

Language of Instruction Policy and Practice in Africa

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Preliminary Information and Comments

This text is intended to accompany the Map entitled 'AFRICAN COMMUNITY LANGUAGES AND THEIR USE IN EDUCATION.' Forty-five countries are represented, and understandably, the languages are listed on the map close to the geographical areas in which they are spoken. However, the list of countries below is alphabetical, with the number of languages indicated in parenthesis after each country: Angola (7), Benin (13), Botswana (1), Burkina Faso (4), Burundi (2), Cameroon (9), Cape Verde (1), Central African Republic (1), Chad (3), Comoros (1), Cote d'Ivoire (5), Democratic Republic of the Congo (5), Equatorial Guinea (3), Ethiopia (5), Gabon (1), Gambia (3), Ghana (14), Guinea (6), Guinea Bissau (1), Kenya (6), Lesotho (1), Liberia (6), Madagascar (1), Malawi (2), Mali (7), Mauritania (4), Mauritius (2), Mozambique (5), Namibia (6), Niger (5), Nigeria (36), Republic of Congo (2), Rwanda (2), Sao Tome and Principe (1), Senegal (6), Seychelles (1), Sierra Leone (4), Somalia (1), Sudan (8), Swaziland (1), Tanzania (1), Togo (2), Uganda (8), Zambia (7), Zimbabwe (2).

The total number of languages represented on the map is 212, which is quite small compared with the estimated 2,011 languages spoken in Africa. A number of factors are responsible for this small number of languages on the map. First, since data is gathered principally through questionnaires, the quality of information depends on the quality of input from the respondents. From experience, information requested on educational language policy is usually directed to Ministries or Departments of Education and the responses given are not always accurate. Second, the emphasis on *community languages* (languages that are used for inter-ethnic communication) means that a number of mother tongues used in education may not necessarily be included in the survey. Third the use of African languages for literacy, which is the norm in most African countries, is not represented in the notation used, although it is indicated in the narrative section on each community language and each country. Were this to be included, many more languages would have been listed.

The notation employed for indicating type and level of language use in education is straightforward and easily understood. There is, however, the vagueness of medium of instruction when coupled with level of education. For example, several languages are marked as **IM**, meaning that they are used as medium of instruction in primary education. In actual fact, it is only in a few countries and in certain pilot projects that African languages are used for the entire duration of primary education. In most cases, they are only used as languages of learning and teaching from one to four years.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the coverage of languages, the map is a major contribution to UNESCO's long-standing advocacy of mother tongue education. The negative attitudes that impede the use of African languages for teaching and learning are shown to be unwarranted, particularly when it is demonstrated in practice that many African countries are either already using, or planning to use, them by embarking on experiments and pilot projects. One of the problems often decried in language educational policy is the dearth of information on what is going on in different countries.

Origins of Language Educational Policies and Practices in Africa

The most important factor in the origins of language educational policies in Africa is the legacy of colonial language policies. In general, there is a correlation between use of African languages as media of instruction and colonial language policies that permit or encourage the teaching of African languages. Broadly speaking, African countries in this regard fall into three categories:

- (a) Countries that fall under colonial powers that favour the use of African languages for teaching:
 1. Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe (*British influence*).
 2. Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda (*Belgian influence*)

In general, during the colonial period, initial literacy and early primary school education in these countries for the first three or four years was conducted in the mother tongue or a language of the immediate community. The result was that language development activities, particularly of a practical kind, such as devising of orthographies, writing of primers and supplementary readers, compilation of dictionaries and grammars, production of literary works and a literary culture of

reading and writing in African languages took place early. This is why the map shows that a preponderance of African languages that are used for teaching and learning are mainly to be found in these countries.

(b) Countries that fall under colonial powers that discourage the use of African languages for teaching:

1. Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon,

Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Togo (*French influence*)

2. Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe (*Portuguese influence*)

3. Equatorial Guinea (*Spanish influence*)

In these countries, mother tongue education was non-existent in the colonial period and, in general, even up to the present day. The use of African languages as media of instruction is today either to be found in pilot projects or as a result of radical innovation in educational language policy. Linguistic research was of a more academic than practical type intended for the scholarly community rather than for use by speakers of the language.

