

Mother Tongue Use And Learning Lags In Public Secondary Schools In Rarieda Sub County, Siaya County, Kenya.

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Abstract: Global goals on sustainable development goal-four on inclusive, quality and equitable life long education for all and universal secondary education completion by the year 2030, has seen the government increase expenditure to education to cushion learners from financial constraints on education costs; thus provide resources for quality education. Despite the initiatives, low achievement and low completion rates continue to ache the education sector leading to heavy costs on those who do not complete school within the recommended four years. The purpose of the study assessed the influence of mother tongue use on learning in secondary schools for achieving quality and equitable life long education. The objectives to the study were; to establish the influence of spoken language (Mother tongue) on students' completion rate and performance, and to determine the influence of evaluation / examination language on students' completion rate and performance in public secondary schools in Rarieda sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Behaviorist theory of learning by Skinner (1960). The study used mixed methods convergent parallel design. The target population was 22650 respondents from 23 schools as sampling units. The sample size was 400 respondents that comprised of 298 students of which 185 were students from mixed day schools, 105 students from boarding boys, 108 students from boarding girls, 274 teachers and 23 principals. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect data. The key results of study revealed that in mixed day schools 87 percent of students use mother tongue as mode of communication and 42 percent in county boarding schools. This is during break times and other times in classrooms when teachers' are not around and they recruit the non- local students to learn the local language. This was found to be against school language policy. 53 percent of students in mixed day schools and 39 percent in county schools assert that some teachers also use mother tongue to communicate with them though outside the classroom but within school compound and this encouraged the students to speak more in mother tongue. These students narrated that they face difficulty in understanding most terms used during teaching and learning process and they also face difficulty in writing the examinations which are done mainly in English, thus perform dismally and may even repeat a grade. The spearman's reliability coefficient of $r=0.71$ confirmed a negative influence of mother tongue on learning. The study findings led to a conclusion that students lacked appropriate language development and enjoyed a laissez-faire kind of monitoring and guidance on appropriate language use at school. The study recommended that schools to have language trainer sessions per week to help learners develop and get used to the English and Kiswahili languages. Reintroduce debating sessions which was realized to have been abandoned in most schools, under the guidance of the teachers to enhance appropriate language development at school. Finally, Mother language to be used to enhance; peace and culture through songs, dances, proverbs and drama during school cultural days to give pride in their heritage and identity.

Key words: Mother Tongue, Learning, spoken language, examination language, teaching, achievement.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Quality education is key for global competitiveness (World Bank, 2019). Language used to express knowledge and exhibit practicum is very key to effective communication and content delivery. Individuals can today work anywhere in the world as education standards globally are geared towards global competitiveness in terms of credit ratings in grades obtained in school and college. The quality of education received by an individual is rated in terms of grades attained in final examination. Learning being lifelong is facilitated by mother tongue as the first language at initial school stages (government of Kenya, 2013). This enable learners to understand the taught concepts easily and has been reported to lead to better academic performance in early years of schooling. Students have extended the use of mother tongue to secondary schools and are in cliques during lesson brakes while they communicate using their mother language, this is an abuse of the school language policy bringing about poor mastery of the official communication languages acceptable by the school

for instruction in the teaching and learning process. UNESCO (2016) and Trudell and Piper (2014) on language and achievement noted a positive correlation between speaking the language of instruction and achievement alluding that when home and school language differ, there is a negative impact on test scores.

UNICEF (2016) on the impact of language policy and practice on children’s learning reveal a rich dynamic language environment with languages such as Setswana, Kirundi, Oromo, IsiZulu, Sotho, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Luo, kikuyu, Chinyanga in Malawi and Somali are spoken as mother tongue by millions of African citizens and additionally other smaller and less well organized African languages. This made International languages introduced during the colonial period to gain strong foothold in the national institutions. UNICEF (2016) noted pedagogical challenges of language of instruction and children’s learning outcomes and advised that using mother tongue in classroom enhances classroom participation, decreases attrition and increases the likelihood of family and community engaging in child’s learning thus established a positive correlation between language use at school and dropout. Statistical information reveal dropout rate at 49.8 percent in Eastern and Southern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa dropout rate at 37.7 percent, Uganda has 60 percent of pupils unable to read in the language of instruction and even in their mother tongue while Kenya having 13 percent of grade 6 pupils functionally illiterate (UNICEF, 2016).

