

Influence of Mother Tongue on Performance in English and Kiswahili Amongst Secondary Schools Students

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Abstract

The raging trend of linguistic incompetence in Kiswahili and English amongst a majority of high school students despite them being compulsory and examinable subjects baffles the general public in Kenya. Students who use mother tongue language in interaction are disadvantaged as they end up performing poorly in English and Kiswahili. Thus, the introduction of a language policy in secondary schools which differs across schools based on their geographic situation. Despite this students opt to code-mix, to fit their circumstances. There is limited literature focusing on mother tongue influence on performance in English and Kiswahili in Nandi North Subcounty. In this regard the study assessed the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty Kenya. The study adopted both descriptive and correlational research designs. The study targeted 6720 form four students, 120 English and Kiswahili teachers from all the 41 secondary schools in Nandi North Subcounty. Data was analyzed by use of both inferential and descriptive statistics of SPSS version 25. From the study findings, based on the perception of the teachers and students in Nandi North subcounty secondary schools the use of mother tongue influences their performance in English and Kiswahili. Besides there is a significant correlation between performance in English and Kiswahili. In this regard the study recommends that in curing the problem of mother tongue use, the schools should ensure strict adherence to the language policy to enhance the usage of Kiswahili and English on different days to avoid biasness to a single language. Giving students daily exercises in form of assignments, Introduction of interclass competitions in speaking and writing.

Key words: Mother tongue, Kiswahili, English, Performance

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I. Background of the study

Language is tied to the construction of identities and relations of difference (Owino, 2013). In a multilingual setting this dual role of language can create conflicts between constructed identities and representations of differences. According to Whiteley (1971) Kenya has approximately 40 languages distributed as follows: 66% Bantu, 31% Nilotic and the rest comprising Cushitic, non-indigenous European and Asian. This establishes Kenya as a multilingual country like many African states. The national language is Kiswahili spoken by about 65% of the population as a second language and as a first language by the Swahili at the coast. English and Kiswahili are the official languages. In this regard English and Kiswahili languages remains a social asset and resource for promoting national cohesion. Thus, English has become the language of instruction, together with Kiswahili they remain compulsory languages studied and examined from primary school to the end of secondary school (Owino, 2013). However according to the Ministry of Education, 2012 report most people want a trilingual approach to education mother tongue is preferred for verbal communication especially in rural areas, while English and Kiswahili were preferred for education from lower primary to the university.

Some languages have a good market, that is, they are in high demand and therefore have a high symbolic value. For the majority of Kenyans especially those who live in homogenous rural settings, mother-tongues are their first languages Kiswahili to most people is a second language (Mose, 2019). In addition, as far as the Kiswahili language is concerned, not much value is attached to it compared to other languages like English, French or German. Schools are considered to be important agents in the production of the linguistic market. In this regard Kiswahili and English are compulsory examinable subjects in the 8-4-4 system of education in Kenya (Momanyi, 2009). However, in educational institutions in Kenya today, the potential economic advantages of knowing English are greater than those of knowing Kiswahili which affects to a certain extent the learner's attitudes towards the two languages (Maina, 2017). Gudu (2015) underscores that the problem of low communicative and linguistic competence from secondary schools carried to the university still remains. An index of poor performance in the English and Kiswahili subjects.

These situations are aggravated by the fact that learners do not practice speaking in standard Kiswahili and English thus meeting the objectives of the curriculum becomes a mirage. Most of the emerging secondary schools are in the rural areas where learners prevalently use mother tongue at home and school. Besides they either use sheng or their ethnic languages (Maina, 2017). Alharbi (2015) avers that use of mother tongue outside and inside classroom environment and use of mother tongue by teachers to explain difficult concept, influence learning of speaking skills in English without exception of Kiswahili. Mother tongue is the first language that you learn when you are a baby, rather than a language learned at school. Mother tongue may influence the way second language vocabulary is learned and the way it is recalled for use. How much mother tongue helps and how much it hinders learning depends on language distance and on the realism of the learner's hypothesis about transferability. Petrovic and Susan (2001) argues that the learners' language of thought dictates their expression in writing. Therefore, if language of thought dictates expression in writing, then it can influence performance of students in other languages. In fine first language affects second language according to (Atetwe, 2015).

