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## The Teacher as a Contributory Factor in Failure to Implement Mother Tongue Education Policy in Nandi County, Kenya

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### **Abstract**

*This study sought to examine the teacher as a contributory factor in failure of Mother Tongue Policy implementation in Nandi County Kenya. The teacher as well as other stakeholders have been blamed for the lackadaisical approach to Mother Tongue Education in Kenya, but no in-depth study has been carried out to ascertain the authenticity of the claims. The current study was carried out in Nandi County, Kenya, to examine the role of the teacher in Mother Tongue Education. The study was guided by Butzkam's Mother tongue Theory. The study adopted a descriptive research design in which a purposive sample of 20 head teachers, 20 lower primary school teachers, and 5 officials from Nandi County Education office were used to generate the research data. The study used structured questionnaires and interview schedules. Data was analyzed qualitatively. Results revealed that most ECDE centers in Nandi County did not use mother tongue as the Language of Instruction (LOI) rather they used English or Kiswahili as the LOI in lower classes. The study also revealed that attitude of teachers is a barrier in the implementation of mother tongue education in Nandi County. It was also revealed that teachers were ill prepared to teach in mother tongue. The results of this study will benefit Ministry of Education, teachers, students, parents and other stake-holders interested in language education. The study findings may also be useful to international bodies such as UNICEF and UNESCO in reporting, comparing data and developing innovations in education.*

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**Keywords:** *Teacher, mother tongue, mother tongue policy, language policy*

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Kenya is a multilingual and multiethnic country with an estimated 40 million people who speak about 50 or more languages and dialects (Gathiora, 2008). The 2019 National Population Census is expected to reveal increase in this due to recent inclusion of the Makonde as a Kenyan community.

Further, Gathiora (2008) notes, dialects boundaries tend to be obscured when culture or ethnicity is used as a criteria for demarcating the difference between language and dialect, rather than linguistic criteria of structure or typology. That is, people with common culture may end up grouped as speaking a similar language but with different dialects as opposed to being grouped as having different languages (Gacheche, 2010). For instance, though the Nandi and Kipsigis dialects are closely related, a closer look reveals deep variances ranging from meaning of words, intonation, speech patterns, and other glaring differences. Among the Nandi, *Legem* means uphill, while the same word means down valley in Kipsigis. Further, some Kipsigis words when used in the Nandi dialect are so offensive/abusive, while others do not just make sense. This makes the two dialects very different and therefore cannot be taught as one dialect, as has been the case in the past. This is also true of other Kalenjin dialects.

Since teachers are the ones who actually provide the instruction in class they are therefore crucial in the implementation of any educational program. It is baffling to note that more than 40 years since the setting up of the Language policy in Kenya and eventual passage

of the new constitution that has strengthened the role and status of indigenous languages, not much can be celebrated in terms of Mother Tongue Education in Kenya. However, even with much stagnation in the implementation of the Mother Tongue Policy, no particular study has pointed out exclusively to the teacher contributions for the failure of mother tongue policy implementation in Kenya, and specifically in Nandi County.

For instance a cross-sectional survey by the Ministry of Education in 2013 conducted in Nandi County shows that very few schools in the county are using mother tongue as the language of instruction (LOI) in the early school years. The factors cited for non-conformance to the Language Policy (LP) and which were authenticated in this study included: teacher related factors, which came out prominently as a great obstacle to the successful implementation of mother tongue policy in Nandi County.

### **Background Information**

Language Policy (LP) gives standards of languages used in a country. In Kenya, the Language Policy in Education is based on the Ministry of Education (MOE) policy of 1976 which stated that the language of instruction in classes 1-3 should be the language of the school's catchment area until class 4 after which English would be the main language of instruction (LOI), (MOE, 1976). The policy recommended that learners should be taught in the language they speak at home; and those in mixed ethnic background be taught in Kiswahili. The language policy for primary schools was enacted in 1976 following the recommendations by the Gachathi Commission. The commission introduced mother tongues as languages of instruction in lower primary schools in Kenya. Previous commissions had indicated that these languages were ill-equipped to play this role (Ominde Commission, 1964).

The Gachathi policy articles that supported MTE were; Recommendation 101; which recommended that MT, the language predominantly spoken in the schools' catchment area, be the medium of instruction for the first three years of primary education. The other one was Recommendation 102; which introduced English as a subject from Primary 1 and made it supersede the predominant local language as the medium of instruction in Primary 4 (Gachathi Commission, 1976, pp. 54-55). In the policy, linguistically heterogeneous areas, referred to in the policy as peri urban/urban or metropolitan areas, the policy states that Kiswahili should be used for instruction. Kenya is predominantly rural with many regions inhabited by specific linguistically homogeneous communities. From the current study, Kenya's LP explicitly stated how MTE should be carried out and what languages should be taught in the various contexts. It is sad to note that its recommendations have not been implemented and seems to have been completely disregarded in the schools visited.

