Language policy, displacement and education in South Darfur: a case study

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the aspects of language policy in the Sudan and the way it affects the educational attainment of school children coming from language minorities in Darfur as well as how the current conflict resulted in the emergence of negative attitudes towards Arabic, the sole medium of instruction statewide. To this end, the chapter investigates the extent to which linguistic minority children's low proficiency in Arabic hampered, on the one side, their learning achievement and, and on the other side, how textbooks designed for these children exacerbated their learning difficulties. In addition, the chapter explores attitudes of parents and teachers towards Arabic, the sole medium of instruction at basic level[1]. The sample of the study comprised of two groups. The first group was represented by 324 young pupils (aged 6 – 10 years) studying in one school in Nyala town and in another at Kalma camp as well as 105 teachers teaching at the IDPs Schools. The second group was represented by 30 parent and 20 teacher interviewees who were living at the camps and in Nyala town. Different quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies were used to collect the relevant data. The quantitative data were obtained via a test given to the pupils, their final end of year examination records and by administering a structured questionnaire to the teachers (the first group). The qualitative data were gleaned from observations and interviews with teachers and parents (the second group). The study found that the level of Arabic proficiency among the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) children studying at the IDPs schools was very low. Therefore, the pupils suffered from lack of effective teacher-pupil interaction. Teaching in Arabic as a sole medium of education was also found to be a major factor in producing unfavourable learning environments for the children. Furthermore, the vast majority of the teachers and parents were found inclined to have native languages accommodated while teaching limited-Arabic proficient children. The emergence of this attitude was attributed to the simmering ethnic-based fragmentations which coincided with the eruption of the current conflict in Darfur.

1. Introduction

Language policy in the Sudan is fraught with a chequered and unstable history. Since the 1930s through the 1990s, language policies were so minority language-insensitive that they inevitably produced so unfavourable situations for native languages that their use retreated to small diminishing geographical niches. At intermittent intervals, Arabic and English reciprocally gained varying levels of national/official statuses, both in pre- and post-colonials eras. Amidst the policies made by the British colonials or by national regimes afterwards to empower English or Arabic, native languages were marginalised, except during the colonial times in the former South Sudan. Since the independence of the Sudan in

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[1] . In Sudan, 'basic level' is the first eight-year long stage in the educational rung, after which successful children are enrolled to three-year-stage high schools.

1956, however, Arabic took the lead in shaping the social, cultural and linguistic outlook of the state.

As Nation (2008) notes, today's nation states are undergoing pressures from bottom by the appealingly pressing calls for observing minority language rights and from above by globalisation maxims which call for founding unified state conventions. In the Sudan, the former pressures were discarded at the expense of the latter ones, for language policies have never been free of ideological motives and insensitivities to native languages. However, the 1990s marked a tremendous transformation of language policy into a state-level collective thinking. With it, terminologies such as 'arabicisation of tertiary education', 'islamisation of life' and 'fundamentalisation of knowledge' were introduced. Arabic was deemed the best medium through which these terminologies could be realised. The ultimate goal was to bring about an Arab culture and identity among the whole communities. Accordingly, speech communities were hardly had opportunities to maintain or develop their languages. Language policy-makers were quite aware of the role language can play in the making of a nation outlook. Linguistic habitus of Bourdieu (1991) stipulates that people who speak different languages might develop cultures and identities peculiar to their own environments. Emergence of peculiar identities was the thing the Sudanese language policy-makers did not want to happen. To unmake cultures and identities which might have been developed by native language speakers, language policies were tailored and operated through media and curricula so that a core Arabic-borne outlook of the Sudan could be maintained.

Although receiving education in mother tongue is a universal right, language minority children in Darfur are, as is the case everywhere in the Sudan, deprived of this right. When the current conflict erupted in 2003, whole communities were displaced to IDPs camps. By the virtue of coming from speech communities whose languages were vigorously spoken at homelands, but at varying levels of proficiency, the IDPs school children suffered from learning difficulties. While the problem of teaching in Arabic is an inherent problem to many school children coming from speech communities across the country, the IDPs children in particular faced language problems in classrooms. Their learning dilemmas were further exacerbated by lack of effective teacher-student interaction and by the fact that all teaching materials were written in Arabic.

Though it is a compelling problem to such a magnitude, there have never been pioneering studies on the education problems of displaced language minority children, in particular in Darfur. The present study explores, gains insights into and brings first-hand stories told by teachers and parents about the low academic achievements of the IDPs school children in Darfur.

2. Language policy in the Sudan

2.1. Language policies in the colonial era

The Juba Conference of 1947 was the first political benchmark of its kind in the history of the Sudan that admitted the mediatory role Arabic could play in the entire country. Following that conference, Arabic gained, Abu-Manga and Abubaker (2006) maintain, an extra elevated status opposite to that it had experienced in the 1930s. The Juba Conference was followed by illiteracy campaigns that did not target only the public at wide, but also all white-collar workers in the former South Sudan to speak in Arabic in official domains. As a result, the number of Arabic-speakers in the former South Sudan provinces increased.

During the colonial era, language policies were made by the British administration (Abu-Manga & Abubaker, 2006) whereby the former South Sudan was the focus of these policies (Mugaddam, 2002). Apparently, and due to political and ideological makings, the British wanted to spread the use of English outside the narrow circle of communication, in particular among the elite. But more significantly, Mugaddam (2002) and Mahmud (1983) argue, language policies were geared towards the suppression of Arabic for purely colonial hegemony and religious interests. Tangible evidence supports this argument. The British adopted many measures, notably (a) the initiation of the Rejaf Language Conference of 1927; (b) creation of no-man's land act; and (c) creation of Closed District Ordinance of 1929. While all these measures were intended for impeding the advancement of Arabic, among other policies, the Rejaf Language Conference was the first language body of its type tailored by the British towards practically enforcing English-favouring language policies. One of its major recommendations was to use the Roman script to harmonise the orthography of vernaculars in the former South Sudan. However, the conference hinted the possibility of using Arabic alphabet in certain communities among which mutual intelligibility of southern languages was difficult. The final output was to empower English at the cost of Arabic, both at community and schooling levels.

2.2. Language policies in the post-colonial eras

In the postcolonial eras, no significant language policy was initiated until 1969, when on May 9th, 1969 the ex-president Jaffer Mohammad Numeiry issued a presidential decree on language policy. The decree, Abu-Manga and Abubaker (2006) maintain, officially recognised the linguistic and cultural rights of speech communities. In June 1969, and in line with the directives of the aforesaid decree, a conference on education was held in Khartoum for setting broad guidelines for a new language policy. However, the conference concluded that, among others, (a) Arabic should immediately be used as a medium of instruction in towns and in multilingual areas in the former South Sudan provinces; and (b) vernaculars should be scripted in Arabic alphabet and used besides English in the first two forms in the schools located in the peripheries of the former South Sudan.