This raging trend of linguistic incompetence in Kiswahili and English amongst a majority of high school students despite them being compulsory and examinable subjects baffles the general public in Kenya. Students who use mother tongue language in interaction are disadvantaged as they end up performing poorly in English and Kiswahili. Thus, the introduction of a language policy in secondary schools which differs across schools based on their geographic situation. Language policy aims to improve the written and oral performance of students in Kiswahili and English (Lauri, 2020). This was meant to combat the influence of mother tongue and sheng in performance of students in Kiswahili and English. Wangechi., (2011), Nyakeoga, (2018) laments poor implementation of language policies in our education system as the factor that leads to poor performance of Kiswahili. Teachers and school administrators come up with language policies and use; but, they themselves as teachers erode these rules. Both languages are given equal treatment in terms of usage unfortunately English is given an upper hand. Language policy implementation is halted by students who opt to code-mix, to fit their circumstances (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989). Besides Kiswahili and English are recognized as an official language within the school compound, but no effort has been made to entrench them further.

Several research reports have supported that the prevalence of the mother tongue affects performance in English and Kiswahili and Atetwe (2015); Adebayo, (2008); Kembo, (1996); Lauri, 2020). However, other researchers are not for this opinion, but have reported that Mother Tongue remains key to the educational foundation of learners. Sanader (2006) supported the need for Mother Tongue in education for communication, cultural identity and cultural heritage. Krashen (2004), as well has the support for the opinion, stating that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the English language. Brown (2006) also argues in favor of the group that using the mother tongue, we learn to think, learn to communicate and acquire an intuitive understanding of grammar. Besides there are limited studies that have been conducted in Nandi North Subcounty to assess the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst Secondary schools' students.

Objectives of the study

General Objective

To assess the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty Kenya

Specific objectives

- i. To find out students' perception on the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty Kenya
- ii. To determine the perceptions of teachers on the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty
- iii. To assess the relationship between performance in English and Kiswahili amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty

II. Methodology

Research Design: Descriptive and Correlational Research Designs were employed. According to Urdan (2011) Correlational Research Design is a statistical measure of a relationship between two or more variables and gives an indication of how one variable may predict another. This design suited the study because the independent variable of mother tongue influence may relate to secondary school students' performance in English and Kiswahili languages.

Target Population: This study targeted 6720 form four students, 120 English and Kiswahili teachers from all the 41 secondary schools in Nandi North Subcounty. The form four students were chosen to represent the secondary school students because of their experiences and efficiency in languages as a result of their large syllabus coverage of English and Kiswahili unlike form one students who were just fresh from primary schools.

Form two and three students could not also participate because their limited syllabus coverage. The target population based on the categories of schools are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Target Population of Teachers and Students North Subcounty Secondary Schools

School Category	Students	Teachers
Boys' Secondary Schools	1125	15
Girls' Secondary Schools	2250	26
Mixed Secondary Schools	3345	79
Total	6720	120

Source(Director of Eductaion Nandi North Subcounty, 2010)

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of schools based on two criteria: those that sit for a joint examination known as Western Zone Joint Examination (WEZOJE) and also every division was represented. The joint examination done by the selected schools could give more reliable information in terms of students' performances than individual teacher made exams. The schools were stratified in terms of Boys secondary school, Girls secondary school and Mixed Secondary schools. After which simple random sampling was used to select students and teachers from each stratum. The researcher used Krejcie and Morgan table to arrive at a sample size of 364 students and 93 teachers.

