

# When Language Policy, Conflict and Displacement Become Learning Barriers: The Case of Linguistic Minority Schoolchildren in Darfur, Sudan

This paper aims to situate the politics of language in Sudan in the wider Sub-Saharan post-colonial African contexts. Taking as an example the case of the educationally disadvantaged linguistic minority schoolchildren in the conflict-torn Darfur, Sudan, we argued that Sudan perfectly exemplifies an area of linguistically disenfranchised minorities. Employing both quantitative and qualitative tools, we investigated how the linguistic minority schoolchildren at the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur were educationally disadvantaged due to their low proficiency in Arabic and explored how their parents and teachers perceived the use of Arabic as a sole medium of instruction (MOI). The study concluded that the children's low proficiency in Arabic together with the adoption of Arabic as the only MOI exacerbated their learning difficulties. Furthermore, a vast majority of the teachers and parents believed that the academic achievement of the children could have been better if teachers had used children's native languages in addition to Arabic while teaching. This tendency was attributed to the current conflict, which has given rise to the revitalisation of native languages in Darfur. The findings also indicated that the forceful assimilation of the IDPs into the community produced a timely conflict-given language policy that the Sudanese government has long pursued. Thus, it did not intervene to alleviate learning difficulties the schoolchildren faced at the IDPs camps.

**Keywords:** language policy, conflict, learning barriers, linguistic minorities Darfur (Sudan)

## Introduction

Sub-Saharan post-colonial Africa is characterised suppression of native languages and denial of linguistic minority rights to bilingual education. In post-colonial Africa, language policies (LPs) are often promulgated by the politically dominant groups with the aim of, among others, maintaining the continuity of an imposed national language, culture or identity. It is argued that African governments addressed such policies as part of an inherent colonial tradition of establishing monolingualism with local languages to assimilate the communities under their subjugation or to divide them (Truong, 2012). With this approach, linguistic minorities have been subject to discrimination, and their children have consequently suffered from disadvantageous schooling—being deprived of receiving instruction in mother tongue (IIMT) and being destined to receive no or low-quality education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Sudan is a perfect example of such a reality.

This paper investigates the nuances of language policy (LP) in Sudan and elucidates how it has been employed as a coercive measure to impose monolingualism for religious and ideological motives whereby linguistic minority schoolchildren were destined to academic underachievement and alienation from their cultures and identities. The paper also probes further

afield L P ideologies in pre- and post-colonial Africa and explores how these ideologies have produced language-in-education policies unfavourable to native language-speaking schoolchildren. Using as an example a case study conducted in the IDPs camps in Darfur, Sudan, the paper advocates the argument that the academic underachievement of linguistic minority schoolchildren springs from denial of their rights to receive IIMT. Finally, the paper explores how the schoolchildren's parents and teachers perceived the use of Arabic as a sole medium of instruction (MOI) in IDPs schools.

We argued that in both language management and LP, in Spolsky's (2004) terms, Africa has been unsuccessful in making, except partially in a few countries, a conceivable breakthrough in bringing bilingual education into practice. Accordingly, we hypothesised that linguistic minority schoolchildren at the IDP camps in Darfur encountered education difficulties because they were exposed to an education system that uses Arabic, although they were not proficient enough in it, as the sole MOI, and as a consequence, their academic achievement was hampered by teacher-learner communication difficulties, cultural alienation and an experiential vacuum. This situation further invited us to claim that there emerged a felt need among the vast majority of parents and teachers to redress the Arabic-only education policy that was disadvantageous for IDP children in Darfur.

## Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

The contemporary history of Africa is full of colonial narratives that were, and still indirectly are, manifested in forms of planned subjugation, linguistic and cultural hegemony, economic exploitation and educational alienation. The practices are mirrored today by many post-colonial African governments when discourses of bilingual education (BE) and the rights of linguistic minorities to receiving IIMT are put on the table. Thus, Africa appears to be a microcosm of the past colonial geography, power and political hegemony that it claims to be fighting today. Power inequalities reminiscent of colonial times continue to exist and are internalised by many national governments in one form or another. Among them, successive governments have failed to institutionalize national/official languages and to settle bilingual education (BE) paradigms because the debate over language is associated with many discourses, notably elite preference for ex-colonial languages, conflicting ideologies, and denial of access to economic and political privileges (Adegbiya, 2000; Wright *et al.*, 2015; Garcia, 2009; Cummins, 2000; Homeso, 1997).

The current paper is centred around and derived from Spolsky's (2000) theory of LP, whose premise features four areas of concern: language practices, beliefs, ideologies and plans—all are derived from language management or planning activities. Spolsky posits that LP functions in four areas: (a) explicit ideological views of appropriate behaviours of language use; (b) individual elements of language such as pronunciation, spelling, lexical choice, grammar, language varieties, racist language, and obscene or correct language; (c) domains of language use as defined by speech communities, political or social

bodies, family or other similar entities; and (d) complex ecological relationships, including linguistic and non-linguistic elements, variables and actors.

The aforesaid areas at which LP functions, Spolsky notes, can be applied in two domains of use: (a) at the bi/multilingual family level, making a decision on selecting language of instruction, and (b) language in the marketplace and its use at individual institutions as well as at the local government level which is responsible for public education, language choice for public signs, for example. The theory further holds that LP for a nation state is defined by interrelated factors concerning the actual sociolinguistic situation of the policy, beliefs that the ethnic or national identity holds, impact of English as a global language, and pressures for recognising the rights of linguistic minorities. Central to the notion of the language theory of Spolsky is the differentiation between language management and LP. The former occurs when an entity, whether individually or collectively, intervenes to manipulate the situation of a language, whereas the latter describes a language situation that exists even if it has not been made explicit or established by an authority.

Spolsky's theory of LP appeals more to a global context and in particular to countries where LP is in practice. However, when virtually contextualised in post-colonial Africa, the theory also correctly fits the topic of our paper because LPs in Africa, in Spolsky's (p: ix) term, are generally "linguicentric", i.e., they are "looked at from the point of one language only."

The official language and the state function reciprocally in that, on the one hand, the creation of a standard language is one of the prerequisites for the making of the state. On the other hand, the language derives its power from its status in the state (Bourdieu, 1991; May, 2008; Spolsky, 2004). It follows that in the pursuit of building the state, African power wielding elites are left with no option other than to officialise one dominant language. Thus, in their attempts to shape how ethnic groups should be treated in a nation state, the elites have politicised the modalities of linguistic rights and the level of government support for linguistic minorities according to the elites' interests (see, for example, Brisk, 2008; Razfarand Rumenapp, 2011; Tuong, 2012; Gudhlanga and Makaudze, 2012; Garcia, 2009; Adegbiya, 2000; Homesos, 1997). Because state ideologies are established and nurtured through historical and cultural relationships and language ideologies are systemic and dynamic, as Razfarand Rumenapp (2011: 242) argue, the quest for actualising African-specific ideologies must draw its legitimacy, we argue, from internal motives that are often reactions to what is reminiscent of Africa under colonial hegemony. The handiest, and perhaps most workable, mechanisms that post-colonial regimes opted to use to eliminate that stigma was, ironically, to mesmerise the populace by mega-propagandising against the legacy of the colonial languages while officialising them in practice.

Paradoxically, many countries in Africa not only officialised the colonial languages, which Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2012: 22) take as "a manifestation of the continuation of imperial domination in sovereign states," but also continued to "...define their own identities by reference to those languages, for example, as *English-speaking*, *French-speaking* or *Portuguese-*

1 *speaking* [emphasis added]” (p: 23). In a sense, the African over-decolonisation  
 2 zeal appears to be moving nowhere, for it is argued that post-colonial  
 3 multi/bilingual policy/education model makers replicated their former  
 4 colonisers’ practices of creating identity divisions in their desire for modernist  
 5 nation-building and management of internal differences (Lin, 2015; Garcia,  
 6 2009; Evans and Cleghorn, 2012; Adegbija, 2000; Homeso, 1997, Esman,  
 7 1992).

