# LOCAL LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

*Posted on July 15, 2010 by Eddie*

**Category:** Languages in Africa

This is a fascinating article on the use of local languages in Africa:

> *Brazzaville, Congo - A United Nations education expert on Thursday told a conference of top African education officials in Brazzaville that countries on the continent need to switch from foreign to local languages as a medium of instruction in elementary school to stimulate learning interest in first-time learners and to enable them to easily grasp concepts being taught.*
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> *Almost universally across the continent, a foreign language - usually that of the former colonising power - is used as the medium of instruction in African schools at all levels, with local languages just being one of the subjects being taught.*
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> *Yao Ydo, a UNESCO regional adviser on literacy and non-formal education, told a conference of African education ministers that the predominant use of foreign languages, particularly in early school stages, was the first faultline of the education systems on the continent.*
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> *He said not only did this intimidate and confuse children entering school for the first time, but also made it difficult for them to understand, or grasp new concepts being introduced to them at their early learning stages.*

To try and imagine what is going on here, picture yourself going to school and finding that everything is done in French rather than English. Everything from being told to go into the classroom and sit at your seats, to the first lessons all take place in a language that you don't understand. Just imagine the confusion that this would bring on a daily basis. And then imagine how much longer it would have taken you to learn to read and write, if it was all happening in a foreign language! This is the reality for millions of children across rural Africa. They are not immigrants who have moved into a new country where they have to learn a foreign language: they are at home, but the national education language is not one that they master at a young age. It adds a whole level of complexity, that simply is not needed.