

Language of Instruction in Kenya: Focus on Lower Primary in Schools in Rural Areas

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Abstract

The use of mother tongue as a language of instruction debate has been ongoing in Kenya as well as in other African countries with no consensus from researchers and policy makers. This paper focuses on the use of mother tongue in lower primary in schools in rural areas in Kenya and the reasons for deviations from guidelines that recommend the use of language of the catchment area in classes 1-3. This paper maintains that the use of mother tongue in the early years of schooling provides basic literacy skills necessary for learning in other subjects. Despite the benefits of use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in lower primary in schools in the rural areas, many primary schools in Kenya hardly use it for instruction. Not only does this paper recommend the use of mother tongue in lower primary in schools in rural areas in Kenya but also proposes that teachers perform the crucial role of enabling parents and other stakeholders in the education sector understand how mother tongue benefits the learner in the teaching learning process.

KEYWORDS: language of instruction, mother tongue, literacy, quality of education, learner participation, cognitive development