8 The fact remains that suppression of indigenous languages is a ubiquitous  
 9 phenomenon across Africa. In many countries, local languages have  
 10 experienced erasure from domains in which they are spoken, and children  
 11 speaking these languages are forced into schooling via the dominant language.  
 12 It followed that indigenous struggles have become characteristic of linguistic,  
 13 cultural and identity survival in nation states as “...language repression  
 14 continues as official government policy” (McCarty, 2008: 146). However, in  
 15 tandem with efforts exerted by African regimes to decolonise the inherent  
 16 economies and social stratification models, language ideologies are instituted  
 17 in some countries through educational reforms. However, such reforms have  
 18 failed to be realised at implementation levels because the rights to education in  
 19 local languages are denied on political grounds, lack of systematic models, lack  
 20 of economic resources, biased cultural considerations or deliberate ethnic  
 21 discrimination practices (see, for example, Lee and McCarty, 2015; Lin, 2015;  
 22 Evans and Cleghorn, 2012; Gudhlanga and Makaudze, 2012; Brisk, 2008;  
 23 2008; Gillborn, 1990; Garcia, 2009; Albaugh, 2009). As Tuong (2012) aptly  
 24 summarises, LPs in Sub-Saharan Africa are made to reproduce the power of  
 25 the privileged classes who ideologised the use of language in the education  
 26 system for generations.

27 While suppression of local languages was quite violent, first by the  
 28 colonials and subsequently by neo-colonial Africans, their recognition of BE  
 29 had begun to gain currency in many African countries. The Asmara  
 30 Declaration (2000) on linguistic rights (LRs) was the first African scholarly  
 31 platform of its kind that called for recognition of local languages. The  
 32 declaration stated that, among other things, the future empowerment and  
 33 democratisation of Africans should be undertaken by using African languages.  
 34 This collective shift was driven by several factors: increased antipathy toward  
 35 colonisers, the emergence of bottom-up pressure that LR advocates exerted on  
 36 national governments, the factoring of local languages into national unity and  
 37 development, and identity preservation (Truong, 2012; Ndhlovu, 2010; May,  
 38 2008; Babaci-Wilhite, 2015b; Millar, 2005; Albaugh, 2007). Furthermore,  
 39 Higgs (2008: 447) contends that if Africa has to make evolutionary leaps in its  
 40 education system, educators should “embrace an indigenous African world  
 41 view and root their nation’s educational paradigm in an indigenous socio-  
 42 cultural and epistemological framework.”

43 The enthusiasm for the reinstitution of native languages in Africa also  
 44 arose, first, as a consequence to a global awakening that prioritised the  
 45 protection of minority languages. Some examples include the emergence of  
 46 Native American movements in the U.S., the Māori language revitalisation  
 47 initiatives in New Zealand, Latin American minority linguistic rights

1 movements and the indigenous language education programmes in the Nordic  
 2 countries (Lee and McCarty, 2015). Initiation of the Asmara Declaration in  
 3 2000, for example, was not unexpected. Second, the African governments  
 4 needed to take pre-emptive measures to avoid potential conflicts by granting  
 5 concessions to linguistic minorities (Albaugh, 2007). Fighting imperialism in  
 6 Africa, as Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2012) contend, must be extended to the  
 7 promotion of native languages and their integration into the instructional  
 8 system.

9 It is no coincidence that over the last couple of decades, the platitudinous  
 10 discourses on African indigenous languages have begun to wane, and a thin  
 11 *nostalgia* for them has permeated across the continent. Then, it is no accident  
 12 that, in search of effective mechanisms for the empowerment of local  
 13 languages, many African countries showed a paradigm shift in their  
 14 educational policies. The credence of these shiftsemanated from the role that  
 15 BE is believed to play a vital role in facilitating education for native language-  
 16 speaking schoolchildren. Across the globe, many countries have realised the  
 17 importance of a careful choice of a particular MOI as an effective way to  
 18 educate children (Spolsky, 2004; Garcia, 2009). The literature in the field  
 19 suggests that local languages can have advantages over other languages in (a)  
 20 enhancing children's academic achievement; (b) enriching their cultural,  
 21 emotional, cognitive and socio-psychological gains and augmenting their self-  
 22 respect and pride in local cultures; and (c) developing their identity and  
 23 internalisation of moral standards (see for example, Babaci-Wilhite, (2015a;  
 24 Lee and McCarty, 2015; Evan and Cleghorn, 2012; Cummins, 2000; Robinson,  
 25 1996).

26 Although the benefits of BE are undeniable, it is argued that such benefits  
 27 are not premised on solid ideological, theoretical and practical grounds.  
 28 Concerning ideology, Blommaert (2001: 137) notes that “ethnolinguistic  
 29 pluralism is based on exactly as the same ideology as the one it claims to  
 30 combat.” Similarly, bi/multilingualism in Africa is considered harmful to  
 31 national unity, whereby the rationale for making a nation state by officialising  
 32 one language becomes a problem in itself (Troung, 2012; Garcia, 2009). With  
 33 the emergence of overzealous resistance to the neo-colonial hegemony, voiced  
 34 through coining terms such as ‘linguicide’ and ‘linguicism’—as suggested by  
 35 Skutnabb-Kangas and Philipson (1995)—the field is charged with antipathy  
 36 toward colonial languages. With this view, doors for rational thinking about the  
 37 merits and demerits of BE are closed. Another challenge springs from the  
 38 internal differences between policy-makers’ politicised perspective on BE and  
 39 practitioners’ school-based experiences (Evans and Cleghorn, 2012).

40 Theoretically, when conceived in the context of conflict, it is contended  
 41 that the imposition of IIMT policy reflects a layer of internal linguistic  
 42 imperialism (Mwinsheikhe, 2009) in that it might risk national unity. This view  
 43 can be a strong ground for not considering local languages for local educational  
 44 contexts. However, such views owe their credence more to a lack of research-  
 45 based conclusions that can validate the relationship between BE and learner  
 46 creativity than to a lack of theoretical bases (Kharkhurin, 2015).

1 Practically and most importantly, language standardisation is a prerequisite  
 2 for the adoption of multilingual literacy. To standardise a particular language,  
 3 the nation state must first resolve the problem of which language is to be  
 4 officialised and then make it a “priority to teach the official language to non-  
 5 speakers” (Spolsky (2004: 142). More often than not, many African countries  
 6 have too many local languages to be officialised and, as a consequence, they  
 7 are handicapped by practical obstacles to coping with globally determined  
 8 factors and internal economic and cultural constraints (Omoniyi, 2003; Truong,  
 9 2012; Evans and Cleghorn, 2012; Millar, 2005; Spolsky, 2004). In countries  
 10 where BE is a reality, teacher/learner classroom practices also appear to be  
 11 lacking appropriate teacher preparedness and learner-oriented curricula.  
 12 Literacy development depends on how the teacher-learner-text  
 13 interaction effectively occurs. Facilitating this requires integrating local values  
 14 and cultures with local curricula content in such a manner that learner attitudes  
 15 and extracurricular activities receive suitable assessment (Evans and Cleghorn,  
 16 2012; Brisk, 2008).

17 Without reiterating the above hurdles that are considered factors in the  
 18 slowdown in delivering effective BE in Africa, we find it imperative to  
 19 pinpoint how culture-bound barriers can also hinder BE due to of either  
 20 teachers’ or learners’ different perceptions of education contexts. In this  
 21 respect—and as far as the academic achievement of linguistic minorities and  
 22 integration of their cultures and identities are concerned—teachers should  
 23 express respect for the languages, cultures and identities that learners bring into  
 24 the classroom (Cummins, 2000; Babaci-Wilhite, 2015b). In classrooms, new  
 25 language and culture complexities arise for both teachers and learners. Evans  
 26 and Cleghorn (2012: 10) aptly coined what they called “border-crossing” and  
 27 defined it as the “...ability to shift conceptually as well as culturally...from one  
 28 particular way of looking at and understanding the world. Then, they applied  
 29 the concept of border-crossing on BE environments and emphasised that it is  
 30 imperative for teachers and learners to cross these borders reciprocally to  
 31 accommodate the new educational requirements.

