally, from a Nigerian point of view, Obioha and Obioha (2014: 74) investigate the effects of bilingualism on mentorship and entrepreneurial development by posing the following central questions about English: 'How does mother tongue interfere with the acquisition of proficiency in the learning of English of tertiary students? Does code-borrowing affect English language learning? Does culture affect tertiary students' English?'.

The three cross-national and Africa-wide studies also focus on issues concerning the medium of instruction. Like Qorro (2013), Brock-Utne (2010) addresses questions on why research on language policies does not seem to inform actual language policies. Brock-Utne's (2010) paper draws on secondary data and the author's own personal experience as a consultant in four research projects in Namibia, Tanzania and South Africa. In addition, Koosimile and Supings' (2015) review-based study investigates the influences of globalisation on science education in anglophone sub-Saharan Africa by assessing patterns, trends, themes, implications and outcomes. In this article, the English language emerged as one of the themes of previous research related to science education in sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, Nabukeera (2012) reviews literature on the challenges that non-native English language teachers face, and these include aspects such as job marginalisation and students' perceptions of the teachers.

English as a medium for knowledge production and archiving

Six of the reviewed articles focused on aspects related to the English language and its role in producing and archiving knowledge, and the language itself as a subject of theoretical study. Table 2 presents the main objectives, theories and findings of papers included in this subsection of the analysis.

The main focus of Mendisu and Yigezu (2014) research is to examine whether or not academic staff members at Addis Ababa University use Ethiopian languages in any significant way in

knowledge production. This Ethiopian case study has both researchers call for the need to restore African studies to its linguistic identity and to critique the dominance of English. This observation arises from the researchers' content analysis of a decade of academic publications from the College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication (CHLSJC) at Addis Ababa University, and a further content analysis of the language of the publications in a five-year archive of the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (JES) from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES).

Sibomana (2016) discusses findings from a study of the challenges experienced by a group of postgraduate students from Rwanda studying at a South African university. These challenges arise from the reality that the students' primary languages are Kinyarwanda and French and yet the South African university uses English as the medium of teaching and research. The study also focuses on the strategies the students used to address these challenges and the support offered to them by the university to complete their research and studies. Similarly, Uwambayinema (2016) investigates the challenges that Rwandan graduate students of English as a foreign language encounter regarding the perceptions and production of North American English vowels.

Cloete (2011) examines the potency of English in expressing issues about nature in Africa such as the animals, the 'wilderness experience', hunting practices, and 'the African bush'. The article also explores how these meaning systems are reflected in environmental education about conservation areas in eastern and southern Africa. Cloete (2011) highlights the necessity for greater interlanguage exchange during the study of Africa's natural and, in particular, conservation environment.

Halvorsen's (2012) qualitative study takes a linguistic turn in its investigation of information communication technology (ICT) participation at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The author examines whether the university's staff and students regard themselves as participants and contributors in a knowledge society dominated by the English language. Ezema (2016) investigates scholarly communication and authorship patterns in language research, drawing on evidence from the citation analysis of 87 language theses and dissertations from the Department of English at the University of Nsukka, Nigeria between 2005 and 2014.

Theoretical perspectives adopted in the studies

Thirteen of the analysed papers did not indicate the specific theoretical perspectives informing their analyses. This finding is evident in five of the seven review-based articles. In papers that explicitly stated theoretical and conceptual frameworks, perspectives and theoretical orientations from traditions in second language acquisition, and critical traditions of applied linguistics, anthrolinguistics and sociolinguistics seem prominent in the studies as presented in the following two subsections. For more on theories and the reviewed studies associated with them also see Tables 1, 2 and the attached appendix.

