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The Language Policy in South Sudan: Implications for Educational Development

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Abstract

South Sudan's independence in 2011 reopened the debate about the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction at the early stages of schooling, which has intensified among African countries formerly under colonial rule. Many studies express concerns and criticisms about educational policies, specifically regarding the language of instruction. Before South Sudan gained independence, the language policy situation was more complex than today, due to numerous attempts by successive governments in the Sudan to Arabicise the educational system, leaving no room for consideration of the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction at the initial stages of education. Although there is sufficient empirical evidence in the literature which supports the use of indigenous languages as the media of instruction in the first three to four years of primary schooling, there are many vehemently opposed to this idea.

Article 6 of the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan esteems all indigenous languages, stressing that all indigenous languages of South Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed, and promoted, and national education legislation and policy have sought to implement these constitutional protections.

This article seeks to assess the impact of national language policy on social cohesion, ethnic relations, national identity, and perceptions of teachers and parents' vis-à-vis the use of these languages as media of instruction in the early stages of schooling. This study addresses these questions through a review of existing literature. It also investigates how language policy affects social cohesion by looking at the ways in which parents and teachers negotiate the language of early year instruction in multilingual classrooms. How schools deal with the question of 'majority' and 'minority' languages is an overlooked area where

different groups negotiate over culture and language, in search of positive outcomes for young children. In addition, this study has practical implications. It aims to provide an increased awareness of how children can best start their formative education in the language they are familiar with. This study will benefit education policy makers, parents, and pupils, but more specifically teachers, who will learn about pedagogical approaches for students of 'minority languages' studying among the 'majority language' students whose language has been recommended as the medium of instruction.

Keywords: Civicness, national languages, indigenous languages, mother tongue, language of instruction, vernaculars.

Introduction

Prior to South Sudanese independence in 2011, the political wrangling over which language to use as a medium of instruction in schools oscillated between Arabic and English at the expense of indigenous languages. In this article, mother tongue, indigenous languages, local languages, and national languages will be used interchangeably. Of course, the preferred official name in South Sudan is now 'national languages' as opposed to 'local languages.' The General Education Bill (2012) in the section entitled "Interpretation," states that "National Languages" refers to all indigenous languages of South Sudan.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Southern Sudan experienced a significant introduction of Arabic in schools as a means to unite the country by way of a single language. This move affected the perceptions of some parents in urban areas with regard to the question of mother tongue/national language instruction, especially in Juba and other big towns. Even today, some children and parents in urban areas have come to regard their mother tongue as socially inferior to Arabic or English. This sort of attitude as, Poth (1988) observes, gives the mother tongue low status and accustoms African children to attach pejorative overtones to everything connected with their linguistic heritage. Nevertheless, the mother tongue is important because in most family environments, it is used in daily activities. Speaking it at school will enable families to get involved in school activities, especially in the early stages of the child's schooling. In South Sudan, the local language is the one used in church as well as community rituals and practices. Family members confide in each other through the use of the mother tongue.

Research has demonstrated that the acquisition of a second language, be it English or Arabic, is much easier when the first steps in cognitive verbalisation and initiation to reading, writing, and arithmetic are considered in the context of operational

activity, which is only possible with the use of a familiar language (Poth, 1988). It is also argued using a mother tongue contributes to the continuity of children's emotional, cognitive, and cultural development.

This argument is echoed in a report commissioned by the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, (Marshall, 2006) that literacy in local languages is seen as a bridge to literacy in other languages. Most importantly, as Baker (1993) puts it, "literacy in the minority language not only provides a greater chance of survival at an individual and group level for that language. It also may encourage rootedness, self-esteem, and the vision and world view of one's heritage culture, self-identity and intellectual empathy." The preceding analysis resonates with the concept of civicness. Here, the term 'minority language' may mean a language that is spoken by few children in a school setting where the 'majority language' is used as a medium of instruction.

The Languages of South Sudan

Before delving into the complexity of South Sudan's language diversity – languages, language families, and how colonial language policy used local languages for elementary education and English for post-elementary instruction while trying to repress Arabic as pidgin Arabic was becoming a lingua franca (Sanderson, 1962) – it may be necessary to include a section showing speaker numbers taken from language studies conducted between 1977 and 2002 by Marshall, (2006: 101-114) which estimated the number of people speaking an individual language as their first language. This important section might help in the understanding of complicated language issues.

Joseph Greenberg (1963) identified four major families of African language, sometimes known as Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo, Afrasan, and Khoisan. Most South Sudanese people speak Nilo-Saharan languages, but Niger-Congo and Afrasan

languages are also spoken. Marshall (2006) states that members of language families often live, although not always, in close geographical proximity. He also notes that within a family there exists a similarity in words and grammar which inevitably enables speakers of one language to learn a related language through everyday interactions. This explains why neighbouring groups often understand each other because of their language relatedness. Although these languages are evidence of long histories of co-existence, they shaped the ethnic classifications of colonisers, and in turn, the post-colonial politicisation of ethnicity. The table below gives an approximate indication of the number of speakers of these languages.

