

# Kenyan Curriculum Reforms and Mother Tongue Education: Issues, Challenges and Implementation Strategies

**Lucy Mandillah**

<https://orcid.org/000-0003-1020-8916>

University of Venda, South Africa

mandila1978@gmail.com

## Abstract

The implementation of mother tongue education (MTE) remains a challenge across Africa and Kenya in particular. This continues despite the fact that the maintenance and development of language and literacy skills in one's mother tongue (MT) plays a critical role in facilitating second language (L2) learning, developing additive bilingualism and continuous cognitive development. Consequently, Kenya has had several education commissions in both colonial and post-colonial periods, which, together with the Constitution of Kenya have had a bearing on the language policy. However, the language policy has not been supported by a careful implementation strategy for MTE. Presently, Kenya is undergoing curriculum reforms from the ongoing 8-4-4 system, where learners study for eight years of basic (primary) education, four years of secondary education and four years of university education to a new system of 2-6-3-3-3. The 2-6-3-3-3 system comprises two years of pre-primary, six years of primary (three years lower and three years upper primary), six years of secondary (three years junior and three years senior) and three years of university education. While English has been given preponderant attention in the new curriculum, the role of MT has also been re-emphasised because it has not received as much attention as it deserves in the past. It is against this background and the ongoing debates on MTE that this paper attempts to examine the challenges that are likely to impede the implementation of MTE in the 2-6-3-3-3 curriculum reforms as outlined in the education policy. The paper further suggests some implementation strategies to avert the challenges. The study was conducted in Bungoma County in Kenya. Purposive sampling

UNISA   
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
PRESS

Education as Change

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/EAC>

Volume 23 | 2019 | #3379| 18 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/3379>

ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)

© The Author(s) 2019



Published by the University of Johannesburg and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

was used to identify key respondents from 10 schools which were used to pilot the new curriculum. The respondents included Grade 3 teachers, head teachers and quality assurance officers (QASOs). Focus group discussions (FGDs), unstructured interviews and document analysis were used to elicit data. The findings revealed that the implementation of MTE policy is likely to flop if it is not supported by careful implementation strategies that take care of teacher training, the production of teaching/learning materials and attempts to change the attitudes of parents towards indigenous languages. The paper advocates for implementation strategies such as greater resource allocation, teacher training on L1 methodologies, a change in attitude with regard to MTE, political will and clearer policy objectives to achieve the aims of an effective MTE system in Kenya.

**Keywords:** competency-based curriculum; implementation; mother tongue education policy; Kenya

## **Introduction**

Kenya is located in the Eastern part of Africa and has a population of over 40 million people (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2009). The country is multilingual, with over 70 different indigenous languages and dialects in addition to Kiswahili and other foreign languages such as English, French, German, Chinese, Hindi, and Italian, which are spoken by a small number of people (Mose 2017). The country comprises three linguistic groups, namely, the Bantu, the Cushites and the Nilotes. Due to the multilingual nature of the country and the foreign language influence, the MT debate has been part and parcel of the history of both colonial and post-colonial Kenya. As a result, Kenya has had several education commissions that have influenced government education policies (Wa Mberia 2016). Some of the key commissions that have been undertaken to review education during this period include the Phelps-Stokes Commission (1924), the Beecher report (1949), the Binns Commission (1952), the Ominde report (1964), the Bessey report (1972), the Gachathi report (1976), the Mackay report (1981), the Kamunge report (1988), the Koech report (1999) and the Odhiambo report (2012).

The mentioned commissions have made numerous recommendations which have had a bearing on the language policy over the years. Specifically, the reports have shown that indigenous languages are crucial vehicles in the acquisition of education. The Phelps Stoke Commission (1924), for example, recognised the great role of indigenous languages in the development of character and acquisition of life skills in agriculture. The Bessy Commission, on the other hand, noted the many benefits that accrue when a child starts formal learning in a language that he or she understands. On a similar note, the post-colonial commissions such as those of Gachathi (1976), Koech (1999) and Nikiema (2011) recommended the need for a child to be taught using the language of the school's catchment area and for Kiswahili to be used only in schools with a heterogeneous population. The commissions' recommendations are in line with

those found in literature on the benefits of using mother languages in education, such as studies by Wa Mberia (2016), Muthwii (2002), Cummins (2000), Baker (2001), and UNESCO (1953). The UNESCO 1953 study, for example, underscored the importance of educating children in their MT because children are more likely to enrol and succeed in school if they are instructed in the language they best understand. Such a language enables them to transition smoothly to a second language (L2) such as English.