Theories of second language acquisition

Various papers explore issues related to the use of the English language from a more functionalist perspective and raise practical concerns regarding the implications of the levels of English language proficiency. The theoretical perspectives used in this respect include Krashen and Brown's (2007) model of second language acquisition (Nel and Müller 2010; Grosser and Nel 2013). Thus, Grosser and Nel (2013) use this approach in combination with perspectives borrowed from Watson Glaser's critical thinking appraisal scheme to investigate the relationship between critical thinking skills and academic language proficiency of prospective teachers. They also use a combination of theoretical perspectives borrowed from Watson Glaser's critical thinking appraisal and Krashen and Brown's (2007) views on academic writing. Furthermore, Nel and Müller (2010) adopt Krashen's theory, which states that teacher talk is an essential input for second language acquisition and use a mixed-methods research design to investigate the implications of student teachers' limited English language proficiency on their practice. Falling into this subcategory, Krashen's theory of language acquisition, which states that teacher talk is an essential input for second language acquisition, is adopted for Nel and Müller's (2010) study. A study that investigates academic writing and feedback practices at a university in Rwanda carried out by Twagilimana (2017) also uses theoretical perspectives drawn from the development of student writing (Coffin et al. 2003), teacher feedback

Table 2: Summary of articles that explore issues related to the English language, focusing on studying the language itself as a theoretical inquiry and the role it plays in knowledge production and archiving

Theme	Context	Author(s)	Focus	Theory	Main findings
English as a theoretical study and medium for research or archiving knowledge	Rwanda	Uwambayinema (2016)	Studies the challenges regarding perceptions and production of North American English vowels faced by Rwandan students of English as a foreign language (EFL).	Not specified	The results show that the graduate students faced various challenges in their efforts to optimise the perception and production of vowels. The influence of their first language vowel system was also found as one of the significant challenges. The respondents also mentioned the large number of vowels in the English language as another problem.
		Sibomana (2016)	Discusses the challenges experienced by a group of postgraduate students from Rwanda studying at an English-medium South African university.	Not specified	The findings suggest that students encounter challenges associated with studying and researching using the medium of English and that they possess academic English skills that are below those expected by their lecturers and supervisors.
	Ethiopia	Mendisu and Yigezu (2014)	Attempts to assess the use and status of African languages in research in an English-medium university, taking the case of Ethiopian studies.	Perspectives adopted from discourses on language and decolonisation	The research confirms that English is the dominant language of academic publications related to Ethiopian studies, while the use of Ethiopian languages, such as Amharic, Afan Oromo, Tigrigna and Somali, is limited or non-existent.
	Nigeria	Ezema (2016)	Investigates scholarly communication and authorship patterns in language research, drawing on evidence from citation analysis of English language theses and dissertations at the University of Nsukka.	Not specified	The findings indicate that 63.6% of citations were from books or monographs, while only 17.9% of the cited references are from journals, and electronic resources accounted for 15.4% of the citations.
	South Africa	Cloete (2011)	Examines the potency of English in expressing issues about nature such as animals, the wilderness experience, and hunting practices.	Critical language awareness theories	There is an additional need in multilingual classrooms to incorporate a critical and self-conscious dimension to inter-language teaching about the environment, which brings the embedded wealth of indigenous knowledge to the fore.
	Tanzania	Halvorsen (2012)	Takes a linguistic turn to investigate ICT participation in the University of Dar es Salaam.	Lindner's paradigm theory	The article concludes that there are remnants from the colonial system in education and ICT practice. At the same time, it was found that the highest number of staff and students tend to use the national language, Kiswahili, in most of their ICT communication.

practices (Brown et al. 1997) and academic literacies in English as a second language (Zamel 1998). Finally, Obioha and Obioha (2014) use the speech act theory in their discussion on bilingualism and its implications for mentorship and entrepreneurship at two higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Critical theoretical perspectives: English language in relation to identity, power, ideology and decolonisation

The remaining papers that had a clear theoretical underpinning adopt a more critical view on language use in higher education. These articles critically consider language, ideology, power and politics in their studies. The theories used in this category include linguistic anthropology (Ngcobo 2014), language ideologies (Abongdia 2014), language policy and planning (ibid.), critical discourse analysis (Mohamed and Banda 2008), critical language awareness theories (Cloete 2011), feminist and postmodern perspectives (Parmegiani 2014), and Bourdieu's theory on language as cultural capital (Hurst 2016). Though Mohamed and Banda's (2008) article draws mainly on discourse analysis, it also uses Bourdieu's perspectives on language to inform their research on lecturers' classroom discursive practices in Tanzania.

