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## The Contribution of Kiswahili in the Implementation of the Mother Tongue Policy: A Case Study of Kilifi North Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper intends to evaluate the contribution of Kiswahili in the implementation of Mother Tongue Policy in teaching of language in Lower primary. The paper examines language policy documents on the place of Mother Tongue and Kiswahili and noting that Kiswahili has enhanced the teaching and learning of Mother Tongue in the area. The study was guided by the following objectives; to identify the school languages policy pursued by schools in Kilifi County and to determine the challenges faced in the implementation of Mother Tongue policy. Purposive data for the study has been collected from the informants where focus group discussions and interview schedules were administered. The paper concludes that Kenyans need to participate in the promotion of Kiswahili if it is to contribute effectively to the teaching and learning of Mother Tongue.*

**Keywords:** *Mother tongue, language of instruction, language of communication*

### **1. Introduction**

Kenya is a multilingual country with over forty different indigenous languages. Its language-in-education policy for early primary education was enacted in 1976. Subsequent education commissions have not altered its core content. Mother tongues should be used as languages of instruction up to grade three – assumedly taking its cue from UNESCO's (1953) position that mother tongues are ideal for early education. English takes over as the language of instruction from grade four. The mother tongue policy applies to all schools except those in urban centres in which Kiswahili should be the medium of instruction.

The debate on the use of mother tongue in education has been unresolved not only in Kenya but also in a number of African countries. The language of instruction in an education system determines the quality of education in the country and overall learner achievement.

Prah (2003) describes the language or medium of instruction as the language in which basic skills and knowledge are imparted to learners. In Kenya, the official language of instruction policy states that children have a right to be taught in the language of the catchment area in classes (grades) 1-3 (Kenya Institute of Education, KIE, 1992), in schools in the rural areas, during which English is taught as a subject in the curriculum. Kiswahili is used as the language of instruction in lower primary in schools in urban areas. From grade 4 English is used as the medium of instruction.

Machuki (2018) studied the role of school language policies in enhancing teaching and learning of Kiswahili the research found out that, schools had language policies in place though not implemented to a large extent; since most learners and teachers often communicated in their first language and in English. The study also revealed that, schools that had implemented language policies performed better in Kiswahili examinations as compared to those that did not implement such policies. The study recommended the following: School authorities should ensure that language policies adopted are properly enforced so as not to alienate or disadvantage other languages. Language policies in all schools should be stream lined and measures put in place to address the usage of sheng and vernacular in schools.

Cheruto and Orudho (2016) looked at the preparedness of Teachers of Kiswahili using the integrated Kiswahili course. The findings of this study revealed that most teachers of Kiswahili were not competent in teaching the subject using the integrated approach and the necessary resources were not adequate. The study recommends that there should be an understanding among the teachers for the need to gain more knowledge in preparation of teaching aids for integrated approach in teaching Kiswahili. This study is different from the current one in as far as the teaching of Kiswahili is concerned.

Githinji, D.G. (2017) studied the factors affecting the teaching of Kiswahili Grammar and established that teachers' perception towards Kiswahili grammar influenced Kiswahili teaching and learning and was positive. The research also found out that learners had positive perception towards Kiswahili language. The study recommended that teachers should be constantly engaged in refresher courses, seminars and symposia to update their skills on language pedagogy and inculcate interest to the students by lobbying for the subject as well as having sound language policy.

Timammy and Oduor (2006) posit that the treatment of Kiswahili has not been a fair one compared to English. This study by Timammy and Oduor further suggests possible reasons for the unfair treatment and note that despite the unfair treatment, Kiswahili's use has increased considerably to a point where its achievements can be identified.

The paper by Timammy and Oduor (2006) gives this study its impetus as it outlines ways of elevating Kiswahili and goes further to observe that every Kenyan needs to participate in the promotion of Kiswahili if it is to continue growing as one of Kenya's two official languages and Kenya's only national language and mother tongue to many Kenyans. In Kenya, it should therefore be noted that it is used by some speakers especially in the coastal regions as a mother tongue. There are about 8 dialects in Kenya used as mother tongues along the coastal region from the Lamu archipelago to the southern coast near the border of Kenya and Tanzania (Bakari, 1982).

This study seeks to answer the following questions;

- What are the language policies pursued by schools in Kilifi County?
- How does the language of instruction used in lower primary in schools in peri-urban areas in Kenya benefit the learner
- Why are teachers not using mother tongue of the catchment area as a medium of instruction in lower primary in schools in rural areas in Kenya?
- What are challenges facing in the implementation of Mother Tongue policy in peri-urban schools and
- What is the role of Kiswahili in the implementation of the Mother tongue policy in Kenya?

## 2. Methodology

The following section provides detailed procedures, techniques and methods applied in the research.

### 2.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals Orodho (2009). It is the most frequently used method for collecting information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education or social issues.

