

Kenyan Indigenous Languages in Education: A World of Potential Benefits

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Abstract

Both African and international second language studies show that children who go through strong bilingual models which involve late exit from mother-tongue (L1) to a second language (L2) perform better linguistically and academically than those who go through subtractive and transitional models in which there is early-exit from L1 to L2 (Baker, 2000; Benson, 2005; Brock -Utne & Alidou, 2006; Cummins, 2000; Heugh, 2006; Truong, 2012). Despite these well documented findings on the benefits of using the learner's mother tongue as a language of instruction, the debate on the language of instruction has persisted not just in Kenya but in several African countries. In Kenya, English is used as a medium of instruction right from nursery school, or in some contexts from standard four, through university. As a result of this early introduction of English as a medium of instruction, most Kenyan children are denied a chance of developing literacy in their mother tongues. Due to this lack of development of mother tongue languages, Kenya like many African countries has not been able to attain the level of literacy and mass education which are instrumental in socio-economic development as well as in the promotion of peace and democracy in the African countries (Alidou, 2006).

Key words: Mother tongue, Literacy, Language of Instruction (LoI)

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