

Use of Mother Tongue As A Language Of Instruction In Early Years Of School To Preserve The Kenyan Culture

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Abstract

In many communities in Kenya, mother tongue was the language of instruction used to impart indigenous education in children. It was also used to transmit and preserve culture from generation to generation. Language policy states that mother tongue should be used as language of instruction in early years of school to preserve the Kenyan culture and to ensure smooth transition from home to school. Despite the policy being in place, it is yet to be implemented in many schools due to several factors. This paper presents results from a study that was conducted in three rural districts in Kenya to establish whether mother tongue was being used as the language of instruction in early years of school and the key factors affecting its use.

Key Words: Mother tongue, language policy, language of instruction, preserving culture

Introduction

Mother tongue is the language that a child learns first from the mother before joining school. It is also the language used by the majority of people in a given area or community. In Kenya, there are over 42 communities, meaning that there are over 42 languages.

Kenyan communities had a system of education called ‘Traditional System of Education’ which provided indigenous education to children. The main goal of indigenous education was to transmit and preserve family and community culture. Education was meant to impart fundamental knowledge, skills, and values to children. Learning took place at all times and anywhere and it was the responsibility of the whole family and community to educate children unlike today when the responsibility has been left mainly to teachers (Bogonko, 1992).

Use of mother tongue as a language of instruction makes teaching and learning effective. According to Walter (2010), learning is effective when both learners and the teachers speak well the language of instruction. Unfortunately, does not happen in developing countries like Kenya. Walter adds that developing countries have continued to use colonial languages as primary languages of education from the earliest years of formal school, and teachers in the countries are also poor in the language and children speak little of the language or not at all by the time they start school. This is the situation in Kenya today. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) adds that discouraging children from developing their mother tongue is a violation of the rights of the child. According to UNESCO (2005) the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction boosts children’s confidence and academic performance. This means that children who start their education in their mother tongue have a good start, and perform better, than those who start school in a foreign language.

Before the colonial period, mother tongue was a very important medium of instruction for teaching children at the family and community level

During infancy stage, parents were the instructors of children using mother as a medium of instruction. As children started to speak, mothers and family members taught them basic knowledge, life skills, and values using a variety of methods such as question-answer, storytelling, and singing in mother tongue. For example, small children were taught names of family members, place of residence, and family culture and history by asking them simple questions like “What is your name? Who is your father? Who is your mother? Who is your grandmother? What is your grandfather’s name?” These questions helped children to acquire basic knowledge and life skills easily. Today, life has changed and parents are very busy. The outcome of this is that children are growing up without important life knowledge, skills, and values which should be imparted at the family level.

After infancy, children were taught by the whole family and community and the medium of instruction was mother tongue. Fathers and older brothers taught boys duties and responsibilities for men including herding of animals, cutting wood, hunting, cultivating land, and protecting the family. Mothers and older sisters taught girls’ duties and responsibilities for women including housework, nursing of babies, and fetching firewood and water (Bogonko, 1992; Kenyatta, 1991). Teaching-learning was interesting to children because the medium of instruction was mother tongue.

Important family values like honesty, respect, discipline, manners, sharing, love, courage, and hard-work were inculcated in children through songs, stories, proverbs, and by example. This no longer happen in many families today because parents are very busy. Story-telling was one of the most effective methods used to teach children before the colonial period. The stories were told in mother tongue. Grandparents were the best storytellers because children were free with them than their parents. The children could ask them questions freely after listening to stories. In most communities in Kenya, children used to gather in their grandparents' houses to listen to stories after or before evening meals.

Children were told stories in mother tongue with good and bad characters. For example stories about heroes of the community were told to instil the values of courage and patriotism in children. Children could also be told stories about animals like the lazy hare that did not cooperate with other animals when they were digging a well during a long drought. After digging the well, the hare could go and steal water from it. Unfortunately, the hare was caught and beaten by the other animals. The story inculcated in children the values of cooperation and hard work. The story also discouraged immoral behaviours such as laziness and stealing and helped children to understand that nothing in life comes easily.

Stories about clever and foolish animals were also used to teach children to be wise. For instance, the story about the clever hare and foolish hyena was told. The hare cheated the hyena that they close their eyes as they picked fruits in the forest, but the hare didn't close his eyes and he ended up picking all the ripe fruits. When they reached home, hyena's children did not have anything to eat. This was to make children to be wise.

