Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of African Languages in the Curriculum: A Case Study of Schools in Kenya, East Africa

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Abstract

In order to revitalize African languages and advocate for their use as media of instruction in Kenyan schools, it is important to investigate and document the teachers' attitude towards the use of these languages in teaching. The research on which this paper is based set forth to explore teachers' perceptions on the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction in Kenya, East Africa. Six schools out of 54 public schools in the Gatundu district were randomly sampled. 32 teachers of Grades 1-3 were interviewed to find out the actual practices in their classrooms, the challenges they faced, and the perceptions they held in relation to the use of the mother tongue in their teaching. The data were qualitatively analyzed and the emergent findings support the claim that the use of learners' mother tongue is beneficial to learners. In addition, the paper discusses the findings and proposes recommendations for pedagogy.

Keywords: Medium of instruction, mother tongue education, language of learning and teaching, perceptions

1. Introduction

The current educational curriculum in Kenya, commonly re-
ferred to as the 8-4-4 system, consists of eight years of primary edu-
cation, four years of secondary, and four years of university education
(Mbaabu, 1996). Since independence, various governments of Kenya
have tried to address the challenges facing the education sector
through commissions, committees and taskforces and in all these
commissions, the question of which medium of instruction should be
used has been one of the critical issues addressed. For instance, the
Koech (1999: 284) report recommends that the medium of instruc-
tion in the lower primary (Grades 1-3) be the learners' mother tongue
or the dominant language within the school's catchment's area.

However, not all areas require the use of the vernacular lan-
guages for instruction due to the linguistically heterogeneous nature
of Kenya's community set-ups. For instance, within Nairobi, and
other urban centres, where the population is made up of people from
different ethnic groups, Kiswahili is the medium of instruction. In the
upper primary (Grades 4-8), English is to be used as the medium of
instruction throughout the country. However, despite the recom-
mendations of the Koech Report, various Kenyan governments have
only paid lip service to the role of African languages in terms of poli-
cy formulation and implementation.

Although Kenyans voted overwhelmingly for the passing of
the new constitution in August, 2010, and that the constitution re-
cognizes both English and Kiswahili as official languages, English has
continued to overshadow Kiswahili and other African languages in
most official communication. Nevertheless, findings of researches in
mother tongue education indicate that the best medium for teaching
a child is the mother tongue, particularly because this is the language
that children understand best and express themselves freely in
(Ndamba, 2008). Similarly, Kembo (2000) argues that cognitive and
affective development occur more effectively in a language well

known to a child. But are teachers in Kenyan primary schools aware of such benefits of mother tongue education and do they fully implement the use of mother tongue education in their classrooms?

2.   Statement of issue

Despite the crucial role played by the mother tongue in early learning (as documented in various studies on mother tongue education), many independent nations in Africa such as Senegal and Kenya continue using ex-colonial languages in their education system, at times right from kindergarten. Thus the child is bound to face myriad problems when he or she starts formal learning in a language foreign to him/her. Using Kenya as a reference, this paper sets to establish teachers' perceptions on the use of African languages in the curriculum, highlights the challenges that are faced in the teaching of such languages, and argues for the preservation, development, and use of instructional materials in African languages.

Rationale

The role of indigenous languages in national development must not be undervalued particularly because they are the means by which different groups within society maintain their identities. The objective of learning these languages should be to promote, foster and propagate the cultural heritage. Such languages will help the learners retain strong ties with their culture; their heritage. Indeed the greatest and most important gift a parent can give a child is to pass their language and culture. Thus, indigenous language teaching should lead to a deeper sense of cultural pride and self awareness, giving the learners social identity. The learner is, therefore, socialized into a culture of his or her language. As President Julius Nyerere once said, "A country which lacks its own culture is no more than a collection of people without the spirit which makes them a Nation." (Abdulaziz, 1971). Therefore, if learners lose their mother tongues in

their early years, they are also losing a part of their culture, resulting in the stripping of their identity.

