

ATTENDING TO THE VOICE OF PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS INVOLVED IN MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION—A CASE OF TWO MINORITY LANGUAGES IN ETHIOPIA

Anna Hugo
Mesfin Derash
University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a qualitative research study conducted to obtain opinions about mother tongue education from members of two minority language communities in Ethiopia and other stakeholders. The study sought the opinions of representatives from the Ministry of Education, lecturers at teacher training colleges, as well as parents, community members and teachers. Six major themes arose from the research, which provided insight into reasons why mother tongue education could be either successful or unsuccessful.

KEYWORDS: Konttathoo and Dawuro languages, minority language areas, mother tongue education, mother tongue education in Africa

INTRODUCTION

The mother tongue plays a vital role in the development of children, especially their cognitive, emotional and social development. Upon entering school, a child's mother tongue can significantly assist them in adjusting to the formal setting and making progress at school.

The Ethiopian education and training policy provides for the protection of local languages, including the minority languages spoken by certain communities. The policy stipulates that all languages spoken in Ethiopia could be used as the teaching and learning languages at the primary school level (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 1994). Currently, about 52 languages are used as languages in the Ethiopian education sector. Some languages are not yet used as languages of teaching and learning but the government and non-government organisations are working towards local language development to include all minority languages in the education sector. There remain several minority languages not yet used as languages of teaching and learning in schools (*The Quarterly Education Journal*, 2021).

In this paper, the researchers' goal is to capture the 'voices' of various people in Ethiopia regarding the use of the mother tongue in schools for educational purposes. In researching the two minority languages discussed in this paper, the authors engaged the Ministry of Education, teachers and lecturers, as well as community members and parents.

The importance of mother tongue education

In a 2020 report, the United Nations clearly states that to respect the human rights of all children and ensure quality education, children from minority communities must be taught in their mother tongue. De Varennes, an expert on mother tongue education, states: ‘Education in a minority’s mother tongue, combined with quality teaching of the official language, is more cost-effective in the long term; reduces dropout rates; leads to noticeably better academic results, particularly for girls; improves levels of literacy and fluency in both the mother tongue and the official or majority language; and leads to greater family and community involvement.’ (UN News, 2020).

At school, the importance of the language of instruction is significant as it is the vehicle used to convey knowledge to the children. When a foreign language, not their mother tongue, is used as the language of instruction, it can have dire consequences. Brock-Utne (2014:10–13) mentions that it could create unequal opportunities between children and might prevent them from making proper academic progress at school. Participants in a research project in Turkey strongly agreed that children should be taught in their mother tongue since language transfers the culture and values of a community from one generation to the next (Şahin, 2018:348).

Research by Van Staden, Bosker and Bergbauer (2016:441) provides evidence that children are disadvantaged when their home languages are not developed and the education of children in their first three years at school is not provided in their mother tongue. The issue is aggravated when there are few linguistic similarities between the language of instruction, which, in the African context, is often English, and the home languages of the children.

Mother tongue education in Africa with reference to Ethiopia

In most so-called developed countries, children have the privilege of being educated in their mother tongue. In contrast, most learners in Africa are not educated in their mother tongue. Upon entering formal school, most learners in Africa are confronted with a language of instruction, usually English or Amharic (in areas with non-Amharic speakers) in the case of Ethiopia, which they have not mastered and is not the language spoken at home or in their communities. To add to this dilemma, many teachers are not proficient in English. In many African countries, education systems are collapsing because learning does not occur in a language the learners have acquired and understand (Wolff, 2018).

More than 2000 local languages spoken in Africa are often not acknowledged in education systems. Many education systems in Africa still reflect the influence of colonial rule regarding the language of instruction. Accordingly, Wolff (2018) refers to linguistic imperialism prevailing in Africa. Brock-Utne (2014:13) aptly opines that the language of instruction is ‘the least appreciated of all the major educational problems’.

In some African countries, many indigenous or home languages are spoken. For example, Chiatoh (2014:376) states that mother tongue education is very difficult in Cameroon, with about 250 indigenous spoken languages, and the government is thus cautious about making a decision about mother tongue education.