This brings us to another important point: the issue of multilingualism and multiculturalism as shown in the table of language families below. South Sudan's multilingualism and multiculturalism can be described as both a blessing and a curse. If a civic language policy, one where public authority based on consent and negotiation, is not implemented, it can be difficult to promote peace and understanding among different language groups. As highlighted elsewhere in this article, agreements such as the Addis Ababa Agreement on the Problem of South Sudan (1972), National Dialogue (1989), Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan (1998), and Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005) all recognised that language policy contributes to peace. Note in the table that Arabic features prominently. Although Arabic is regarded as a non-indigenous language in South Sudan, Juba Arabic, a creolised version of Arabic, as Marshall (2006) describes it, has been developing in South Sudan for over a hundred years. Some speakers regard it as their first language. This is because some of its vocabulary is derived from Arabic and Bari, and its phonology and grammar are to a greater extent influenced by other local languages of South Sudan (Watson 1989).

The Development of Language Policy

In the light of the previous discussion, the issue of language policy in education dates back to colonial rule in the Sudan. This culminated in the Rejaf Language Conference of 1928, which was convened in Mongala Province when colonial policy aimed at dividing cultures into self-contained racial and tribal units, with structure and organisation based "upon indigenous customs, traditional usage and beliefs," in the words of the 1930 Southern Policy. Those who attended were missionary representatives from the Belgian Congo and Uganda Protectorate, in addition to experts from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. The main aims of the conference were fourfold: firstly, discuss the possibility of adopting a system of group languages for educational purposes, secondly, to consider the possibility of adopting a unified orthographic system, thirdly, to devise how to produce educational textbooks, and finally to produce an up-to-date classified list of languages and dialects in the South (Abdalhay, et al., 2017). Consequently, eight group languages: Dinka, Bari, Nuer, Zande, Lotuko, Shilluk, Acholi, and Madi were selected, and textbooks in Roman script were developed in these languages.

Shortly before Sudan's independence in 1956, the government in Khartoum adopted Arabic as the medium of instruction. In 1954, the International Commission on Secondary Education recommended that instruction in vernacular languages be discontinued. It also recommended that:

- The state should take over the education of the people of the South and provide them with schools to develop them into 'good citizens.'
- Arabic should become the medium of instruction not only in southern secondary schools, but also in elementary schools; and

Language Table: Approximate estimate of speaker numbers for South Sudan language families, 2003 (Marshall, 2006: 101-114)

Language group	Languages listed in ethnologue	Areas language family is spoken	Simplified language classification	Estimated speakers in South Sudan, 2003
Nilo-Saharan: West Nilotic languages	Nuer, Southwest Dinka (Rek), Northeast Dinka (Agar), Southeast Dinka (Bor), Northwest Dinka (Alor), Reel (Atuot)	Flood plains: Warrap, Lakes, Northern Bahr al-Ghazal, Jonglei, Upper Nile	Nilo – Sahara, Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic, West Nilotic	3,751,640
	Shilluk, Lwo (Jur Luo), Anuak, Burun, Jumjum, Maban, Pari, Thuri (Shatt) Belanda Bor, Acholi	Spoken across South Sudan and in Kenya, Uganda and other parts of East Africa	Nilo-Sahara, Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic, West Nilotic, Northern and Southern Luwo	801,029
Nilo-Saharan: East Nilotic languages	Bari, Mandari, Kakwa, Otuho (Latuka), Lopit, Kakwa, Lokoya, Lango, Toposa	Equatorial hills: Central and Eastern Equatoria	Nilo-Sahara, Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic, East Nilotic	1,190,596
Nilo-Saharan: Surmic Languages	Didinga, Murle, Kacipo, Logarim, Tenet	Ethiopian border, Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria	Nilo Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Surmic, southwest Surmic, similar to those in southwest Ethiopia	238,515
Nilo-Saharan: Central Sudanic Languages	Jur Modo, Baka, Jur Beli, Morokodo, Nyamusa, Mola, Moda, Gulu (kara), Yulu, Gbaya	Flood plains and ironstone plateau	Nilo- Saharan, Central Sudanic, Western, Bongo-Bargimi, Bongo Baka	195,546
	Moru, Madi, Avukaya, Keliko, Dongotono	Equatorial hills	Nilo-Saharan, Central Sudanic, Eastern, Moru-Madi	218,166
Niger Congo languages	Zande, Mundu, Balanda Viri, Ndogo, Lulubo, Feroqe, Banda	Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and in bordering states in South Sudan: Western Bahr al-Ghazal and Western Equatoria	Niger-Congo, Atlantic Congo, Volta-Congo, Adamawa, Ubangi	782,370
Afrasan languages	Arabic	Arabic-based creoles are spoken across South Sudan; Sudanese Arabic widely understood and used; language spoken across the Middle East and North Africa	Afro-asiatic	

- Vernaculars in Southern Sudan should be discontinued as medium of instruction at any level of education (Beninyo 1996: 43).

