

Literacy Development in a Multilingual Society: Experiences from Nigeria

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Issues

- Multilingualism is a norm Africa
- Illiteracy is a major barrier to development in sub-Saharan Africa
- Is literacy and multilingualism mutually exclusive?
- Literacy in what language, in a multilingual setting?
- What kind(s) of literacy, in a globalized world?
- A concern for Nigeria

Introduction

- World focus on literacy
 - Close ties to development (individual and national)
 - Literacy empowers people for development and development requires educated, skilled and competent people
 - Illiteracy synonymous poverty
 - countries with the lowest levels of literacy are also the poorest economically.
- Changing nature of literacy
 - Basic literacy (read, write, in different contexts)
 - Functional literacy (read, write, to cope with demands of everyday life)
 - Everyday demands increases as world advances
 - Enlightenment literacy (read, write, to transform self and community, involves a range of literacies and competencies)
- Changes due to globalization and information society

Multilingualism a norm in Africa

- In Africa...there are between 1,250 and 2,100 languages and the degree of multilingualism varies greatly. About 105 million people speak around 410 languages in Nigeria, 30 million people in Zaire use 206 languages and Ethiopia has 97 languages for a population of about 45 million.... In Cameroon 185 languages are used by 8 million people...3 million inhabitants of Benin are spread over 58 languages while 2 million Congolese have at their disposal 31 languages...Mauritania has four languages, Niger ten... With a population of about 28 million Tanzania has 120 languages...Mali has 12 languages ... Burkina Faso has about 60 languages for a population of 9 million..." (WolffAbout, 1998)
- These countries are also known to have the lowest GDP, per capital income (\$300-\$2000) and literacy rates. Is multilingualism a factor in illiteracy?

illiteracy also a norm?

- In absolute numbers, those without literacy skills are mainly in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, South & West Asia. (UNESCO, EFA GMR, 2006)
- Between 1985-1994 & 2000-2006, the global literacy rate increased from 74% to 84%. However, 45 countries have adult literacy rates below the developing country's average of 79%, mostly in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, South & West Asia. 19 of these countries have literacy rates of less than 55% (UNESCO, EFA GMR, 2009)

Countries' profiles

| Country | No of Languages* | Literacy Rate (%)** | GDP per capita (\$)*** |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Tanzania | 120 | 69.4 | 1,236 |
| Nigeria | 510 | 69.1 | 2,082 |
| Cameroon | 185 | 67.9 | 2,215 |
| Dem. Rep. of Congo | 215 | 67.2 | 328 |
| Ghana | 79 | 57.9 | 1,452 |
| Mauritania | 6 | 51.2 | 12,078 |
| Ethiopia | 90 | 35.9 | 868 |
| Benin | 54 | 34.7 | 1,468 |
| Niger | 21 | 28.7 | 684 |
| Mali | 57 | 24.0 | 1,120 |
| Burkina Faso | 69 | 23.6 | 1,161 |

- * Ethnologue (<http://www.ethnologue.com>)
- ** UNDP (2009). Lower than global average of 84%
- *** World Bank, 2008

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Multilingualism & Literacy in
Nigeria

Nigeria as case study:

Facts & Statistics

- **Location:** Western Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea, between Benin and Cameroon
- **Population:** 148, 023 (2007); 55% below age 18.
 - Approximately 50% of West Africa's population
 - Population growth rate 2.2% (2007)
 - 75% rural, 25% urban
- **Administrative Divisions:** 6 geopolitical zones; spread across 36 states & 1 capital territory (Abuja); and 774 LGAs

Literacy Rate...

- 69.1%, (UNESCO, EFA GMR, 2009).
 - **Geographical disparity**: illiteracy is higher in rural areas and in the northern parts of the country
 - SE 73.5%; SW & SS 70.4%; NC 53.5%, NW 23.2%
 - State disparity: Lagos (SW) 80.1%, Yobe (NE) 20.3%
 - **Gender disparity**: Male higher, also based on geographical disparity.
 - **Age disparity**: Highest Literacy between 15-19 years (84%)
 - **Language disparity**: Literacy in different languages- Mother Tongue(s), English and Arabic.

