

# School and home languages in Africa

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper delves into the complex issue of language policies within African education systems, focusing particularly on the disparities between languages spoken at home and those used in schools. Drawing from a variety of research and real-world examples, it emphasizes the pivotal role of mother tongue-based education in improving literacy rates and overall educational outcomes. Highlighting successful initiatives in countries like Ethiopia, Namibia, and Uganda, the study underscores the transformative impact of bilingual and multilingual education programs in narrowing these linguistic divides. The findings advocate for inclusive policies that honour linguistic diversity, engage local communities, and empower students by nurturing their cultural identities through education in their native languages.

**Keywords:** Africa, education, languages, literacy.

## INTRODUCTION

Africa, with its rich mosaic of cultures and languages, presents a fascinating yet complex picture when it comes to education. Imagine a classroom in a rural Kenyan village where children converse fluently in Kikuyu at home but switch to English or Swahili in school. This scenario, common across the continent, underscores the linguistic diversity and the challenges it brings to education. According to Ethnologue (2020), there are over 2,000 languages spoken across Africa, making it one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world.

Understanding the dynamics between school and home languages is crucial. It is not just about communication; it is about cultural identity, cognitive development, and educational success. For many African students, the language they speak at home is a fundamental part of who they are. Yet, when they step into the classroom, they often encounter a different linguistic reality. This chapter aims to explore these complexities, shedding light on the historical, sociocultural, and educational contexts that shape language use in African schools.

The educational landscape in Africa is deeply influenced by the interplay between home and school languages. Many students grow up in multilingual environments,

where the language spoken at home can differ significantly from the language of instruction used in schools. This linguistic diversity is both a strength and a challenge. It enriches the cultural tapestry of the continent but also poses significant obstacles for educators and policymakers striving to provide inclusive and effective education.

Language is not just a tool for communication; it is integral to cognitive and social development. Studies have shown that children learn best in their mother tongue during the early years of education (Cummins, 2000). When children are taught in a language they understand, they are more likely to grasp complex concepts, develop critical thinking skills, and perform better academically. Conversely, when the language of instruction is foreign, students may struggle to keep up, leading to frustration and disengagement (Benson, 2004).

For many African students, the language spoken at home is a key part of their cultural identity. Schools that acknowledge and incorporate these languages can foster a sense of belonging and self-worth among students. Conversely, when home languages are ignored or devalued, students may feel alienated and disconnected

from their cultural roots. This disconnection can have far-reaching implications for their educational success and personal development (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

By understanding and addressing the complex relationship between school and home languages, educators and policymakers can create more inclusive and effective educational environments that respect and leverage Africa's rich linguistic heritage. This chapter will delve into the historical context, current situation, challenges, and potential strategies to bridge the gap between home and school languages in Africa, ultimately aiming to enhance educational outcomes for all students.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Colonial influences on language policies

The colonial era left an indelible mark on Africa's linguistic landscape. European powers, in their quest to control and "civilize" their colonies, imposed their languages as the medium of instruction. English, French, Portuguese, and other colonial languages were prioritized, while indigenous languages were marginalized (Bamgbose, 2000). This legacy of linguistic imperialism has had long-lasting effects on language policies in post-colonial African states.

During the colonial period, education was a tool of domination. Colonial administrators believed that teaching in European languages would modernize and civilize African societies. Indigenous languages were deemed inferior and unfit for formal education. This imposition created a hierarchical structure where speaking the colonial language was associated with power and prestige, while indigenous languages were relegated to informal, private settings.

The effects of these policies are still evident today. In many African countries, proficiency in a colonial language is often seen as a prerequisite for social mobility and economic success. For instance, in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, English remains the dominant language in both education and business, perpetuating the colonial legacy. This has resulted in a significant divide between the elite, who are fluent in English, and the rural populations, who often speak only indigenous languages (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998). Take, for example, the bustling streets of Lagos, Nigeria. Here, you'll find business professionals, government officials, and academics conversing fluently in English, navigating a world where their proficiency in the language opens doors to opportunity. Meanwhile, in the rural villages, elders and children gather around evening fires, sharing stories in Yoruba or Igbo—languages that are rich in cultural heritage but often undervalued in formal settings.

