

Language-in-Education Policy in Kenya: Intention, Interpretation, Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Kenya is a multilingual country with over forty different indigenous languages. Its language-in-education policy for early primary education was enacted in 1976. Subsequent education commissions have not altered its core content. Mother tongues should be used as languages of instruction up to grade three – assumedly taking its cue from UNESCO's (1953) position that mother tongues are ideal for early education. English takes over as the language of instruction from grade four. The mother tongue policy applies to all schools except those in urban centers in which Kiswahili should be the medium of instruction. This paper presents findings of a study revolving around the policy statement, its interpretation, and implementation by classroom teachers, head teachers, and quality assurance and standards officers (QASOS). Findings indicate that there is a discrepancy between drafters' intention, implementers' interpretation, and operationalization of the provisions of the policy. The disparity between intention, implementer interpretation, and government silence seems to have bred both contempt and defiance for the policy by implementers, hence impacting negatively on implementation.

Keywords: policy, intention, conceptualization, implementation, defiance.