Secondly, linguists believe that if pupils do not fully acquire their first language, they may have problems later in becoming fully literate and academically proficient in the second language. This is supported by evidence from research which indicates that pupils learn academic material and other languages most successfully when they begin school in the language they speak most comfortably (Hornberger, 1996: 456 and Cummins, 1996). The interactive relationship between language and cognitive growth is very significant. This implies that everything acquired in the first language (academic skills, literacy, concept formation, and learning strategies) will be transferred from first language to the second language. That is, the first language will act as a foundation to the learning of other languages. Teachers' Perceptions on the Use

In addition, intellectual independence is an important condition of achieving economic, social, and political independence (Kamwangamalu, 2000). The usage of African languages in education and teaching is a prudent way to achieve intellectual independence. It is on that point of view that this paper argues that the usage of African languages in schools will help in promoting African students' academic growth and develop in them a strong sense of confidence.

Moreover, African languages, when used in schools, act as a link between home and school. Their own languages enable young learners to immediately construct and explain their world without fear of making mistakes, articulate their thoughts, and add new concepts to what they already know. Therefore, those who come to school with a solid background in their mother tongue develop literacy in the school language, since both languages will nurture each other when the educational and home environment permit children access to both languages. On the other hand, Abiri (2003) posits that mother tongues also play a profound role in the psychosocial devel-

opment of the individual and therefore early use of the languages will help expand the learners' verbal facility and cognitive realm.

Mohanlal (2001) opines that a good education is that which draws from the learners' ethnocentric and eco-centric values. This postulation lends credence to the commonly held belief that it is only the mother tongue education that fully meets this requirement. But are the teachers entrusted with this responsibility aware of the benefits of using the learner's first language as the medium of instruction? What are their attitudes toward mother tongue education? These are some of the questions that this paper purposes to answer.

3. Research Questions

This study was designed to find out the opinions of teachers on the use of African languages as the medium of instruction in Kenyan schools. It sought answers to the following questions:
   a) What is the reality on the ground?
   b) What media do teachers use in teaching?
   c) What challenges do teachers face when teaching in the mother tongue?
   d) What are the teachers' perceptions as regards use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction?

4. Literature Review

4.1 Mother Tongue Education

The mother tongue is normally understood as a language that is naturally learned by members of a speech community and is employed by them as the first medium of vocalized communication (Iyamu and Ogiegbaen, 2007). It could also be understood as the language of a native community or of a group of people with common ancestry. Therefore, each of the diverse ethnic communities in

the world has its own language that is naturally learned by members in the socialization process (Blake, 2004).

In this paper, mother-tongue education is used to refer to the use of the mother tongue in formal education. A lot of research has been done about education in the mother tongue (Blake, 2004; Iyamu, 2005; Urevbu, 2001). Mohanlal (2001) and Blake (2004) are of the view that an important goal of education is to instill the conventionally recognized moral norms to the individual and integrate these with the ethnic values, cultural norms and the worldview of the learner's community.

Among many other advantages, a mother tongue plays a significant role in the psychosocial development of an individual (Abiri, 2003). The mother tongue also provides a more rewarding learning environment, as school learning and experience become a continuation of home experience, a condition that guarantees cognitive equilibrium.

4.2 Teachers, pupils and parents' perceptions of the mother tongue

Barkhuizen (2002) examines high school students' perceptions of the status and role of Xhosa (an indigenous African language) and English in the educational context. He surveys 2825 students in 26 high schools throughout the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces. These Xhosa high school students were being instructed in their mother tongue and also learning English as a second language. It was discovered that students had a preference for English as a second language. Dyers (1999) in her study of Xhosa university students' attitudes towards South African languages observed a similar pattern. The two studies, however, did not look at how teachers perceived the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

Iyamu and Ogiegbaen (2007) looked at parents and teachers' perspectives of mother-tongue medium of instruction policy in Nigerian primary schools. Questionnaires on the subject were adminis-

tered to samples of 1000 primary school teachers and 1500 parents of primary school children. They found out that many inadequacies of Nigeria's schools stem from their religious and colonial past which seems to have put a lot of premium on the language of the colonizers to the detriment of African languages. There is also considerable opposition to the use of mother tongues as the medium of instruction. In addition, both parents and teachers were found to appreciate the advantages of mother-tongue education, but parents would not subscribe to their children being taught in the mother tongue in this era of globalization. It is important to find out whether the attitudes of teachers in Kenya will be different from those of teachers in Nigeria as far as the use of mother tongue medium of instruction is concerned.