The dominant theoretical perspectives engaging with aspects related to the English language used in this article were found to be drawn from decolonial and postcolonial studies (Kamwendo 2010; Kamwendo et al. 2014; Mendisu and Yigezu 2014; Parmegiani 2014; Hurst 2015). Hurst's (2015) study, which is informed by decolonial perspectives from Mignolo (2005; 2009), discusses student perspectives on language support at the University of Cape Town. In addition, Mendisu and Yigezu (2014) based their analysis of research output in the field of Ethiopian studies at Addis Ababa University by engaging with perspectives mainly borrowed from the Kenyan author and postcolonial critic, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1994). Kamwendo's (2010) analysis of language policy in Malawi is informed by Ali Mazrui's and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's ideas. Kamwendo et al. (2014) also based their analysis of language policy and practice at the University of KwaZulu-Natal on perspectives from African scholarship, the Africanisation of higher education, and the concepts related to the African Renaissance and transformation. Qorro's (2013) study on language policy in Tanzania, which uses Robert Philipson's (1992) theory of linguistic imperialism, could also fall into this category of articles. The articles that adopted decolonial/postcolonial/Africanist perspectives share a theoretical claim with Pennycook (1998), which is that popular views that regard English as a neutral language of global communication must be challenged since the language remains a carrier of colonial discourses and meanings.

At the heart of these arguments is the question of the relative absence of African languages in the continent's higher education systems and institutions both in teaching and learning and knowledge production.

Main findings of the reviewed articles

Many of the papers identify the problematic nature of using the English language in higher education. As presented in the next two subsections, this is evident in (1) articles focusing on assessing the implications of levels of proficiency (Nel and Müller 2010; Grosser and Nel 2013; Jha 2013; Bouazid and Le Roux 2014; Obioha and Obioha 2014; Sibomana 2016; Uwambayinema 2016) and (2) articles that addressed the language in relation to policy, (de)coloniality, identity and other context-specific issues (Mohamed and Banda 2008; Kamwendo 2010; 2016; Posel and Casale 2011; Webb 2012; Qorro 2013; Mendisu and Yigezu 2014; Parmegiani 2014; Seabi et al. 2014; Hurst 2015; 2016). However, it is worth noting that, as is the case for other sections, these categories should not be perceived as mutually exclusive.

Critiquing the implications of levels of English proficiency

The findings of some of the papers on proficiency levels reveal impacts on variables such as critical thinking, employability opportunities and entrepreneurial development. According to Grosser and Nel (2013), English language proficiency has been identified as affecting students' level of critical thinking and their ability to make inferences, although students' overall performance was found to be poor. The researchers assert that the findings are concerning for South African students since they are

expected to analyse and interpret texts in English at higher education institutions, irrespective of their home language. On the other hand, the study carried out by Posel and Casale (2011) demonstrates that the economic returns of English language proficiency are higher for the majority of employed South Africans than that of home languages. In contrast, Obioha and Obioha (2014) indicate that bilingual proficiency in English and Nigerian languages has overriding positive implications on mentorship and entrepreneurial development of students. These benefits include enhancing and enriching the students' language experiences, offering opportunities for the development of cognitive skills, enhancing students' ability to interact in both English and their local languages, and transferring concepts from one language to another.

Other studies in this category indicate that ineffective teaching methodologies, language learning strategies and first language interference negatively affect the attainment of English language proficiency. Jha (2013), who identified 17 linguistic and non-linguistic impediments as serious deterrents to mastering English in eastern Ethiopia, also argues that the teaching methodologies used in the classroom are often ineffective and that English language teachers are not familiar with the relevant methods of language teaching and learning. Sibomana (2016) states that strategies used to improve Rwandan graduate students' English language proficiency seem ineffective as the students face 'enormous' challenges when it comes to academic English. Bouazid and Le Roux's (2014: 882) discovered that '…inappropriate teaching strategies, inadequate language proficiency and poor student self-efficacy' lead to poor English language proficiency in English literature in Algeria. In an address on the challenges faced by Rwandan students of English as a foreign language, in particular concerning their perception and production of North American English vowels, Uwambayinema (2016) shows that the students faced various challenges in their effort to optimise the production of vowels. The influence of their first language vowels system was also found to be one of the significant challenges.