Cummins (2000) similarly argues that learners who understand the language they are instructed in are more likely to engage meaningfully with content, question what they do not understand and even enjoy the challenge of new things during the teaching/learning process. On the same note, article five of the Asmara Declaration states that all African children have the inalienable right to attend school and learn in their mother tongues. Implementing a mother tongue medium of instruction policy would therefore be in line with the Asmara pan-African resolution (Asmara Declaration 2000). Therefore, the decision to revisit the implementation of MT as a languages of instruction (LoI) in early years in the new 2-6-3-3-3 curriculum reforms is not a “new policy.” The fact that it is seen as a new policy is an indicator of the failure on the part of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Kenya to adopt effective implementation strategies and supervise adherence to this policy.

Despite the elaborate recommendations of previous education commissions in Kenya, studies and the guiding language policy on the importance of MTE, varied misconceptions and attitudes that surround the use of MTE generally in Africa and Kenya in particular still persist. Mother tongue education (MTE) programmes use the learner’s first language (L1), otherwise called mother tongue or indigenous language, to teach reading and writing skills along with academic content in the early years (Uwezo 2015). The misconceptions and negative attitude towards MTE are largely as a result of many developing countries, Kenya included, having allowed foreign languages to dominate the education sector instead of a fully implemented MTE. For instance, English has been elevated and used to the detriment of African languages, including Kiswahili, in Kenya. Kiswahili in Kenya is not a widely accepted lingua franca as it is in Tanzania, where all government officials speak Kiswahili. Consequently, controversies have arisen with regard to the adoption of MTE; for example, it is viewed as archaic, a waste of time in the era of globalisation, irrelevant given the status English commands as a language of technology, and it is believed that MTE cannot be used to get jobs (Wa Mberia 2016). When such opinions are expressed, it is hard to disagree with Waruingi’s (2009) observation that learning in Kenya is not about imparting knowledge or culture but grasping English to earn the title of being educated. This is contrary to the Constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2010), which contains recommendations that have informed Kenya’s education sector with regard to the use of indigenous languages. Chapter 2, Section 7(1), of the Kenyan Constitution (The Republic of Kenya 2010) stipulates that the national language of the Republic shall be Kiswahili while 7(2) stipulates that the official

languages of the Republic shall be Kiswahili and English. Chapter 2, Section 7(3) also outlines the following obligations of the state: To promote and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya, and to promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities. Although indigenous languages are not recognised as official languages in Kenya, it is encouraging that for the first time these languages are entrenched in the Constitution. In the same ambit, Kenya operationalised a devolved system of government after the promulgation of a new Constitution in the year 2010. Devolution provides for a two-tier government system; national and county. The agenda is to devolve national resources to the grassroots in order to spur socio-economic development in all parts of the country.

Language, according to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), is also a natural resource to be used as a tool for socio-economic development. In this regard, the creation of the current 47 counties in Kenya was partly meant to align the Kenyan education sector to the requirements of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and Kenya's Vision 2030 blue print. Vision 2030 is the country's current strategy in development whose main objective is to help Kenya transform into a middle-income country that provides high-quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030. The vision is found on social, economic and political pillars. Within the social pillar, the education sector plays a critical role in facilitating the process of inculcating knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for catapulting Kenya to the status of a globally competitive country (Government of Kenya 2007). Apart from the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Vision is also in line with Goal 4 of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are meant to ensure an inclusive and equitable, quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The full implementation of MTE, starting at the county level, would be a sure way of attaining access and equity in education for all. Thus, there is a need to increase the relevance of education through environmentally related curriculum reforms based on community needs and conditions. This environment is in the physical, social, cultural, economic and political spheres in the context of Kenya's Vision 2030 and the global SDGs, which can partly be attained through the implementation of MTE with the support of county governments.

