THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Contribution of the development of national capacity for working out educational content

National languages in education

by David Dalby

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NATIONAL LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. INTRODUCTION.......................................................... 1
B. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS........................................... 1
   Preamble........................................................................ 1
   National policy.......................................................... 2
   Common African cultural and educational system.............. 2
C. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

   Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages.................... 3
   National Planning Committee........................................ 3
   Literature and reading materials in African languages....... 4
   Teaching profession.................................................... 5
   Literacy in African languages....................................... 5
   Teaching method........................................................ 5
   Mother tongues and official languages.......................... 6
   Vehicles for languages of education.............................. 6
   Teaching of languages................................................ 6

APPENDICES

I   Consultant's programme
II  Bibliography
A. INTRODUCTION

1. The consultant visited Paris (14-16 October 1980) and Sierra Leone (16-31 October 1980), in response to an invitation to advise the Ministry of Education of Sierra Leone on policy with regard to national languages in education.

2. Intensive discussions were held in Sierra Leone during the period of the mission (see "Consultant's Programme" below) and a study was also made of the relevant documentation available in Sierra Leone (see Bibliography, Appendix II).

3. As a result of these discussions and study, a series of recommendations were drawn up by the consultant (see recommendations in section C below). These were discussed at the Ministry of Education before the consultant's departure, including a personal discussion of the recommendations with the Minister of Education.

4. The potential for developing Sierra Leonean languages in education must be viewed not only against the country's strong educational superstructure in Freetown, but also against its infrastructure in the provinces, especially at primary-school level.

5. The approach of this report has been to present a set of recommendations covering the whole field of language policy in Sierra Leone. These recommendations are based not only on the brief period of the consultancy, but also on the consultant's experience in or contact with Sierra Leone over a period of twenty years.

B. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

6. The following objectives are taken as accepted by an increasing number of OAU member-states, including Sierra Leone, and the recommendations which follow are based on the need to achieve these four NATIONAL OBJECTIVES in the field of African languages in education:

(i) Recognition of the right of every citizen to have access to literacy and education through his/her mother tongue:

(a) as the surest basis for self-expression and self confidence;

(b) as a means for the appreciation and preservation of Africa's cultural heritage;

(c) as an essential element in community development; and

(d) as the most solid foundation for the subsequent acquisition of a foreign language.

(ii) Achievement of universal primary education through the medium of the mother tongue, and the introduction of the study of African languages and cultures at all subsequent levels of education.

(iii) Promotion of mass literacy and adult education in the mother tongue of each linguistic community.
(iv) Use of African languages in the promotion of economic development, social justice and cultural decolonization, and in the advance towards African unity.

National policy

7. In realizing the above objectives, the emphasis must be on self-reliance and self-help, and on the harnessing of national resources and of national talent. "Learning through doing" is preferable to delegating important national responsibilities to outside agencies or experts.

8. Such an important programme in the history of the nation needs to be introduced by a major policy statement by the Head of State. Leadership in the programme must come from all levels of government - national, provincial and local. Government should provide an inspiration and example to the people in their public use of African languages. All relevant government departments and agencies, and all appropriate national institutions, must give their full and untiring support to the programme.

9. The ultimate success of the programme will depend on the support of all Sierra Leoneans who have already enjoyed the benefits of formal education. In a country where almost nine citizens in ten are still illiterate and where, in some areas, almost three-quarters of the children never reach school, it is a sacred duty of all literate Sierra Leoneans to assist in teaching their fellow-citizens to read and write their own languages. All those who are literate only in a foreign language need, therefore, to become literate in their mother tongue also, and intensive courses will be needed for this purpose.

10. The difficulty in implementing so many earlier educational recommendations for Sierra Leone needs to be frankly recognized, together with the fact that Sierra Leone, if adequate action is not taken now, will fall further behind many other African countries in the promotion of universal education and mass literacy, and in the respect for its national languages and culture.

11. There is justification neither for defeatism nor for self-satisfaction in Sierra Leone, both of which are dangers to the cultural and educational revolution which younger people in Africa are increasingly demanding. African languages will never play their proper role in the life of the country unless they can be seen to facilitate upward mobility and the availability of equal opportunities for the whole population.

Common African cultural and educational system

12. The entry into the Mano River Union of the People's Revolutionary Republic of Guinea provides a unique opportunity for Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia to advance towards the goals of African cultural and economic unity, and to achieve the vision expressed so clearly by Kwame Nkrumah. The historical domination of the three member states by three different foreign powers provides an opportunity for Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia to build a new common educational system based on the languages and cultures of their shared African heritage.