Ejieh (2004) looks at the attitudes of student teachers toward teaching in the mother tongue in Nigerian primary schools. Data for the study were gathered by means of a questionnaire administered to 106 students in a Nigerian college of education. It was found out that the students had a generally negative attitude towards teaching in the mother tongue.

These studies on mother tongue teaching and others conducted in other contexts have succinct valid beliefs about their people's experiences and attitudes towards the use of indigenous languages in teaching. It is crucial to establish what holds true for Kenyan situation and this is our main motivation for undertaking the study discussed in this paper.

5.   Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative survey design. An interview schedule (Appendix A) was used as a data instrument for this study. The teachers were asked questions and their responses written down. Later, these recordings were analyzed to determine teachers' perceptions on the use of African languages in the Kenyan curriculum and

the emerging patterns are then discussed. Further, the challenges that teachers undergo in the course of their teaching as far as teaching using three languages (English, Swahili and Mother tongue) are discussed and recommendations on how the challenges can be mitigated are suggested.

5.1 Sampling procedure and sampling size

The research randomly sampled 6 schools out of 54 schools as well as the 32 teachers. In view of the fact that the research dealt with the perceptions of teachers on the use of African languages in the curriculum, the dichotomy of gender was factored in so that 16 teachers were males and the other 16 were females. The teachers were carefully chosen so that only those who could read and write in English and Gĩkũyũ were selected. We considered a sample of 32 teachers' representative since there is a strong indication in the field that large samples tend to bring increasing data handling problems with diminishing analytical returns (Milroy, 1987). Since our interview schedule consisted of 8 questions and our sample comprised 32 teachers, we expected to analyze 256 items.

5.2 Data collection

An interview schedule (Appendix A) was presented to the 32 teachers of Grades 1-3. The introductory section of the interview schedule helped us in getting the bio-data of the respondents viz name, sex, and age. The interview schedule comprised both the open-ended and close-ended. This helped the researchers to understand the perceptions and logically structure them for analyses.

5.3 Data collection instrument

The instrument used in this study was an eight-item interview schedule. The questions sought the opinions of the teachers on some issues and problems related to teaching and learning in African languages. These questions included teachers' opinions on the possibility

of teaching all school subjects in African language, the benefits of teaching and learning in the mother tongue to pupils, and some of the limitations of imparting education in the mother tongue.

Items 1 and 2 sought the teachers' opinions on whether all the subjects in class are taught using the mother tongue and whether pupils in school found it hard to make a switch to English at Elementary Grade Four. Item 3 sought their opinion on whether they were trained on how to teach the mother tongue at teacher training college. Item 4 sought their opinions on whether they teach Mathematics using the mother tongue and whether pupils seem to understand better than they would if they were taught in English. Item 5 sought to know whether parents mind the medium of instruction used in teaching being English, Kiswahili, or the mother tongue. Item 6 sought to know whether there are benefits of teaching pupils in lower primary and nursery school in the mother tongue while item 7 sought their views on whether they would recommend that teaching in schools be done in the mother tongue. The last item sought their view on whether they would want the Kenya Language Education Policy changed so as to allow teaching of all children in English right from kindergarten.

6. Responses

Both men and women respondents had similar observations in relation to the questions in the interview schedule. The responses to each item are presented below.

6.1 Item one

The research found out that all the 32 teachers mostly use the mother tongue in their teaching. Interestingly, the research also found out that teachers use the 3 languages (English, Kiswahili and mother tongue) in the classroom teaching and learning. In most cases, code-switching practices play an important role in many Kenyan

classroom environments, although they can never be said to constitute a viable alternative to the development of formal academic proficiency in the African languages.