Moreover, the preference for colonial languages in education has led to the neglect of indigenous languages, many of which are now at risk of extinction. According to

UNESCO, approximately 30% of the world's languages are spoken in Africa, and many of these languages are endangered (UNESCO, 2010). This loss of linguistic diversity not only threatens cultural heritage but also undermines the educational potential of millions of children who could benefit from learning in their mother tongue.

Imagine a child in a small Ethiopian village who speaks Amharic at home, surrounded by the melodies of his native language. However, when he steps into the classroom, he's confronted with textbooks and lessons in English. This disconnect can create a sense of alienation and hinder his ability to fully engage with his education. The colonial language policies also had psychological effects on African societies. The imposition of European languages often led to a sense of inferiority among speakers of indigenous languages. This was compounded by the association of colonial languages with modernity and progress, while indigenous languages were linked to backwardness and tradition. This dichotomy created a lasting stigma around indigenous languages, affecting their use and transmission to future generations (Thiong'o, 1986).

Moreover, the colonial emphasis on European languages created practical challenges in education systems. Teachers who were often not proficient in the local languages found it difficult to communicate effectively with students, leading to poor educational outcomes. This language barrier hindered the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students, as they struggled to understand and engage with the curriculum (Brock-Utne, 2001).

In a nutshell, the colonial influence on language policies in Africa has had profound and lasting effects. The prioritization of European languages over indigenous ones has created social, cultural, and educational challenges that continue to affect African societies today. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to promote and preserve indigenous languages while ensuring that educational systems are inclusive and reflective of Africa's rich linguistic diversity.

### Post-colonial language reforms

After gaining independence, many African countries sought to reassert their cultural identity by promoting indigenous languages. However, the implementation of these reforms has been uneven. Some countries, like Tanzania, have successfully integrated Swahili into their educational systems, while others continue to grapple with the dominance of colonial languages (Mazrui, 1997).

In the early post-independence period, there was a strong movement towards linguistic decolonization. Leaders in newly independent African nations recognized that language is a crucial part of cultural identity and national pride. They aimed to break away from the colonial past by promoting indigenous languages in education and

administration. This effort was seen not only as a way to preserve cultural heritage but also to make education more accessible to the majority of the population who spoke these languages at home (Bamgbose, 2011).

Tanzania stands out as a success story in this regard. Under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, Swahili was adopted as both the national and official language. Swahili became the medium of instruction in primary schools, and its use was promoted in government and public life. This policy helped to unify the diverse ethnic groups within the country and foster a sense of national identity. Moreover, the widespread use of Swahili has facilitated higher literacy rates and better educational outcomes at the primary level (Roy-Campbell, 2001).

However, even in Tanzania, challenges remain. The transition from Swahili to English in secondary and higher education often creates a linguistic barrier for students who are not proficient in English, potentially affecting their academic performance and access to opportunities (Rubagumya, 2010).

In contrast, other African nations have faced significant challenges in implementing similar reforms. In Nigeria, for example, despite policies that advocate for mother tongue education in the early years, English remains the dominant language of instruction. The country's linguistic diversity, with over 500 languages, complicates the implementation of a unified language policy. Additionally, there is a strong societal preference for English, seen as the language of opportunity and advancement, which undermines efforts to promote indigenous languages (Adegbija, 1994).

Francophone African countries also struggle with the dominance of the French. In countries like Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, French is deeply entrenched in the education system and public administration. Efforts to promote indigenous languages have been met with resistance due to the perceived prestige and economic advantages associated with French. Furthermore, the lack of educational materials and trained teachers proficient in indigenous languages poses significant barriers to their integration into the educational system (Albaugh, 2014).

Globalization has added another layer of complexity to language policy in Africa. The increasing interconnectedness of the global economy places a premium on proficiency in global languages like English and French. This economic reality often clashes with the cultural imperative to promote indigenous languages. As a result, many African countries find themselves balancing the need to participate in the global economy with the desire to preserve their linguistic heritage (Simpson, 2008).