Although the benefits are clear, implementation of Mother Tongue programmes can be complex (Tolhurst, 2007 cited in Gacheche, 2010). Practical issues include the absence of suitable materials, the fact that teachers are often not proficient in the local language, the presence of more than one language group in the same classroom (Kishindo, 1998). However, in this study the major challenge facing the implementation of Mother Tongue Education seems to revolve around teacher related issues.

### **Statement of the problem**

Studies have shown that mother tongue plays a significant role in language learning especially as in early childhood. Though there are many factors that affect the process of this education, there is no in depth studies done to ascertain the attitude of teachers towards mother tongue education, their level of preparedness and their competence in implementing mother tongue education policy in Kenya. This study seeks to find out whether teacher attitude, competence in handling mother tongue and their preparedness in handling mother tongue education are impede on the implementation of mother tongue policy in Nandi County.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To examine the attitude of the teachers towards mother tongue instructed teaching (MTIT) in Nandi county
- ii. To evaluate teacher competencies in mother tongue competencies in mother tongue education in Nandi County.
- iii. To appraise teacher practices in mother tongue teaching in Nandi County.

### **Literature Review**

According to Gacheche (2010) the way teachers feel about the languages they are exposed to in a school setting influences how they use these languages during classroom instruction. How they use these languages also influences how their learners use such languages. Basically, linguistic attitudes of an individual come to play when an individual is confronted with more than one language (Omulando, 2004). It can therefore be concluded that the higher the value of language, the warmer the reception it receives, and vice versa (Khejari, 2014).

Attitude to a language is particularly important in the learning process because it affects the outcomes of education. As Baker (1992) states, attitude is considered both as input and output. Indeed, values and attitudes are some of the basic components of motivation in any given situation, language use included. Motivation in this case, refers to what Keller (as cited in Omulando, 2004) describes as the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and the degree of efforts they will exert in that respect.

Therefore, in relation to the languages teachers are exposed to, evidence from past studies show that the value placed on English in relation to mother tongue by teachers has a bearing on the attitudes they have towards mother tongues and English (Khejari, 2014). Baker (1992) points out that the status value and importance of a language is most often and most easily measured by attitudes of the language. In most cases, mother tongue is disregarded for its lack of instrumental motivations, while English is preferred for both its instrumental and integrative motivations (Khejari, 2014).

### **Teacher competence in handling Mother Tongue**

One of the issues that predominates discussion on the effectiveness of LI-based systems is the ability of teachers to efficiently and effectively transmit cognitive skills and values in the learners' L1 (International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) 1997 cited in Gacheche, 2010). However, most education systems that attempt to institute policies that encourage learning through a child's home language suffer from an acute shortage of teachers who speak or have access to these home languages, yet one of the criteria for effective usage of indigenous languages for instruction is that there must be enough teachers to teach in it (Fasold 1984, p. 292; Thomas 2009, p. 90). In the current study, the use English as the LOI in lower classes as reported in most schools greatly undermines learning. This is because children are not taught in a language they understand best, which in most cases is an indigenous language. It is not expected that any child uses English at home in Nandi County yet on the contrary English is used as the LOI in lower classes.

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education sent out a memo in 1976 to all schools to inform them of the new LP policy, but within a few years of inadequate support for the development of local languages and poor accountability structures, the policy was soon ignored. Most teachers, motivated by the fact that English would be the language of instruction in higher classes and of examinations, chose to teach in English as opposed to the mother tongue. This was due to the mistaken belief that the earlier English is introduced as the LOI, the faster pupils are likely to attain competency in it (Muthwii 2002, p. 5; Bunyi 2005). As observed from the

current study, use of English in lower classes was found to be quite unfair to learners. This is because teachers failed to take into account the entry behaviour of learners when they join school. In addition, learners' home experiences are not used as a foundation for learning as would be the case when L1 is used as the LOI. In the end the expected learning outcomes will not be achieved within the stipulated time period.

Teaching of learners using L2 has not received protests from parents and learners as many believed that submersion in the L2 would help pupils gain speedy access to greater socioeconomic opportunities (Trudell 2005; Benson 2004a). But perhaps such opinions are expressed because indigenous languages have not received sufficient attention, making L1-based programmes ineffective. And as Benson (2004a) found that parents tend to favour L2 learning over Mother Tongue education. As observed in this study, Kenya's LP is weak and has created a situation where schools make decisions on their own on which languages to use as the LOI in lower classes. This has been made worse by failure of the government through the MOE, to monitor and evaluate the implementation of MTE in the schools. It was evident from the study that lower primary schools were at liberty to choose the LOI as it deemed to convenient to them alongside the desires of the parents/guardians in their respective schools.