The Ethiopian education and training policy offers an opportunity for all minority languages to be used as school languages, provided due preparation is made for using a language as the language of instruction. The policy reads as follows: ‘Making the necessary preparation,

nations and nationalities can either learn in their own language or can choose from among those selected on the basis of national and countrywide distribution' (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 1994:23). Among the more than 85 languages spoken in Ethiopia, 52 are offered as a medium of instruction or as a subject in schools (at different levels), but whether or not the concept of 'making the necessary preparation', as indicated in the policy, has been achieved is questionable.

The question addressed in this paper deals with the opinions about mother tongue education of members of the communities where the Konttathoo and Dawuro languages are spoken, as well as the opinions of other stakeholders in the school domain.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants and sampling

The research study involved people at all levels of society who could contribute to a better understanding of mother tongue education and its role in a community and society in Ethiopia. The phenomenon with which the research dealt was two minority languages, Dawuro and Konttathoo, spoken in Southern Ethiopia.

The study obtained data from participants on various levels of the population and individual development, such as at national, regional and local levels. Four participants from the Ministry of Education, three interviewees from teacher training colleges and 32 mother tongue teachers at primary schools were interviewed, bringing the total of participants to 39. The focus group discussions involved parents, school directors, community representatives and teacher representatives. One learner representative was present in each of the focus groups, but they preferred to observe.

The data were collected in 2018 from eight primary schools and community members in two minority language areas in the Southern Region of Ethiopia, known as the Southern Nation and Nationality Peoples' Regional State, where Dawuro and Konttathoo are spoken. The data collected and discussed in this paper refer to the use of these two languages as a medium of instruction and as a subject in the education of primary school children.

All the participants were treated sensitively and without bias. Each participant provided the researchers with written letters of consent before the research commenced. The ethics committee of the university to which the authors were attached granted permission to conduct the research.

Data collection instruments and procedures

This study undertook qualitative research about mother tongue education in the selected primary schools. Various participants were interviewed individually, and focus group discussions were conducted. Qualitative research deals with the characteristics of phenomena and helps gain a better understanding of such phenomena. Phenomena are at the core of qualitative research. This research involves the nature of the phenomena, how they occur and the context in which they occur. If persons are involved, their values should also be considered. The data from qualitative research are usually provided in the form of words (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). The collected data were analysed using coding, categorising and thematising.

Caillard and Flick (2017:155) opine that focus group discussions are not always used alone in research. They can be combined with another method or methods, which might lead to utilising a strong triangulation approach. Both focus group discussion and interviews were employed in this study, and thus, triangulation was applied to obtain a better understanding of the many issues involved in mother tongue education in the southern state of Ethiopia. Triangulation is regarded as a mixture of different methods; it leads to the use of multiple data sources and can enhance the trustworthiness of data (Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018:20).

The research forms part of the data for an unpublished PhD thesis. The research is based on a social constructivist theoretical framework as the research intended to construct the opinions of various people (Creswell, 2013:44). It was possible to obtain the meaning of individuals and groups of people about the problems arising from mother tongue education in minority areas.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In the study, six major themes arose from the interviews and focus group discussions.

Lack of awareness-raising about the use of a mother tongue as a school language

Blackwood, Lanza and Woldemariam (2016:125) note the importance of the community having the correct attitude towards the minority languages to be used for instruction as one of the essential factors that should be considered by language policy developers. From the participants' responses, the status given to minority languages as written languages and languages of literature indicated that the identity of the community owning the language was respected. However, the study indicated a lack of sufficient awareness-raising about the use of a mother tongue as a school language.

From the data collected during the interviews and the focus group discussions, it became evident that no planned strategy for the implementation of the mother tongue policy existed. In an interview with one of the participants (MEP-1) from the Ministry of Education, they said that the policy was very progressive, but the community was not properly informed about mother tongue education for their children. He stated: '[W]e need to have changed the attitude of the community through continuous awareness-raising before we let their children learn in their mother tongue'. This was reiterated by another participant from the Ministry of Education: 'Obviously, there are gaps here and there, one of which is the training of teachers in addition to inadequate materials supply, lack of awareness-raising'.

