

Effects of Language of the Catchment Area in Learning Kiswahili

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Abstract: Kiswahili one of the compulsory subjects that is nationally examined but there has been complaints about poor performance in schools. This paper is a report of a study carried out in 2012 in Kapseret Division of Uasin Gishu County. The study assessed the effects of the language of the catchment area in learning Kiswahili. The study was guided by sociocultural theory (SCT) and was descriptive in nature. Simple random sampling was used to select 15 out of 50 schools in Kapseret Division, it was also used to select 20 %(750) of standard six pupils from each of the selected schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 30 upper primary Kiswahili teachers; one class six Kiswahili teacher and a Kiswahili panel head from the selected schools. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation checklists. It was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as percentages and frequencies. The investigation found out Nandi was the language of the catchment area but Kiswahili was used in communication because of different ethnic communities. Kiswahili be used in schools, parents be sensitized to have a positive attitude towards Kiswahili hence changing the learners attitude.

Key Words: Catchment area, Language of instruction, Direct translation, Stigmatization, Kiswahili

I. Introduction

Language of the catchment area refers to language of the people within the locality of the school. Research has shown that a number of case studies of immigrant minority groups and their languages have shown the extent of language diversity which schools in larger European urban settings are confronted with. In 2001/2002 such a survey was conducted in the German city of Essen at the level of primary education (Chlosta, Ostermann, Schroeder 2003 in Thurmann 2010). The aim was to establish language profiles for individual primary schools and their catchment areas. Data was collected concerning home languages (i.e. languages spoken in the family), languages learnt in school (preference of languages, skills and competences) and background variables. A few of the overall results show that: Slightly more than 100 languages are spoken by primary school children in Essen; 28% of children grow up in two or more languages; every school has to cater for bi-lingual or plurilingual children – and these bi/plurilingual children are not distributed evenly across schools (Thurmann et al. 2010).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 recognized the increasing number of language minority students in the U.S. public schools and stated a preference for the use of bilingual programs in their education; which are based on the pedagogical premise that children's acquisition of basic literacy skills and comprehension of academic content is easier if the instruction is provided in a language that is comprehensible to them, i.e. native language, and first language literacy and academic skills are an important support for the development of literacy and academic skills in the second language (Cummins, 1991).

Children who have to learn literacy skills and academic content in a language they do not speak well are doubly burdened. Native language instruction builds upon children's early conceptual and perceptual development, motivates students to come to school and stay in school, and prevents them from falling behind in content matter learning, and thereby helps "to equalize shortcomings of opportunity" for language minority students (Cummins, 1991).

The study was to establish whether the language of the catchment area had a role in the learning of Kiswahili. Chimerah (2000) asserts that, foreign languages are stumbling blocks; they cannot be expected to enhance learning since they are limited as facilitators of communication and retard thinking. Thus, if instructions are in the language of the catchment area, the learner will be motivated to be in school and will be able to understand the content matter.

Nomlomo (2003) in his study on accommodating diversity in IsiXhosa classroom showed that the speakers of standard IsiXhosa dialect were academically advantaged as they achieved good grades in IsiXhosa while the speakers of non standard dialect were experiencing problems in the IsiXhosa classroom. This means that learners enter the school setting as winners or losers depending on the dialects they speak. As a result of the stigmatization of these dialects in the classroom and socially very early in life, the learners begin to develop negative attitudes towards their own home dialects.

Kiswahili is a national language and used in cosmopolitan area, it suffers stigmatization since teachers encourage the use of English in schools during their free time, and is accorded a high status in the place of work. As a result, the learners develop negative attitudes towards subject.

Siegel (1999 in Nomlomo 2003) states that, children who feel more confident about vernacular are more successful in learning the standard dialect. Similarly, in South Africa proficiency in written forms of English often act as a gatekeeper when it comes to access to tertiary education and high profile jobs in the private sector (Desai 2003). However, Prof Wally Morrow adds that, in contexts where there is institutional access, there is no guarantee that epistemological access will take place. Medium of instruction plays a crucial role in providing epistemological access. However, it should be noted that limiting the use and development of Kiswahili diminishes the possibility of meaningful learning in the classroom thus affecting the level of quality participation and performance.