Stories with characters that had immoral behaviours were also narrated in mother tongue to children. For example, the story of a cunning hare that went to steal the old man's honey was told to children. One day he was caught, beaten and kept in a cage to await slaughter. This story taught children that it was wrong to steal for such behaviour was punishable. In pastoral communities, children could be told stories about natural calamities like drought and famine that killed all the livestock and left some families with nothing to eat. At the same time they were told how some families donated their herds of animals to those dying of hunger. Through the stories narrated in mother tongue, children easily acquired values of kindness, generosity, and love. Today in many families in Kenya, children are not told stories in mother tongue which is a very important medium of instruction.

Songs were used to teach community values, norms and customs. Songs in most of the time were accompanied with dances and sang in mother tongue. The songs were of different kinds and were sung in mother tongue in different occasions for example planting and harvesting seasons. Harvesting songs were meant to teach children that when they are working, they should do work with commitment and focus. Both elders and children sang songs together in mother tongue, which does not happen today. While singing, children were encouraged to listen to the words of the songs in order to learn the accepted behaviour.

Proverbs were the other medium used to impart important indigenous knowledge and inculcate moral, social and cultural values in children using mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The values wrapped in sayings, easily sank into the minds of children because they were told in mother tongue. The proverbs helped children to acquire knowledge, skills, and develop positive attitudes towards life. For instance the Abagusii community used proverbs to pass to children valuable indigenous knowledge in mother tongue as follows:

1. Proverb: *“Erieta rigiya nigo ribuete chisenenu chie ching’ondi.”*

Translation: *A good name is better than the sheep's fat.*

Lesson: Children were to learn that good character is better than having many riches. The world and Kenya need people of good character and integrity than anything else. Good character entails such virtues as honesty, sincerity and faithfulness.

2. Proverb: *“Mominchoria imi, tang’ani mosera ibu.”*

Translation; *“The person who wakes up early cannot compare with one who likes sitting near the fire place to keep himself/herself warm.”*

Lesson: The proverb teaches children to wake up early and work hard in order to be successful. The proverb also discourages laziness.

The situation in many homes in Kenya today is that parents do not know the proverbs, stories and songs with which to pass indigenous knowledge to children. Parents also do not have time to tell children stories or sing together with them like was the case in the old days. This means that culture is not transmitted to children and thus children are growing up without the important indigenous education. Cummins (2001) states that when parents and other caregivers are able to spend time with their children and tell them stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts; children come to school well prepared to learn the second language. In Kenya, the role of inculcating values in children has been left to teachers; the teachers who are underpaid and de-motivated. The grandfathers, who have adequate mastery of the stories, songs, and proverbs as they get old, pass on with the stories and proverbs that are rich with indigenous knowledge. Thus, there is need to preserve the indigenous knowledge by collecting the stories, songs, and proverbs and write books for children. However, the main challenge is lack of funds for doing the wonderful job. Funds from different sponsors will make the dream come true.

Use of Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction in Kenya during the Colonial Period

In Kenya during the colonial period, mother tongue was also used as medium of instruction in early years of school for Africans (Education Department, 1938). The aim of early year's education was mother tongue literacy and instruction was given in mother tongue and Kiswahili which was the "lingua franca" of the colony (Education Department, 1949). Later in 1951, the African education system was reorganized to provide three four years courses: Primary, intermediate and secondary. The main objective of early years' education was to provide every African child with the opportunity of entering a local government or aided school to make them literate before they returned to their rural communities after finishing the four year primary school course (Education Department, 1951). In 1955, the colonial government did a survey to provide information on the status of education in Kenya. According to the report, the structure of the African Educational System consisted of the primary course (Standards I-IV), Intermediate course (Standards V- VIII), and Secondary course (Form 1-4). The aim of primary school course was to achieve mother tongue (vernacular) literacy and English was introduced as soon as possible (Education Department, 1957). It is thus clear that the colonial government encouraged the use of tongue as a medium of instruction in early years of school.

Start of Use of a Foreign Language as a Medium of Instruction in Early Years of School

So when did the use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction in early years of school start? After the colonial period, English medium started to be used as language of instruction in early years of school. The Education Commission which was established soon after independence recommended the introduction of free primary education and integration of education into a single system and abolition of racial based education. By 1966, half of the standard one pupils in Kenya were being taught using English as the medium of instruction (Ministry of Education Triennial Survey Report, 1966).