While language policies adopted in the post-colonial eras seemed lucid and somehow sensitive to native language languages, unstated policies unfavourable to the maintenance of native languages were being operationalised. Arabic was given an unprecedented, elevated status across the state. It did not only become the national language, but was also empowered in such a predatory way that native languages were coerced to very limited domains. This retreat was translated by some research-oriented endeavours – known as Language Survey Studies (LSSs) embarked on by the Institute of African and Asian Studies (IAAS) in 1972. Although the LSSs were ostensibly intended to study the status of the Sudanese languages and their level of use in different domains, they were not devoid of many implicit goals to empower Arabic for some sound reasons.

Firstly, Stevenson (1975) states that the LSSs were carried out with the aimed of: (a) identifying and documenting the Sudanese languages and knowing who speak them, especially languages spoken in small-scales and were likely to disappear in the foreseen future, (b) knowing the impact of Arabic on other languages, (c) collecting and recording oral literature, and (d) collecting the Sudanese language materials which were at that time outside the country. From 1976 through 1979, a series of twenty-nine booklets were produced by IAAS. The booklets provided comprehensive field-drawn data on the languages

surveyed. However, the surveys were by no means accommodative to, except verbally, prerequisites which would guarantee the maintenance of native languages.

Secondly, as contended by Abu-Manga and Abubaker (2006), the Sudanese political developments, including language policies, were faced by a lot of controversial issues in the field of education and language planning, not the least debates on the maintenance of native languages and their use in education in some areas. In terms of language empowering endeavours made, Arabic was the centre of those policies. Capitalising on its status as a lingua franca, the Arabic-propagandist official circles were inclined to give Arabic a greater power. Such a thinking was based on the belief that Arabic, Abu-Manga and Abubaker (2006, *ibid.*) argue, could be the only medium which could offer all the Sudanese equal education and employment opportunities.

While Arabic was gaining ground as such, the other Sudanese languages were hardly given any consideration. However, when the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 was reached, the time was ripe for the former southerners to find a niche for their native languages and English. Pursuant to that agreement, English was defined as the principal language in the former South Sudan. Nevertheless, that was a temporary euphoria for the southerners. Shortly afterwards, it became clear to the southerners how great the dilemma of English was. The status of Arabic was so firmly established in the former South Sudan that it became formidable for the southerners to dismiss it from everyday communications. As a result, a pidgin was born, known as *Juba Arabi* (or Arabic of Juba) whose vocabularies, sound systems and structures were a mixture of lexicons, grammars and sounds borrowed from Arabic together with many South Sudan languages. Unrivalled by English, Arabic or any other single native language, Juba Arabi was used as an indispensable medium of communication by almost all   southerner Sudanese.

2.3. Language policies after 1989

In 1989, the year the present government ascended to power following a military coup d'état, a significant language policy was brought into force. Driven by aspirations of the coup zealots whose foremost manifestation was to 'islamise' everyday life aspects, arabicisation of tertiary education was enforced as the first step forward. Ever since, and as early as the 1990s up to date, many terminologies have been coined to that effect: 'islamisation of life', 'fundamentalisation of knowledge' and the likes. Amidst such a surge, native-language-accommodative language policies were theoretically imposed. Practically, however, underpinning the existence of native language exclusivist tendencies within these policies would not far-fetched evidence, a point which we will elaborate on now.

In 1997, the National Assembly for Language Planning (NALP) was established by a presidential decree. Seen overall, the establishment of that body was a timely necessity. It was aimed to (a) strategise for language policy and planning; (b) promote the spread of Arabic as the language of wider communication; and (c) empower Arabic to negotiate economic, social, intellectual and political development of the Sudan. The decree emphasised on issues of maintenance of the Sudanese native languages, their transcription and documentation. Perceived from minority linguistic rights point of view, however, the body was not only an epitome of minority language exclusion policy, but also an anti-English policy as well. For example, Idris (2007) reports that after the declaration of the aforesaid decree, restrictions were imposed on private Christian schools in the capital which used English as a medium of instruction. As noted by Abubaker and Abu-Manga (1997: 8), the 'authorities arabicized tertiary education and established a higher council to conduct

linguistic research, translate [into Arabic] and publish teaching materials.' Within such contexts, the arabicisation of tertiary education was a practical step towards the exclusion of minority languages. In the 1990s and afterwards, and apart from some schools in the former South Sudan, Arabic became the major medium of instruction at all the national universities in the North. In terms of goals set in NALP, nothing was realised at practical levels of language policies. This indicates that, as Idris (2007) argues, the recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity backslid in the 1990s.

It is a paradox that minority language rights were incorporated into the Sudan Constitution, but were not realised at application levels. The National Constitution of 1998 stipulates that, in Article 3, 'Arabic is the official language in the Republic of Sudan.' Similarly, Article 27 of the same Constitution stipulates that:

> *There shall be guaranteed for every community or group of citizens the right to preserve their particular culture, language or religion, and rear children freely within the framework of their particularity, and the same shall not by coercion be effected.*

In the same vein, the Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan (2005), Article 1, recognises multilingualism. It further allows legislatures of any sub-level governmental entities to adopt any other national language, i.e. Arabic or English, as an official working language at their respective administrative levels. However, the use of Sudanese languages other than Arabic as a means of instruction was not stipulated anywhere in this Constitution. Incorporating native languages into the constitution, but at the same time excluding them from their use at teaching levels can be understood as a deliberate trick to undermine the sensitivity of speech communities to their languages. This is noted by Idris (2007: 67) who contends that '….. there is no intention to introduce Sudanese languages other than Arabic as a medium of instruction in Northern Sudan.'

2.4. Language policy in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005

Putting an end to a two-decade devastating conflict between the present South Sudan and the Sudan, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in Naivasha, Kenya, in 2005 between the government of the Sudan and Sudan Liberation Movement. Conceived in the context of the Sudan policy, the agreement was the second legal document of its kind, after Addis Ababa Act of 1972, which gave the Sudanese native languages a politically recognised status equal to Arabic. The significance of CPA emanates from the fact that policies of multilingualism prior to the CPA were, unlike the former policies, politically manifested (Miller, 2006). Afterwards, however, the recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity of the former South Sudan was incorporated into a peace deal which became a part and parcel of the Interim Constitution of South Sudan (ICSS) of 2005. The ICSS, whose many of its articles were also reflected on the CPA, gave great emphasis on the issue of language. Chapter 1, article 6 of ICSS stipulates that (a) all the indigenous languages of the former South Sudan are national languages and should be respected and promoted; and that (b) Arabic and English should have an equal status at all official circles.

