

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education

SOUTH SUDAN





Children, if they start learning in mother tongue . . .

. . . find it easier to learn a second language in school.

Photo by LuAnne Cadd, MAF

Head Teacher of Panyana Primary School,
South Sudan

An educated nation

... is a prosperous nation.

- 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low income countries gained basic literacy skills. This could result in a 12% cut in global poverty.
(UNESCO 2011)
- One additional year of schooling increases an individual's earnings by 10%.
(UNESCO 2011)
- A small increase in student literacy and mathematics scores has been shown to result in a 2% increase in annual GDP per capita growth.
(World Bank 2007)

An educated nation ... is a healthy nation.

- A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past age 5. *(UNESCO 2011)*
- Each extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10%. *(UNESCO 2011)*

**“Education is the most powerful weapon which
you can use to change the world.”**

... Nelson Mandela

An educated nation ... is a peaceful nation.

- Education has been identified as one of the indicators or conditions for determining peace within societies.
(UNESCO, 2012)
- If the enrollment rate for secondary schooling is 10 percentage points higher than the average, the risk of war is reduced by about 3 percentage points.
(World Bank, Understanding Civil War 2005)

South Sudan Context

South Sudan sets out their ambitions for the nation in the new curriculum: "for peace, prosperity, for growth and development, for harmony and justice." (*MoEST, Curriculum Framework*)

Through education, South Sudan seeks to:

- Eradicate illiteracy, improve employability of young people and adults and promote life long learning for all citizens
- promote national unity and cohesion
- contribute to the personal development of each learner and to the moral, social, cultural, political and economic development of the nation. (*General Education Act, 2012*)

However, while opportunities to achieve this vision abound, South Sudan still faces many challenges. Literacy rates are still low (especially for women), drop out rates are still high, and assessments of learning outcomes show learners at any age are simply not gaining the necessary skills they need to be able to read.

We all know that literacy is the foundation for ongoing learning. If a learner has not mastered basic literacy skills, information found in textbooks, newspapers, the internet and other sources of information remain inaccessible. Options for ongoing, life-long learning are simply not available to the majority of South Sudanese people.

Yet, it doesn't have to be this way.

Evidence from Africa and around the world shows that when learners are educated first in a language they know best, literacy outcomes are vastly improved.

South Sudan has recognized the importance of language on learning outcomes and has explicitly stated in official documents, as well as in the new Curriculum, the value of South Sudan's National Languages (or, 'mother tongues') in early grade literacy and learning.

South Sudan's Transitional Constitution (2011) declares that:

6. (1) All indigenous languages of South Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted.

It further states that

38. (1) All levels of government shall:

- ... (d) recognize cultural diversity and encourage such diverse cultures to harmoniously flourish and find expression through education and the media;
- ... (f) protect, preserve and promote the cultures of the people which enhance their human dignity and are consistent with the fundamental objectives and principles set out in this Chapter.

The General Education Act (2012) explains the role of education in respecting, developing and promoting South Sudan's National Languages, in addition to ensuring that a quality education is accessible to all people in South Sudan, regardless of the language(s) they speak.

Recognizing the importance of learning to read and write in a language that is familiar to them, the new National Curriculum Framework states that English will first be learned orally, and it is only when learners are "secure in reading and writing in the National Language will they start to learn to read and write in English".

P4 and P5 will be "transition years", where the main medium of instruction will be English, but learning will be supported by the use of National Languages in the classroom.

When the curriculum and teaching build on what learners know about their own language, culture and heritage, literacy and education become relevant and accessible, motivating learners, especially girls, to defy the odds and stay in school.

