

Developing Mother Tongues as Academic Languages in Primary Schools in Kenya: Exploring Extent and Indispensability

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Abstract

The language in education policy in Kenya recommends mother tongue education in primary school learning. The purpose of this study was to explore the development of mother tongues as academic languages at the lower primary section in which the languages are supposed to be used. The exploration was on the functions they play in classroom instruction and if they are dispensable or otherwise. Ekegusii was used as a case study. Data were obtained through classroom observations and administration of semi-structured interviews with lower primary teachers. The findings indicate that mother tongues play important pedagogical functions in grades 1 up to 3, but not exactly as contemplated in the language policy. Secondly, mother tongues are indispensable in classroom teaching in spite of negative attitude towards their use. The study recommends a stakeholders' admission that, against all considerations for early English, mother tongues play an irreplaceable role in lower primary teaching and learning.

Keywords: Ekegusii, English, Kenya, Lower primary, Mother tongue, Policy issues

Full text:

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