Kenya is a multilingual country since it is made up of different dialect which uses Kiswahili in their communication and English as a medium of instruction in the upper primary school. Kenya's constitution states that Kiswahili and English are the official languages although Kiswahili is considered less prestigious (Kembo-Sure and Ogechi, 2009). Research has shown that a stigmatized dialect or language like Kiswahili has an impact on the learner's performance. Thus, the researcher would want to establish if performance in Kiswahili is affected by stigmatization of the language.

II. Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the Social Cultural theory (SCT) and the process of second language acquisition by Vygotsky (1987). Firstly, the theory has it that the human mind is always and everywhere mediated primarily by linguistically based communication and secondly, mental functioning is mediated (activity theory). Second language acquisition (SLA) as a mediated process has been viewed in three general perspectives: social mediation by experts and peers, self mediation and the artifact mediation. This research investigated the role of peer and expert mediation in learning Kiswahili.

III. Research Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the present study. The study was carried out in Kapseret Division, because of the dismal performance in Kiswahili displayed in K.C.P.E results. It targeted Kiswahili Panel heads, Kiswahili teachers and learners in primary schools.

Simple random sampling was used to obtain 30 % of 50 (N=15) primary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select; one class six Kiswahili teachers since the study was limited to the upper primary classes in particular class six because class 8 were being prepared for the K.C.P.E. exams while class sevens in most schools were being prepared to be the candidates, and a Kiswahili panel head from each selected school. Simple random sampling was used to select 20% of 750 class six pupils in each selected school. Therefore, 150 learners and 30 Kiswahili teachers participated in this study, making a sample of 180 respondents.

Data collection instruments were observation schedule and questionnaires which were administered to teachers and learners. Content validity of the instrument was determined by discussing items in the instrument with the two supervisors from Moi University. Pilot study was done and 0.73 coefficient of reliability obtained. Data analysis was done basing on descriptive statistical techniques such as; frequencies, and percentages.

IV. Results

Language of the Community Surrounding the School

The teachers responses on language of the catchment area are as follows; 63.3% (N=19) revealed that, the language of the community surrounding the school was Nandi and 16.7% (N=5) was Kiswahili, 13.3% (N=4) and 6.7% (N=2) reported that it was Luhya and Kikuyu respectively. This implies that there were different languages being spoken by the community surrounding the school.

Kiswahili is a language that is used for inter-ethnic communication among the population of this Division. Kiswahili was mostly used in an area where the population was mixed; that is where there were Kikuyu and Nandi, Kikuyu and Luhya, Nandi and Luhya or Nandi, Kikuyu and Luhya. Kapseret is a peri-urban area but the population inclines to one of the Kenyan communities. This is because of inter-ethnic clashes which keep on reoccurring in Kenya after every five years since 1991.

Language of the catchment area is very important in the Kenyan system of education. There are policies that have been put in place regarding the language of the catchment area. For instance, Gachathi Report (1976) advocated that, language of the catchment area be used as a medium of instruction from standard one to three. This implies that the language that is likely to be used mostly in our case is Nandi which has the majority of its speakers, this is not the case since there are other communities in the area thus Kiswahili is used as language of instruction from class 1-3 and taught as a subject in other classes. Skutnabb-Kangas agrees with this by arguing that one's mother tongue does not have to be defined by origin only and does not have to be the same or remain one throughout one's life. This implies that one's language can be one that he chooses to be identified with whether he speaks it or not (Kembo-Sure and Ogechi, 2009).

Teachers were asked to state whether pupils use the language of the catchment area to communicate in school, 56.7% (N=17) said No while 43.3% (N=13) said Yes. Further, 93.3% (N=28) stated that the language of the catchment area affected the learning of Kiswahili. However, only 6.7% (N=2) stated otherwise. This indicates that, learners do not use language of the catchment area in school but it does affect the learning of Kiswahili. This is because in the schools neither Kiswahili nor mother tongue is encouraged yet they are the languages used at home. As observed and tape recorded in the course of data collection, standard six pupils could not communicate fluently in English or Kiswahili. They kept on mixing the languages which is cultivated by 'home characteristic' where the home language is different from the school language. This has a great implication in learning because the medium of instruction plays a major role in determining success or failure of the learner.

