A way to improve literacy in primary education in
Nigeria

by Marianne Aaron

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Marianne Aaron, from the Netherlands, had training in Applied Linguistics at SIL’s summer courses in Horsleys Green, England in 1979 and 1980. There she met her husband, Uche, a Nigerian. After their marriage in 1981, she took literacy specialist courses at the International Linguistics Center, Dallas. She and her husband have worked with the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust (NBTT) since 1983. They worked as advisors to a literacy and Bible translation project in Uche’s language, Obolo, from 1983 to 1991. The Obolo Language Project is one of the two projects that are described in this article. From 1991 to 1994, Marianne and Uche lived and studied in Santa Barbara at the University of California, where Marianne got an MA in Education. She is currently serving as Literacy Coordinator/Consultant with NBTT.

1. Abstract

Although “the inculcation of permanent literacy” is one of the major objectives of primary education in Nigeria, it has been found that too few children graduating from primary school have achieved permanent literacy.

Although the national policy has been a policy of transitional bilingual education, to accommodate the over 400 indigenous Nigerian languages, in general, initial instruction in literacy has been in English, the official language of the country. This study describes two projects in Nigeria where there was increased emphasis on the teaching and use of literacy in the mother tongue. The author was involved in the setting up of one of these projects.

It was found that the majority of children living in rural communities do not understand any English, nor do they have any idea of the nature of literacy when they start primary school. This study shows that the almost exclusive emphasis on instruction of literacy in English, which was found in primary education, is detrimental to the children’s acquisition of literacy. On the other hand, results of the described projects show that an emphasis on instruction in literacy in the mother tongue throughout primary school has much greater potential for most children to achieve permanent literacy in their mother tongue and in English.

There is also a brief discussion of possible uses of literacy in minority languages in Nigeria.

2. Two language projects in primary schools in Nigeria

The two projects discussed in this article are both concerned with the improvement of primary school education in Nigeria through increased use of the students’ primary language for instruction. The Ife Primary Education Research Project was the more comprehensive project, affecting the entire curriculum. For the Obolo primary school project, only the teaching of the language arts was affected.

Another major difference between the Ife and the Obolo projects is in the size and the status of the languages concerned. Yoruba (used in the Ife project) is one of the national languages of Nigeria, with about 15 million speakers (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989:2), while the Obolo language is just one of the hundreds of minority languages with less than one million speakers each. The Obolo language had not been written with any standardized orthography, and there were no school books at all in the language, not even any Obolo readers. Yoruba, on the other hand, has been written since the end of the previous century, and it is likely readers for primary school have been used for at least 40 years. The Yoruba area is also very large, comprising several states with several major cities with universities. The University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, caters mostly to Yoruba students and has many Yoruba professors. Obolo area, on the other hand, is a small area with no major city in it and no institution of higher education. It was part of one local government area in Rivers State (OLGA) until 1993, when it was given a local government area by itself. One-third of Obolo area is situated in Akwa Ibom state and is divided over three local government areas there. Since Yoruba is a major language, they could afford a much larger project with a larger team of experts than the Obolo project.

3. The Ife Primary Education Research Project

3.1. Background

The Ife Primary Education Research Project (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989) was formally started in 1970. It continued for six years (the time needed in Nigeria to complete primary education). It continued afterwards with proliferation classes and follow-up research. The project was funded from its inception in 1969 up to 1976 by the Ford Foundation of New York. Several professors of the University of Ife were involved in it.

Ife is a city in western Nigeria located in the Yoruba area. Yoruba is one of the three major languages of Nigeria. There are approximately 15 million native speakers of Yoruba (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989) and several million who speak it as a second language. In the Yoruba area, transitional bilingual education has been in place for a long time, probably since 1925, when the colonial government decided “that the medium of instruction in the early years of the children’s education should be in the vernacular and English as medium in the last three or four years of the primary course” (1925 Memorandum on Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa as taken from Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989). Fafunwa and others assess this program as follows: “With the switching of the medium of instruction from the mother tongue after three years to English in the last three or four years of primary education, the average Nigerian child is usually neither proficient in his mother tongue nor in English” (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989:7). They also say that a number of studies carried out to determine why so many children (from 40 percent to 60 percent) drop out of school before completing their primary education. They attributed this phenomenon to three causes:

- Premature introduction of English as a language of instruction at the primary school
- Poorly trained teachers
- Inadequate teaching and learning facilities (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989:8)

Fafunwa and others stress that there is no continuity between an African child's home experience and his school experience, and they sketch the three types of home environments Nigerian children come from as follows:

- An indigenous home and environment (most common in rural areas)
- A partly indigenous and partly Western home and environment
- A Western-oriented home and environment

The indigenous homes only use local languages and have most likely no previous school experience in the immediate family, so that the child has little idea of books and school.

They also found that in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades of primary school, teachers were doing “a double task,” that is, they were employing Yoruba as a medium of communication whenever the children failed to understand in English. This seemed to happen frequently, even up to Grade 6. They commented that the children’s level of proficiency in English was minimal. They also observed from experience over the years that the English competencies of primary school teachers had been such that they had great difficulty using English as an effective medium of instruction. Though they recognize there are many other factors playing a role, such as, poorly prepared teachers, lack of adequate teaching materials, scarcity of appropriate textbooks, and the poor implementation of the national language policy, the matter (1998). Notes on Literacy, 24(2).
of language of instruction is seen as a major culprit responsible for low achievements and especially for lack of permanent literacy (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989:10).

3.2. Project philosophy

The project was started in the belief that the most natural way of learning is through the mother tongue and that Nigerian children may have been “unnecessarily maimed emotionally and intellectually” (ibid.) because they had to struggle with a “foreign language” instead of focusing on learning other things. They were convinced that a child’s foundational education is better laid in his or her mother tongue and that this puts him in a better position to build on in later years even in another language. They also felt that the present system does not serve the broad majority of people very well, rather the important role accorded to English limits the number of people who succeed in education to the elite group who grow up in an environment where English is used. They took an egalitarian quantitative stance, which they felt was in agreement with the five main national objectives in Nigeria as stated in the Second National Development Plan; this concerns the building of a democratic, just, and egalitarian society. Though they tried to achieve good quality education, they had “more concern for reaching the maximum number of pupils and simultaneous leading them to attain permanent literacy and numeracy” (ibid., 12). This led them to use the mother tongue for education, as it was the language most readily available to the students as well as their teachers.

The policy was to develop a program that would encourage the students “to use their own mother tongue to obtain maximum self-reliance, growth and development as individuals” (ibid.). The program should also make it possible for them to achieve communicative competence in English to enable them to interact with people of all other ethnic groups in the nation and to be prepared for instruction through the medium of English in secondary school.

3.3. Project planning and development

As they set about planning, they identified two major problems that would need addressing: (1) a lack of teachers who were well trained in teaching both Yoruba and English, and (2) a lack of appropriate textbooks in both Yoruba and English. It was found that the first problem was the most difficult one.

Many of the efforts of the project were consequently spent on the writing of textbooks in Yoruba and on the training of the teachers for the project in the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction and in the teaching of the language as a subject. Initially, it was thought that mere translation of the existing English teaching materials would be sufficient, but as planning progressed, it became obvious that many of the existing materials were inadequate and inappropriate. They, therefore, felt they had to develop new materials to fit their philosophy. These were written by teams of specialists in each subject.

The project thus contributed a great deal to the standardization of the writing system of the language. They also had to coin words in Yoruba for some concepts and do research into the language to find the best descriptions and names for other ones. They researched into Yoruba culture and customs for items and practices that could be useful for the teaching of basic science, mathematics, and especially as topics
for the subject of social studies. The project also set up its own book publishing unit, so that books could be produced cheaply.

Though it had always been assumed that Yoruba-speaking teachers would be able to teach Yoruba as a language without any additional training, this was found not to be so. All the teachers needed extensive additional training, which was accomplished mostly through short workshops all through the project life. Because it was envisaged that the new curriculum would be adopted in the entire state, the University of Ife Institute of Education also adapted its one-year Associative Diploma Program to meet the teaching requirements of the new curriculum.

It can be seen from the report that the participating scholars, educational personnel, and teachers worked with much zeal and enthusiasm, even though it was a demanding task. The teachers in particular had to do more work than usual, as it was required of them that they should participate in workshops during many of the school vacations and on weekends.

Though the project was primarily meant for the development of materials for teaching through the medium of Yoruba, and for the first time in history to properly design and implement a curriculum in a Nigerian indigenous language, an experimental design was also added early on in the project. For this purpose (and for the sake of other non-Yoruba speaking Africans who might like to refer to the experience of the project), the syllabus, schemes of work, and the teaching materials (where at all possible) were produced in both Yoruba and English.

### 3.4. The experiment

An experiment was set up in a typical primary school in Ile-Ife township. It consisted of two classes of the regular intake of students for Grade 1 designated as the experimental group (80 students) and a third class for control (40 students). The students were randomly assigned to these classes. The experimental classes received all their education in Yoruba, except English language arts which was taught by a specialist teacher. This instruction continued on all through the six years of primary education. The control classes went through the regular transitional bilingual education program, which meant that from Grades 1 to 3 they had an almost identical program with the experimental class, except that they were taught English by their regular teacher instead of a specialist teacher. From Grades 4 to 6, they were taught through the English medium. Each consecutive year from 1970 through to 1975, the new intake of students for Grade 1 participated in the project.

