

# Implementation Status of Kenya's Language in Education Policy: A Case Study of Selected Primary Schools in Chuka Division, Meru South District, Kenya

Nancy Wangui Mbaka\* Christine Atieno Peter Mary Karuri  
Chuka University, P .O. Box 109-60400, Chuka, Kenya.  
\*E-mail of the corresponding author: mbakanancy@yahoo.com

## Abstract

Language-in-education policies in many developing countries are constantly an issue of discussion in scholarly circles. This paper looks at the language-in- education policy in lower primary in Chuka Division, Meru-South District, Kenya. The paper evaluates the teachers' awareness of the language policy and actual implementation in the classroom. It also analyses the problems that teachers experience in implementing the policy and gives the teacher's recommendations in case the language policy were to be restructured. The paper establishes that teachers are aware of the policy but they do not always implement it in the classroom. The findings in this paper are of great benefit to all stakeholders in the ministry of education in Kenya and contribute to scholarly literature in the area of language planning and policy.

**Keywords:** Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP), Policy Implementation, Language of Instruction (LOI), mother tongue (MT)

## 1. Introduction

The important role that language plays in the acts of learning and teaching is recognized by education systems all over the world. According to Oller (1979), being able to use a language or even a particular variety of a language seems to be a prerequisite for anything that education attempts to accomplish and without language there can be no curriculum. Teachers should be aware of non-verbal aspects of thinking but most of the thinking in the classroom situation involves linguistic structures.

Neustupny (1968) points out that developing countries face unique language problems. Having inherited legacies of colonialism, they wish to develop language policies which more accurately reflect the present-day political realities behind the uses of English and the indigenous languages in their countries. One of the major issues which a language planning approach may help to clarify is that of choice of language in multilingual societies, of which languages should be used for instruction and when, and whether they should be taught as subjects or used as 'carriers' for content subjects such as Science and History.

Kenya's LiEP has been revised a number of times since 1895 when Kenya became a British Protectorate. Mbaabu (1992) states that "Kenya has not put the whole language policy issue on the public agenda for a broad policy formulation adoption and implementation," (Mbaabu 1992:182). In what many scholars see as a language dilemma, (for example, Gorman (1970), Mbaabu (1992), Bogonko (1992) and Muthwii (2002), Kenya has adopted what appears to be a multi-focal approach which does not allow emphasis on any specific language. English, Kiswahili and mother tongue (MT) are all used in education in varying degrees. The current LiEP is based on the recommendations by the Gachathi Report (1976). The report recommends that in lower primary English or Kiswahili should be used as Language of Instruction (LOI) in urban schools and MT in rural schools. English is recommended as LOI in all schools in upper primary. Although the LiEP in Kenya has been in force since 1976, there has not been any formally recognized evaluation in order to investigate its relevance and applicability at the classroom level. This study therefore sought to investigate the implementation status of the LiEP in selected primary schools.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To ascertain whether teachers were aware of the language-in-education policy
2. To investigate the extent to which what is recommended in the language-in- education policy is what is implemented in the classroom.
3. To describe the problems that teachers experience in implementing the policy.
4. To find out teachers' recommendations on restructuring of the language-in- education policy.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Rubin (1973) and Haugen (1983), the process of implementation involves activities of government agencies, institutions and writers in adopting and using the selected and codified form. Activities such as the production of newspapers, textbooks, books and other publications as well as the use of the language for mass

communication are part of the implementation process.

Since the colonial era, the language policy in Kenya has been characterized by dilemmas and contradictions. Though the missionaries advocated for the use of MT in lower primary education as LOI, they were divided on the role of Kiswahili. The Beecher Report (1949) finally restricted Kiswahili only to areas where it is spoken as a first language. The NPA programme in the 1950's which emphasized discovery in activity methods of learning operated in favour of English to the disadvantage of Kiswahili and other local languages. The trend has been the same after independence. The Ominde Commission (1964) assigned MT no role and its recommendations on Kiswahili were not implemented. The recommendations of the Gachathi report (1976) went unimplemented until 1984 when Kenya adopted the 8-4-4 education system as recommended by the Mackay Report (1981).