32 The application of border-crossing concept in classroom setting holds  
 33 sound, but we argue that responsibilities for crossing the borders cannot be  
 34 distributed between teachers and learners on an equal basis. Smooth immersion  
 35 programmes of learner cultures in a BE classroom for the purpose of  
 36 facilitating learning requires well-conceived integration. Here, the role of the  
 37 teacher as an initiative taker in crossing cultural borders becomes vital for  
 38 adjusting the requirements of her/his learners in new teaching cultures. To do  
 39 so, teachers need to consider the learning opportunities available at home and  
 40 explore how they can support learners to bring their cultural and identity  
 41 backgrounds into the classroom (Babaci-Wilhite, 2015b; Brisk, 2008;  
 42 Cummins, 2000).

43  
 44

## 1 **Bilingual Education in Practice**

2  
3 *Bilingual education in practice* is hardly a consensual reality in Africa and  
4 is not even close to reality in Sudan, the focus of the present paper. At the time  
5 that most African countries gained independence, only 43% of them were using  
6 local languages in early primary education, while at the beginning of the 21st  
7 century, 81% were doing so (Albaugh, 2007). Ethiopia, Eritrea, Malawi,  
8 Somalia, Tanzania, Burundi, Ruanda and the Central Republic of Africa are  
9 among the countries that have taken the lead in the integration of local  
10 languages into their curricula (Spolsky, 2004). However, neither are the  
11 increase in figures nor the increase in the number of countries promoting local  
12 languages indicative of a meaningful breakthrough in bringing LP from theory  
13 to practice, not least when BE is considered. Sixteen years have passed since  
14 the adoption of the Asmara Declaration in 2000, at which African scholars  
15 vowed to and called for decolonising African minds through bilingual  
16 education. However, Africa is still in limbo in this field.

17 South Africa officialised and gave equal status to eleven local languages  
18 (Evans and Cleghorn, 2012), making it the first state to officialise the largest  
19 number of languages. It is argued that the success of Kiswahili in Tanzania  
20 proves the potentiality that African languages can be officialised and that the  
21 recognition of eleven official languages in South Africa has been responsible  
22 for its present economic development (Omoniyi, 2003).

23 Apart from Tanzania and Somalia, where Kiswahili and Somali, were  
24 given a full-fledged single national language status in all domains of their use,  
25 and apart from the recognition of local languages in almost all African  
26 constitutions or recognition of their partial use in early education stages, no  
27 other single local official language is traceable elsewhere. The power of the  
28 colonial languages is most noticeable in West Africa, where most governments  
29 are still divided over what local language(s) are to be nationalised (see, for  
30 example, Albaugh, 2007; Adegbiya, 2000; Bender, 1985; Ndhlovu, 2010).

31 It is noteworthy that Somalia, the only African state with a single  
32 officialised local language for such a long time—has been a failed state since  
33 1991. Nor did the empowerment of Arabic as a national language and a single  
34 MOI for the sake of an Arabised and unified Sudan (Sharkey, 2007; Garriand  
35 Mugaddam, 2015) prevent it from being devastated by protracted political,  
36 ideological and language-related civil conflicts for more than sixty years.  
37 Eventually, the South Sudanese semi-consensually voted for a “de-Arabised”  
38 independent South Sudan following a referendum on self-determination in  
39 2011. As the issue of language choice was a top priority for the leaders of the  
40 newest state in Africa, South Sudan, English was immediately declared the  
41 official language, bringing an end to the hegemony of Arabic—the bearer of  
42 Arab ideology and identity in Sudan (Garri, 2014). Another example that  
43 would render deficit the “one language for unity” discourse is the case of  
44 Kiswahili in Tanzania. In 2010, the teaching of science subjects in Kiswahili in  
45 Zanzibar was replaced with the teaching of English on the grounds that, as  
46 Babaci-Wilhite (2015b) notes, teaching in Kiswahili was not cost effective.  
47 Thus, we argue that linguists with the view that monolingualism can create a

homogeneous nation state would find it difficult not to believe that appealing factors other than the language factor should be considered in the field. For the specific relevance of LP to the focus of our paper, we shall delineate the historical development of LPs in Sudan in the next section.

## Language Policies in Sudan

LP in Sudan, in terms of ideologies and government politics, is crudely traceable over two distinct periods: the British colonial era and the post-colonial regimes. Throughout history, LP has been challenged by many controversial issues in the field of education and language planning, not least the debates over the feasibility of maintaining native languages and their use in the educational system (Abu-Manga and Abubaker, 2006). During the British colonial era, the Juba Conference of 1947 was a historical mark in the history of LP in Sudan. The conference set important benchmarks for the suppression of Arabic for purely colonial and religious reasons (Abu-Manga and Abubaker, 2006; Mugaddam, 2002; Mahmud, 1983). Over the postcolonial eras, however, a significant shift towards Arabic-favouring policies occurred in 1969, when the linguistic and cultural rights of native peoples were officially recognised. In 1972, following the Addis Ababa Act, the Sudanese native languages were again officially recognised and given a status equal to Arabic. Arabic was resolved to be used as an MOI in towns and in multilingual areas in South Sudan, and it was determined that native languages should be scripted in the Arabic alphabet and used in addition to Arabic in the first two grades of schools located in remote areas of South Sudan.

As is the case with many African countries, the LP embraced in the post-colonial Sudan appears to be a reaction to pre-colonial practices. Thus, the ideology of “Islamising” and “Arabising” the outlook of Sudan factored into conflating Arabic and Islam as inseparable components in the making of Sudan resulted in adopting monolingualism as the official LP (Garri, 2014; Abdelhay *et al.* 2012; Sharkey, 2007). Consequently, Arabic was not only declared the national language but also empowered in such a predatory way that it pushed aside the native languages to ever-shrinking domains of use. This retreat was documented by many field studies, notably the Language Survey Studies, conducted from 1972 throughout 1983 by the Institute of African and Asian Studies. In 1989, another significant LP plan was made. A government-led committee stated that the National Assembly for Language Planning had to be commissioned to (a) strategise for language planning; (b) promote the spread of Arabic as the language of wider communication; and (c) empower Arabic to lead the economic, social, intellectual and political development of the country. In 1990, Arabic was made the major MOI at the tertiary level in Sudan. The year 2005 marked a juncture in the LP in Sudan, for the recognition of South Sudan local languages and their integration in the educational system was incorporated into the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Naivasha that was reached between Sudan and Sudan Liberation Movement (Abdelhay, 2007; Abdelhay *et al.* 2012).

Thus, there are cogent reasons for us to argue that the dilemma of native languages in Darfur is perpetuated by a deliberate state-gear policy of incorporating native languages into the constitution, but in practice, this recognition is denied and local language-speaking children are linguistically disenfranchised. The situation of native languages was one of the disputable issues in the Darfur Peace Agreement of 2006 and subsequently in the Doha Document of Peace in Darfur of 2011. Again, the two agreements reiterated minorities' LRs, but the right to receiving IIMT was not guaranteed. The overall LPs at the national level as well as in Darfur peace agreements offered *nothing* regarding how to practically accommodate native languages in Darfur in any conceivable measure.

### **Darfur: People, Languages, Displacement and Education**

Composed of five states, Darfur is located in the western part of Sudan, with an area of 549,000 square kilometres and a population of 7,405,231. Demographically, Darfur is the home of two ethnically distinct groups characteristic of shared industries—mainly farming, animal breeding and small-scale trading. The complexion of the vast majority of Darfurians renders them Africans; however, when identification with ancestors is indexed, the Arabs and Blacks unmistakably become two distinct groups—the latter often pejoratively referred to by the former as *zurga*, meaning blacks (Harir, 1993).

According to the 1953 census, out of 16 languages spoken by 45% of the population in aggregate in Darfur, Arabic was spoken by 55%. No census-based statistics are available on the number of Arabic or local language speakers since then. Arabic is widely spoken in Darfur in varieties different from that spoken in central Sudan. Today, in the context of the current conflict, many native language speakers are characterised by ethnolinguistic vitality and vigorously speak their languages (Garriand Mugaddam, 2015), but some, such as Berti, Borno and Birgid, lost their languages a very long time ago.