Some members of the community still believed that learning in English was the best way to obtain a proper education; for example, participant KFG-2 said: 'Because[,] some parents still doubt the importance of mother tongue and they are in favour of English and the Amharic languages'. This was confirmed by participant DFG-5-A:

They don't understand why mother tongue is important. More than that they say their language is spoken only in their vicinity and no more. In most instances, parents feel that children will get a job if they learn in English and Amharic rather than in a local language.

The authors believe that this perception emanates from a lack of awareness.

Inadequate teacher training to teach in a mother tongue and a mother tongue

The skill and knowledge of teachers could play a decisive role in learners' achievement at school. This study found that many mother tongue teachers in the minority language areas did not receive sufficient training that could equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to teach a mother tongue. Some participants' responses indicated that teachers were sometimes assigned to teach subjects in which they had not been trained, including the mother tongue spoken in the area used as the medium of instruction. They were simply assigned to teach the mother tongue because they were native speakers of that mother tongue. A participant (MEP-1) from the Ministry of Education admitted the problem of inadequate teacher training by saying:

This question will lead us to think of the teachers' abilities because teachers are the main persons in the teaching and learning scenario. The teachers of these languages themselves have not been trained in these languages ... I mean they don't know the orthography. They don't read and write correctly... The language was not ready to be used in schools and colleges some years ago. It was a new phenomenon and it lacked the necessary conditions to be used in schools at the time this research was conducted. It should have been well-developed before being used in schools both as MoI [medium of instruction] and as a subject.

A teacher (KOT-7) of the mother tongue as a subject in one of the Kontta area schools pointed out that support was minimal:

The government representatives here in our area and those at the higher levels don't show up to help us. They don't visit and look into the successes and failures [of the programme] at all. They don't give us professional development. For example, I was trained only once two years ago for ten days and no more. There are lots of teachers who have not been trained at all. I have not seen a government representative coming to this school to observe what is going on regarding MTE [mother tongue education].

A mother-tongue teacher (DAT-11 A-1) teaching the Dawuro language as a mother-tongue subject said the following regarding the challenges teachers encounter when they have to teach a mother tongue in a minority area:

I have been teaching mother tongue for many years... During all this time no support or professional development was given for us. The language is not given attention except being given the right to be school language. No training is offered. Materials are not sufficiently distributed. At a certain time, we were told to evaluate the books and we found lots of mistakes, but the books are not improved so far.

Another teacher participant (DAT-9) from the region where Dawuro is spoken raised the lack of continuous professional development and training as one of the challenges they are facing:

Though some of us were taught primary school lessons in [the] Dawuro language and the language as a subject in primary schools, those teachers who graduated before the language was introduced as school language have not had any experience of using the written language. This means that we were expecting continuous professional development training for all of us as support from the relevant government and non-government organisations, but nothing was done.

Six interviewees said that because of their love for and interest in teaching in their mother tongue, they made a considerable effort to learn the orthography of the Konttathoo and Dawuro languages. As a result, they were able to read and write in the mother tongue spoken in their regions. For instance, a teacher (KOT-4) who taught Konttathoo as a subject said:

I have never been given training though I have been assigned as a Konttathoo mother tongue teacher. However, it has been encouraging to see our language being recognised as a language of instruction. Thus, I have been teaching myself to read and write my language and now I am very good at it.

A mathematics teacher (DAT-5) in the Dawuro region spoke about the wide-ranging problems he had with teaching mathematics in his mother tongue:

I graduated as a Health and Physical Education (HPE) teacher. Although I was teaching HPE, I have been requested to teach mathematics in my mother tongue as there was not any trained mother-tongue medium teacher though I myself was not trained as well. I accepted the request and began teaching as I was a native speaker of the language...I just struggled by myself and did sort of self-teaching. Though it was difficult at the beginning, I became successful over time.

Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh (2012:274) agree that teachers who have to teach in a mother tongue but have been trained in another language struggle with a lack of knowledge of the correct terminologies.