(c) Countries that fall under a dual language policy or whose language policy is divergent from those of the colonizing power:

Cameroon, Ethiopia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia

Unlike the countries listed in (a) and (b) above, the countries in (c) are marked by certain peculiarities. Dual influence can be illustrated by Cameroon, Seychelles, Namibia and Somalia. Cameroon came under French influence in the east and British influence in the west. However, because the French influence was predominant, African languages were not used as media of instruction until recently in a pilot project. Originally a French colony, Seychelles later became a British colony and this accounts for why Kreol/ Seychellois is used in teaching at primary

level. Namibia was a German protectorate, which was later administered by South Africa. The latter influence meant that some African languages were used in teaching. Somalia was under Italian and British influence, but the latter influence was predominant as can be shown by the enhanced role that Somali plays in education.

Divergent language policy can be illustrated by Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Madagascar and Comoros, although originally French colonies, promoted African language education, perhaps mainly on account of the predominant influence of Malagasy in Madagascar and Ngazija/Comorien in Comoros. On the other hand, Mauritius, which ended up as a British colony, did not overcome the French policy of not using African languages for teaching. In a special class are Sierra Leone and Liberia, which were founded as colonies for resettling freed slaves. Unlike the other British territories, Sierra Leone did not have a policy of using African languages for teaching nor did Liberia, which was founded by the American Colonization Society and was later proclaimed an independent republic. Ethiopia was an empire, which, for a brief period, came under Italian influence. But such was its great tradition that it maintained its attachment to Amharic, which was widely used in education. When Eritrea was excised from Ethiopia in 1993, it embarked on an aggressive promotion of African languages, particularly Tigrinya, which is the country's official language.

Policy Maintenance and Policy Shift

As far as educational language policies go, the two factors of policy maintenance and policy shift are in evidence. Policy maintenance is a direct consequence of an inheritance situation defined as the way the colonial experience continues to shape and define post-colonial experiences and practices. Not only are policies maintained in terms of use or non-use of African languages for teaching, the colonial practice of confining African languages as media of instruction to the lower levels of primary education has persisted in most countries till the present time.² The factors responsible for this situation include the resilience of the former policies and the continued use of imported European languages as official languages as well as languages of secondary and higher education. The argument frequently advanced is that the ultimate medium at higher levels might as

well be introduced as early as possible. This is, of course, a mistaken notion based on the myth of “longer means better”. Experience with the use of imported official languages as media of instruction has shown that this is not necessarily the case, as success in the use of a language for teaching depends on several factors, including quality of teachers and instructional materials.

Understandably, if a language is to be used for teaching a subject which hitherto has been taught in another language, course materials will have to be designed and this will involve language development activity, especially vocabulary expansion. For those who are not keen on using African languages as media of instruction beyond initial primary classes, the fact that language development is a major undertaking is a convenient excuse. In this connection, it is remarkable that, with few exceptions, the logical progression of extending an African language medium to higher classes, even in the primary school, is not usually seen as a viable policy. The contradiction involved in this is borne out by reports from country after country of what teachers actually do in the classroom. When the language of instruction is officially an imported official language such as English, the reality is that teachers are aware of the limitation of their pupils that they often switch between the official medium and the mother tongue in order to make their teaching meaningful. Hence, an official medium in higher primary classes is often a myth for the consumption of inspectors of schools and visitors.

Policy shift may involve increasing, decreasing, or fluctuating use of African languages in education. The reasons for all of these could be ideological or political, or an outcome of educational reform. In the case of increasing use, one can cite as an example, the post-independence period when certain countries with a socialist orientation, such as Guinea and Burkina Faso, broke off from a French-only medium to include African languages as media of instruction. On the other hand, the increasing attention to the use of African languages for teaching in Mali and Niger has arisen mainly from educational reform. In both countries, there has been experimentation and a change of attitude to the importance of African languages in education. In Mali in particular, such is this attitudinal change that taking an African language subject is a requirement for completion of a degree in the Humanities. In Ethiopia, other languages, such as Oromo and Tigrinya have been added to Amharic as media of instruction.