Despite these challenges, there are ongoing efforts to promote multilingual education in Africa. Organizations such as UNESCO and various NGOs are working to support the development of educational materials in indigenous languages and to train teachers. There is also a growing recognition of the cognitive and educational benefits of mother tongue instruction. Research shows

that students who begin their education in their mother tongue are more likely to succeed academically and to transition smoothly to learning additional languages, including global ones (Benson, 2004).

## CURRENT LANGUAGE SITUATION

### Overview of major languages spoken at home

Africa's linguistic landscape is a vivid tapestry of over 2,000 languages. In homes across the continent, languages such as Yoruba, Zulu, Amharic, and Hausa are spoken, each carrying its unique cultural heritage and oral traditions. These home languages are integral to the cultural identity of communities and play a crucial role in the transmission of cultural values and traditions.

For instance, in Nigeria, Yoruba is spoken by over 20 million people and is deeply embedded in the cultural practices, religious ceremonies, and day-to-day interactions of the Yoruba people (Adegbija, 1994). Imagine a typical Yoruba family gathered around in the evening, sharing folktales and proverbs that have been passed down through generations. These stories are not just for entertainment; they impart moral lessons, cultural norms, and a sense of identity to the younger generation.

Similarly, Zulu, spoken by nearly 10 million people in South Africa, is not just a means of communication but a vessel for the rich Zulu traditions and history (Mesthrie, 2002). Picture a Zulu household where traditional songs and dances are a part of daily life, celebrating milestones and honouring ancestors. The language itself is rhythmic and expressive, perfectly suited for the oral literature that is so central to Zulu culture.

Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, is another example. Spoken by over 32 million people, it is not only a language of daily communication but also the medium for Ethiopia's rich literary tradition, including religious texts, historical chronicles, and modern literature (Woldemariam, 2003). The language's unique script and long history reflect Ethiopia's distinct cultural heritage, which has remained relatively insulated from colonial influences.

Hausa, widely spoken across West Africa, serves as a lingua franca in many countries, facilitating trade and communication among diverse ethnic groups. It is the mother tongue for around 30 million people and is also used extensively in media, education, and business (Phillipson, 1992). In a bustling market in Kano, Nigeria, traders from different ethnic backgrounds might converse in Hausa, negotiating prices and exchanging news, thus reinforcing social cohesion through a shared language.

These languages shape the worldview of their speakers, influencing how they perceive and interact with their environment. They are more than just tools for communication; they carry the essence of cultural identity and continuity. In

rural areas, children grow up immersed in their native languages, learning about their heritage through everyday interactions. For example, a child in Ethiopia might learn about their history and values from grandparents who recount stories in Amharic, while a child in South Africa might participate in traditional Zulu dances that teach rhythm, coordination, and social values.

However, the prominence of these languages at home contrasts sharply with the linguistic landscape in formal education, where colonial languages often dominate. This dichotomy can create a sense of dissonance for children who must navigate between their home language and the language of instruction at school. The preservation and promotion of these indigenous languages are crucial not only for maintaining cultural heritage but also for enhancing educational outcomes by providing instruction in a language that students understand and connect with deeply.

### Overview of languages in Africa

In stark contrast to the rich tapestry of languages spoken in African homes, the educational landscape across the continent frequently revolves around a handful of official or colonial languages. Nigeria, for example, boasts a linguistic mosaic with over 500 languages, yet its educational framework predominantly employs English as the primary medium of instruction (Adegbija, 1994). This discrepancy poses formidable obstacles to effective learning and development (Ansah, 2014).

Despite progressive policies advocating for mother tongue education during the foundational years of schooling, the translation of these ideals into practice encounters numerous practical challenges. These obstacles encompass a dearth of educational resources available in indigenous languages, inadequate preparation of teachers to facilitate instruction in local dialects, and entrenched societal preferences for colonial languages, which are often perceived as conduits to economic advancement. South Africa exemplifies this dilemma, where official policy recognizes eleven languages but where the actual implementation in urban educational settings frequently sidelines Indigenous languages in favour of English and Afrikaans (Kamwangamalu, 2004). This discordance between policy objectives and their application underscores the intricate dynamics of managing linguistic diversity within educational contexts.