Table 2 Sample Size of Teachers and Students

School Category	Students	Teachers
Boys' Secondary Schools	61	12
Girls' Secondary Schools	122	20
Mixed Secondary Schools	181	61
Total	364	93

Source(Director of Eductaion Nandi North Subcounty, 2010)

Research Instruments: This study focused on primary data. Primary data is obtained from original sources which provides firsthand information found in the context of the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The study used questionnaires for data collection. A questionnaire is a research instrument that gathers data over a large sample and facilitates easy and quick responses. Two similar questionnaires were prepared (For both English and Kiswahili students). The questionnaire contained questions on both background information on students' mother tongue and the perceptions of both teachers and students on the influence of mother tongue on secondary school students' performance in English and Kiswahili. Piloting involved 10% of the size of the sample which was 36 questionnaires for students 4 teachers which was done at Uasin-Gishu High School and 5 teachers from Moi Girls High School before the instruments of this study were used. Few corrections were made on wording, layout, sequencing, validity and reliability of the questions before the final draft disseminated to the respondents.

Data analysis: Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the closed-ended questions use of SPSS 25. The percentages were calculated. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was specifically used to determine the relationship between performance in English and Kiswahili.

III. Findings

Response Rate:

The response rate for students was 65% while for teachers was 72%. This response rate was deemed adequate for external validity. According to Nulty (2008) any response of 50% and above is adequate for analysis.

Background information on students' mother tongue

Table 4.1 presents the background information on students' mother tongue. From the findings Kikalenjin had a large percentage of 90.1 while the other groups of students had a very minimal percentage amongst secondary schools in Nandi North Subcounty as indicated in the table below. An implication of lack of uniform representation of mother tongues amongst the schools in Nandi. This provided a better opportunity for answering of the study objectives due to the dominance of one tribe amongst schools in Nandi North Subcounty. Kembo (1996) and Oluwole, (2008) indicate that mother tongue is one of the factors that influence language performance. This means that mother tongue may negatively or positively affect performance.

Table 4.1 Background Information (Students' Mother Tongue)

Mother tongue	Frequency	%
Kiswahili	4	1.7
Kikalenjin	218	90.1
Kijaluo	7	2.9
Kiluhya	8	3.3
Kikikuyu	0	0
Kikamba	1	0.4
Kikisii	2	0.8
Others		
Maasai	1	0.4
Teso	1	0.4

Students' perception on the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst secondary schools' students in Mossop Constituency

Students were asked about their perception on the influence of mother tongue on their performance in English and Kiswahili and their comments provided in table 4.2

Table 4.2 Students' Comments on the influence of Mother Tongue on English and Kiswahili Performance

Students	Answer	Comment	F	%
English students	Yes	Leads to poor results, mother tongue influence and communicating poorly in English including poor sentence construction, inability to understand questions written in English and lack of confidence in the use of English in communication.	199	82
	No	No comment	43	18
Kiswahili students	Yes	Poor results, mother tongue influence and communicating poorly in Kiswahili including poor sentence construction. inability to understand questions written in Kiswahili and lack of confidence in the use of Kiswahili in communication	233	96
	No	No comment	9	4

In response to these questions, 199 and 233 English and Kiswahili students agreed and explained that mother tongue affects language performance. They argued that mother tongue leads to poor results, mother tongue influences their communication through poor sentence construction in English and Kiswahili respectively, inability to understand questions written in English and Kiswahili and lack of confidence in the use of English and Kiswahili in communication which adversely affect their performance. This represents 82% and 96% respectively. Only 43 (18%) and 9 (4%) students did not agree with the fact that mother tongue negatively affects their performance in English and Kiswahili respectively. These results indicate that mother tongue affects both English and Kiswahili students' performance based on the perception of the students. This could be the reason why most of the students perform poorly in these two subjects in the district. This perception is amplified by Adebayo, (2008) who argued that English language should be used as a medium of communication within and outside the classroom and both teachers and students should endeavor to improve their proficiency level of the language which will eventually lead to improved performance. Mwakira and Mwangi (2021) lays emphasis on "firm foundation in English language for better performance in the subject in future and argue that a solid foundation in English essentially provides students with fundamental skills of English language". In this regard there is need for providing a better foundation and strictly ensuring frequent and appropriate use on English and Kiswahili languages subservient to adversity of mother tongue influence on performance of English and Kiswahili.