Lokesh (1984) notes that descriptive survey research studies are designed to obtain information concerning the current situation and other phenomena and whatever possible, to draw valid conclusion from facts discussed. Survey design helps collect data from the population that is too large to be observed directly. The aim of survey design is to collect information from a sample that is a representative of the population as a whole, and generalizability that is, it will enable the researcher to use the data to make plans for, or predictions regarding the total population, it helps the researcher to ascertain attitudes and opinions as well as factual information. A survey design was appropriate because, it enabled the researcher to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning status of the role of language policies in teaching/learning of Mother tongue in Kilifi North Sub-County.

### 2.2. Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Public schools in Kilifi North Subcounty. This area being a Peri-urban was ideal for the study because it is a cosmopolitan and home to almost all the 42 tribes in Kenya.

### 2.3. Target Population

The study was carried out in 2 schools, where 10 teachers of Lower primary were selected for the study. The teachers were selected because the area being a cosmopolitan one, was one most schools have language policies in place, however, the mother tongue language policy was likely to face problem in its implementation because of having students belonging to various tribes in the same school.

### 2.4. Sample and Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was used to select the 10 teachers of lower primary because these teachers are directly involved in the implementation of the language policies in the schools.

### 2.5. Data Collection Methods

A structured interview schedule and questionnaires were administered. The questionnaires had both open and close ended questions. Section A of the questionnaire included the Demographic information, section B was used to identify the language policies in school implementation and possible challenges while section C outlined the role of the policies in enhancing teaching and learning and section D, identified the role played by Kiswahili in the teaching learning process.

### 2.6. Data Analysis and Procedures

After administration, the questionnaires and structured interview schedules were then collected, data was then appropriately organized into themes categories and objectives relevant to the study. The results were presented in tables on the basis of the research objectives. Analysis and interpretation was done to determine clear characteristics and relationships that exist between the variables.

### 3. Data Analysis and Presentation

#### 3.1. Language Policies Used by Peri Urban Schools in Kilifi County

The study sought to identify the language policies used by peri-urban schools in Kilifi North sub-county, Kilifi County and the following policies were identified.

#### 3.2. English and Kiswahili as a Mode of Communication in School Setting

The researcher sought to identify from teachers of Lower Primary on what language was used in the teaching and learning process and how frequent learners observed this policy. From the responses obtained by the researcher, it was clear in the school rules, staff and student leaders' minutes, that the language of communication within the school setting was Kiswahili or English. Teachers' responses are presented in Table 1.

	Responses Frequency	Percentages
Often in Kis/ Mother tongue	15	50%
Rarely in Kis/ Mother tongue	11	36.7%
Never in Kis/ Mother tongue	4	13.3%

Table 1: A Table Showing What Language and How Often It Is Used

Table 1 shows that 15(50%) teachers confirmed they often witness and engage learners in speaking Kiswahili, 11(36.7%) teachers said they rarely witness learners speak in Kiswahili but rather hear them speak in first language; while 4(13.3%) teachers responded that, they never hear their learners speak in Kiswahili. The debate on the use of African languages as instructional media has been there for some time now. It has been said often times that a human being learns best if educated in their language and it follows that African languages Kiswahili being one of them are the best media for education of the African peoples according to UNESCO Report in African languages as instructional media (1999).

### 4. Discussion and Findings

#### 4.1. Language Policy in Schools in Kilifi County

The study found out that there is a language policy in place for the teaching and learning in Lower primary. That teachers and the administration are aware of the policy on Mother Tongue, however, the school administration does not implement it. The administration of the school insist that the learners be taught in English and if at all the learners are to be taught from known to unknown, then the language to be used should be Kiswahili. In other primary schools the same applies. That the administration is aware of the policy on the use of Mother Tongue but it insists on the use of English as a language of instruction. The reasons propagated for insisting on the use of English as the language of instruction even though the Mother tongue policy is in place is that they believe that most learners already know Kiswahili from their backgrounds and for those whose background is a language other than Kiswahili, like Kigiryama and other Mijikenda languages, then they are taught in Kiswahili.

#### 4.2. How the Language of Instruction Benefits the Learners

The respondents cited various reasons on why the use of Kiswahili was popular amongst the teachers and their learners. They identified the following benefits for the use of the Kiswahili language:

- Teachers use Kiswahili for teaching because most learners at this stage are from homes where the language of socialization was just their mother tongue.
- Kiswahili as a language of instruction enables learners in understanding the lessons and the concepts taught.
- Kiswahili is like the language of the catchment area for some learners especially for those who speak it as their first language. For such learners therefore, Kiswahili assists them to develop the learning of a second language like English. For example, when teaching the concept 'cup' an English word, the teacher is forced to use the Kiswahili word 'kikombe'.
- When a teacher teaches in English, the students just stare at her, implying that they do not understand. This forces the teacher to change to Kiswahili which in turn results in a response from the learners.
- Kiswahili is also used amongst the learners especially when playing outdoor games. The language used enhances the development of various competences. For example, when playing the game 'Watotowangujama.' (My children eeh') such a game enhances the development of communication skills, listening skills, language and cognitive skills.
- For some learners the language policy does not benefit them in any way, this is because when teachers communicate to these learners in either Kiswahili or English, they insist on using their mother tongue (Kigiryama) to communicate. For example, you may hear of a student saying, 'Ndzokuno we' meaning You come here.