Code switching, the mixing of words, phrases, and sentences from two distinct grammatical systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event (Bokamba 1989) is a regular phenomenon in multilingual settings. In this connection, Abdulaziz (1971) reports that mixing of languages occurs in many schools in almost all environments from an early age. He argues that this is probably necessitated by the dearth of materials to teach all subjects in the mother tongue and similarly the pupils do not understand English as used in the school texts. This scenario was the case in the schools visited. The learners did not understand some concepts in English. Thus the teacher switched to the mother tongue and the learners would say, "**haiya**", surprised that what they had found incomprehensible was so easy to understand when communicated in their mother tongue.

6.2 Item two

On whether pupils found it easy or hard to make a switch to using English at Primary Grade 4, all the 32 teachers indicated that their learners faced difficulties and that most learners drop out of school at this level. They find the curriculum too hard to follow, hence they opt out.

6.3 Item three

It emerged from the data analysis that teachers are not trained on how to teach the mother tongue or how to teach using the mother tongue. The syllabus in the teachers training colleges is silent on this and does not include any guidance on mother tongue education.

6.4 Item four

The teachers reported that when they used the mother tongue to explain some mathematical concepts, learners understood better

than when the same are explained in English. One teacher explained how difficult it was for her to explain the concept of 'division' using English. When she switched to the learners' mother tongue, they all understood more easily.

6.5 Item five

The teachers reported that parents wanted their children taught in English from Primary Grade 1 since they felt that this would give their children a head start, now that English is an important language in Kenya. This situation could be the case due to the fact that English enjoys more functional privileges than Kiswahili and other indigenous languages in Kenya. English is thus seen as the key to economic and educational advancement. The language is accorded very high status and has overall dominance in many spheres that are associated with modernization. The language is thus associated with power and elitism and is a major asset in social mobility.

6.6 Item six

All the 32 teachers were in agreement that the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in school is beneficial to learners. This finding concurs with the consensus among researchers and practitioners that children learn best in the mother tongue since it helps to bridge home and school experiences. The World Bank Report (2000), for example, notes that learners are more likely to participate actively in the classroom when the language of instruction is the local language.

The teachers interviewed noted that the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development. Children who come to school with a solid background in their mother tongue develop literacy in the school language. African languages teaching also enables parents and teachers to work together to support the learning which takes place at school while at the same time encouraging first language development and

support through storytelling, sharing books and reading in the mother tongue.

Teachers perceive mother tongue as a means of promoting cultural heritage. As noted out earlier in the rationale, using an African language as a medium of instruction leads to a deeper sense of cultural pride and self awareness giving the learners social identity. This is because indigenous languages have a wealth of knowledge concerning the local ecosystem and act as a "repository of a polity's history, traditions, arts and ideas." (Kamwangamalu, 2000).

Teachers noted that mother tongue education is effective in helping the child to understand his environment. This view is in consonance with the opinion of Mohanlal (2001) that a good education is that which draws from the learners' ethnocentric and eco-centric values. We also found out that African languages help children understand the environment and helps them recognize their own mother tongue as a source of identity, thought, and instruction (Maas, 2001).

Teachers also stressed that mother tongue facilitates acquisition of second language and third language learning. This finding concurs with what research has consistently shown that learning to read and write in the mother tongue facilitates access to second language learning (Heugh, 2002; Brock-Utne, 2000; Grin, 2005 and Reh, 1981). Therefore, the teacher of a second language can make his/her job easier by creating conditions for students to reactivate these study skills and learning strategies and apply them to their study of a new language so long as the child has the vocabulary to reproduce it in that second language. Urevbu (2001), an expert in curriculum studies in Nigeria, believes that early education in the mother tongue enhances a child's cognitive equilibrium.