For decreasing use, there are examples from the Democratic Republic of Congo, which, after independence, abandoned the Belgian policy of encouraging African languages for a French-only medium. However, the information on the map shows that this post-independence policy shift has been reversed. Of particular significance is the case of South Africa, which under the apartheid regime had a policy of using African languages as media of instruction up to Standard 6 (i.e. the entire eight years of primary education). Owing to agitation against this policy, particularly its accompanying imposition of a dual medium of Afrikaans and English at post-primary level, the mother tongue medium was whittled down progressively from eight to six, four, and, eventually, zero. The position today is that African languages are not generally used as media of instruction in primary schools, except in pilot projects such as mixed English and Xhosa classes and survivals of old Department of Education and Training (DET) schools in the Western Cape, which still carry on teaching and learning in isiXhosa, Setswana, and Sesotho in classes ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 3.³

Fluctuation in policy is one of the major problems of educational language policy in Africa. Changes of government or party in power or even of officials running government departments are often to blame. In Guinea and Burkina Faso, the weakening of the strong support for mother tongue education has coincided with the change in political leadership,⁴ while in Ghana, fluctuation in educational language policy ranging from zero to 3-year-plus medium in African languages could be associated with the various changes in government over a period of about twenty-five years.

One major factor that influences policy shift and fluctuation in policy is the role of practices recommended by international organizations or committees of experts. In the case of some countries that have a policy shift from mother tongue medium to an English medium, the motivation was the result from an experiment conducted in Kenya in 1958, which showed that Asian children taught in English performed very well. This was the immediate cause of a reversal in 1961 of the long-standing policy of mother tongue medium in the first three years of primary education. Such was the influence of this experiment that the policy arising from it was adopted in a number of countries, including Zambia, Ghana, and Northern Nigeria (where it was given the title “Straight-for-English”). When these countries later realized that this policy did not produce the best

results, they reverted to the mother tongue medium policy they had earlier abandoned. But for the undue influence of this foreign-induced experiment, this particular policy shift would have been unnecessary.

In contrast to the shift away from the use of African languages as media of instruction, the reverse shift towards it is exemplified by the role of UNESCO in the promotion of mother tongue education. From the momentous recommendation of the UNESCO Meeting of Experts in 1951 to the effect that “On educational grounds, we recommend that the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the break between the home and the school as small and possible”⁵ to more recent declarations, the Organization has relentlessly advocated mother tongue education. More recently, in a position paper reviewing and summarizing the Organization’s stand, three basic principles have been enunciated as follows:

- *mother tongue instruction* as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.
- *bilingual and/or multilingual education* at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.
- language as an essential component of *inter-cultural education* in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.⁶

The effect of UNESCO’s relentless advocacy is that member states of the Organization have been under pressure to re-examine their policies. Those already engaged in the practice of mother tongue education have felt justified, and those that have not had such a policy have made statements supporting it or have actually embarked on experiments and pilot projects. In effect, conducting initial literacy or lower primary education in an imported official language is no longer fashionable.

In considering policy shift, it is important to draw attention to problems of implementation, which often impede innovations in policy. The classical example is the

case of Tanzania, which adopted a Kiswahili medium in primary education with the aim of extending this medium gradually to the secondary level. In spite of the success of the policy in primary education, the expected progression to secondary education did not materialize owing to implementation problems. Similar examples are the change of policy in Zambia from an English medium to an African language medium in the first four years of primary school, which was approved but not implemented, and the proclaimed right of 40 or more children in a class to demand instruction in their language, which is part of the language educational policy in South Africa, but which remains till now merely a policy on paper.⁷