Readiness of the minority languages to be used as academic languages

Children learning in their mother tongue instead of in other languages that they do not speak and hear often achieve far better education outcomes than those who learn in a language they do not speak. However, the mother tongue should be developed as an academic language. One of the aspects that needs to be developed is the orthography or written form of the language (Cahill & Rice, 2014:2).

Problems with the orthography of Konttathoo and Dawuro arose in the data in this study. Some participants indicated they had made every effort to acquaint themselves with the orthography of the two languages. One of the participants, (DAT-6) explained it well:

In the beginning, I was hesitant to be a mother-tongue teacher since I did not have the awareness and as I have never been taught the language to read and write. However, later on though, I was encouraged and loved teaching in my mother tongue, and I made all the effort to adequately learn and be efficient in reading and writing [in my mother tongue]. Now I feel that I use the orthography perfectly.

A participant in the Dawuro area (DAT-2) mentioned the need for a standardised orthography. A couple of years ago, the education department in their zone asked him and other teachers to identify deficiencies and mistakes in the available mother-tongue textbooks. As there was no

standard orthography, there were spelling mistakes and also problems with culture-related concepts. However, nothing was done to improve the textbooks.

Another problem that became evident during the study was that the two languages had not developed the necessary terminology, especially in certain school subjects such as natural science and mathematics. A teacher participant (KOT-4) in the Kontta area stated:

Since the Konttathoo language has been used as a school language, we have seen that improvement takes place through time and practice. At this time, I would say our language is suitable though there are some terminologies that have no equivalent meaning in the language.

Another teacher participant (KOT-5) in the same region stated:

I teach Environmental Science in Grades 3 and 5. It is good to begin using the language [spoken in this area] though there are some problems regarding terminologies. Some words don't have equivalent terminologies in English or Amharic, so we have difficulty in explaining what it means. For example, words such as 'photosynthesis' or 'chemical' are difficult to explain though children understand the concept explained in their own language better than when it is explained in any other foreign languages.

The issue of suitable academic language for teaching and learning purposes aligns with what Baker (2011:170) opines about mathematics lessons and lessons in the different sciences, stating that children need academic language to understand more difficult concepts. Their home language should thus be developed for it to achieve an academic standard using appropriate academic language.

Shortage of mother tongue materials in schools

The provision of appropriate educational materials for learners remains one of the decisive factors for sufficient learning and educational achievement. The study found that educational materials were scarce in general, especially materials to teach in the mother tongues of the two regions.

In the study, a teacher (DAT-10) from the Dawuro language area said:

The responsibility of mother-tongue primary class books development is that of the Regional Education Bureau and the Zonal Education Department. The office simply contracts educated people of the surrounding whom they think are skilful in knowing the language and who have teaching and learning experience in general. I don't think they have curriculum development and quality education materials preparation capacity.

The lack of appropriate mother tongue teaching and learning materials also arose during interviews with teachers from the Konttathoo language area. The words of a teacher (DAT-11) from this area bear witness to this:

The biggest problem of teaching and learning in Konttathoo language both as a subject and as medium of instruction is the high scarcity of books written in the language.

A participant (KOT-6) from the Dawuro language area said the following:

Well, the main problem I see is lack of sufficient mother-tongue materials. The scarcity of mother-tongue materials is greater than the scarcity of other education materials in the schools. I also doubt the quality [of mother tongue books that have been prepared] since I don't think the people who prepare books are capable in that regard as well.

A teacher participant from one of the Dawuro sample schools touched on the importance of culture being reflected in the textbooks. The participant was adamant that textbooks should mirror the culture of a region and the surroundings where it is spoken. The participant (DAT-10) explained:

Except recently, some books at lower grade levels have been developed in the zonal education department. Many of the books were simply translated from Amharic books or other languages instead of being written with the content[s] reflecting our culture and environment.

As can be noted from the data, some of the teacher participants raised serious issues about the provision and availability of textbooks in the mother tongue of the regions. This is supported by Malone (2018:16), who states that children have to be surrounded by reading materials in school and at home when they learn to read and write, and this necessitates the development of quality mother tongue materials.