The mother tongue is also perceived as a guarantee of security for the pupil. This is because language gives the individual a sense of belonging and ownership. When a child cannot competently use a language, her/his self-esteem is negatively affected, making the child insecure.

In the view of the teachers, learners are passive and take long to respond if they are asked questions in English and are expected to use English in their responses. That is, they view English a as strange tongue. For instance, one of the teachers interviewed informed this study that when the pupils are asked questions in the three languages, that is, English, Kiswahili, and the mother tongue, they would exhibit different behavior. For example, if they reported to school late and were asked:

1. *Why are you late?* (question asked in English)
2. *Umechelewa kwa nini?* (question asked in Kiswahili)
3. *Wacererwo niki?* (question asked in mother tongue – Kikuyu)

pupils would keep quiet if asked question (1), while a few learners would understand question (2) and respond, but their Swahili would not be grammatically correct. For question (3), all the learners would understand and respond correctly. Therefore, when teaching is done in English, learners are confused and many of them do not understand what is being taught because at Grade 1-3, they have not received much input in English.

6.7 Item seven

In view of the above benefits of mother tongue education, all the teachers recommended that teaching, especially in the early years of formal learning, should be done in their mother tongue. Teachers observed that lessons in a foreign language are mostly teacher centred especially in primary schools, since learners have not acquired reasonable proficiency in the target language. Therefore, the use of the mother tongue or a familiar language facilitates the use of effective, child-centred teaching practices which encourages learners to be active and become involved in the subject matter. Alidou and Brock-Utne (2005) is an example for such an approach.

The teachers further reported that the child becomes more confident and expresses himself/herself best in the mother tongue

than when using a second language. This finding agrees with Lameta-Tufuga (1994) who found out that if learners are given a chance to discuss a task in the first language before they had to carry it out in writing in the second language, they will do the task well. This is because the learners will be very actively involved in coming to grips with the ideas and hence making school less traumatic.

Secondly, the first language discussion will facilitate acquisition of second language vocabulary which would be used in a later task. Therefore, it is imperative that when a teacher feels that a meaning based second language task might be beyond the abilities of the learners, a small amount of first language discussion can help overcome some of the obstacles. Therefore, from a pedagogical point of view, school results are plausibly better when children are taught in their mother tongue.

6.8 Item eight

Teachers did not recommend the change of language in education policy to have the language of instruction from Primary Grade 1 being English. They argued that the benefits of teaching children in their mother tongue during the early years of formal learning outweigh the advantages of teaching them using English as the medium of instruction. However, the teachers were aware of several challenges that need to be countered for mother tongue education in Kenyan schools to be a reality.

7.   Challenges of adopting mother tongue education

According to the teachers interviewed, one of the challenges encountered in attempt to implement the use of mother tongue education policy in Kenya is the lack of enough teachers trained to teach the various mother tongues spoken in the country. As Mbaabu (1996)

points out, primary schoolteachers in Kenya are not trained in teaching in mother tongue. On the other hand, Wolff (2006) notes that language teachers, whether of English or African languages, must be exposed to the general methodology of teaching language for effective teaching in the said languages.

Secondly, teachers felt that there is profound lack of instructional materials in African languages. This observation concurs with Okombo (2001), who notes that reports of the unavailability of instructional materials in indigenous languages are very common, even in the child's first three years of primary education. In order to lessen the paucity of literature materials, Rubagumya (1986) feels that the state should assist various groups in producing reading materials to minimize the problem. According to Kembo-Sure, Mwangi, and Ogechi (2006) English books normally take the lion's share in the publishing industry. Mother tongue books are rarely published. Fagerberg-Diallo (2001), on the other hand, feels that the availability of attractive reading materials will contribute to increasing the demand for literacy courses.