Language Instruction at Pre-primary Level

Education at pre-primary level is often not part of the public school system. Parents who can afford it send their children to private pre-primary schools run by entrepreneurs. This limits the control that educational authorities can exert on language policy at this level. The Handbook on Community Languages, in which the map appears, states, “Benin and Togo are the only two African countries with national policies for use of African languages in pre-school education”.⁸ The question that arises is whether the stated policy is being observed in practice. For example, there is a similar policy in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education as follows: For pre-primary education, the Government maintains that it will “ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community”.⁹ In practice, this policy is not enforceable because of the following constraints: First, as has been pointed out, the regulatory influence of the Government is limited because it does not own or run pre-primary schools. Second, middle-class parents who send their children to fee-paying pre-primary schools demand early instruction in English rather than in a Nigerian language. Third, proprietors of pre-primary schools, who determine the language of instruction policy, bow to the wishes of the parents, since their aim is to maximize profits through higher enrolment. What happens, in effect, is that medium of instruction is English, but by way of appearing to show an interest in the child’s first language, occasional oral lessons are given in the first language directed mainly at vocabulary recognition. Thus, it may be said that use of African languages in pre-primary

education either never occurs at all or, when it does, it is hardly as a medium of instruction, but rather as a rudimentary subject in the curriculum. Hence, this is one area where improvement is called for both in policy and practice. As a starting point, governments should be encouraged to establish model public pre-primary schools, which can serve as examples to private ones in terms of implementation of government's language policy on pre-primary education.

Language Instruction at Primary Level

The primary level of education is the major level at which African languages are used as media of instruction in the public school system. Practices, however, vary from country to country and from one language group to another. In general, the norm seems to be the use of African languages as medium of instruction in lower primary, i.e. the first three classes as in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. Departures from this norm occur in the case of small-group languages, which may be introduced for initial medium lasting for the first one or two years. Extension of an African language medium to upper primary classes have only been reported in a few countries¹⁰ such as Botswana (Setswana) and Lesotho (Sesotho), where the national languages are used as languages of instruction up to Primary 4, Uganda (Ateso, Luganda, Lugbara, Luo, Runyankore, Runyoro) up to Primary 5, and in Tanzania (Kiswahili), Somalia (Somali), Ethiopia (Amharic), Eritrea (Tigrinya), Madagascar (Malagasy), Nigeria (Yoruba in pilot project schools only), where the languages indicated are used as languages of instruction for the entire duration of primary education. In fee-paying private schools, it is possible to ignore the policy of African language medium in favour of an imported official language.

The policy of limiting an African language medium to lower primary classes appears to be misplaced when compared with observed practice in most countries. Owing to a variety of factors, including inadequate mastery of the imported European language, limited teacher competence, and lack of readiness on the part of pupils, the African language medium supposed to be replaced continues to feature unofficially in classroom instructional practice. An example from Ghana is the finding of a Committee, which discovered in 1956 that, contrary to laid-down policy, 76% of the primary schools visited

in the course of their investigation did not use English as a medium of instruction at any level. Given this situation, it makes better sense for the language of instruction policy to be reviewed so as to allow for the use of an African language medium throughout the primary level of education.

In the existing policies, there is some recognition of the importance of continued instruction in African languages, even after they have ceased to be used as a medium of instruction. Consequently, they are usually retained either as optional or compulsory subjects in the curriculum. In actual fact, it may be argued that it would be better to make them compulsory, since abandoning them at this juncture is throwing away an irreplaceable cultural heritage.

Language Instruction at Secondary Level

The use of an African language as a medium of instruction at secondary school level is very rare. Attested cases for which instructional materials in content subjects are available include Somali in Somalia and Malagasy in Madagascar. Several reasons have been advanced for the non-use of African languages as media of instruction in secondary education. First is the question of lack of technical vocabulary for discussing content subjects. The experience of other languages that have gone through a similar process is often ignored. Given the will to do it, language development is possible. In fact, all languages are constantly developing and improving their capacity to cope with new experiences. Consider, for instance the changes that have taken place in imported European languages with the coming of the Information and Communication Technology, particularly with respect to the computer, internet, e-mail, text messaging, etc. In Nigeria, metalanguage for teaching the major languages through the languages themselves have been developed through the well-known processes of vocabulary expansion. Second is the need to prepare for tertiary education, the medium for which is not an African language. Third is the multiplicity of languages, which limits possibility of use as a medium to only those languages with sizeable school populations. Fourth is the demand for international mobility, which has been intensified by the demands of globalization. While an African language medium for secondary education may not be feasible for most countries at the moment, nothing stops a gradual progression towards it,