Later on, in 1973, the project decided to extend the experiment to rural and semiurban areas of the former Western State. Ten schools, called “proliferation of schools,” were from then on included in the project. A total of 700 children were enrolled in Grade 1 of the project that year. In these proliferation schools, only this set of students was made part of the project, with one experimental group and one control group in every school. This set was carried through the six years of primary education with the project’s new curriculum, teaching materials, and teacher training. The experimental classes of the proliferation schools did not have specialist English teachers but were taught by their regular teachers for all subjects. The teachers, however, received intensive training on how to teach through the media of Yoruba and English respectively, as well as how to teach each of these languages as a subject. Unfortunately, it is not quite clear from the report whether the control classes in these schools used the new or the old curriculum, (1998). *Notes on Literacy*, 24(2).
though it seems to this author that it must have been the new curriculum, that is, the same as was used for
the control group in the pilot school.

From the beginning it was believed that the students in the experimental groups would gain effective
communicative competence in English which would at least be comparable to that of the students in the
control classes, even though they would spend less time in English, because they would not have English
as a medium of communication in the higher grades of their program.

Although the experimental design was interfered with at times (especially initially in the pilot school)
because of unforeseen circumstances and adaptations that had to be made for the good of the students, it
was clear that mother tongue primary education in Nigeria can be at least as effective as the transitional
bilingual education model. The classes in the proliferation schools (see below) were not affected by
changes in the design of the experiment and by practical problems as the ones in the pilot school had
been. Therefore, they show a clearer picture than the pilot school.

3.5. Tests and results of the experiment

Every year all the experimental and control classes were given tests. The results of the set of the
proliferation schools (which were admitted to the project in 1973) are reported yearly, from 1976 when
they were in Primary 3. The results of each of the urban proliferation schools are compared with those
years’ results in the pilot school and with those of an urban control group that was following the
traditional curriculum. This group consisted of two classes of 68 students in total. Because some groups
were following the project curriculum and others the traditional curriculum, all of them were tested on
both. The experimental groups of both the proliferation schools and the pilot schools did generally better
than the control groups from Grade 4 onward, and they tended to be at the top for Yoruba and English
language. The difference for English language was significant from Grade 5. In Grade 6 there was a
significant difference between the experimental groups and the control groups in all subjects. The pilot
school experimental classes, with their specialist English teachers, performed better than the proliferation
classes. This seemed to indicate that there is some value in the use of specialist teachers.

It has been known that rural and urban schools in Nigeria cannot be compared with each other because of
a host of factors that are different in the two situations. Some of these factors are

1. the lower exposure to English and to environmental print in rural areas

2. the greater lack of facilities in schools, as well as

3. the best qualified teachers often prefer to live in the towns.

Because of such factors, the schools in rural areas are known to achieve much lower standards than the
ones in urban areas. Though Fafunwa and others do not make any comments about this, they report the
results of the rural proliferation schools separately from those of the urban ones. The experimental classes
here are compared with the project control classes (which used the project curriculum) and with a control
class that followed the traditional curriculum. As was the case in urban areas, the experimental classes in
rural areas were also found to perform significantly better than the project control classes in all subjects.

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In this case, a significant difference for all classes was already established in Grade 5. This seems to indicate that mother tongue education was more effective than the transitional bilingual education model.

It is noteworthy that, both in the urban and in the rural comparisons, the efforts of the project showed up in significant superior results for the project control groups over the control groups that followed the traditional curriculum. The difference in treatment between these groups apparently consisted of a new curriculum, extra training for the teachers in using the Yoruba and English media for teaching (and in teaching Yoruba as a subject), and the provision of full sets of materials for teachers and students to use. Both groups followed the transitional education scheme, teaching through the medium of Yoruba in Grades 1 through 3 and through the medium of English in Grades 4 through 6. In fact, from this author’s analysis of the results, comparing the result of the rural schools with that of the urban ones, the project intervention went very far toward eliminating the difference between the results of rural and urban schools. In Elementary 6, not only the rural project experimental classes but also the control classes appeared to rank among the urban schools, scoring higher than the urban traditional control classes.

In 1975, the first batch of the children in the pilot school graduated from primary school and set for two public examinations. For the First School Leaving Examination, the results of the control and the experimental groups were comparable for English and the content subjects. For Yoruba, however, the experimental group did significantly better than the control group. For the National Common Entrance Examination, there were only eight students from the control group and 25 from the experimental group. Their results were comparable for the four papers tested:

- Arithmetic
- Quantitative aptitude
- English
- (English) verbal aptitude

After the initial experiment, an effort was made to track the graduates of the project through their further education, and it appeared that they compared rather favorably with others in several respects, including socially with their peers, as well as, academically. It appeared to Fafunwa and others that a higher than normal percentage of them went on to higher education. Then “a significant proportion of them gained entry into secondary schools through competitive entrance examination in 1975 in contrast to their counterparts in the control group” (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989:130). Children of this first set were admitted into different schools in Nigeria, but because of financial and personnel constraints the monitoring exercise was limited to a few schools in Ile-Ife. The principals of these schools were asked to report yearly about the graduates of the project in the areas of academic work, “co-curricular activities and general behaviour” (ibid., 131). Apparently their performance and behavior were rated satisfactory and above average by most principals.

There was also a study of “affective outcomes” of the project with the 27 students who were traced to their respective secondary schools. Two instruments designed to test adjustment of school children were used. Instrument 1 was the Student Problem Inventory (SPI) which asks respondents to tick any of the listed problems that apply to him. The total score of the experimental children was then compared with

that of the other children in their classes. Instrument 2 was a sociometric instrument in which all members of a class had to choose persons they would like to fill certain roles, such as

- a person to be a leader
- a study mate
- a playmate
- a confidant, or
- somebody with whom to share food.

The average number of times the experimental children were nominated for each role was then compared with that of their classmates. The results showed that the project children reported on the average fewer problems than other children. They were also notably above average in acceptability as leader, study mate, trip mate, and play mate, and slightly above average in social acceptability on the whole. In 1989, when a search was done for graduates of the pilot school then in institutes of higher education, 17 of them were found in such institutions.

In 1985, the Oyo State Government, one of the Yoruba speaking states, decided to introduce the project into its primary schools on a trial basis beginning January 1986. The state has an approximate population of 12 million Yoruba speaking people. They started with the training of 70 tutors who, in turn, trained 700 teachers. The plan was to extend the project to cover the entire primary school system in the state by 1989 (± 2 million children).

### 3.6. The teaching of English language arts

For English language arts, two different curricula were designed for the experimental and the control groups. Though there was a basic set that was the same new curriculum, the experimental groups were provided with more materials, that is:

- More reading readiness exercises
- Extended oral language practice
- Additional exercises in their Grades 5 and 6 readers
- Extra suggestions in the teachers’ guides for writing exercises (for example, composition, story writing, and letter writing)
- Procedures for teaching intensive reading and for teaching oral and reading comprehension
- Extra supplementary readers to practice some additional concepts and structures the teachers had introduced

The control group also received an “adequate quantity” of supplementary readers and both groups were monitored in their extensive reading assignments. The experimental groups also had additional work.
books for practice and revision of additional structures and lexis introduced in their readers. There were also “comprehension texts” and “medium servicing texts,” which were especially written for the experimental groups only, to teach concepts and registers for the other subject areas that they learned through the Yoruba medium.

In Grades 4 to 6, the experimental groups had more periods of English language arts per week than the control classes, who, however, were instructed through the English medium in all subjects. In the pilot school, specialist teachers were employed for the teaching of English language arts to the experimental classes. However, as this was not possible for the proliferation schools, there the class teachers were given intensive training on how to teach English as a subject and how to use it as a medium of instruction.

For the experimental group, the role of the English language in the project curriculum was

1. as a school subject with emphasis on the teaching of communicative competence (both orally and in written form) and to prepare students for the subsequent use of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools, and

2. for “medium servicing.”

What this meant was that the terminology, the “registers and language structures,” specific to the content subjects would be incorporated in the English language lessons (since these subjects would be taught in Yoruba only).

From previous studies of actual classroom practices in primary schools, it was found that the teachers switched back and forth much between the use of English and Yoruba. This was not seen as a desirable situation (compare Legarreta-Marcaida’s later research on effective use of the primary language in the classroom, 1981). It was, therefore, decided that English was to be taught as a distinct subject with its own culture, without any substitution of vocabulary, phrases, or total utterance from Yoruba to English or vice-versa, that is, no code-switching was allowed. Only in such cases where a concept did not exist in one of the languages, the language in which it exists could be used briefly to explain it.

Active pupil participation in the English classes was seen as very important, so that students would become used to the language by using it functionally. There was extensive use of dialogues, role-play, and dramatization of real life situations which was done in groups and in pairs.

3.7. On the teaching of literacy

In the experimental classes, initial literacy instruction during the first grade was done in Yoruba, while English was taught orally only. (In the control classes, initial literacy in English and Yoruba was taught simultaneously, as has been the pattern.) Much emphasis was placed on reading readiness in this first year. One of the things done was to teach auditory discrimination of the sounds of Yoruba. During this time the “mechanics” of writing were also taught.

The project’s language specialists decided, for several reasons, that the students should be taught initial reading in Yoruba approximately one year before instruction in English reading would be introduced. They stated that basic reading readiness skills are transferable to other languages and that the use of the (1998). Notes on Literacy, 24(2).
mother tongue for initial literacy instruction would make it possible to use the Language Experience Approach for early reading. This author finds this a good choice because of its clear demonstration of the processes of reading and writing and of the function of written text as a vehicle of meaning. The language specialists also believed that mother tongue reading would stimulate motivation for reading generally, because the child would be reading meaningful and interesting contents that were related to his or her experiences and environment.

For the development of speaking and listening skills, the teachers were reminded of Yoruba’s rich oral tradition, and they were encouraged to draw on this to help develop students’ creative speaking habits. Children were to be taught such skills as to listen attentively and to reproduce correctly, to observe and to describe, and to use descriptive words and expressions. Oral composition and storytelling were important activities during the Yoruba language lessons. Discussions, dramatizations, and role-play were also important activities.