14. National Languages in Education (from the Education Act, 2012)

- (a) All indigenous languages are national languages and the English and Arabic languages shall be treated in accordance with the Constitution.
- (b) The Ministry shall develop the national standards for indigenous languages; train teachers of national languages and develop learning materials for national languages.
- (c) In early childhood development and primary 1 through 3, the medium of instruction shall be the indigenous language of the area. In urban settings, the school may choose to use more relevant or widely used national languages.
- (d) In primary 4 through 8, the medium of instruction shall be English. In primary 4 through 8, the indigenous language shall continue to be taught as a subject to ensure that all school children are able to communicate in national languages of the Republic of South Sudan fluently, accurately and effectively in a variety of situations.

What is Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education and Why is it Important?

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is a model of education which has, at its heart, the goal of producing multilingual, multi literate citizens who can interact with their community, region, and the world, to be capable and creative life long learners.

MTB-MLE recognizes that even very young learners come to school with knowledge of their language and of their culture. In MTB-MLE, this knowledge is used as a foundation to build new knowledge, especially for building literacy skills. When learners are exposed to written material that is relevant and which is in a language they can understand, the basic skills of reading for meaning and the concept of taking information from a written text are easily grasped.

Not only that, but a learning environment can be a truly learner-centred space where learners and teachers can interact with ideas and concepts in a language they know best, unhindered by barriers of foreign grammar and vocabulary.

Once these foundational cognitive and academic skills are built in the first language, these same skills can be accessed as a learner begins to learn in and through additional languages.

Children's education needs to be a community affair. MTB-MLE allows for greater involvement of parents and the community in their children's education, ensuring the community's language and culture are valued in the school environment.

Underlying Language Proficiency

Jim Cummins, one of the pioneering researchers in bilingualism, describes two different ways of thinking about what happens in the brain when we learn in and through different languages. In the first picture, he describes what we learn in each language as separate balloons. What is learned in and through one language never affects or interacts with what is learned in a second or additional language.

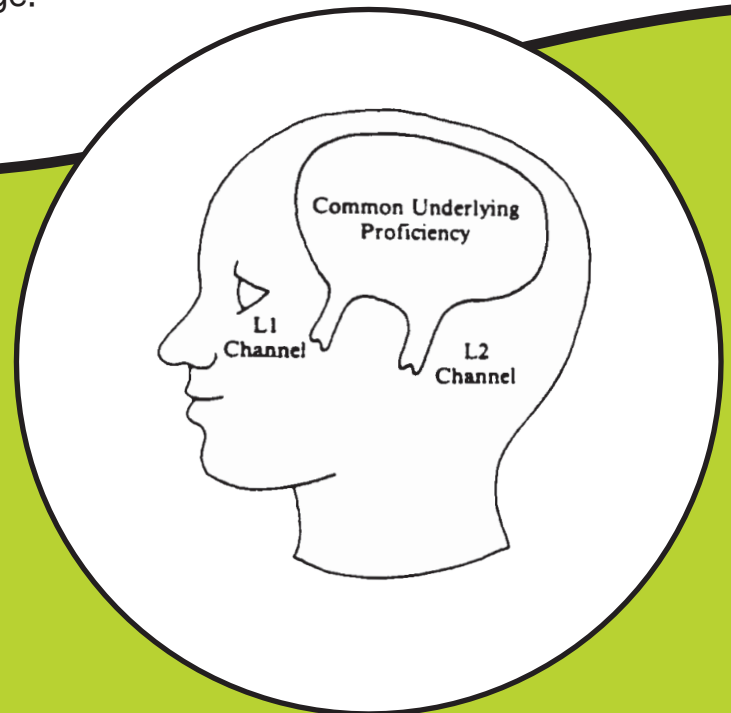
However, anyone who is bilingual can attest that this picture does not match their experience. If this were the case, you wouldn't even be able to access memories of an event that took place while you were using one language and describe it using a second language.



In fact, the more accurate representation of what happens in our minds is that we have one big container. All of our learning, all of our experiences, no matter what language it happens in, goes into the same container. The knowledge and information stored there can then be accessed in any language.

Whatever we have learned in the first language can easily be accessed and built upon in a second language.