#### 4.3. Why Teachers Do Not Use Mother Tongue Or the Language of the Catchment Area

There are various reasons why teachers do not use mother tongue/ language of the catchment area. The following reasons have been put forth:

First and foremost, most schools are cosmopolitan and they draw learners from different ethnic groups such as Kikuyus, Kambas, Luos, Mijikenda and etc. This implies that a teacher cannot use the language of the catchment area since it may result in misunderstanding when learners are taught in a language they do not understand. Secondly, the school's administration does not want learners to be taught in mother tongue believing that acquisition of knowledge is equivalent to learning English. Thirdly, the parents also insist that their children be taught in English because they believe that knowing English is synonymous with acquiring education, knowledge and success. Furthermore, the teachers hail from different ethnic language groups and most of them do not know Kigiryama or Mijikenda, the languages of the catchment area and hence cannot communicate in these languages. Lastly, teachers feel and know that all subjects are examined in English except Kiswahili and therefore there is no need of teaching in Mother tongue.

#### *4.4. Challenges of implementing the Mother Tongue Policy*

Most students in these peri urban schools do not speak the language of the catchment area but instead speak their various ethnic languages, this therefore poses a problem on the implementation of the Mother Tongue policy in these schools because as a teacher one cannot impart knowledge in a language that cannot be understood, it causes language barrier. In addition, most school administrations are reluctant to implement the mother tongue policy with claims of 'it is retrogressive policy'. To encourage learners to speak in either English or Kiswahili, schools have devised the 'disk' method where a student is required to walk with a tag around their neck stating, 'I am a FOOL I do not speak in English'. This further causes psychological effects on the learners if not handled properly. Moreover, with the recent guideline by the Ministry of Education on 'Delocalisation', teachers should not teach in their local areas and instead they are posted in areas further from their areas of origin. This has in turn posed a challenge on the implementation of the language policy because teachers finally find themselves in areas where they cannot communicate in the language of the catchment area and thus resort to either using English or Kiswahili as a language of instruction. Lastly for the parents who insist that their children be taught in English do pose a challenge as well to the implementation of the Mother Tongue policy because as stakeholders they have a say on how and in what manner their children should be taught.

#### *4.5. The Role of Kiswahili in the Implementation of the Mother Tongue Policy*

In line with the above mentioned challenges, a solution need to be sought to curb these aforementioned challenges. The following suggestions were put forth to solve the problem.

One, Kiswahili be used as a medium of instruction to especially to curb the challenge of those students who do not speak the language of the catchment area and at the same time to assist those teachers who belong to different language groups far from their own. Thus Kiswahili serves a double purpose of bridging the language gap between learners and teachers. Secondly, if Kiswahili is made the language of instruction then it eases communication because teachers can use it to teach concepts that can be understood and which would otherwise have been difficult to teach. Similarly, Kiswahili as a language of instruction enhances the development of other language like English. Kiswahili being an examinable subject is the best choice as a medium of instruction because it beats logic to insist that the mother tongue policy be implemented and yet none of the subjects sat for by learners are examined in mother tongue. Moreover, Kiswahili is the official language of Kenya and as such the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Languages of Kenya Bill and the Languages of Kenya Policy contain policy statements that touch on the use of Kiswahili. This means that it should still be used for general or social communication between communities. It is also an official language alongside English unlike in the past where English was the only official language. The status of Kiswahili as an official language in the Constitution has implications for education because it is expected that English and Kiswahili would then operate at the same level as media of instruction in primary and secondary schools and even at the university level. Kiswahili further enhances cohesion and integration which are some of the national goals of education in Kenya.

#### *4.6. Recommendations*

The study suggests recommendations that would help in addressing challenges facing teaching/learning of Mother Tongue and Kiswahili:

- School authorities should ensure that language policies adopted are properly and fairly enforced so as not to alienate or disadvantaging other languages.
- Schools should come up with clear and working language policies in order to promote the use of Kiswahili language. Learners should not be punished for using Kiswahili which may lead to negative attitude towards this language.
- Teachers should be constantly engaged in refresher courses, seminars and symposia to update their skills on language policy changes in school curriculum this will improve their communicative ability and terminological developments.
- In this way, teachers become role model to learners for emulation.
- Language policies in all schools should be stream lined and measures put in place to address the usage of sheng and vernacular in schools.
- To increase the use of Kiswahili, the following need to be done. Kiswahili scholars in our universities need to translate documents into Kiswahili, organize in-service and certificate courses for university staff to improve their levels of proficiency in Kiswahili and fundraise with the help of the government to sponsor such activities.
- Other suggestions include increased research on Kiswahili as a language and the setting up of a language committee to deal with language issues, etc.

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