It was one of a number of clumsily-implemented measures aimed at incorporating Southern Sudan into the dominant culture of the capital, which initially contributed to the civil war that began in this period. After the First Sudanese Civil War concluded with the signing of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, the Summer Institute of Languages (SIL) arrived in Southern Sudan in 1974. SIL's main objective was to translate the Bible into as many local languages as possible. It worked in collaboration with the Institute of Regional Languages (IRL), established in 1977, and was based in Maridi, then Western Equatoria. Another conference was held in Juba in 1974 with the aim to revive the recommendations agreed on at the Rajaf Language Conference of 1928, adding that "Arabic shall be the official language for the Sudan and English the principal language for the Southern Sudan, without prejudice to the use of any language or languages ..." (Beshir, 1969). This time, however, the language groups were classified into two categories: Group A comprised Bari, Dinka, Kresh, Lotuko, Moru, Ndogo, and Nuer, while Group B comprised Acholi, Anuak, Baka, Banda, Didinga, Feroje, Jur-Luo, Kakwa, Mundari, Murle, Shilluk, Toposa and Zanda. As Abdalhay (2008) explains, languages belonging to Group A were to be used as languages of instruction in rural elementary schools (grade 1-3), while those in the second group were designed to enhance literacy training. Likewise, to implement the policy of material production, the English department of the IRL was charged with producing simple English readers for primary schools under the guidance of linguists from SIL between 1984-1987. The Arabic department was also charged with material production for beginner learners, but largely failed due to a lack of Arabic teachers willing to get involved.

The IRL, set up by the Southern Regional Government and funded by USAID, relied on teachers seconded to it by the government, while the SIL was staffed by linguists from different countries. Both institutions worked in partnership to develop materials and writing systems for both Group A and B languages. Marshall (2006) summarises the main goals of the Institute of Regional Languages as follows:

- (a)** Training of professional linguists to become consultants, translators, writers, trainers, and teachers who would develop materials in local languages and train others;
- (b)** Promoting the use of local languages by encouraging people to speak their mother tongue with their children at home; and
- (c)** Developing curricula which reflected the cultures and traditions of the people (MoEST 2006a).

The High Executive Council (HEC) of the Southern Regional Government required the Regional Ministry of Education to establish a college for languages with a department for local languages, with the assistance of the SIL (Resolution 8/11/1975 No SG/HEC/SLRII.A.2). Additionally, the HEC promoted local languages as media of early instruction in rural schools (Meeting No 103 of 8-11-75).

In rural schools, for example, the vernacular was to be used as the medium of instruction from first to fourth year with Arabic and English introduced orally. Arabic and English, on the other hand, were to be taught intensively in third and fourth years. In fifth and sixth years, however, Arabic was to take over as the medium of instruction while the teaching of English was to be intensified.

In urban schools, Arabic was recommended as the medium of instruction from first to sixth years while English was introduced orally in the first two years of schooling. Although the teaching of English was to be intensified in all these stages, there was no mention of the role of vernacular in the education of the children. This differs from the most recent language policy, the

Implementation Guidelines for National & Foreign Languages (2015), where there is an attempt to spell out the language choice in mixed language areas – both in rural and urban settings. The omission of vernacular in urban schools, if deliberate, was an unfortunate decision on the part of the HEC.

The implementation of these policies faced many challenges, such as a lack of political will to implement them in urban areas, while ethnic and linguistic diversity made the teaching of indigenous languages difficult. Moreover, there was a lack of trained teachers and educational infrastructures in rural areas (Abdalhay, et al., 2017). However, the educational achievements of this period were undermined by a confusing policy of switching pupils between Arabic and English media of instruction from one educational level to another. And in any case, in the 1980s, pressure to adopt Arabic language as the medium of instruction in government schools once again grew as a new civil war spread across the South (Beninyo 1996: 203).

Debates about dominant languages continued during the Second Sudanese Civil War, as the Islamic regime of former president Omar al-Bashir vigorously promoted Arabic. For example, soon after coming to power in September 1989, the Islamic regime organised a National Dialogue Conference, where a resolution was passed on language and education which highlighted that the government should not take funding limitations as an excuse to limit the use of any indigenous languages as media of learning and instruction. Moreover, it was considered important that the government should encourage those ethnic groups wanting to promote their respective tribal languages and use them as media of instruction for their children (Abdalhay, Abu-Manga, Miller, 2017). After the signing of the 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement and the adoption of the 1998 Constitution, more attention was given to language rights. A constitutional decree was issued on 22 November 1997 which recognised the

cultural diversity and linguistic plurality of Sudan, and established a National Council for Language Planning in which Arabic was recognised as the 'national language,' and other languages termed as 'local languages.' Likewise, Article 27 of the 1998 Constitution stipulated that "there shall be guaranteed for every community or group of citizens the right to preserve their particular culture, language or religion, and rear children freely within the framework of their particularity, and the same shall not by coercion be effaced" (Abdelhay, Abu-Manga, Miller, 2017).