Absence of proper guidelines and strategy to implement mother tongue education

The research results showed that neither teachers nor college instructors have been provided with the necessary guidelines or strategies to inform teachers on the proper implementation of a mother tongue programme. The participants from the Ministry of Education admitted that the lack of any kind of guideline has been one of the biggest drawbacks of education in the mother tongue. During an interview, a representative from the Ministry of Education (MEP-1) said:

I think one of our problems is lack of a well-organised guideline and strategy that enables each of us at various levels to accordingly serve the promotion of MTB MLE [mother tongue-based multilingual education] in addition to several other drawbacks we have in this regard.

This view was reiterated by another interviewee (MEP-3) from the Ministry of Education, who believed that some of the existing problems with the implementation of the mother tongue policy were the following:

However, I will have a reservation to say that the implementation is also appropriate and according to the policy. Obviously, there are gaps here and there, one of which is the training of teachers in addition to inadequate materials supply, lack of awareness-raising.

According to Malone (2018:16), among the essential components for a successful multilingual education programme is what she calls a 'realistic implementation plan'. A realistic plan provides guidance for an implementation plan to achieve its goal.

Lack of adequate support

A teacher participant (DAT-9) from the Dawuro area mentioned the lack of follow-up and support that could be provided to teachers if continuous professional development and training offered to them never realised:

Though some of us were taught primary school lessons in Dawuro language and the language as a subject in primary schools, those teachers who graduated before the language was introduced as school language have not had any experience of using the written language. This means that we were expecting continuous professional development training for all of us.

The lack of support in implementing the mother tongue education programme was also reiterated by a teacher participant (KOT-3) from the Kontta area, stating that there was no support provided to enhance mother tongue education:

One of the weaknesses of the MTE [mother tongue education] emanates from the lack of proper guidance and support from both the zonal and the regional education office authorities... In my four years' service as mother-tongue teacher, the support rendered to our school to promote MTE and its task is very minimal or almost none.

As can be seen from the data, the two teacher participants raised issues about support to teach a mother tongue during the interviews. They needed to be trained to use the correct methods to teach a mother tongue and, they also needed support from the regional offices to help them. This is confirmed by Ball (2011:6), who opines that the quality of instruction, which requires training and support for teachers, is one of the contributing factors for successful mother tongue education.

DISCUSSION

The depth of the study was reflected by the participants representing most educational levels, including at the classroom, school, district and regional levels. Thus, the study did not only obtain the viewpoints of the officials who make the mother tongue policies but also the opinions about mother tongue education of people like the language lecturers and the teachers who teach languages and have to implement such language policies. It was also important to hear the voices of community members who speak Dawuro and Konttathoo. Many community members were pleased that they, as the custodians of the two languages, were also requested to provide their opinions about mother tongue education.

Factors within different educational levels

Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh (2012:272) opine that some factors are meaningful for any type of education to be successful. The authors state that these factors should be even more emphasised in minority language regions where learners are using their mother tongue as the language of instruction. These crucial factors are teacher quality and teachers' working conditions, improved quality and supply of curriculum materials, strengthening instructional support, which would enable learners to understand their lessons, and participation by the community in supporting the development of schools. These factors relate to most of the systems of human existence.

The levels included in this study relate to these factors and comprise factors arising from the national government and at the regional level, at which, for instance, teachers are trained. There are also factors at the local level, which include the home, school and the community. The data showed that many factors in the Ethiopian education system could influence the success or the failure of mother tongue education and that the input of people at all levels of society could enhance an understanding of the problems.

Adequate awareness-raising about the importance of mother tongue education

Though the idea of mother tongue-based multilingual education was accepted by most of the stakeholders in the Ethiopian education system, the study revealed that adequate awareness-raising did not occur at all the different levels in the education sector. As a result, many stakeholders, especially parents and community members, had doubts about its importance. However, the study found that many participating community members and parents indicated they would prefer their children to be taught in Amharic (the [then] Federal working language of Ethiopia) or English rather than in their local languages. The importance of mother tongue education to lay the foundation for learning and mastering new knowledge and concepts was thus not propagated when policies about mother tongue education were passed. Research in human development and language education affirms that using the mother tongue is one of the best methods for young learners to perform well cognitively (Stoop 2017:1–2). Lafron and Webb (2010:3) take the issue a step further by stating that education in the mother tongue is far superior to being educated in a language not spoken at home.

