

The Case Against Bilingual and Multilingual Education in South Africa

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experience feelings which range from fear of being found out, guilt or incompetence (FDE Multilingual Education students 1999: Personal communication). In other words, I can understand that educators who are attempting to report on language in education practice might rely on teachers' and school principals' initial reports of which language is used as the medium of instruction. If these educators were, however, to explore the actual situation in the classrooms, what they hear might be very different from what they have been told.

15. The work of Cummins, Swain, Skutnabb-Kangas and others is a recent development over the last two decades. It was preceded by the practice of bilingual education in South Africa from the late 1800s and the study of EG Malherbe in the late 1930s and 1940s. Far from South African educators borrowing from international experience, we provided the initial experience from which international research has benefited. See 3.1 above.
16. Until 1976, African language speaking students had mother tongue instruction for 8 years. After SOWETO this was reduced, first to 6 and later to 4 years, followed by a sudden switch to English medium. The Department of Education and Training formalised legislative changes to the education of African children in 1979, but the second phase of *Bantu Education* really began with the compromise reached in practice after the SOWETO rebellion and continued until the first democratic elections of 1994. What nobody recognised at the time was that the consequences of these compromises were to wreak more devastation upon the education of black students than the first phase could have accomplished.
17. After 1994 matriculation results were no longer published according to a racial/ethnic breakdown of data. Thus the 1997 results should be interpreted against an estimation that about 80% of candidates who passed would have been speakers of African languages. The 10% overall decline in the pass rate between 1994 and 1997 is cause for considerable alarm.
18. Perhaps it is unnecessary to point out that this participant is himself a home language speaker of an indigenous South African language.
19. Haroon Mohamed said that: "It is too costly to produce books in all 11 languages". None of the panelists or presenters at the seminar indicated that they were in disagreement with this point. (DoE Seminar, Pretoria, 22 January 2000).
20. It is interesting to note that in the province (Western Cape) where 80% of learners wrote their 1999 matric examination in their mother tongue, there was a 79% pass rate.

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1. Introduction

The issue of language in education in South Africa at the turn of the millennium remains heavily contested. Apartheid language in education policy infused with unequal language proficiency demands for school pupils in the country was replaced in 1997 with a new policy based on non-discriminatory language use and the internationally accepted principle of mother tongue education in the context of a bilingual or multilingual framework. It was designed to guarantee pupils the best possible access to and proficiency in another language (English for the majority of pupils) alongside the language best known by pupils upon entry to school. The policy has not been accompanied or followed by any significant government initiated implementation plan. It has, however, been met with several arguments against its implementation and these have found their way into publications which are now being used to deflect government's responsibility regarding implementation. Whilst government remains inert on the matter, the discriminatory policy of the former apartheid government continues to be practised in schools.

Argument which is directed against bilingual education in South Africa is not new. An examination of education in South Africa shows the uncanny way in which history repeats itself. More than sixty years ago Malherbe complained about the way in which the detractors of bilingual education then made claims about the educational advantages of what were known as unilingual schools despite comprehensive evidence which demonstrated the linguistic, academic and social advantages of bilingual schools. Malherbe's observations then are equally applicable today:

Unfortunately, most of these claims are made on *a priori* grounds and are not backed by objective data or scientific proof – as far as the South African situation is concerned. In fact, the vehemence with which they are propounded is generally in inverse proportion to the amount of scientifically reliable data which can be adduced in support of these views. Assertion alone does not necessarily verify a statement (Malherbe 1943: 38).

2. Contexts

2.1 The immediate context

The shift in political power in 1994 both necessitated and made possible a reappraisal of the educational disaster facing South Africa. The Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, at the recent National Colloquium on Language in Education (9 June 2000) spoke of the heady days of hope and idealism which accompanied this historical juncture in the history of South Africa. He warned, however, that the days of high-minded idealism had, now, to give way to practical, implementable solutions within the existing budgetary constraints of government. What he might have added is that it is necessary to diagnose correctly the ailments which continue to plague education, because taxpayers' money ought not to be wasted on a system which can only deliver failure. Remedies, which treat the symptoms and secondary ailments without tackling the problem at source, similarly cannot be afforded. Unfortunately, a leaden bureaucracy which includes an uneasy collection of former apartheid educational institutions, expanded with new personnel, has not yet shown the single-mindedness of purpose to grasp the big picture. Under the first Minister of Education after the 1994 elections, apartheid education was disaggregated for corrective treatment. This happened in the absence of a comprehensive education policy and plan integrated into a new national plan for development.² The approach was to look at corrective treatment of the component parts as separate entities rather than as a whole. Apartheid, in contrast, began with the whole and this was applied to the parts.

2.2 The historical context

In hindsight, of course, it should not be surprising that apartheid succeeded in accomplishing what it was set out to do. *Bantu Education*, one of the components of apartheid was, ironically, the only education policy in sub-Saharan Africa, in the last half century, which achieved that for which it was intended. It was devised for the sole purpose of effecting the unequal segregation of our society. Just as *Bantu Education* was an integral part of apartheid, so the language in education policy was integral to both *Bantu Education* and apartheid. The entire plan worked perfectly, because all the component parts were in logical symmetry. It was no accident that the administration of apartheid language policy, the State Language Service (SLS) was located within the central Department of Education during National Party rule.

Segregated education, a language policy designed for separate development, unequal resources, and a cognitively impoverished curriculum has resulted in the massive under-education of the majority of the population.

8. See the articles by Komarek, Küper, Dutcher, Vawda & Patrinos and Woodhall in Küper (ed) 1998.
9. Neville Alexander, in discussion with colleagues at PRAESA has pointed to the absurdity of this argument by questioning 'whether our children are any different from children elsewhere in the world' (Alexander, personal communication 1999).
10. Colleagues in PRAESA, a project which has been engaged in extensive dialogue with language planners and educators across Africa for more than a decade, are unaware of a Pan Africanist approach to language policy and are unable to shed any light on this claim.
11. According to Baker & Garcia (1996:200) the first extensive research on bilingual education was conducted in Wales in the 1920s, and the next in South Africa. Here they refer to EG Malherbe 1946 *The Bilingual School*. London: Longman.
12. See Cummins (1984:105). Baker & Garcia (1996:132-4) discuss Ianco-Worrall's findings and quote one of her conclusions that bilingual children "...reach a stage of semantic development, as measured by our test, some 2-3 years earlier than their monolingual peers" (Ianco-Worrall 1972:1398 in Baker & Garcia 1996:133).
13. Ianco-Worrall 1995 Personal communication.
14. My observations of language use in primary school classrooms in 'township' schools in the Western Cape is that teachers may tell one that they use English as the language of learning when first asked. When probed a little they admit to code-switching. When observed, they use mainly Xhosa with a very small percentage of code-mixing, i.e. the use of English terminology within mainly Xhosa discourse. From Grade 4 onwards, after they have taught content in Xhosa, they write sentences on the board in English. The pupils then copy these English sentences into their workbooks. To a parent, school principal, or departmental official who examines the workbooks, it might appear as if English had been the language of learning. If one asks pupils to read these sentences they are seldom able to comply. If one asks the pupils to explain what each sentence means, they are unable to do so. The pupils are not generating sentences of their own in English. I have not yet seen, in any primary school classroom in a Western Cape township, evidence of pupils writing their own paragraphs or essays in English. It appears to me that there is an almost schizophrenic situation where teachers believe that they are expected to teach through English and that when this becomes impossible to accomplish in practice, they code-switch or use Xhosa mainly without always being conscious of this. When they are conscious of this process, they may

Endnotes

1. The title of this paper is borrowed from Stephen Krashen 1996 *Under Attack: The Case Against Bilingual Education*. This paper is an expanded version of an article, Beyond Myths and Legends: Languages Other Than and Alongside English – or *why not?* in *Perspectives in Education* (forthcoming).
2. In South Africa the closest we have come to such a plan is the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy of 1996. Neither of these address adequately the nature of what kind of education we need, in South Africa, to shift into the 21st Century; nor do they in any way demonstrate that the multilingual nature of the country needs to be taken into account for planning and development purposes.
3. Despite the attempt to neutralise the term *Bantu Education* with “Department of Education and Training”, commonly known as DET education, a second phase of *Bantu Education* continued after the 1979 legislative changes in principle. Despite the new legislative and other changes on paper since 1994, it has survived, as a third phase, in its continued practice in most schools today.
4. Almost every commission of enquiry into language and education, every language in education conference and every set of recommendations on the matter, in Africa, over the last 100 years, has concluded that education must begin in the mother tongue of the child or in that language of the immediate community which the child knows and uses best. (See, for example, Heugh 1999:304-5 and also see the entire volume of Skutnabb-Kangas 2000.)
5. Thomas & Collier in fact show that children who are plunged almost immediately into a second language learning environment might only score 20% in their final examinations in English.
6. Even though there is no scientific evidence to show that this perception is valid/true, it is presented in oral argument by mainly English first language speaking ‘academics’/‘experts’ at educational conferences, seminars and workshops in South Africa. Why?
7. Obviously there will be initial costs involved here. However, there will also be job opportunities and a growth of a language industry. The initial investment will lead in the medium term to the opening up of job opportunities for translators and terminologists and hence the expansion of a language industry here. The significant benefits to a national economy of an expanding language industry have been clearly evidenced in Australia during the last decade.