13. A generation is growing to maturity and power in Africa which was born after the end of colonial rule. If their elders have devoted insufficient resources to education, and have shown insufficient respect for their own languages and cultures, then the younger generation will demand to know why. Cultural and educational
evolution, vital to the achievement of true independence in Africa, must be promoted now, if this division between the generations is not to become increasingly severe. Education in Africa must of course provide access to foreign languages and cultures, but can only be healthy if it rests on a foundation of respect for the languages and cultures of Africa itself.

C. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

1. That the languages of the peoples of Sierra Leone - including Krio - to be referred to as AFRICAN LANGUAGES, all these languages (or closely related languages) being spoken in one or more other African or Afro-Caribbean states, and that unsuitable terms inherited from the colonial past be abandoned forthwith (including such terms as "vernacular", "indigenous", "tribal" or "local" languages).

Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages

2. That a SIERRA LEONE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES be established in Freetown, staffed by Sierra Leoneans or specialists on secondment from other African states, and that this institute be charged with the co-ordination of all work in the development of African languages in Sierra Leone, including their written development (orthography, standardization of divergent dialects, modernization of terminology and the production of literature), their use in education and administration, their expanded role in radio, television and the press, and the implementation of a national language survey.

3. That the Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages be incorporated as a semi-autonomous institute of the University of Sierra Leone, having close links with all other national bodies concerned with the development of African languages, including the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Education, the Sierra Leone Library Board, SLBS, the Provincial Literature Bureau, etc., that the Institute maintain close links with similar institutes in other countries, such as the Académie des Langues in Conakry, and with appropriate international bodies, such as the Mano River Union Secretariat, the OAU Inter-African Bureau of Languages, IBA, Unesco, UNDP, etc., that the foreign denominational bodies, using a national Sierra Leonean title in the field of African language studies, be requested to change their designation, to avoid confusion with the new national institute, and that the Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages carry an appropriate title also in the major languages of Sierra Leone (e.g. Inghere na atont n'afrik in Temne).

National Planning Committee

4. That the recently established NATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE for the use of African languages in education be charged forthwith with the task of drawing up precise proposals for the urgent international funding, staffing and operation of the Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages, and
that these plans should emphasize the Institute's active role in areas not yet adequately covered, in contrast to its supporting and consultative role in areas already covered by one or more other institutions or agencies (such as curriculum design and harmonization, teacher training, and textbook development and publication).

5. That the National Planning Committee, before the establishment of the Institute (of which the Committee, suitably enlarged, could provide the initial governing body), should complete its current consideration of the orthographies of Sierra Leone's African languages, and

that a system of orthography be agreed and promulgated without delay, to cover all African languages spoken in Sierra Leone, and if possible for all those spoken within the three member states of the Mano River Union, having due regard to current practice and to the African Reference Alphabet established at the Unesco-sponsored inter-African meeting on orthographies (Niamey, 1978).

Literature and reading materials in African languages

6. That the production of secular reading materials in African languages, at all levels of reading ability, including books and periodicals for education and entertainment, be regarded as the highest priority in the achievement of the four national aims in the field of national languages in education.

7. That the production of literature in African languages be encouraged by the institution of annual prizes for the best items of literature written in each language (including prizes at the level of the Mano River Union, for languages spoken widely in at least two of the member states).

8. That the responsibility for the organization and judging of these literary awards, and of the selection of suitable entries for publication, be assigned to the SIERRA LEONE LIBRARY BOARD (or, where appropriate, to the Mano River CIB Project Committee).

9. That the Sierra Leone Library Board also maintain a co-ordinating role in the identification of potential works for publication in African languages (including functional literature and textbooks, creative writing, traditional oral literature, and translations from foreign languages), that the Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages be responsible for the linguistic evaluation and editing of such materials,

that all printers in Sierra Leone be encouraged to compete in the economic and efficient production of materials in African languages (including the Bunumbu Press in Bo, and the Government Printer in Freetown), and

that local publishers and booksellers invest in the publishing, distribution and marketing of books in African languages (using national talent for book design and illustration, and small-scale local traders for distribution to remoter rural areas).

10. That funds be sought to further expand the PRIMARY SCHOOL SERVICE (mobile lending libraries operated by the Sierra Leone Library Board),

that the Library Board be assisted to build up the African language component in this service, as well as in its urban libraries and in rural "library centres", and
that the mobile libraries of the Primary School Service be accompanied always by a teacher qualified to provide assistance and advice in the field of literacy teaching, and to evaluate progress in the schools and areas visited.