Countries such as Tanzania have managed to use indigenous African language in its curriculum implementation. South Africa currently is at the final stages of introducing Kiswahili in its education curriculum as one of the subjects to be taught in schools so as to help grow and develop an African language in their country (Mose, 2018, UNICEF, 2016). Kenya is a multilingual country with over 40 different indigenous languages which include; Ekegusi, Luo, Kikuyu and others. The language in education policy was enacted in 1976 which requires that mother tongue be used as languages of instruction up to grade 3 thus English to be used from grade 4 and used both as spoken and examination language. Cliques of students have continued to use mother tongue in schools up to secondary School level. Poor performance in national examination has continued to hit the country. Could the illegal use of mother tongue be partly to blame for the poor grades in examination at the secondary school level?

The learning output has been on a downward trend as reflected in the KCSE examination results as shown in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) performance in the past Nine Years

Grade	YEAR								
	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
A	627	315	142	141	2636	3073	2722	1975	1930
A-	5796	3417	2714	4645	12069	11768	9768	9335	9063
B+	13 366	8268	7344	10975	21927	19814	17013	17730	16390
B	24 478	16403	12628	17217	33927	29319	24656	25183	22944
B-	35 340	26156	19385	23745	44581	38315	30864	31110	30115
C+	46 139	20131	27860	32207	54770	47428	38315	38471	39216
C	63 102	40707	40747	44792	64913	58688	48571	48905	49965
C-	83 358	71047	61041	61026	74115	70677	60763	58748	58845
D+	101 687	60147	60040	61026	74115	76198	71803	67203	63853
D	137 713	147918	135550	112135	79555	73501	78177	73566	64392
D-	152 339	165139	179381	149929	48658	47716	55793	52433	41207
E	29 318	30840	35537	33399	5350	5636	7039	7884	6198
Total	699745	660 204	521 328	571161	52165 8	48213 3	44552 0	432433	41058

Source: Ministry of Education 2019

The analysis on the table 1.1 shows that more than half of the candidates who sat for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Scored grade D and E. What kind of learning could be taking place such that half of the candidates manage grade D and below? Mother tongue has been established as one of the contributing factors to poor performance. Poor progression and non-completion by the end of four year cycle has equally been realized in secondary schools. This is evidenced by the trend depicted in table 1.2.

Table1.2: Kenya’s Enrolment per Class in thousands

<i>Year/Class</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>
<i>Form 1</i>	521.6	532.1	617.5	667.2
<i>Form 2</i>	460.0	513.9	542.0	628.6
<i>Form 3</i>	413.1	457.4	496.1	552.5
<i>Form 4</i>	373.1	411.3	448.7	461.6
Total	1 767.7	1 914.7	2 208.1	2 309.9

Source: UNICEF, 2015

Table 1.2 document Gross enrolment rate (GER) in Kenya by 2014 at 58.2per cent, while non-completion rate was 11.50 percent. This implies that 60 000 students never completed their secondary school education by 2014 as was expected. The table further reveal an increase in enrolment every year from 1 767 700 students in the year 2011 to 2 309 900 students in the year 2014. A decrease in promotion from 521600 students enrolment in form one in the year 2011 to 461600 students in form four by the year 2014. What makes these students not to complete their secondary education within the four years as expected? Is mother language influence a contributory factor? Education must be well planned with appropriate language use in schools for effective educational outcome.siaya county indicate a high out of school population asserted by her leaders and NGOs like kippra and uwezo group which literally fish children out of the lake to go back to school (odek, 2007; ray,2016).The county has the spoken language as luo and children only acquire instructional languages in school

Statement of the Problem

Poor grades and low progression rates have been persisted for the past decade whereby more than half of the candidates score between grade D and E, while 12 percent of the students who enroll in form one fail to complete form four as expected by the end of four years in secondary school, an evidence that the world is off track to achieving universal completion of secondary education as documented in the sustainable development goal for education and Kenya’s vision 2030 making eradication of poverty from the face of the earth a mirage.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To establish the influence of spoken language (Mother tongue) on students’ progression and performance in public secondary schools in Rarieda sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya.
- ii. To determine the influence of evaluation/examination language on students’ achievement in public secondary schools in Rarieda sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya.