From colonial times to the present day, Darfur has experienced protracted ethnic conflicts. In 2003, however, it was on the threshold of one of the most heinous conflicts ever known in its contemporary history. An armed movement called the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army emerged, later broken up into ever-mushrooming splinter groups, declared war against the government. In response, the government recruited infamous paramilitaries known as *Janjaweed* to fight the movements. The Janjaweed devastated whole homelands of the originally African natives. By February 2014, thousands of villages were pillaged and then burned to the ground, civilians were killed, internally displaced or coerced to take refuge in neighbouring countries. In the first two years of the conflict, the international community was shockingly alarmed by the atrocities that the parties to the conflict committed against the people of Darfur. 'Many UN-related reports claim that the conflict claimed between 200,000 and 500,000 lives, about 2000 villages were completely decimated and more than two million people were made homeless' (Garri, 2015: 143). In July 2007, the United Nations resolved to deploy a hybrid UN-

1 African Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) to protect civilians and help the  
 2 government restore peace and security. Reaching sustainable peace in Darfur is  
 3 still a long shot. The ongoing conflict has forced and is still forcing linguistic  
 4 minorities in Darfur to become IDPs and refugees.

5 In the IDPs camps, schoolchildren speaking local languages are currently  
 6 disadvantaged by their limited proficiency in Arabic. While the problem of  
 7 teaching in Arabic is inherent to many children across the country, the IDPs  
 8 children in particular are suffering from a two-pronged dilemma: on the one  
 9 hand, their learning difficulties are exacerbated by a lack of effective teacher-  
 10 student interaction because textbooks are written in Arabic. On the other hand,  
 11 they are not proficient enough in Arabic to understand what they learn.

12 A flyer published by the government-funded Women's Commission for  
 13 Refugee and Children 2006 states that schools at the IDPs camps do not have a  
 14 sufficient number of teachers and that the classrooms are overcrowded, with  
 15 limited or no teaching aids. As Reid (2006) notes, schools in Darfur are  
 16 understaffed, under-funded and often located in remote and hardly accessible  
 17 areas. Our field observation suggests that one can coin countless 'under-'  
 18 words to describe the deplorable situation of IDPs schools. Among the  
 19 estimated 257,000 conflict-affected children of school age in South Darfur  
 20 State alone, two-thirds of them are IDPs (*ibid.*). Most dropouts occur after only  
 21 a few years of schooling, even before the children have a chance to develop  
 22 basic literacy and numeracy skills.

## 23 24 25 **Methodology**

26  
27 The population of this study comprises IDPs schoolchildren studying in  
 28 their second year at two basic schools (equivalent to primary schools), one at  
 29 the Kalma IDPs camp and another in Nyala town, as well as parents and  
 30 teachers. The Kalma camp, located 17 kilometres east of Nyala town, is the  
 31 largest camp across Darfur. It hosts approximately 150,000 people (all natives  
 32 of African origin) who were displaced at intermittent intervals since the  
 33 eruption of the current conflict in 2003. The sample of the study comprised 201  
 34 children studying at Qatar Basic School in the Kalma camp and 123  
 35 schoolchildren studying at Bakhit Basic School in Nyala. The sample also  
 36 included 105 teachers teaching at 19 different schools in Direig, Kalma and  
 37 Otash IDPs camps as well as 11 parents drawn from the same camps and from  
 38 Nyala. Qatar Basic School was selected to represent a sample of schoolchildren  
 39 who were disadvantaged by their low proficiency in Arabic and displacement  
 40 from rural areas where a low variety of Arabic was spoken. Bakhit Basic  
 41 School was selected to represent a sample of educationally and linguistically  
 42 privileged children who were not been displaced and were proficient in Arabic.  
 43 The latter sample also represented different ethnic groups whose languages are  
 44 widely spoken in their homelands but who were also proficient bilinguals. The  
 45 rationale for selecting these two schools was to depict how wide the  
 46 (under)achievement was between the two samples of schoolchildren.

We employed quantitative data collection tools to generate the data, including (a) a questionnaire designed for the teachers, (b) an Arabic language proficiency test administered to schoolchildren, and (c) second-year final examination records accessed from the two schools. We also generated qualitative data from interviews conducted in Arabic with the teachers and parents. They were asked to express their attitudes towards how (in)effective the use of Arabic as the only MOI was and what they thought about the role the current conflict could have played in the emergence of their attitudes towards teaching in Arabic. We also observed the efficiency of teacher-learner interaction and their level of mutual intelligibility while the children were involved in classroom activities. For ease of reference, extracts from the interviewees' answers were coded. The initials K, O and N stand for Kalma, Otashand Nyala, respectively; P and T stand for Parent or Teacher; and the digits indicate the order of the interviewees in our list. Thus, for example, **OT12** means a teacher interviewee from the Otash IDPs camp identified as number 12.

The first part of the questionnaire contained items structured to produce data about the teachers' attitudes towards communicative-related problems in classes and to gain insights into their perceptions of how the children's low proficiency in Arabic impacts effective classroom-interaction and its relationship with academic achievements. The second part was designed to generate data on the extent to which first- and second-year textbooks written in Arabic met the learners' linguistic and cultural needs.

An Arabic language proficiency test was also administered to both samples of children. The tested language abilities covered an objective comprehension test (a short text followed by multiple-choice questions), a vocabulary multiple-choice test and a short sentence writing test. The tests were designed to elicit data on the children's proficiency in comprehension, their vocabulary stock, and their level of writing skills. The tests were conducted with the assistance of teachers whom we had commissioned to observe. The test takers' final-year examination records were also studied to draw an analogous analysis between the overall performance of the children studying at IDPs camps and that of their peers in Nyala town.

## **Analysis of Data and Discussion**

### *Academic Underachievement*

Our hypothesis in this section holds that giving instruction in Arabic resulted in the underachievement of IDPs schoolchildren whose Arabic proficiency was low, which in turn resulted in an ineffective classroom interaction. To test this hypothesis, we first administered a questionnaire to the teachers teaching the first- and second-year children at schools in Kalma, Otash and Direig IDPs camps. The findings below elucidate the communication difficulties that the children encountered.

1

Table (1): Communication difficulties due to teaching in Arabic							
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree	%
Camp	Direig	2.9%	1.0%	1.0%	15.2%	2.9%	22.9%
	Otash	1.0%	3.8%	1.0%	11.4%	6.7%	23.8%
	Kalma	6.7%	14.3%	1.0%	20.0%	11.4%	53.3%
	Total	10.5%	19.0%	2.9%	46.7%	21.0%	100.0%

2

3 Table 1 shows that 46.7% and 21% of the teachers, respectively, *agreed*  
4 and *strongly agreed* that the children encountered communication difficulties,  
5 indicating 67.7% of the teachers' opinions in aggregate validating our  
6 hypothesis.

7 Interviews with teachers also supported our hypothesis. Most of the  
8 teachers emphasised that the level of Arabic proficiency among the children  
9 was low enough to hinder them from learning effectively to an alarming extent.  
10 A teacher in the Otash IDPs camp stated as follows (**Extract TO12**):

11

12 يمكن القول بأن قدرات التواصل في اللغة العربية لدى التلاميذ [النازحين] مشابهة بقدرات  
13 تلامذتهم في مدينة نيالا. التلاميذ في المدينة غالباً لا يتحدثون لغة غير العربية. على أية حال  
14 تقريباً كل الأطفال في معسكرات النازحين يتحدثون لغاتهم الخاصة والتي يستخدمونها حتى  
15 في داخل المدرسة.

16

17 I cannot say the communication skills of the [internally displaced] pupils in  
18 Arabic are as the same as that of their peers in Nyala town. The pupils in the  
19 town do not usually speak languages other than Arabic. However, almost all  
20 the schoolchildren in the internally displaced persons' camps speak their  
21 own languages which they use even inside the school.

22

## 23 The Communication Barrier

24

25 In this section, we investigated the negative effects of Arabic as the MOI  
26 on teacher-student communication. To some teachers, the situation of IDPs  
27 schoolchildren who spoke little Arabic was very critical. One teacher deplored  
28 the lack of motivation for learning among his classes due to communication  
29 barriers, particularly among children in the first year. Such lack of interest was,  
30 as we also observed was, mostly associated with the low teacher-learner  
31 classroom interaction as well as a lack of smooth delivery of teaching inputs.