Teaching profession

11. That the teaching profession, especially at primary level, receive the national respect and recognition which it so fully deserves, but often lacks,

that primary-school teachers be paid a substantial bonus on successful completion of a written examination in an African language,

that teacher-training students and primary and secondary-school teachers be encouraged, through the medium of writers' workshops, to produce graded school materials in their own languages, and

that the present primary pilot project (see paragraph 24 below) be extended to other primary schools in the three languages concerned, initially in classes 1-3, as soon as the availability of sufficient trained teachers and of adequate teaching and reading materials has been assured.

Literacy in African languages

12. That the entire population of Sierra Leone be mobilized in a drive towards universal literacy in African languages, and

that every literate person fulfil his national duty to provide unpaid literacy teaching, in his/her own language, to non-literate individuals or groups.

13. That private companies and institutions be strongly encouraged to support this national literacy campaign, by providing financial and material support (e.g. by sponsoring literature awards or subsiding publications), by introducing African languages in advertising, and by releasing staff for up to one hour a day to participate in literacy classes (either as teachers or as pupils).

14. That the importance of literacy in African languages be recognized in the teaching of foreign languages, including the preparation of two-way dictionaries and vocabularies between African languages and English, and the utilization of African languages, including Krio, in teaching English and in making pupils consciously aware of differences in structure and usage between their own languages and English.

Teaching method

15. That such reforms in teaching method be introduced informally forthwith, and that they be reflected in revised syllabi for English-language teaching as soon as possible, and

that the currently used format of the English and so-called "Verbal Aptitude" Tests in the Sierra Leone Selective Entrance Examination for Secondary Schools be replaced without delay by a form of selection which is less biased in favour of primary children with English-speaking parents, and which is better designed to reflect a child's natural verbal aptitude and power of expression in his/her own language and cultural environment.
Mother tongues and official languages

16. That the two most widely spoken mother tongues of Sierra Leone, Mende and Temne, be declared official languages alongside English, and be introduced progressively into national administration, government and parliament, including the use of Mende and English as official languages of the southern and eastern provinces, and of Temne and English as official languages of the northern province.

17. That Krio, although not having the status of an official language, be recognized as having a special role in the western area and as being the most widely spoken second language throughout Sierra Leone as a whole.

18. That all other mother tongues in Sierra Leone be regarded as educational media within their own areas, and that every encouragement be given for the production of literature in those languages, even if for very small populations.

19. That immediate consideration be given, by the three governments now participating in the enlarged Mano River Union, to the introduction of their most widely spoken common language, i.e. Maninka (Mandingo), as the joint official language of the Union alongside English and French, and that such a move be considered as preparing the way for the adoption of Maninka as the regional lingua franca for the western half of West Africa.

Vehicles for languages of education

20. That radio, and television through community-owned television sets, be regarded as major instruments of education, with no less than 50 per cent of total broadcasting time devoted to programmes of an educational or instructional nature,

that approximately equal broadcasting time on SLBS and SLTV be allocated to Mende, Temne and English, with shorter periods to all other mother-tongue languages of Sierra Leone, in approximate order of their demographic importance, and

that Krio be used frequently to provide translations and summaries of broadcasts in other languages, as well as for its proportionate share of broadcasting time as a mother tongue.

21. That drama, both live and via television, be also regarded as a major vehicle for the use of African languages in education and entertainment, and

that every encouragement be given to writers, producers and actors of plays in African languages.

Teaching of languages

22. That Fourah Bay College be requested to reconsider the structure and nomenclature of its language departments, inherited from a foreign academic tradition (e.g. including "Classics" and so-called "Modern Languages", but excluding until now the teaching of modern African languages), and

that consideration be given by Fourah Bay College to the possible establishment of a single department of languages and linguistics, including African languages, English and French.
23. That provision at secondary and university level be made for teaching of and eventual qualifications in African languages, including O and A levels, teaching qualifications and university degrees, and 

that this provision cover not only the major languages of Sierra Leone but also African languages of regional and continental communication (such as Maninka, Kiswahili and Arabic).