This positive recognition of indigenous languages and linguistic plurality of the then united Sudan was also reflected in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which brought to an end the war between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Sudanese government, and Sudan's 2005 Interim National Constitution. The two documents used identical wording on language rights: "All indigenous languages of the Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted" (Article 8). This wording was repeated in the 2011 Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (Article 6), which added that South Sudan is "a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-racial entity where such diversities peacefully co-exist" (Article 1).

The 2012 South Sudan Language Policy and the General Education Act (Section 13) reflected this diversity and re-endorsed previous language policies such as the Rajaf Language Conference of 1928, the Educational Conference organised in Juba in 1974, and the language rights set out in the 1998 Constitution. The fact that South Sudan has come up with a language education policy reflecting the importance of using mother tongues or national languages as media of instruction is a welcome move. But some oppose multilingual education. Their concerns, cited in the Implementation Guidelines for National and Foreign Languages (MoEST, 2015) are:

- a)** Fear that the learning and fluency of international languages will be negatively impacted;
- b)** Fear that investment in national languages will produce negative political and educational fallout;
- c)** Fear that linguistic diversities cause divisiveness and therefore national disunity;
- d)** A perception that mother tongues have little relevance in today's 'global village'; and
- e)** A concern for the cost of implementing primary education through many different languages.

However, as Schroeder (2015) argues, the use of African languages as languages of instruction in the early classes of primary education was the norm in other British colonies such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Malawi. The Organisation of African Unity, which became the African Union in 2002, also supported this position which vehemently emphasised the need to promote African languages, especially in education (Matsinhe, 2013). Other international conferences were held to discuss using African languages, such as the Second Festival of African Cultures and Civilisation in 1977, the colloquium attended by countries and United Nations organisations that also encouraged the use and teaching of African languages in research, education institutions, literacy campaigns programmes, and in the media (Schroeder, 2015). Additionally, the first International Conference on African Languages and Literatures held in Asmara in 2000 asserted that "African children have the inalienable right to learn in their mother tongue and the need to develop African languages for effective development of science and technology in Africa," (Schroeder, 2015). Other advantages associated with the use of African languages for educational purposes include cultural, emotional, cognitive, and psychosocial benefits.

UNESCO, for example, encourages mother tongue-based education/multilingual

education, a concept which refers to the use of at least three languages in education namely: the mother tongue, a regional or national language, and an international language. Research demonstrates that mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education has a positive impact on learning outcomes. Children taught in their local languages showed a marked advantage in achievement in reading and comprehension compared with children who follow their education in English (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2014). Not only has research shown that mother tongue-based multilingual education positively impacts the acquisition of a second language, but that multilingualism can be a source of strength and opportunity for humanity. Finally, multilingualism can encourage peace, for example, in the case of South Sudan, which is regarded as a custodian of cultures; erasing these cultures and languages may lead to violence while maintaining them promotes the practice of democracy.

Language Policy and Civiness

The questions raised in the development of language policy are relevant to the concept of civiness. Kaldor (2019) vividly explains the concept of civiness as connected with public authority that relies on consent, brought about through common responsibilities centred on norms and rules that uphold respect for persons. As noted, language-related problems plagued South Sudan well before independence in 2011. These problems were related to class hierarchisation, a product of the dominance of Arabic as the main language for education at all levels, which was politically motivated. Mahmoud (1983:2) asserts that language can become a critical ingredient in the evolution of a class divided society in the Southern Sudan. As Millar (2003) states, "conflicts about language issues and language planning in the Sudan have accompanied the Sudanese political

life since the early 20th century." Language policies were deeply entrenched in a political system that fostered a divisive form of identity politics.

Can the use of national languages for education play a role in minimising conflict between South Sudanese? Can fair recognition of diverse cultures and languages help to promote an equal distribution of economic wealth? Would a fair language policy help communities display what Kaldor (2019) describes as a transformational display of concern for others which could help them resist divisive identity politics and humanise the system in which they live? This paper looks at two areas where a language policy built around the use of national languages as media of early years instruction can foster civicism. First, the use of national languages requires state and community recognition of diversity in multicultural societies. Second, the process of choosing one language as a medium of early instruction offers communities a model of practical democratic negotiation.