32

33 To mitigate communication breakdowns, we observed that some teachers  
34 translated whole lesson chunks into the children's mother tongue. Some  
35 teachers believed that using the mother tongue did not reduce the status of  
36 Arabic as an official language or as a medium of instruction. One teacher  
37 reported that when he sometimes translated into the learners' mother tongue  
38 while teaching, his classes seemed to develop better Arabic proficiency.  
39 Likewise, the majority of the teachers believed that a lack of mutual  
communication resulted in boring teaching practices because they were unable

to transmit thoughts and ideas without using an MOI familiar to the children. A headmaster at the Direig IDPs camp believed that the use of Arabic as a single MOI in limited-Arabic proficiency IDPs classes was unfair. He argued as follows (**Extract TD8**):

عدم استخدام لغة (اللغة) الأم يضر بمصداقية السياسة التعليمية لأنها فشلت في توفير فرص التعليم متساوية لكل الأطفال.

*Not using the mother tongue jeopardises the credibility of the educational policy because it failed to offer equal education opportunities to all children.*

Based on his experience from communicative competence perspective, the same teacher contended that the children's achievement was better when the MOI conformed to the children's linguistic backgrounds.

Similarly, another teacher raised concerns about using local languages in classrooms because he said that it would create learning difficulties (**Extract TK13**):

توجد صعوبة في فهم الكتب المكتوبة بالعربي. وده [هذا] في النهاية بيأدي [سيؤدي] إلى تندي في مستوى الدراسة.

*There is difficulty in understanding the textbooks that are written in Arabic. This would ultimately result in low academic performance.*

To maintain a workable teaching technique, some teachers who spoke local languages code-switched during class. At Qatar Basic School, a teacher from the Fur ethnic group informed us that he usually shifted to the Fur language to illustrate some points to children who belonged to the Fur group. When he was asked what he would do with children who spoke other languages, he said the majority of the children were Fur, but he knew a bit of Masalit and Zaghawa languages and sometimes used them while teaching. As we continued conferring with another teacher on the difficulties arising from the language barrier, he stated that some of his colleagues often code-switched to the learners' mother tongues to help them understand a difficult lesson. However, he disagreed with the idea of teaching one class in many languages because this, he argued, would be impractical. In the same vein, a teacher in Otash camp poignantly argued as follows (**Extract T09**):

انا استعجب ليه بتعب [لماذا اتعب] نفسي بشرح الأشياء بلغة أنا متأكد بأنو [بأن] طلابي ما يفهمونها [لا يفهمونها] بسهولة.... أغلبية الطلاب في الصف الأول في المدرسة يأتون إلى المدرسة وهم ضعاف في العربي [اللغة العربية].

*I wonder why I bother myself explaining lessons in a language that I'm quite sure my classes do not understand easily.... The majority of the children in the first class arrive at school with very little Arabic.*

However, some teachers were against using native languages in teaching. A teacher contended that teaching in Arabic hampered maintaining an effective two-way communication between teachers and children at the IDPs schools. Another teacher not only strongly disagreed with the idea that teaching in Arabic caused passive interaction in his classes but further argued that, based

on his own experience, effective student-student and teacher-student interaction in his native language-speaking classes were better when he used Arabic. According to another teacher at the Kalma IDPs camp, intensive use of pupils' mother tongue in the classroom would prevent pupils from becoming proficient in Arabic (**Extract TK1**):

نحن لا نشجعهم باستخدام لغاتهم الخاصة داخل الفصل لأنهم إذا فعلوا ذلك فإن مستواهم في اللغة العربية لا تتحسن.

*We discourage them from speaking much in their mother tongues in classrooms because if they do that, their proficiency in the Arabic language will not improve.*

### Arabic Proficiency vs. Academic Achievement

This section explores the extent to which Arabic as a sole MOI was detrimental to the academic achievements of the IDPs children.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree	%
Camp	Direig	1.9%	1.0%	1.0%	6.7%	12.4%	22.9%
	Otash	3.8%	1.0%	0.0%	4.8%	14.3%	23.8%
	Kalma	1.9%	2.9%	1.0%	19.0%	28.6%	53.3%
Total		7.6%	4.8%	1.9%	30.5%	55.2%	100.0%

More than a half (55.2%) of the teachers and a great number (30.5%) of them *strongly agreed* and *agreed*, respectively, that academic underachievement of the IDPs schoolchildren was caused by their limited proficiency in Arabic (Table 2).

### Curriculum and cultural background of the IDP children

This section investigates whether the ethno-cultural backgrounds and identities of the IDPs children were incorporated into teaching materials. Such a situation not only, as we hypothesised, exacerbated the learning difficulties of the children but also exposed them to cultural alienation and social detachment. To validate this hypothesis, a questionnaire was administered to teachers at the IDPs schools.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree	%
Camp	Direig	6.7%	1.0%	1.9%	1.0%	12.4%	22.9%
	Otash	6.7%	2.9%	1.9%	1.0%	11.4%	23.8%
	Kalma	17.1%	6.7%	5.7%	3.8%	20.0%	53.3%
Total		30.5%	10.5%	9.5%	5.7%	43.8%	100.0%

Table 3 shows that 30.5% of the teachers *strongly disagreed* and 10.5% of them *disagreed* with the point that curricula were designed to reflect cultural realities of the children. On the contrary, a nearly equal number of teachers (43.8%) *strongly agreed* that cultural experiences of the children were not incorporated into the curriculum. In this vein, an IDPs Education Coordination Officer based in Nyala explained as follows (**Extract TN1**):

التلاميذ في مدارس النازحين لديهم قصصهم وأغانيتهم ورقصاتهم الخاصة. لغاتهم وثقافتهم غنية مثل اللغة العربية...، ولكن لأنهم يدرسون باللغة العربية يحدث إعاقة [في التحصيل الدراسي].

*Pupils in the internally displaced persons' schools have their own stories, songs and folklores. Their languages and cultures are as rich as that of the Arabic..., but because they study in Arabic, there is a barrier [to their academic attainment].*

However, the data gleaned from the teacher interviewees revealed that a sizeable number of them were against developing bilingual textbooks or incorporating local contexts into the curriculum for religious viewpoints. In this regard, one teacher argued as follows (**Extract TN5**):

اللغة العربية هي لغة القرآن ويجب أن تشكل ثقافة المسلم. لذلك مافي [لا يوجد] داعي بإدخال كل الثقافات واللغات الأخرى في المنهج.

*Arabic is the language of the Qur'an; it should mould the culture of Muslims. Therefore, there is no need to have all other local languages and cultures included in the curriculum.*

## **The Academic Achievement: A Test-Drawn Repertoire**

This section further tests the previous hypothesis that using Arabic as an MOI hampered the IDPs children from academic attainment. Tests in Arabic comprehension, Arabic vocabulary stock and the ability to write short sentences in Arabic were administered to children studying at Qatar and Bakhit schools.

### **The Reading Comprehension Test**

The overwhelming majority of the children at Qatar School failed the comprehension test (as many as 84.6% of them). By contrast, almost half of the children studying at Bakhit School (51.2%) excelled in the test, and 35.8% did very well. Evidently, the number of the highest-performing test takers at Qatar School nearly equalled the number of failures at Bakhit School (Table 4).

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Table (4): Performance on the comprehension test								
Marks	0 – 14		15 – 25		21 – 30			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	total	%
Bakhit School	16	13.0%	44	35.8%	63	51.2%	123	100%
Qatar School	170	84.6%	31	15.4%	0	0.0%	201	100%
* Minimum marks to pass = 15								

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3 During the test, we observed that the subjects at Bakhit School immediately  
 4 began reading the passage and then answered the comprehension questions.  
 5 Some of them answered all the questions and turned in their answer sheets in  
 6 less than 20 minutes. When the test sheets were distributed to the children at  
 7 Qatar school, however, no single child started reading the passage from the  
 8 outset. The children not only waited until the invigilator verbally instructed  
 9 them in their mother tongues but also kept asking him to read the passage and  
 10 the comprehension questions. This group of children looked very distracted  
 11 while they were taking the test. There was mayhem now and then, and some of  
 12 them began whispering to each other while others stole glances at the answer  
 13 sheets of their peers. The instructor sometimes used the children's first  
 14 language to clarify questions several times but did so in vain. As noted by a  
 15 teacher in the Kalma camp, using mother tongues in the IDPs children's  
 16 examination rooms was not an option but a necessity (**Extract TK6**):

17

أنا أهمل إلى إستخدام لغة [اللغة] الأم عند الأطفال لشرح بغض الأشياء [الأسئلة] الصعبة في  
 الامتحان. لو جيتو معاي [ جنتم معي ] إلى الفصل تعرفو [ستعرفون] بأنه لا يوجد خيار آخر. مثلاً  
 بعض تلاميذ الصف الأول يفهمو بسيط جداً [إذا لم نستخدم لغاتهم].