Adoption of the policy of use of mother tongue as a language of instruction in early years of school

In 1976 the language policy of using mother tongue as a language of instruction in pre-primary and lower primary schools was adopted. According to the policy, the medium of instruction in rural pre-primary and lower primary schools should be mother tongue; Kiswahili is to be the medium of instruction in urban areas of mixed communities, while English should be the medium of instruction in none indigenous communities. The National Committee on Educational Objectives and policies recommended that to preserve the Kenyan culture, vernacular languages should be the medium of instruction in rural pre-primary and lower primary schools (Government of Kenya, 1976). This is because mother tongue is easily lost in the early years of school and when children lose their mother tongue, they also lose their culture and self identity (Cummins, 2001). UNESCO (2005) adds that every year, at least 10 languages disappear and of the 6,000 currently spoken in the world, about half are threatened. To promote education in mother tongue and to improve the quality of education, 21st February of every year was declared by UNESCO International Mother Language Day. The languages of Kenya Bill, 2013 was also passed to protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya and to promote the development and use of indigenous languages (Government of Kenya, 2013)

Education policies in Kenya support culture-based education. According to Sessional paper No.1 of 2005, education in Kenya should promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures (Government of Kenya, 2005). Children should learn using culturally relevant instructional materials to help them appreciate their culture and promote a smooth transition from home to school. Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) National Policy Framework (2006) also affirms that pre-primary education

should be based on the culture of the child to ensure that the culture of the community is transmitted to children (Republic of Kenya, 2006).

One of the goals of education in Kenya is to preserve and transmit culture. According to language policy of education, mother tongue should be the medium of instruction in the early years of school to preserve Kenyan culture (Government of Kenya, 1976). However, it has been found that many pre-primary schools in rural areas in Kenya use English language as a medium of instruction (Government of Kenya, 1999). Benson (2004) remarks that developing countries Kenya included have many languages, yet they continue to allow a single foreign language to dominate the education sector. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), this is known as “submersion” that is teaching children through a language that they do not speak. Benson continues to report that when submersion is compounded by other factors like poorly trained teachers, poorly designed curriculum, and lack of instructional resources, it makes teaching-learning very difficult for teachers and children.

In spite of the many benefits of use of mother tongue as a language of instruction and the language policy clearly stating that mother tongue or language of the catchment area should be used as a medium of instruction in pre-primary and lower primary schools in Kenya, the policy is yet to be implemented in many schools. Also, even though studies have clearly shown that when a second language is used as a medium of instruction in early years of school the results are poor, many schools have continued to use a foreign language as the medium of instruction.

Methodology

This study was designed and conducted to establish whether mother tongue was used as a language of instruction in pre-primary and lower primary schools in three districts in Kenya as per the language policy. The study was conducted in three districts in Kenya. The population of the study was 36 pre-primary and 36 lower primary school teachers randomly selected from three districts drawn from three counties (Kisii, Kericho and Bondo). The study employed a survey design. The dependent variable was use of mother tongue as a language of instruction, while the independent variables were teacher training, availability of culturally-relevant instructional resources, parents support, school language policy, and support from the school management and zonal education officers. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were used to select the sample. Data was collected from teachers using a questionnaire and was analyzed using qualitative methods.

Results and Discussions

To establish whether pre-primary and lower primary school teachers were using mother tongue as a language of instruction as provided by the language policy, teachers were asked to indicate whether they were using mother tongue as a language of instruction or not and results are presented in Table1 below.

Table1: Number of Schools using Mother Tongue as a Language of Instruction per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	Using Mother Tongue		Not Using Mother Tongue	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary Schools	16	44.4	20	55.6
Lower Primary Schools	15	41.7	21	58.3

Table1 shows that 44.4% of the pre-primary schools in the three districts were using mother tongue as a medium of instruction compared to 41.7% lower primary schools. Fifty five percent of the pre-primary schools were not using mother tongue as a language of instruction compared to 58.3% of lower primary schools. The results clearly shows that majority of the schools were not using mother tongue as a language of instruction.

