

Institution: University of Reading

Unit of Assessment: 25 Education

Title of case study: Resourcing multilingual education in Africa

1. Summary of the impact

University of Reading research, in collaboration with a South African partner, has led to the development of materials on literacy learning in multilingual settings in Africa, transforming teaching practice across the continent.

A second, related project is helping to deepen understanding of the conditions necessary for African language publishing to thrive, attracting considerable interest from the South African book industry. The findings have also been used to justify the inclusion of African languages in a South African reading campaign; to help civil society organisations campaigning for improved basic education in South Africa; and to support the development of local language materials in seven African countries.

2. Underpinning research

The research was led by Professor Viv Edwards, building on work she had carried out in the 1980s and 1990s focusing on linguistic and cultural diversity in UK classrooms and how teachers can be supported in their attempts to embrace this. Between 1998 and 2010, she extended the focus to Africa through work undertaken in collaboration with University of Reading colleagues Naz Rassool and Marriote Ngwaru, and Carole Bloch at the University of Cape Town.

In the first of two projects, a British Council Higher Education link award (2003–6) to Edwards and her team made it possible to compare responses to linguistic diversity on the part of UK and South African teachers. It drew on analysis of UK and South African policy documents and semi-structured interviews with educational policy makers and language activists in South Africa's Western Cape province. As well as demonstrating the many similarities between the challenges for teachers in the two countries, it highlighted two urgent needs in South Africa, where only 30 per cent of the population speaks English: the development of training resources for teachers working in multilingual classrooms, and the development of reading materials in a range of other languages. An output of this project was the creation of a suite of training materials for teachers working in multilingual classrooms.

This South African collaboration was the springboard for a further two-year project funded by the Leverhulme Trust (2008–10) on *Interdisciplinary perspectives on African language materials with children*, the aim of which was to deepen understanding of the conditions necessary for African language publishing to thrive. The project, led by Edwards and Ngwaru, had two strands: a case study of African language publishing for children in South Africa, and an evaluation of *Stories Across Africa*, a key project of ACALAN (African Academy of Languages), the language arm of the African Union, and the first pan-African project to produce materials for multilingual education.

The South African case study was the first comprehensive analysis of African language publishing for children anywhere on the continent. It entailed a survey of existing materials, categorised by language, age range, genre and publisher, which demonstrated important gaps in provision. These findings served as the starting point for in-depth, semi-structured interviews with publishers, translators, children's authors and policy makers. Thematic analysis identified a range of policies and practices which were either supportive of or represented obstacles to African language publishing, and led to a set of recommendations for both publishers and government.

The *Stories across Africa* strand of the project brought together publishers and educators from Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and South Africa for a series of meetings in 2008 and 2009 in Reading and Cape Town, recordings of which formed the data for analysis. The inclusion of this strand allowed comparison between South Africa, where the publishing industry is relatively well developed, and other parts of the continent. It thus has had the effect of considerably broadening and deepening the discussion of challenges for the production, marketing and distribution of African language materials, both in the countries concerned and as part of cross-border initiatives.

3. References to the research

- a. Rassool, N., Edwards, V. & Bloch, C. (2006): Language and development in multilingual settings: a case study of knowledge exchange and teacher education in South Africa. *International Review of Education* 52 (6): 277-28; DOI: [10.1007/s11159-006-9008-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-006-9008-x)
- b. Edwards, V. & Ngwaru, JM (2011): Multilingual education in South Africa: the role of publishers, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 32(5): 435-450; DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2011.592192](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.592192)
- c. Edwards, V. & Ngwaru, JM (2011): African language publishing for children in South Africa: challenges for translators, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(5): 589-602; DOI: [10.1080/13670050.2011.558618](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2011.558618)
- d. Edwards, V. & Ngwaru, M. (2012): African language books for children: issues for authors. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 24 (3), 1–15; DOI: [10.1080/07908318.2011.629051](https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2011.629051)

All of these articles were published in international refereed journals of high standing in the field. Reference 'a' reports the findings of the first of the two projects, funded by a British Council Higher Education Link award (2003–6) of £20,000. References 'b', 'c', and 'd' report the findings of the Leverhulme Trust-funded project on 'Interdisciplinary perspectives on African language materials for children' (2008–10; £126,000). Both grants were awarded to Viv Edwards. Each of the journals in which these articles appear is covered by at least 18 abstracting and indexing services.

4. Details of the impact

Impact overview

Outputs of the first project - training materials for teachers - are helping to change teaching practice in many thousands of classrooms across Africa. The findings of the second project have been used to support policy decisions in a national reading campaign in South Africa; are being used by civil society groups in the preparation of litigation for improved basic education, also in South Africa; and are serving as a focal point for materials development in a further six African countries.