In a report compiled by Muthwii (2002), a team of researchers carried out a study which investigated the views and perceptions of parents, teachers and pupils on the LiEP and usage issues. The study was explanatory in nature and followed a case-Study approach. The sample comprised forty selected schools from both rural and urban settings in Kenya and Uganda. The data was collected using interview schedules. It was found out that although the policy statement in both countries may seem plausible in theory, in practice it is inundated with many problems. In Kenya, there has been no serious attempt by the government to sensitize teachers, parents and pupils as to the wisdom and benefits of the language policy in education. As a result, many teachers did not follow the policy but acted according to the dictates of the prevailing pressures exerted on them from parents and the examination system in the country. Some parents and even pupils were found to be opposed to some of the well-intended clauses in the policy statement such as the clause that recommends the use of MT in rural areas. The parents were of the opinion that there is no need for their children to be instructed in MT because it does not help them to grasp concepts fast in their schooling. Muthwii's study (2002) helped to identify possible positions and views on the language policy and highlighted related issues. Being exploratory in nature, the selected sample of schools and respondents did not completely and accurately accommodate the divergent perceptions and views on language policy and use in the whole of the region represented.

Mbaabu's (1992) study aimed to analyze Kenya's language policy as stipulated in government documents and commission reports with a view to explaining why Kenya was not developing Kiswahili. It adopted a historical approach and draws upon historical, descriptive, analytical and statistical data. Its findings were that the official promotion of several languages results in the underdevelopment of Kiswahili. The major strength of this study is that it has compiled in one volume the history of Kenya's language policy since 1930. This had not been done before. However, its historical approach means it can be incorporated into other studies in summarized form. The present study has greatly benefited from Mbaabu's study.

One of the objectives of McNab's Study (1989), was to analyze key points in the process of language policy implementation in the education system in Ethiopia. The other objective was to develop a model of education language planning and use it as a framework. The developed framework would then be used in the study and revised on the basis of its appropriateness for such an analysis. This was a national case study. The method of data collection was in depth semi-structured interviews with people working in key areas in education. Questionnaires were also used for Teacher Training Institutes and for staff in a pedagogical centre. The Study was carried out over a period of two years.

McNab developed a theoretical Model of Education Language Planning in a multilingual context. This was done by combining two models; Haugen's Revised Model (1983) and Warwick's Transactional Model of Planning and Implementation (as cited in McNab, 1989). This combination allowed for the depiction of both cohesion and tension in a politically sensitive area of social planning. The model is a valuable contribution to research. It is the model that will be used in the present study. It is also a good resource material on how language policy implementation can be evaluated on a national scale.

The major dilemma in the education system in Kenya is whether rural schools should continue using MT while many academies use English right from P1. The other dilemma is whether Kiswahili should replace MT as LOI in lower primary (Fawcett, 1970). There is also need to find out whether teachers implement the policy at the classroom level given the multilingual context they work in. The findings of this Study could be useful in resolving these issues.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This research was guided by the theoretical model of educational language planning in a multilingual context developed by McNab (1989).

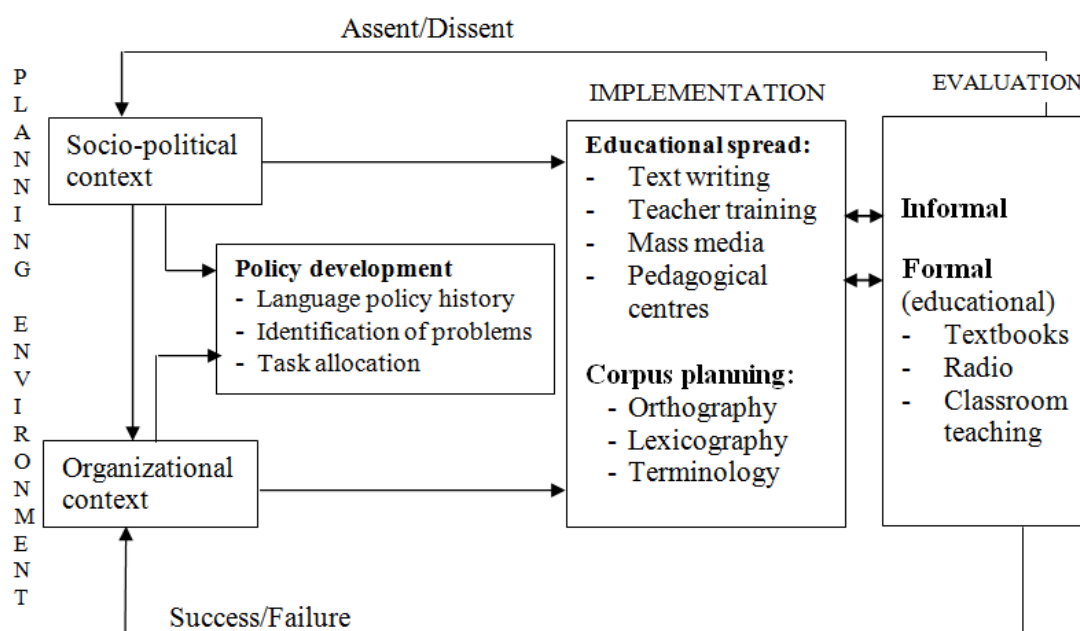


Figure 1: A Theoretical Model of Education Language Planning in a Multilingual Context:  
 Source: McNab (1989:189)

