

## **Challenges to African Development: The Medium of Instruction in Uganda's Education System**

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Education is perceived as development and language is the major medium of instruction and communication through which innovations, ideas, and opinions are transmitted from one person to another. The medium of instruction in school dictates to a large extent the attainment of knowledge and skills at all levels of the education system. It is unfortunate that the major media of instruction in African Schools emanated from foreign cultures! And, as much as such media of instruction are regarded as second languages to the respective countries where they are employed, they are largely foreign in structure and their mutual intelligibility. The four major languages that occupy the education space in Africa include French, Portuguese, Arabic and English.

The recent research findings on use of mother tongue as a means of instruction in the lower primary in Uganda indicate that there is a relative level of adherence to the language policy in the first three years of primary school (Piper, 2010). But this occurs in lower primary and English takes over at the rest of the levels. However, research has indicated that Children and adults learn better when they are taught in their mother tongue (Government White paper on Education 1992). Therefore, this study is geared towards assessing the challenges learners' face where English a second language is employed in the classroom as a medium of instruction.

### **Methodology**

A case study is being used to guide the study. Respondents include students from two senior secondary schools who study Biology and History. Interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis are the major mode of inquiry.

### **Preliminary Results**

- Students in African schools grapple with acquiring the medium of instruction as well as learning the content; which stifle their creativity.
- Some concepts in science related disciplines are difficult to relate to the local context.
- Some teachers are forced to code switch into the mother tongue of the learners in order to drive the message home.

**N.B: This study is on-going and be completed in March 2011.**

### **References:**

Piper, B. (2010). *Uganda Early Grade Reading Assessment Findings Report: Literacy Acquisition and Mother Tongue*. RTI International.