21

*I tend to use the children's mother tongue to explain some difficult points in the  
 22 examinations. If you come with me into the classroom, you will realise that there  
 23 is no other option. For example, some of our first class pupils understand very  
 24 little [if we do not use their languages].*

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## The Vocabulary Stock Test

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There was great variation in the vocabulary test results achieved by children at  
 Bakhit School versus those at Qatar School. None of the children at Qatar  
 School passed the test, whereas all of their peers at Bakhit School passed  
 (Table 5). The vocabulary stock among IDPs children was almost non-existent.  
 The figures in this table are self-explanatory. They clearly depict the plight of  
 the IDPs schoolchildren. Arabic vocabulary was their weakest language aspect  
 in all of the tests they tempted.

1

Table (5): Comparing pupils' performance on the vocabulary test									
Marks	0 – 10		11 – 20		21 - 30		31 - 42		%
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	total %
Bakhit School	18	9.8%	10	8.1%	22	17.9%	89	64.2%	139 100%
Qatar School	182	90.5%	19	9.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	201 100%
* Minimum marks to pass = 21									

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To gain insights into this plight, we should revisit some contentious arguments posed by some teachers and parents as to how ineffective mother tongue instruction was. A teacher in Kalma vented his anger about teaching only in Arabic (**Extract T01**):

8

التدريس بالعربي؟ أنا متأكد إنو [إن] تلاميذي لا يفهمون [الحصة] بسهولة. التدريس باللغة العربية لتلاميذ الصف الأول هو في الواقع ضياع زمن.

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*Teaching in Arabic? ... I'm quite sure my pupils do not understand [the lesson] easily. Teaching in Arabic to the first and second classes is really a waste of time.*

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The majority of the parents also lamented that their children were forced to learn with limited Arabic vocabularies. A parent attributed the learning disability of her ten-year-old daughter to her limited Arabic vocabulary. This argument was further supported by an Arabic teacher. The schoolchildren, he reported, were often hesitant to use Arabic inside classrooms because they feared being ridiculed by their peers due to their poor vocabulary. To retain their self-esteem, the teacher said that some children remained silent almost all day at school. This is reminiscent of the situation of the Tanzanian language education policy for children from linguistic minorities, about which a student recalled his feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence:

*I know of classmates who stayed dumb in the classroom rather than to embarrass themselves in a language they were not even sure they understood* (Roy-Campbell, 1996: 16).

Having no or limited vocabulary in a language greatly hampers learning it. For example, Desai (2012) investigated the case of Xhosa-speaking children grades 4 and 7 in South Africa. The pupils were given a set of pictures, which they had to arrange in the right order, and then described them in both Xhosa and English. Desai found that the vocabulary that the children used when they expressed themselves in Xhosa was richer than that they used to express themselves in English.

## The Sentence Writing Test

All of the IDPs children at Qatar Basic School failed the sentence writing test, whereas all of their peers at Bakhit Basic School passed the same test (Table 6).

Table (6): Performance on the sentence structure test								
Marks	0 – 13		14 -20		21 -28			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bakhit School	15	12.2%	54	43.9%	54	43.9%	123	100%
Qatar School	149	74.1%	52	25.9%	0	0.0%	201	100%
* Minimum marks to pass the test = 14								

Finally, we obtained records of the second-year final exam marks in the four subjects in which the children were tested (the Holy Qur'an, Islamic Studies, mathematics and Arabic language) to compare the overall academic achievement of the IDPs children with that of their peers in Nyala (Table 7).

Table (7): Overall academic performance in four subjects								
Subjects	Holy Qur'an		Islamic studies		Mathematics		Arabic language	
Status	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
Bakhit School	100%	0.0%	100%	0.0%	100%	0.0%	100%	0.0%
Qatar School	32.8%	67.2%	69.8%	30.2%	29.8%	70.2%	43.4%	56.6%
* Pass mark = 50								

The figures in Table 7 are self-explanatory. Apart from Islamic studies, which the pupils at Qatar School were able to pass (69.8%), their overall achievement in the other subjects was extremely low. On the contrary, all the pupils at Bakhit Basic School passed in all subjects.

## Parents' Attitudes towards Arabic

This section tests our hypothesis that LPs in Sudan deprived children coming from speech communities rather than Arabic of the right to be taught in their own languages, causing growing antipathy towards Arabic among teachers and parents. Gleaning data from parent and teacher interviewees, we elaborate below on how the current conflict in Darfur has buttressed this antipathy.

The majority of the parents believed that their children were underprivileged in schools because of their lower fluency in Arabic compared with students in Nyala. For example, a parent who was a member of a Parental Council at the Kalma camp stated as follows (**Extract PK5**):

إذا أطفالنا لازم يدرسوا [إذا كان لإطفالنا أن يتعلموا] زي [كتعليم] أطفالنا في نيالا، لازم يدرّهم بلغاتهم الخاصة.... أنا أستغرب ليه المدرسين ما بستخدموا [لا يستخدمون] لغة التلاهيذ. أنا كل يوم أغضب [أجبر] ولدي عشان [لكي] يمشي المدرسة، لكنو بيقول [لكنه يقول] لي أنا ما بفهم [لا أفهم] كلام الأستاذ [بالعربي].

*If our children should receive the same type of education as those in Nyala do, they should be taught in their own languages.... I wonder why the teachers do not speak to our children in their languages. Every day I force onmy son to go to the school, but he says he cannot understand what the teachers say [in Arabic] very well.*

As some teachers did not find it harmful to use Arabic as an MOI, there were also some parents whose attitudes towards Arabic were more positive than their attitudes towards native languages for reasons related to economic and upward mobility. Arguing over the instrumental role of Arabic in Sudan, a young parent argues (**Extract PO10**):

نحن لا يمكن أن نزيح اللغة العربية من حياتنا لانها جزء من حياتنا. انحن [نحن] كلنا يجب أن نتحدث بالعربي في المدارس والأسواق. لازم [يجب على] أطفالنا أن يدرسوا بالعربي.

*We cannot remove Arabic from our lives because it is a part of our life. We all have to speak in Arabic at school and at the market. Our children have to learn in Arabic.*

## Discussion

The findings convey multi-layered educational, socio-cultural and ethnic factors at play. The academic underachievement of the IDPs' schoolchildren is primarily traceable to teacher-learner communication breakdowns resulting from the use of Arabic as a sole MOI. These breakdowns occur because Arabic is not the mother tongue for the vast majority of IDPs children. Most of them are displaced from areas where Arabic, despite being a lingua franca, was not widely used in everyday communication. As Holmes (2009) notes, a child's communication is developed through multiple cultural factors such as family, socioeconomic status, dialect, and education—all of which can together impact his or her learning. At the time the children were being enrolled in schools in their homelands before the eruption of the current conflict, their learning difficulties were greatly facilitated by their direct contact with peers who spoke Arabic at schools to which Arabic-speaking and native language-speaking children were enrolled. By February 2014, the IDPs were almost always natives of African origins characterised by ethnolinguistic vitality (Garriand Mugaddam, 2015); hence, the full exposure of their schoolchildren to Arabic-speaking peers was no longer possible.