Teachers were asked to state the problems caused by frequency Mother Tongue use. The results were 23.3% (N=7) consonant displacement, 26.7% (N=8) direct translation, 20% (N=6) poor performance, 20% (N=6) negative attitude towards Kiswahili language and 10% (N=3) inability of self expression. The same problems were observed and tape recorded as the researcher collected data. Direct translation was evident in learners of the same and different schools during the classroom session and outside the classroom. These were some recorded sentences that were a direct translation from mother tongue:

1. *Ni vizuri watoto waogope wakubwa. (Direct translation)
No 'obulayi abana barye abakhongo. (Luhya)
Ni vyema watoto kuwaheshimu watu wazima. (Correct sentence)
It is good for young ones to respect adults. (English)
2. *Msichana wenu anafanyanga wapi kasi? (Direct translation)
Omukana wenyu akholanga hena emirimo. (Luhya)
Dada yenu hufanya kazi wapi? (Correct sentence)
Where does your sister work? (English)
3. *Baba anatoa kazi ya walimu. (Direct translation)
Fafa arutaga wira wa walimo.(Kikuyu)
Baba anafanya kazi ya ualimu. (Correct sentence)
Father works as a teacher. (English)
4. *Analilia mtoto maziwa.(Direct translation)
Richin lakwet chego.(Nandi)
Mtoto analilia maziwa.(Correct sentence)
The child is crying for milk (English)
5. *Wanaenda mama na watoto sokoni.(Direct translation)
Bendi kamet ak lagok siro.(Nandi)
Mama na watoto wanaenda sokoni.(Correct sentence)

Mother and children are going to the market. (English)

Direct translation highly affects the written work especially the *insha* (composition) which constitutes 40% of the Kiswahili exam. The learner is not able to express himself using correct grammatical sentence which may result in misrepresentation of the information. The second problem was consonant displacement; the correct consonant is displaced and replaced with another. Among the Luhya represented in this research, consonant **z** is replaced with consonant **s** in a word like **kasi** to mean **kazi** (job). Among Kikuyu's consonant **l** was replaced by consonant **r** in a word like **lia**, the learner pronounced it as **ria** and wrote it as **ria** to mean (**lia**) cry. Among the Nandi consonant **ch** was replaced by consonant **j** for instance in a word like **chini** the learner pronounced it as **jini** and wrote it as **jini** to mean **chini** (down). Such kinds of problems affect the written and oral speech. They contribute to change in meaning of what is said, for instance the word **jini** means a monster therefore if the learner wrote a sentence it would appear like this;

6. **Mtoto alianguka jini.*(The child fell monster)

This sentence is wrong since the word **jini** means monster yet the correct word would be **chini** (down). Negative attitude towards Kiswahili language is another problem that has its root in the colonial period where colonial policies favored English and marginalized the Kenyan indigenous languages. After independence English has continued to be favored and different myths and stereotypes established as to why English used as medium of instruction. For instance, English is needed in order to develop an individual socially, culturally and economically. Secondly, important subjects like maths, science and technology can only be taught in English because local languages do not have the lexical resources to handle them. Finally, English is neutral and is suitable for national integration (Kembo-Sure and Ogechi, 2009)

Myths and stereotypes have influenced the attitudes of parents in Kenya who are happy with the current language situation in the country. To them education is about learning English and being able to communicate in it. This is a similar case as that of South Africa where Desai in her research states that proficiency in written forms of English often act as a gate keeper when it comes to access to tertiary education and high profile jobs in the private sector (Desai 2003). Teachers and Parents have created negative attitude among the learners towards the Kiswahili subject as such, learners end up putting more emphasis on the foreign language rather than Kiswahili. Negative attitude has influenced the learning of Kiswahili and has contributed to low performance. Additionally, a gap has been created among learners who attend rural primary schools and those who attend urban primary schools where the language policies being implemented are different. Kiswahili is the only language that can bridge this gap since it is a national as well as official language in Kenya.