Writing was integrated with reading using the Experience Story Approach. The children were taught initial writing as they dictated their stories or experiences, either as a group or as individuals, to the teacher who then recorded it on the chalkboard or on sheets of paper for individuals. Then teacher and students would read and re-read these stories. (The mechanics of letter formation and practice in handwriting were taught during different periods.)

The above were the activities the experimental classes engaged in mostly during the initial period. After this, they started to use graded course readers. The Yoruba readers contained, amongst other things, some materials drawing on lessons in other subjects. The English readers contained

- reading passages with comprehension exercises
- language exercises for structure practice, and
- activities for reinforcement of concepts acquired.

The authors of this study do not say what further approaches for the teaching of reading and writing in the two languages were used. After an initial preparatory period in Yoruba only, around the end of Primary 1, instruction in English literacy was introduced. There were additional readiness exercises in the English class, presumably for discrimination of sounds that are not in Yoruba. From then on, literacy instruction in both languages continued side by side.

In both languages, creative writing was also developed. Teachers had to come to realize that Yoruba could be used for written compositions as well as for oral tradition with which they tended to associate the language. They had to learn to teach and grade Yoruba composition. The same procedures, as were used for the development of creative oral language, were also used for the development of creative writing skills.

There were graded readers in both languages and a class library with additional materials, as well as other ways in which books were made available. Extensive reading was promoted. Parents also contributed by buying two or three supplementary readers for each student, which were then exchanged between the student and his or her classmates, so that each child had access to a much larger number of books. This was called “the invisible library.” To provide adequate reading materials in Yoruba for the lower grades, (1998). *Notes on Literacy*, 24(2).
children in the upper grades were encouraged to write additional short stories for the children in Grades 1 to 3.

For the English classes, it is reported that both the experimental group and the control group were monitored in extensive reading assignments. However, it is also reported that, “time proved that the experimental group, by virtue of their initial reading training, tended to read more books and to read faster; [and that] consequently they covered a wider variety of supplementary readers” (ibid., 59). So the better results of the experimental group are attributed mainly to the extended introduction period to reading and writing in Yoruba that the experimental classes received.

The project also operated a remedial program for the early remediation of children who seemed to have some problems in their reading and/or writing development. This was done in the Yoruba language. It was found that “a good percentage of the reading problems could be traced to insufficient readiness for reading” (ibid. 82), and this depended on the type of home background of the children. It was found that “those who were sent to the remedial unit tended to be those whose home environment offered little or no stimulus for initial reading” (ibid.). These children were helped with additional prereading activities in Yoruba before the time they started to be instructed in English literacy.

4. Concluding comments on the Ife project

4.1. Findings about the transitional bilingual education program for primary education as prescribed in the National Policy of Education

First, it should be noted that the Ife project provides evidence that the existent transitional bilingual policy for Nigerian primary schools has not been executed anywhere to its full potential. From this project, it became clear that there is a lack of teaching materials (that is, items such as course books and teachers’ handbooks) for all the subjects to be taught in the indigenous languages, even for major languages in the country, such as, Yoruba.

It was found that the common practice for teachers to use English teachers’ handbooks to teach from through the medium of the Yoruba language was unsatisfactory. Fafunwa and others say, “It was not uncommon that the teacher’s knowledge of the second language was defective with the resultant effect that distorted ideas were communicated to the pupils through misinterpretation” (1989:63). The project, therefore, produced teachers’ handbooks in Yoruba. Because their English was not quite adequate, the teachers were not well prepared to teach through the medium of English either, as they did in Grades 4 to 6.

It was also found that the assumption there had been that any Yoruba speaking teacher would automatically be able to teach the language was false. Teachers had never been trained to teach the mother tongue properly as a subject. They needed to be given intensive training, during which they learned that there is a difference between teaching the mother tongue as a subject and teaching a second language as a subject, in that children already bring their language to school, so they have a basic foundation for further oral language development and for reading and writing.

It follows that to execute the official transitional bilingual education program optimally, some urgent improvements are needed in two important areas:

1. The writing and publishing of textbooks in the mother tongue (for all the subjects taught in Primaries 1 through 3)
2. The additional training of teachers in the instruction of language arts (both in English and in the mother tongue)

Another observation was that many teachers are themselves not proficient enough in English to use it as a medium of instruction in the higher grades of primary school. This may be the toughest problem to solve when continuing with this program.

The results of this project showed that the children who had more practice in reading and writing in Yoruba (since all the subjects were taught through this medium and made use of textbooks in the Yoruba language throughout primary school) ended up outperforming the control groups in language arts, both in Yoruba and English (as well as in all the contents subjects). It, therefore, appears that education through the mother tongue all through primary school (together with improved instruction in English as a subject) would render better results for primary education in general and for literacy acquisition in particular. This kind of program may, however, only be feasible for the major languages of the country.

4.2. Side benefits of the project

It should be noted that the project provided textbooks for all the students and teachers involved in it. Since lack of books and the finances to buy textbooks is a very severe problem in many areas, this was a decided advantage (although the problem was not as severe at Ife nor was it as severe at that time as it became later on in the 1980s, see below). They were able to publish these books from the grant they had, and they put this money to good use by publishing in the cheapest way possible through mimeographing. Children had to return books to the school and pay for the replacement of any damaged, lost, or stolen books, so that the books could be reused for several years. At schools, the books were kept behind locks. Parents contributed to the stock of books available for their children by acquiring two or three additional readers for each child that were used in the “invisible library.”

One observation was that cooperation between the school and the home increased. Fafunwa and others (1989:143) say that “the parents came to the realization of the truth that the ongoing activities within the classroom walls were not opposed to the interest of the home; rather they were to complement the informal education of the home, enrich and stabilize it, or where it is deficient, strengthen it.” Parents’ cooperation had been called upon for several aspects of curriculum and material preparation. Elders and known masters of the language had been called upon too, so they must have seen that the knowledge they had of their language and culture was also appreciated in school.

Further, one of the effects of programs in which the mother tongue is maintained is bound to be that monolingual parents can witness the progress their children make as they hear them reading and see them writing in their language for homework assignments. This was also attested to by Ramirez and others (1991) in late-exit maintenance bilingual education. They found parents were more likely to help with or

monitor their children’s homework (in their mother tongue) than in programs where the mother tongue was not maintained through the later grades of primary school. Similar things were observed in the Obolo project (see below in this section). Goldenberg (1993) also writes about the importance of the homeschool connection for minority language children and how to stimulate parents’ involvement in children’s beginning literacy development. In the case of minority language speakers, this is more feasible if the mother tongue is used for instruction in literacy.

4.3. Impact of the Ife project in Nigeria

It is important to note the time frame within which this project took place. At the beginning of this project (in 1969), information about the Canadian French immersion projects had not yet been widely published. Cummins’ theory on bilingual proficiencies also became known later. It can be seen from this project that Fafunwa and the other researchers involved in it were not yet aware of the extent to which literacy skills acquired in one language can be transferred to another language. However, they knew that “pre-reading skills” are transferable and took full advantage of the fact.

This was the first project of its kind in Nigeria. As Fafunwa and others also mention, it had been “the assumption that no Nigerian language was rich and flexible enough to express scientific concepts and ideas” (1989:135). Unfortunately, these ideas still continue to be prevalent. This author thinks the project will still make a difference in Nigeria, especially now that Oyo state is introducing it into the whole primary school system. She hopes the results of the project will still be better published, because in general, the public (including educationists and teachers) still seems to be uninformed of the fact that Nigerian languages can, in principle, be used for education just as well as any other language, let alone that it may be advantageous to teach students in primary school through the medium of their mother tongue.

The researchers of this project would encourage other language groups to embark on a similar project in their language. For this purpose, the project has made the curriculum, textbooks, teachers handbooks, and other materials they produced available in English versions. They also included recommendations for proposed replication. This would be a worthwhile effort.

The authors of some of the present-day Nigerian English readers and other textbooks adapted ideas from the project’s books and curricula. According to Fafunwa and others, the present national policy for education was influenced by position papers for the planning of the Ife project, though it is hard to pinpoint such aspects. Some states’ editions of the national curriculum seem to have been influenced by findings from the project. This author found that some of these now recommend for Primary 1 that instruction in literacy in English should not be started until the last term of Primary 1. They also recommend that during the first two terms instruction in literacy in the mother tongue should already be given, while the teaching of English should be oral only. This is the same procedure as was followed in the Ife project.

5. The Obolo project

5.1. Differences between the Ife and Obolo projects

It is important to note that the above described Ife Primary Education Research Project took place largely before 1976, when Universal Primary Education (UPE) was instituted in Nigeria. UPE made primary education free for all, and the number of schools as well as the population of schools grew enormously in the years that followed. Though large portions of the national income were spent on education during the following 10 years, teacher training could not quite keep up with the demands. Moreover, since the early 1980s, when world recession started to have its impact in Nigeria, the budget for education had to be cut drastically. This has negatively affected the quality of education (Habte 1990). The poor quality of education probably accounts for much of the present-day low levels of literacy, which may consequently be lower than at the time of the Ife project (compare Habte 1990). Schools are not providing readers and other textbooks for children anymore, nor are they subsidizing books, as was done some time in the past. Schools also have less equipment than they had in the past, such as teaching aids and good cupboards for storing books. Parents, too, are affected by the general economic conditions and can afford less to buy books. Even teachers in training in the 1980s often could afford few of the books they needed for their training. These are some of the negative effects on education that have influenced it since the time of the Ife project.

It is also important to note that the Ife project took place largely in Ife, an urban area (and in the semiurban area around Ife), while the Obolo project took place in a rather remote rural area. There are major differences in Nigeria between education in urban and in rural areas (see the introduction to this section above).

Two other major differences between the situation at Ife and the one in Obolo are the size of the population speaking these two respective languages and the languages’ status, as discussed in the introduction of this section.