It is as a result of this premise that basic education (BE), under which MTE is supposed to be implemented, is a devolved public service sector. This is an opportunity to fully implement MTE in different counties where different indigenous languages and dialects are spoken. Mose (2017) notes that there is a predominance (in settlement patterns) of specific language communities in almost all counties in the country. Research indicates that less than 30 per cent of Kenyans have a competent mastery of the English language (Bunyi 2005) and it is only through a language that people know, speak well and understand that development can take place. Therefore, devolving basic education to the county level is part of making quality education accessible, equal, and relevant to the grassroots. It is also an opportunity for the various stakeholders to have a sense of ownership of the policy. Bungoma County,

where the study was conducted, is one of the 47 counties in Kenya located in the western part of the country, bordering Uganda. The county is constituted by nine sub-counties namely, Mt Elgon, Sirisia, Kabuchai, Bumula, Kanduyi, Webuye East, Webuye West, Kimilili and Tongaren. The county had an estimated population of 1,375,063 in 2013.

Studies have shown that the majority of children in Kenyan primary schools, Bungoma County included, are reading far below grade level. Also, more than one million Kenyan children of school age are out of school and one in five youth aged 15–24 cannot read (UNESCO 2014). On the same note, an Uwezo (2010) report on a study conducted on levels of basic literacy and numeracy in the country revealed that 85 per cent of the children in Class 2 could not read a passage in English, 25 per cent in Class 5 could not read the same passage, and four per cent in Class 8 could not read the passage, meaning that they leave primary school without the ability to read in English. Similar problems have been reported in Bungoma County. For instance, school attendance and performance in national examinations have also not met the expectations of education stakeholders in the county, the latter as a result of low literacy and numeracy levels (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2006). This scenario points to a serious deficit in the quality of Kenya’s primary education system and particularly in its literacy instruction in early grades. While there are many factors involved in delivering quality education, language is a key requirement for communication in and outside the classroom (Baker 2001). Teaching in the learners’ L1 as opposed to L2 offers significant pedagogical advantages as mentioned before.

The poor performance in the numeracy and literacy skills could also be attributed to the failure of the 8-4-4 system to implement the MTE policy. Due to many criticisms that are facing the 8-4-4 system, the government has in place a competency-based curriculum (CBC), also called a 2-6-3-3-3 system. The rollout of the new curriculum began in June 2017 when the first pilot phase was launched in 10 schools in each of the 47 counties. The schools included both public, private and special needs institutions (KICD 2017). The CBC places more emphasis on learners’ mental ability to process issues and proposes a practical framework that nurtures competencies of learners based on their passions and talents. The language policy for the early years states that the language of instruction (LoI) in pre-primary (PP1 and PP2) and grades 1–3 (G1, G2 and G3) shall be the language of the school’s catchment area until Grade 4, after which English shall be the main LoI (KICD 2017). The CBC is aimed at making education responsive to the imperatives of Vision 2030 and the SDGs. It is believed that amongst other factors, MTE would ensure that “learners acquire competencies and skills to meet the human resource aspirations of Kenya’s Vision 2030 blueprint for development” (Wa Mberia 2016).

Consequently, teachers are expected to provide the democratic environment, materials, activities and guidance to learners at this level using the language of the catchment area or Kiswahili for schools with pupils with a mixed ethnic background (KICD

2017). However, despite all the commissions created in Kenya to bring about curriculum reforms that have a direct bearing on the medium of instruction and the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and a well drafted 2-6-3-3-3 system, there are challenges that are likely to impede the implementation of MTE in Kenya. This paper, therefore, is a contribution towards deepening the debate on the implementation of MTE in Kenya. The paper focuses on the challenges that are likely to impede a successful implementation of MTE in the 2-6-3-3-3 curriculum reforms. The paper further attempts to give possible implementation strategies that could be adopted by relevant stakeholders.