(Pictures from "Literacy at Stake")



South Sudan has chosen a model of education which uses the learners' own language and culture as a foundation for life-long learning. Using the mother tongue of the learner for the foundation of education has far reaching benefits, as evidenced both around the world, and right here in South Sudan . . .

Burkina Faso

In a pilot project in which children were taught in their mother tongue before transitioning to learning in French, the primary school pass rate was 85%. This was a marked improvement over schools where children started learning in French from the very beginning of their education, where the pass rate was only 62%. Furthermore, there was a marked improvement in girls' motivation, participation, attendance and pass rate in the schools where the mother tongue was used.

Kenya

In a Kamba speaking area of Kenya, a project called "Literacy Boost" was carried out in a partnership by 3 NGOs. This project provided community-developed literature to schools and literacy "camps" in an area where children's literacy rates were lower than average. Teachers and parents saw a vast improvement in children's motivation and skills in reading. Comments from the community members included, "If children's foundation in education is in an unknown language, they may hate it." "Mother tongue makes children want to go to school because they are not shocked from the home environment." "How can children do their homework if they don't even understand the questions?" "Nowadays, it is has become very easy for the children to read because the books are in a language they understand." "I have seen children learn to read and begin improving in class and confidence levels. I have seen those in lower primary improve their abilities very much... Now they can read with comprehension."

Mali

Learners who started using their own language for education and transitioned slowly to using French, the official language, had end of primary pass rates that were 32% higher than learners who learned only in French - even though final exams were taken in French.

Guatamala

In schools that begin with the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, the rate of grade repetition is about half that of repetition rates in schools where learners use only the official language. Drop out rates in the schools that use the mother tongue as a foundation are also 25% lower.

South Sudan

In 2011, a pilot project was started in 5 schools in KajoKeji, a Bari speaking region in South Sudan. Prior to the intervention, a baseline assessment showed that P1 learners were able to score only 8% on a letter recognition assessment. In P3, learners were still only able to correctly identify less than half of the letters on the letter recognition assessment (41% for girls, 48% for boys).

Using ABC Books (provided by SIL) and other community teacher generated materials, P1-P3 learners were taught basic literacy in and through their own language. By the end of just the first trimester of focused Bari literacy instruction, those numbers soared. Both boys and girls in P1 scored 40%, while the average score for children in P3 was 78%!

Most significantly, in the English classrooms, as in classrooms all over South Sudan, teachers and students relied on repetition and rote learning, simply copying sentences and answers from the chalkboard, rather than emphasizing actual understanding.

Not only did learners' test scores increase, classroom observations showed a marked increase in active learner-centred teaching and learning taking place in the Bari classrooms over the control classes that were conducted only in English. Learners in the Bari program were interactive, with teachers making more connections with learners' experiences. Additionally, there were fewer behavioural issues in Bari classes than in the English only classes, resulting in fewer teaching interruptions and increased time on task for learning. Girls, especially, were observed to be more involved in their learning in Bari classrooms.

Most significantly, in the English classrooms, as in classrooms all over South Sudan, teachers and students relied on repetition and rote learning, simply copying sentences and answers from the chalkboard, rather than emphasizing actual understanding. The authors of the study write, "Whereas English classes in P1 through P3 taught vocabulary or polite oral English, Bari language class for P1 through P3 taught students how to read." These reading skills are the foundation for learning and literacy in additional languages.

Multi-Lingual Education

Q & A

My child already knows how to speak their mother tongue! They don't need to go to school to learn it.

Good education takes what children already know and builds on that foundation. Research shows that children need at least 12 years to fully develop their language and to be able to use it for academic and abstract thinking. Once these skills are developed in the mother tongue, they can easily be transferred to English or any other language.

It is true that it is cheaper to develop textbooks and teacher training programs in just one language. Initially, it IS more expensive to develop several National Languages. However, research from around the world shows that in the medium to long term, it is actually cheaper, due to savings in repetition and drop out rates. The initial investment leads to higher learning outcomes, even in English and additional languages. The costs of wide-spread illiteracy are even higher.