The model incorporates the planning environment in language planning. This environment is divided into the sociopolitical context and the organizational context. The sociopolitical context is the interlocking network of cultures and social groupings in the multilingual society and the formative historical experience of the country. The types of language varieties in the community are an important factor here. Kenya is made up of many heterogeneous communities and this situation must be taken care of in language planning. The organizational context consists of arrangements for language planning and education, and key factors in the education language planning process. The actors in this setting are the decision makers, planners, administrators and experts in the fields of education and linguistics.

Language policy planning is influenced by both sociopolitical context and organizational context. The sociopolitical context influences policy directly through the correlations between language and socio-economic class, between language and political power and between language and decision making. In general, socio-political complexity correlates with the complexity of the communication system which individuals/pupils must acquire.

Implementation is influenced directly by the socio-political and organizational contexts. It is sub divided into two main parts, that is, corpus planning and educational spread. Corpus planning refers to the development of languages designated by the government as media of instruction or as school subjects. It includes the development of curriculum, materials and books. The task of the educationists is to incorporate the new language norms into the classroom practice and into the body of spoken discourse by means of teacher training. It should also be incorporated into the body of written discourse by development of instructional materials.

Evaluation is sub-divided into evaluations which are purposively initiated by the organisation involved in education language planning (formal evaluations) and informal judgments which are made by policy makers, implementers and the target groups of language plans. The aim of this Study was to make a formal evaluation of Kenya's language-in-policy on teacher's awareness of the language policy, classroom practice and availability of textbooks. Problems encountered by teachers are also described. This theory is very vital for this study because it incorporates the planning environment, which is multilingual, and provides for evaluation of the policy either from the organizational context or from the socio-political context. The evaluation done in this study was from the organizational context.

#### 4. Population and Sampling Procedure

The total population was all primary schools in Chuka Division. According data obtained from the District Education office, there were sixty four primary schools in the Division. Out of these, eleven were private schools. Out of the fifty three public schools, two were boarding schools and therefore did not have a lower primary section. The researcher used two sampling procedures. These were stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. Because a sample need not be representative in a case study according to Kothari (2004), three schools

were selected on the basis of the LOI they used. According to the LiEP, the academy was supposed to use either English or Kiswahili as LOI, the public urban school was supposed to use Kiswahili and the rural public school was supposed to use MT. Purposive sampling was also used. The researcher picked the schools that were easier to access.

### 5. Methods of Data Collection

A questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire contained both structured and open-ended questions. It was divided into four sections. These were language policy awareness, language use in the classroom, problems encountered in implementing the policy and restructuring of the language policy. The questionnaire was piloted. The researcher used the piloting exercise to determine the validity of the instrument used in data collection in this study. The researcher used the split-half technique of reliability testing. The correlation coefficient was calculated and found to be 0.82. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher. An observation schedule was used to collect data on language use in the classroom and in formal domains like school assemblies.

### 6. Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected using the questionnaire was separated into two groups, that is, responses from open ended questions and responses from closed questions. Data from the closed questions was then coded and analysed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS. A report was written on the data collected using the observation schedule

### 7. Results and Discussion

The results from the research are presented according to the objectives of the study. A total of 32 teachers from the three schools responded to the questionnaire.

#### 7.1. Language Policy Awareness and Critical Consciousness

To find out whether teachers were aware of the policy statement, the respondents were asked whether they were aware of the policy governing the language of instruction in primary schools in Kenya. 10 teachers (31%) said they were fully aware of it, while 22 teachers (69%) indicated that they were aware. Therefore, no teacher indicated that they were uncertain, unaware or fully unaware. These results indicate that teachers were aware of the national language policy and they are presented in Figure 2 below.