The teachers further commented that there is also an apparent lack of enthusiasm for African language teaching in Kenyan school. This remark tallies with Wolff's (2006) observation that one of the major problems that blocks progress towards African languages is the continued lip service to the importance of African languages. The maintenance of education systems which systematically exclude the use of the majority's vernacular languages can no longer be justified by politicians (Elwert, 2001). Coulmas (2001) argues that giving up social and cultural pride is one of the "costs" of literacy. Learning to be literate in a second, international language at the expense of an indigenous vernacular language is one of the sacrifices in building a more literate society. On the other hand, Heugh (2005) opines that learning indigenous languages is relevant and sustainable by itself and that it is inappropriate and costly to pay lip service for the sake of economy of scale (see also Grin, 2005).

In addition, there was an observation that teachers using African languages as a media of instruction lack interpretive and translation skills that may help nurture learners for higher learning. On the other hand, while learners may have attained a certain level of basic interpersonal communicative competence in African languages, they lack what Cummins (2000), for example, termed cognitive academic language proficiency, and thus they are unprepared for higher education or for training in a sophisticated work environment.

Another challenge to African language teaching, according to the teachers interviewed, is the ardent push of a language of wider communication. Although Kiswahili is seen as a unifying language in East Africa, some people still look at the use of African languages in education as an obstacle to national unity. In other words, national unity, it is argued, is tantamount to official monolingualism. The use of several mother tongues is misconstrued as accentuating inter-ethnic conflict. English, being the dominant language of international business and economic development, continues to flourish with the continued globalization of business and international investment.

As such, the respondents noted that most teachers, parents and pupils look at African languages as inferior. This defeatist attitude towards use of indigenous languages for education may be connected to the inferior position accorded to African language during the colonial era. It has been argued that because of the status attached to the European languages, some Africans educated through them shun their mother tongues (Sure & Webb, 2000). In addition, some Kenyans believe that indigenous languages cannot be used for any serious conduct of scientific and technological affairs (Okombo, 2001). They, therefore, look at English as a language that helps bridge communication gaps between people. However, this only helps to threaten the continued existence of many mother tongues.

The respondents argued that a number of Kenyans view English as a status language with many benefits. However, teachers, parents, and their children must be made to see that the use of African

language in education leads to palpable benefits in economic empowerment, social mobility and influence and pathways to further academic opportunities (Dyers, 1999; Kamwangamalu, 2000; and Githiora, 2008). Therefore, its deployment often serves to establish formality and social distance between interlocutors. Stakeholders in the education sector must be convinced of the benefits of vernacular languages' teaching, not merely in a cognitive sense, but in a much larger socio-economic context.

A few teachers though, the respondents observed, consider African languages as obstacles for the learning of English. This position is also shared by some linguists like Marton (1981). Marton maintains that from a psychological perspective not only at the moment of cognition but also when amassing fresh knowledge for his/her 'linguistic reservoir', the pupil is faced with a belligerent conflict between his native language and the second language system. Intriguingly, these are the same arguments that were peddled earlier in Kenya against the learning of Kiswahili in the curriculum (Sheffield, 1973). However, research evidence shows that the level of development of children's mother tongue may be a strong predictor of their second language development (Cummins, 2001), and that teaching and learning in mother tongue facilitates learners' cognitive and affective development (Kembo, 2000 and Thondhlana, 2000).

Another noticeable challenge noted by the respondents is that the national examinations in Kenya are set in English and therefore learners introduced to English at Grade 1 are advantaged. Those pupils who have not mastered the fundamentals of the language are disadvantaged. Such candidates do not seem to understand what is required of them and when they try answering the questions they lack the proper facility to express themselves.

8.   Recommendations

Standardized textbooks, support materials, teaching aids and literature must be made readily accessible in African languages and kept continuously up to date. This is particularly germane in the fields of humanities, mathematics, science, and technology where new terms will have to be developed and communicated to the learners. It is imperative, therefore, that standard written forms in African languages need to be modernized, regularized, codified and elaborated.

We also recommend that African languages be examined in the curriculum. The government should come up with a policy that would make indigenous Kenyan languages examinable throughout the different educational levels. This will boost their status and many publications will be realized. This is going on in South Africa as well as Uganda where Luganda is taught up to the university level. The Kenya National Examination Council should set examinations in African languages and give certificates to successful candidates. Passing of the examination at Standard Eight should be one of the prerequisites for admission into secondary school level.