... Literacy Rate

- Figure based on self-reported survey
 - How many people are actually literate?
 - What level of literacy (basic, functional or transformational)?
 - Literacy in what language - English, Nigerian languages, Arabic?
 - *'many of the world's languages are not used as a medium of instruction in formal schooling; figures on "literacy" therefore represent literacy in the dominant language of a country, not necessarily in the learner's mother tongue (UNESCO Bangkok, 2006).*
- Disparity due to historical, cultural and socioeconomic factors
 - Colonial antecedents
 - Industrial capitations
 - Skewed distribution of wealth (social classes, rural-urban)
 - Quality and quantity of education a function of social resources (of individual, family and community)
 - Beliefs and practices, especially about girl-child
 - Multilingual nature of the country

Multilingual, Multi-ethnic

- **Ethnic Groups:**

- Over 470 ethnic groups; distinguished by language, customs & religious beliefs, with varying sizes, power and influence.
- Major groups include **Hausa** and **Fulani** 29%, **Yoruba** 21%, **Igbo** (Ibo) 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%.
- Groups in the southern region of the country have traditionally had much higher levels of education and employment in the public sector than groups in the northern region.

- **Languages:**

- Over 510, about 75% spoken by minority groups.
- English (official), Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba (national)

- **Religions:** Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, indigenous beliefs 10%

Linguistic map of Nigeria



Geographical Distribution

| Zones | States | Languages |
|---------------|---|--|
| South-West | Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun. Ondo, Osun, Oyo | 11 languages Yoruba (dominant) |
| South-East | Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo | 8 languages Igbo (dominant) |
| South-South | Akwa-Ibom, Balyeas, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Rivers | 105 languages (Igbo, Efik, Edo, Igala, Ijaw, Ikwere, Izon, others –over 100) |
| North-Central | Benue, FCT, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau | 139 languages (Nupe, Epira, Tiv, Yoruba, Idoma, Igede, Agatu, Ron, Taruk, Gbari, others –over 120) |
| North-East | Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe | 224 languages, Hausa & Fulfude dominant, Kanuri, Tiv, Junkun, Bacama, Bole, others –over 200 |
| North West | Kaduna, Kastina, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara | 76 languages (mostly endangered), Hausa & Fulfude dominant, Kanuri, Gbari, Bade, others –over 70 |

Complicated Sociolinguistic landscape

**Excerpts from the songs of Evi Edna Ogholi,
a Nigerian musician:**

Which of dem we go speak? ...

One metre --

*We travel to **Umunede**, we go speak **Isoko**,
We travel to **Borno**, say na **Fulfulde**,
We travel to **Ughelli**, dem go speak **Urhobo**,
We travel to **Buguma**, say na **Kalabari**,
We travel to **Kaduna**, dem go speak **Hausa**,
We travel to **Okene**, dem go speak **Ebira**,
We travel to **Abbi**, dem go speak **Kwale**,
Ogomola, dem go speak **Okrika**,*

***One kilometre means another language,
half a kilometre means another language,
One metre ...***

*We travel to **Sokoto**, dem go speak **Fulani**,
We go to **Benin City**, dem go speak **Edo**,
We travel to **Onitsha**, dem go speak **Igbo**,
We travel to **Asaba-Asa**, den **Bendel** we go,
We travel to **Gboko**, dem say na **Tiv**,
We travel to **Otukpa**, dem go speak **Idoma**,
We travel to **Akure**, dem go speak **Yoruba**,
We travel to **Ase**, dem go speak **Aboh**,
We travel to **Uyo**, na **Ibibio**,*

*We travel, we travel, we travel travel travel ...
All I'm saying, Lingua franca ...
One metre ...*