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Spoken language, examination language and learning

In the USA, a survey by the state department of education (2016) assessed questions in regard to what forms of language practice facilitates what form of learning, the education department settled on further probing by the teacher to check on language level to scaffold the learning further. The issue that emerged is, what if the learner does not understand the classroom communication language considering the children of African American origin and therefore the learners’ first language is not English. The survey noted the use of African-American language in education to be associated with complex of relationships among language education noting that the spoken language and the teaching languages in schools are more than simple matters of pedagogy and referred to African American mix language as non- English but a slang which could be subjected to cultural and political debate on which language to use at school. The study failed to establish the influence of the “slang” on performance which is unraveled by this study.

Koiko (2014) study on mother tongue language and education in Africa reveal that children are frustrated in the learning process when a foreign language is introduced as they even fail to score correctly the questions that they easily give correct responses to when asked in their mother tongue. The author recommended that myths that portray the use of mother tongue as inadequate to deliver the teaching content be demystified and the indigenous languages be used in education to grow the child language since these languages enhance learning and have economic opportunities. This study further corroborates this set of frustration by a confirmation that mother tongue negatively influence learning when the mode of instruction and examination language is by the use of a foreign language.

A study by Spolsky (2019) on language policy in education in South Africa, found complexity of negotiating an agreed language education policy and difficulty in dealing with status of corpus problems, though part of it has been filled by the growth of a neighboring field of education linguistics but a challenge

persists as students understanding continues to be blocked by ignorance of the language used in schools. The study confirms spoken language and teaching language difference challenges which are revealed by this study.

Obungu (2016) case study in Kenya on analysis of mother tongue on performance in English subject establish that students face a difficult transition from mother tongue to second language (English) posing poor performance and recommended improved interaction with the text book that enhances the second language for improved performance.

The Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess mother language influence on learning output in relation to spoken language and examination language in public secondary schools in Rarieda sub county, Siaya County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on the Behaviorists theory of learning; Operant conditioning by Skinner (1960) whereby he considers free will an illusion and that all behavior is dependent on consequences of previous actions. If the consequences are bad, there is high chances that the action will not be repeated, if the consequences are good, the probability of the action being repeated becomes stronger thus the principal of reinforcement. Skinner used operant conditioning to strengthen behavior and considered the rate of response to be most effective measure of response strength. Comparatively the learnt behavior of mother tongue speaking can be unlearnt by removing its stimulus from the environment and by withdrawing any favors the students are used to and administering punishment whenever such characteristic is exhibited while at the same time rewarding non mother tongue speakers and at the same time putting strict measures on the school language policy that would force the learners to be conditioned to the appropriate language for use at school. This conditioning should reflect on the learners improved progression rate and performance because stimulus generalization will produce secondary conditioning which is adopting completely the use of the recommended languages at school.

Research Methodology

The study hence adopted the use of convergent parallel mixed methods design to help investigate the situation on the ground about mother tongue use and issues progression and performance in secondary schools in Kenya. The quantitative data were collected through the use of questionnaires concurrently with qualitative data which were collected by the use of interview guide and document analysis guide from principals, teachers and students on use of mother language in schools and how it influences progression and performance. The two sets of data collected were analyzed independently and the results triangulated by comparing the points at which quantitative and qualitative the results relate or diverge. An overall interpretation was then made on the mixed method question the influence of mother tongue on learning. The convergent parallel design is concerned with the validity of the outcome of the study and this is realized because the design allows for self-corroboration of the findings and in depth of inquiry for factual results (Creswell and Clark, 2012). The target population was 22650 respondents from 23 schools as sampling units. The Slovene (1960) formulae generated sample size was 400 respondents that comprised of 298 students of which 185 were students from mixed day schools, 105 students from boarding boys, 108 students from boarding girls, 274 teachers and 23 principals

The information would help the Ministry of education to improve every aspect of education in the attainment quality education and 100 percent completion as is the quest of sustainable development Goal of education. This can be made effective through appropriate monitoring of the language policy implementation process at school level and in the classrooms.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Spoken language/ mother tongue use, progression and performance

Table 1: summary of the rate of mother tongue use, non-progression and performance

	<i>Mixed day</i>		<i>Boarding girls</i>		<i>Boarding boy</i>		<i>Average rate</i>	
	<i>S</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>T</i>
<i>Mother tongue use at school</i>	87%	13.04%	31 %	4.35%	41.80%	10%	47%	9.13
<i>Non- Progression rate</i>	8%		2%		2%		4%	
<i>performance in school tests (schools average mean score)</i>	3.562		4.574		6.254		4.795	

Source: students' questionnaire and document analysis guide for the principals.