### CASE STUDIES FROM DIFFERENT AFRICAN COUNTRIES

#### Nigeria

Nigeria, a West African country, has a National Policy on Education that advocates for the use of the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community in the first

three years of primary education, followed by a transition to English (Adegbija, 1994). However, implementation is inconsistent due to the vast linguistic diversity and the dominance of English.

In a typical Nigerian classroom, students may speak Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, or any of the numerous local languages at home. However, they are often required to learn in English, which can be a significant barrier, especially for those from rural areas where exposure to English is limited. Despite efforts to promote indigenous languages in early education, the lack of resources and trained teachers who can teach these languages remains a major hurdle.

#### South Africa

South Africa has eleven official languages, and the South African Schools Act allows for instruction in any of these languages, though implementation varies widely (Kamwangamalu, 2004). This policy aims to promote multilingualism and cultural diversity but faces practical challenges such as unequal resource distribution and teacher preparedness.

For example, in urban areas like Johannesburg, schools may predominantly use English and Afrikaans, reflecting the economic and social dynamics of the city. In contrast, schools in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal might use Zulu more extensively. The disparity in resource allocation and teacher training across these regions often means that students in rural areas do not receive the same quality of education as their urban counterparts.

#### Tanzania

In Tanzania, Swahili is the medium of instruction in primary schools, while English is used in secondary and tertiary education, creating a linguistic divide that impacts students' performance (Roy-Campbell, 2001). Despite these challenges, the use of Swahili in early education has been praised for promoting national unity and cultural identity (Blommaert, 2014).

The transition from Swahili to English at the secondary level can be challenging for many students, as their proficiency in English may not be sufficient to cope with the academic demands. This switch often results in a drop in academic performance and increased dropout rates. Efforts to improve English language instruction at the primary level are ongoing, but resource constraints and teacher training remain significant obstacles.

Since colonial times, the question of language in African education has sparked heated debates and divided opinions. Some influential voices, often driven by perceptions rather than evidence, argue against incorporating indigenous African languages into the educational system, especially as mediums of instruction. They claim that

African languages could hinder learning, advocating instead for the use of English, French, and Portuguese—languages inherited from colonial rulers—as they are seen as international and sufficient for educational needs (Tibategeza, 2010).

This viewpoint is reinforced by some parents who, influenced by historical biases that portrayed African culture as backwards, see little value in their children learning in indigenous languages. This sentiment isn't limited to just elites and parents; educators and unionists within the education sector also share similar reservations (Othieno, 2014).

On the other side of the debate are advocates—experts in education, psychology, and linguistics—who passionately argue for mother tongue education in early formal schooling. They highlight concrete benefits for children and communities alike. Research supports their stance, with studies showing that students consistently perform better when taught in their native languages. For instance, a Tanzanian study found that students excelled when taught in Kiswahili compared to English or through code-switching (Tibategeza, 2010). Similarly, in Niger, tests conducted in local languages yielded higher scores than those in French, with no apparent detriment to French language proficiency (Nikiema, 2011).

Advocates of indigenous language education emphasize that such approaches not only enhance academic outcomes but also empower communities by integrating local knowledge and culture into the education system (Tibategeza, 2010). For example, initiatives in Burkina Faso using the Moore language as a medium of instruction led to improved academic performance and faster curriculum completion compared to traditional French-medium schools (Othieno, 2014).

In essence, while the debate continues, the evidence suggests that embracing Indigenous languages as mediums of instruction can profoundly benefit learners and contribute to broader societal empowerment and development (Othieno, 2014).

## CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

The disparities between home languages and school languages in Africa pose substantial challenges to educational equity and student success. When children are taught in a language they are not proficient in, it can erect formidable barriers to their learning journey. This issue is especially acute in rural areas, where indigenous languages prevail in the home environment but are often sidelined in formal schooling systems.

Imagine a young child in a rural village in Nigeria, where Yoruba or Hausa is spoken at home, suddenly thrust into a classroom where English is the exclusive language of instruction. This shift can be jarring, making it difficult for the child to grasp concepts, participate actively in lessons,

and ultimately succeed academically. Studies, such as those by Heugh (2006), underscore how this linguistic mismatch contributes to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates among students.