The legacy of this will continue to plague us for generations. The effects of this policy are such that *Bantu Education* has developed a lifespan of its own – one which continues to outlive its parent, *Grand Apartheid*. To be honest, there were never going to be any quick solutions to bring it to a grinding halt, and there certainly are no quick solutions to reverse or transform the process. Approaches which tackle one area of a dysfunctional education system, and which do not arise out of a thorough examination of the bigger picture, cannot possibly succeed. The big picture includes the goals of a new and hopefully democratic national plan for development, a clear understanding of the precise conditions from whence we have come and of those in which we currently find ourselves, and a grasp of how long it will take to bring about effective change.

2.3 The context of language in education

In this regard, I should like to turn to the matter of South Africa’s languages, the users of these languages, and the attitudes and perceptions about these languages in education. Unless the fog of prevarication and myths with regard to the role and nature of languages in education is lifted, the little window we have to effect change in education will close and the opportunity will be lost.

The failure of language and educational policy where the two are not closely inter-related in multilingual settings is legendary. International research and experience shows conclusively that no language policy will ever succeed unless an accompanying plan is implemented; neither will it succeed if there is an accompanying plan which is at variance with the goals (see for example Akinnsa 1991:29–61). Furthermore, a language in education policy will not succeed unless it is integrated with and in synchrony with the national education policy and plan (or a new curriculum). Chumbow asserts, further, that the place of language planning is within the ‘National Development Plan’ (1987:22).

If the goal of South African education is to ensure that all pupils will have equal access, not only to the school door, but also to a useful and meaningful engagement with the curriculum, then we should follow an unequivocal path to realise this. It means that, in a clinical manner, all the weak, middle class and obfuscating excuses, which are presented as insurmountable obstacles, should be cut adrift. This paper will focus on the case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa and the arguments which are being mounted in defence of the *status quo*. The intention is not to suggest that language is everything. I should like to predict, though, that should the role of language continue to be shrouded in a confusion of ill-informed myths, it would eventually become the most important factor, which determines the failure of the majority and success

for a tiny minority. It will certainly increase the gulf between those who have and those who do not.

In the attempts thus far to reform the education system, specifically at school level, the matter of curriculum and language policy have been seen as two separate areas requiring parallel and separate discussions. Although both discussions were initiated by the Department of Education (DoE) towards the end of 1995, they were never integrated. Hence Curriculum 2005 was announced ahead of the Language in Education Policy in 1997. Curriculum 2005 included language, as a separate learning area, and any reference to language beyond the learning area was cursory. It is as if, despite the Constitutional provisions giving official status to 11 languages, there were an underlying assumption that only one language has value in the country. South Africa's multilingual reality, and the effects of the language policy within *Bantu Education*³ were simply put aside. The logic of the language in education policy, however, is different. It is based on the recognition that South Africa is multilingual and that the mother tongue (or the language used most proficiently at home) is the most appropriate language of learning everywhere in the world⁴. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that all pupils will need a very strong proficiency in at least one other language, and that for most pupils English will be a language of high priority. The concept of bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa is framed, in the policy document, in the context of adding a second and even a third language to each pupil's linguistic repertoire in ways which would best guarantee both academic and linguistic success. At no point is the position of English questioned or threatened.

The policy, in fact, offers English a much better opportunity for expansion as a medium of communication than before. Only those who do not understand how second languages are and can be learned with success will believe otherwise. The new language policy offers the best possible opportunity for those who do not have English as a first language, to learn it well enough to use it in institutions of higher education and for employment purposes in the mainstream economy. It most certainly does not prevent access to English, neither does it dilute or minimise learners' opportunity to gain meaningful access to English. Volumes of work have been written on this topic (see for example: Baker 1988, Baker & Garcia 1996, Cummins 1984, Krashen 1996, Liddicoat (ed.) 1991, Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins (eds.) 1988, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Each of these authors, and many others as well, provide copious evidence of the failure of most children who are plunged too quickly into English without strong support in the school for their home language. In particular, the majority of children whose home language/s have a lower status than English are never likely to achieve more than 40% in their final school examinations for English if they are plunged too quickly into an English mainly or only education. (See, for example, the

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Skutnabb-Kangas T & Cummins J (eds.) 1988 *Minority Education: From Shame to Struggle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

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Snow C, Burns MS, Griffin P (eds) 1998 *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

longitudinal studies of Ramirez et al 1991 and Thomas & Collier 1997⁵.) In other words, the common sense notion that the earlier and greater the exposure to English coupled with a proportional decrease in the use of the mother tongue will result in better proficiency in English does not hold up to scientific scrutiny. Rather, the less use made of the mother tongue in education, the less likely the student is to perform well across the curriculum and in English. In a multilingual society where a language such as English is highly prized, there is only one viable option and this is bilingual education where adequate linguistic development is fore grounded in the mother tongue whilst the second language is systematically added. If the mother tongue is replaced, the second language will not be adequately learnt and linguistic proficiency in both languages will be compromised.

It is obviously important that the attitudes of civil society are taken into account, and particularly those of parents when education is at issue. In this regard, there are some who argue that parents believe that the sooner their children are exposed to English as the language of learning the sooner they will gain proficiency in it. There are two questions here:

- Where is the statistical evidence to support this perception?⁶
- If it is true that parents think this, why do parents think this?

Krashen points out that this perception does not usually stand up to the test:

If you ask people if they support the development of the first language at the expense of English and school success, nearly all say “no.” But if you ask them if they support bilingual education, a surprising number say they do. Similarly, a large percentage agrees with the principles underlying bilingual education. When people do object to bilingual education, quite often it is on the basis of application, not theory (Krashen 1996:49).

(This issue is discussed further in 3.2 below.)

Implications of the new language in education policy include the need to use the other official languages as languages of learning alongside English. This means that school textbooks and materials must become available in languages other than English, and therefore, systematic development in the area of terminology and translation will be necessary.⁷ None of these developments should be seen to pose a threat to the position of English. English will remain a language of aspiration for the majority and of high economic return for the middle classes. Lest there be any misunderstanding of this issue, the development of and investment in African languages as languages of learning and teaching will bring the best possible returns. Given the wealth of evidence from studies⁸ conducted both in South Africa and elsewhere one would expect the benefits to include:

- an increase in the overall standard of education in the country
- increased levels of competence in English
- lower drop-out and failure rates
- raised levels of self-esteem and a greater degree of social tolerance for many citizens
- a positive impact on the economy.

2.4 Policy review and implementation

Unfortunately, because curriculum development and language policy developments were kept apart, the curriculum developers and language policy advisers were not able to share their expertise or better inform one another's attempts at educational reform. For reasons of political urgency, government needed to signal a renewed fervour towards the implementation of policy immediately after the general elections of 1999. The appointment of a new Minister of Education was accompanied by stock-taking, evaluation and a need for speedy implementation. A review of the major education changes in school was prioritised. First, the new curriculum was placed under review. An appeal from the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (Alexander 2000), to the Minister and Department of Education, that the curriculum review and language policy review processes should be integrated and conducted simultaneously, was ignored by officials in the department. The logic of separate development proved irresistible. The curriculum review process began with a workshop of the department in January 2000, and the language policy review was delayed until early June, after the curriculum review team had submitted its report (Review Committee on Curriculum 2005: 2000) to the minister. To its credit the curriculum review team has highlighted the importance of early literacy with numeracy as the foundations for successful learning and has recommended that a greater portion of the school day should be devoted to language learning than was the case with Curriculum 2005. Unfortunately it is the nature of language within a multilingual country that has not been contextualised and this may mean that we continue along a misty path without the best linguistic beacons to guide our pupils through the curriculum.