From the data analysis in table 1, mother tongue speaking in schools is highest in mixed day school where by 87 % of students speak in mother tongue while teachers who communicate with their students in mother tongue are at 13.04%. In girls boarding schools mother tongue speaking is rated at 31% among the students while teachers who speak with students in mother tongue rated at 4.35% and in boys boarding schools mother tongue speaking is at 41.80% among the students while teachers who communicate to students in mother tongue are rated at 10%. Therefore the rate of mother tongue speaking in schools was established at 47% among students and 9.13% among teachers.

Non-Progression rate to a subsequent grade in a subsequent year; class size on enrolment in mixed day schools, girls boarding and boys boarding was established to be at 8%, 2% and 2% respectively whereas the general non-progression rate in schools was established at 4%.

The performance in school tests when averaged in form of mean scores revealed the mixed day schools mean score at 3.562, girls boarding at 4.574 and boys boarding at 6.654 while the general schools mean score at 4.795

Table 2. Language policy/ Examination language and practice

<i>Language</i>	<i>Mixed day</i>	<i>Boarding girls</i>	<i>Boarding boy</i>	<i>Average rate</i>
<i>Use of English</i>	30%	43%	52%	41.67%
<i>Use of Kiswahili</i>	36 %	51%	44%	32.67%

Source: Principals interview schedule.

Data analysis from table 2 established that only 30% of students in mixed day schools use English to communicate while 36% use Kiswahili. In girls' boarding schools 43% of the students use English as a medium of communication while 51% use Kiswahili. In boys' boarding schools 52% of the boys use English as a medium of communication while 44% use Kiswahili. Cumulatively, language policy rating was established at 41.67% for use of English and 32.67% for use of Kiswahili.

The study further revealed that the worst hit schools are mixed day schools whereby about 33% of students from have no appropriate language of communication since even their spoken English is daunted with a mixture of corrupted Swahili and English thus a sloppy kind of language (slang).

Most students interviewed in mixed day schools confessed that the instructional language is a challenge to majority of learners. This limits the affected students' participation in even answering questions in class to avoid being laughed at by their peers. That such student at times even boycott lessons and some use "slangs/ sheng" to answer certain questions in examination. That a lot of mother tongue speaking take place during short breaks such as; meal times and games time which was equally confirmed by students in boy's boarding schools. Majority of girls interviewed reported that girls shun mother tongue speaking at school and even brand their peers who speak in mother tongue as "zinjanthropus" in one of the schools, though also reported that majority use a mixture of English and Swahili languages. School debating sessions had never been seen in 26% of the schools while in 19 %, the sessions were very irregular at once a year (*student's interview schedule*).

Teachers' interviewed on their experiences with mother tongue influence on learning, reported a daunting task mostly with form 1 class, where majority of the students do not understand the language of instruction making it difficult for the students to understand the language of the subject. That such students adjustment to high school life and learning is elongated hence reflected in their delayed internalization of taught concepts and consequently in their dismal performance.

IV. CONCLUSION

The smuggling of mother tongue to school has slowed down the practice and mastery of the examination language. There is laxity in schools to reinforce the language policy for effective communication and content deliveries.

There is a positive relationship between mother language, performance and progression rate.

Possible Policy Strategiesto address the issue of mother language use in schools

Schools to re-introduce debating session as plenaries to assist students build on English and Kiswahili languages.

Quality assurance office to follow up with schools to monitor the progress and level of reinforcement and practice of education language policy for a period of time. But are allowed to use the mother languages to present drama and folk songs.

English or Kiswahililanguages become compulsory subjects/ common courses to every teacher at the teacher training institutions and the trainees be allowed to make a choice in the two options.

Due to regional decentralization, the government to formulate policy which allows the regions to introduce one major local language as an optional but examinable subject in secondary schools. This will give learners opportunity to grow the mother languages on interest and consequently lead them to employment as tour guides, and in the field of journalism and theatre arts given that currently they have embraced the use of local languages/ mother tongue in delivering their content.

Learning center for mother language be created by the government to enable students pursue such languages in higher institutions of learning/ colleges, the students would finally become teachers of the mother languages back in schools.

Recommendation for Further Research

The study recommends further research of a case study to be conducted in Countries in Africa and/or those outside Africa which have successfully incorporated the use of mother language in their curriculum so as to establish the effectiveness of its implementation process.

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