for example by the extension of an African language medium in primary education to the first two years of secondary education. In any case, the move towards Universal Basic Education, which is designed to extend compulsory schooling beyond primary education, provides a favourable context for such extension. The point that needs to be emphasized is that using an African language medium does not preclude proper mastery of a language such as English or French, which will be taught as a subject. The goal will be viable bilingualism, where knowledge gained in one language can be expressed in another.

In secondary schools, just as in primary schools, an African language subject is either optional or compulsory at least for the first three years. Since entry requirements for tertiary education for non-science programmes generally stipulate a language other than English, a number of students often find themselves taking an African language subject if they cannot take another European language such as French. In any case, several languages such as Akan, Ga, and Ewe in Ghana; Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Efik in Nigeria; Kiswahili in Tanzania and Kenya; and isiZulu, isiXhosa in South Africa are subjects available in the final secondary school certificate examinations.

In practically all the cases in which an African language is taken as a subject, it is the first language of the student. There is however the possibility of a student taking another African language as a second language in addition to the one he or she already speaks. An example of this is in Nigeria's bilingual policy, which requires that a child should offer one of the three major languages in addition to his or her mother tongue. This policy is implemented at secondary school level, where two Nigerian languages are compulsory subjects at the Junior Secondary level and one of them continues to be compulsory till the end of secondary education. This is a model that can be usefully adopted in situations in which one or more dominant languages have emerged as a national lingua franca.

Language Instruction at Tertiary Level

Teaching an African language as a subject at tertiary level is a widespread practice. Such teaching varies from the pure linguistic aspects of the language, which are often taught in an imported language, to full-scale study and research in the African language, using the language itself as a medium. It is interesting to note that even where

an African language is not taught at all either as a subject or as medium of instruction, such as in Cameroon, Senegal, Mozambique, Benin, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, research is conducted in the relevant Departments of Linguistics and teaching of the grammatical and phonological structure of the language is often done as well.

The use of an African language as a medium of instruction is limited to the teaching of the language as a subject and not for any other subject. In this connection, metalanguage has been developed for teaching language and literature especially in those languages, which are also taught as subjects at secondary school level. This is an advance on past practice of teaching African languages in English or some other imported official language.

The importance of the teaching of African languages as subjects at tertiary level is that it helps in the process of language development, often leading to devising, reforming and harmonization of orthographies and preparation of dictionaries and grammars. Experience in some African countries has shown that such work at the tertiary level facilitates teaching of the languages at lower levels of education, particularly in terms of the students that major in language subjects and the materials developed.

Language Instruction and Literacy

Literacy is one domain in which the use of African languages is inevitable. Several reasons may be adduced to justify this situation. First, since literacy at the earliest stages involves coding and decoding of language data in form of reading and writing, it can only be meaningfully carried out in a language that learners know well. This explains why attempts to carry out literacy in imported languages, for example, in French in Mali, in Portuguese in Mozambique and English for tobacco farmers in South-west Nigeria have been a dismal failure. Second, considering high illiteracy rates in many African countries, adult literacy needs to target large populations of learners, particularly in mass literacy campaigns, which call for a mobilization of instructors, most of whom can only function maximally in their own languages. Third, adult learners have specific needs, which are linked to the world of work. Hence, the emphasis on functional literacy for which it is meaningful to relate to a language, which the learner already uses in the course of everyday transaction. Fourth, eradication of illiteracy is a gigantic undertaking

for which as many languages as possible need to be employed, if the effect is to be felt in the shortest time possible.