Finally, it should be noted that in the Ife project, full mother tongue primary education was compared with a transitional bilingual primary education program that had been in existence for many years. In Obolo, and in the Rivers State where Obolo is situated, only English was used for literacy instruction, and this approach is compared with the project’s approach of teaching for biliteracy in both the mother tongue and English.

5.2. Obolo geography

Obolo is an area situated in southeast Nigeria on the Atlantic coast. The area is divided by state boundaries, so that approximately two-thirds of the population live in Rivers State and one-third in Akwa Ibom state. The total population living in the area is approximately 150,000. The majority of the people are subsistence fishermen. They live mostly on deltaic islands and fish in the ocean and in the deltaic rivers and creeks. Women only fish in the rivers and creeks, while men usually fish in the ocean. Children also learn to fish with their relatives when they are not in school. The bulk of the fish the men catch in the ocean is smoked by the women and traded off in the markets on the mainland. Agricultural produce and other needed items are bought in exchange.

5.3. Languages spoken in the area

Not many nonindigenes are living on the islands. The population is rather homogeneous, and the few individuals from other ethnic groups usually learn the language at least to the extent that they understand it. There are also not many teachers who are not Obolo indigenes. Only in the district headquarters are there some offices of the ministries represented. There is a police station and a bank where employees from other areas may prefer to communicate in English or, depending on the occasion and the person, in a Nigerian national or regional language (Igbo and Ibibio are two languages spoken by many Obolo people age 35 and above).

5.4. Scope and results of education

By 1991, there were 49 primary schools in the Obolo area in Rivers State. There were also nine secondary schools. Many had been built with community effort. Before 1960, there were only two primary schools. Many of the present teachers went to these two schools. Presently, there are many more people who went to secondary school. Most of these leave the area permanently in search of a job. Teachers and clergy are the only educated people who may stay as they are posted to this rural area. Unfortunately, these days not many who attend the local secondary schools pass the final examinations with high enough credits to be able to work or continue their education. Then they end up in the cities living with relatives and trying for years to find a job or to improve their education by home study. Since life in the city has also become harder, more and more of them return to the area to settle back and fish.

5.5. History of Obolo language project

In 1978, some teachers in the area had organized themselves to form the Obolo Language Committee. They had been motivated by the work of Professor K. Williamson, a linguist at the University of Port Harcourt, to cooperate with a linguist of the university on the development of some books for teachers and primers for students in the Obolo language. This was part of the efforts of the Rivers Readers Project, a state government supported project whose aim was to provide primary school readers in all the state’s languages. Then, in 1980, the Obolo Bible Translation Committee was formed. This committee had as its goal the translation of the Bible into the Obolo language. In 1981, the members of the two committees decided to join the two committees to form the Obolo Language and Bible Translation Committee. This committee finally approved an orthography proposed by the linguist working with them as well as a first primer in Obolo. This author joined them shortly after this, in 1984, as a literacy advisor seconded to them by the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust. Her background for this work was a year of training in linguistics and literacy at the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Her husband also was seconded to the Obolo Language and Bible Translation Committee as an advisor for Bible translation.

5.6. The idea for the Obolo Primary School Project

The Obolo project, in which this author was involved from 1984 to 1991, is an ongoing project, that is, it is not yet completed and more work is being done. It was not designed as an experimental project, but rather it grew in response to requests by the Obolo Language Committee. This author knew, from the (1998). Notes on Literacy, 24(2).
experience of others working in minority languages to promote literacy for adults as part of development projects, that literacy skills are transferable, and it is easier to acquire literacy in the language one knows best. To her it was clear that literacy in their mother tongue would also help children to make better progress in their education than was possible in English, a language they were only exposed to in school. Even though to succeed in education, they eventually had to learn to read and write in English (insofar as they would learn English also), she believed that their ability in literacy in their language would be transferable to literacy in English. She also felt that they would enjoy reading (and writing) in Obolo so much more than in English, because they could understand it, thereby they would be more motivated to learn it. Since a strong movement had started to push the production of literature in their native language, it would be worthwhile to learn to read and write in this language.

Since initial literacy instruction in the mother tongue was congruent with the official language policy for education, the Ministry of Education and the schools board gave their permission. Later on, the local schools board became actively involved in the organization of workshops for teachers and the monitoring of their progress.

5.7. English literacy = English

The practice in many nonelite schools in Nigeria is that children are instructed in literacy in English immediately upon entering primary school, even though they do not understand anything in this language. There are no public preschools, and only the elite can afford to send their children to the private nursery or kindergarten classes. In the major languages, children are instructed to read and write in their mother tongue simultaneously with English, but in minority languages, there is usually nothing else than this instruction in “English.” From her observations and discussions with teachers, this author noticed teachers tend to equate the teaching of English with the teaching of literacy, as though there is only (English) reading and writing to be taught. So they start their instruction of English with a first reading lesson on day one. This leads to a high rate of failure to even begin to read and write. Most children double Primary 1, and many children drop out of school before they learn how to read at all.

5.8. State of affairs in education in Obolo

5.8.1. Teachers’ interest in and ignorance about use of local language for teaching literacy

Though many teachers made contributions for the publication of the first school book, it soon became clear that they were not sure how mother tongue readers would fit into the school curriculum and what the benefits would be for the children’s education. It appeared the teachers were interested out of ethnic pride and the prestige it would add to the language. Many people had the experience of being told they had no language because there were no books in the language. They were not aware that with literacy in their first language, children would be helped on their way into literacy in English also. Even though it had been the National Policy of Education to educate children initially in their mother tongue before later transition into English, it had not occurred to them this meant anything more than that for the initial
period the children were allowed to have classes in their own language, until they would be able to understand enough English to be taught through it.

5.8.2. School buildings and facilities for learning

In many cases there were no walls between classrooms. For example, Elementary 1, 2, and 3 were all housed in one long hall with only a narrow walking space between the classes. In other schools, there were partitions made with cupboards or half-high walls. Children would share the desks-with-benches with five or six squeezed together on a desk designed for two. The space was usually quite full, especially in the lower grades, where first grade classes were usually overfull with one teacher taking care of sometimes as many as 70 children. This, however, varied so that on other days this teacher might only have about 40 students in her class (due to irregular attendance).

From this author’s observations in primary schools, both the schools and students were lacking all facilities except chalkboards and chalk. The students in Grade 1 used slates and chalk to learn to form letters and numbers. From Grade 2 onwards, they each had an exercise book and a ballpoint pen. Many children had no textbook at all, especially in Primary 1. On inquiry, the parents often said that their child was not able to read yet, so why waste money on a book? Often the problem was the parents’ poverty, so that students would only get their grade’s (English) reader by the middle of the school year. Books for other subjects were out of the question. The schools did not have libraries. Even teachers did not always have the recommended reader and teachers’ handbook. Paper and cards, such as teachers could use for teaching aids, are not available in schools nor can they be bought in the area.

Afiesimama (1991) reports similar conditions all over the state and some places even lack chalk! She concludes that obviously the “government is unable to cope with primary education and to meet even the basic standards which government itself has set for voluntary agencies” (Afiesimama 1991:137). She is, therefore, happy that voluntary agencies and private individuals have been invited to participate in the development of schools. She also observes that too much of the government resources have been spent on facilities for urban elite schools.

5.8.3. Practices in teaching English language arts and literacy

Even though the teachers’ notes accompanying the English readers instruct the teachers to practice English orally with their class before going on to read those same words and constructions, teachers did not usually follow these instructions. English is taught from books (see also above). Most of the teachers felt they needed the time after school to earn an extra income, and they did not have much time to prepare their lessons (especially at such times when the payment of salaries was many months delayed). The result was that teachers used any method they knew best. Often they first teach children the English alphabet, that is, to recite it and to recognize and write the letters. In Grade 3, this author observed a class “reading” a new lesson in which the teacher read the text in the lesson to the students, then reread it with the children in unison paragraph by paragraph so that they memorized it, after which he told the class to read the whole text in unison. There was much rote memorization and an emphasis on spelling and other discrete skills. Writing was not taught as a separate subject, or if it was, this period was used to practice handwriting, that is, the copying of words and sentences to improve and beautify one’s handwriting.

Further, children were taught to form letters, to copy things, to fill in blanks and answer questions in the English readers (usually one-word or one-sentence answers), and to watch their spelling. Teachers marked the exercises mainly for spelling.

The only model of teaching this author observed was the lecture type. Instruction was very much teacher controlled. There was no group work or interaction between students, except that students shared their books so that others sitting beside them could also read in them. The various subjects were not integrated but rather taught separately.

Seeing the condition of the schools, this author thinks work in groups would not be possible even though the present national curriculum now prescribes it (National Primary Education Commission 1988). In many classes, there is no space to form groups. Even if there were, there would be talking in the groups, and the neighboring classes (in the same room) would be greatly disturbed. On the other hand, it can be very noisy in the lecture-type class too, especially when the teacher tells students to repeat things in chorus! It would, however, require training for the teachers to be able to understand the philosophy behind a modular model of teaching which is more interactive and less teacher controlled.

5.8.4. Student attendance

Since the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was instituted in the 1950s, primary education has been tuition free. It is, however, not compulsory. Children who do not like their teacher or who are not interested in what they are learning (perhaps they are not doing well) often stay home, though most parents urge them to go. This author estimates at least 80 percent of all Obolo children go to school. There are schools within short walking distances of almost all the villages. Only those children who stay with parents at the fishing ports cannot go to school, but parents usually arrange with relatives for their children to stay in the towns so that they can attend school. However, it is very attractive for children to go to the fishing ports. At the ports, there are always some fish for them to roast and enjoy as snacks, and there is no school to restrain them in their play. It also happens that mothers keep one of their children home to look after the younger ones while she goes to market (weekly) or even to help her as she trades in small goods. So it happens that a child may be gone for several months or for a year, staying at the fishing port. Others are irregular during the week. Parents who have had no education or did not complete primary school are most likely to keep their children at home more often.

