

A Situational Analysis of Language of Instruction in Lower Primary School in Nyeri county, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish the language(s) used for instruction in lower primary school and also find out to what extent various factors related to school, teachers and parents influence the language choices for instruction in the respective classes and schools. This is because in spite of the language policy in Kenya stipulating that, learners in lower primary school be instructed in the language of the catchment area, studies in pre-primary school show that some schools ignore this rule. This comes at a time that issues have been raised concerning children being introduced to foreign languages too early before they have even mastered the first language. Likewise in the recent past a debate has been raging concerning instructing children in mother tongue at the pre-primary and lower primary schools. The available studies did not focus on language choices made at the lower primary level of education which is a crucial transition stage to formal learning. Most of these studies either addressed the status of the language policy in general or focused on other levels. They have also been exploratory in nature and dwelt on either perceptions, attitudes, values, multilingualism or other aspects of language. The study adopted the Choice theory and Transitional language model in the theoretical framework. The study design was qualitative and adopted a descriptive survey methodology which allowed for an in-depth examination of the situation. The independent variables were the factors said to influence the choice of the language of instruction while the dependent variable was the language of instruction used at lower primary school. This study was carried out within Nyeri County in which Kikuyu is the dominant language. This county has experienced an outcry in academic performance particularly in languages, mathematics and the sciences which has been attributed to the inability to express ideas. The target population of the study was children in lower primary school classes, their teachers and parents. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. Schools were randomly or purposefully selected at various stages; classes were selected through cluster sampling while teachers were randomly selected. Data was collected from private and public schools in rural and urban areas through lesson observations, interviewing teachers and focus group discussions with parents. A pilot study was conducted to pretest the instruments. Validity and reliability were established through triangulation. The qualitative data collected was analyzed using Kitwoods Qualitative Technique of Analysis to bring out the emerging patterns, themes and trends. Among other findings a variety of languages were being used in the classroom instruction with limited consideration to language policy in education. This was seen to be influenced by choices made by the teachers, parents and schools' management and locality. The study recommends a cross monitoring of implementation of language of instruction policy, training of teachers and education officers, community awareness and resource mobilization so as to benefit children at lower primary school.

Key word: A Situational Analysis, Language of Instruction, Lower Primary School, Nyeri county, Kenya

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