## **Materials and Methods**

The study was conducted in Bungoma County in the western part of Kenya. The county is mostly inhabited by the Bukusu and Tachoni communities among other groups such as the Sabaot, Tura and Teso. Towns within the county such as Bungoma, Webuye and Kimilili have attracted people from other communities, making them linguistically heterogeneous. Schools within these towns and boarding primary schools are expected to use Kiswahili as a LoI in early years. On the other hand, all other rural schools should use either Lubukusu, Olutachoni, Olutura, Oluteso or Olusabaot for instruction up to and including Grade 3. Twenty-five (25) respondents were purposively sampled from 10 schools in the county that were used to pilot the 2-6-3-3-3 curriculum in June 2017. The respondents included five QASOs, 10 head teachers and 10 Grade 3 teachers. QASOs are based at sub-county levels and they are in charge of curriculum implementation in schools within their territories. The QASOs were drawn from five sub-counties from which the respective schools that underwent piloting were identified. Teachers, head teachers and parents have a crucial role to play as main agents of language policy implementation (Njoroge 2012).

In-depth interviews, document analyses (DA), and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to elicit data. FGDs and in-depth interviews gave room to in-depth responses and gave insight into the respondents' feelings, hidden motives, interests and decisions, thus creating space for qualitative analysis (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed and then thematically analysed. For DA, content analysis of research literature on studies conducted in Kenya on the subject of language-in-education policy were reviewed for background information and to establish the meanings and possible implications of the provisions of the policy. Notes from both sources of data were then used to present the findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

The introductory section has shown that education in Kenya is plagued by low competency levels. This highlights the need for the government to provide greater support for its language policy. This is in light of the benefits MTE holds for improving learning outcomes for the large percentage of children being left behind. To

do this adequately, the country will have to address and overcome the policy challenges that are likely to face the implementation process of MTE during the early years that lay the foundation for education, as discussed below.

## **Mother Tongue Education: Issues and Challenges**

### *Lack of Training in Mother Tongue Education*

A lack of teachers trained in MT teaching methodologies is a main concern among the identified key stakeholders. It has always been taken for granted that a native speaker of a given African language will naturally make a good teacher of that language. Consequently, teachers assigned to teach lower primary could be native speakers of the language of the catchment area, but lack sufficient training in L1 methodology to teach in MT. This assumption is associated with the low esteem that characterises African languages contrary to foreign languages. For example, teachers of English are trained in English teaching methodologies as a prerequisite for them to teach the subject.

Similarly, primary school teachers (P1) who undergo a two-year training course are trained in over 10 teaching subjects taught in primary school plus professional pedagogical courses apart from mother tongue. Even if mother tongue is included, such a system fails to equip trainees with intensive, specialist knowledge in a few subjects and instead gives them a general idea about everything. With such training, teachers lack the opportunity to gain the necessary competence and specific training in MTE to use it as a bridge to competency in L2. According to Bunyi (2005, 45), when teachers are not native speakers of a child's L1 or lack sufficient training on how to carry out mother tongue-based teaching, they avoid the "unknown good" and regress to the "known bad." That is, teachers revert to old systems of teacher-controlled interactions, where pupils are merely required to repeat content after the teacher and given little room to ask any questions. In the same vein, Benson (2004) contends that without specific formal training on multilingual strategies and practices, MTE instruction is likely to be ineffective.

### *Teaching/Learning Materials*

A lack of teaching/learning materials, if not addressed, will equally hinder the transmission of content in local languages according to QASOs, head teachers and Grade 3 teachers. This observation is based on the fact that many of the African languages in Kenya do not have an orthography, resulting in a lack of written materials. Consequently, children taught in such languages would not have class readers and other materials to support their learning. A study done in Nigeria on quality educational output revealed that the availability of teaching/learning materials such as textbooks, laboratories and other equipment is vital for effective teaching and learning (Adegbija 2008). Adegbija further noted that a lack of such materials compromises quality teaching, which affects quality learning in educational institutions. Bloch (2002) in South Africa posits that producing visually appealing,

high-quality materials in the L1 and/or L1 plus other languages is motivational and raises the status of the L1.