When there is an ailment that requires treatment, the symptoms need to be carefully examined, the cause and ailment diagnosed, an appropriate remedy prescribed and administered correctly. What has been happening repeatedly in South Africa, through an abundance of research findings, is that the problem is presented and analysed. Unfortunately, the findings which seem to enjoy support are those which are based on an incorrect or incomplete diagnosis. The wrong remedy is prescribed and the 'patient' (failure of the education system) returns time and again with a deteriorating condition. There are many problems in the system which contribute to the worsening

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5. Conclusion

The *why* questions in this paper signal that bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa are “under attack” (see Krashen 1996). They signal the pressure to ignore/forego the mother tongue principal for 83% of pupils who mainly come from poor socio-economic backgrounds and who are mostly taught by teachers who themselves have usually struggled through the second phase of *Bantu Education*. If we are to succumb to this pressure, then we need to look at the projections for success/failure in a mainly English school system. The responsibility of educators in this period of increasing crisis is to look toward possible answers with care. If existing proposals are inadequate then the inadequacies should be demonstrated with scientific evidence. The false dichotomy which is presented as a choice between either English or mother tongue/African languages needs to be set aside once and for all. Bilingual education for each child within a multilingual education policy does not mean a choice between either English or an African language. It means both. It means developing the first language and adding a second language in the best possible manner to ensure the successful learning of the second language. Jettisoning the one for the other spells individual and societal disaster for the country. The country’s political, economic and social future depends upon the successful education of its youth. If the majority of the youth continue to be failed, the socio-economic differences which existed during apartheid will not change very much. The youth have been promised change and promised opportunities denied their parents. Their disappointment will inevitably turn to disaffection and this will not benefit those who currently support the *status quo*.

crisis in education. Until, however, there is an acknowledgement of the misguided and faulty perceptions of how and why it is that **language is a key** to the learning and teaching processes, there will be no effective remedy.

Skutnabb-Kangas explains why it is that wrong approaches are taken elsewhere:

Nice people are working with good intentions – and still the results are often a disaster. **Why?**

I share with many researchers worldwide the belief that the education of indigenous peoples and minorities in most countries is organised in ways which counteract sound scientific evidence from education and several other disciplines. In many cases we **know** in general terms how education could be organised better. We can show that it works, and often it is not even more costly in the short-term and certainly not in the medium or long-term ... But it is not done. **Why?** ...

Many linguists and educationists are working hard, with devotion, to make people literate. The United Nations and UNESCO, the Organisation of African Unity, and many other organisations publish scores of resolutions and declarations about their commitment to literacy and Education for All. Still the world’s literacy rates are either not improving or are improving at a much slower rate than any of the ... plans have suggested ... **Why?** I claim that the wrong choice of medium of education is the main **pedagogical** reason ... And most ‘development aid’ supports the wrong languages. **Why?** (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:xx–xxi.)

By way of answering some of these questions Skutnabb-Kangas argues that a positivist paradigm to which some academics adhere allows them to believe that answers to problems can be found by examining only the evidence before them and not *why* that evidence has presented itself. She critiques the approaches of positivist researchers and intellectuals whose feelings and moral and political value judgments are seen as irrelevant to the research and or are not acknowledged by them. She argues that positivists tend to ask *what* and *how* questions but not *why* questions. Alternatively they ask the wrong *why* questions (2000:xxiii–xxiv). She goes on to quote Gramsci:

The intellectual’s error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned ... in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people:nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of

the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated, i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation ... (Gramsci 1971:418 in Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:xxiv-xxv).

population actually benefits? Bilingual/multilingual education on the other hand, with a little more investment, carries the possibility of a positive return. The hard evidence we have in South Africa dates back to 1943. New hard evidence of this cannot be presently found, it is true. Government has not found the courage to try to find any. Baseless, middle class, and anglocentric arguments are in the meantime being used to scare it off.

to accompany the materials are established. They show that there are increased costs, but these are not that significant where there are print-runs, which do not exceed those required for our smallest languages (Venda and Tsonga). The overall cost increase on the expenditure for materials is 10% (Vawda 1999). Given that we spend less than 10% of our education budget on materials and teacher training, this would mean at present levels an additional 1% on the education budget. There is evidence which shows medium to long-term benefits for the economy where a linguistically more accommodating environment encourages children to stay in school for longer. There are other studies which show that the failure rate is lowered where there is an accommodating linguistic environment (Dutcher & Tucker, *ibid.*). A thorough costing has yet to be done for each of the options for education in South Africa.

The following table takes the statistics available from international research on the success of children whose home language/mother tongue is replaced by English as the main language of learning.

English Mainly Education	Possible Matriculation Pass Rates
With adequate reading materials and resources in schools and the teacher ratio is no more than 1:30, teachers proficient in English	40% (maximum for students writing in other than home language), 80% (maximum for students writing in home language) ²⁰
With poor resources, and a teacher ratio in primary school of 1:40 or more, and teachers not sufficiently proficient in English	20%-30% (pass rate for students writing in other than home language irrespective of whether or not discrete curriculum changes are implemented)
Bilingual Schooling for All	National Average Score
With adequate resources	60% Aggregate (70%-80% pass rate)

(percentages drawn from the findings of Ramirez et al 1991 and Collier & Thomas 1997)

Table 5

With good resources one can only expect the continued failure of the majority if English mainly education is to be pursued, particularly when this conflicts with the wishes of the majority of people. Without sufficient resources we can expect the worst. How can spending 22% of the budget be justified on an education from which only a quarter of the school going

3. Misconceptions, myths and misdiagnosis

I argue that in South Africa the *what* is not necessarily identified or found, it is sometimes invented. Claims are made about public perceptions. Then the claims are treated as verifiable evidence (the *what*). If any evidence is offered, it is either weak or it applies only to a small sample of students or informants rather than the majority. Despite evidence which is flimsy at best, it finds its way into texts which support the *status quo* in relation to language use in education. Collectively, because the claims are restated with such frequency, they become mythologised. There are several contemporary myths about language and education in South Africa, and I shall focus only on a few, by way of example.

Myth 1: There is little or no indigenous South African research on language in education to show what is wrong or what could work well. This myth is used to discredit international research as being not appropriate to our circumstances and it ignores very fine and important work done here.

Myth 2: Parents want straight for English – and in a democracy it is our duty to give people what they want, without question or the need for (responsible) intervention.

Myth 3: In South Africa English is the only language which has the capacity to deliver quality education to the majority; African languages do not and cannot.

Myth 4: African language speaking children are multilingual and therefore do not need mother tongue education. South African children are unique; they are unlike children in other parts of the mainly multilingual world. Our children's multilinguality means, according to the myth, that they do not have a mother tongue, and therefore have no need of mother tongue education.

Myth 5: Bilingual or multilingual education is too expensive and we have only one option: English only (or mainly).

Why do these myths, in the absence of sufficient supporting evidence, and often in spite of evidence to the contrary, find their way into debates on education in South Africa? Unfortunately, if myths are given the status of reputable research, they are used to misdiagnose the problem. This is costly. So who benefits?

3.1 Myth 1: There is no or not enough indigenous South African research

On the one hand many recent reports on South African education attest to the volume of research undertaken in this country in the area of languages in education, and then for some reason, ‘experts’ are quoted in the very same reports as either denying the existence of this research or pleading for more – to identify the problem which has already been identified. Furthermore, international research is discredited as having little relevance to South Africa. It is asserted that the findings on how children learn and how they learn languages in other countries can have little bearing on the linguistic and cognitive development of children in South Africa. The implication is that children in South Africa are cognitively different from children in other parts of the world and that only local research could have any value.⁹ For example:

Widespread consultation and debate has accompanied language policy development in South Africa in the last decade. The debates were informed, and confused, by international studies on education policy in bilingual and multilingual countries, by Pan Africanist views of language policy emerging from African countries, and by the limited amount of South African research undertaken in schools (Taylor & Vinjevoold 1999:211).

