Angola

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

unicef
2.1 Angola

2.1.1. Background information

Angola was colonized in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries by the Portuguese. Although the country achieved independence in 1975, the history of Portuguese in Angola still dominates the linguistic policy.

Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2015), a catalogue of the world’s languages, lists Angola as having 38 living languages.

2.1.2. Current language policy

The current language policy in Angola, as laid out in the Constitution of 2010, states that Portuguese is the official language (Const. of the Rep. of Angola, Article 19). It also states that “the state shall value and promote the study, teaching and use of other Angolan languages, in addition to the main international languages of communication” (Article 19). A fundamental task of the Angolan state is to “protect, value and dignify Angolan languages of African origin, as part of the cultural heritage, and to promote their development, as living languages which reflect national identity” (Article 21). This policy aligns with the 2001 policy as reported by Augusto (2012, p.3): “…the Angolan parliament passed the Law number 13/01 that allowed the introduction of indigenous languages into the formal educational system as a medium of instruction.”

Portuguese, however, remains the language of instruction in school, and its effect is described by Diarra:

“The generally indifferent results of teaching in Portuguese are due in very large measure to either of the following: an inadequate command of the language by teachers and pupils, or confusion between Portuguese and the national languages from the phonetic level to that of syntax and semantics. This confusion tends to slow down the rate of learning and noticeably affect the quality of teaching.”

(Diarra, 2003, pp. 340-341)

An additional language dynamic in Angola is the increased interest in English, which challenges the dominance of Portuguese in some contexts. Mooko (2009, p. 170) notes that “English is gradually usurping the privileged position that Portuguese used to have in Angola due to the role of language in achieving economic opportunity that has emerged in Angola.” Mooko attributes this partly to the pressure of the widespread use of English in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), of which Angola is a founding member.

2.1.3. Education policy and practice

According to Nsiangengo, Diasala and Wolhuter (2014, p. 20), the primary curriculum subjects include Portuguese and a national language; the authors comment that “which national language is included is determined by the region and the dominant language of that part of the country.” They further note that “the inclusion of a national language is an innovation in the curriculum and is still in the experimental stage.” As of late 2014, information showing national language as a curriculum subject indicates no hours per day prescribed for it.

2.1.4. Study

The Directorate of General Education of the Angolan Ministry of Education is carrying out a study of the education needs of mobile and migrating populations in the country, including relevant aspects of ethnicity and language fluency of these populations. This study is supported by UNICEF.

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7 Ethnologue, a product of SIL International, is a catalogue of the world’s languages (http://www.ethnologue.com/). The count of languages in each country is based on the most current information available; it covers all languages spoken in a given country, whether indigenous or not.
2.1.5. Language education initiatives

Textbooks in 7 Angolan languages

Pearson Education, an international education publishing and assessment service based in the UK, announced in 2008 a project to develop and introduce textbooks in seven Angolan language plus Portuguese.\(^8\) The project was to be carried out in conjunction with the Angolan government and the Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy. Molteno’s annual report for 2011 indicated that their books were being sold in Angola at that time.

The textbooks were produced by Longman, part of Maskew Miller Longman, a South Africa-based educational publisher of which Pearson Education holds a 50 per cent stake. The 2008 announcement noted that: “the books are now being trialled in about 120 classrooms, and are expected to be rolled out to more than 1 million children beginning in 2009, in a program that embraces the indigenous languages of Cokwe, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Ngangela, Olunyaneka, Oshikwanyama and Umbundu.” The announcement also notes that: “[t]he colorful books include exercises in the alphabet, simple mathematics problems, colors and shapes, and written exercises for vocabulary and grammar.”\(^9\) Pearson stated that the programme would be assessed in 2011; the outcomes of that assessment have not yet been made public.

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9  As footnote 8.
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**Save the Children’s “Rewrite the Future”**

In 2005, the INGO Save the Children launched an education campaign called *Rewrite the Future*, focusing on 20 conflict affected states including Angola. The programme focused on logistical and technical support for teachers and supervisors in three provinces of Angola. The programme’s final evaluation in 2011 (Save the Children, 2011) indicated a marked improvement in the teaching observed in supported classes. Instruction and assessment in the project schools were in Portuguese. The report estimates that for 40 per cent of those tested, Portuguese was not their mother tongue. The assessment detected no difference in test scores for this group, probably because of the overall low level of learning for a variety of other reasons. The 2009 midterm report for Angola noted that training in teaching methods that support bilingualism may be more effective than training only in Portuguese language and that “in the early grades, teaching of basic reading skills can be done in a local language before introducing Portuguese language” (Save the Children, 2009, p. 25).