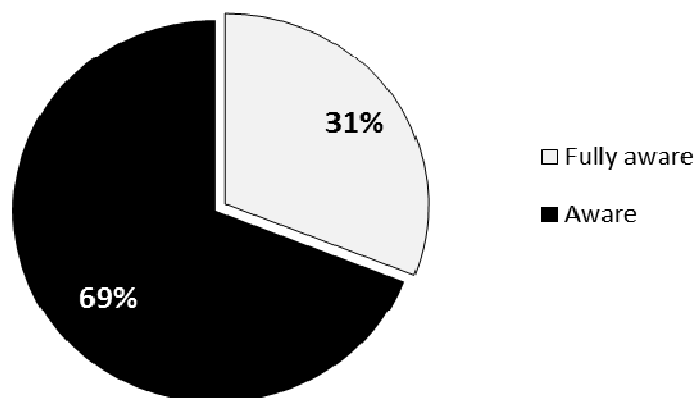


Figure 2: Teachers' Awareness of the Language Policy

#### 7.2. Implementation of the Policy in the Classroom

The respondents were asked to indicate how often they used other languages during teaching other than the language of instruction in order to find out whether they implemented the language policy in the classroom. Five respondents indicated that they used another language other than the language of instruction very often, eight respondents said that they did so often, 13 respondents said that they use it rarely and two respondents said that they did so very rarely and four respondents said that they did not use another language at all. Therefore only 12% of the respondents did not use another language other than the language of instruction. According to these results, majority of the teachers used another language other than the LOI. These results are presented in Figure 3.

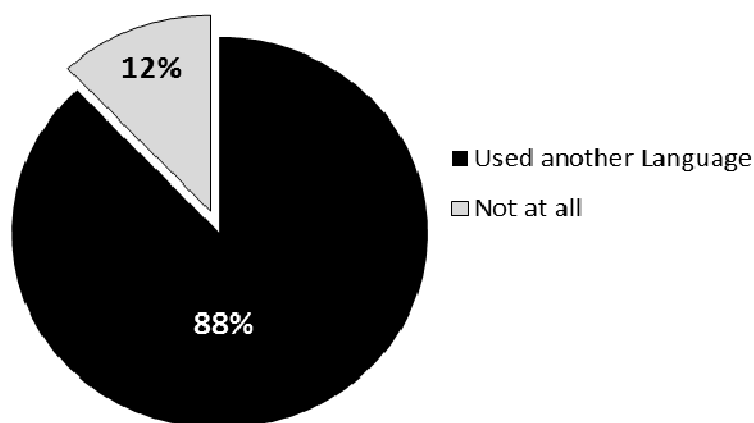


Figure 3: Use of another Language other than the LOI

### 7.3. Problems in Implementation

On the issue of whether pupils encounter language problems in lower primary, 31 teachers (97%) indicated that pupils encounter language problems while one teacher (3%) indicated that they do not. Table 1 shows this information in summarized form.

Table 1: Responses on whether pupils encounter Language problems in the classroom

School Section	Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Lower Primary	Yes	31	97%
	No	1	3%
Upper primary	Yes	25	78%
	No	7	22%

On the issue of how they solve language problems in the classroom, 16 respondents (50%) indicated that they solved the problems by mixing languages. Two respondents (6%) indicated that they developed their own materials, 14 respondents (44%) indicated that they solved the problems by translating and interpreting and no respondent solved the language problems by using English as is shown in Figure 4 below.

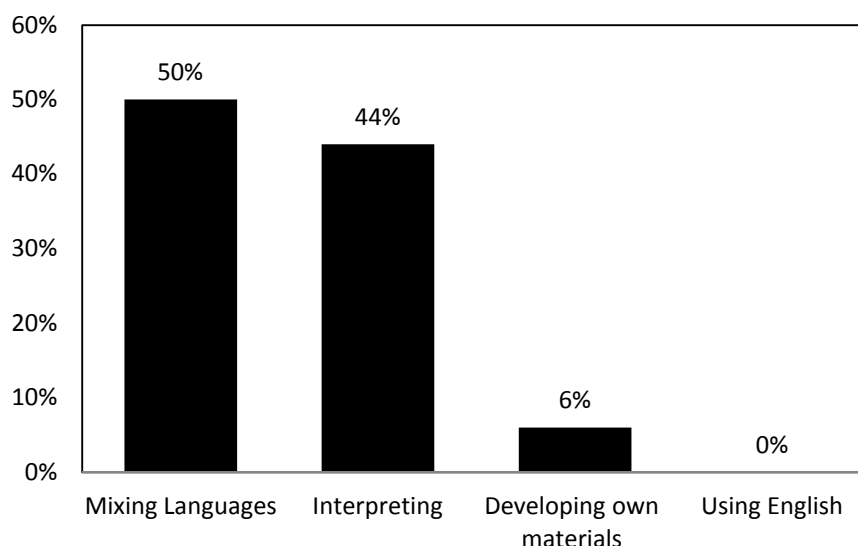


Figure 4: How Teachers Solve Language Problems

### 7.4. Restructuring of the Language Policy

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they would want the language policy to be restructured. On this, two respondents (6%) said that the language policy needs to be restructured very much, 10 respondents (31%)

said much, four respondents (13%) said they were not sure, 13 respondents (41%) said it needs a little restructuring and three respondents (9%) said that it does not need any restructuring. These results indicate that the majority of teachers were of the opinion that the language policy should be restructured. Table 2 summarizes this information.