...[S]everal ... interviewees, indicated the need for a research framework indicating questions, even methodology, to which researchers can contribute if they wish: a ‘mental map’ of projects being undertaken ... (NCCRD 2000:32).

Professor ... would appreciate it if there were nationally generated questions to which the master’s degree learners on his course could contribute through their dissertations (NCCRD 2000:34).

There is in fact a huge body of research which has been conducted in South Africa and which points conclusively to the disastrous effects of attempting to teach mainly through English when the conditions do not and cannot make this possible. We also have significant studies which show both academic and social advantages of bilingual education in this country. *Why* is this research ignored in reports and publications such as referred to above? Will more research disprove the incontrovertible evidence? How much will this new research cost? How much time will be wasted? The authors who claim that ‘Pan Africanist’ views on language policy emerging from African countries contribute to confusion in South Africa, do not identify what they mean by Pan Africanist nor do they provide any evidence of this assertion.¹⁰ On the other hand there have been numerous independ-

of this investment on development, the economy, as well as the social and political implications.

- Costs on schooling in South Africa are cut. One way to do this would be to make explicit use of English as the access point to educational institutions. Those who do not pass an English language test could be excluded directly rather than indirectly, as is currently the case. This can be done with little negative impact on the current 27% return of investment. The saving on investment could be re-routed to other priority areas such as housing or health. Again the cost-effectiveness of this option would have to be calculated in relation to development, the economy, and social and political results.

To say that we must go the English mainly or only route because it is cheaper, is absurd. It’s an argument which can only spring from an intention to preserve the current inequities in the society. It is also a sheer waste of money. Huge amounts are spent, even in well-resourced parts of the world, like the USA, where teachers are well-trained and competent speakers of English, and still their English second language pupils fail. We could spend more and our pupils will still fail or we could spend less and they would do no worse.

There are now a number of studies which question the cost-effectiveness of going the second language route and ignoring the first language or bilingual route. The following is a selection of clear and unambiguous findings from international research as spelt out in Dutcher & Tucker (1995):

- *Development in L1* is critical for cognitive development and as a basis for learning the L2
- *Teachers* must understand and speak confidently the language of instruction
- *Parental* and community support is essential
- There are additional initial *costs* for bilingual programmes, but recurrent costs are the same as for traditional programmes
- *Cost benefit analysis*: there are savings on reduced repetition/failure; there are economic benefits to a country where the dropout rate is reduced.

[Adapted from: Dutcher & Tucker 1995 In Küper 1998.]

Furthermore, there is a recent study conducted by Vawda and Patrinos for the World Bank, in which the development and printing costs of bilingual teaching materials and books as well as the necessary teacher training

4. Four alternatives

There are currently four possibilities for the way forward. Sober consideration of all of the facts and implications is required. The options are as follows:

- A multilingual approach to education in the country, which would boil down to mother tongue maintenance plus good provision of English; or use of English for up to 50% of the day alongside the mother tongue. This would require careful planning and implementation programmes. These would include the updating of: terminology which was in written use until 1975 and extending this where necessary; textbooks which include African languages for content areas of the curriculum; and in-service teacher education. The in-service teacher education needs to include English language upgrading programmes for up to 40% of teachers; bilingual teaching methodology for all teachers; and learner-centred teaching methodology. This option would require an investment from the side of government. The World Bank has shown, as have other studies, that there would be a reasonable expectation of a positive return on the investment made (see below).
- An English mainly approach is adopted which would require extensive in-service teacher education to raise the existing proficiencies in English to L1 levels for up to 95% of the teaching corps. Extensive English language improvement programmes would need to be initiated to cater for the needs of prospective and new teachers. New textbooks would need to be carefully written by second language experts across every area of the curriculum in order that the English language levels are adjusted. The poor success rate of education based on a second language mainly approach in well-resourced countries such as the USA, Canada and Britain indicates that there would be no guarantee of increased levels of literacy or academic success via this approach. The expectation of a positive return on the investment is zero. (For example see Ramirez et al 1991; Collier & Thomas 1997 and the table below.) However, it is possible that if second language speakers of English were provided with an additional two years of schooling, the prospects might improve. An additional two years of schooling would need to be financed for 83% of pupils at current levels.
- The third phase of *Bantu Education*, i.e. the *status quo* continues. 22% of the budget is spent with an expected 27% return (percentages of pupils who leave the school system with a matriculation certificate). Children of the more privileged sectors of the country will be the main beneficiaries of the schooling system. Economists would need to assess the impact

ent commissions of enquiry into the state of education in Africa over the last century (see, for example, in Heugh 1999:304–305). Each of these has identified the importance of early mother tongue literacy and home language maintenance for successful education in the specific countries concerned in the investigations. In other words, separate and different enquiries have come to similar conclusions. Is it possible that these conclusions, arrived at by different commissioners in separate reports, are interpreted in South Africa as a confusing Pan Africanist approach? That these conclusions, which concur with findings from South America, Australia, the Indian sub-continent, South-East Asia, North America, Europe etc, are seen as dubious, is extraordinary. What is additionally troubling is that a discourse, which suggests confusion and Pan Africanism above, is resonant of the old suspicious, conspiracy-laden discourse of apartheid where active measures were taken to ‘protect’ South Africans from gaining access to ‘dangerous ideas’ from beyond the country’s borders.

The following is a selection of a large body of South African research on bilingual education and transitional bilingual programmes already conducted in schools. Whilst it has influenced international research and thinking, its implications have either been overlooked or ignored in South Africa.

- A large survey of 18 733 pupils conducted by the Director of the National Bureau for Educational and Social Research, EG Malherbe, in 1938, on the extent of bilingualism amongst pupils in schools was considered by WF Mackey, WE Lambert, E Glyn Lewis, WR Jones, and Joshua Fishman, amongst others, as the most authoritative and comprehensive study of the relationship between education and bilingualism at the time (see EG Malherbe 1977:64–5). Yet it has been largely ignored in South Africa. Cummins (1984:145–6) refers at length to this study and quotes Malherbe as follows:

Not only the bright children but also the children with below normal intelligence do better school work all round in the bilingual school than in the unilingual school (Malherbe:1969:48, in Cummins 1984:146).

- See also Baker & Garcia’s reference (1996:200) to *The Bilingual School* (EG Malherbe: 1946).¹¹ This book was given numerous accolades in earlier international literature (see for example Penfield 1969, and Boveri in EG Malherbe 1977:65).
- Ianco-Worrall’s PhD research in the late 1960s (and in Ianco-Worrall 1972) on bilingual Afrikaans-English speaking children contributed to much of the later Canadian work on bilingualism and bilingual education.¹² Her findings showed that bilingual children have greater cogni-

tive flexibility than do monolingual children and this is an advantage. Although considered internationally to have made path-breaking findings in the area of bilingualism and education, Ianco-Worrall was unable to secure employment in this area at a South African university or Department of Education upon her return to the country.¹³

- The research co-ordinated by Carol Macdonald (1990) for the HSRC, to be found in the *The Threshold Report*, is probably the most underrated but most significant piece of research conducted on language in education in South Africa over the last half century. Macdonald's work is similarly highly regarded outside of South Africa. Later research in the USA by Ramirez et al (1991) and Snow et al (1998) corroborates much of Macdonald's findings. A central finding of her research was that school pupils who switch medium of instruction before they have sufficiently developed and learnt the new target language of learning, would not succeed. Curiously, this vital piece of information has still to impact on the thinking within South African national and provincial departments of education, a decade later. Although Macdonald's research is well known inside the country, the **implications** of this research have somehow not been fully appreciated by 'academics'/ 'experts' who promote English as the only or main language of learning.
- The *Final Report of the Language Plan Task Group* is a significant document which presents the culmination of the widest and most consultative, national process on language policy and planning ever conducted in South Africa. The report contains a coherent map of language-related research which is still required, and conveniently identifies the baseline data and research and development needs for the country, in the area of language in education (DACST 1996: 125–132).