Critiquing the use and status of English considering policy, (de)coloniality, identity and other contextual specificities

Language policies that privilege English, that are not informed by evidence and research and that do not take into consideration contextual realities are critiqued in the findings of the reviewed articles. The finding from a study undertaken at the University of the Western Cape (Abongdia 2014) shows that even though the language policy of the university is developed by scholars who seem to have ideological stances on the advancement of multilingualism, the policy eventually privileges English over the other languages. This research also concludes that the language policy includes vague 'escape clauses' that have contributed to the problems related to policy implementation. In cross-national and regional studies, Brock-Utne (2010: 636) draws on secondary data and personal experience as a consultant in research projects in Namibia, Tanzania and South Africa to argue that '[r]ecommendations from only one of the four studies/consultancies looked at have been thoroughly followed up'. Qorro (2013) asserts that the education policy in Africa, including Tanzania's education and training policy, demonstrates that the elite who are products of colonial education make 'bizarre' and 'impractical' policy decisions that are not in the interests of the people on the continent. One of the objectives of this reviewed article, according to Qorro (2013), is to 'expose' the 'injustices' that African students in general and particularly in Tanzania suffer because of education policies that are rooted in the colonial experience and backed by former colonial masters. Qorro (2013) concludes that the choice of an inappropriate language of instruction in Tanzanian secondary schools led to low student and teacher English language proficiency. It is also argued that English as a language of teaching and learning in Tanzania produces dysfunctional graduates, thus rendering the whole education system a waste of both time and resources for most students. Kamwendo (2016: 226) argues that Malawi's new language policy cannot serve as a strategy for eradicating low English proficiency among learners. The author states that '[w]ith the new language policy, learners are likely to neither develop their own familiar African language, Chichewa, nor learn subject matter, nor learn English well'. In another article, Kamwendo (2010) underscores that there is silence on Malawian languages' role in the country's leading national document, *Vision 2020*, thus reflecting the tendency of glorifying the foreign and denigrating the local.

Similar to decolonial perspectives adopted to critique policy by Qorro (2013) and Kamwendo (2010), some of the papers also critiqued the dominance of English in higher education considering the impact of traumatic language shifts, and the absence of African languages in African studies, for ICT participation and discipline-specific knowledge production. In studies conducted at the University of Cape Town, Hurst (2015; 2016) challenges the insufficient language support that students receive and calls for the need to question an education system that reflects a 'colonial wound' through language (Hurst 2016). It was discovered that students find aspects such as language mobility and language shift to be significant but traumatic parts of their transition into higher education, Hurst (2016: 232) states that '…students' experiences recall the colonial wound, as they perceive that intelligence is measured by their proficiency in English, and that they and their languages are inferior'. Mendisu and Yigezu (2014) draw on the case of Addis Ababa University to argue for the need to conduct Ethiopian studies in Ethiopian languages. The researchers argue that there is a need to include African languages in research and knowledge production in order to achieve the decolonisation of knowledge in African universities. Mendisu and Yigezu (2014: 303) claim that

> [t]he espousal of colonial or foreign languages like English and French as a medium of instruction and publishing makes the knowledge produced by African intellectuals totally inaccessible to the majority of the African people to whom it is meant to be the most useful and relevant.

Halvorsen's (2012) study on ICT participation in higher education in Tanzania indicates that most students and staff who participated in the research feel 'subjugated' because of the English-language dominated world of the internet and prefer to use Kiswahili in most of their ICT communication. Halvorsen (2012: 319) argues that it is important for Tanzanian intellectuals to create online content that is 'relevant, readily assimilated, and in languages and contexts users can relate to and understand.' On the other hand, Cloete (2011) highlights the necessity for greater interlanguage exchange during the study of Africa's natural and, in particular, conservation environment.