While the worthiness of native languages in the former South Sudan were theoretically recognised as this,when CPA was reached and practically when incorporated into ICSS, the recognition of native languages of Darfur and of the Sudan at wide were only given a lip recognition. Apart from the vague reference made in the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in Abuja in 2005 and in Doha Document of Peace in Darfur signed in Doha in 2011, the right of speech communities to maintain and develop their languages and cultures were not

maintained. The overall language policies rendered little emphasis on how native languages of Darfur could genuinely be accommodated in any aspect of a planned language policy.

3. Undercurrents of linguistic rights awareness

Amidst such persisting exclusivist language policies practised, a simmering linguistic right awareness began to surface among the speech communities in Darfur. As noted by Garri (2012), it was not until 2003 when the dormant linguistic inequalities were, though not manifested in linguistic terms as such, overtly voiced by minority speech communities – altogether heightened by the current conflict which has had a knock-off effect on the whole linguistic revitalisation process in the region.

Though not so quantitative, studies on language status in Darfur show that native language speakers of Darfur are developing a sense of linguistic rights awareness. Idris (2007) conducted interviews with students in the University of Nyala and the University of Khartoum on their perceptions of native languages they spoke. She found that there was a high tendency among the subjects towards developing and promoting their local languages. Her study also showed that the informants were found to be emphasising on the importance of their languages in their personal lives for reasons of identity assertion and continuity of cultures and heritages. This tendency was also noticed even among students who were not fluent in their native languages (Idris, 2007 and Garri, 2012)

This evidence shows that ethnolinguistic groups in the areas investigated exert great efforts to maintain, preserve and promote their local languages. However, there were some officials who were suspicious of or against the recognition of minority linguistic rights. Abubaker (1995) argues that the 1983-census questionnaire designers deliberately opposed any serious attempts to include in the questionnaire questions which could yield informative data about languages other than Arabic or Arabic-speaking demographical features. He notes that 'following a debate in the People's Assembly, there was an attempt to add in the constitution a clause in the preservation of vernaculars, but it failed' (*ibid*: 15).

More often, deliberate obstacles were placed against local language promotion initiatives taken by unofficial entities. Idris (2007) conducted an interview with members of the Khartoum-based Fur Language Development Committee (FLDC). The informants mentioned that the chairperson of their committee in Khartoum had been interrogated several times by the Security Police. That was in particular, after the spillover of the current armed conflict in Darfur. The FLDC was an official linguistic body registered by the government as a national NGO. It was established to – among other goals –maintain, develop, and make it possible for the Fur community to read and write in Fur. To this effect, FLDC produced a rudimentary primer in 2009 for the purpose of teaching, reading and writing in Fur.

As it was the case with the FLDC, endeavours made for standardising native languages were usually carried out by unspecialised individuals. Another immature, but a pioneering attempt was made by a Zaghawa-speaker, Adam Tajir. His attempt to standardise Zaghawa was far from rendering a significant linguistic value. Osman (2006) points out that the ever first attempt to codify Zaghawa which was made by Adam Tajir was bound of much impracticality, the least of which was the problem of orthography, for which Tajir suggested symbols the Zaghawa use to brand their animals.

4. The right to mother tongue education

The Sudan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Child in 1990. Among the rights incorporated into this convention was the right to receive education in mother tongue. In Darfur, where more than two million people have been displaced since the conflict started in 2003 Reid (2006), Arabic has been, as is the case elsewhere in Sudan, the sole medium of instruction. Several factors favoured this situation.

Despite the multiplicity and diversity of the Sudanese linguistic and ethnic cultures, the early 1950s witnessed the first declaration announced by the Ministry of Education imposing Arabic as the only medium of instruction at all national schools. The declaration was never sensitive to the issue of observing minority linguistic rights. According to the 1953's census, Arabic was spoken by a half of the population. Among the sixteen native languages spoken in Darfur during the 1970s, Thelwal (1978) reports, Arabic was spoken by 55% of the Darfurians. The declaration, as noted by Abdelhay (2007), was not a value-neural act because Arabic was not the dominant language in the peripheries compared with its status in the metropolitan centres. Nowadays, however, the dominance of Arabic even in the peripheries may not be questionable. Because the question of national identity of the Sudan has been hinged on the question of national language as adopted by the post-colonial pro-Arabic power wielding centres, the link between Arab nationalism and Islamism was rationalised by the introduction of monolingualism via arabicisation. Consequently, Arabic and Islam are depicted as if anchored to each other by an immutable biological link.

According to Idris (2007), environments conducive to empower Arabic were created by, in particular after 1989, several means. Firstly, in almost the 18 radio stations functional by the time her study was concluded, Arabic was the major broadcasting language. Except intermittently and during very limited broadcast hours, the other Sudanese languages were not satisfactorily incorporated into the national radio service programmes. Secondly, the national Omdurman Television and other state-based television stations also broadcast their programmes mainly in Arabic. Thirdly, the majority of the daily newspapers publish in Arabic and only a few magazines and newspapers in English. Fourthly, Arabic is the major language of business and administration in North Sudan. Fifthly, and by the virtue of being a lingua franca, Arabic is taken as the language most appealing for politicians during electioneering seasons. Finally, and most importantly, Arabic is the language of religious teachings for the Muslims and Christians of north Sudan alike – a capacity that renders it the sole appropriate source of the Sharia jurisprudence.

All these factors, combined with the arabicisation processes imposed by the present government for suppressing local cultures and languages, minority language-speaking children were deprived of receiving education in their mother tongues.

5. Linguistic minority rights in the Sudan

It is shown in the above section that minoritising the Sudanese native languages is a result of language education policies tailored to arabise the Sudan culturally, socially and linguistically. Amidst the surge of establishing a unidirectional, a hegemonic linguistic ideology tailored by the present government for making Arabic the sole powerful language, minority languages cannot survive. The hegemonic ideology could hardly mean in this context anything other than the policy of making Arabic and Islam the sole interdependent principles which are entitled to shape the outlook of the Sudanese people on issues related to culture, language and the overall life milieux. Drawing its political and cultural roles from status vested in it as such, Arabic became this powerful. As noted by Nash (1989:6), language is a part of culture, but on addressing it, it turns to be a political debate and this

will, in turn, pose the question of whether, Nash argues, '…official or recognised languages in any given instance are often the result of politics and power interplays.'