After establishing the number of schools using mother tongue as a language of instruction, teachers were asked what they thought were the benefits of using mother tongue as a medium. The responses given by the teachers include: It helps children to develop good interpersonal skills, lays the foundation for learning other languages, and it improves children’s communication skills. Other benefits given include: It improves understanding of concepts taught, and facilitates smooth transition from home to pre-primary school. From the responses given by the teachers, it was clear that teachers understand the benefits of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Then

the question raised is, if the majority of the teachers understood the benefits of use of mother tongue, then why are the teachers not using the language as a medium of instruction? According to Fullan (2001), for teachers to implement a new change in education like the language policy, they should understand its objectives and importance and if they do not, they will resist the innovation. This means that a new change if introduced in a haphazard manner will not bring the desired changes. Fullan further observes that educational change is a dynamic process involving many interacting variables and if one or more of the variables are working against the implementation, the process will be less effective. He also states that the more factors supporting the implementation, the more change in practice will be accomplished.

To understand the factors working against the implementation of the language policy, it was important to investigate whether attention was paid to the factors which affect the implementation of the policy including teachers' initial training, provision of in-service training, availability of culturally-relevant materials, support from head teachers and zonal education officers, existence of school policy which supports the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, and support from parents.

Initial Training of Teachers

According to Karim (1994) the role of teachers in any educational innovation is very important because their knowledge, skills, and attitudes count a great deal in the success of the innovation. Kinyua (1994) adds that teachers can make an innovation to fail if: 1) they do not have necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to carry out their roles, and 2) they do not have the required equipment and materials. This means that however important an innovation may be, its success is greatly affected by the quality of teachers. Effective teacher preparation enables teachers to effectively implement the language policy. The question then to ask is, were teachers trained on how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction? Table 2 below presents the results.

Table 2: Number of Teachers Trained on Use of Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction per Educational Level

Level of Education	Response			
	Trained		Not Trained	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School Teachers	11	30.56	25	69.44
Lower Primary School Teachers	10	27.78	26	72.22

Table 2 shows that 30.56% of the pre-primary school teachers were trained on how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction, while 69.44 were not trained. In lower primary schools, 27.78% of the teachers were trained compared to 72.22% of the teachers who were not trained. The results clearly show that majority of the teachers have not been trained on how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction and yet they are expected to implement the policy. This could be one of the reasons why the teachers are not using mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

Teachers were also asked why they had not been trained on how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The main reasons given by them include lack of training opportunities, mother tongue is not in teacher training syllabus, and training is only organized for English and Kiswahili subjects and not for mother tongue.

In-service Training for Teachers

Teachers should be well prepared when they start teaching and continue to improve their knowledge and skills after training by attending in-service training. In-service training for teachers would help them to understand the importance of mother tongue and to accept the new change or policy. In this study, whether pre-primary and lower primary school teachers attended in-service training to learn how to implement the new policy was a subject of investigation. Teachers' were thus, asked whether they had attended any in-service training on mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The results are presented in Table3 below.

Table3: Number of Teachers Who Have Attended In-Service Training per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	In-Serviced		Not In-Serviced	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School Teachers	07	19.44	29	80.56
Lower Primary School Teachers	09	25.00	27	75.00

Table3 shows that 19.44% of the pre-primary school teachers reported that they had attended in – service training on how to use mother tongue as a language of instruction, while 80.56% of the teachers had not attended in-service training. In lower primary schools, only 9% of the teachers reported that they had attended in-service training, while 75% of the teachers had not attended. The results disclose that the majority of the teachers had not attended any in – service training and this could be working against the implementation of the policy.

Different reasons were given by teachers as to why they had not attended in-service training which include: They were not aware of in –service training opportunities; government sponsors in-service training for English and Kiswahili subjects only; and there is lack of funds to enable them attend in-service training or conferences. Thus, it is clear from the responses that many teachers have not had an opportunity to attend in-service training. This has a negative effect on the implementation of the language policy.

The study has also has shown that the majority of teachers have not been oriented on how to implement the language policy and how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

Availability of Culturally-relevant Materials

Culturally-relevant materials refer to learning resources which have local content. Culturally relevant materials are essential for the success of any educational change and inadequate quality and lack of materials impair curriculum innovation (Kallon, 1996 & Fullan, 2001). The implementation of language policy require that the syllabus, text books, teachers’ guides and other culturally-relevant materials be developed and delivered in schools for use before the implementation starts. The availability of culturally-relevant materials in schools for instruction was therefore investigated and results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Number of Teachers having Culturally-relevant Materials per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	Available		Not Available	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School Teachers	13	36.11	23	63.89
Lower Primary School Teachers	12	33.33	24	66.67

Table 4 shows that 36.11% of the pre-primary school teachers reported that they had culturally-relevant materials, while 63.89% of the teachers did not have culturally relevant materials. In lower primary schools, only 33.33% had culturally-relevant materials while 66.67% of the teachers did not have culturally relevant instructional materials. The results reveal that the majority of the teachers did not have culturally-relevant materials to facilitate the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction.