The studies that explored issues related to language and identify also emphasise the role African languages play as significant identity markers in the higher education context. Ngcobo's (2014) findings indicate a 'robust African pride' among isiZulu-speaking students at the Mangosuthu University of Technology over the use of their languages in education. However, the study also states that there are concerns about the negative impact this might have on their development of English proficiency and the implementability of bi/multilingual instruction on campuses with diverse student populations. Parmegiani's (2014) study shows that although some South African students claimed ownership of English as the basis of their 'expertise' and their language practice, they expressed an inseparable affiliation with their mother tongue, underscoring the importance of isiZulu as a marker of their identity.

Some of the studies problematise the use of English in higher education raising concerns about contextual specificities. These concerns include inadequate discursive and assessment strategies, limited opportunities to use the language, inadequate language support, and poorly organised language management systems. Mohamed and Banda (2008) critique educators' linguistic practices as hurdles to effective language learning in Tanzania. They argue that lecturers often perform what they (the lecturers themselves) accuse their students of doing (e.g. code-switching and code-mixing), thereby failing to see students' linguistics behaviour as a reflection of the lecturers' discursive practices. According to these researchers, there also seems to be the tendency of equating 'being educated' with 'being educated in English'. Mohamed and Banda's (2008) research presents a critical view of higher education in Tanzania which they argue fails to utilise opportunities presented through a bilingual mode of teaching and learning.

Focusing on assessment and evaluation in English, Twagilimana's (2017: 75) findings indicate that Rwandan students are unlikely to benefit from instructors' feedback, since 'the type of feedback practices observed is surrounded with confusion regarding what the lecturers' expectations are and hence what is required of an academically acceptable text'. Sibomana (2014) also indicates that Rwandan students have struggled to cope with the change in language policy since the 2008 introduction of English in the country. The author states, however, that the limited opportunities for

daily English use and the limited capacity of learners to 'produce enough input and output' in the language, makes the Rwandan context not favourable enough to enable the attainment of English communicative competence.

Hurst's (2015) research suggests that the process of mainstreaming academic literacy may have to be accompanied by targeted support for English as an additional language. This study established that 39% (n = 129) of the students who participated in a survey at the University of Cape Town stated that they could have improved their grades had they received additional support in improving their academic writing skills. Furthermore, research by Seabi et al. (2014), focusing on transformation at the University of the Witwatersrand, found that both a high workload and the use of English as a medium of instruction hinder student experiences at the university. Finally, a study conducted by Webb (2012) that focused on multilingualism in two historically white South African universities shows that the current dominance of English and the limited role African languages play in South African universities indicates that much remains to be done. Thus, there is a need for further efforts in the management of language if African languages are to be included as mediums of instruction and communication.

The inference from these studies' findings is that English can be an effective medium of instruction and research in Africa after the raising of the proficiency levels of students, lecturers, and researchers because this has an impact on the quality of instruction, employment prospects and students' critical thinking skills. The studies that challenge the dominance of the English language in African higher education systems considering policy, coloniality, identity and institutional conditions seem to advocate projects for what Alexander (2007) and Prah (2017) call intellectualising African languages that have to be undertaken if viable alternatives to the use of the English language are going to be presented. One such initiative explored in one of the articles is the University of KwaZulu-Natal case. As Kamwendo et al. (2014) state, the existence of a series of misconceptions working against the use of isiZulu as a medium of instruction at the university has not stopped the university from taking proper steps towards debunking the myth that African languages do not have the capacity to handle scholarly discourses.

Discussion

One of the major findings of this systematic review of articles that engage with the use of the English language in African higher education systems is that there is research on the continent on the topic that has not previously been covered in other systematic reviews (see Macaro et al. 2018). Therefore, this review serves as a contribution towards systematically compiling such research from the continent.

A classification of the studies categorised using Brumfit's (2004) broad categorisation of the functions of language in higher education shows that the expanding use of the English language as a medium of instruction and its implications has been the preoccupation of researchers in the field. A review of articles using Tight's (2012) work on systematically categorising the themes of higher education research shows that the pedagogical categories (teaching and learning, course design, and student experience) seem to feature dominantly in the reviewed articles as opposed to the other major higher education research themes such as quality, system policy, institutional management, academic work and knowledge. This focus on English and the role it plays in teaching and learning seems to be a continuation from earlier literature exploring the topic from African vantage points (see Rubagumya 1991; Brock-Utne 2002; 2007; Alexander 2003; Mazrui 2003; Bamgbose 2004; Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2004; Webb 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that more research needs to be conducted on English language use to increase our understanding of the implications of its expansion.