About a month every year is lost with rainy days, when the sound of the rain on the metal roof and the cold and wetness in the building prohibits instruction. Students also stay away when it is raining in the mornings. The teaching times are already short with only four hours a day of instruction, and the first week of every term is lost to work on the grounds (grass cutting).

5.8.5. Language use

Teachers from other areas, who do not speak Obolo, tend to be assigned to the higher grades. Teachers in the lower grades usually tend to use more Obolo for instruction, even though arithmetic, reading, and writing were taught in English. In arithmetic, explanations would be given in Obolo, but counting and terminology would be in English. For social studies, all instruction would be in Obolo, but the “notes” on
the lesson that the teacher wrote on the board would be in English. Students would copy it in their notebooks, even though none of them would be able to read it.

From Grades 4 to 6, teachers usually tried to teach in English, since all examinations had to be written in English. English was also a major subject on the First School Leaving Certificate Examination and the Common Entrance Examination for secondary schools.

Afiesimama (1991) reports on all the districts in this state, that it very much depends on the teacher what language he or she uses in class. Some used only English for instruction, even in Grade 1, because they “upheld English as the language of enlightenment while blaming the local language for retarding their children’s progress” (ibid., 46). Some also used the mother tongue even in the higher grades, because they could not speak English fluently. Some spoke English most of the time, but they explained some concepts in the children’s mother tongue. Some teachers could not speak the children’s mother tongue, so they had to use English. Many of these teachers did not know the national policy.

5.8.6. Levels of achievement in reading and writing in English

It was shocking to this author to see that children in the first year of secondary school had no way of understanding the texts in their course books. This was the case even with the brightest of the students (see also Etim 1991:87). The level of literacy reached by those who completed primary school, but did not make it through the entrance examinations to secondary school, is likely to be even lower. This is also the case in the rest of the Rivers State (Afiesimama 1991, see also below) and in most rural areas in Nigeria (compare Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989, above). Those who did not continue schooling after primary school most certainly relapse into illiteracy after some years (see also Afiesimama 1991).

It appears, however, that during the five or six years of secondary school, students gain much in reading speed and in comprehension, though this author thinks that, except for the brightest students, comprehension remains very limited. From a study of Ayodele (1985 as reported by Etim 1990), it appears that mean reading rates in secondary schools improve from 115 in first form (comparable to seventh grade in USA) to 190 in fourth form (comparable to tenth grade in USA). This, compared with mean rates in Britain, is still very low, with 367 for British form three. This author thinks that Obolo secondary school students improve due to their greater exposure to English (which at this time is the only medium of instruction) and through increased practice of reading and writing. This is due in part because they have more books; each student possesses several thick course books in contrast to the single reader that primary school students possess. Secondary school students also copy lengthy “notes” which the teacher writes for them on the blackboard after the lesson. Students read and reread these notes as well as some sections in their course books to memorize them and use them in their tests.

6. The work of the Obolo Language and Bible Translation Committee

The committee held monthly meetings in which everything concerning their work was discussed and all important decisions were taken. It was an open committee, so that anyone with interest in the language could join in at any time. Many of the members were teachers, some were pastors, and some were (1998). Notes on Literacy, 24(2).
fishermen. They represented all the different clans, dialect areas, and religions of the Obolo. Most of all, they came as individuals who were interested to make a difference.

6.1. Community involvement and Obolo literature production

The first two years the committee sent representatives to all the towns and villages of the Obolo to enlighten the population about the existence of the organization and the plans they had for

- Bible translation
- literature production, and
- literacy instruction.

In the meantime, the first books were produced and short courses for educated adults were held to introduce them to the writing system. Several writers workshops were also held. Every new book and every new activity were publicly introduced with a festivity. Festive openings, called “launchings,” were held in many places on the various islands. Finances for all the activities and for the publication of books came entirely from contributions by the community, mostly from launchings. There was much excitement about the activities of the committee, and every new book was welcomed with much joy.

Later on, all the local churches also made regular contributions for the work of Bible translation. Some full-time and some part-time staff were employed by the committee, and there were many volunteers.

Some of the teachers of the committee were involved in the writing of the readers for school. Part of these were written during courses for literacy workers organized by the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust. From some of the writers’ workshops and other courses came materials for the publication of a magazine that was cut on stencil and duplicated. The Bible translation team also produced books of the Bible in Obolo that were published and used in churches. The office of the committee soon turned into a publishing house for Obolo books.

Short courses in Obolo literacy for those who were already educated continued to be held from place to place. These courses also had a writing component and continued to produce short contributions for the magazine and other publications. The readers were tested with trial editions in two pilot schools nearby the office. The teachers in Primaries 1 to 3 in these schools were trained to read and write in Obolo and to teach it using the readers.

6.2. Teacher training

Once necessary improvements were made in the readers, they were published and teacher training courses were organized on a large scale. These were two week courses. Officials of the Ministry of Education and the local schools board were very cooperative. The courses were held for several years in zonal centers throughout the Obolo area. A major effort was made in 1988, when the district schools board decided to take over the organization of the teacher training courses with the goal to get all the primary school teachers in the area trained to teach Obolo. On this occasion, the state Commissioner for Education (the (1998). Notes on Literacy, 24(2).
The equivalent of the superintendent in the USA) came for the opening ceremony. He was very pleased with the progress, and he especially praised the Obolo people for taking on the challenge of the development of their language themselves. He expressed the wish that other language areas in the state would start similar projects. This gave publicity to the work of the committee in the state and brought some level of recognition to the Obolo people. Both the committee and the district schools board have since held some shorter refresher courses to encourage the teachers.

The teacher training course contained an introduction to reading and writing in Obolo to give the teachers some practice in these skills. There was also information on government policy and how mother tongue literacy features in it. The transfer possibilities of skills acquired in the mother tongue were also discussed, as well as the value of Obolo literacy in and of itself. The larger part of the time was used for an introduction to the readers, demonstration classes, and teaching practice. Since it was clear that the teachers did not have the time to prepare extensively for their lessons, the lessons in the readers followed a set pattern. It was emphasized that the students should be encouraged to think about what they read and that teachers should ask questions about the texts and discuss them with the students.

6.3. The Obolo readers

Only readers for Primaries 1 to 3 have been produced so far. There are plans to provide readers for the other grades also, as well as textbooks for the teaching of Obolo as a subject in junior secondary school (comparable to junior high school in the USA). It would have seemed ideal for the children to start their instruction in reading and writing with the Language Experience Approach, but there were several factors militating against this. Some of the major factors were the teachers’ inexperience in writing Obolo, large classes, and the need for books for the children, so it was decided that readers should be prepared.

The readers are graded, but care was taken to use natural, not contrived, text. The texts are mostly about events that take place in Obolo around the house and on the water. The familiar contents make it easier to read. The pictures are drawings by a young local artist. They are easily recognizable to Obolo people and have much appeal. In the series and in the accompanying teachers’ guide much emphasis is placed on reading for meaning.

There are reading readiness lessons with the teacher reading stories to the children; these are then discussed and questions are asked about them. The teacher also demonstrates some of the functions of reading and writing with letters and written messages and by writing a message that the children dictate on the board. There are also “ear,” “eye,” and “hand” prereading and prewriting exercises, but the emphasis is on developing concepts of “reading” and “writing,” that is, on preparing the “mind” to know what reading and writing is like and how it can be used. This was emphasized, because most children had very little or no experience with books. Little children are not read to nor are they given books. In many cases, no one reads in the house. Even secondary school students usually read mostly in the classrooms. It is often only at church that little children may see books being sung from, in Obolo, or Bibles being read in English or Igbo! Most living rooms have almanacs and calendars with pictures decorating the walls. There are also some English alphabet charts with pictures. This is the limited assortment of written materials preschool children see. Letters, newspapers, books, and magazines are few in most houses.

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The *ear exercises* help children to recognize the beginning sounds of words, then the final sounds, and to count the syllables in words. This is easier in this language, because it has only a few syllable types and the syllable is a tone-bearing unit. The *eye exercises* help children to recognize drawings and see details in them, as well as, helping them to recognize differences in the shapes of letters. There are also *hand exercises* to train the hand to hold a chalk and to draw letter shapes.

After the prereading and prewriting section, the lessons follow a similar pattern. There is a phonics part in which a new keyword is learned, some other words are built up from syllables, and there is an exercise teaching a new functor. Finally, there is the reading text.

The teaching of writing is not included in the readers. The exception is that, from halfway through reader two, children are asked to write the answers to some questions on the text printed in the book. There are other suggestions for the teaching of writing in the teachers’ handbook, including letter formation, copying exercises, and sentence completion, whereby some sentences are to be completed according to the student’s wishes, where he or she could find appropriate words from reader to copy. A few suggestions for more creative writing are also made.

### 6.4. Problems encountered in the primary school project

Teachers tended to skip over prereading and prewriting exercises to get to the “real” reading. The value of and need for these exercises needed to be emphasized more.

The teachers also tended to overemphasize the phonics part of the lessons. They spent too much time on this aspect, resulting in much slower progress than anticipated. This emphasis on sounding out syllables was frustrating to the children, who could not do it very well, and it might have given the impression that reading is meaningless. On the teachers’ request, teaching schemes for Obolo were prepared. This gave them a better idea of how much time to spend on each lesson.

There were also scheduling problems, because the school timetables did not specify when Obolo should be taught. Headmasters who had not taken the time to participate in the teacher training courses were often very reluctant to allow much teaching of Obolo during the time that was initially scheduled for English. When, through discussions, the headmasters realized that the program was expected to help the students do better in reading and writing and that these skills were transferable to English, they obliged.