Another challenge that must be addressed as concerns teachers is the wrong assumption that if teachers can speak a child's LI then they can teach in it, which makes education ministries lax about providing specific training for LI teachers. Benson (2004b), however, notes that without specific formal training on multilingual strategies and practices, instruction is likely to be ineffective.

The ideal situation for a Mother Tongue-first education system is to "identify teachers who are fluent in the language, familiar with the local culture and respected by others in the community" (Young 2009, p. 129). In communities with an insufficient number of trained teachers, the use of community assistants' speakers of the local language who can receive some training to help trained teachers communicate curriculum content - can help bridge gaps between the teacher and learners. In the current study, teachers were found to play a critical role in the implementation of MTE and therefore concurs with Young's sentiments that there is need to identify teachers who are competent in the indigenous language and who must be able to teach MT.

### **Emerging issues in teacher preparedness for handling Mother Tongue Education in the new dispensation**

According to Cheruto & Orodho (2016), teacher preparedness in teachers' education is an integral component of education. It involves the preparation of properly identified and selected individuals for the teaching profession. The teacher education programme should be designed and administered to produce a cadre of component teachers to serve a prescribed system of education (Bogonko, 1992). This is because teachers are key factors in contributing towards any enhanced quality of classroom experience. In the implementation of Mother Tongue Education, teachers need to be trained on how best to handle mother tongue lessons in the classroom.

With regards to teacher competency, Hewton (1988) cited in Cheruto & Orodho, (2016) asserts that competency refers to appropriate prior knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities in a given context that adjust and develop with time and needs in order to effectively and efficiently accomplish a task and that are measured against a minimum standard. Hewton further lists the following as characteristics of teacher competencies: content area knowledge, pedagogical capabilities, communication skills, professionalism, and teacher preparedness.

Delocalization of teachers is new phenomenon in the education sector in Kenya. It involves posting and deploying teachers outside their home counties. The TSC is said to have 'sneaked' a clause of delocalization while preparing a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

that was later signed by TSC and the Kenya National Union Teachers (KNUT). KNUT officials are said to have signed the CBA without closer scrutiny since at the time they were more interested in salary increment, which indeed they had been awarded in the CBA. However, when TSC started to implement delocalization policy, KNUT protested, while TSC insisted it was part of the CBA signed by the two parties. Nonetheless, TSC went ahead to implement the policy that saw the transferring of head teachers and principals as well as posting newly recruited teachers outside their home counties. KNUT on the other hand, continued to oppose it.

Delocalization is perceived to be a great barrier to the implementation of mother tongue education in Kenya. The current study posits that delocalization poses two challenges. Firstly, delocalization has led to posting of teachers outside their counties, which coincidentally happens to have a different ethnic language from that of the teachers posted. If this exercise continues, the implementation of mother tongue will be affected in the long run. Such teachers cannot be expected to teach in a language that they do not understand. This, coupled with the shortage of teachers in Kenya, will further complicate not only the implementation of mother tongue education, but also the entire provision of education in Kenya.

Secondly, delocalization of school heads will further complicate the implementation of mother tongue education in Kenya. This is because school heads deployed outside their counties also find themselves in an awkward position to implement it since they may have other management challenges to grapple with at their new work stations. Similarly, their new work stations may constitute an entirely different language in its catchment area, and as such head teachers may not be motivated to supervise implementation of the teaching of a language he/she does not understand. In addition, since neither TSC nor the MOE, have been supervising the implementation of Mother Tongue Education as it does for other programmes such as TUSOME; FPE, among others, then nothing is expected to change. Laxity among head teachers is expected to continue unless the implementation of mother tongue is stepped up by the MOE.

However, the implementation of the delocalization policy was halted following a directive from Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta, to give room for further consultations. It seems no further discussions have been made on the implementation of this contentious policy. From the current study, it was found that the implementation of the delocalization policy will greatly affect the implementation of MTE not only in Nandi County, but in Kenya as whole. This is because the deployed/transferred teachers as a result of delocalization have found themselves in areas that they are not linguistically competent to teach or supervise mother tongue education. It is therefore hoped that, the implementation of this policy will be completely disregarded to save mother tongue education.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was found appropriate since it describes the variables to be studied specifically, including characteristics of a large group of persons, objects or institutions, through data collection instruments. In addition, the study was able to bring out the unique features of mother tongue education in Nandi County. The study was conducted in selected schools in Nandi County. A stratified random sampling technique was used for sampling respondents. A sample of 20 head teachers, 20 lower primary school teachers, and 5 officials from Nandi County Education office were interviewed. The researcher used a questionnaire as data collection instrument. The questionnaires contained both the structured and semi-structured questions. Data was organized and presented using descriptive statistics. This study used tables and percentages to present the information.