There is no need for more research to identify the problem or how to remedy it. The answers to these questions have already been established through research conducted in South Africa. There is no reliance on international research in this regard. There is nothing in the South African research which is confused by international research. On the contrary, South African research has been taken seriously outside of the country and has been used to further international research. At the same time it would be foolish if one were to seek succour in the vacuum of academic isolationism which existed during the years of apartheid. It is important to keep abreast of international findings and developments since the country's survival during the current phase of globalisation depends upon this. If there is a gap in the domestic research, then it has already been identified in the LANGTAG Report of 1996. *Why* is it that people who do not appear to have knowledge of these things, are cited as the authoritative voices in

should be no longer possible to present only a partial picture of the educational domain in academic publications. The following extract illustrates, however, that a certain myopia persists.

[S]o far, schools have been single-medium and have taught additional languages only as second languages. Language planners like Neville Alexander have thus called repeatedly for a definite commitment to the establishment of multilingual schools (schools which use more than one medium of instruction) to fulfil the constitutional provisions ... However, so far there are few teachers adequately prepared for the teaching practice in such multilingual schools, and the teaching materials are not yet available for the higher grades. Financial constraints on the school budget often make it difficult for state-aided schools to hire new teachers for the African languages which are now being promoted in the schools (Deumert 2000:413).

This refers to the language in education practice of schools which cater for children from English and Afrikaans speaking communities, and which have been single medium in the main since 1948. The situation described above does not and has never applied to the education of the majority of African language speaking pupils. The reference to multilingual education and Neville Alexander in connection with a minority of schools in the country creates a skewed impression of multilingual education. The costs of supplying a very small number of African language teachers to the minority of schools is an extremely weak argument considering that the majority of teachers in the country are first language speakers of African languages, several of whom could easily be re-deployed to the schools in question, at no extra cost to the system. This is simply not the reason to shelve a policy of multilingual education, which means the maintenance of the home language alongside English, for the majority. What is overlooked, however, is that the vast majority of the country's teachers are first language speakers of African languages who do not have an adequate English language proficiency to teach through this language. The costs of attempting to provide the requisite in-service English language upgrading courses for these teachers to make it possible for them to teach through English have yet to be calculated.

To my knowledge there has been no assessment of the cost of a thoroughly well thought-out and planned implementation of English only education in South Africa. Those who argue in favour of English only or mainly do not appear to recognise the need to do this when they argue that the costs of bilingual education are unaffordable. (Compare Taylor & Vinjevold's presentation of their two alternatives in 3.3 above: **Allocating substantial resources to promoting added [sic] bilingualism ... and Accepting the growing use of English ...**)

employ the spoken variety and add the standard written variety if this were different. What would be inappropriate is the pedagogy rather than the principle of the medium. On the other hand, it is important to note that much attention does need to be given to the syllabuses in African languages themselves, particularly at secondary school where entirely inappropriate materials and syllabuses have survived the apartheid era virtually intact. Neither the survival of inappropriate apartheid syllabuses, however, nor unacceptable teaching methods should be confused with the principle of mother tongue or first language education or used as a ruse to dispense with it.

3.5 Myth 5: Bilingual or multilingual education is too expensive and we have only one option: English only (or mainly)

The Department of Education held the Seminar: Review of Curriculum 2005 in Pretoria, on 22 January 2000. The seminar/workshop was designed to stimulate debate and initiate the curriculum review process. None of the presenters or panellists at any point made reference to the fact that our pupils speak a range of different languages or that this should be factored into the curriculum. When I challenged this, the panellists dismissed language as an issue, and indicated that it was too expensive to entertain multilingual education.¹⁹ I have, since 1993, pointed out that we spend a great deal on textbooks in English each year, and on teachers' salaries on the pretext that we are providing an education through the medium of English. While we do this, the majority of pupils who write matric fail this examination. Many others drop out before they reach matric. We spend a great deal of money, 22% of the national budget, on an education system which fails more than half of the learners who manage to stay at school until the twelfth year. Only 27% of the pupils who begin school in South Africa exit with a school-leaving certificate after the twelfth grade. From my own experience as an in-service teacher trainer, I know that most of the teachers with whom PRAESA comes into contact, and who teach in primary schools, do not themselves have sufficient English to teach through English. We do not hear them teaching in English in their classrooms despite the fact that they think they should do so and despite the fact that they tell us that they do teach through English. At best we hear teachers code-switching, but more often than not they are code-mixing (using two languages within the same sentence). The language model they provide for their pupils is a code-mixed model. This is the closest they can get to English medium and it is not English medium. Pretending that we can go for an English only or mainly option under these conditions or that we are really practising English mainly is not responsible and it reveals, unfortunately, a form of schizophrenia in which the truth is denied. The political developments in the country would give one reason to assume that it

literature which continues to support the *status quo* position, namely, a replacement of first language in education by English mainly?

3.2 Myth 2: Parents want straight for English or English only

The reluctance towards implementing the new language in education policy, or tardiness with regard to it is often ascribed to the belief that most parents want English only. There has been a positive attachment to English in South Africa by people who were previously disenfranchised and in particular, from within the liberation movements from at least the early years of the twentieth century (Alexander 1989: 28-29). For obvious reasons, English has played a significant role and will continue to do so, not least in the area of international communication, higher levels of education and the economy. At the same time, an attachment to and high value accorded English does not necessarily imply that an attachment to indigenous languages is proportionately reduced. A belief that African language speaking parents are making an explicit choice in favour of English has been gaining ground over the last eight years, particularly as political changes have made it possible for increasing numbers of African language speaking people to enter higher levels of the economy, mainstream political activity as well as educational environs from which they were previously excluded.

The National Education Policy Investigation report, *Language* (1992) is cited by Ridge as his source of evidence for the following:

[W]hen offered a choice, significant numbers of black parents have opted for English as the language of instruction for their children, even from the first year of primary school (NEPI 1992, 13f). Edusource Data News (August 1993) reported that it was already so in 43% of schools... (Ridge 1996:26-27).

What is overlooked by Ridge is that the NEPI report indicates that its information is based on a perception of preliminary findings from a Department of Education and Training survey, the results of which had not been tabulated at the time that the NEPI report was published (see Table 1 below). Secondly the statistics in Edusource were based on a survey of teachers rather than schools. 29% of the teachers surveyed taught in secondary schools where the medium of instruction was English throughout, thus the figure of 43% should not be assumed to imply that 43% of all primary schools use English from the first year. It would mean rather that 43% minus 29%, that is 14% of primary schools might have used English beginning in the first year. Thirdly, the Edusource document actually reveals that when teachers refer to the use of English as a medium this often includes the use of the "vernacular to standard 2" (Edusource 1993:2). Fourthly the same document explicitly states that only 4% (not 43%) of

schools had introduced English earlier than Standard 2 (Grade 4), after 1990. (From 1979 to 1991, the policy made provision for four years of mother tongue before a switch of medium could be made.) Fifthly, the document also shows that the majority of teachers interviewed (55%) were in schools in the Transvaal, the province which at the time had the highest percentage of people living in urban areas. The fewest number of teachers (4%) interviewed were from the eastern seaboard rural areas, where the majority of the population at the time lived. The greatest number of primary schools was located in these areas where African language speaking people have had very little access to English.

Far from suggesting that English has replaced African languages in primary schools, an accurate reading of the Edusource document shows that the statistics do not suggest this. The impression left by Ridge, however, is that they have. This misreading of the documentary source is unfortunate since it contributes to the building of an inaccurate perception about the role of English or the changing role and use of English in schools.

Assuming that there was some basis to a growing perception that black parents in particular wanted the medium of instruction to be English from the word go and in preparation for the years after apartheid, the Department of Education and Training (DET), the department responsible for the education of African children at the time, offered parents a choice of language medium in 1992. Much to the surprise of officials of the department who were convinced that parents would choose English from the start, the following statistics were returned:

Straight for English	22%
Gradual transfer to English	54%
Sudden transfer to English	13,4%
Retain status quo	7,5%

(Heugh 1993:31)

Table 1

The majority chose the option giving greatest percentage of time to the mother tongue within the various bilingual options. Whilst these statistics were not available to the authors of the NEPI report, they have been available since 1993. Ridge (1996), unlike others who contribute to the notion that many black parents prefer English, acknowledges the DET statistics but he does not appear to realise that they contradict his earlier

practice, 45,3% said either Afrikaans or English was mixed with their home language. 47% of the 36% admit to the use of one African language with their home language, and 4% of the 36% admitted to mixing more than one South African language with their home language. This means that 1,44% of South Africans identify themselves as mixing two or more languages with their home language. Whilst acknowledging that there may be instances where self-reporting may be scientifically inaccurate, the interviewees were especially chosen for their language skills and ability to identify and distinguish amongst languages in use in the communities in which the research was undertaken. It is also important to take cognisance of how speakers identify the language/s they use and in this instance the speakers did not themselves appear to believe that they spoke an unidentifiable amalgam of languages. Thus whilst it is undeniable that South Africans are often bilingual and multilingual, they do not appear themselves to be confused about the linguistic identity of their communicative acts, and the vast majority clearly identify with a dominant first or home language.