Nevertheless, the pressure to teach English more was very great. English was a major examination subject, and all examinations were written in English. There was no examination in Obolo! Some teachers probably remained convinced that the reduction in time spent in English would hamper the children’s development in English. Not all teachers and headmasters participated in the project, but the great majority did, and they did it with enthusiasm. Even some teachers who were not native Obolo speakers participated!

To get the Obolo readers into the hands of the students was another problem. Since parents used to delay buying the English readers, and since they usually bought only one book for each child, they now needed to be persuaded to buy an Obolo reader before buying the English reader. Though the Obolo readers were only approximately one-third of the cost of the English readers, it still meant an extra expense for
the parents. After some time, teachers in the pilot schools convinced the parents of the need for these books for their children, so that many of them would buy the books within the first month of a new school year. This was not a small task, because many of the parents lived at the fishing ports and only came to the village occasionally. Teachers in other schools had the same problem, besides they needed to travel to the office to collect the books on behalf of their students after having collected money from the parents. Later on, in 1990, the committee also employed a full-time staff to travel with the books to other islands after having made an appointment with a school. This alleviated the problem, but it was not a complete solution.

The committee was not yet able to produce readers for Primaries 4 to 6. There was also a long gap between the production of readers two and three. These delays made the program less than perfect. The committee was not sure about the intentions of the National Policy of Education regarding the teaching of local languages in the higher grades of elementary school, because the language used in the policy was very vague. Nevertheless the committee decided that readers for every grade of primary school should be produced.

7. Results

7.1. Observations

Teachers were surprised to find that, even in Grade 1, children can start to read with understanding. Though they learned much more slowly in class than when this author taught some children individually, they still made much better progress than they had done in English.

It was also very clear that the children enjoyed reading the Obolo books. They were discussing the stories and proverbs everywhere, for example, on the school playground and at home. They were also begging their parents to buy them these books. In some cases, they saved up the money they were given for snacks to buy an Obolo book instead. They started to read the books in small groups together at home. Parents began to notice that their rather young children could really read, and they became interested in the books, too, even those parents had never been to school themselves. This encouraged the children and made the parents proud of them.

Some parents, from a big fishing port where there was a school, heard and saw children reading Obolo when they visited in their home town. Upon their return to the fishing port, they demanded that the teachers should also start to teach Obolo in the school in the fishing port. Some parents expressed interest in learning to read themselves.

When the senior headmaster in one of the two pilot schools noticed that the children in Primaries 1 and 2 were reading better than before, he became very enthusiastic. He then became a good ambassador of the project to other headmasters and education officers. Later, he said that learning to read Obolo even helped his son learn to read French in the elite secondary school where he attended.

In the pilot schools, the teachers tried to continue teaching Obolo for one or two periods each week, even though there were no readers for these grades and the teachers were left to their own devices. In one
school in particular, there was a teacher who kept the interest of the children going. He helped them to read editions of the Obolo magazine (not graded material). These magazines became very popular with the children, and since they were much less expensive than a textbook, many children could afford them and chose to buy them themselves. This teacher also let the students write some compositions. When he saw the students’ enthusiasm and the interesting things they wrote, this teacher (a prominent member of the Obolo language committee) told the children that they might be able to start a new magazine in Obolo, specially written for and by children. He also conferred with the teachers in the other pilot school, so that they also were let into this plan. More time was spent on creative writing. The result was a large collection of pieces of creative writing that were used to start the Obolo children’s magazine.

7.2. Testing

Though this author and the teachers in the pilot schools definitely saw improvements in the students’ performance, and this improvement seemed to transfer to English, they did not have any more objective evidence. This author was also aware that there was a Hawthorne effect, since these were the pilot schools and they were the closest to the Obolo Language Office. Other schools started teaching Obolo at a slower rate. The language committee got some other evidence that the teaching of Obolo had helped the students with English, too, when the Local Government Council organized an essay competition in English, and the first three prizes were won by children of the two pilot schools.

There were also the results of the research of a doctoral candidate into the implications of linguistic complexity for language use in education in Rivers State (Afiesimama 1991). One of the things she researched was the state of literacy achievement in all the local government areas of the state. She came to two schools in Obolo. One of these was a pilot school for the Obolo language project. The identity of the other one she did not reveal. She tested literacy achievement by having the children in Primary 6 write an essay in English about their school. She gave the students 30 minutes to complete it. In this case, she also had the children write an essay in Obolo after they completed the one in English. They were not told so beforehand.

Although mother tongue readers have been prepared in most other languages (in 20 of them) in Rivers State, Afiesimama found that they were not now used in schools. These were the readers prepared (mostly in the 1970s) by the Rivers Readers Project. At that time the readers had been welcomed with enthusiasm and teachers started using them. She found that many teachers did not think it advantageous to use the mother tongue or the children’s primary language in education. This was especially the case with people living in the state capital and in areas near to the capital, where the local languages are only used in the homes with relatives and where Pidgin and English are the languages most used with others. In such areas, the researcher naturally expected to find fewer people who were biliterate in English and their mother tongue. She also expected that students in these areas would reach higher levels of literacy in English than those students in other areas, whose first language was not English or Pidgin (English-related). The people in the city have “greater exposure to the mass media, to books, to better educated people and to better qualified teachers” (ibid., 121).

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The research into the state of literacy achievement in primary schools was conducted in 13 schools that were carefully selected from all the local government areas. After collecting these essays, they were graded according to the

- number of words
- writing mechanics (such as spelling and concord)
- structural variation of sentences, and
- communication of ideas.

With this they were classified as

- very poor
- poor
- fairly good
- good, and
- very good.

Students in the categories of very poor and poor wrote less than 60 words in the 30-minute period. Those in the category of poor made many spelling errors, but in contrast to those in the category very poor, at least some of their sentences were “recognizably English.” In the category of fairly good, students’ essays were of reasonable length, that is, about 100 to 120 words. These students also “were able to write structurally varied sentences which communicated their ideas to the reader. On the average, they made less than 15 mistakes in spelling, concord, and mechanics” (Afiesimama 1991:118). The good essays were longer and had “clear and more syntactically complex sentences than the other groups” (ibid.). They also contained more details and showed evidence of preplanning. They had on average less than 15 errors. The researcher decided that those classified as very poor and poor should be classified as functionally illiterate, since “it was obvious that they could not use the English language to perform simple tasks like filling forms, writing simple letters, reading newspapers or textbooks, let alone explain what they had read” (ibid.). The groups that performed better were classified as functionally literate, although she says “some of them could lapse back into illiteracy if denied the opportunity of a good secondary school education” (ibid.).

On analysis, when the percentages of functionally illiterate students were counted, they added up to 61 percent of all the students tested, that is, 16 percent very poor and 45 percent poor. Some samples, taken from Afiesimama’s work, can be seen in the appendix.

When the schools were ranked according to their percentages of functionally literate students, surprisingly the two Obolo schools ranked second and third on the list, with 68.75 percent and 60 percent of literate students respectively. The school ranked number one was a school of urban elites with 100 percent literate students. The two schools of urban poor did not do as well as the two Obolo schools, even though they had been expected to do better than all the rural schools, because (1) they had greater exposure to

English through radio and television, and (2) they were taught through the English medium only. In fact, the best of these poor urban schools had only 51.6 percent literate students. The best of the rural schools (after the Obolo ones) had 48 percent literate students, and this community is located quite close to the city. The next rural school had only 36.6 percent, and the rural schools following all had less than 30 percent of the students literate.

Andoni (Obolo district in Olga) is, according to the researcher, more remote than all the other areas in the study except Balga and Salga. The schools in these two areas had the worst results with 0 percent and 8.3 percent of their students respectively classified literate. The question was why the Andoni (Obolo) results should be so much better.

For the grading of the essays in the Obolo language, the researcher employed the assistance of two Obolo University students who had no connection with the Obolo language project. They used the same scales for scoring as had been used for the English essays. The two scorers seemed to score similarly, and the average of their scores was taken. Only the Obolo essays of the pilot school were graded, because, in the other school, the teacher had assisted the students by writing words on the board that they did not know how to write.

Upon analysis, 10 out of the 16 students in this class had a score of fairly good and higher, so that they were classified as functionally literate in the Obolo language. When each student’s results in English and in Obolo were compared, it was clear that the same pupils who did well in English also did well in Obolo. There was only one exception: a student who scored fairly good in English and very poor in Obolo. Since Obolo people move often to other places to fish, this author thinks this may be a case where a student had previously lived in a different area, where no Obolo was taught until the student had reached a later grade. Those who were poor in English were also poor in Obolo.

| Number illiterate in Obolo and English: | 10  =  62.50% |
| Number illiterate in Obolo and English: | 5   =  31.25% |
| Number illiterate in Obolo, literate in English: | 1   =  6.25% |
| Total number of students: | 16  =  100.00% |

Afiesimama 1991:123

Summary of results

7.3. Discussion of results

From these results, the researcher concludes that “the results suggest that language skills are applied across languages” (Afiesimama 1991:123). She, therefore, strongly recommends the instruction of initial literacy in the mother tongue, which she says “should also be taught as a subject throughout the duration of primary education, and tested in the final examinations” (ibid., 141).

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It is noteworthy that, in the Obolo project, no other changes were made in the curriculum than the introduction of literacy instruction in the mother tongue. Compared with other schools where this was not introduced, the only differences were (1) a two-week teacher training course, specifically for the teaching of literacy in the mother tongue and (2) the introduction of instruction in Obolo literacy as a subject. Outside school, in the community, there was at the same time a rising awareness and support of the production of literature in their language.