Multiculturalism can contribute to more dynamic and cultural richness of community. It can also symbolise the possibility of co-existence of multi-ethnic communities. This is specifically necessary, Fasold (1994:9) argues, when a nation-state is made up of 'sociocultural groups, which are aware of their cultural and linguistic identity at the regional level, but still consider themselves a part of the nation as a whole.' As is the case in almost all the African states, where the power wielding group's language is selected and officially promoted until it is accepted by other powerless language minorities, the Sudan is no exception, with Arabic becoming the leading language. According to Kloss (1977) and Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (1994), developing one national language to overcome problems arising from multilingualism is in itself an exclusion and reduction of the minority languages. So, linguistic rights must be, they argue, maintained and respected, and their speakers must be allowed to receive knowledge in their languages at two levels: tolerance-oriented and promotion-oriented rights. These rights are, in essence, reflections on the United Nations declaration on the recognition of minority ethnicity rights (1966, 1992 and 2007). In particular, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights endorsed by the United Nations in 1966 stipulates in Article 27 that:

> In those states which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such communities shall not be denied the right, in communication with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Such international conventions are observed nowhere within language policies in the Sudan except verbally. As long as the policy of disempowering minority languages persists by disenfranchising speech minorities their educational rights, pupils coming from language minorities can experience alienation and, consequently, they may develop a diluted or weakened faith in and conformity to a future nation-state.

6. Displacement and education among linguistic minority children

While the aforementioned situation of language policy is instituted by some external (top down imposed) factors helped in producing the lamentable status of education in mother tongue, there are also some internal (bottom up) factors which kept speech community children in Darfur deprived of receiving education, not only in mother tongue but also a quality education in general. According to data obtained from Women Commission for Refugee and Children which was founded in Nyala in 2006, the schools at IDPs camps did not have sufficient number of teachers. In addition, classrooms were overcrowded, with limited or no teaching aids. As Reid (2006) notes, schools in Darfur were understaffed, under-funded and often located in remote and hardly accessible areas. On the ground, the possibility of coining 'under-' words to describe the deplorable situation of the IDPs schools can go endless.

Among the estimated 257,000 conflict-affected children of school age in South Darfur State, two thirds of them were IDPs and the majority of them were not enrolled in schools (Reid, 2006). Most dropouts occurred after only a few years of schooling, before children had a chance to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills. Capacity of the government to provide good education environment for these children was limited by lack of resources. Generally, we observed that the dilemma of education in Darfur was exacerbated by the escalating security issues, rather than by education-related problems to which the Sudanese

government, NGOs and international organizations were placing priority to address the ever emerging humanitarian emergencies.

Priority issues during a conflict usually centre on providing protection to civilians and provision of livelihood. As stated by Reid (2006), children and youth who were traumatised by the conflict and displacement missed the opportunity for the structure, stability and sense of normality that schooling could have provided. According to Reid, there were efforts exerted by UNICEF to train volunteer teachers who lived in the camps. However these teachers were not paid by the Ministry of Education under the pretext that they should have received training before they were allowed to go to teach in the schools at the IDPs camps. In addition, a few teachers who were deployed by the Ministry of Education, especially those who lived far away from the camps, often had hard times getting to the IDPs camps each day. Most of them complained about not having enough money to pay for transportation or to buy food in the camps.

However, education authorities in Nyala town, together with some international and local NGOs and UNICEF have been working to address these problems. UNICEF was the most active organisation. Since 2004, it provided support for the education of about 70% of the conflict-affected children through the provision of educational supplies, uniforms, in-service training for volunteer teachers, construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, and by providing school water and sanitation facilities. UNICEF had also prioritised improving access to education of marginalised groups – in particular girls whose enrolment rates increased from 28% at the beginning of the conflict in 2003 to 42% during the 2005/2006 academic year (Reid: *ibid*).

7. Population and sample of the study

The population of this study comprised of IDP schoolchildren, parents and teachers. The sample of the study compromised of 201 second class pupils studying in Qatar Basic School in Kalma camp and 123 pupils studying in Bakhit Basic School in Nyala town. The sample also compromised of 105 teachers drawn from 26 different schools, 30 parents and 20 teacher interviewees.

7.1. Data collection tools

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were employed, including: (a) a structured questionnaire designed for teachers; (b) Arabic language proficiency test for second form pupils (c) final year examination records; (d) face-to-face interviews conducted with teachers and parents; and (e) classroom and outside classroom observation.

7.2. Quantitative data collection tools

A two-part questionnaire was designed for the teachers. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to elicit data about the teachers' attitudes towards the communicative-related questions and also to gain insights into their observations on the impact of the pupils' low proficiency in Arabic on effective classroom-interaction and its relationship with academic achievements. In the second part, the questionnaire was intended to probe the extent to which 1st and 2nd Arabic textbooks reflected the needs of pupils coming from multicultural/multi-ethnic backgrounds.

An Arabic language proficiency test was also administered to the second form pupils studying in Qatar Basic School at Kalma camp and in Bakhit Basic School in Nyala town in the academic year 2010/2011. The tested language abilities covered an objective

comprehension test (a short text followed by comprehension questions), a vocabulary multiple-choice test and a sentence structure test. The tests were conducted with the assistance of 8 teachers who helped the pupils in explaining the questions, whenever necessary, in native languages. In addition, the final year examination records were also used to draw a comparative analysis to see how wide the two group of pupils' overall performance in four subjects:

7.3. Qualitative data collection tools

Interviews with the teachers and parents were conducted to collect the qualitative data. They were asked to elicit their attitudes towards the use of Arabic and/or native languages as medium/media of instruction, and what they thought of the role the current conflict might have played in the emergence of their language attitudes. We also observed the degree of pupil-teacher interaction and mutual intelligibility during lessons and outside linguistic behaviours and patterns of language use to trace the IDP pupils' proficiency in speaking and reading in Arabic.

7.4. Data analysis techniques

For the quantitative data, we employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to calculate percentages and frequencies. The qualitative data were manually analysed, and wherever applicable, cross-collated and tallied with the quantitative data.

For reasons related to unusual data gathering settings in which we carried out the interviews, we preferred texting the data produced by the informants anonymously. Two reasons prompted us to do this. Firstly, a great number of the interviewees opted to have their identities kept undocumented. Secondly, we observed that the informants were able to string together their opinions more productively and insightfully when they were anonymously referred to than not.