The perceptions of teachers on the influence of mother tongue on performance in English and Kiswahili amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty

The total number of teachers who responded to the open-ended questions in English and Kiswahili were 34 in each subject. All English and Kiswahili teachers (100%) teachers perceive that student perform poorly in English and Kiswahili because of mother tongue influence. The teachers noted that students should be encouraged to avoid the use of mother tongue. They should be given a lot of assignments so that they can practice speaking and writing in English and Kiswahili. Since literature and studies reviewed suggest that

mother tongue affects students' performance, this could be the reason why these students who most of the time speak Kikalenjin the dominant mother tongue amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty perform poorly in English and Kiswahili. This implies that the use of mother tongue brings about challenge in pronunciation and writing in English and Kiswahili which affects the overall student's performance in this subject. Petrovic and Susan (2001) argues that the learners' language of thought dictates their expression in writing. Therefore, if language of thought dictates expression in writing, then this indicates that the poor performance of amongst Secondary schools' students in Nandi North Subcounty might be attributed to the 90.1% of students who think in kikalenjin mother tongue. Atetwe (2015) notes that students exhibit a challenge of lack of confidence and poor communication skills as a result of use of mother tongue. Therefore, teachers are under obligation in nurturing a positive perception towards the use of English and Kiswahili in school to enhance the performance of the students amongst Secondary schools' students in Mossop Constituency. They should be role models to the students and encourage them to converse in English.

Relationship between Performance in English and Kiswahili in Nandi North Subcounty The study investigated the relationship between performance in English and Kiswahili languages in Nandi North Subcounty as depicted in table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient in performance between English and Kiswahili languages in Nandi North Subcounty

		Score in End of Term Exam in English	Score in the End of Term in Kiswahili
Score in end of term exam in English	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.373**
	<i>p</i> -value	0.000	0.000
	N	242	242
Score in the end of term in Kiswahili	Pearson Correlation	0.373**	1
	<i>p</i> -value	0.000	0.000
	N	242	242

**significant at 0.01 level

From the findings there is a significant relationship between performance in English and Kiswahili. Those students who perform well in English tend to perform well in Kiswahili. However, Mutua, (2015) notes that the practice of school forcing student to use English as medium of communication so as to improve their performance in the subject has some negative effect to the overall performance of student in Kiswahili

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Secondary school students' performance in English and Kiswahili is affected by mother tongue influence. This is corroborated by the fact that higher percentage of students of the students in secondary schools in Nandi North Subcounty are from one dialect prompting frequent use of that language which is Kalenjin. This espouses from the fact that the use of mother tongue dictates the learners' language of thought and expression in writing which affects their performance in English and Kiswahili. Both students and the teachers acknowledge that mother tongue leads to poor results in English and Kiswahili, mother tongue influence negatively affects the student's effective communication courtesy of poor sentence construction and pronunciation hence poor performance in English and Kiswahili in secondary schools. The frequent use of mother tongue by the students erodes their confidence compromising on their interaction with students from other dialects. Furthermore, students lacked clear interpretation English and Kiswahili language used in different context and examinations. Finally, there is a relationship between English and Kiswahili language use.

To cure the problem of mother tongue use, the schools should ensure adherence to the language policy to enhance the usage of Kiswahili and English on different days to avoid biasness to a single language. Students should be motivated to have a passion in the use of Kiswahili and English language by punishing the defaulters of the language policy and rewarding those who Performa well in these subjects. In addition, Kiswahili teachers suggested that there should be guidelines to curb the influence of 'sheng' in Kiswahili to improve performance. Having a well-equipped library. It should be equipped with English and Kiswahili books, newspapers and novels. Giving students daily exercises in form of assignments, Introduction of interclass competitions in speaking and writing

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