It's too expensive to teach in Mother Tongue!

Using a single language for teaching will unify the nation!

When people are denied the right to use their own languages, and express their cultural identity, it can cause resentment and discontent. When people feel their cultural identity is under threat, they will fight to maintain it, often at the expense of other identities. However, when the linguistic and cultural diversity is valued and validated, peace and unity can be built. Yes, ethnic conflicts happen, but these conflicts are usually over other issues such as access to resources, not over ethnic or linguistic diversity.

A Way Forward ...

South Sudan has a long history of using its National Languages for literacy and education. Writing systems ("orthographies") have been developed in at least 34 of South Sudan's languages. Basic literacy materials such as Alphabet Charts, Alphabet Books and Primers have been developed in these 34 languages. The South Sudanese government, including the Ministry of General Education and Instruction, has adopted policies that support and value its rich cultural and linguistic diversity. Now is the time to build on these strong foundations.

... for South Sudan

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue to develop new and updated materials to meet the needs of the new curriculum, both for Primary and the Alternative Education System. Bold decisions and strong leadership is needed from MoGEI, as languages are introduced in a phased approach. Language communities themselves also need to be involved, as government and partners cannot do everything alone.

Allow for the use of existing materials in all languages. SIL South Sudan is currently acting as "custodians" for much of what exists, and government, churches, partners and language communities have access to these materials. Some funding partners have already been involved in reprinting and distributing these materials, and more should be encouraged.

Make use of South Sudanese languages as a foundation in Functional Adult Literacy programs, as it will make transition to literacy in other languages more effective.

Advocate at all levels for the value and richness of all South Sudanese languages. Where all languages and cultures are esteemed and respected, all people can flourish.

Ensure teacher training for National Languages is integrated into existing teacher education programs.

**Do you want to know
more about the
role of language in
education?**

Contact Us!

SIL South Sudan
education.ssudan@sil.org



Click on the links below:

SIL Africa Learning and Development Website:
<https://africa.sil.org/>

"Good Answers to Tough Questions in Multilingual Education":
https://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/sil_2016_good_answers_to_tough_questions_0.pdf

UNESCO Multilingual Education Website:
<http://www.unescobkk.org/education/multilingual-education/>

Dr. Susan Malone's MTB-MLE Resource Website:
<https://www.sil-lead.org/susanmalone>

Save the Children's "Steps Towards Learning: Overcoming Language Barriers in Children's Education".
<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/steps-towards-learning-lr.pdf>



- Benson, Carolyn J. (2002) "Real and Potential Benefits of Bilingual Programmes in Developing Countries", *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 5: 6, 303 - 317
- Chatry-Komarek, Marie. (2003). *Literacy at Stake: Teacher Reading and Writing in African Schools*. Windhoek, Namibia: Gamsberg Macmillian.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, Power and Pedagogy. Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- Laguara, Ana Isabel and W.P. Woodward. (2013). "They own this: Mother tongue instruction for indigenous Kuku Children in Southern Sudan". *School Psychology International* 34(4) 453 - 469.
- MoEST. (2012). *General Education Act*, Juba: MoEST.
- Republic of South Sudan. (2011). *Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan*.
- SIL Africa Area. *Multilingualism and Peace*. SIL International.
- Trudell, Barbara and J. Ndunde. (2015). "Making Space for Local Knowledge: Community-based Literature and Internationalized Education." Dallas. SIL International Language and Culture Archives.
- UNESCO. (2011). "Education Counts Towards Millenium Development Goals". Paris. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001902/190214e.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2012). Notes for International Literacy Day: Literacy and Peace. <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/NotesLiteracy-Peace.pdf>
- World Bank. (2007). *The Role of Education Quality in Economic Growth*. By Eric A. Hanushek and Ludger Wößmann. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/7154/wps4122.pdf?sequence=1>
- World Bank. (2005). *Understanding Civil War: Vol 1. Africa*. By Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/978-0-8213-6047-7>