8. Data analysis, interpretation and discussion

In this section we are presenting, analysing and discussing the quantitative data obtained from the teacher questionnaire and from the three-part competency test as well as the qualitative data gleaned from individual interviews and observation. Using Wolcott's (1994) qualitative data treatment processes (i.e., employing descriptive, analytic and interpretative processes simultaneously), the quantitative data are presented first, and then tallied, cross-collated and analysed along with the qualitative data.

8.1. Monolingualism and academic underachievement

Our analysis in this section is centred on our hypothesis that using Arabic as a sole medium of instruction hampered the IDPs children's classroom interaction. To qualify this, we shall first analyse the data produced by the questionnaire administered to the teachers. The below findings quantify communication difficulties the pupils faced when Arabic was used as a medium of instruction.

Table (1): Communication difficulties among IDPs children

		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%

As shown in Table 1, 46.7% of the teachers *agreed* that the children faced communication difficulties, while 21% of them so *strongly agreed*, which means that an aggregation of 67.7% of the teachers supported the hypothesis. That is, the pupils in the IDPs schools suffered from poor communication skills in Arabic. This finding rests on the fact that Arabic was not the mother tongue for the IDPs pupils. Most of the IDPs were displaced from areas where Arabic was, though a lingua franca, not the single everyday major communication channel. As noted by Lue (2003, cited in Holmes *et al.*, 2009: 279):

> *a child's patterns of communication are developed through multiple means such as family, socioeconomic status, dialect, and education. These language and cultural factors impact student learning.*

It is apparent that communication difficulties among the IDPs children came from the fact that they were, when only Arabic was used as a medium of construction, detached from their social and cultural contexts pointed out above by Lue (*ibid.*). That Arabic is an unrivalled lingua franca statewide did not mitigate the learning plight of the pupils. This is so because there are several sharp inter- and intra-communal diglossic differences in Arabic in Darfur, all of which are greatly different from the texted materials in schools. Inside classrooms classical or semi-classical Arabic is used whereas in everyday life communications the pupils used an Arabic dialect whose intelligibility continuum is largely confined to Darfur states widely known as *arabi mukassar*, or gibberish Arabic.

Interviews with teachers also supported our hypothesis that lack of proficiency in Arabic barred IDPs children from getting engaged in effective communication. Most of the teacher interviewees emphasised that the level of Arabic communicative competence among the IDPs pupils was notably bad enough to hinder them from effective learning to an alarming extent. Among speech minorities, such a situation results from, as stated by Spolsky (2004), situations where children at first days of schooling rarely have control over the language or languages that the school system uses.

A teacher interviewee in Otash IDPs camp was asked whether or not he observed any difference in Arabic proficiency of the IDPs pupils and their counterparts in Nyala schools. She had the following to say:

> *I cannot say that communication skills of the pupils in Arabic are the same as that of their peers in Nyala town. The pupils in the town do not usually speak languages other than Arabic. However, almost all the children in the IDPs schools speak their own languages, which they use even inside the school…*

By and large, the vast majority of parents voiced their concerns towards using Arabic as a sole medium of instruction. Their sensitivities were primarily rested on and resulted from the unequal learning environments created by learning difficulties posed to their children who were not proficient enough in Arabic. However, the teachers appeared to be more accommodative to Arabic as a medium of instruction than the parents, but were more sensitive than the parents towards the right to education in mother tongue.

8.2. The linguistic communication barrier

In this section, we are further investigating how low proficiency in Arabic was responsible for creating teacher-student communication barriers due to teaching IDPs children in Arabic as a sole medium of instruction. Communication barriers occur when children of linguistic minorities are taught in a language other than their mother tongues. As a result, flow of literacy is defied overwhelmingly by communication breakdowns.

The situation of IDPs pupils was very awkward to some teachers, especially pupils who spoke little Arabic. The communication barrier led to lack of interest in teaching from both the teachers and pupils alike, said a teacher, in particular at first stages. Such lack of interest among the pupils was, we too observed, on its most part related to the lack of pupil-teacher interaction and lack of easy channelling of teaching inputs and outputs. The absence of learners' mother tongue in teaching reversed the teaching process to a tedious task.

To mitigate communication breakdowns, we observed that some teachers translated whole lesson chunks into learners' mother tongue. Some teachers believed that translation into mother tongue did not reduce the status of Arabic as the official language or as the medium of instruction. Interestingly, one teacher reported that his class virtually developed a better proficiency in Arabic through translation than in teaching in Arabic only. However, this contradicts some opinions expressed by another teacher who bitterly expressed concern of the passive interaction among his classes. He argued that establishing student-student and teacher-student interactions in a classroom by using Arabic was precondition for streaming knowledge required by certain lesson routines. Likewise, the majority of the teachers interviewed believed that lack of mutual communication resulted in a boring teaching practice because they were unable to, as put by another teacher, transmit thoughts and ideas without using a medium of instruction familiar to the pupils. Arabic was unable, another interviewees contended, to negotiate an effective two-way communication between teachers and pupils at the IDPs schools. More often than not, our observation holds that such a communicative deficiency constituted a major classroom barrier.

In Qatar Basic School at Kalma camp, a teacher from the Fur ethnic group told us that he usually shifted to Fur to illustrate some points to pupils who belonged to his tribe. When asked what he would have done with pupils coming from different ethnic backgrounds, he said he had learnt a bit of Masalit and Zaghawa languages during the eight-year long span he had settled at the camp. As we went on conferring with a teacher interviewees on the difficulties arising from language-related difficulties IDPs children faced in classrooms, he stated that some of his colleagues often code-switched into learners mother tongues to make teaching easy. He said that he was against the idea of teaching one class in many languages, but it was a workable way out to familiarise pupils with teaching shortcuts which would help pupils understand subjects quickly. However, he did not think that using the children's mother tongues intensively in classrooms was a good practice because, he argued, when the pupils arrive at higher rungs, that is, secondary and tertiary levels, teachers would never teach them in their native languages. According to one of the teachers, intensive use of mother tongue in classroom would hinder pupils from becoming proficient in Arabic:

> We discourage them not to talk much in their mother tongues in the class because if they do that their proficiency in Arabic language will not improve.

