

Literacy through a Foreign Language and Children's Rights to Education: An Examination of Kenya's Medium of Instruction Policy

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Abstract

The paper examines whether or not English medium in Kenyan primary school education serves the intended instrumental and sentimental or symbolic functions. It is based on Standard Four (when English medium is introduced) Maths and Science classroom data in two schools from two regions of the country. The dominant home languages are Kiswahili in one region and DhoLuo in another. Premised on linguistic human rights and education as a basic human right, the data are analyzed on four dimensions. These are: teacher talk-grammatical accuracy and appropriacy; types of questions; types of communication strategies and turn distribution. The paper concludes that teachers and learners are not ready to use English medium at Standard Four and the emphasis on the instrumental value of English is disastrous since very few Kenyans use English in their day-to-day interactions at work places. It recommends at least five years of Mother Tongue medium in primary school before the transition to the English medium.

Keywords: Literacy, Medium of education, Teaching/learning strategies, Right to education

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