24. That the Government of Sierra Leone be congratulated for the steps already taken by the Minister of Education to reintroduce Mende, Temne and Limba into primary education, including the experimental teaching of these languages in a number of pilot schools throughout the country,

that the teachers and children of these pilot schools, and the Ministry of Education's supervisory staff, be also congratulated for the enthusiasm with which they have responded to this initiative,

that it be recognized, however, that reliance for technical advice and support on an inadequately staffed non-Sierra Leonean organization has led to discouragement and confusion among Sierra Leonean teachers, and to an unwarranted delay in the availability of teaching materials in the pilot schools,

that immediate steps be taken to reinforce the existing teachers in the pilot schools by identifying and retraining older teachers who studied their own languages at school (ironically, during the colonial period), and

that graded primary-school texts in the relevant languages be printed and distributed to the pilot schools during the current school year, including the publication of texts now being collected or written by Ministry of Education staff and the reprinting of older texts produced by the Provincial Literature Bureau.
CONSULTANT'S PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 14 October 1980: (Evening) departure from London to Paris.

Wednesday, 15 October: Visit to Unesco.

Thursday, 16 October: Travelled from Paris to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Met at Lungi Airport by Rev. John K. Gbla, Co-ordinator of Indigenous Languages Project, Ministry of Education, and Mr. Amadu Camara, Education Officer attached to Key English Language Teaching Programme (KELT), Ministry of Education. Discussion after arrival at Freetown with Dr. A.K. Turay, Teaching Fellow, Department of Linguistics and Sierra Leonean Languages, Fourah Bay College (FBC), University of Sierra Leone.

Friday, 17 October: Discussions at Ministry of Education with Rev. Gbla, Mr. Camara, Dr. Turay and Mr. Shaikh Imam Sesay, Acting Chief Education Officer (representing Mrs. O.C. Fawry, Chief Education Officer at Ministry of Education, currently at Unesco's General Conference, Belgrade). Visit to Government Printing Press, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Mr. A.T. Johnson). Further discussions at Ministry of Education with Mr. A.F. Conteh, Permanent Secretary.

Saturday, 18 October: Brief meetings with Mr. Tai Afrik, Senior Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Mr. A.M. Sallah, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP, Professor Eldred Jones, Principal, FBC (and Acting Vice-Chancellor, University of Sierra Leone, during absence of Professor Arthur Porter at Unesco's General Conference). Study of background documents.

Sunday, 19 October: Discussions on education with secondary-school pupils. Discussion with Miss Ann Hayes, British Council KELT Adviser, attached to Ministry of Education.

Monday, 20 October: (Public holiday in Sierra Leone.) Documentary research. Discussion on Temne language research with Dr. Turay.

Tuesday, 21 October: Meeting with Minister of Education, Honourable Abdul Karim Koroma, with Mr. A.F. Conteh (Permanent Secretary). Visit to Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS): discussion with Mr. John Bunting-Graden, Director of Programmes. Visit to Sierra Leone Library Board: discussion with Mrs. Gloria Dillsworth, Director, and Mr. Barry Camara, Deputy Director. Visit to Institute of Education, University of Sierra Leone: discussion with Mrs. Talabi A. Lucan, Curriculum Development Co-ordinator. (Evening) Visit to FBC: discussion with Dr. Cecil Magbaily Fyle, Director, Institute of African Studies.

Wednesday, 22 October: Return visit to UNDP. Discussion at Embassy of People's Revolutionary Republic of Guinea with Ambassador H.E. Konate and Dr. Turay (re possible visit next week to Conakry, to discuss collaboration between Sierra Leone and Guinea in the field of African language studies, including proposed Conference on Linguistic Decolonization and African Unity). Discussion with Mr. Michael Chadwick, British Council Representative in Freetown. Visit to Fourah Bay College (FBC): discussion with Dr. Alex Johnson, Department of English (in absence of Professor Eustace Palmer, Head of Department) and with Professor Eldred Jones, Principal of FBC. Discussion with Professor Newman Smart, Professor of Education and Head of Department of Education, FBC (and Chairman of the National Planning Committee for the Ministry of Education Indigenous Languages Education Programme). (Evening) Visit to television.
studios to participate in half-hour panel discussion in Temne language (be\p\i n yif mi), chaired by Rev. Gbla on subject of school education in Sierra Leonean languages (live broadcast on television and radio).

Thursday, 23 October: Visit to Freetown office of West African Examinations Council. Met B.B. Davis, Deputy Registrar, and obtained documentation from Mrs. F.M. Jonah, in charge of examination administration. Visit to Mano River Union secretariat: discussions with Dr. S. Jabaru Carlon, Project Co-ordinator of the Union's Curriculum Planning, Instructional Materials Production and Book Development (CIB) Project (formerly African Studies Director at the University of Liberia), and with Mrs. Elizabeth P. Hyde, English language and language arts specialist. Drove with Rev. Gbla to Bo (3½ hours): visited Mr. Jobson Momoh, Acting Provincial Secretary (Southern Province), and Mr. Alfred B. Cole, Regional Provincial Education Officer. Supper with Mr. Killa Bangura-Brown, Inspector of Schools, Bo District.