The efficacy of African language instruction for literacy is demonstrated in its general acceptance, even by countries that do not have a practice of such instruction in primary education. Examples are Benin, Angola, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Mali. Some of the successful experiments in literacy include Bambara and Fulfulde in Mali, Amharic, Oromo and Tigrinya in Ethiopia, Hausa and Zarma in Niger, and Kiswahili in Tanzania. The use of African languages for literacy has helped in reducing the high rates of illiteracy. For example, between 1985 and 1990, virtually every African country south of the Sahara recorded a fall of between 4% in the case of Burkina Faso, Central African Republic and Rwanda and almost 10% in the case of Mali, Niger, Gambia, Liberia and Burundi.¹¹

Typology of African Language Instruction

Taking into consideration non-formal education and all levels of formal education, a typology¹² of use of African languages as a medium of instruction may be presented as follows:

<u>USE/LEVEL</u>	<u>EXAMPLE OF COUNTRIES</u>
1. No Use	Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe,
2. No Use with Experimentation	Cameroon, Niger, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Mali, Chad, Liberia, Burkina Faso
3. Literacy only	Angola, Benin,
4. Early Primary	Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, , Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho
5. Full Primary	Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Madagascar, Nigeria (Yoruba Pilot Project only)
6. Secondary	Somalia, Madagascar, Ethiopia
7. Tertiary	No example, except in the case of metalanguage for teaching the language itself e.g. Kiswahili in Tanzania, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria, Akan in Ghana and Shona in Zimbabwe

Experiments in Language Medium

Over the years, there has been a strong pressure either to introduce or experiment on African languages as media of teaching and learning in schools. This explains why there are several pilot projects, even in countries that do not have a tradition of mother tongue education. The map shows that countries such as Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone are involved in one project or the other directed at introducing African languages as media of instruction whether at pre-school or primary level.

At primary school level, there are basically three types of pilot projects: initial or early medium in an African language, bilingual medium, and full medium for the entire primary education. Experiments in early or initial medium have been reported in Sierra Leone, Senegal, Niger and Nigeria (for languages with small school-going populations). An example of this is the Rivers Readers Project in Nigeria, which is designed to introduce initial literacy in about twenty so-called minority languages/dialects through their use as media of instruction in the first two years of primary education. Since one of the main objections to mother tongue education is cost, one important lesson from the project is that costs can be minimized through the use of uniform formats and illustrations for primers as well as cheaper methods for producing reading materials. It is instructive that, in this project, 40 publications were produced in 15 languages/dialects between 1970 and 1972 at a cost of 20,000 US dollars. These publications include primers, readers, teachers' notes, orthography manuals and dictionaries.¹³ Another lesson is that by harnessing community interest and participation, an enabling environment is created for the project. For example, language committees comprising linguists and influential native speakers were set up to review orthographic proposals and to assist with publicity.

Unlike an initial or early medium, where instruction proceeds in an African language for two to three years before a shift to another medium takes place, the bilingual medium involves sharing of roles between an African language and an imported official language. This approach is ideally suited for a situation in which there is suspicion of viability of mother tongue medium. For example, in the context of South Africa, where mother tongue education has acquired a negative connotation as a result of its misuse for

racial and political purposes under the apartheid system, the bilingual approach is probably a more feasible alternative to an outright mother tongue medium. This is probably the rationale behind the pilot project in the Western Cape in South Africa, being run by the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) of the University of Cape Town and which involves the use of isiXhosa and English as dual medium of instruction.

Another example of a bilingual medium is the project known by the French acronym PROPELCA. This is a project in Cameroon where there are over 200 languages in a total population of about 12 million, most of them languages spoken by small populations. In such a complex linguistic situation, mother tongue medium is often believed to be very difficult, if not impossible. Another factor in the situation is that the project is based in Eastern Cameroon, where the dominant official language is French and where the medium of instruction from primary to tertiary levels is also French. Begun in 1981, this project sets out to conduct initial literacy in the mother tongue followed by its partial use as a medium. Seven languages are selected for the project, beginning with the first four (Ewondo, Duala, Fe'efe'e and Nso'). Time allocation to the African languages is 70% in the first year, gradually decreasing to 30% in the third year. Basic language skills are introduced in the African language and the introduction of French is gradual.¹⁴ By 1996 the project has been generalized to embrace 12 languages.