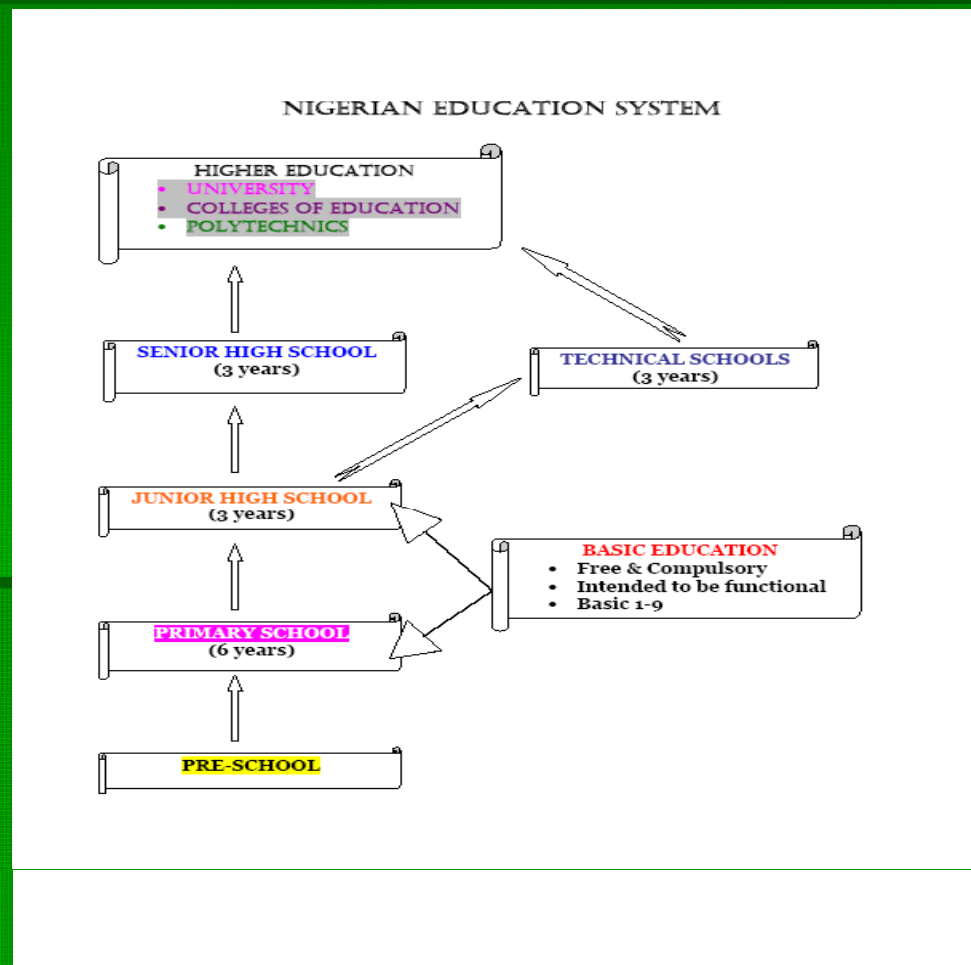
With attendant Social realities

- Language is a source of individual identity, and basis for social, cultural, economic, educational and political lives.
 - Names, political units and parties, cultural troupes, broadcast and print media, etc. are divided along linguistic lines.
 - Integration into local communities and participation in grassroots social, economic and political processes are facilitated by knowledge of local languages.
 - Language loyalty
 - Seemingly rivalry among languages
- Politics revolve round the fear of domination of one language over another
- Based on diversity, effective communication between different languages is impaired.
- Need for a language policy

Language Policy: (NPE, 1977,...2004)

- Use of Mother-Tongue (MT) as language of initial literacy (medium of instruction) at pre-school, lower primary (basic 1-3) & adult/non-formal education. English is taught as a subject.
- English as the medium of instruction at upper primary (basic 4-6), junior high (basic 7-9) and senior high school. MT becomes a subject in the curriculum.
- At high school (junior and senior), a child is also expected to learn a major language (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), aside his MT.
- English remains the language of formal literacy, secondary and higher education.
- French as “second official language” is learnt as compulsory subject in primary and junior high school (basic 1-9)
- No official recognition for Arabic, but used in Islamiyyah schools in the north.
- Where Mother Tongue is not standardized, Language of Immediate Community (any of the regional languages) is used.

Nigerian Education System



Policy implications

- Multilingualism as national goal.
 - Languages status & functions redefined
- Exoglossic nation
- Multi-literacy

Languages status & functions...

| | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Official language | English | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•education, administration, mass & international communication, commerce, inter-ethnic communication among elites,•Library and archival language (record nation's history)•access to government jobs & social mobility•Exclusive preserve of urban elites (25% of population)•Not spoken at all in some rural areas |
| National languages | Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•3 major tribes (50% of population)•Spoken as major languages in 25 states; speakers found in reasonable numbers across 36 states•support & compete with English in schools, in government , offices•Used in adult literacy•Taught and fully examined in schools, studied at degree and PG•Extensive books/ literature developed in them•Develop vocabulary for technical terms in science and technology•Web presence |