It is apparent that the disagreement among the teachers was sometimes very sharp on whether or not education in mother tongue was useful, though the majority favoured it. In this vein, a teacher in Kalma camp poignantly argued:

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

The tendency among the teachers to use a child's mother tongue in class was not only found by the present study. Findings reached by Groff (2010) in India consistently support this phenomenon. Describing her early experiences with language and education at her primary

school, an Indian child interviewed in the study explained how the teacher would use Hindi with the older students, but facilitated the younger students to understand by using Kumauni:

> *When I was very small… [and] because my mother knew Kumauni, I learned Kumauni…. When we went to school, we also spoke Kumauni. So the teacher also spoke Kumauni…. He also spoke to me in Kumauni so I could understand because then we spoke very little Hindi…. The books were always written in Hindi…. So after reading it in Hindi, he would explain it in Kumauni (Groff ibid: 186), [ellipses are ours].*

By and large, the idea of education in mother tongue was favoured by a great number of the teachers. A school principal at Direig camp believed that the use of Arabic as medium of instruction to limited-Arabic proficient children in the IDPs schools was unfair, emphasising that 'using mother tongue jeopardises the credibility of the educational policy for offering equal education to all children.' According to him, the matter did not need much effort to be justified from a communication competence perspective. The academic achievements would be better, he further argued, whenever the language of instruction accommodated the children's linguistic backgrounds. Conversely, however, another teacher contended that when teachers tended to use local languages in classrooms, they would create a 'deficiency in understanding of the textbooks which are written in Arabic. This would ultimately result in low academic performance.'

8.3. Learning achievement of the IDPs children

A careful selection of an acceptable medium of instruction to language minorities is an important factor in making learning process a success story. Academic achievement and educational progress of pupils can be put at risk when the right to education in mother tongue is denied via imposing minority language-insensitive teaching materials as is the case with the situation in the area of the present study. The extent to which Arabic as a sole medium of instruction is detrimental to the academic achievements of the IDPs children is shown below.

Table (2): Impact of low proficiency in Arabic on academic underachievement

		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%

Table 2 shows that 55.2% and 30.5% of the teachers, respectively, *strongly agreed* and *agreed* that academic underachievement of the IDPs pupils was caused by their limited proficiency in Arabic. Only 12.4% of the teachers *strongly agreed* that Arabic as a medium of instruction negatively affected the learning attainment of the IDPs children.

Thus, the pupils' academic achievement must have been affected by their low level of proficiency in Arabic. Monolingualism, as noted by Baker (2001: 297):

> *…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.*

Bearing in mind that learning difficulties often arise from low proficiency in Arabic, as we shall further discover in the following section, it is then unfathomable why a great number of

teachers *agreed* with our hypothesis that low proficiency in Arabic would impede learning achievement of the IDPs pupils.

In their attempts to narrow the gap in academic underachievement of the pupils, we observed that a great number of teachers occasionally used pupils' mother tongues in classrooms. Such a tendency was built on the ground that children performed better when their languages were used in classrooms. We also noticed that pupil-teacher interaction through local languages was also taking place even outside the classrooms. Williams (cited in May 2006) found that the Malawi children who were taught English in local languages during the first four years scored slightly better in English than those whose local languages were not used while being taught English. Williams also found that academic standards of the former group were better than those of Zambian students who were instructed in English. The study concluded that there was a clear risk the policy of using English as a sole language of instruction might contribute to stunting, rather than promoting academic and cognitive growth of learners.

8.4. Cultural background of the IDPs children in curriculum

In this section we are investigating the extent to which teaching materials did not reflect ethno-cultural realities of the IDPs children. Such a situation did not only, we hypothesised, exacerbated learning difficulties of these children, but also exposed them to cultural alienation and social detachment.

Table (3): (Under)representation of pupils' cultural realities in curriculum

		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 multicultural/multi-ethnic realities of the IDPs pupils were reflected in the curricula designed. Conversely, a nearly equal number of teachers (43.8%) *strongly agreed* that the multicultural and multi-ethnic realities of the children were not reflected in the syllabus.

The informants' opinions on inclusion of child's culture and language in teaching materials were weighed at nearly equal haves. In terms of statistical significance, this should be taken as an alarming violation of equal education rights minority children are entitled to. In terms of citizenship entitlements too, telling statistics like this indicates how apparent the lack of equality is in the education of linguistically disadvantaged children. We are not rendering statistical significance to such trends as per the proportionate strength given to it vis-à-vis out of the total percentages calculated. Rather, statistical significance on such cases would matter a lot if given weight according to the established conventions such as the right of children to receive education in mother tongue. Here, 30.5% matters greatly.

The data gleaned from teacher interviewees also revealed that a small number of them did not think school curricula should be built on a monolingual-accommodative approach. A proponent of this viewpoint goes this:

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

Despite the fact that the majority of teaches interviewed were from the same IDPs' ethnolinguistic communities, they were influenced by the stereotypical concept which holds that developing good command of Arabic is a prerequisite for whoever has faith in Islam.

However, the ubiquitous Arabic-for-Qur'an myth as seen above is not untenable. There are many nations around the world which do not know Arabic. Nevertheless, they are well known for their good faith in and submission to Islam. Similarly, linguistic minorities in Darfur, among other wider communities statewide, are all known for faith in Islam, for Darfur is often called the land of 'religious celebrities', or religious scholars; yet a great number of ethnic communities would never admit a pure Arab affinity. Such arguments can be weighed against the nationalist theory of nation-state building. The proponents of Arabic-for-Islam theory, among them are the linguistic and cultural assimilationists, do not only attempt to implement their anti-multilingual measures at teaching levels, but also tend to have all the minorities assimilated into one core dominant Arab culture. Such an ideology holds that the integration of linguistic minorities is prerequisite for maintaining the unity of nation (Schmidt 2000). In line with this, the nationalist policy in the Sudan is derived from a standpoint Joseph (2006 cited in Abdelhay 2007: 1) notes:

Nation-builders in the Sudan have, unsurprisingly, conceptualized multilingualism, language change, and non–standard usage as threats to the very foundation of a culture, since the language itself is the principal text in which the culture's mental past and its present coherence are grounded.

Consequently, the IDPs pupils' learning and problem-solving experiences and their knowledge of how things would work in their own culture and social settings did not improve their academic attainment as such because the culture of the classroom, the teaching processes, and the textbooks were based on Arabic. In this vein, an education coordinator for the IDPs in Nyala lamented:

Pupils in the IDPs schools have their own stories, songs and dances. Their languages and cultures are as rich as that of Arabic…, but because they study in Arabic, there is a barrier [to their academic attainment].

The positive role that incorporated cultures can play in community coherence should be recognised. Group identities which can particularly be national or ethnic could be double-edged swords (Joseph, 2004). On the one hand, they are positive because they bestow on people the positive sense of who they are. Incorporationism creates a sense of belongingness to a community. On the other hand, when that sense is diluted, a person can develop a sense of alienation which can result in disastrous nation-disintegrating consequences (Schildkraut (2003).