A) National language policies foster state and community recognition of diversity

Alidou (2009, p110) strongly argues that "the language in education policies must take into account the multilingual and multicultural situations of each country and community and also the political ramification of the policy." This assertion is true because any language in education policy must aim to promote multicultural competence among all learners. It is arguably true that language, culture, identity, and traditional values must be part and parcel of any language education policy. African languages and, in the case of South Sudan the national languages, can be seen as the most appropriate means of communication both in school settings and other socio-economic and political spaces. That means these languages can also become languages of power and economy, as opposed to those

who argue that using them in schools as media of instruction amount to nothing as far as economics and power are concerned.

UNESCO's position paper entitled 'Education in a Multilingual World' contains principles which I consider relevant to our situation in South Sudan:

Principle 1: UNESCO supports mother-tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of learners and teachers.

Principle 2: UNESCO supports bilingual 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.

Principle 3: UNESCO supports language as an essential component of intercultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

B) Civicism and language choice in early years instruction

The choice of a particular language as medium of early years instruction in a conflicted, multi-cultural environment can lead to conflict. But it can also provide a starting point for negotiation over cultures, languages, and representation. Consultation with all stakeholders is important to avoid conflict that may arise as a result of other languages being left out of implementation. To ensure democratic participation in crafting a language policy, there should be respect for all local/national languages and wider consultation of all stakeholders. Only once these are in place can they lead to humanised systems of governance. To suggest that some local languages be deferred in education is a recipe for disaster which may lead to resistance by the speakers of those languages. It can be assumed that selection of certain languages as media of instruction is dependent on

representation, that is, who sits on the selection panels, and to some extent who wields power in the government. Those whose languages have been selected as media of instruction will naturally feel elevated in status while those whose languages have been left out until further consideration may feel marginalised and their language devalued. But, as this study shows, local dialogue can help resolve some of these difficulties.

Researching the Connections Between Language Policy and Civicsness

The decision to choose a language for educational purposes in early years of schooling in a mixed language area can pose problems, as it may easily lead to political contention. Makoni (2013) argues that there is another controversy within the indigenous African languages themselves as about which of the multiple varieties of minority languages should be used as media of instruction. Although the South Sudan Language Policy (2012) recommends that in mixed language areas, the criteria for choosing the medium of instruction for P1-P3 is to select the majority language, where majority means more than 50%. It is worth noting that cases where schools or classes may have to select the language of instruction if there is no majority are a rare phenomenon. Given the fact that the Ministry of General Education has just started implementing its language policy, there seems to be no schools that operate in very mixed areas that have to use more than one language. Such an arrangement would be impossible since there is already a lack of teaching and learning materials for these languages, as well as a lack of trained teachers of national languages.

It is argued that most of the minority children will have been exposed to their mother-tongue in their home environment before enrolling in school, so this language

will be known to them. Secondly, those minority communities must be encouraged to establish community or church-based classes to teach literacy, literature, and culture related to their language. The latter recommendation assumes that the 'minority' is not being implemented in school. That said, this idea may not succeed if issues related to structures, trained personnel, and materials are not addressed. If you consider the classification of the languages into 'Role A' and 'Role B', one can concur with the assertion that "different languages are accorded different status, thereby perpetuating systems of inequality in that some languages acquire dominant status while others are marginalized" (Wicket, 2001) as quoted from Language Planning in Africa (Makoni, 20013 p. 215). Also, as Kaldor (2019) argues, violent conflict or contemporary wars is the side-lining, marginalising, disintegration, or indeed destruction of civicsness in relation to formal institutions. Therefore, in order to implement a language policy in any given country, there must be a consultation with all stakeholders in this important exercise of choosing a medium of instruction for educational purposes.

The recommendation of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and Institute of National Languages (MoEST/ INL, 2015) was that each state should select one language for a local/national language instruction pilot program, preferably a Role A language considered a regional language of wider communication. In this regard, Kajo Keji County seems to be the only county in South Sudan that attempted to implement the language policy as recommended by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology. For example, a pilot programme of mother tongue instruction in five primary schools for classes P1-P3 in Kajo Keji County was carried out by teachers and volunteers with support from the Jesuit Refugee Service, an international non-government organisation (Laguarda, 2013). The aim of the research was to examine how mother tongue education impacted

teaching and learning during one academic term. Because Kajo Keji has linguistic uniformity and its people value education, the county did not face some of the issues connected with choosing a language of instruction in early stages of schooling. Another advantage for Kajo Keji was the fact that mother tongue basic readers and teacher guides were provided by SIL. One of the findings of this pilot project was that all the language classrooms using Bari as a language of instruction were very interactive, differentiated, and tended to have meaningful presentations and assessments. According to Laguarda (2013), there were few behavioural problems from pupils, and as a result there were no interruptions in the classroom. The success of the pilot project according to Laguarda's comparison of the instructional practices in classrooms in Kajo Keji with other countries agrees with the assertion that: "Instructional practices in Kajo Keji resemble those described by researchers in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa," (p. 457). In addition, this pilot project demonstrated that a bottom-up approach in implementing language policy can achieve the desired results of under-resourced policies.