Friday, 24 October: Meeting at Mr. Cole's office with Mr. Joseph Yakawa and Mr. Max B. Katta, Supervisors of Indigenous Languages Pilot Project (Mende area), Mr. I.D. Peters-John, acting Senior Inspector of Schools (Southern Province) and Mr. D.S. Barber, Inspector of Secondary Schools. Visit with Mr. Momoh to Resident Minister Honourable Hancils (in charge of Southern Province). Visit to Methodist Primary School at Tikonko (near Bo), pilot school for Indigenous Languages Pilot Project (Mande language) since 1979. Visit to UCC Provincial Literacy Bureau (Bunumbu Press): talk with Director, Mr. R.H. Sam-Kpakra. Return to Freetown.

Saturday, 25 October: (Day on which Guinea joined Sierra Leone and Liberia within the Mano River Union.) Interviewed for radio (in Krio) by Mr. Bunting-Graden. Visit to the "Institute for Sierra Leonean Languages" (title of the Freetown branch of the Messengers of Christ Lutheran Bible Translators Inc. of California): discussion with the Director, Mr. Hank Millies, on the subject of the Institute's contract to support the Ministry of Education's Indigenous Languages Pilot Project. Further discussions with Professor Newman Smart (Head of Department of Education, FBC), and Mrs. Gloria Dillsworth (Director, Sierra Leone Library Board).

Sunday, 26 October: Writing up draft recommendations, and discussion of these with Dr. Turay.

Monday, 27 October: Visit to British Council: discussion of book production needs with Mr. Colin Stevenson. Visit to Guinea Embassy (Mr. Telli Diallo, First Secretary), where official invitation received for visit to Conakry by Dr. Turay and self, for discussions on 29 October with the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique and with the Director, Académie des Langues. Drove with Rev. Gbla to Magbele, Northern Province: visit to Magbele Primary School, pilot school for Indigenous Languages Pilot Project (Temne language) since 1979. Joined at Magbele by Mrs. Patricia Conteh, Supervisor of Indigenous Languages Pilot Project (Temne language) (and her husband, Principal of Siaka Stevens Commercial Secondary School, Port Loko): teaching demonstration and discussions on project.

Tuesday, 28 October: Private discussion of draft recommendations with Honourable Abdul Karim Koroma, Minister of Education. Departure for Conakry prevented by the state of the roads between Port Loko and Kambia, after heavy rains. Discussion with Mr. Martin Long, Assistant Field Director (British), Voluntary Service Overseas.
Wednesday, 29 October: Final attempt to reach Conakry aborted through lack of serviceable Landrover. Discussions in Freetown with Dr. Turay and Rev. Gbla.

Thursday, 30 October: End-of-mission meeting with Minister of Education, Dr. Turay, Rev. Gbla, Mr. Amadu Camara and Mr. Tai Afrik. Short meeting with Mr. Afrik, Senior Education Officer in charge of adult education, concerning use of African languages in this area (with Canadian support through CUSA).

Friday, 31 October: (Early morning) Flight to Paris.

Wednesday, 5 November: Return to United Kingdom.

November: Subsequent discussion of mission with Dr. Carew Treffgarne of the Department of Education in Developing Countries, University of London Institute of Education, and with Mr. Hugh Hawes of the same Department, recently Consultant to the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education's Primary Schools Curriculum Seminar-Workshop (Freetown, September 1980).
APPENDIX II

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS (1977-1980) consulted during mission to Sierra Leone

Fourah Bay College (proposals for establishment of) Sub-Department of Linguistics (by A.K. Turay, Dept. of English), Freetown (1980).


Institute of Education, English Language Programme for Primary 1 & 2: Integrated Approach to the Teaching of English Language and Social Studies (Recommended Syllabus), Freetown, 1979.

Institute of Education (papers presented to) Primary Schools Curriculum Seminar/Workshop, Freetown, September 1980, incl. A.K. Turay, Developments in local language programmes for primary schools.


Ministry of Education & TISLL, Working Agreement between Institute of Sierra Leonean Languages (TISLL) and Ministry of Education of Republic of Sierra Leone for a Vernacular Education Pilot Project, Freetown, March 1979.


TISLL, The Institute for Sierra Leonean Languages (TISLL) serving God and the People of Sierra Leone, Freetown, October 1979.


UCC Literature Bureau, Progress Report...1979-1980, Bo (1980) and Literacy Programme Outline, Bo, n.d.