That teacher-learner communication difficulties (whether in listening, speaking, reading or writing) result in academic underachievement is a documented phenomenon (Evans and Cleghorn, 2012) confirmed by our findings. Communication difficulties must have resulted not only from the children being taught in Arabic but also from their being detached from their

1 social and cultural environments (as elaborated below). The fact that Arabic is  
 2 the official language and an unrivalled lingua franca state-wide did not mitigate  
 3 the communication plight of the children. There are several sharp inter- and  
 4 intra-communal dialects of Arabic spoken in Darfur. The dialects greatly differ  
 5 from the dialect in which national teaching aids are written. Inside classrooms,  
 6 we observed, classical or near-classical Arabic was the dominant MOI,  
 7 whereas in everyday life communications, the children use an Arabic dialect  
 8 whose intelligibility continuum is largely confined to Darfur and is often  
 9 pejoratively known as “*arabimukassar*” (Thelwal, 1971), or gibberish Arabic.  
 10 Communication breakdowns in such situations arise, as Spolsky (2004) notes,  
 11 because children in their first days of schooling rarely have control over the  
 12 language(s) that the school system uses.

13 Difficulty in reading and writing (as suggested by comprehension,  
 14 vocabulary and short sentence writing tests) are other areas of communication  
 15 deficiency. The children are handicapped by the provision of instruction only  
 16 in Arabic at such an alarming magnitude that their academic career is  
 17 threatened by total failure. During the tests, the children were distracted and  
 18 unconfident, unlike their peers in Nyala. Their test anxiety was exacerbated by  
 19 their inability to understand the test instructions written in Arabic; thus, they  
 20 could not answer questions on the skills they were tested on. The children at  
 21 Bakhit School outperformed their peers at Qatar School, who either failed or  
 22 got a minimal passing grade. Still worse was the assessment method itself, as  
 23 Brisk (2008) notes that bilinguals should be assessed on language and literacy  
 24 in both languages, which was attempted by none of the teachers.

25 Our study did not investigate whether the children’s proficiency in Arabic  
 26 was hampered by their extremely limited vocabulary, or vice versa. The  
 27 vocabulary test indicated that children’s vocabulary stock was one of their  
 28 weakest aspects. The weakness to such an alarming degree needs to be  
 29 deciphered further in future studies. As a rule of thumb, however, the two  
 30 deficiencies must have an interrelated effect upon each other. Holmes (2009)  
 31 states that some topics require background knowledge and specialised  
 32 vocabulary to understand. For example, for someone who is not proficient in  
 33 English, Holmes explains, the phrase ‘stealing a base’ in baseball would mean  
 34 a thief is running away with a ‘base’ and being hunted by the police. Those  
 35 whose schemata are based on fluent English vocabulary would know that  
 36 ‘stealing a base’ has another meaning. The IDP children whose linguistic  
 37 schemata are not built on Arabic must have suffered a great deal to understand  
 38 vocabulary in such contexts as well as in situations similar to those experienced  
 39 by Xhosa-speaking children. There is a methodological flaw in the sentence  
 40 writing test that we found it imperative to explain. Children in their second  
 41 year of schooling are usually not mature enough to express themselves in  
 42 writing, but given the simplicity of sentence structures tested, this drawback  
 43 can be insignificant.

44 It appears that parents’ concerns over the academic underachievement of  
 45 their children did not come from, as we argued, their understanding of  
 46 monolingual education abstractions of how it could hamper the learning of  
 47 linguistic minorities. Rather, their views centred around the overall learning

difficulties at the camps, the deplorable physical learning environments displacement produced, the passive role of the government in redressing education inequalities and the lack of teaching aids. Parents can play a vital role in ensuring that schools effectively address the needs of bilingual education (BE). At the IDPs camps, however, this was not possible because there was no direct parent-government coordination to address such needs, and if any existed, it could not be effective because the vast majority of the parents were illiterate and were not involved in decision making in the field. Nevertheless, the parents could not have been unaware of the disadvantages arising from monolingual education.

Teachers, however, appeared to be more accommodating than parents regarding the established tradition of using Arabic as an MOI but were more worried than the parents about their inability to give instruction in local languages that rendered learning outputs negligible. We observed that a great number of the teachers bemoaned their dissatisfaction with the official denial of BE in Sudan.

As voiced by some parents, the IDPs children lacked motivation to learn to the extent that, as one parent complained, he had to *force on* his son to go to school every day, “*but he says he cannot understand well what the teachers say [in Arabic]*” (extract PK5). Given the possibility of such recurrences among other children, it would not be a far-fetched conclusion to suggest that the academic underachievement of IDPs children was primarily attributed to teaching in Arabic. The plight of the children under the study was not only perpetuated by having their native languages rejected but also, as Cummins (2001) contends, by being alienated from their inherent cultures and perception of the world around them. Learning environments at the IDPs camps looked like confinements in which the children were kept to detach them from their languages and local cultures leading to total immersion in Arabic. The schooling environment suggests that children start learning from a disadvantage. Their previous views about life and the world are dismissed in the new learning settings; their learning, as a consequence, occurs in an experiential vacuum.

The reason that teacher-learner interaction breakdowns occurred in the classroom due to the children’s language deficiency was not conclusive among the teachers. They were divided on whether such breakdowns were caused by giving instruction in Arabic only, what techniques they could use to overcome it or by other factors. For the majority of the teachers, the use of children’s mother tongue could not be avoided as a technique to overcome communication breakdowns and, hence, to solve the problem of academic underachievement. For others, the learning dilemmas should be conceived in state-wide contexts in which overall academic underachievement issues could be situated and handled. However, our observation also confirms the very obvious communication barriers occurring because of using Arabic as the only medium of instruction. Code-switching and translation into the mother tongue were the most practised techniques among teachers who spoke local languages. However, such techniques fall short in giving a workable solution making it a perennial problem for the teachers to solve the challenges of teacher-learner

communication breakdowns and give instruction effectively. In addition, not all teachers were multilinguals, and if even somewhere, the practice was not efficient. Disagreement among the teachers over the tradition of teaching in the mother tongue was obviously a perplexing matter. We ascribe this disagreement to political reasons that, as Evans and Cleghorn (2012) note, hinder teachers from taking into consideration learners' home cultures and languages. The teachers apparently had their own political affiliations, and we discerned that some of them must have been hardliners supporting the government-imposed monolingual education.

Our investigation also registered a strong interrelation between academic (under)achievement of the IDPs schoolchildren and their low proficiency in Arabic. This finding further buttresses the argument for how detrimental monolingual education is for bilingual children, as Baker (2001: 297) notes:

*[monolingual education] denies the child's skills in the home language, even denies the identity and self-respect of the child itself. Instead of building upon existing language proficiency and knowledge, the 'sink or swim' approach attempts to replace such language abilities.*

Language proficiency entails the ability to function in school socially and academically (Brisk, 2008). Alongside the curriculum content that is insensitive to linguistic minority students' needs, we also observed that the overall schooling environments were not conducive to promoting academic learning. Oppressive power relations, in Cummins' terms (2000), existed in the schools. There were no extracurricular activities or compensatory measures to mainstream the IDPs children. The government left the children and the teachers by themselves to make something out of nothing.

The teachers' opinions on whether the cultural realities of the children were integrated into teaching materials (30.5% *strongly disagree* versus 43.8% *strongly agree*, as shown in Table 3) constituted a very unlikely finding. We appraised all the four subjects taught to the population of our study. Apart from the portion of the Holy Qura'n in which local cultures had no room to be accommodated, the contents of the other three textbooks hardly reflected local cultures. In terms of statistical significance, however, we could take the ratings given to this item in the questionnaire as evidence to support our position that LP in Sudan flagrantly denies equality in the rights to IIMT.

While concerns regarding the inequality arising from monolingual education were overtly and strongly voiced by the vast majority of the teachers, they did not give reasons to defend their belief that Arabic, as claimed by some of them, was an indispensable medium of instruction for religious reasons. We believe that the viewpoints of the teachers on the interrelation between religion and Arabic are ascribed to the stereotypical perception that Arabic is the language of Islam. This argument might be untenable. Millions of Muslims around the world do not know or speak Arabic but are known for their faith in and submission to Islam. The same applies to other faiths. Not all Christians are necessarily English speakers, and not all Jewish people speak Hebrew. Essentially, the teachers were reiterating and operationalising the language

1 ideology through which the national LP is invested to have local languages and  
2 their by-products superseded by Arabic.