All Kenyans need to understand that children can attain high level of literacy if they are allowed to use Kiswahili which is common in all Kenyan homes. Kiswahili has contributed to socio-economic transformation among different people since it has created jobs both nationally and internationally.

Poor performance in Kiswahili was cited and was the reason for the study. In the past three years; 2008, 2009, 2010 Kiswahili had a mean of 51.00%, 51.77%, 53.02% respectively and average mean of 51.93%. Although for the three years Kiswahili has shown significant improvement in its mean mark, it is important to note that it still lags behind other subjects. For instance in the year 2008, it was ranked the third out of five subjects. In the year 2009, it was ranked the fifth out of five subjects and in the year 2010 it was ranked third out of five subjects.

There are many causes for poor performance in Kiswahili but as Kembo-Sure and Ogechi, (2009) noted, there is always a tendency to explain poor school performance by blaming facilities, teacher competence, socio-economic status etc but hardly the language of instruction, especially where it is alien to the learner. Indeed, in most schools the language that is encouraged is not Kiswahili yet it is the language that is used among the different ethnic groups.

Learners' responses concerning the language of the catchment area were as follows; 53.3% (N=80) of the learners use Kiswahili language to communicate while going home or school, 22% (N=33) use mother tongue, 4% (N=6) use English and 20.7% (N=31) use both Kiswahili and English. Further 48.7% (N=73) and 42.0% (N=63) of the learners use English and Kiswahili respectively to communicate in school during free time. There were 8.7% (N=13) who use Kiswahili and English and 0.7% (N=1) use Mother tongue to communicate while in school.

The findings show that, Kiswahili is popular among the learners and is used outside the school compound but while in school, less than half of the sampled respondents admit that they do not use Kiswahili in school because of the language policy in schools. Siegel (1999 in Nomlomo 2003) states that children who feel more confident about vernacular are more successful in learning the standard dialect. Thus, Kiswahili should be the language that the learners in primary school in Kapseret feel more confident about.

Learners' responses on frequency of mother tongue use were as follows; 63.3% (N=95) of the learners did not use mother tongue while 24.7% (N=37) frequently used mother tongue while in school. The research gives the evidence that mother tongue is minimal for communication among learners; this is similar to Kiswahili since the learners are discouraged to communicate in it while in school apart from the stipulated day of the week. Prah (2003) states that, the language in which education is principally conducted, is one of the far-reaching and significant features of any education system. It is the language in which basic skills and knowledge are imparted to the population, and medium in which production and reproduction of knowledge is taught.

Prah (2003) argues that if the language of instruction is same as mother tongue or home language, it doesn't only affirm the developmental capacity of mother tongue to grow as a language of culture, science and technology, but also gives confidence to a people, with respect to their historical and cultural baggage. Therefore, minimal use of Kiswahili is detrimental since it does not build confidence in the learner which results in less production and reproduction of knowledge.

III. Summary

The study found out that the language of the community surrounding the school was Nandi, though there were other languages. Also, majority of learners did not use language of the catchment area to communicate in school, but mother tongue affected the learning of Kiswahili. The problems caused by the frequency of mother tongue use were consonant displacement, direct translation, poor performance in Kiswahili and negative attitude towards Kiswahili language. Further, most learners used Kiswahili language to communicate while going home or to school but did not use it in school.

IV. Conclusion

Basing on the findings, the language of the catchment area played a role in the learning of Kiswahili. The language the learners used, mostly affected written and spoken Kiswahili. The research established that Nandi, Luhya, Kiswahili and Kikuyu were the languages of the catchment area although Nandi had the highest population and they affected Kiswahilis' performance.

The findings help the researcher conclude that Kiswahili is the language of the catchment area, which teachers and parents haven't supported in building confidence in it since they encourage learners to speak and write in English as a result there is poor performance in it and other subjects

V. Recommendation

The Ministry of Education should sensitize parents and the community on the importance of Kiswahili so that they can have a positive attitude towards Kiswahili which will also change the attitude of their children, Kiswahili should be used in schools especially in peri-urban areas.

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