Even though the function language plays as a medium of instruction still needs more research, especially in multilingual African contexts, these findings concur with Brumfit's (2004) observation that a lesser emphasis is given to roles that the English language plays in archiving knowledge and research. It is suggested that the increased use of English in internationalised higher education systems and the emerging knowledge economies in Africa means that the role played by the language for academic purposes, such as in conducting, disseminating and archiving research and

knowledge, should receive more attention. It is also important to investigate that particular function played by the language while considering the moves African universities are making towards research-intensive statuses. Therefore, this research confirmed, in line with Kuteeva and Mauranen's (2014: 1) reflection, that the use of English for research remains a 'surprisingly under-explored topic'.

The significance of this finding should not be underestimated, since the rise of knowledge economies and technologies in the name of knowledge societies and the so-called 4th industrial revolution demand that we pay attention to the connection between language, knowledge production, and technology in Africa's higher education systems. As universities in the higher education sector are urged to drive the knowledge era and the 4th industrial revolution by pushing the boundaries of their triple mission of teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and public service and engagement, these convergences are expected to compel them to promote linguistic diversity, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaching, research and innovation, and the pursuit of new modes of internationalisation of knowledge production, collaboration, and consumption.

Diverse theoretical perspectives are used in the reviewed studies, except for seven articles that did not incorporate explicit theories. This finding can be considered as a strength of the body of literature reviewed. Theoretical perspectives in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, and decolonial and postcolonial studies attempting to problematise ideological, contextual, sociolinguistic, and cultural factors dominate many of the articles analysed here. The adopted theoretical perspectives, which include decolonial language anthropologies and linguistic imperialism, are appropriate for such an investigation. It is, however, worth noting that these perspectives, granted that they have the efficacy to critique the use of the language in the sociolinguistic realities in the contexts studied, could also have contributed to the unfavourable views presented in the studies. Therefore, for the sake of creating a body of knowledge that is informed by diverse epistemological and theoretical underpinnings, it is argued that a more open-minded and pragmatic multiple theoretical framing has the potential to strengthen the studies and would render the practices and implications of using English in African higher education systems more intelligible.

In line with the findings by Macaro et al. (2018) and Williams (2015), the papers reviewed emphasise the problematic nature of the implementation of the English language as a medium of instruction. This assertion considers the low proficiency level of both students and teachers and the implications of using the language in the development of African languages as media of instruction. This finding calls for more empirical research on strategies that mitigate the negative implications of using English for teaching and learning. The research papers suggest the need to improve the English language proficiency of learners and educators, and/or to develop African languages so that they can serve as media of instruction in the higher education space. The idea of moving toward a diglossic future, where English is used as the language of academia and other languages are used as languages of identity as suggested by Coleman (2006), also seems to be challenged in the studies reviewed. Instead, the studies favour the creation of a multilingual university environment that accommodates both English and African languages (see, for example, Webb 2012; Abongdia 2014; Kamwendo et al. 2014; Mendisu and Yigezu 2014). Concrete strategies on implementing that vision of the multilingual university, however, need more research and theorisation.

Other areas could be suggested as directions for further research. One of them could be in the expansion of the level of analysis. Many of the papers in this study focus on studying particular institutions or departments, which shows that macrolevel or systematic examinations of national, regional and international dynamics could yield more illuminating findings. This approach might have practical implications on how to increase the research impact. The suggestion from Saarinen (2017) indicates that the effect of language policies on other institutional policies in higher education could receive more attention. Another research direction that seems to not have been effectively used in the studies reviewed is comparative analysis. Vertical and longitudinal case studies could also be used to come up with a broader understanding of the matter. In addition, more attention could be given to exploring the implications of using the language in relation to graduate student training and engagement. This is because the findings section – except for studies by Sibomana (2016) and Uwambayinema (2016) exploring the issues Rwandan students face – shows that much of the research is focused on studying student issues at the undergraduate level. As suggested

in the findings by Macaro et al. (2018), studying the use of English as a medium of instruction, and connecting policies, practices and implementations at the higher education level with that of secondary and primary education could be explored.