In a similar vein, Manfredi, Tosco (2013) carried out research which specifically aimed to understand the role, uses, and beliefs surrounding the use of Juba Arabic. Although Juba Arabic is not recognised as an indigenous languages per se, the findings indicate that it is still alive and functions as the real lingua franca and the most widely spoken language in many parts of the country. For some children, Juba Arabic is their mother tongue, especially for those born in urban areas and whose parents speak different languages.

Challenges of Implementing National Language Policies

Recognition of national languages is part of educational development and national

peace processes, but difficult to implement in the classroom. Take for example, the case of Southern Sudan after the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, which recognised Southern Sudan as an autonomous region within a united Sudan. Yet, in spite of this constitutional provision, the language issue remained a contentious educational problem between the North and South, leading to this language conflict spilling over to South Sudan after its independence. However, the Addis Ababa Agreement's recognition of the Southern Sudanese vernaculars, now known as national languages, was an important step in the right direction because it provided the legal framework for a multilingual linguistic policy. That said, it is one thing to declare a language policy in the country, but quite another to implement it because language policy involves both symbolic and pragmatic aspects.

Millar (2003) asserts that, "language is one of the main symbolic flags of collective identity but there are often huge discrepancies between the symbolic importance of language for a given collective identity (nation, region, ethnic group, etc.) and the very role of this language in the socio-economical life of the citizen." This assertion is true because choosing one language over another for educational purposes can lead to misunderstanding by those who feel left out. Those whose language has been selected as a language for education may also feel elevated, hence the tendency to regard themselves as superior to those whose language has been marginalised. Echoing these sentiments, Scarino & Papademetre (2001) and Wickert (2001) argue that some language policies give certain languages different status: some acquire dominant status and others are marginalised, promoting systems of social inequality. Tollefson (2006:42) concurs that "policies often create and sustain various forms of social inequality, and that policy makers usually promote the interests of dominant groups."

Consultation is one way to avoid problems. Perhaps the most positive step the MoEST has taken to implement language policy which encourages consultation of stakeholders was the initiative to organise a workshop in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal, headed by Marshall (2007) and her team. Some of the findings and recommendations, among others, especially when dealing with mixed language areas were to: use different approaches for different areas; use a common language in towns, but to allow churches or communities to establish classes in vernaculars; encourage larger populations in the town to teach mother tongue; begin implementation of the policy in rural areas; and finally hold meetings between parent teacher associations, parents, chiefs, intellectuals, and local authorities of the area.

The Implementation Guidelines for National and Foreign Languages (National and Foreign Languages Centre-MoEST, 2015) were written in this spirit. Any decision taken with regard to selecting one language-in-education model before consulting all those concerned without due consideration for variation in language use may lead to conflict. Alidou (2009) states that rural areas are considerably homogenous, with only one language in any given context, whereas in urban areas, a different organisational approach may be needed. He suggests that the educational policy should be flexible enough to accommodate these variations, hence the need for a decentralised decision-making. This study shows some of the possibilities and challenges of practicing decentralised decision-making regarding language.

The Implementation Guidelines for the National Languages and Education Policy (2015) admits that while ideologically and pedagogically sound, the language and education policy documents do not provide blueprints as to how this policy can be implemented. For example, in a situation where the ethnologue (SIL, 2013) lists 68 languages including Juba/ South Sudanese Arabic, questions

abound, like: 'Which national language?', 'With so many languages how can this implementation proceed?', 'Will some languages be implemented first?', 'How does implementation work in a decentralised system?' 'Is Juba Arabic a national language?', and 'What about mixed language areas?' (Implementation Guidelines for National and Foreign Languages, 2015). All of these questions can pose serious problems for policymakers as well as other stakeholders. The Rejaf Language Conference of 1928 came up with nine 'Group A' languages (Bari, Dinka, Kresh/ Gbaya, Lotuko, Moru, Ndogo, Nuer, Shiluluk, and Zande) to be used in early schooling. This was followed by attempts in the 1970s and 1980s by the IRL to develop writing systems for 'Group B' languages: Acholi, Anuak, Avokaya, Baka, Banda, Belanda Bor, Belanda Viri, Didinga, Jur Modo, Luwo, Keliko, Mabaan, Madi, Mundu, Murle, and Toposa. The questions posed above remain unanswered, hence the need to carry out research.

This could be regarded as a starting point for subsequent language policies, both in Sudan and South Sudan. It is worth reiterating that South Sudan is seen as a rich resource that values the diversity of culture and heritage, as well as educating global citizens who are "proud of South Sudan's role and position in the world" (Curriculum Framework. p.5). That said, this paper seeks to investigate schools that are implementing the language policy under discussion to determine its impact on social and ethnic relations, social cohesion, affiliations, national identity, etc. As South Sudan embarks on implementing the language policy, this study is necessary to ensure that what is formulated in policy is put into practice.