Attempts to provide teaching/learning materials in local languages have been challenging because of language attitudes, the influence of donor interests, strong economic interests from overseas publishing companies and global power relations (Waruingi 2009). Brock-Utne (2000) gives examples of the British and French governments' roles in advocating for the use of their languages in schools in their former colonies through bilateral aid to support language acquisition. The aid, which comes through school texts written in French or English or money to support literacy in these languages, makes it difficult for cash-strapped governments to focus on local language development. The contrary is the case with foreign faith-based organisations (FBOs), which have played a different role in the promotion of MTE in Africa in general and Kenya in particular. For instance, because of their desire to deliver God's word in the language of the people, FBOs have been proactive in the production of religious literature in African languages and the use of these languages in their activities, although the initiatives have not been sufficient.

Respondents also pointed out that multilingualism in Kenya makes it difficult and expensive to produce teaching/learning materials in all the languages. This is in line with Muth (2007), who noted that the amount of languages used in Kenya varies between 30 and 70, which makes it expensive to publish in all the languages. Furthermore, the results are in agreement with Waruingi (2009), who was involved in a UNESCO-run basic learning materials initiative (BLMI) that ran from 1996 to 2001 in Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Mali and Burkina Faso. The initiative did not achieve its aim of providing teaching/learning materials in local languages because of the lack of criteria to adopt a language in which to prepare teaching/learning materials.

In Kenya, for example, there are over 70 languages and dialects and a similar problem to that which Waruingi experienced is likely to manifest. Furthermore, although it is inferred that children will have to learn the language of the catchment area spoken in each of the 47 Kenyan counties, there is no policy structure explicitly stating exactly which languages would be taught. Moreover, there are no explicit policy guidelines on which agencies would monitor to ensure that there is uniformity in the interpretation, translation and delivery of content in each of the languages. The challenge herein is to ensure that teaching/learning materials that meet the language and cultural needs of all learners are codified and standardised based on the selected ethnic languages.

### *Shortage and Placement of MTE Teachers*

It was reported that the implementation of the 2-6-3-3-3 curriculum is likely to suffer from a general acute shortage of teachers, particularly in MTE. Teachers are a critical education resource in every country, Kenya being no exception. From early childhood



programmes, the presence of qualified, well-motivated and supported teachers is vital for learning. However, in recent years, an increasing number of studies have expressed concern about current and prospective teacher shortages in many sub-Saharan African countries. In Kenya for example, teacher recruitment has been minimal despite an increase in the supply of teachers graduating from teacher training colleges (TTCs). According to Santiago (2002), severe shortages currently exist, which have created a gap between the demand and supply of teachers needed to ensure effective learning in many schools. Similarly, the World Bank has reported that qualified teachers in both the developed and developing world are quickly becoming the hardest segment of the teaching profession to attract and retain (World Bank 2005). This is happening in spite of the fact that teacher shortages impact negatively on the quality of teaching/learning, which is a setback to educational planners and policy makers. Thus, any successful education implementation plan such as the MTE policy should be based on teacher recruitment, appropriate placement and retention (DAE 1996).

The acute shortage and challenges with the placement of teachers could be attributed to both political as well as economic reasons across Africa and Kenya in particular. For instance, one of the major challenges facing the education system in Kenya is the need for more teachers against a constrained budget. By 2005, the teacher wage bill absorbed 84 per cent of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's (MOEST) budget (MOEST 2005b). This called for containment of the wage bill so that savings could be used to fund other educational inputs. In the same ambit, stakeholders fear the likelihood of teachers who are non-native speakers being placed in schools where the language of the catchment area is different from their own native language. Due to a shortage of teachers of MTE, such non-native speakers are likely to be assigned to teach lower grade levels where the language policy is meant to be implemented. Thomas (2009) warns against such a situation when he observes that one of the criteria for effective usage of local languages for instruction is the availability of enough teachers to teach in it. The effectiveness of L1-based systems is determined by the ability of teachers to efficiently and effectively transmit cognitive skills and values in the learners' L1 (Bunyi 1999).