In view of the limited nature of the project in the primary schools, with the production of instructional materials for the lower grades only and with delays in the production of the third reader as well as other problems described, the effects of the project for literacy are truly amazing. If permanent literacy is one of the main objectives of primary school education in Nigeria, instruction in literacy in the mother tongue surely appears to render superior results in rural areas.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted from the results of Afiesimama’s research that the level of functional literacy described is a rather low standard of literacy when compared with the standard of literacy expected of Grade 6 students in the United States. It is also lower than the standards set by the schools for the children of the elite in Nigeria; these are generally more comparable with the standards set in more developed countries. In the one school of urban elite, all the students (100 percent) reached the standard of functional literacy set for the study. Not only is this a much higher percentage than all the other schools reached, but there is also a difference in the quality of the essays that were written. While in this elite school, 50 percent of the students scored good and 8.3 percent scored very good. In the second ranking school, an Obolo school, only 31.25 percent of the students scored good, and none of the students scored very good.

### 8. Implications and recommendations

#### 8.1. Validation of the National Policy of Education

For areas where the language situation is relatively homogeneous, the language policy of the National Policy of Education (NPE) appears to be validated in the Obolo example. The NPE stipulates that the first few years of a child’s education, including initial literacy instruction, should be in the student’s mother tongue. It was clear, from the research in all the local government areas of Rivers State, that rural students who were taught reading and writing in their mother tongue and in English, as a group achieved much higher levels of literacy than those who were taught such in English only (Afiesimama 1991).

In many areas in the country, literacy instruction in the mother tongue has not been given proper attention by teachers and other educational personnel, so that there are areas where school books were published but are not used (Afiesimama 1991). Secondly, there are also still over 300 languages that do not have school books yet, and there does not seem to exist any plan of the government and its institutions to attempt to get school books in these remaining languages.

Even though mother tongue literacy instruction has taken place in some languages for some time (especially in major languages such as Yoruba), it is likely that this instruction was secondary to English literacy instruction, because the English instruction was considered so much more important. In addition, (1998). *Notes on Literacy*, 24(2).
mother tongue literacy was not taught before instruction in English (literacy), rather it was introduced simultaneously (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989). Furthermore, there was the tendency of teachers to spend much more time on literacy instruction in English than in the local language. Teachers have felt the pressure to prepare the students for their examinations, which have always been in English and in which English is a major subject. As a result of these attitudes of teachers and educational personnel, even in such languages where literacy instruction in the mother tongue had taken place for some time, the program did not yield the advantages it could have brought, because its importance was downplayed and insufficient attention was given to it. Under such circumstances, both teachers and students would be likely to be less motivated.

All the research described in this article points to the fact that literacy skills acquired in one language can indeed be used in another language the person acquires. Many arguments for initial literacy instruction in the mother tongue were also made. It was argued that, especially in rural areas in Nigeria where children do not live in a literate environment, initial literacy in the mother tongue demonstrates much more clearly than literacy in English what reading and what writing is (and that it is supposed to make sense). Through the Ife and Obolo projects, it was also demonstrated that more time spent on literacy instruction in the mother tongue had many beneficial effects, including improved performance in literacy in English. Some other effects are discussed below.

Because of the appalling low levels of literacy achievement in the nonelite schools in Nigeria, it is paramount that people, especially the elite, be convinced of the advantages of using the mother tongue for literacy instruction. It should also be emphasized that literacy instruction in the mother tongue not only has great potential for transfer of literacy skills to English, but literacy proficiency in the mother tongue can also have great value in itself. Some of the value of instruction in mother tongue literacy can be in children’s greater motivation for reading, increased opportunity to use the language in writing and thus to practice literacy skills being acquired, and parents’ increased interest and involvement in their children’s education (see description of the Obolo language project above).

Moreover, as has been clearly demonstrated by the Ife Primary Education Research Project, Nigerian indigenous languages can be used for education throughout, or at the very least, through primary school. When the preparation of materials and training of teachers is properly done, this can be a decided advantage for the students. Instead of sacrificing the whole content of a primary school education to the demands of having to master English before and above everything else, the children in the Ife project were taught everything using the language they already understood from home. Care was also taken in the preparation of textbooks to build on the children’s cultural background, that is, on what they knew and understood from their experiences outside school. Such things contribute to make students into better adapted and integrated persons, less removed and estranged from their environment by education (Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989, compare also Akinnaso’s personal experience as a young Yoruba person, Akinnaso 1991a). The value of the language and culture of the community are acknowledged in education as elders and knowledgeable persons within the culture were consulted for their contribution. Parents and other adults were also enabled to form a better impression of what was taught in school. Students could more easily report and discuss what they had learned or demonstrate what they could do, such as reading, because they were taught in their language (see report on Obolo project above). Such things are important for children’s educational progress. For example, Saville-Troike (1984) found

discussions of what was learned (with parents or others) in the first language to be the factor most strongly contributing to children’s success in the content subjects.

The children in the Ife project were also taught English, and they outperformed the control classes on this, even though it had only been taught as a subject. They were also able to take the regular standard examinations on all the subjects in English, even though they had been taught these subjects in Yoruba only. This demonstrates again that cognitive development and storage of knowledge are not compartmentalized in the brain by language, as had previously been thought (compare Cummins 1981:22–25).

The research discussed above, both Nigerian and other, clearly validates the language policy of the National Policy of Education (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Information 1981). The problem is that the injunctions of the policy have not been followed properly, especially regarding the teaching of literacy in the Nigerian languages. In this regard, it would be helpful if the NPE would be more specific concerning what it recommends (compare also Afiesimama 1991). As it stands, it is too vague, that is, it does not clearly state that initial literacy should be introduced in the mother tongue, although it seems to be implied, since it says that “the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community” (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Information 1981:13). The Nigerian government also promised to develop orthographies for many more languages and to produce textbooks in Nigerian languages (ibid., 10). It should, however, be clearly stated that all initial instruction, both in oral and written form, should be in the mother tongue or “the language of the immediate community,” while English would be taught initially as a subject only. It would also be helpful if it would be stated clearly that the mother tongue (or the language of the immediate community) will also be a subject all through primary school. Then, when it will have been taught through primary school, curricula and texts for the teaching of the mother tongue in junior secondary school can also be prepared. For the time being, there is a shortage of textbooks even for the teaching of reading in the junior grades of primary school. Since there is still this shortage of books in many of the minority languages, it would be desirable for the policy to strongly recommend rather than to prescribe the teaching of reading and writing in the primary languages of the students.

8.2. Implications arising from this study

8.2.1. Initial introduction to literacy in the primary language

Rural children in Nigeria generally do not live in literate environments, and because they do not know English before they start primary school, initial introduction to literacy in the primary language rather than English is imperative. The urban poor are in a similar position, though they are more exposed to English through the media and probably also more exposed to literacy in their environment. It should be noted that, for the children of the urban poor, the primary language often may not be their mother tongue, that is, the language of their parents. Rather, the primary language may be a lingua franca, such as a major Nigerian language, or, increasingly so in the southeast, Pidgin (Afiesimama 1991). As the children of the urban poor are more exposed to English, literature, and environmental print, they are known to get better results than the rural children. Yet, rural children who were initially instructed in literacy in their primary
language became more literate, both in English and in their primary language, than those in urban areas who were instructed through English only. It appears then that the urban poor would also benefit from initial instruction of literacy in their primary language, whether it be a major Nigerian language or Pidgin English (Afiesimama 1991).

It is much more effective and efficient to start instruction in literacy in the primary language alone, that is, not simultaneously with instruction in literacy in English that would be a reduplication of efforts. Also, it would be much more effective for the children to first learn English orally, since it is not possible to read in a language you do not understand.

**8.2.2. Continued literacy instruction in the primary language throughout primary school**

It was found that the children in the Obolo school, where the Obolo language was used for some literacy instruction throughout primary education, a higher percentage of the children became “literate” (even in English) than in the school where literacy instruction in the language was discontinued in the senior primary grades (see Obolo study above). In the Ife project, too, the benefits of education in the Yoruba language continued to become increasingly visible during the senior primary grades. The same finding, that is, that continued literacy instruction in the primary language to a higher level of proficiency is more beneficial for a child’s development in a second language as well, has also been reported by others (Cummins 1981 and his “threshold theory,” Thonis 1981).

Given the conditions, Nigerian children in primary schools have not become sufficiently literate in English to start learning from reading. In the Ife Primary Education Research Project, where they continued consistently with literacy practice in Yoruba, the students used Yoruba textbooks. In the Rivers State where children do not have textbooks and where they are given “notes” in English to copy, it was observed they were not able to read these. It would be advantageous to them to write “notes” in their primary language instead of English, so that they would be able to read these with understanding.

It would be good to emphasize the teaching of writing in the primary language, so that more materials for reading would become available. As in the two Nigerian projects described, the senior primary school children’s pieces of creative writing could be used for publications for children. This could include such items as a children’s magazine (as in Obolo) or as small books for the collection of additional reading material for the junior grades (as in the Ife project). It might also be helpful to study the ways in which writing is used in the local community, so that the teachers would give the children practice in this type of writing and other types that would be regarded useful in the community (compare Heath 1981). For example, in Obolo this author observed that writing is used most extensively for recording of minutes of meetings, for recording of loans and payments of loans, and secondly for the writing of letters to relatives who are living far away. This writing has been in English, since literacy in Obolo had not been taught in school until very recently, but the oral reading of it is usually done in Obolo. It, therefore, appears that writing in Obolo to fulfill these functions would be more sensible. Maybe some type of journal writing would also be possible to encourage practice in written communication.

8.2.3. Development of materials in Nigerian languages for literacy instruction throughout primary school

In those languages where there are no materials for the teaching of literacy, the government could encourage linguists in the universities to help in the development of orthographies and to advise local language committees on matters of standardization of their orthographies. The working procedures of the Rivers Readers Project, which, spearheaded by a small group of university professors, eventually resulted in the publication of readers in 21 of the languages of Rivers State (Bamgbose 1976), may be replicable in other states as well. Some government grants for the publication of these readers and the accompanying teachers’ notes would be necessary.