An important issue touching on personal sentiments arose during the focus group discussions. The participants displayed a positive attitude towards their local languages and pride in their languages being accepted as languages of literature. Such acceptance identified them as a group, and they felt that their languages were respected. This attitude could be incorporated into awareness-raising about mother tongue education. Originally from Shetland, a very small island, Da Luca (2017:164) shares this pride in the mother tongue. She urges that efforts should be made for children from Shetland to read books in their mother tongue and that the children from Shetland should be able to write in Shetlandic (Da Luca, 2017:164). Nishanti (2020:77) stresses the importance of developing a cultural identity by saying that ‘by upholding of the different language spoken in society, cultural identity arises that flows unquestionably to other phases of an individual’s life’.

The teaching needs of mother tongue teachers

It was clear that many of the teacher participants experienced practical problems with the teaching of a mother tongue in their classrooms as they did not know how to teach the mother tongue. They did not have the necessary backgrounds and training, which included guidelines and the correct teaching methods. There was no opportunity to report back to government representatives or the regional offices about their needs in teaching the mother tongue, and they did not receive any support. This aligns with Ball’s (2011:6) opinion, already raised eleven years ago, namely that the quality of instruction, which requires the training and support of teachers, is one of the important factors for mother tongue education to be successful.

The teaching needs of teachers responsible for educating learners in the two minority language areas in their mother tongue were not attended to. One of the reasons why teaching needs started at the government and regional levels was that no provision was made for in-service teacher training. The problem is presently addressed in the system of teacher training at teacher

training colleges in Ethiopia. This means that (mostly) recently trained young teachers had received training to teach either in the mother tongue or teach the mother tongue as a subject. However, the older teachers who acted as participants had not received training in the mother tongue, and no in-service training was offered.

The orthography and standardisation of Dawuro and Konttathoo

As regards the orthography of the Dawuro and Konttathoo languages, the study indicated that these languages did not have a standardised orthography and the languages were thus introduced by government policies without being ready to be used as academic languages. Another problem was that the orthography of the languages was not taught to the teachers. As discussed, one teacher respondent indicated that she taught herself the orthography of her mother tongue. According to Cahill and Rice (2014:9), for the orthographies of languages to be accepted, both non-linguistic factors, such as government policies, and linguistic factors, such as sociolinguistic issues, need to be considered. Regarding the orthography of Dawuro and Konttathoo, government policies were available, but a policy alone cannot make a minority language teachable in schools.

Another issue is the standardisation of the Dawuro and Konttathoo languages. Standardisation is a major component of language development. It means that all speakers of the languages should agree to use the languages in a particular way, especially the written form of the language. For a language to be standardised, it has to have an approved orthography and a dictionary, which did not exist in the case of Dawuro and Konttathoo. The need for the correct orthography and standardisation of the two languages calls for the help of experts and should be addressed at national and regional levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that efforts from all the stakeholders in the various educational levels would be required to address the many issues surrounding mother tongue education in Ethiopia. The Ministry of Education should plan well-structured awareness-raising programmes about mother tongue education; furthermore, schools in minority language areas should be supported in enhancing mother tongue education. Appropriate language materials should be provided to schools in minority language areas, and scientific terminologies should be developed. Developing and distributing as many reading materials as possible in the target mother tongue is very important for children's educational achievement. The orthography of all the minority languages that would be used should be standardised.

It is recommended that teacher education colleges take on the responsibility of training students to teach in the specific mother tongue languages used in specific minority language areas. Students should also be trained in current mother tongue teaching methods and the orthography of the various languages.

