The Acquisition of Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) and Its Significance as A Mother Tongue and Medium of Instruction in Schools for The Deaf in Kenya

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Abstract

University of Nairobi This paper outlines the importance of KSL in the teaching of deaf learners in Kenya by examining the acquisition and use of KSL in the family, school and the Kenyan society at large. It, therefore, argues for early intervention policies that would enable deaf children to acquire KSL early and calls for the immediate adoption of a bilingual approach to deaf education, thus creating a conducive environment for the use of KSL across the curriculum. Convinced that “to reject a child”s language in the school or anywhere [else] is to reject the child”, (Cummins 2001) the paper argues that any meaningful education for the deaf in Kenya must take cognizance of the importance of their native tongue or mother tongue – i.e. Kenyan Sign Language (KSL). In spite of its recognition by the Constitution of Kenya 2010, it does not seem to have been embraced as the language of learning in schools for the deaf in Kenya. The proposal made in this paper is that KSL should become a medium of instruction in schools for the deaf and, as such, be used to teach language and other academic subjects, KSL itself as a subject, as well as KSL-teaching methodology courses for trainee teachers of the deaf. The paper demonstrates that the continued reluctance to use KSL as the mother tongue of the deaf in their education is largely to blame for the poor state of deaf education in Kenya, which has not given deaf Kenyans the opportunity to compete on an equal footing with their hearing counterparts in the country – making it a human rights issue. For deaf Kenyans to have equal access to the services offered by the larger society, their language – KSL, which is their mother tongue (L1), must occupy its deserved place in their lives, starting with their education. The adoption of the late-exit or developmental bilingual education approach is one way of doing this. To advance this view, the paper benefits from the social model of perception on disability and the human rights-based approach.

Full text:
http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/96019/Mweri_The%20acquisition%20of%20Kenyan%20Sign%20Language%20and%20its%20significance.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y