When the argument suggesting that African language speaking children may not have an identifiable home language was presented at the recently held National Colloquium on Language in Education, held by the Department of Education in Pretoria (9-10 June 2000), an angry participant questioned the ethics of those who argue that African language speaking children do not have a mother tongue.¹⁸

The scientific evidence from international research indicates that children need at least 12 years of learning their mother tongue or language of their immediate environment (i.e. 12 years from birth). There is no South African research which has shown that our children are any different from other children or that they can do with less. Most children across the world live in multilingual contexts, and have a range of languages/registers/dialects when they go to school. The logic of child-centred school education everywhere is to use the language/s which children bring to the classroom and to build on this. If the language the children bring to the classroom differs from the standard written form then the standard written form is added to the repertoire of the child so that literacy can be established successfully. If this language is not a language of wider communication, then it is normal practice also to add the language of wider communication which has greatest currency in the wider community.

It has been argued that some teachers adopt alienating linguistic practices in the classroom by, for example, using a language variety which is unfamiliar to pupils. An example might be the use of deep rural (formal and antiquated) spoken Xhosa by a teacher in an urban area or township where another variety is in common spoken use. Neither my colleagues nor I have encountered this practice in the classrooms we visit in the Western Cape. If this practice does happen, it does not conform to good child-centred pedagogy which should

lingual children. They also know how to distinguish between different languages. When they do not, and they mix languages, they are doing so for their own reasons/purposes, often to prevent adults or figures in authority from knowing what they are saying, not necessarily because they cannot draw a distinction between them. Wolff concludes his study of “Pre-school Child Multilingualism and its Educational Implications in the African Context” with the following:

There could be no successful and competitive national development of multilingual states in Africa without due recognition of the big three ‘M’s’:

- multilingualism (and multiculturalism)
- modernisation of the mother tongues; and
- mother-tongue education.

Any educational policy which in consequence deprives children of their mother tongue during education ... particularly in environments characterised by social marginalisation, cultural alienation and economic stress as is true for many communities in Africa will, produce an unnecessarily high rate of emotional and socio-cultural cripples who are retarded in their cognitive development and deficient in terms of psychological stability. Faced with heavy institutional multilingualism, particularly in urban agglomerations, with English as the preferred target language to which they have only restricted access and largely in the form of inadequate role models...joblessness and juvenile delinquency are just two of the likely social consequences; the other is the emergence of ‘new’ languages filling the vacuum ... Educationists, linguists, sociologists have barely begun to look at a totally new set of problems arising from this consequence (Wolff 2000:23).

For the record, the MarkData survey for PANSALB again shows interesting results. Respondents were asked several questions about the languages which they mainly use at home, and in a range of contexts outside of the home, i.e. in the community, at work, at school/educational institutions, trade union meetings, religious gatherings, amongst others. They were also asked if the language/s they used were mixed with other languages and, if so, which ones.

35,4% of respondents said that they used more than one language at home. Of these 91% said that they spoke one additional language in the home, while 8% said that they used two or three other languages at home. All of them however said that they used one language mainly.

In response to whether another language was mixed with their home language, 64% answered in the negative. Of the 36% who admitted to this

claims drawn from the NEPI report. They do not seem to alert him to a more careful reading of the Edusource data.

Webb, convinced also of the apparently dramatic shift towards English in education, confuses the legislative amendments to language in education policy in 1991 with the outcome of the DET’s invitation to parents in 1992 to choose their preferred option. Webb records the parents’ choice, collated in 1993 in a table based on Table 1 above, under the following heading: “Choice of language of learning and teaching in DET schools in 1991 in percentages and number of schools” (Webb 1999:69). The outcome of parents choices could not have pre-dated the offer in 1992 to make known their choice, neither could their preferences have been prematurely implemented. Implementation was scheduled to be phased in from 1993 – 96 (DET 1992:6), but according to the official most directly responsible for the process, the department had no implementation plan in place and would not be able to do so if required (Southey 1993: Personal communication). Webb continues with the following:

[I]t is clear that there has been a decline in the choice of an African language as first language of learning and teaching and an accompanying increase in the choice of English: whereas an average of about 25% of the pupils in DET schools were taught in English in the late nineteen-eighties, more than 60% of the schools in the four provinces outside the Western Cape selected English as first language of learning and teaching in 1997 (Webb 1999:70).

This statement creates the impression that a significant shift towards English has taken place. There is no source cited for the figure of either the 25% or the 60%. In reality almost all DET schools and schools catering for African language speaking pupils in the *bantustans* opted for English in theory, if not in practice, after grade 4 from the date of the legislative amendments in 1979. There is no substance to the claim that there was a dramatic increase from 25% to 60% in the 1990s and it serves only to create an entirely erroneous impression. Desai (2000) points out however, that the point of change in medium from mother tongue to English was adjusted by the Department of Education to coincide with the end of the foundation phase (after Grade 3), as the new curriculum was phased in from 1997.

Other authors disregard entirely the DET findings. Despite this easily retrievable evidence from the records within the new Department of Education, Vinjevoold & Taylor make the following incorrect assertions in a publication designed to influence educational decisions in South Africa:

There has been no systematic survey of the options chosen by parents in the early 1990s but **anecdotal** [my emphasis] evidence

suggests that many schools adopted English as the language of learning in Grade 1 (Vinjevold & Taylor 1999:210).

Furthermore, these authors give prominence to the (mis)perception that parents want straight for English in a sub-heading of a chapter on language in education: “Many parents want English language instruction from early as possible” (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999: 220). The impression given is that parents want English to replace the home languages in education. A subtler claim, that parents want improved and greater access to English alongside the home language for their children, might have been closer to the real situation. It is not surprising, however, that once a reductionist viewpoint is presented as verifiable fact in a publication intended to influence government thinking, it finds its way, again without evidence, into other publications, as for example in the following:

[M]any parents, whose home language is a language other than English, prefer their children to receive their schooling in English and not in their first language (L1) (Deumert 2000:413).

An initial partial presentation of fact or misunderstanding of the situation, is passed on from one source to the next. On each occasion the degree of distortion increases. There are sources of more accurate information and publications which record this. They do not, however, contribute to the idea that the popular demand is for English only, and their omission is obvious.

Xola Mati, a PRAESA colleague, who spends a great deal of time in classroom-based research activities has a rather different experience of the real language practice in Grade 1 and other ‘foundation phase’ classrooms. He reports that when he goes into rural and township primary school classrooms where African languages predominate he hears very little, if any, English, whatsoever. At Department of Education’s National Colloquium: Language in the Classroom, in Pretoria on 9–10 June 2000, he put it to the participants that they knew very well that despite the claims that English medium was the norm in such schools across the country, very little English was in fact being used in practice. Mati was not contradicted or challenged by any official of either the provincial or national departments of education. Of the other participants at the colloquium, not a single one expressed disagreement. If the perception that English is being used as the *de facto* medium of instruction were true, as claimed, why did nobody challenge Mati in this forum where the subject was central to the discussion? The assertion that ‘anecdotal evidence’ suggests that many schools use English as the language of learning from Grade 1 is neither supported in statistical evidence nor by the wide cross-section of educators present at this DoE colloquium.

It is troubling that publications designed to offer responsible comment and analysis of effective learning situations should contribute to popularis-

learn to read and write in the languages which they already know and use. Thus the term mother tongue should not be misunderstood, in a narrow and rigid manner, to exclude bilingual or multilingual dimensions. Surely nobody would suggest that there is some cognitive difference between children in South Africa and children elsewhere which would preclude South African children from requiring and benefiting from mother tongue education?