In countries like South Africa, which recognizes eleven official languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans, the reality in schools often deviates from policy intentions. Urban schools predominantly use English and Afrikaans, reflecting historical and societal preferences that prioritize colonial languages perceived as pathways to economic opportunities (Kamwangamalu, 2004). This linguistic hierarchy not only marginalizes Indigenous languages but also perpetuates inequalities in access to quality education.

The impact of language policies extends beyond the classroom. It influences societal attitudes towards linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. Many parents, influenced by colonial-era biases that denigrated local languages as inferior, prefer their children to be educated in English or other colonial languages, believing it offers better prospects for future success. This attitude, while understandable in the context of economic aspirations, further widens the gap between home languages and school instruction.

Yet, amidst these challenges, there is a growing body of research advocating for the inclusion of mother tongues in early education. Experts in education, psychology, and linguistics argue passionately for the cognitive and social benefits of using indigenous languages as mediums of instruction. They point to studies that demonstrate how children learn best when taught in a language they understand deeply and fluently. For instance, research in Tanzania highlighted significant improvements in learning outcomes when subjects were taught in Kiswahili rather than English, showing that familiarity with the language enhances comprehension and retention (Tibategeza, 2010).

Moreover, initiatives in countries like Burkina Faso and Kenya have shown promising results by integrating local languages into school curricula. In Burkina Faso, using Moore as the medium of instruction not only improved academic performance but also accelerated the pace of learning compared to conventional French-language schools (Othieno, 2014). This approach not only supports academic achievement but also fosters pride in cultural identity and community resilience.

In conclusion, bridging the gap between home and school languages requires a nuanced approach that respects both cultural diversity and educational equity. It involves not only revisiting language policies but also addressing systemic barriers such as teacher training, curriculum development, and resource allocation. By embracing indigenous languages as valuable assets in education, African countries can nurture inclusive learning environments where all children have the opportunity to thrive academically and culturally (Othieno, 2014).

## Impact on African

The impact of using a child's mother tongue in education cannot be overstated, especially when considering literacy and overall educational outcomes. Research consistently indicates that children learn most effectively in their mother tongue during the formative years of education. This approach enhances comprehension, retention, and engagement, leading to better academic performance and lower dropout rates.

One of the significant benefits of mother tongue-based education is the improvement in literacy rates. When students receive instruction in a language they understand deeply, they can build a solid foundation in reading and writing. This strong linguistic base facilitates the learning of additional languages later on. According to Benson (2004), students who begin their education in their mother tongue acquire literacy skills more rapidly and effectively, which sets the stage for lifelong learning.

For instance, in Ethiopia, a country with a diverse linguistic landscape, studies have shown that students who are taught in their mother tongue in the early grades outperform their peers who are taught in a second language. A UNESCO report highlighted that Ethiopian students in mother tongue programs had higher scores in reading and mathematics compared to those in non-mother tongue programs (Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

Similarly, in Mali, the use of local languages in primary education has led to significant improvements in student learning outcomes. Research conducted by the Education Development Center (EDC) found that students in bilingual programs, where instruction was given in both the mother tongue and French, performed better in both languages compared to those in French-only programs (Pinnock and Vijayakumar, 2009). This evidence underscores the cognitive advantages of mother tongue instruction, which include a better understanding of content, greater classroom participation, and increased confidence among students.

Furthermore, the cognitive benefits of mother tongue education extend to the acquisition of additional languages. When children are literate in their first language, they find it easier to learn and master a second language. This phenomenon, known as the "threshold hypothesis," suggests that a solid foundation in the first language is crucial for effective bilingualism or multilingualism (Cummins, 2000).

In conclusion, embracing mother tongue-based education is not merely a matter of cultural preservation but a strategic approach to improving literacy and educational outcomes across Africa. It enables children to grasp complex concepts in their first language, which in turn enhances their ability to learn additional languages and subjects. By investing in mother tongue education, African countries can create more inclusive and effective educational systems that empower all students to succeed

academically and beyond (Benson, 2004; Heugh *et al.*, 2007; Pinnock and Vijayakumar, 2009).