When teachers were asked to give reasons why there were no culturally relevant instructional materials in their schools, the main reasons given were: There was lack of access to culturally-relevant materials in the market; teachers lacked information on published materials; and there was lack of funds for developing and acquiring culturally-relevant materials. Lack of information on the published materials could be because the majority of the teachers had never attended any in-service training.

Lack of culturally-relevant materials hinders the use of mother as a language of instruction. Instructional materials like textbooks, pictures, charts, and flash-cards which are culturally-relevant help teachers to make learning meaningful to the learners (Shankar, 1980). The National Committee on Educational Objectives and policies found that a lot of the teaching materials used in pre-primary schools in Kenya were foreign in concept and content. The committee also found that vernacular languages were not used as a medium of instruction in pre-primary schools due to lack of culturally-relevant materials (Government of Kenya, 1976). Several years

later, a Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya also found that instructional materials were made from imported materials and contained foreign content and in most of the pre-primary schools, English was used as the language of instruction instead of mother-tongue or language of the catchment area as provided by the language policy (Government of Kenya, 1999).

Lack of funds and time for teachers to develop teaching learning materials affect the availability of instructional resources. In Kenya, Ruthiri (2009) investigated the availability, acquisition and utilization of teaching - learning of English language. Results revealed that the acquisition of teaching-learning resources was a challenge to most schools due to lack of finances and lack of time for teachers to develop teaching-learning resources. Ogott, Indoshi, and Okwara (2010) conducted a study on how teaching and learning of language in Early Childhood Development and Education Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) Centres could benefit from effective selection, development and use of materials. The study found that there was acute shortage of language materials due to administrative, physical, and human factors.

Support from Head Teachers and Zonal Education Officers

Head teachers and educational officers are agents of change and influence the likelihood of change. They are also the initiators and driving force behind an innovation (Fullan, 2001). Thus, successful innovation is influenced by school head teachers and education officers. Teachers were therefore asked whether their head teachers and zonal education officers encourage them to use mother tongue as a language of instruction and results are presented in Table 5 & 6 below.

Table 5: Number of Teachers Encouraged to Use Mother Tongue as a Language of Instruction per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	Encouraged		Not Encouraged	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School Teachers	20	55.56	16	44.44
Lower Primary School Teachers	15	41.67	21	58.33

Table 5 shows that 55.56 % of the pre-primary school teachers were encouraged by their head teachers to use mother tongue as a language of instruction, while 44.44% were not encouraged. In lower primary schools, 41.67% of the teachers were encouraged while 58.33% were not encouraged. The results depict that most of the teachers are not encouraged by their head teachers to use mother tongue as a language of instruction and this could be hindering the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the schools.

Further information was sought from the teachers who reported not supported by head teachers. The common reasons given by them were: Head teachers prefer the use of Kiswahili and English; parents put a lot of pressure on head teachers to use English medium, some head teachers think that it is time wasting; parents are interested in the use of English and Kiswahili. The other reasons given are that some head teachers think that it will affect parents' confidence in their administration abilities; and parents may not bring their children to the school if the language of instruction is tongue. Whether zonal educational officers support the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction was also investigated and results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Number of Teachers Encouraged by Zonal Educational Officers to Use Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	Encouraged		Not Encouraged	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School Teachers	20	55.56	16	44.44
Lower Primary School Teachers	14	38.89	22	61.11

Table 6 shows that 55.56 % of the pre-primary school teachers reported that they were encouraged by zonal education officers to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction, while 44.44% of the teachers were not encouraged. In lower primary schools, 38.89% of the teachers were encouraged while 61.11% were not

encouraged. The results reveal that at pre-primary school level, the majority of the teachers reported that they were encouraged by zonal education officers to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction, while the majority of the lower primary school teachers reported not encouraged. The reasons given by teachers why the officers do not support the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction include: The officers emphasize the use of English and Kiswahili and they also think that it may reduce performance in national examinations in their zones.