This research only focused on articles drawn from selected research databases and, as a result might not be comprehensive, especially given the fact that not much research from Africa is well represented in international research databases. A more extensive search using more keywords might result in finding more articles worth reviewing. In addition, the analysis focused on articles published in English, which can also be considered a limitation. The fact that this systematic review covers a ten-year time period could be seen as a limitation. Further research could be conducted covering the pre-2008 and the post-2017 periods for an added and nuanced understanding of issues related to English in African higher education.

Conclusion

This article attempted to systematically review literature about the English language in higher education in Africa. It analysed 30 articles after engaging in a step-by-step screening of articles from one continental and three international research databases. The reviewed articles come from seven countries, with South Africa having the highest percentage (40%) compared with the other countries, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana, and Algeria. Three articles covered regional and continental issues.

One of the significant findings of this review study is that much of the research on the use of English in African higher education focuses on the teaching and learning aspect of the function of language in higher education.

The majority of the articles presented critical and problematic uses of the language in higher education. The findings indicated that proficiency levels are low, and/or that questions related to Africanisation, decolonisation and postcolonial studies call for a greater scrutiny of the use of languages such as English that are often perceived as foreign or colonial. This critique is reflected in articles that approached English from functional as well as more critical and ideological perspectives, though the critique seems much more pronounced in the latter. In conclusion, the English language use is one of the various factors necessitating in-depth research and transformations in higher education. It is therefore befitting that we assess its challenges and opportunities with a healthy dose of pragmatism.

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Appendix

Theory/perspective	Description	Reviewed studies that adopted the theory/ set of perspectives
Krashen and Brown (2007)'s second language acquisition	Propose that cognitive academic language proficiency, or academic proficiency, can be analysed as containing two components: (1) Academic language, characterised by complex syntax, academic vocabulary, and a complex discourse style; (2) Academic content, the content of subjects such as algebra, history, literature, etc. Related to each component are strategies that serve to make input more comprehensible and help acquire academic language and strategies that help us learn new concepts and facts.	Nel and Müller (2010), Grosser and Nel (2013)
Watson Glaser (1980) critical thinking appraisal	The Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal is designed to measure different, though interdependent, aspects of critical thinking through its subtests: inferences, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments.	Grosser and Nel (2013)
Development of student writing (Coffin et al. 2003)	State three influential approaches to teaching student writing: writing as text, writing as process and writing as a social practice. Assessment and feedback have teaching functions to help students improve their work rather than just to measure their achievements.	Twagilimana (2017)
Teacher feedback practices (Brown et al. 1997)	While one of the qualities of feedback is to be meaningful and acceptable to the receiver, and that detailed criteria are rather useful for research than teaching purposes.	Twagilimana (2017)
Academic literacies in English as Second Language (Zamel 1998)	Suggests that: by looking for evidence of students' (non-native English language speakers) intelligence, by rereading their attempts as coherent efforts, by valuing, not just evaluating, their work, and by reflecting on the critical relationship between educators and students, opportunities can be created for a better practice.	Twagilimana (2017)
Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969)	'main hypothesis- 'speaking a language is engaging in a rule- governed form of behaviour'. Major concerns of Speech Act Theory is to analyse the roles that utterances play concerning the behaviour of speakers and hearers in interpersonal communication. Searle (1969) claims that there are five major types of actions that human beings can perform by using language. These are representative, declarative, directive, expressive and commissive.	Obioha and Obioha (2014)
Critical perspectives: language, power, politics, policies and identities		
Language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000)	Kroskrity's (2000: 8–21) four intersecting dimensions of language ideologies. According to him (emphasis in original): • '*…language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group'*; • '*…language ideologies are profitably conceived as multiple because of the multiplicity of meaningful social divisions (class, gender, clan, elites, generations, and so on) within sociocultural groups that have the potential to produce divergent perspectives expressed as indices of group membership'*; • '*…members may display varying degrees of awareness of local language ideologies'*; and lastly • '*…members' language ideologies mediate between social structures and forms of talk'*.	Abongdia (2014)