An argument, which suggests that bilingual or multilingual children do not have sufficient proficiency in any language other than a messy amalgam of languages, belongs within a deficit theory of language and learning. Deficit theories in education are based on the assumption that there is some deficiency, often cognitive, within the student. It would not be one which Makoni would support, yet the authors cited above do not delve more substantially into his argument to make this clear. Makoni’s point is really that a narrow definition of the term mother tongue is inadequate for those children who are bilingual or multilingual. If one spends time watching how deftly bilingual and multilingual children switch from one language to another for different purposes, one can only marvel at the degree of their multiple proficiencies. Whilst it is important to factor multilingual proficiencies into the linguistic repertoire of the classroom, there is no logical argument which could support the notion that multilingualism precludes mother tongue education.

If multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception in Africa, and if, even before entering any kind of formal education, multilingual African children are known to have mastered adequately and creatively their command of two, three or more languages, and if this linguistic competence testifies to more elaborate and complex patterns of the broader communicative competence of these children as opposed to monolingual children, then anyone who bears some responsibility in planning and deciding on the linguistic aspects of educational policies would...be well advised to view multilingualism as an important resource to be utilised as widely as possible since this draws on the children’s prior experience, their established abilities, and relates directly to their linguistic, social and, cultural environments (Wolff 2000:18).

Wolff makes reference to numerous findings of the cognitive and linguistic advantages of bilingualism, which he traces as far back as the writing of Quintilian over 1 800 years ago, and the ability of young children to distinguish accurately between two or more language systems (Wolff 2000:18–22). If one takes cognisance also of Ianco-Worrall’s research, the early reports in *The Bilingual School*, and what people like Rama Kant Agnihotri of the University of Delhi (see for example Agnihotri 1995) have noted for many years, then it is clear that multilingual children have more and better language proficiencies than do mono-

not be learning through their primary language (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999:219).

One problem with the notion of primary language is that learners cannot always be identified easily with a specific language, for example, many learners will have a set of languages that they use in different contexts and for different purposes as has been noted of many learners in Africa by Makoni (1999) (NCCRD 2000:6).

It is true that many South African children grow up in bilingual homes and or multilingual communities. It is also true that there are many children all over the mainly multilingual world who grow up speaking several languages, with different people and for different purposes. This does not mean, however, that they do not have a language proficiency in at least one of these languages, sufficient for learning purposes when they go to school. Teachers in schools within multilingual communities usually have the linguistic repertoire of their pupils and the sheer common sense of most teachers means that they use the language variety or varieties which are closest to that of their learners in the first years of school. Any observant researcher in classrooms will hear this quite clearly. It is, however, the responsibility of every teacher, to facilitate access, also, to the standard written variety that is closest to the spoken variety of the child.

Children in Devon, Cornwall, the West Country, and Scotland, come to school speaking what might be called dialects of ‘Standard Southern RP English’. They are not considered to be without a mother tongue or incapable of learning the ‘standard’ variety of English at school. Swiss German-speaking children go to school and are expected to learn to read and write in ‘standard German’, a variety of German which is not, if one applies a rigid definition to the concept, their mother tongue. Their teachers use Swiss German in the spoken form, but they also facilitate the addition of the ‘standard written variety’. There is no serious debate about whether or not Swiss German children should be taught standard German or whether or not standard German qualifies as the first language for the educational development of Swiss German children. The concept of ‘mother tongue’ or first language is taken to be sufficiently broad to include both the informal home variety as well as the formal school written variety. The same applies to children who speak the local varieties across Britain, the children who speak local varieties of French in France, and so on.

Children right the way across Africa and India are often bilingual and even multilingual. This does not mean that they are not sufficiently proficient in one of these languages or its variety to learn to read and write in it. Preferably, the language in which they first learn to read and write needs to be one with which they are most familiar. However, if children are already bilingual or multilingual there is no reason why they are not given the opportunity to

ing ideas which are insubstantial and erroneous.¹⁴ It is a serious mistake to believe that teaching and learning is taking place through English in township or rural schools where the majority of pupils are from African language speaking communities. Education planning can only be effective if based on the reality of the classroom. If it is based on erroneous assumptions, unsupported by evidence, it cannot possibly address the needs of pupils and it is likely to have serious ramifications, not least of which is financial.

In late 1999, the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) commissioned MarkData to conduct a national socio-linguistic survey in order to gauge attitudes towards languages, people’s wishes regarding language use and development, as well as to establish the degree of multilinguality in the country. Findings of the main survey conducted during 2000 show very interesting results to the following question:

“Think about the situation of language of instruction in government-funded schools and universities. Which of the following would come closest to the way you feel, but you may choose more than one item if you wish?”

This data, in Table 2, shows that the majority of people, at least 88% favour the maintenance of the home language throughout education or the

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION CHOICES

	First answer	Multiple answers included
Mother tongue instruction and good teaching of another official language should be available	38%	37%
Learners should have the opportunity to learn both their mother tongue and English equally well	32,6%	42%
Learners should learn <u>through</u> both English and their mother tongue	21%	39%
It is more important that learners learn in English than in other languages	7,6%	12%
	99,2%	130%

(data from MarkData-PANSALB 2000)

Table 2

maintenance of the home language alongside a second language/English. There is another set of interesting statistics from the same source in relation to a question asking which languages should be used for educational programmes on television and radio in South Africa. The answers are revealed in Table 3.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Afrikaans	11,5%
African languages	34,4%
English	42,9%
A combination of official languages	9,5%

(data from MarkData-PANSALB 2000)

Table 3

These figures show that there is a surprisingly high degree of support for languages other than English, in regard to exposure to educational material outside of school hours, despite the popular perception that people in South Africa equate education with English.

Just as Krashen argues that myths about parents rejecting first language maintenance and bilingual education do not stand up to being tested in other countries, we find that the same phenomenon is evident in South Africa. Quite simply, there is no scientific evidence to support the myth that the majority of parents want straight for or only English.

There are many other voices in South Africa who argue as have Ridge, Webb, Taylor & Vinjevd and Deumert that many parents are choosing English in preference to African languages. It is not as if there is no basis for this argument whatsoever. It is true that there are parents who would choose English over their home language. The fact is, however, that there are many more parents who do not make such choices. What is happening is that the preferences of a minority are presented as if they were valid for the majority.

Who are the parents who choose English and what are their reasons for doing so? A number of researchers have conducted research into the attitudes of African language speaking parents and pupils in relation to English in education. Vivian de Klerk, for example, has conducted research amongst Xhosa speaking parents who have chosen to send their children to English medium (former ‘white’) schools in the Eastern Cape (De Klerk 2000).

It was clear from many comments that part of the reason for choosing English schools was dissatisfaction with conditions at

educationally enabling language in education policy was applied. Immediately after the 8 years of mother tongue came to an end we see a coincidental decline in pass rates at matriculation level, i.e. during the second phase of *Bantu Education*. In the minds of many people, the poor curriculum, “moedertaal-onderwys” (mother tongue instruction) and *Bantu Education* were and still are conflated. There is however no academic or any other reason why they should continue to be linked by persons upon whom the responsibility for education now rests.

Carol Macdonald’s research, referred to earlier and which culminated in *The Threshold Report* in 1990 focussed on the effects of the change in policy and practice after 1976 (the second phase of *Bantu Education*). In other words, her research focussed on the rapid switch to English after only four years of mother tongue instruction. The rapid increase of failure in the years after 1976, which coincides with the switch to English medium four years earlier than during the first phase of *Bantu Education*, is not a testimony to the efficacy of English as a medium of instruction for the majority. Despite the Taylor & Vinjevd assertion (earlier) that international research and findings confuse the issue, the fact of the matter is that South African research shows that the switch too early to English does not work in the majority of South African schools. Contrary to the assertions of Young, it is South African research such, as Malherbe’s and Macdonald’s, which has been followed by and informed other international research. The international research simply corroborates that which has been found in South Africa. Nowhere has English on its own been shown to be the most successful language of learning for children who speak other languages at home. On the other hand there is ample evidence of the benefits of bilingual education which adds to rather than subtracts from the pupil’s repertoire of languages. There is nothing confusing about the research. If there is confusion then it is on the part of those who champion the use of English on its own rather than in conjunction with African languages.