## Sociocultural implications

Language is closely tied to cultural identity, and the marginalization of home languages in favour of colonial languages can have profound sociocultural implications. The displacement of indigenous languages in educational settings not only affects academic performance but also impacts cultural heritage and personal identity. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), when children's home languages are devalued, it can lead to a loss of cultural heritage and a sense of alienation.

This alienation occurs as students are distanced from their cultural roots and community traditions. For instance, in Kenya, children from Kikuyu-speaking homes who are taught exclusively in English may feel disconnected from their ancestral language and customs. This disconnect can lead to a diminished sense of belonging and self-worth, as the language of instruction does not reflect their lived experiences or familial ties (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Moreover, the use of colonial languages as the primary medium of instruction often perpetuates historical power dynamics, reinforcing the dominance of former colonial powers and undermining local cultures. As Thiong'o (1986) eloquently argued, language is not just a means of communication but also a carrier of culture. When education systems prioritize colonial languages over indigenous ones, they inadvertently contribute to the erosion of cultural diversity and knowledge systems that have been passed down through generations.

Conversely, incorporating home languages into education can foster a sense of pride and identity among students. It validates their cultural background and promotes inclusivity within the educational environment. For example, in Bolivia, the implementation of bilingual education programs in Quechua and Aymara has strengthened cultural identity and community cohesion among indigenous students (Hornberger, 2008).

In conclusion, the sociocultural implications of language policies in education are far-reaching. Ensuring that home languages are respected and incorporated into the educational system is essential for preserving cultural heritage, fostering a sense of identity, and promoting social cohesion (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Thiong'o, 1986; Hornberger, 2008).

## STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

### Bilingual and multilingual education programs

Implementing bilingual or multilingual education programs can effectively bridge the gap between home and school languages, making a significant difference in the lives of students. Imagine a child in Ethiopia, starting school in

their familiar mother tongue, feeling confident and connected to their cultural roots. This strong foundation in their first language sets them up for success as they gradually learn additional languages, like English, in a supportive environment (Cummins, 2000).

In Ethiopia, for instance, bilingual education programs have shown promising results. Children begin their education in their mother tongue, which helps them understand concepts more deeply and build a solid literacy foundation. As they progress, they are introduced to English and other languages in a way that doesn't overwhelm them. This approach has led to improved literacy rates and better academic performance overall (Ansah, 2014).

Similarly, in Namibia, bilingual education programs emphasize the use of indigenous languages during the early years of schooling (Frydman, 2011). English is introduced gradually, allowing children to maintain their linguistic and cultural roots while also gaining proficiency in an international language. Studies have shown that students who start their education in their mother tongue perform better academically than those who are taught exclusively in English from the beginning (Wolfaardt, 2005).

These programs are not just about academic success; they also foster a sense of pride and cultural continuity. For example, in Bolivia, multilingual education initiatives have helped indigenous students feel more connected to their heritage while improving their educational outcomes (Hornberger, 2008).

By promoting literacy in the mother tongue and gradually introducing additional languages, bilingual and multilingual education programs provide a supportive and effective learning environment. They ensure that children do not feel overwhelmed, enhancing their overall educational experience. These programs support academic achievement, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, showing that education can be both inclusive and effective (Cummins, 2000; Heugh *et al.*, 2007; Wolfaardt, 2005; Hornberger, 2008).

### **Community and parental involvement**

Engaging communities and parents in the educational process is vital for the success of language policies. When parents and community members are actively involved in developing and implementing language programs, the outcomes are significantly improved. Community-based approaches ensure that the educational content is culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate, which enhances both teaching and learning experiences.

In Uganda, community organizations play a crucial role in supporting mother tongue education. These organizations collaborate with schools to produce textbooks and teaching aids in local languages, ensuring that learning

materials are accessible and relevant to the student's cultural context (Trudell, 2007). This collaboration not only provides resources but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride among community members, reinforcing the value of indigenous languages in education.

Parental involvement is equally important. When parents understand the benefits of mother tongue instruction, they are more likely to support and encourage their children's learning. In Mali, for example, programs that actively engage parents in the educational process have seen higher levels of student achievement and retention. Parents participate in school activities, help create learning materials, and reinforce the use of the mother tongue at home (Pinnock and Vijayakumar, 2009). This involvement creates a cohesive learning environment where students feel supported both at school and at home.