Trainees should undergo thorough training in African languages and the language content in the syllabuses should reflect the social, political and economic philosophies aspired for. In the government domain, policy issues should be written in the language understandable by the people and in a style that embodies the culture of the people.

It is also important that the government offers service contract bursaries for student teachers specializing in African languages. In addition, the government should form a committee in the Ministry of Education to oversee the establishment of teaching materials and syllabuses in African languages.

Programs aimed at the citizenry in Kenya and Africa in general, for example, HIV /AIDS, political awareness campaigns, human rights violations, the constitutional implementation debates, gover-

nance, female genital mutilation, and affirmative action, among others, should be transmitted to the people in African languages. The NGO's and other stakeholders should use indigenous languages as much as possible if they are to make any effective impact.

The government in partnership with the Kenya Institute of Education and other stakeholders should not only come up with the African language school curriculum at the primary, secondary and at tertiary levels, but should also revise and modernize the entire teacher education curriculum (including the undergraduate Bachelor of Education programs) at our universities.

The government also ought to undertake a massive translation of government documents such as the constitution from English to Kenyan languages so that all people can comprehend and follow such documents in their vernacular languages. Translation of other literature materials covering mathematics, sciences, philosophy, and other disciplines would also be undertaken so that even such specialized disciplines are not left in the dark.

The government and non governmental agencies need to support and finance literature in African languages by organizing workshops and seminars and providing grants to publishers and authors.

9. Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to present the perceptions of teachers on the use of African languages (learners' mother tongues) as media of instruction especially in the early years of formal learning. The general finding is that the teachers interviewed noted that African languages had a significant role to play in education. The paper has highlighted some of the benefits of using mother tongue media in teaching as far as concept formation and comprehension are concerned, as seen from the teachers' perspectives. It has also looked at some of the challenges that need to be countered and made some

useful recommendations that will facilitate a change of attitude among teachers, parents, and learners in relation to the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

Because of the many benefits to the learner that are associated with mother tongue education, as shown by research evidence, the respondents felt that attempts should be made by policy makers, educational administrators, and planners to empower teachers to develop positive attitudes towards African languages. Teacher education programs in training colleges should be restructured to reflect major indigenous languages in Kenya. Further, teacher trainees should be trained on mother tongue education so that teaching the same in the primary schools will be easy and effective.

All the teachers were in agreement that there is a great need to promote African languages by putting in place and fully implementing language in education policies if all the benefits are to be realized. The implementation of such policies will be meaningful if the African languages are developed extensively and aggressively through programs in the print and electronic media. That way, their cultural richness will be sustained and developed.

Although this study provides useful information about the perceptions of teachers on the use of the mother tongue in the curriculum, the generalizations that are made are not conclusive. The findings of this research, therefore, may need to be validated by further research. However, these findings are hoped to provide insights into what is actually happening in a multilingual nation like Kenya, and probably in the rest of Africa.

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Appendix A
Interview Schedule

Introduction

The purpose of this interview schedule is to get your views on the perceptions of teachers on the use of African languages in the curriculum. Any information that you give will be treated with confidence and will only be used for the purpose of this academic research.

Name (optional) …………………………………………..
Age …………………………………………………………….
Your sex

Male
Female

1) Do you teach pupils all the subjects in your class using the mother tongue?
2) Do pupils in your school find it hard to make a switch to English at Standard Four?
3) Were you trained on how to teach the mother tongue at Teacher Training College?
4) When you are teaching mathematics using the mother tongue, do pupils seem to understand better than they would if you were to use English?
5) Do parents mind whether you teach the children in English, Kiswahili, or in the mother tongue?
6) What are the benefits of teaching pupils in lower primary and nursery school in the mother tongue?
7) Would you recommend that teaching in the primary school be done in the mother tongue?
8) Would you want the Kenya Language in education policy changed so as to allow teaching of all children in English?