Somalia

2.14. Somalia

2.14.1. Background information
Separate areas of what is now Somalia were colonized by the British and the Italians. The territory colonized by Britain gained independence in 1960, and the territory colonized by the Italians followed soon after. The two colonies then united to form what is today the Federal Republic of Somalia; its official languages are Somali and Arabic. The Republic of Somaliland, a self-declared state since 1991, has been internationally recognized as an autonomous region of Somalia. It is located in northwestern Somalia; its official languages are Somali, Arabic and English. Puntland, a region of northeastern Somalia, also declared itself an autonomous state in 1998; its official languages are Somali and Arabic.

Ethnologue lists 13 languages for Somalia.

2.14.2. Current language policy
The current language policies in Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia differ, although all three aim at using Somali as the medium of instruction in primary grades.

The Directorate for Education of the South Central Zone of Somalia has stated plans to develop a language and literacy policy as part of its Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2013-2016,\(^\text{48}\) responding to “fears that the Somali language could disappear as a medium of instruction” (Somali Federal Republic, 2013, p. 9).

In Puntland, the language policy as expressed in the Puntland Education Sector Plan 2012-2016\(^\text{49}\) is based on two beliefs about language:

“The first is that language is a fundamental factor in the interplay between education, culture and participation in society. The second is that languages in education influence language status and language structures” (Ministry of Education, Puntland, 2012, section 12.1).

The objective of the Puntland language policy is to develop “trilingual individuals who are fully literate in Somali, Arabic and English” (ibid, section 12.1).

In Somaliland, language policy has been a subject of debate; strong support exists for the use of Somali in primary grade classrooms, but the importance of English in later education is also being recognized (Republic of Somaliland, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2012)\(^\text{50}\).

Assessing these language policy choices, Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007) note that “the acquisition of basic literacy in Somali is a desirable goal for a country with such a rich linguistic heritage, and the use of Somali for teaching and learning in the early primary grades is the best way to reach the widest possible audience.” The authors also note that the reality today is that many Somali children first learn to read and write in Arabic in Quranic schools. Combining Somali-language instruction with reading and writing instruction in Arabic is challenging for both students and teachers; nevertheless, the authors believe that it will give Somali children a “marked advantage in both the national and international language arenas” (p. 118).

2.14.3. Education policy and practice
In the South Central Zone of Somalia, Somali or Arabic tend to be the languages of instruction, with Arabic being used particularly at the secondary level. Many of the schools in this zone are managed by non-government agencies and international NGOs (Brophy, 2014, p. 334).

---

In Somaliland and Puntland, Somali is the medium of instruction in the majority of schools; this is a unique language policy in Africa, in which an indigenous language serves as the language of instruction (Wolff, 2011, p. 74).

According to the 2012-2016 Education Sector Plan for Somaliland, the objectives of primary education in Somaliland include “equipping girls and boys with the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in Somali, the national language; and laying the foundation for basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking of Arabic and English, as bases for further learning” (Republic of Somaliland, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2012, p. 33). Somali is the medium of instruction in primary grades, while English is the medium of instruction from secondary school onward.

The language position of the Puntland Education Sector Plan 2012-2016 is similar. Somali is the medium of instruction in primary school; English is taught as a subject from Grade 5 English is the sole medium of instruction for secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Education, Puntland, 2012).

Puntland’s Education Sector Plan aims at a maintenance approach to bilingual education, based on a firm foundation of Somali language support:

“All policy and practice by the Ministry of Education, will uphold the status of Somali language as the first language of the Puntland people, and it will also uphold its usefulness for social, academic and economic advancement. Somali and English will be used as the media of instruction in an arrangement that allows language and thinking skills to be developed in both languages while ensuring Somali language maintenance” (ibid., section 12.3).

Many private schools in Puntland and Somaliland, however, are taught in Arabic and use curricula and textbooks from nearby Arab countries. This multi-language instructional environment has brought challenges to the harmonization of the curriculum as well as to examinations. Teachers’ levels of English are also low (Brophy, 2014, p. 335).

2.14.4. Language education initiatives

Go-2-School Initiative

The Go-2-School Initiative is a programme of the Somali government, supported by UNICEF. The initiative includes the development of teaching and learning materials as well as innovative teaching and learning strategies.

Somali Interactive Radio Instruction Program

In 2006 and 2007, EDC implemented the Somali Interactive Radio Instruction Program a USAID-funded radio-based learning intervention that aimed to increase access to quality education opportunities and to improve teaching at the lower primary level. The programme targeted schools in Puntland, Somaliland and South Central Somalia, focusing in particular on mathematics and Somali literacy. The tools of this programme are still used as a resource in an education programme for pastoralist children that is supported by UNICEF and Save the Children.


Somalia