Table 2: Responses on the Restructuring of the Language Policy

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very much	2	6%
Much	10	31%
Not sure	4	13%
A little	13	41%
Not at all	3	9 %

The respondents were asked to indicate what they would prefer as a language policy there would be need to change it. 28 respondents (88%) preferred a language policy where Kiswahili was LOI from Std 1 – 3 and English as LOI from Std 4-8. One respondent also indicated that the text books for lower primary should be written in Kiswahili. One respondent (3%) preferred English as LOI from Std 1-8 in all primary schools. Two respondents (6%) indicated that they would prefer MT as LOI from Std 1-3 and English as LOI from Std 4-8 in all primary schools. One respondent (3%) preferred English as LOI from pre-school to Std 8 in all primary schools. Most teachers preferred a language policy where the LOI was Kiswahili in lower primary and English in upper primary. Table 3 summarizes this information.

Table 3: Responses on Language Policy Preference

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Kiswahili as LOI from Std 1-8 in all primary schools	1	3%
Kiswahili as LOI from Std 1-3, English as LOI from Std 4-8 in all primary schools	28	88%
English as LOI from Std 1-8 in all primary schools	1	3%
MT as LOI From Std 1-3 and English as LOI from td 4-8 in all primary schools	2	6%
MT as LOI from Std 1-3 and Kiswahili as LOI from Std 4-8 in all primary schools	0	0

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this research indicate that the policy implementation at the classroom level is a failure. This failure is as a result of assumptions made at the stage of policy development. There is no mention of coordinating, monitoring and evaluation agencies to oversee implementation, there are no books and other materials in MT and teachers get no training for teaching in MT. There are also no new innovations. The current practices are mainly inherited from the colonial period. Lack of a clear-cut, well formulated policy in both status planning and corpus planning in the education arena has led to poor implementation of the language policy.

An analysis on the development of Kenya's language policy shows that its objectives are not clearly stated. A conducive environment has not been created by the policy makers for policy implementation. Such an environment requires that steps are taken to ensure that the structure, spelling and vocabulary of the languages designated as LOIs are modified to conform to the demands made on their functions. Without such steps being taken, there can be no successful implementation. English enjoys a prestigious position in the Kenyan education system. It has also received good corpus planning. The status of Kiswahili in education in Kenya in recent years has greatly improved. Despite being designated as LOIs, MTs have received poor corpus planning. Teachers portrayed a negative attitude towards them and majority of them felt that MT should not be used in education at all. The language problems that the teachers experience are as a result of shortcomings in the development of the policy. . The findings of this research agree with those of Muthwii (2002) and Musau (2004). Kenya's language policy has failed to promote use of MTs in education despite the fact that they have been assigned a role as LOI in rural areas in lower primary in urban areas.

The current language policy is suitable because it has put into consideration ideological social-economic and educational issues into its formulation. However, its implementation has been hampered by lack of clarity, lack of texts, lack of political good-will, lack of uniformity, lack of an evaluation and monitoring agency and lack of consistency. From the descriptions of classroom interaction between teachers and students, the conclusion is that in lower primary, teachers use more than one language most of the time. They mix two or sometimes three languages depending on the type of school. This is code mixing. The results obtained from observation were in

agreement with the results obtained through the questionnaire.

## 9. Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the findings of this research:

- i. There is need to restructure Kenya's language policy. However, this should not be done without first doing nationwide consultations and extensive research.
- ii. This study evaluated the language policy from the organizational context. There is need for further research to be conducted to evaluate the acceptability of the language policy from the sociopolitical context.
- iii. According to the findings of this research, teachers suggested that they preferred a policy which recommended the use of Kiswahili as LOI in lower primary in all primary schools. This is also one of the issues that further research can help verify.
- iv. The use of code mixing in the classroom needs to be addressed in the formulation of the language policy. So far, the Ministry of Education has no policy on code mixing and code switching.
- v. In the formulation of a new language policy, there is need to come up with a distinctive body responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the language policy. Lack of a monitoring and evaluation agency has been a major short coming in the formulation of the language policy

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