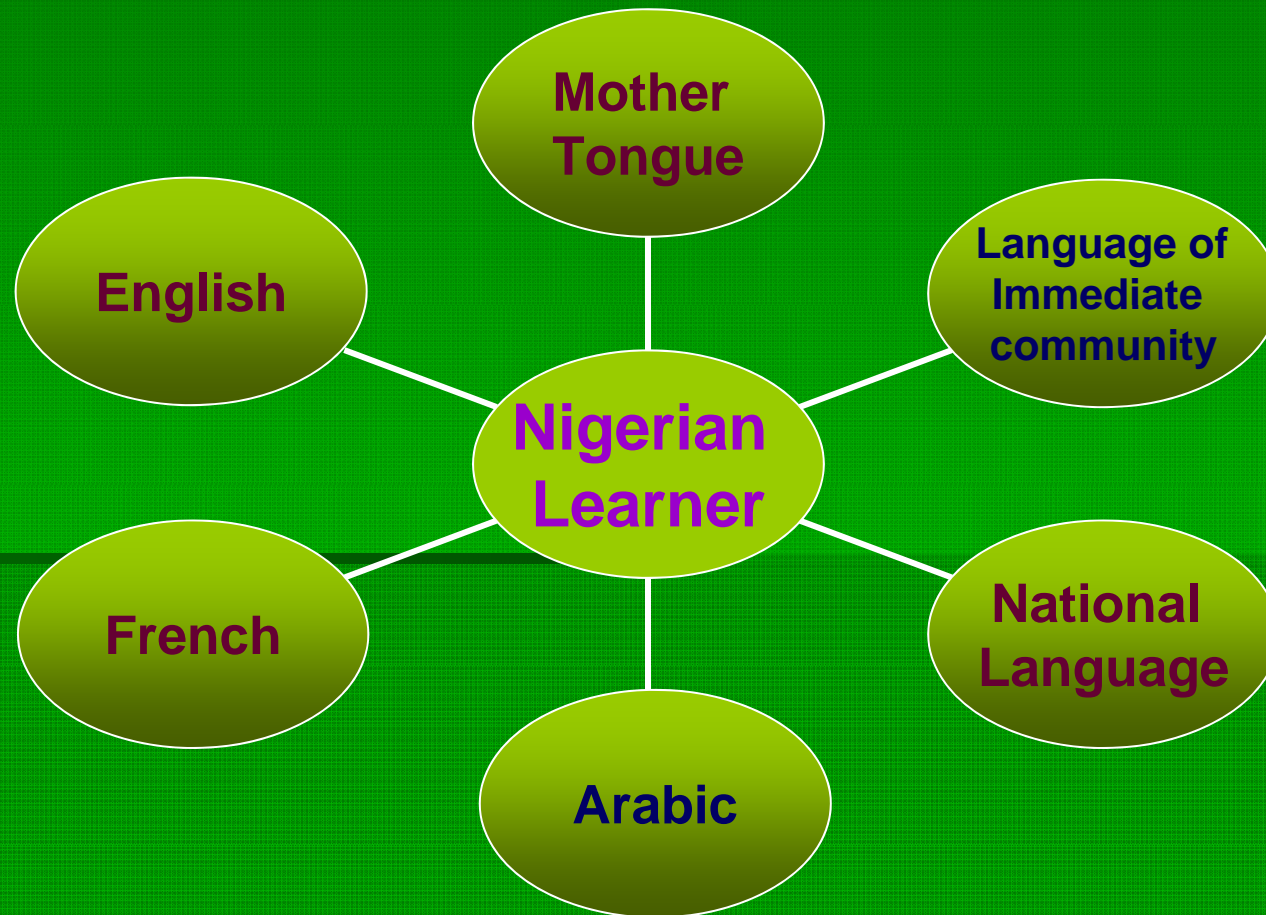
...Languages status & functions...