At the regional governmental level, in-service teacher training on mother tongue education and the provision of quality teaching materials in the various mother tongue languages are advised. By planning before implementation, the use of a mother tongue in education and schools by the teachers could be fostered. Parents should be informed about the vital role of mother tongue education. Furthermore, education in the mother tongue should also be nurtured and encouraged in the communities where children grow up and learn the culture and the value of the use of their mother tongue.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study's findings, it is evident that a policy on mother tongue education cannot be successful if it is decided and developed by the national government on a macro level without planning for its implementation. However, the planning should continue at all levels of education. This would necessitate the involvement of people at all educational levels to ensure that all voices around mother tongue education are heard. The authors opine that if the use of the mother tongue is nurtured in the education system, it could empower children and also women, men and the communities in regions where minority languages, such as Konttathoo and Dawuro, are spoken.

REFERENCES

- BAKER, C. 2011. *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*. Volume 79. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- BALL, J. 2011. Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in early years. *Analytical Review Commissioned by the UNESCO Education Sector*. Paris: UNESCO.
- BLACKWOOD, R., LANZA, E. & H WOLDEMARIAM. 2016. *Negotiating and contesting identities in linguistic landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury.
- BROCK-UTNE, B. 2014. Language of instruction in Africa – The most important and least appreciated issue. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, 1(1):4–18. <https://upjournals.co.za>.
- BUSETTO, L, WICK, W & C GUMBINGER. 2020. How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>.
- CAHILL, M & K RICE. 2014. *Developing orthographies for unwritten languages*. Dallas: SIL International.
- CAILLAUD, S & U FLICK. 2017. Focus groups in triangulation contexts. In Barbour, R & D Morgan (Eds), *Advances in focus groups research*, 155–177. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- CHIATOH, BA. 2014. The Cameroonian experience in mother tongue education planning: The community response framework. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 15 (4):376–392.
- CRESWELL, JW. 2013. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 4th ed. London: SAGE.
- DALUCA, C. 2017. Mother tongue as a universal human right. *International Journal of Speech-language Pathology*, 2(1):161–165.
- ETHIOPIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. 1994. *Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education.
- FUSCH, P, FUSCH, GE & LR NESS. 2018. Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Social Change*, 10(1):19–32. Doi: 10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02.
- LAFRON, M & V WEBB. 2010. Introduction. *The Standardisation of African Languages*, 2–6. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-0449090/document>.
- MALONE, S. 2018. *UNESCO: Including the excluded: Promoting multilingual education*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246278>.

- NISHANTI, R. 2020. Understanding of the importance of mother tongue learning. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 5(1):77–80.
- ŞAHİN, I. 2018. A look at mother tongue education in the context of the right to education. *Educational Research and Review*, 13 (9):343–353.
- SKUTNABB-KANGAS, T & K HEUGH. 2012. *Multilingual education and diversity work: From periphery to center*. New York: Routledge.
- STOOP, C. 2017. Children’s rights to mother-tongue education in a multilingual world: A comparative analysis between South Africa and Germany. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 20 (1). <https://law.nwu.ac.za>.
- THE QUARTERLY EDUCATION JOURNAL. February 2021. The Ethiopian Department of Education.
- UN NEWS 2020. Educate Children in Their Mother Tongue, urges UN Rights Expert. *UN News* 11 March 2020. <https://www.news.un.org/story/2020/03>.
- VAN STADEN, S, BOSKER, R & A BERGBAUER. 2016. Differences in achievement between home language and language of learning in South Africa: Evidence from pre-PIRLS 2011. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajcev6i1.441>.
- WOLFF, E. 2018. Africa failing to address linguistic imperialism. *University World News*. <https://www.universityworldnews.com>.
- ZEME, MD. 2020. Exploring the challenges of mother-tongue-based multilingual education in primary schools in minority language areas in Southern Ethiopia. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Anna Hugo is a professor of Education Emeritus, University of South Africa. Her research focus is on the teaching of a first and a second language. Current research includes mother tongue education and the teaching of reading. Email address: annajohugo@gmail.com

Mesfin Derash is currently an executive director for Teach for Ethiopia which is an NGO. Previously he worked in the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education as a language curriculum expert, as National examination English test items expert and as the head of the Department for English language improvement and mother tongue education. Email address: mesfinder@yahoo.com