African languages as media of instruction have generally been limited to the lower classes of primary education. An extension to upper primary classes in order to provide for a full medium is rare. An example of a pilot project in order to achieve a full medium is the Six Year Primary Project, which is designed to compare the traditional system of mixed medium with a new system in which Yoruba, the mother tongue of the pupils, is used for learning and teaching for the full duration of primary education. Begun in 1970, the project originally consisted of an experimental group taught in Yoruba throughout the six years of primary education and a control group taught in Yoruba for the first three years followed by the last three years of instruction in English. The main feature of the experimental group is that it had an enriched curriculum, new English materials and a specialist teacher of English teaching English as a subject for the entire duration of the primary school. In order to reduce variables in the project, the enriched

curriculum and new materials were later extended to both groups, while three new groups were added: a new experimental group without a specialist teacher of English, a new control group without new English materials and a traditional control group with neither enriched curriculum nor new English materials. Between 1976 and 1978, the project was subjected to detailed evaluation covering the subject areas - Yoruba, English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Intelligence tests as well as psychological tests of affective outcomes were also administered. The results show consistently that the best group in all subjects is the original experimental group followed closely by the new experimental group. The worst group in all cases is the traditional control group. Thus, the language of instruction is shown to be a significant variable in the performance of the different groups. The project has now been generalized to more schools, but still on an experimental basis.¹⁵

Although the proliferation of pilot projects is a pointer to a renewed interest in language instruction in African languages, there is still a wide gap between experimentation and practical application in terms of policy. Many pilot projects remain so for many years without adoption as policy. For example, in spite of the favourable results from the Six Year Primary Project, it is yet to be adopted as policy in all the States in which Yoruba is a dominant language. It is important, therefore, to couple pilot projects with a plan of action, which will proceed in phases from execution to evaluation and subsequent adoption as policy.

Concluding Remarks

A retrospective look at the use of African languages as languages of instruction in schools will show that much progress has been made over the years. From outright opposition or grudging acceptance, there is now a realization that, if education is to be meaningful for most of the African population and to have a value that goes beyond the school, there is no alternative to mother tongue education. Attitudes are changing and this is borne out by more pronouncements in favour of African language instruction, pilot projects with an African language medium, increased research and teaching of African languages as a subject in Universities and Colleges of Education, and emergence of associations of African language teachers. Areas in which further efforts need to be made

include awareness campaigns (particularly among parents and guardians, who tend to consider language instruction in an imported European language as superior), possibility of establishment of model schools where African language instruction can be shown to be as valid as instruction in other languages, and extension of an African language medium to pre-school and upper primary school levels in the first instance and ultimately to secondary school level. It is hoped that the next edition of the map will reflect increased use of more languages at all levels, both as a medium of instruction and a subject.

¹ Published by UNESCO: Regional Office for Education in Africa, Dakar.

² Bamgbose, Ayo (1991). *Language and the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

³ Plüddermann, P., X. Mati and B. Mahlalela-Thusi (2003). *Problems and Possibilities in Multilingual Classrooms in the Western Cape*. PRAESA Occasional Papers No.2. Cape Town: PRAESA.

⁴ See Sanou, F. (1990) Who's afraid of National Languages as Instructional Media and Why? In UNESCO/UNICEF (eds.). *African Thoughts on the Prospects of Education for All*. Dakar: UNESCO / UNICEF, pp. 75-76.

⁵ UNESCO (1953). *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 47-48.

⁶ UNESCO (2003). *Education in a multilingual world*. Paris: UNESCO, p. 30.

⁷ Republic of South Africa (1997). Department of Education: Language in Education Policy. Government Gazette 18546, 19 December, 1997.

⁸ UNESCO (1985), p. 54.

⁹ Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.

¹⁰ UNESCO: Regional Office for Education in Africa (1990). Regional Seminar on National Languages and Foreign Language Teaching in Africa. *FINAL REPORT*. Dakar: UNESCO.

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