3 Differences in opinions between teachers and parents in whether the IDP  
4 schoolchildren should receive IIMT further invite us to suggest that the  
5 urgency of bilingualism in education is gaining ground among teachers more  
6 than ever before. The reasons are not merely linguistic. Amidst the state-led  
7 suppression of native languages, simmering LR awareness has begun to surface  
8 among the speech communities in Darfur. As Garri (2013) notes, it was not  
9 until 2010 when the emergence of native language revitalisation movements  
10 was in full swing and, with this, dormant linguistic inequalities were overtly  
11 voiced by minority speech communities, heightened by the current conflict,  
12 that awareness of the need for linguistic revitalisation emerged in Darfur.

13 As Albaugh (2007) found in Cameroon and Babaci-Wilhite (2015a) in  
14 Tanzania, parents' preference for educating their children in the national  
15 language for economic reasons is reasonable. In Darfur as well, the belief that  
16 Arabic should be used in education for economic reasons was almost  
17 universally agreed upon by the teachers and parents. The credit given to Arabic  
18 in this regard was apparently associated with its key role as a national  
19 language, its use in education at tertiary level, and its instrumental role in  
20 social and economic gains. Having a good command of Arabic is a prerequisite  
21 for getting a job; favouring learning in Arabic in this sense would be  
22 indisputable as economic gains are weighed against one criterion, i.e., one can  
23 either receive education in Arabic or miss potential career opportunities. Again,  
24 parents' attitudes towards Arabic are by no means attributable solely to  
25 economic reasons. Nor can they be linked to their concerns about IIMT.  
26 Rather, the current conflict in Darfur seems to have given rise to sentimentality  
27 about native languages and the revitalisation of ethnicity and in-group  
28 identities. This trend was found to be more ubiquitous among educated parents  
29 than among uneducated ones.

30 It is noteworthy that the findings reached in this study cannot be  
31 generalised, at least not in the long term. IDPs children are currently  
32 undergoing an unplanned immersion process facilitated by their constant  
33 contact with people in towns. Communication difficulties are not as critical  
34 today as they were at the beginning of the displacement. For the long term,  
35 teachers and parents will opt to encourage the children to learn Arabic to cope  
36 with the national monolingual policy in education as they cannot resist the  
37 policies indefinitely. Children raised in the IDPs camps will also not be as  
38 disadvantaged at schools as were those displaced at the beginning of the  
39 conflict. The latter can overcome their low proficiency in Arabic by their  
40 current ongoing exposure to exclusively Arabic-speaking communities. Many  
41 IDPs (schoolchildren, parents and youth) are now commuters and are  
42 becoming resilient by leading in petty trades.

43 Essentially, Sudan has adopted, in Spolsky's (2004) term, a *linguicentric*  
44 language policy, and accordingly, LRs to bilingual education are denied,  
45 except on a theoretical level. Our findings suggest that the IDPs children were  
46 suffering from multi-faceted learning difficulties exacerbated by the absence of  
47 their cultural and linguistic heritages at macro LP-making levels: the state

1 develops curriculum that denies the right to receive IIMT. A careful selection  
 2 of an acceptable MOI for linguistic minorities is an important factor, as  
 3 Babaci-Wilhite (2015) notes, in enriching the learners' cultural, emotional,  
 4 cognitive and socio-psychological benefits.

5 Our study offers insightful implications. There is Arabicization process in  
 6 Sudan through *linguicide* and *linguicism* in the way suggested by Skutnabb-  
 7 Kangasand Philipson (1995). It has been a state-gear LP for more than sixty  
 8 years. Given that an overwhelming majority of the IDPs are characterised by  
 9 ethnolinguistic vitality, their displacement to camps in the vicinities of many  
 10 cities in Darfur has exposed them to contact with Arabic-speaking communities  
 11 at an unprecedented magnitude, both in the length of time and in the intensity  
 12 of contact. Thus, the loss of native languages becomes increasingly inevitable.  
 13 For the government, the time is now ripe to invest in this conflict-given  
 14 coercive assimilation through which the Arabicization process can be  
 15 expedited. As there is no glimmer of hope that the conflict in Darfur could be  
 16 resolved soon and the IDPs could return to their homelands, the collective loss  
 17 of native languages will be recalled in history as the largest in scale and the  
 18 quickest in time.

19 There is a reason to believe that the government has deliberately distanced  
 20 itself from intervention in the IDPs children's dilemma in the hope that the  
 21 'sink or swim' monolingual approach to education, in Baker's (2001) terms,  
 22 will be a cost-effective shortcut to the process of native language erasure. The  
 23 current policy in practice, to describe it aptly, is of a 'sink or sink' nature rather  
 24 than 'sink or swim'. This conundrum invites us to argue that the longer the  
 25 IDPs stay at the camps, the more quickly they will lose their languages.  
 26 Mindful of this fact, the government is slowing its intervention to address the  
 27 plight of the IDPs.

28 Nevertheless, for IDPs teachers, parents, bilingual education proponents  
 29 and the like, the case of schoolchildren in Darfur makes it difficult not to  
 30 realise that bilingual education in Sudan is implausible. Approximately sixteen  
 31 local languages are spoken in Darfur, with no single language spoken by any  
 32 dominant group. Again, Sudan is being devastated by several protracted civil  
 33 conflicts based on political and ethnic rights backgrounds. South Sudan  
 34 separated in 2011 against the backdrop of political, ideological and linguistic  
 35 inequalities (Garri, 2014). The unity of Sudan will again be at stake unless  
 36 national LP continues to capitalise on the current language situation in Darfur  
 37 to consolidate the "language unity for state unity" approach.

38 Our observations also suggest that the dilemma of the schoolchildren was  
 39 not entirely about difficulties arising from monolingual education. Other  
 40 factors are also at play, including escalating insecurity at the IDPs camps, lack  
 41 of trained teachers, timely acquisition of textbooks, and the deplorable school  
 42 environment in which the IDPs children study. Dropout rates will rise as a  
 43 result. Inequalities in education at the IDPs camps will produce inevitable  
 44 grievances that may threaten communal integrity and national unity. The  
 45 government may need to balance the short-term benefits of Arabicization that it  
 46 has sought; otherwise, neglecting the needs of IDPs schoolchildren will  
 47 produce dire social, economic insecurity disparities in the long term.

## 1 Conclusion

2  
3 The paper explored LP in Sub-Saharan African from a historical  
4 perspective. We have argued that while the call for decolonising Africa from  
5 colonial languages was an appealing rhetoric to politicians and scholars alike,  
6 the LP across the continent has achieved no more than reproducing the colonial  
7 ideology of officialising the dominant language at the cost of minority  
8 languages.

9 The study has further investigated the extent to which monolingual  
10 education, i.e., giving instruction in Arabic only, had an impact on the learning  
11 achievement of displaced children coming from speech communities in the  
12 war-torn Darfur. The study concluded that the IDP's schoolchildren lagged in  
13 education because they were taught in Arabic as a single MOI. This problem  
14 was perpetuated by, on the one hand, their low proficiency in Arabic which  
15 resulted from and/or resulted in the lack of efficient classroom teacher-learner  
16 interaction. On the other hand, the children lagged in education because  
17 textbooks were designed in a way that was insensitive to their cultural and  
18 learning needs.

19 The study has highlighted some issues to consider. Recognition of all  
20 native languages in Darfur, at least to meet the needs of linguistic minority  
21 schoolchildren, is hardly an achievable goal in Sudan. Nevertheless, the  
22 pressing need to cope with difficulties arising from such situations is  
23 unmistakable. This conundrum emanates from multi-faceted factors. Bearing in  
24 mind the 60-year Arabicisation policies designed to eliminate the use of  
25 native languages, the government is unlikely to accommodate minority LRs  
26 and offer equal education opportunities to IDPs children. The other factor is the  
27 lack of compensatory measures on the part of the government to meet its  
28 obligations to secure environments conducive to good education. Although the  
29 conflict is currently not as tense as it was in the early 2010s, the IDPs cannot  
30 return to their homelands. Hence, the learning difficulties of IDPs children will  
31 continue.

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