The findings of the study also reveal that head teachers, teachers, and parents are critical of and defiant towards the MTE policy because of their negative perceptions of African indigenous languages. This is based on the fact that language as a communication tool is also a symbol of power. Such negative attitudes are a result of the high status that is accorded to English as a foreign language (FL) both in the Kenyan Constitution as well as the language in education policy. Despite a language policy that advocates for an MTE curriculum, the policy on the contrary favours English by advocating the setting of final examinations in English and using English as a language of instruction (LoI) for the rest of the subjects apart from Kiswahili in higher grades. In addition, some teachers reported that it is not practical to implement the policy due to penalties that follow poor performance in national examinations which are administered in English. Consequently, English continues to be the chief

screening determinant as to who accesses higher education, jobs and other social mobility mechanisms. Teachers, parents and pupils have therefore developed a negative attitude towards MTE by being more focused on the acquisition of English, which is the language of examination and economic mobility. It is for this reason that the respondents assume MTE policy during early years is likely to be ignored, as this has been the norm.

Negative attitudes to mother tongue education have previously been reported by researchers such as Kembo-Sure (1994), Bunyi (2005), Khejeri (2014) and Muthwii (2002). Muthwii (2007, 45–51) notes that Kenya’s language policy faces tremendous challenges with regards to language attitudes, as English literacy is seen as the mark of being educated while those with literacy in local languages are viewed as being at the “bottom of the pile.” English as a global language has become favourable due to the high official status it has been accorded in the Constitution of Kenya (2010) alongside Kiswahili. English is considered necessary for further education, work, high-paying white/blue collar jobs and other opportunities (Kembo-Sure 2002). As a result, most Kenyan parents prefer to enrol their children in private primary schools where English is used as a LoI from early years. Bunyi (2005) also contends that teachers in Kenya choose to teach in English as opposed to teaching in a mother tongue in the mistaken belief that the earlier English is introduced as the LoI, the faster pupils are likely to attain competency in it. Bunyi (2005) reports that children are punished if they speak their home languages in the school compound even though they are expected to acquire literacy in their L1. In the same ambit, Benson (2004) asserts that teachers, parents and pupils believe that learning in English will help pupils gain speedy access to greater socio-economic opportunities.

These observations are not always true because countries such as Japan, Norway, Finland and China have been able to keep up to date with technological development yet they have not resorted to educating children in global languages. It is therefore possible for Africa, and Kenya in particular, to attain greater socio-economic mileage by making use of its indigenous languages if proper implementation strategies in MTE are adopted. According to Blommaert (2006), a language policy can only work properly if people ascribe value to the suggested indigenous language of instruction. This can only be achieved through the empowerment of African languages through intellectualisation in terms of usage in different societal domains.

### *The Cost of Teaching/Learning Materials*

The high cost of implementing an MTE curriculum in early years is likely to be another challenge according to the respondents. QASOs reported that a huge investment is needed particularly in teacher preparation and materials development by the MoE. According to the head teachers, Kenya’s economic hardships may prevent decision-makers from considering large-scale implementation of MTE to allow them to maintain submersion programmes or minimal use of the mother tongue, which may

limit the effects of an otherwise well-designed policy. In places characterised by extreme linguistic diversity like Bungoma County, comprising Bukusu, Tachoni, Sabaot, and Teso, among other languages, this may mean small print runs for minority languages, making them less attractive to commercial publishers. This would be contrary to the fact that resource allocation is essential to any successful educational reform, including MTE. This is in support of Muthwii's (2007) observation that mother tongue-based programmes are initially more costly due to the need for intellectualisation of undeveloped languages and the production of instructional and supplemental materials in those languages.