Impact of first research project

The beneficiaries of the first research collaboration have been teachers and teacher educators in the school system in South Africa and beyond and, through them, very large numbers of children across the continent.

The TELL (Training for Early Literacy Learning) materials (<http://praesa.textmatters.com>) were designed for use in both short workshops and longer courses. They are the only training materials available for early literacy learning in multilingual settings and can be downloaded free of charge, both very important considerations in an African context. Since 2009, they have been used as part of the Pan-African MA on Multilingual Education at the University of Cape Town, which attracts approximately 15 teacher trainers a year from all over the continent; these trainers, in turn, cascade their learning as part of initial teacher education and continuing professional development courses on return to their workplaces.

The materials have also been used in the training of 3,000 teachers working for the Western Cape Education Department in preparation for the implementation of their new mother-tongue-based bilingual education policy; and, from 2012, as part of the training programme of Nal'ibali, a national reading-for-enjoyment initiative that aims to make people in South Africa – both children and adults – passionate about telling and reading stories (nalibali.org). Training for Nal'ibali will reach many thousands of volunteers every year.

Impact of second research project

The research carried out in the second research project affects not only teachers and teacher trainers, but also a wide range of groups associated with the book industry, including publishers of children's books, booksellers and distributors, translators and writers. Evidence of the importance of the project for the industry includes the willingness of the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) to circulate the findings to all 300 of its members in late 2010. The South African Book Development Council, the representative body of the South African book sector, offered a platform for dissemination at the inaugural event of the First National Book Week at Museum Africa, Johannesburg, in September 2010, allowing the research team to reach an audience of approximately 100 educational policy makers, language activists, book promotion organisations and trade journalists. The *PUKU Children's literature in South Africa* blog also featured the project in 2010, while *Bookmark*, the magazine of the South African Booksellers Association, included a two-page spread on the findings in 2011.

The recommendations contained in the final report have provided support for initiatives such as the hugely influential Nal'ibali campaign (see above). Acknowledging the importance of the research, the Director of Nal'ibali stated: "Your project lends academic credibility to our efforts; the analysis of existing materials draws attention to the gaping holes that need to be filled and offers support for the successful case we have made to our funders that Nal'ibali resources should be made available in the widest-possible range of African languages."

The findings have also proved useful to the Public Participation in Education Network (PPEN), which is committed to high-quality public education for all in South Africa. PPEN, together with some branches of the Progressive Principals' Association of the Western

Cape, is preparing a case concerning the right to basic education which will go first to the High Court with the aim of proceeding to the Constitutional Court. Highlighting the usefulness of the project, the Director of the Institute for Accountability in Southern Africa, which is funding the case, said: “Your research is of central importance to our case, because it represents the only independent evaluation of the African language materials for children fundamental to the implementation of effective basic education in South Africa. As such, it adds an important dimension to the arguments we are making for educational reform.”

Evidence of the impact of the project can also be found beyond South Africa in Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya. For instance, Bible Literacy Kenya, an NGO that works in partnership with local people to develop writing systems for culturally relevant literacy programmes, has been actively engaging with issues highlighted in the project throughout the period since its completion. Barbara Graham, Senior Literacy Consultant for the project commented: “The participatory nature of this research project and its cross-national dimension has served as a catalyst for discussion among language activists in many different African countries. It has allowed us to pool experiences and to identify practical ways forward, including cost-effective ways of materials production which take advantage of modern technologies.” Graham also includes discussion of these issues in a module on literacy offered by the Summer Institute of Linguistics attended by literacy specialists working all over the world.

A letter from the Dean of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology states; “The projects have gained the support of Ghanaian Publishers who are into local language publishing as well, and who over the years have had difficulty in promoting and selling their books. It has helped to popularize the books and last year the Ministry of Education assured to purchase a million copies of bilingual/L1 books for use in basic schools.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The sources below can corroborate the detailed impact (testimonials are available upon request)

Dean of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana (Development of multilingual education in Ghana and promotion of publication in Ghanaian languages resulting in the commitment of the Ministry of Education to purchase one million new books for use in basic education.)

Director Nali’bali project, South Africa (The use of the training materials in the training of very large numbers of teachers and volunteers in reading clubs. Advisory role and support on the Nali’bali project.)

Institute for Accountability in Southern Africa (Impact on legal case to go before the High Court in South Africa)

Mediator of the *PUKU Children’s literature in South Africa* blog (Dissemination of project findings in the non-academic sector – Second Research Project)

Senior Literacy Consultant, Summer Institute of Linguistics (Impact of the research on Bible Literacy Kenya)