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Regional languages | Fulfude, Efik, Kanuri, Ibibio, Ijaw, Edo, Nupe, Igala, Idoma, Urhobo, Ibibio, Annang (+ Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Function sometimes as major languages within their specific regions•Standardized orthography and science vocabulary•Used in state schools and state (sometimes national) broadcasts•Often used as Language of Immediate community (LIC)•Extensive use in traditional literature, oral & written |
| Second official language | French | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Taught in primary and Junior high school•pursued at degree and post graduate levels•international communication |

....Languages status & functions

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Local languages | Over 380 languages | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•less than 30% of population•1m & 10m speakers•Limited to small villages & LGAs•23% have developed orthography, but less can be used for literacy education•Most underdeveloped, undeveloped,•some seriously endangered•valued by their communities |
| Neutral lingual franca | Pidgin | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•wide acceptance, but no official recognition•Controversial: Debates over its status•trade language developed from early contacts with Portuguese•Creolized into a mother tongue in some parts of Delta and Edo states,•popular among illiterates in urban centres•Used in advertisements, advocacy, political propaganda & populist |
| Foreign language | Arabic | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Religious language•Used in northern schools•Pursued at degree & PG levels |

Multi-literacy: 4 - 6 languages for literacy



Other implications ...

- Each language is by definition a Mother Tongue, all qualified to be medium of instruction at pre-school and lower elementary. In reality, most of the languages are spoken by small population, and are not committed to writing, few have teachers trained in them, most have no books or instructional materials. Hence, rather than **literacy in Mother Tongue (MT)**, **literacy in Language of Immediate Community (LIC)** is encouraged.

...other implications

- Several questions about policy effectiveness which affects literacy development?
 - If the Mother Tongue is considered an important medium for achieving initial and permanent literacy, why used it only 'initially' and not throughout the whole of primary education?
 - Why should there be a change-over only after three years?
Too early
 - Problem of identifying what constitutes “Mother Tongue”. Is it the native language, language of parents, language first acquired, thinking/dreaming language, language spoken most frequently?

Ambiguous policy, varied implementations...

- Total immersion in English literacy instruction. (urban elites schools forbids the use of 'vernacular' even in interaction with peers).
- Initial instruction in MT, transition to English after a period (mostly in urban and semi-urban schools).
 - Time of transition to English varies according to school location (urban/rural).
- Bilingual literacy instruction from the start (sometimes code mixing in classroom instructions in public schools in semi urban areas).
- Mother tongue use throughout the primary school and some secondary schools (rural and semi-urban schools)
- Sometimes, Pidgin English (not officially recognized) is used (Edo, Delta and River states).

... faulty implementations

- While the policy recognized the use of all languages, only few are standardized:
 - 10% has primers and readers
 - 15 has the production of a glossary of technical terms in Science and Maths.
 - about 25% used in radio broadcast
 - 95% of Nigeria dailies and weeklies are published in English
 - 70% of airtime (TV & programmes) devoted to English
- With so many languages to cope with within the curriculum, coupled with infrastructural and material deficiencies, teachers find it difficult to teach functional literacy, but rather teach language/linguistic studies
 - No recognized pedagogical procedure/skill to teach school subjects in most Nigerian languages, teachers therefore have narrow repertoire of pedagogical skills in literacy teaching both in English and Nigerian languages.
 - Often, potential teachers don't want to study '*local*' languages

Challenges to Literacy development

- Because of the level of confusion at implementation, many students leave primary schools without being proficiently literate in either English and any Nigerian language.
 - Nigerian pupils perform so poorly in the Monitoring Literacy Achievement (MLA) tests, 1991-1995.
- Disregard for a lot of Mother Tongues, leading to lack of motivation- high drop-out rates, low achievement
 - There is disparity school language and home language
 - Effect on cognitive maturation and intellectual development of the child (Chumbow, 1986)

Challenges to Literacy development

- Faulty basic literacy cannot transform to functional literacy or enlightenment literacy.
 - “if literacy is to function as real instrument of the empowerment of the poor, it must be perceived in an even wider perspective than just the development of skills of functionality in an existing social order. It should transcend these and function as an instrument of total transformation of the individual as *enlightenment literacy*” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 97).
 - Does Nigeria have the resources (human and material) to develop enlightenment literacy?

In conclusion...

- Though Nigeria adopted language policy seems to recognise the potentials in multilingualism, its ambiguity and faulty implementation seriously impair effective literacy development.
 - In this context, multilingualism appears to be a impeding factor in access to learning when coupled with high population, poverty rates and literacy rates.
 - Effective literacy in multilingual countries is dependent on learners' access to linguistic environment that give them opportunities to learn and develop (Trudell, 2009).

Thank you for your
kind attention