Theory/perspective	Description	Reviewed studies that adopted the theory/ set of perspectives
Language policy and planning by Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) and Brumfit (2006)	Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) define language policy as 'an effort by someone with or claiming authority to change the language practice (or ideology) of someone else'. Within the language policy, the policymaker has some authority level over those expected to follow its requirements. Brumfit (2006), in his contribution to language policy, says that all humans are born with the ability or capacity to acquire a language(s) that they are exposed to. Brumfit (2006: 36), in his research on language policy in Europe, argues that 'policy making is normally aspirational and symbolic'.	Abongdia (2014)
Linguistic anthropology	According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 369), 'linguistic anthropology is a study of language and identity that describes not merely kinds of speech but kinds of speakers who produce and reproduce particular identities through their language use'.	Ngcobo (2014)
Critical language awareness theories	Building on the work of the Bakhtin Circle, language analysts such as Fairclough have taken an additional look at language and power and how educators can engender a critical language awareness amongst scholars and students. Fairclough notes that: the meaning of a single word depends very much on the relationship of that word to others. So, instead of the vocabulary of a language consisting of an unordered list of isolated words, each with its own meaning, it consists of clusters of words associated with *meaning systems*. (1989: 94; emphasis in original)	Cloete (2011)
Discourse analysis (CDA)	Looks at language as a socially constituted practice where text, whether written or spoken, is considered as discourse, that is, produced by speakers and writers who are socially situated.	Mohamed and Banda (2008)
Bourdieu's theory of language as an aspect of cultural capital	In his formulation, individuals have access to various forms of capital, and he acknowledges both cultural and linguistic capital, where linguistic capital is a subset of cultural capital. In (a simplified version of) his theory, all individuals have capital that is valued in different domains, and individuals will be able to operate successfully in fields that value the types of capital they hold. Not having the 'right' kinds of capital can adversely impact someone's success in a given field.	Hurst (2016); Mohamed and Banda (2008)
Feminist and conceptions of identity (Weedon 1987)	Weedon (1987) argues that identity is 'fluid', 'contested' and 'decentred'. It is 'fluid' because people project themselves differently as they move across time and social domains.	Parmegiani (2014)
Decolonial and post-colonial theories and perspectives	Decolonial theory has recently begun to engage with how the enlightenment, modernity and colonialism are entangled, resulting in what Mignolo describes as 'coloniality' (Mignolo 2009). According to Wa Thiong'o (2009: 20), language is 'a communication system and carrier of memory – what Frantz Fanon calls "bearing the weight of a civilisation"'. Bhabha's (1994) post-colonial notion of 'hybridity' is a healthy reminder that it is 'theoretically innovative and politically crucial' to 'think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities'.	Hurst (2015); Mendisu and Yigezu (2014); Parmegiani (2014); Kamwendo (2010)

Theory/perspective	Description	Reviewed studies that adopted the theory/ set of perspectives
African scholarship, Africanisation of higher education, the African Renaissance, and transformation	The late Neville Alexander made a critical observation when he said that 'to speak of an African Renaissance without addressing the fundamental question of the development and use in high-status functions of African languages is a contradiction in terms' (Alexander 1999: 11).	Kamwendo et al. (2014)
Phillipson's linguistic imperialism	Phillipson defines English linguistic imperialism as the 'dominance of English as asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages' (Phillipson 1992: 47).	Qorro (2013)
Other theories		
Linder's paradigm theory	Definitions of humiliation: one form of humiliation is connected with equality, or equal dignity, while the other is connected with the negation of equality. The first one, connected with equality, relates to the deeply wounding violation of a person's dignity as a human being, where dignity draws its justification from the human rights notion. She adds a further complication introduced by the fact that the humiliation felt by an individual might not be the same as the humiliation felt by a group or a nation.	Halvorsen (2012)