



South Sudan

**The impact of language policy
and practice on children's learning:**
Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa
2016

2.16. South Sudan

2.16.1. Background information

Following a series of internal conflicts, South Sudan gained independence in 2011 from the Republic of Sudan. The referendum on independence from Sudan passed with more than 98 per cent of the South Sudanese vote. Upon achieving independence, South Sudan selected English as its official language, in part to separate itself from Arabic, which was seen as the language of oppression.

Ethnologue lists 71 languages for South Sudan.

2.16.2. Current language policy

English is the official language of South Sudan. Nevertheless, policy changes continue to emerge; South Sudan's General Education Strategy Paper (GESP) 2012-2017 and its accompanying Action Plan developed by the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) and its development partners, provides a framework for the development of the education sector over the next five years (Hammond, 2013, p. 9). The strategy paper commits to using mother tongue-medium instruction in primary Grades 1 to 3, but it is unclear how the initiatives will be supported and coordinated. Moreover, the Government of South Sudan has released a policy decision on the provision of continued learning in Arabic in pre-existing schools for returning migrants and refugees in Grades 4 to 8 and in secondary school (MoGEI policy paper).

2.16.3. Education policy and practice

The distribution of English, Arabic and local languages as languages of instruction is very much in flux in South Sudan. As of 2006, English replaced Arabic as the official medium of instruction; however the Ministry of Education has stated its intent to include local languages as media of instruction in early grades, with a move to English as the language of instruction in the later primary years (Yai,

2012, p. 173). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 and the country's Transitional Constitution also recommend this approach (Yoasa, 2012, p. 177).

The focus on English as a medium of instruction has posed significant learning challenges, particularly for South Sudanese citizens who have migrated from Sudan (Bredlid, 2010, p. 570). Du Toit (2014, p.364) notes that Juba Arabic (also called Southern Arabic) is "still the preferred lingua franca for most South Sudanese." Du Toit notes that this situation is changing over time:

As of 2010, English was the dominant medium of instruction, with about 61% of schools using it from P1-P3 and more than 85% of schools in P4-P8. About 33% of schools were using the MT as the medium of instruction up to P3 level (Du Toit, 2014, p. 358).

Despite these changes, student and teacher fluency in English is still limited. A recent World Bank report notes that overall performance of students in a 2010 assessment of primarily urban schools was "weak in both mathematics and [English] language" (World Bank, 2012, p. 67). This very limited fluency in English is one of the drivers of the Ministry of Education's plans to use local languages rather than English in early primary school.

2.16.4. Language education initiatives

SIL South Sudan

SIL Sudan (later SIL South Sudan) has been involved in mother tongue-based education in Sudanese languages for nearly 40 years. SIL and the Institute for Regional Languages (IRL) established a partnership in 1978 to carry out a "joint literacy project" targeting children in Sudanese language communities. SIL's role was materials development, author training and teacher training; with USAID funding assistance, SIL produced more than 180 titles in 10 years, in 17 languages, including Arabic and English (IRL and SIL 1987). Throughout the civil unrest in Sudan and southern Sudan,

SIL continued to provide limited assistance to local-language literacy projects. SIL South Sudan is now engaged with the Department of National Languages of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; its current projects include materials development and teacher training in seven languages, assistance to several other projects in the area of local language materials, and participation in regional and national policy dialogue.

Across

The NGO Across is implementing a mother tongue reading project for children in two language communities, under the *All Children Reading Grand Challenge*. The project combines mother tongue literacy materials, recorded lessons, digital audio players and teacher capacity building in Bari- and Dinka-speaking communities. SIL South Sudan provided the written literacy materials. Across has also established the *Sudan Literature Centre*, which focuses on the development of literature in more than 20 Sudanese languages in addition to Arabic and English. The literature produced at the centre includes dictionaries, folk stories and church-focused materials.⁶³

Little Libraries

UNESCO South Sudan is implementing a project called *Little Libraries* (bags with pockets full of books) in local languages and English, to support education activities in displacement camps. Some of the local language books were provided by SIL South Sudan.

Room to Learn

Winrock International and FHI360 are establishing the *Room to Learn* (RtL) South Sudan project, funded by USAID; the project intends to use a community-based approach to rapidly reach out-of-school children with an emphasis on early grade literacy, gender equity, conflict mitigation, and marginalized populations.⁶⁵ The project plans to carry out local-language literacy in at least four languages of South Sudan.

South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction

EDC carried out the *South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction* (SSIRI) project between 2004 and 2012, with funding from USAID. The central feature of the SSIRI was the *Learning Village*, a series of 480 half-hour programmes targeting primary school grades 1 to 4 with 120 lessons per grade. Based on government syllabi, the programmes include instruction in English, local language literacy, mathematics, and life skills such as HIV/AIDS and landmine risk awareness. The radio programmes are broadcast in English and require that the classroom teacher translate some of the instructions into the local language of the benefiting community (Leigh and Epstein, 2012, p. 8).

IBIS

The Danish education NGO IBIS carried out accelerated learning programmes in two regions of South Sudan from 2007-2012.⁶⁶ More recently, IBIS has been engaged in local language reading programmes, including the production of basic reading books in cooperation with SIL South Sudan.

63 <http://www.across-sudan.org>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.

64 <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/juba/thematic-areas-of-action/education-for-the-21st-century/education-in-emergency/>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.

65 [http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/ERoom%20To%20Learn%20\(RtL\)%20South%20Sudan%20is%20a%20project%20of%20editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/15648/PSA-from-Winrock-International-Room-to-Learn-South-Sudan.aspx](http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/ERoom%20To%20Learn%20(RtL)%20South%20Sudan%20is%20a%20project%20of%20editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/15648/PSA-from-Winrock-International-Room-to-Learn-South-Sudan.aspx). Accessed 11 March, 2016.

66 <http://ibissouthsudan.org/our-work/accelerated-learning-programme/>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.