Existence of School Policy supporting the use of Mother Tongue as a medium of Instruction

The existence of language policy in schools which supports the use of mother tongue as a language instruction is very important and was therefore investigated. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of Schools with a Policy which supports the Use of Mother tongue as a Medium of Instruction per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	Available		Not Available	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School	22	61.11	14	38.89
Lower Primary School	12	33.33	24	66.67

Table 7 shows that 61.11% of the pre-primary school teachers reported that their schools had a policy which support the use of mother tongue as medium of Instruction, while 38.89% of the schools did not have. In lower primary schools, 33.33% of the teachers reported they had a policy, while 66.67% did not have. The result reveals that language policy in some schools in both pre-primary and primary schools discourages the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The frequent reasons given for lack of a policy were: Schools emphasize on use of English and Kiswahili; they admit children from different ethnic groups; mother tongue is not an official language; examinations are not set in mother tongue; and parents prefer English and Kiswahili.

Parents' Support

Parents' support on the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction was also investigated and the results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Parents who would be Happy when Mother Tongue is the Language Medium of Instruction per Level of Education

Level of Education	Response			
	Parents who are Happy		Parents who are not Happy	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Pre-Primary School Teachers	08	22.22	28	77.78
Lower Primary School Teachers	06	16.67	30	83.33

Table 8 shows that 22.22 % of the pre-primary school teachers reported that parents would be happy when mother tongue is the language of instruction, while 77.78% reported that parents would not be happy. In lower primary schools, 16.67% of the teachers reported that parents would be happy, while 83.33% of the teachers reported that parents would not be happy. The results indicate that the majority of parents did not support the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction.

When the teachers were asked why parents would not be happy; the common reasons given include: Parents prefer English and Kiswahili; parents think that learning will not take place when mother tongue is the medium of instruction; children are not examined in mother tongue; and it may lead to poor academic achievement. The other reasons given were: Parents believe that their children would drop out of school; the children come from different ethnic groups; and parents feel good when their children are taught in English and Kiswahili.

Several studies reviewed have shown findings to the contrary. In Cameroon, an experimental project was done consisting of 12 experimental schools in which mother tongue (Kom) was the medium of instruction, while in other 12 schools English was used as a medium of instruction in grade one and two. In the experimental schools, pupils were taught English as a subject for about three hours a week, while in the control schools all instructions were in English. Results from the study revealed that pupils in mother tongue classes performed better overall and subject-wise than those in English medium classes. It was also observed that English ability of the pupils in mother tongue classes was not reduced. The study further revealed that children who were taught using mother tongue as a medium of instruction performed better in mathematics and English than those pupils whose medium of instruction was English. This is contrary to parents and zonal educational officers' beliefs that the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction would reduce pupils' ability to learn English language and reduce pupils' academic performance (Walter and Trammel, 2010).

Malawi Institute of Education and Save the Children Federation (2000) investigated the role which teachers' home language plays in the implementation of mother tongue instruction policy in two districts. Results revealed that pupils who were taught using mother tongue performed better in both English and mathematics. Walter & Morren (2004) reveal that use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction increases the likelihood that children would continue schooling beyond primary. This is also contrary to the parents' beliefs that their children will drop out of school. Additionally Cummins (2000) states that bilingual programmes when well implemented promote literacy in a minority language without any negative effect on children learning of the second language.

Mother tongue education programmes produce capable readers in 2-3 years. In Eritrea, a reading survey was conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2002 to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in educational delivery in primary schools. Results revealed that it takes five or six years in a second language instructional model to approximate the reading skills developed in three years or less in a mother tongue instructional model (Walter and Davis, 2005). Thomas and Collier (1997) in a study conducted in USA schools found that children who were receiving as much as six years of instructional support in their mother tongue finished their formal education at a higher level than those who were in English-only programmes, and achieved greater level of proficiency in English. In Guatemala, Walter and Morren (2004) report that when the medium of instruction was mother tongue, it increased the chances of learners proceeding to a higher level of education by 48%. This is contrary to the parents' belief in the three districts in Kenya that their children would drop out of school when mother tongue was the language of instruction.

The study also revealed that many parents do not want their children to learn in mother tongue. This could be because the parents may not understand the importance of mother tongue and its effects on children's performance. If parents do not understand the importance of mother tongue, they will also not help their children to understand the importance of mother tongue. The parents will also not read and tell stories to children in mother tongue, and sing songs in mother tongue as a way of transmitting and preserving their culture. It is the role of parents to preserve culture by ensuring that their children use the language because when mother tongue is used, it is preserved. Parents should also encourage teachers to use mother tongue as a language of instruction and not discourage them.