Procedure for Selecting a Language in Mixed Areas

Although it is stipulated in the Implementation Guidelines for National and Foreign Languages (2015) that "where

people speak closely related languages they should be encouraged to choose one for the purpose of education," it is well-established that this can be impracticable in a situation where there are many spoken variants or dialects of one particular languages in its written form. The recommendations offered by the Ministry of Education in this respect are commendable, but without political will and trained personnel to implement them, they exist on paper only. It is worth quoting them here:

- 1.** Closely related dialects should choose a central dialect to be used for education. There must be careful linguistic research and consultation with communities to ascertain if this is feasible and acceptable.
- 2.** Members of the Language Committee and Materials Development and Review Team must have some representation from the different dialects.
- 3.** The Materials Development and Review Team must develop one set of materials to be used in schools. The focus in the materials, at least for P1-P2, must be on using common vocabulary rather than vocabulary unique to different dialects. Once students are literate and in later grades (P3 onwards), they are free to write materials in their dialect but using a unified, standard orthography and spelling system, though formal textbooks should use the common vocabulary.
- 4.** If a language is not yet written, there must be careful examination of how closely it is to related other languages to see if there is truly a need to develop its own writing system.

These are bold statements that require investigation through research, hence the purpose of this study to determine whether the above recommendations are being implemented.

It is possible that the civil wars which erupted in 2013/2016 might have negatively impacted the implementation of these well-intentioned recommendations. Nevertheless,

a research of this nature might shed light on whether national language policy has the pedagogical and sociological desired outcome for learning and teaching in the early years of schooling. These are more complex issues that go beyond mere recommendations as even the personnel structures created or suggested by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology cannot alone ensure that they will be effective. The element of a thorough research in this area is critical, as well as conducting a pilot scheme like the one carried out in one of Kaio Keji among the Kuku children (Laguarda, Woodward, 2013).

Research in Schools: Methodology

This paper looks at the impact of national language policy on social cohesion, ethnic relations, national identity, and perceptions of teachers and parents vis-à-vis the use of these languages as media of instruction in the early stages of schooling. The literature reviewed suggests that much is to be gained from promoting national languages in early years education. The author also sought to investigate this question by looking at how parents and teachers negotiate the language of early years instruction in multilingual classrooms. How schools deal with the question of 'majority' and 'minority' languages is an overlooked area where different groups negotiate over culture and language in search of positive outcomes for young children.

A qualitative approach was used to conduct this research, as qualitative designs tend to be naturalistic and fit well with this study. At the onset, a number of schools were considered for a visit by the researcher, especially those identified as implementing the language policy that advocates the use of national languages from (P1 -P3) as prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Kajo Keji schools seemed to have been the

first to carry out a pilot project in an attempt to implement the language policy, as discussed earlier. A Research Questionnaire was designed for both teachers and parents to gauge their perception with regard to children being taught in their mother tongue for the first three years of schooling and assess as how the language policy impacts social and ethnic relations, social cohesion, and affiliation to national identities. Any language policy is fraught with political decisions and can sometimes result in conflict among those affected. The questionnaires included open-ended questions and were conducted in a friendly environment favourable to those involved.

The benefit of qualitative methods as Miles and Huberman (1994) observe, is that it deals with four aspects for this type of study, namely: the setting, where the research is conducted; the actors, those who will be observed and interviewed; the events, what the actors will be observed or interviewed doing; the process, the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting (p.198). Open-ended questions were asked of the participants, allowing them to answer in any way they felt comfortable. Also, face-to-face interviews were conducted with education authorities, language teachers, and parents who had brought their children for registration. The interviews involved unstructured/open-ended questions intended to elicit views and opinions from participants.

School Visits

After securing permission from the Director General, Ministry of Education of former Jubek State, visits were planned for schools implementing the language policy. I was assigned three language officers to accompany me to two schools: Sacred Heart Primary School (faith-based Catholic School) and Luri Rokwe Primary School (government-run). Two of the officers were chosen from the National Language

Department, one female and one male. The third held the position of inspector for national languages based at Luri County, a female. I was not able to reach the third primary school due to distance and the fact that most schools were still conducting registration for the new academic year, 2020/2021, and I was informed that actual teaching might not have started.

The mother tongue used as medium of instruction was Bari, it being the language of the majority of children in the school. It is worth mentioning that my visit was during the first two weeks of registration and most children had not started attending classes regularly, thus I was unable to determine the number of non-Bari speakers and how they were distributed in the classes. The school officer at Sacred Heart Primary school informed the researcher that there were four language communities at the school, namely: Bari, Dinka, Zande, and Lotuko, and that they varied from time to time. With regard to the questionnaire about the attitude of teachers and parents towards children receiving education in their mother tongue, both seemed positive that minority children showed enthusiasm to learn Bari, something which was a positive indication that children belonging to different language communities can mix freely together. This was an interesting finding: the table above shows that Dinka-speaking people make up a larger language community than do Bari-speaking people, and Zande and Lotuko people make up even smaller language communities. But in the context of a primary school classroom, these differences could be negotiated and positive outcomes found.

