

Medium of Instruction in School: The Indigenous Language, the National Language or the Official Language? A Case study from Multilingual Deep Rural Kenya

Kari Iren Spernes and Rose Ruto-Korir

Abstract

The connection between multilingualism and the school curriculum continues to engender debates on language preferences because of the potential to influence the amount of learning among learners. To understand language preferences among multilingual learners and their implications for the selection of the medium of instruction (MoI) in a multilingual country, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews among learners, teachers and head teachers in deep, rural Kenyan primary schools. These schools are located away from urban centres, with little or no basic infrastructure, hence the concept of “deep ruralness”. The participants were purposively sampled from among learners, teachers and head teachers to examine how learners’ affiliations with multilingualism could explain the preferred MoI, and the ways through which schools implement the use of an MoI in the curriculum. The findings show that Kiswahili and English were used as the MoI, even when the curriculum recommended indigenous languages and English. Moreover, learners’ multilingual affiliations and their spontaneous languages were their indigenous languages and Kiswahili. Based on these findings, we claim that the indigenous language, Kiswahili and English should be used as the languages of instruction in Kenyan schools.

Keywords: curriculum, indigenous language, medium of instruction, multilingualism, rural Kenya

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