Challenges Faced by Teachers using Mother Tongue as A Language of Instruction

The challenges faced by teachers who are using mother tongue as a language of instruction was investigated and the results are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9 shows that in both pre-primary and lower primary schools the major challenges experienced by teachers who were using mother tongue as a language of instruction include: Parents' have negative attitudes towards mother tongue; lack of culturally-relevant materials; difficulty to translate some concepts into mother tongue; and lack of reference materials.

The teachers were also asked to suggest what they thought should be done to overcome the challenges and the results are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 9: Challenges Experienced by Teachers Using Mother Tongue as a Language of Instruction per Education Level

Pre-Primary School Teachers	f	%	Lower Primary School Teachers	f	%
Children from different ethnic groups	11	17.74	Children from different ethnic groups	15	20.54
Difficulty in translation of certain concepts into mother tongue	11	17.74	Difficulty in translation of certain concepts into mother tongue	12	16.43
Parents' negative attitudes towards mother tongue	13	20.97	Lack of culturally-relevant materials	11	15.07
Lack of culturally relevant materials	11	17.74	Difficulty in correct pronunciation of certain words	01	1.37
Examinations not set in mother tongue	01	1.61	Lack of interest from children	02	2.74
Lack of training	04	6.45	Parents' negative attitudes toward mother tongue	09	12.33
No allocation of time for Mother tongue	01	1.61	Lack of reference materials e.g. books	09	12.33
Difficulty in pronunciation	03	4.84	Examinations are set in English	02	2.74
Difficulty in understanding certain words	05	8.06	School administrators negative attitudes towards mother tongue	01	1.37
Lack of government support	01	1.61	Difficulty in understanding concepts	07	9.59
Negative attitudes by staff other members	01	1.61	Lack of syllabus for mother tongue	01	1.37
			Lack of trained training	01	1.37

Table 10 shows that in both pre-primary and lower primary schools, the majority of the teachers suggested the following: Training opportunities should be availed to teachers and head teachers on the use of mother tongue; parents should be sensitized on the benefits of mother tongue; provision and development of culturally-relevant materials, and mother tongue should be included in the school curriculum.

Findings of the Study

Language policy of use of mother tongue as a language of instruction was adopted in 1976. According to the policy, the language of instruction in rural pre-primary and lower primary schools should be mother tongue; Kiswahili should be the medium of instruction in urban areas of mixed communities, while English should be the medium of instruction in none indigenous communities.

Use of mother tongue as language of instruction in rural pre-primary and lower primary schools is meant to preserve the Kenyan culture and to ensure a smooth transition from home to school.

Table 10: Solutions to the Challenges Experienced by Teachers using Mother Tongue as a Language of Instruction per Education Level

Pre-Primary School Teachers	f	%	Lower Primary School Teachers	f	%
Ensure that the language policy is made clear and implemented	02	5.13	Ensure that the language policy is made clear and implemented	03	6.00
Training opportunities should be offered to teachers and head teachers on mother tongue use	04	10.26	Training opportunities should be offered to teachers and head teachers on mother tongue use	16	4.00
Parents should be sensitized on the benefits of mother tongue use in teaching children	12	30.77	Parents should be sensitized on the benefits of mother tongue use in teaching children	09	18.00
Provision and development of culturally relevant materials	08	20.51	Include mother tongue in the school curriculum	10	20.00
Setting of exam in mother tongue	03	2.56	Support the development of reference materials	14	28.00
More research should be done in the area	01	2.56	Organize workshops and seminars for teachers	01	2.00
Emphasis should be laid on use of Kiswahili	02	5.13	Encourage use of mother tongue in schools	01	2.00
Provision of reference materials	01	2.56	Stop using mother tongue	01	2.00
Training of teachers	03	7.69	Government to develop syllabus for mother tongue	02	4.00
Establish more centres for training	01	2.56			
Curriculum organization to include mother tongue education	01	2.56			
Mother tongue to be made compulsory at the pre-primary and lower primary levels	01	2.56			

Pre-primary and lower primary school teachers understand the benefits of mother tongue as a language of instruction while parents do not. However, many schools are not using mother tongue as a medium of instruction because of the following factors:

- (i) The majority of teachers have not been trained on how to use mother tongue as a language of instruction. The teachers have also not attended in – service training.
- (ii) There is lack of adequate culturally-relevant materials to enable teachers to use mother tongue as a language of instruction. The main reasons why there is lack of culturally relevant materials include: Lack of access to culturally-relevant materials in the market, lack of information on published materials, and lack of funds for developing and acquiring culturally relevant materials.
- (iii) Head teachers in some schools do not support the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction because: Parents put a lot of pressure on them; they think that it is time wasting; and parents are interested in the use of English and Kiswahili. The other reasons for head teachers not supporting use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction are that it will affect parents' confidence in their administration abilities; and parents may not bring their children to the school if the medium of instruction is mother tongue.
- (iv) Some zonal educational officers do not support the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction because they believe that it may reduce performance in national examinations in their zones.
- (v) Language policy in some schools in both pre-primary and primary school discourages the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction. This is because management of the schools emphasizes on use of English and

Kiswahili, schools admits children from different ethnic groups, examinations are not set in mother tongue, and parents prefer English and Kiswahili.

- (vi) Majority of the parents do not support the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction because they believe that learning will not take place when mother tongue is the medium of instruction, and it may lead to poor academic achievement. The other reasons for lack of parents support are; parents believe that their children may drop out of school and parents feel good when their children are taught in English and Kiswahili.
- (vii) Teachers face many challenges while using mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Some of the common ones are: Parents have negative attitudes towards use of mother tongue as a language of instruction; there is lack of culturally-relevant materials; teachers find it difficult to translate some concepts into mother tongue, and there is lack of reference materials. To overcome the challenges, teachers suggested that they need training opportunities on use of mother tongue; parents should be sensitized on the benefits of mother tongue, there should be adequate provision of culturally-relevant materials, and mother tongue should be included in the school curriculum.

Conclusion

The study was to establish whether mother tongue was used as a medium of instruction in pre-primary and lower primary schools in order to preserve the Kenyan culture and to ensure a smooth transition of children from home to school. A few schools are using mother tongue as a medium of instruction; most of the teachers understand the benefits of mother tongue but parents do not understand. Mother tongue is not being used as the medium of instruction in many pre-primary and lower primary schools because: Teachers have not been trained on how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction; in – service training are not organised to orient teachers about the policy; and there is lack of culturally-relevant materials. The other factors hindering the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction are; Majority of head teachers and zonal educational officers do not support the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction; language policy in schools discourages the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction; and parents have negative attitudes towards mother tongue.

The teachers using mother tongue as a medium of instruction experience many challenges including: Parents have negative attitudes towards mother tongue; there is lack of culturally-relevant materials; teachers find it difficult to translate some concepts into mother tongue, and there is lack of reference materials. To overcome the challenges, teachers suggested that they need in-service training; parents should be sensitized on the benefits of mother tongue; and there should be adequate culturally-relevant instructional materials.

Recommendations

To improve the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction in pre-primary and lower primary schools in Kenya, the following are the recommendations for different stakeholders including government, Ministry of Education, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, Quality Assurance Officers, Teacher Training Institutions, Publishers, International organizations, and NGOs.

- (i) The Government of Kenya should: Sponsor in-service training for pre-primary and primary school teachers on use of mother tongue as a language of instruction; ensure that language policy is implemented in order to preserve the Kenyan culture; provide funds for the development and acquisition of culturally-relevant materials to promote culturally relevant teaching.
- (ii) The Ministry of Education should ensure that schools should comply with language of instruction policy which states that mother tongue or language of the catchment area should be the medium of instruction in pre-primary and lower primary schools; organize workshops for writing and publication of culturally-relevant materials in all local languages; ensure that culturally-relevant learning materials are produced to promote culturally-relevant teaching-learning; and ensure that education policies are fully implemented for example the ECD policy framework, and the language policy.
- (iii) Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development should ensure that curriculum is culturally-relevant in order to impart culturally-relevant education; and facilitate the production of culturally-relevant materials that support the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- (iv) Quality Assurance and Standards Officers should: Organize seminars to sensitize parents and teachers on the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction; organize capacity-building and sensitization meetings

for parents to help them to understand the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction; and organize seminars and workshops for teachers and head teachers on the benefits of mother tongue.

(v) Teacher Training Institutions should help teacher trainees to understand the benefits of mother tongue; and train teachers on how to design and develop culturally relevant instructional materials.

(vi) Publishers should produce instructional materials which are culturally relevant and affordable.

(vii) International organizations and NGOs should also sponsor research and production of culturally-relevant instructional materials.

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