Opinions given by the teachers suggested that, in a nutshell, the IDPs children were suffering from a double-dimension stigma. Their academic underachievement was exacerbated by the absence of their cultural and linguistic heritages in the curricula as well as by low proficiency in arabic.

8.5. Academic achievement of pupils: a test-drawn repertoire

In this section we shall further qualify our hypothesis that teaching in Arabic as a sole medium of instruction hampered the academic attainment of the IDPs children. We shall

cross-collate scores gained by pupils studying in Bakhit and Kalma schools in Arabic comprehension, vocabulary and sentence-structure tests. This is done by investigating the level of Arabic as revealed by proficiency tests given to second year pupils in Qatar and Bakhit schools in, respectively, Kalma camp and Nyala town. There was specific criterion for selecting these schools. The former school was chosen to represent unprivileged children coming from ethnolinguistic background whereas the latter to represent educationally privileged children in Nyala. The rationale behind dichotomising the subjects this way is to depict how wide learning (under)achievement was between the IDPs children and their peers in Nyala.

8.5.1. Comprehension test in Arabic

The comprehension test was administered to find out the difference in understanding texts written in Arabic between limited-Arabic proficient pupils in Qatar basic school and their peers in Bakhit Basic School who spoke Arabic with a high degree of fluency. Table 4 shows that the overwhelming majority of the pupils in Qatar School failed in the comprehension test, as high as (84.6%) of them. To the contrary, almost a half of the pupils in Bakhit School (51.2%) excelled and 35.8% of them did the test very good. Ironically, the number of best test-takers in Qatar School (15.4%) nearly equalled the number of failures in Bakhit School (13%).

Table (4): Performance in the comprehension test

Aggregation of scores	0 – 14		15 – 25		21 – 30			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	total	%
Bakhit School in Nyala	16	13.0%	44	35.8%	63	51.2%	123	100%
Qatar School at Kalma	170	84.6%	31	15.4%	0	0.0%	201	100%

∗ Minimum scores to pass = 15

The majority of the parents interviewed also lamented that their children were forced to learn with limited Arabic vocabularies. A parent openly argued that it was the limited vocabulary that retarded her ten-year-old daughter the most in classroom activities and group discussions. This argument was further supported by an Arabic teacher. He noted that the pupils were often hesitant to use Arabic because they feared of being ridiculed by their peers due to their 'broken' Arabic or due to their poor vocabulary. To avoid such situations, the teacher said, children preferred staying silent all the school day. This is a reminiscence of what the Tanzanian language education policy caused to children coming from linguistic minorities, to which a student recalled the feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence he experienced:

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

During the test which was closely monitored by an invigilator we assigned, the test-takers in Bakhit School did not ask for oral instructions when they were asked to do the test. They immediately began reading the passage and then answered the comprehension questions. Some of them answered all the questions in less than 20 minutes. When the test sheets were given to the pupils in Qatar School, however, no single pupil started reading the passage from the outset. They had remained waiting for oral instructions from the invigilator before they were prompted to begin doing the test. The invigilator had to read the whole passage and the following questions to make them clear for the test-takers.

While taking the test, the IDPs pupils looked very distracted. They were sitting on the ground because there were no chairs or desks. Some of them began whispering to each other while many others kept on stealing glances at the answer sheets of their peers. Every now and then a pupil asked the invigilator to read for him/her some points in the test. Sometimes he had to use pupils' mother tongue to explain the questions.

Both the test and classroom observation suggest how wide the difference in academic (under)achievement between the IDPs children and their peers in the town. Difficulty in understanding the passage must have hindered the former pupils from obtaining good scores. Attempts made by the teacher tried to elaborate on some questions several times did not either help greatly. Using mother tongues in the IDPs children schools was a familiar phenomenon, as a teacher in Kalma camp stated:

> Sometimes I tend to use the children's mother tongue to explain some difficult points in the lessons. If you accompany me to the classroom you will realise that there is no other option. For example, some of our first class pupils understand very little [if we teach in Arabic only].

8.5.2. The Arabic vocabulary test

Table (5): Comparing pupils' performance in the vocabulary test

Aggregation of scores	0 – 10		11 – 20		21 - 30		31 - 42		%	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	total	%
Bakhit School in Nyala	2	1.6%	10	8.1%	22	17.9%	89	72.4%	123	100%
Qatar School at Kalma	182	90.5%	19	9.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	201	100%

∗ Minimum scores to pass = 21

Table 5 shows that the difference in the vocabulary test results achieved by pupils in Bakhit and Qatar schools was incredibly and incomparably different. Those who passed the test in Bakhit School aggregated (90.3%, i.e. 17.9% plus 72.4%), but none in Qatar School.

Figures revealed by this table clearly depict the plight of the IDPs schoolchildren. Arabic vocabulary was their weakest point in all the tests administered. To sum up this plight, we should revisit some contentious arguments posed by some teachers and parents as to how effective instruction in mother tongue could be. A teacher interviewee in Kalma gave vent to his anger towards teaching in a 'language [Arabic] that I'm quite sure my pupils do not understand easily. Teaching in Arabic to the first and second classes is really a waste of time.'

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

We believe that children at the IDPs camps had few opportunities, compared to those in Nyala town, to augment vocabularies necessary for and conducive to learning environments. Their limited proficiency in Arabic must have hampered the children to build a rich stock of Arabic vocabularies. Holmes *et al.* (2009) states that some topics require background knowledge and specialised vocabulary to understand. For example, for someone who is not proficient in English the phrase 'stealing a base' in baseball would mean a thief is running

away with a 'base' and being hunted by the police. However, pupils whose schemata are based on English would know that 'stealing a base' has another meaning. The IDPs children whose linguistic schemata are not built on Arabic as such must have suffered a lot to understand situations similar to the ones experienced by Xhosa-speaking children.

However, we cannot conclude that failure of all the Qatar School children in vocabulary was caused by limited vocabulary, nor by mere linguistic issues. Extraneous factors might have intervened, not the least lack of trained teachers, scarcity of textbooks and school environment conductive to good learning.

8.5.3. The sentence structure test

Table (6): Performance in the sentence structure test

Aggregation of scores	0 – 13		14 -20		21 -28			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bakhit School in Nyala	15	12.2%	54	43.9%	54	43.9%	123	100%
Qatar School at Kalma	149	74.1%	52	25.9%	0	0.0%	201	100%

∗ Minimum scores to pass the test = 14

Table 6 shows that all (100%, 74.1% plus 25.9%) the IDPs pupils in Qatar School failed in the sentence structure test. To the contrary, the vast majority of their peers in Bakhit School excelled (43.9%) in the test and (43.9%) did it very good.