3.4 Myth 4: Many South African children do not have a mother tongue and therefore do not need mother tongue education

Many learners do not have an obvious primary language ... Since 1984 when Pirie published ... researchers and teachers have commented on the fact that many learners do not have a single primary language or mother tongue ... The reality according to Makoni, is that the language spoken by these children is an amalgam of Southern African languages with regional and community variations. This situation, which requires children to learn through the medium of a single, defined African language, means that they will

subjects in one and half in the other). Text-books and terminology were available in African languages for eight years of school. The terminology has not vanished, it continues and is constantly adapted in the code-switching discourse of most classrooms today. What the architects of *Bantu Education* could not then know was that the findings of international studies of bilingual education between 1980 and 2000 would show that in ideal conditions, most pupils need 6-8 years of learning a second language before they can use it effectively as a medium of learning. The following table demonstrates a correlation between the number of years of first language maintenance with accompanying second and third language learning and academic output at matriculation level.

PASS RATES AT MATRICULATION LEVEL

Year	African language speaking students	% pass rate	(Overall total number of candidates, plus % pass rate)
1955	595	43,5	
1976 ¹⁶ (Soweto)	9 595	83,7	
1979	14 574	73,5	85 276 (87%)
1980	29 973	53,2	109 807 (75%)
1982	70 241	48,4	139 488 (69%)
1992	342 038	44,0	448 491 (56%)
1994	392 434	49,0	495 408 (58%)
1997			559 233(47,4%) ¹⁷
1998			552 862 (49%)

(statistics from: SAIRR – Topical Briefing (1984); South African Survey (1996:101; 2000:113)

Table 4

Despite the cognitively impoverished curriculum, eight years of mother tongue instruction gave pupils the time to learn their own language, through this language and to learn a second and third language sufficiently well to make the switch in medium in the ninth year. During the first phase of *Bantu Education*, 1953–76, the matriculation results steadily improved, despite the poor curriculum. Pupils had a single advantage in that, purely by accident, an

local Xhosa schools. While the legislation is in place to uplift and support Xhosa, no noticeable difference is evident in most formerly black state schools, where the legacy of apartheid lingers on, and inefficiency and incompetence exacerbate an already inadequate educational system ...

By the time institutional support for Xhosa is sufficiently impressive and reliable, the elite among this community will probably already have shifted allegiance to English completely (De Klerk 2000).

The parents she has interviewed have made a conscious decision to opt for schools that were formerly privileged schools for mother tongue speakers of English. The contribution which de Klerk makes is that she explores beyond superficial evidence. She does not ascribe the shift of a minority of parents with middle class aspirations, to an English medium school, as an outright rejection of the mother tongue. She gives a careful and subtle contextualisation of the matter. What she says is that in the absence of any tangible support of and improvement in the use of African languages in education and the education of African language speaking pupils, the elite will take decisions which will ultimately result in language shift to English. Trying to secure the best possible education for one's children is a perfectly normal activity on the part of parents the world over. De Klerk's later reference to a "small elite" places the matter into perspective. The aspirations of a few cannot be equated with the reality for the majority.

In total those who are opting for English mainly or only constitute a minority of parents in the country. The MarkData-PANSALB survey referred to in Table 2, above, shows that, at best, 12% of South Africans over the age of 16 believe in English only or English mainly education. Given that 9% of South Africans are first language English speakers who are most likely to opt for English mainly education, this leaves a possible 3% who might be African language speaking. If one includes the possibility of some Afrikaans speakers having selected this option then the degree of support from African language speakers is smaller still. Assuming, though, that the 3% of those who selected the English mainly option are African language speaking, then 3% of the total population would constitute 4% of African language speakers. This is a rather small minority. The oft repeated refrain of 'many parents prefer English only' is therefore rather overstated and misleading. In a country where the majority of people are part of what Bamgbose (2000:7) terms the 'underclass and the working class' it is not at all surprising that there is a small aspirant black middle class who would make such decisions. What is surprising is that those who are expressing middle class aspirations are so few.

If the preferences and perceptions of a mere tiny middle class are taken as the point of reference for educational decisions, then the *status quo* will be presented

as the most attractive option. Ayo Bamgbose, perhaps the most well known scholar whose specialisation is language policy in education, with particular reference to African countries, has some pertinent observations to make. In his latest publication, in which he writes about matters in Africa, after completing a study and lecture tour of South African universities in 1998, he argues:

Apart from the lack of political will by those in authority, perhaps the most important factor impeding the increased use of African languages is lack of interest by the elite. They are the ones who are quick to point out that African languages are not yet well [sic] developed to be used in certain domains or that the standard of education is likely to fall, if the imported European languages cease to be used as media of instruction at certain levels of education. Hence, a major part of non-implementation of policy can be traced to the attitude of those who stand to benefit from the maintenance of the status quo (Bamgbose 2000:2).

It is important that those who proffer advice to government, and who choose to make reference to the preferences of others, consider their sources with utmost care. Are statements which might hold true for a small minority given prominence because they happen to coincide with the perspective of the 'expert'? Are the views of people closest to the economic and urban centres given priority over the majority who are dislocated from the centres? The MarkData-PANSALB survey reveals disturbing statistics of the degree to which South Africans who are physically distant from the economic and political centres are marginalised and have little or no understanding of messages from government.

Currently 83% of pupils in South Africa are African language speaking (SAIRR 2000:127). 28% of schools are described as "multi-racial" (SAIRR 2000:129). This means that just over a quarter of the schools in the country have pupils which come from the range of the previously classified groups. The majority of schools however have pupils who are entirely African language speaking (68,4%). Given that the numbers of pupils in classrooms in rural and township schools are still higher than in the urban and independent schools, the percentage of African language speaking pupils in schools which are not mixed is greater than 70%. It is important to bear in mind the percentages of schools which are not mixed is extremely high in certain provinces (Northern Province 95%, Eastern Cape 92%, and KwaZulu-Natal 86%). In the more metropolitan and urban of the provinces, the statistics change. In the Western Cape only 54% of schools are not mixed, and in Gauteng this figure drops to 52%. At the same time, one also needs to remember is that Gauteng has only 7,1% of the schools in the country, thus findings of studies conducted here cannot necessarily apply to the conditions to be found in the Northern Province, for example.(SAIRR 2000:127ff.)

Classroom observations and research conducted in areas where there is a greater shift towards multicultural schools will reveal different practices and emphases from those in the rural, more monocultural or linguistically homogeneous areas. The reality of the classrooms where the pupils come from exclusively African language speaking backgrounds is that teaching and learning through English is neither viable and nor is it taking place.

3.3 Myth 3: English is the only language which has the capacity to deliver quality education to the majority: African languages do not or cannot

Currently, English is the major language medium at higher primary and secondary level, yet most of the teachers do not have a command of the language adequate for them to enable their pupils to make nuanced distinctions ... But if there were a decision to expand the use of the other languages, currently underdeveloped for that purpose, there would be major difficulties (Ridge 1996:28).

[I]t seems that government is faced with one of two alternatives:

Allocating substantial resources to promoting added [sic] bilingualism ...

Accepting the growing use of English as language of instruction at all levels of the schools system and promoting the conditions requisite for effective teaching and learning through English ...

It would seem that modernisation in South Africa and, the inexorable urbanisation in particular, is undermining the possibilities of the first alternative and that the more realistic option is a straight for English approach ... (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999:225).

However intuitively appealing and pragmatically sound it might seem as a theory, there is little evidence of the successful application of Cummins and Swain, Skutnabb-Kungas [sic] additive bilingual learning theories in South Africa. We need to persuade teachers with solid evidence from our research that the 1997 language education policy's prescription of additive multilingualism is a practically achievable goal in the classroom (Young 1999:27).¹⁵

If one looks at the statistics of matriculation results between 1955 and 1976 one discovers one of the strange anomalies of the apartheid years of education. The first stage of *Bantu Education* came into being in 1953 with eight years of mother tongue instruction, and the teaching and learning of Afrikaans and English as subjects, by teachers proficient in these languages. Only in the ninth year of education were African language speaking pupils expected to switch medium and then to English and Afrikaans (half of their