## **Results and Discussions**



The study found out that most teachers used English or Kiswahili as the LOI in lower classes. This happened even in schools that have Nandi speaking pupils only. The study established that in all the schools visited, mother tongue lessons were nonexistent and not scheduled in the timetable. Such non-inclusion implies that teachers indeed have contributed to the failure of the implementation of the mother tongue policy. This means that even those schools that used mother tongue only used it to supplement other languages of instruction i.e. English and Kiswahili.

It was also observed that schools with purely Nandi speaking children had not implemented the mother tongue policy as well. In such cases, there was no justified reason for not teaching mother tongue in those schools. It was established that the only time mother tongue was used in lower classes was in instances when teachers wanted learners to understand some concepts such as teaching from known to unknown. Other instances were in making clarifications on words/concepts that learners do not seem to understand.

The study revealed that most of the teachers were found to be incompetent in mother tongue and therefore could not be handle it. The study found out that even those teachers who hail from the local community may not be able to teach in mother tongue because most of them are not proficient in their own language. Additionally, they have not been trained on methods of handling instructions in mother tongue.

-In the sampled schools, teachers who have been delocalized were already in the schools and most of them hailed from different language groups and do not understand the language of the school catchment. This means they could not teach in mother tongue. For instance, respondents pointed out that delocalization of teachers will greatly affect the implementation of mother tongue education, a fact supported by 90% of the respondents. Firstly, it was noted the mass transfer of head teachers will affect the implementation of mother tongue education since most of that them have to grapple with management challenges at their new work stations. In addition, their new work stations could be a new ethnic set up, with a different language/dialect from the one spoken by the head teacher and therefore the head teacher may not have the motivation to supervise the implementation of mother tongue education, done in a language he/she does not understand. This therefore confirms that teachers should be placed in an area where they are linguistically connected as alluded in the 1976 LP.

A study by Khejeri (2014) revealed that English, Kiswahili and mother tongue are used for instruction but mother tongue is the least preferred. A mismatch between language policies and practice exists in schools and this indicates that children are being instructed in a language they are not yet familiar with when they enter school.

In this study the sampled teachers were aware of the LP, yet did not seem interested to implement it. The teachers were solely responsible for the instruction process and therefore seen as the protagonists in the crusade against the implementation of Mother Tongue Policy in schools. Those teachers who use English and Kiswahili as the LOI, are actually using immersion, which is instruction carried out in a language that children do not speak and it is comparable to forcibly holding a child under water (Skutnabb-kangas, 2000).

It was confirmed in this study that mother tongue was not valued by teachers in the schools visited. It was revealed that mother tongue was not allocated lesson hours and did not even feature in the school timetables in all the schools visited. This corresponded to findings of Ogechi (2005) who noted that the sociolinguistic situation in Kenya is triglossic: English is top of the rank as the official language; Kiswahili is in the middle of the rank as the co-official language and the local lingua franca, while at the base are the local languages or mother tongues.

The study also revealed that some teachers have a negative attitude towards teaching in mother tongue. In some of the schools involved in this study, children were punished if they spoke in their mother tongue, which reveal deep seated negative attitude towards mother tongue

education in Nandi County. This finding confirmed sentiments of Ngugi (1986) who noted that the local languages are associated with primitiveness. This study confirmed that this notion still exists among parents and teachers. This practice of undermining local languages and treating foreign ones as superior, prevails in several developing countries and was noted in this study. In this study, it was observed that in some of the schools involved in the study, children were punished if they spoke in their mother tongue.

The aspects of teacher training identified in the study included: pedagogy, cited by 30% of the respondents and useful for equipping teachers with the best methods for teaching mother tongue; Nandi grammar, cited by 40% of the respondents, useful for establishing basic phonetics, semantics, patterns and Nandi vocabulary; and Teacher preparedness, cited by 30% of the respondents, as critical in fostering positive attitude towards mother tongue.

In a nutshell, it was the view of many respondents that most Kenyan children are being denied a fundamental right when they are not taught in mother tongue. This is because the Kenya Constitution is clear on the place of local languages in an individual's life and considers it a basic human right. In this connection, failure to expose learners to indigenous languages is denying them basic human rights.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that teachers have played a significant role in resisting and delaying the implementation of the mother tongue education policy in Nandi County. Teachers are strategically placed in the implementation of the school curriculum and therefore being in charge of curriculum implementation at the classroom level, should be at the forefront in the implementation of mother tongue Policy.

### **Recommendations**

Thus study recommends sensitization of teachers on the importance of mother tongue to prepare and foster their positive attitudes towards mother tongue education Teachers should also be trained in colleges and those in service be in-serviced on how best to handle mother tongue education. In particular, trainee teachers should be taught pedagogical and other aspects of mother tongue education while yet in colleges/ universities

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