Dialogue over language choice also affects classroom practice. From a pedagogical point of view, one of the two schools visited mentioned that they often tried to pair children together so they would help each other in reading out assigned parts of the text in front of them. This seating arrangement initiated by the mother tongue teachers was to ensure that 'majority'

and 'minority' children blended well into the system so that no issues would arise between them. In fact, a teacher from Luri Primary school reported that some 'minority' children showed more interest in Bari language than native speakers.

Training of Bari language teachers seemed to be an issue – something that may be common with other languages in most schools in South Sudan as most of those I interviewed (six) stated that they received some sort of training, although not comprehensively. Some relied on recalling how they were taught Bari years ago. One teacher from Sacred Heart Primary School stated that the only training he had was an in-service training, which was in teaching subjects like, English, maths, and social subjects, but nothing on how to teach Bari. Most trained Bari teachers are either retired or have passed on. A female language teacher complained that she was initially recruited as a cleaner, and due to lack of Bari language teachers, was approached to handle the classes from P1-P2. The researcher had an opportunity to observe her class once and she seemed to be doing well as far as seating arrangements were concerned: one 'minority' child placed between two native speakers of Bari to help explain difficult concepts to their peers. She started with a greeting to the class followed by singing a song that had been taught previously. The teaching was all in Bari, but occasionally the teacher would resort to Juba Arabic for the purposes of clarity. This was the pattern of teaching in the two schools visited.

In both schools visited, the 'minority' children were speakers of Dinka, Zande, and Lotuko, and despite the fact that these children all spoke different languages, they were very enthusiastic to learn the Bari language. One reason could be they had no choice if they wanted to thrive amid the other children speaking Bari. As it may be the case in a situation where one finds themselves a minority language speaker, one doesn't want

to be left out in confidential discussions, especially as young children tend to confide in each other in their own language. When asked whether Bari language teachers employed the student-centred approach, the female teacher seemed unable to give an appropriate answer as she herself wasn't trained to teach Bari but relied on past experiences on how she was taught years ago. Her strong Christian background, charisma, and desire to help children learn made her a popular teacher among the children and other staff.

There were reasonably enough books in both schools visited, namely: (1) 'Jujumbo Kendya Ko Bari, Buk to Geleng/Tomurek, (Learning to read in Bari, Institute of Regional Languages, 1997), (2) 'Jujumbu Kendya ko Bari, Buk Tomusala, Buk Ludukoty, (Learning to read in Bari 3), Institute of Regional Languages. 9th Edition, Nairobi, 1999, (3) 'Buk Nio Kenet, Buk Na Kijakwa, Buk Togeleng/Komurek (My Animal Story Book), Institute of Regional Languages and Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1996. These volumes were available in the bookstore and some of them were produced by the IRL working in collaboration with the SIL, formerly both based in Maridi, Western Equatoria. The IRL now exists in name, as it is supposed to be replaced or renamed the Institute of National Languages. Unfortunately, its buildings are now occupied by the state education authorities and the printing press is nowhere to be seen. Although there are various teaching centres for indigenous languages around Juba, they are not formal schools, but rather a collection of adults who are interested in promoting the learning of their mother tongues (Zande, Shilluk, and Dinka). As these centres were not part of this study, they were not visited since the learners were mostly adults who were interested in keeping their languages 'alive and kicking,' so to speak.

Conclusion

The findings from research in schools suggest that both parents and teachers have no negative perceptions toward the national language policy, although some admit that they had scanty knowledge of the policy and what it entails. In fact, it seems parents are supportive of their children learning other languages as well as supporting the idea that English and other foreign languages be introduced to their children. The research findings also suggest that local-level dialogue over language choices in the classroom is an important way for communities to negotiate cultural and linguistic differences towards positive local outcomes.

As South Sudan strives to improve the quality of education, the implementation of the language policy should be backed by the provision of trained teachers of indigenous languages, a ready supply of textbooks in these languages, and a smooth transition from national languages to English. Even if the language policy states that the teaching of national languages terminates at P3, literature should be developed in these languages beyond primary schools to enrich our cultural heritage expressed in languages. The researcher believes that for any education policies to succeed, there must be an effective and honest dialogue between researchers and policymakers, or else findings will ultimately end up in libraries not being consulted or accessed by stakeholders concerned. With the dawn of new political development in the country, there must be a renewed determination to put more resources into implementing the language policy and encouragement for more research into this important field. Finally, with regard to the lack of teaching and learning materials for national languages as well as the lack of trained teachers of national languages, it would be interesting to investigate if this was true and how it would be addressed as a matter of urgency if the language policy was to succeed in its implementation.

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