Any other private organizations, individuals, or local language committees working on the development of the local languages should also be encouraged and their work promoted by government officials at all levels, and especially by those in the ministry of education.

In the major languages that have had materials for the teaching of literacy for a long time, these materials should be checked and, if necessary, replaced (compare Ife project above). The readers should have acceptable, culturally appropriate contents, and they should not have undue emphasis on the teaching of separate skills but rather emphasize meaningfulness. Teachers’ handbooks in the local languages should also be prepared. Prereading and prewriting exercises should be included in the curriculum, and significant time should be spent on this to demonstrate to the children what reading is and what writing is, namely, that they are two ends of a form of language communication. This is all the more needed, because many of the children have hardly seen any print in their environment, and hardly any of them have ever been read to by their parents or caretakers. Being read to by adults is one of the strongest predictors of success in reading (Hernández-Chávez and Curtis 1984).

Following the model of the Ife Primary Education Research Project, in each of these major languages, linguists and educators (preferably mother tongue speakers of the language concerned) who are highly motivated to develop their language for the sake of their children’s education could team up to work on the project for the development of instructional materials in the language. These could then be introduced to the schools through the necessary workshops for teachers. In the major languages, instructional materials for all the subjects of primary education should be developed, including teachers’ handbooks (in the language). In all this work, the input of people who are locally recognized as masters in the language and those who know much about the culture should be sought. It is advisable that a local language committee oversee all the efforts for the development and promotion of the language in writing both in the community and in education (compare the Obolo project). Government and private grants might be needed, besides finances from contributions from the language area, for

- the acquisition of typewriters on which the necessary alterations are made
- duplicating machines
- computers and printers
- the employment of typists

• printing cost, and
• all other things needed for the production of books and for printing.

In smaller minority languages, at least full sets of instructional materials for the teaching of language arts throughout primary school (including teachers’ handbooks) should be prepared, published, and introduced to schools. A team of experienced and well-qualified teachers might also want to see into the production of teachers’ handbooks in the local language for the teaching of other subjects apart from language arts, at least for the lower primary grades. (Both Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya 1989 and Afiesimama 1991 comment on the teachers’ lack of ability to understand and interpret the English handbooks for instruction in the local languages.) All the instructional materials should be introduced into the educational system accompanied by the necessary teacher training.

In all of these activities the public approval, support, and active involvement of the government, as well as of the local language committee, would be necessary. As for the financing, foreign or private Nigerian grants could also be sought as in the case of the Ife project. However, certain responsibilities should be carried by the language community, so the local community gets some amount of ownership and control of the education of their children in their language.

8.2.4. Teacher training for the teaching of primary language

Teachers need to be properly trained at the teacher training colleges and the colleges of education, to teach language arts in the primary language of the students. Since the children already speak and understand their primary language when they start school, they should not be taught language arts in this language as though it is a language they do not know yet, such as is the case with the teaching of English in Nigeria. There is also need for workshops in the local language areas, where teachers would be to be trained to fluently read and write in the local language. For the time being, teachers will also need to be trained through workshops in the local language area to teach literacy in the local language.

8.3. Decreased emphasis on English in primary education

For major languages, complete primary school education in the mother tongue would be recommended. This would be followed by English-immersion education with the mother tongue taught as a subject in secondary school. This is essentially what happened with the students in the Ife project, except that these students may not have had Yoruba as a subject in secondary school, yet this did not have any negative results for their achievement in secondary school and beyond. From the reports of the Canadian French-immersion programs, too, it was noted that late immersion programs (starting from Grade 7 or later) were effective and that, through such programs, it took less time for the students to reach the same level of second language proficiency as early immersion students did. The initial adjustment of the students to instruction in English only took a few months, after which they were able to learn content subjects equally effectively through French as through their mother tongue. This was the case for those students who had been taught French-as-a-subject throughout the years of primary school. As for their achievement in language arts in their second language, within only two years they reached par with the early immersion students. Since Nigerian indigenous languages are of totally different language families than English is, it

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may take longer for Nigerian students to reach a level of proficiency in English comparable with the level of proficiency reached by Canadian English-speaking students in French (compare Saville-Troike’s 1984 research).

For many minority languages, it would not be possible to organize a big project, such as the Ife project for the Yoruba language. In such cases, it would still be ideal for as much of the teaching of content subjects in the senior, as well as in the junior, primaries to be done in the primary language rather than in English. The first priority, however, would be to introduce the teaching of literacy in the primary language. Next in priority would be to prepare teachers’ handbooks for the teaching of content subjects in the primary language in the junior grades. Finally, teachers’ handbooks for the content subjects taught in the senior primaries would be needed. Teachers will need these handbooks, because terminologies and other vocabulary for the subjects taught in school will need to be found (or coined) in the primary language. The teachers cannot be expected to do this alone.

Decreased emphasis on English in primary education would make it possible to increase the use of the primary language and allow for more practice of literacy in it. An increased allocation of time for the teaching of language arts in the primary language throughout the senior primary grades would be needed (not just one or two hours a week). It would be best if at least some subjects in the senior primary grades would also be taught through the primary language, so that the students would have more practice using reading and writing in this language for learning.

For the time being, children would not have textbooks for these subjects in their language. Since few children have been able to get any other books besides their readers anyway, this would not make any difference for them. To provide more practice in reading and writing, there should be much emphasis on the teaching of writing (see also Section 8.2 above), including the writing of notes on lessons and reports on projects done at school.

8.4. The need to convince the educated elite of the advantages of education in the primary languages

Afiesimama (1991) reports that the educated elite in Rivers State thought that using English for instruction would be more advantageous for the students than using their primary language. Many of them (57 percent) also thought that the use of the mother tongue in education only retards their children, even when the children do not understand any other language. Similar beliefs are held by many educated people elsewhere in the country.

It is likely that the situation has continued as it is, despite the long existence of the National Policy of Education and its language policies, because of the beliefs of most of the educated elite. Therefore, no efforts are made to make it possible to use the mother tongue for literacy instruction. In such languages where it is used, it is done half-heartedly.

The major reason for this may be that the teachers, educational officers, and other officials are not aware of the benefits of initial literacy in the mother tongue for education. They generally do not know that experience with literacy in one language is useful for the acquisition of literacy in another language. They do not know that literacy skills transfer or generalize from one language to another. Some teachers are not (1998). Notes on Literacy, 24(2).
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even aware of what the National Policy of Education prescribes regarding the teaching and use of languages (compare Afiesimama 1991).

Educators at all levels, teachers, lecturer at teacher training colleges and colleges of education, as well as the general educated public, need to be informed of research findings on the use of primary languages in education and to be convinced of its value. They also need to be made aware of the potential of transfer of skills in literacy from one language to another. Results of such research done in Nigeria, especially, should be widely publicized and taught at the relevant institutions of higher learning.

As it has been observed to the chagrin of many a teacher and parent, that children who go through primary school do not become permanently literate in either English or their mother tongue, it is high time that the value of teaching literacy in the mother tongue is properly acknowledged and the practice vigorously promoted.

9. Conclusion

Many resources are spent on primary education, both by the government and by the parents of students. Yet for a very large proportion of the students, it is a waste. The children do not become permanently literate. This author believes that the teaching of literacy in the primary language would increase the proportions of citizens who would use reading and writing for personal and communal functions.

References


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See also [Cummins and Swain 1986a](#)
See also Dixon and Nessel 1983 Bibliography (Literacy)


Citations


Citations


**Map 1. Map of Nigeria**
Samples of English essays

Example 1

My School

My school is little Memorial Primary School, the school is opposite St. Peter's School, it is the first school on the island. The main reason why I love the school is that all the children from primary one to six are all hard working especially primary six examination which is first. School Leaving Certificate fast approaching.

I love this school in that any time which candidate school I will afford it because the teacher are very practical at school and the principler teacher is Mr. Telesano, the teacher who teaches for the Second master of the school, the principal of the school is Mr. P. A. this school is a Government school which is pointed very wel.

Afiesimama 1991


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Example 2

"My School"

The name of my school is Primary School X. My school is very big. We have a lot of flowers in our school yard. The class and our class are divided into smaller groups. The classes are divided into small groups. Our class is divided into smaller groups. We have a lot of flowers in our school yard. The class and our class are divided into smaller groups.

Subjects we learn: English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Art, and Computer Science. Our school is divided into smaller groups. We have a lot of flowers in our school yard. The class and our class are divided into smaller groups.

Good

Afiesimama 1991

Example 3

Page 41.
“My School”
The name of my School is State School I Street
and I live on Fort Berland. My School is at K.I.I.
I like my School because the teachers teach
very well. In my School there
are 32 classes and 32 teachers.
My School is a mixed School.
The buildings are very nice and
there are some trees and flowers and
there is a field in my School
and we play football every day.
Our School is one of the best Schools.
In football we always win matches
we play and there is a place year
we buy something to eat from
the school ground. mi-ma-Adjid
eat with my School. There are four
sections: School I School II School III
School.

Family God

Afiesimama 1991

Example 4
My School
The name of my School is... X
My Name is... X her/his Sex...
I go to... X and I have three teachers...
My School the name of the teacher...
The headmaster of the.... X is...

Very Poor

My School
The name of my School is... X
My Name is... X her/his Sex...
I go to... X and I have three teachers...
My School the name of the teacher...
The headmaster of the.... X is...

Very Poor

Afiesimama 1991

Example 5

My School
The name of my School is... X
My Name is... X her/his Sex...
I go to... X and I have three teachers...
My School the name of the teacher...
The headmaster of the.... X is...

Very Poor

Afiesimama 1991

Example 5