Moreover, community and parental involvement can address some of the practical challenges of implementing mother-tongue education. In Ethiopia, community participation has been instrumental in overcoming the shortage of educational materials and trained teachers. Local communities help develop curriculum content and provide training for teachers, ensuring that they are equipped to deliver effective instruction in the mother tongue (Heugh *et al.*, 2007). This collaborative approach not only improves educational outcomes but also strengthens community bonds and cultural heritage.

In Namibia, similar strategies have been employed, with communities and parents working together to support bilingual education programs. This collaborative effort ensures that educational policies are responsive to the needs of the students and the community, leading to more sustainable and effective language education initiatives (Wolfaardt, 2005).

In conclusion, engaging communities and parents in the educational process is essential for the success of language policies. By involving local stakeholders in the development and implementation of mother tongue programs, educational systems can become more inclusive, effective, and culturally relevant. This approach not only enhances academic outcomes but also promotes cultural preservation and community cohesion (Trudell, 2007; Heugh *et al.*, 2007; Pinnock and Vijayakumar, 2009; Wolfaardt, 2005).

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Policymakers should consider the linguistic realities of their populations and design education systems that are inclusive of all languages spoken by students. This includes training teachers to be proficient in multiple languages and developing curricula that reflect the linguistic diversity of the country (Bamgbose, 2011).

Policymakers need to embrace the linguistic realities of their populations when designing education systems,

ensuring that all languages spoken by students are included and valued. This means making sure teachers are well-trained to handle multiple languages and creating curricula that reflect the rich linguistic diversity of the country (Bamgbose, 2011).

Imagine a young girl in Nigeria who speaks Yoruba at home but is taught in English at school. If her teachers were trained to teach in both Yoruba and English, she would feel more comfortable and confident in her learning environment. Teacher training programs should, therefore, include courses on bilingual and multilingual education, cultural awareness, and strategies for managing diverse classrooms. Such training has shown promising results in Nigeria, helping teachers support students learning in their mother tongue while also introducing a second language (Benson, 2004).

Curricula should be developed to reflect the linguistic diversity of the student population. This means creating textbooks and learning materials in various languages and ensuring that educational content is relevant and accessible to all students. For example, in South Africa, efforts to incorporate indigenous languages into the curriculum have led to the production of textbooks in languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, and Sesotho. This approach has not only made education more inclusive but also improved learning outcomes (Kamwangamalu, 2004).

Parents and communities also play a crucial role in this process. When parents are involved in their children's education, the results are often more positive. In Uganda, community-based approaches that involve parents in developing textbooks and teaching aids in local languages have made mother-tongue education programs much more effective (Trudell, 2007). Imagine parents helping create a textbook in their native language, feeling a sense of pride and connection to their child's education.

Policymakers should also establish systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of language policies on education. This data-driven approach can help identify what's working and what needs improvement, ensuring that language policies are continuously refined to meet the needs of the population.

Investing in language education is equally important. Governments need to allocate sufficient resources for teacher training, curriculum development, and the production of educational materials in multiple languages. In Ethiopia, such investments have led to significant improvements in literacy rates and academic performance (Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

By training teachers, developing inclusive curricula, involving communities, setting up evaluation systems, and investing in language education, policymakers can create educational environments where all students thrive. This not only improves academic outcomes but also helps preserve cultural heritage and promote social cohesion (Bamgbose, 2011; Benson, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2004; Trudell, 2007; Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

The interplay between school and home languages in Africa is complex and multifaceted. Addressing the challenges posed by linguistic diversity requires a nuanced understanding of the historical, sociocultural, and educational contexts. By promoting inclusive language policies and practices, African countries can enhance educational outcomes and preserve their rich linguistic heritage.

Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of multilingual education programs, exploring innovative approaches to language teaching, and documenting successful case studies from different regions. By working together, educators, policymakers, and communities can ensure that all African children have the opportunity to learn and thrive in a linguistically inclusive environment.

## Final thought

Imagine a future where every African child, regardless of their home language, can walk into a classroom and feel understood, valued, and empowered to learn. This vision is achievable through dedicated efforts to embrace linguistic diversity and create inclusive educational policies.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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