As it was the case with Table 5, where all the pupils in Qatar School failed in the test, they all again failed in the sentence structure test. Neither the easiness of the test, nor the helpfulness of the invigilator to the test-takers mattered, but what mattered was the low proficiency in Arabic, combined with, again, trained teachers and scarcity of textbooks.

To conclude, we shall make a comparison between the overall academic achievement scores of the IDPs pupils in Qatar basic School at Kalma camp and their peers' in Bakhit Basic School in Nyala town. The scores were drawn from second year pupils' exam records in the two schools on four subjects: the Holy Qur'an, Islamic Studies, mathematics and Arabic language.

Table (7): The 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 in Nyala	0.0%	100%	100%	0.0%	100%	0.0%	100%	0.0%
Qatar School at Kalma	32.8%	67.2%	69.8%	30.2%	29.8%	70.2%	43.4%	56.6%

The figures in Table 7 are self-explanatory. Except the Islamic Studies in which the pupils in Qatar School were able to pass (69.8%), the overall academic performance of the IDPs performance was drastically lamentable. To the contrary, all the pupils in Bakhit School passed all the subjects. It was discussed in section (8.5.1) that the former group of pupils were studying in extremely unfavourable school environments. No doubt, these could be factors in the emergence of such a low academic performance, but they are by no means the sole factors. Low proficiency in Arabic, combined with lack of teaching facilities, must have rendered the IDPs pupils underachievers as such.

8.6 Parent attitudes towards Arabic

In this section, we are looking into our hypothesis that language policy operationalised in the Sudan resulted in the emergence of a growing antipathy towards Arabic among the parents

and teachers of IDPs children. Gleaning data from the parent and teacher interviewees, we will now elaborate on how, on the one hand, using Arabic as a medium of instruction and, on the other hand, the current conflict both together caused the emergence of this antipathy towards Arabic.

The majority of the parents believed that their children were underprivileged at schools because, for they widely emphasised on this, the children were not treated as equally as their peers in Nyala town. For example, a parent who was a member of a Parental Council at Kalma camp had this to say:

> *If our children should receive the same type of education as those in Nyala, 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 my son to go to the school, but he says he cannot understand well what the teachers say [in Arabic].*

Language policy at practical levels epitomises the perception held by this parent. It would not be a far-fetched reason if we have to understand how it became a concern for parents the language-related academic problems among the IDPs school children. The dilemma of low Arabic proficient was not only protracted because their native languages were rejected, but also their inherent cultures and their perception of the world around them. Cummins (2001) believes that when a child's mother tongue is rejected at school, the child is rejected, too. The parents could not have been unaware of this disadvantage.

Such resentment against teaching in *Arabic only* was also associated with, as questioned by one parent, whether or not the state has the right to deny the status of a person which goes parallel to the status given to his or her language. Referring to the language-related plight of learning among the IDPs children, a parent interviewee poignantly argued that 'how it could be that our *rutanat*[2] are rendered nonsenses. The person who disrespects your language also disrespects you.' Such extreme ideas could be taken as indicators to the existence of a strong correlation between the dominance of Arabic and the emergence of sensitivity that native languages of young children were disrespected, and eventually they were disrespected too.

In fact, our field observation hinted that the negative perception held by parents towards Arabic did not come from a vacuum. Learning environments at the IDPs camps looked like transitional confinements during which children were to be detached from their languages and cultures, immersed and then assimilated into the core Arabic-borne culture. As we noted in section 8.4, pupils' languages, cultures and life experiences were not incorporated into teaching materials. This entails that pupils start schooling from a disadvantage. Everything they learn about life and the world is dismissed from schooling environment, whereby the children are, as Cummins (2001) notes, expected to learn in an experiential vacuum.

As there were some teachers who did not find it harmful in using Arabic as a medium of instruction to children coming from linguistic minorities, there were also some parents whose attitudes towards Arabic were positive than towards native languages. Arguing over the instrumental role Arabic plays in the Sudan, a young parent had this to say:

> *We cannot expel Arabic out of our lives because it is a part of our life. We all have to speak Arabic at schools and at markets. Our children have to learn in Arabic.*

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[2] *Rutanat*, singular *rutana*, is usually pejorative-ridden word used by laymen and, more often than, educated people to mean 'language'.

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It is apparent that the credit given to Arabic in this context was more associated with its key role in economic gains and social upward mobility. That is, if learning in Arabic is perceived from the above parent's point of view, it would be a precondition for the IDPs children to be matriculated to a university; and getting employed is again preconditioned by having good command of Arabic. By the very virtue of the de facto status of Arabic, whether to like or dislike it would not be a negotiable issue as long as access to higher education and benefiting from economic gains are weighed against only one criterion: either to receive education in Arabic or to miss access to education and, consequently, miss potential career opportunities.

However, parent attitudes towards Arabic were by no means attributable to mere reasons of economic ends. Nor could they be related to concerns related to education in mother tongue. Rather, the current conflict in Darfur seems to have triggered the emergence of sentimentality and revitalisation of ethnicity and ingroup identity. Such a trend was more apparent among educated parents than among uneducated parents or those having little education. However, an uneducated parent bitterly voiced that his antipathy towards Arabic arose from the ethnic-ridden wordings which came into existence along with the conflict. In the literature of the current conflict terms such as the 'zurga', or worthless Blacks, is more often than not weighed against the 'Arabs', a word whose connotations are usually contextualised next to every possible characterisations of a manly disposition, agility and prowess. Amidst such surge of feelings, Arabic could not be liked to be a medium of instruction, language for taking pride in or for its psychological intimacy.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter we have reviewed language policies in the Sudan from a historical perspective, since the times of British colony through the 2000s, during which language policies were tailored to empower Arabic in all domains. Towards that end, minority languages were left to go obsolete though, besides Arabic, there are many other native languages spoken in the Sudan. While these languages are incorporated into the constitution, school children coming from native-language-dominant communities are deprived of education in mother tongue.

In the war-torn Darfur, addressing issues of education can yield some telling stories. The chapter has investigated the case IDPs school children facing learning difficulties in three camps located around Nyala town, the capital of South Darfur State. Having been displaced from peripheries where they used to use their mother tongues, the young IDPs school children were found retarding in learning. The chapter has concluded that low proficiency in Arabic, which in turn resulted in the absence of teacher-student interaction, was responsible for the children's underachievement. The study has further found that the current conflict played as a major factor in the emergence among teachers and parents negative attitudes towards teaching in Arabic as a sole medium of instruction.

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