### *Lack of Recognition of Strategies of Communication*

Respondents alluded to the fact that the MoE in collaboration with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) had not engaged fully key stakeholders in education such as teachers, parents, the education sector, labour unions, politicians, religious and community leaders in decision-making with regard to MTE. According to the respondents, language policy makers have not incorporated key stakeholders in different regions of Kenya in order to put into consideration cases of strategies of communication. This has resulted in a lack of public ownership of MTE, which is now viewed as a directive on language use from the MoE with strict rules on how language should be used, neglecting the everyday reality of usage among pupils, teachers and parents. Thus, the implementation plan is likely to be weakened by the assumption that language is a discrete entity whose use can be manipulated; in reality it is dynamic in nature. A lack of community-based research and collaboration between linguists, researchers, educationalists and the community is likely to pose a challenge during the implementation.

According to Grade 3 teachers, the common linguistic practices in the classroom include code-switching (CS), code-mixing (CM) and the use of hybrid codes. In CS and CM, teachers and pupils use different languages to facilitate communication for effective delivery of content. Hybrid codes are the nativised versions of official languages such as Sheng in Kenya. Sheng is a nativised code which is a mix of English, Kiswahili and some Kenyan indigenous languages. These local strategies, some of which have the potential to be successfully developed for better content understanding, have not been considered in traditional policy models and are thus not accommodated. According to Probyn (2005), even though most teachers consider CS as illicit rather than a valid linguistic tool, it has the potential to give learners the opportunity to participate in classroom discussions and to express themselves, especially if they have not yet fully grasped the L2. Bunyi (2005) also asserts it is important that the way language is used by teachers and learners and the ideological attitudes and allegiances social groups have towards language should inform policy in a more localised context. Prah (2003) similarly proposes that current approaches to language planning and policy should become more cognisant of the fact that the

language used by teachers and students does not exist neatly in discrete categories, since language itself is a fluid, dynamic construction.

### **Mother Tongue Education Implementation Strategies**

The implementation of MTE in Kenya as well as in other African countries would be the right decision for the child, the community and the nation. However, in view of the identified challenges, this section attempts to summarise some implementation strategies which could be adopted by relevant stakeholders.

First, the promotion of literacy and fluency in indigenous languages should create a positive paradigm shift that would facilitate a change in the social, intellectual and psychological attitudes that parents, teachers and learners have towards their cultural heritage and worldview. This can be achieved by empowering African languages through intellectualisation so that the languages are used in various domains in society. The status that a language acquires depends a lot on government support for it. One way the government can use to improve indigenous language status is by increasing its functional uses (Hornberger 2006, 30). In this case, the government of Kenya could adopt a policy that makes Kenyan indigenous languages official at the county level. This would be an attempt to make local languages function beyond the home and as LoI. As literacy and usage in them increase, the languages gain greater value in the community and beyond. In this way, local languages can begin to be viewed as a valuable resource and thrive alongside global languages.

Research has indicated that mother tongues do not enjoy much public goodwill. For instance, Mose (2015) has indicated that the public, including scholars in non-language/linguistics/learning disciplines are ignorant of the central position that mother tongues occupy in early child teaching/learning. This calls for a nationwide campaign towards attitude change. This could be achieved easily now that the country enjoys media broadcasts in mother tongues on more than 30 vernacular radio stations. These stations could be avenues for mother tongue popularisation efforts by the government. Such campaigns could also be sustained by NGOs, CBOs (community-based organisations), and other organised groups such as youth and women groups to target parents, teachers, and other stakeholders such as teachers' unions which do not support MTE programmes. These efforts could guarantee implementation of the policy as possibly intended by the drafters. Such efforts could also address the defiance that is underpinned by teachers' attitudes and feelings regarding the policy.

Second, influential pedagogical zones should be established as a way of providing teachers with platforms for experience sharing, cross-fertilisation of ideas and in-service training opportunities. National and county governments should partner in financing the in-service training of teachers. Moreover, teachers who are speakers of respective indigenous languages should be in-serviced in L1 instruction methodologies and be used to train other teachers in the county. This will enable a

cheap and continuous in-service training which will build up networks among multilingual teachers and the community. Apart from early years, the teaching and learning of indigenous languages should be strengthened at other levels of learning such as upper primary, secondary, middle-level colleges and universities in order to improve the status of such languages with a view to changing people's attitude to adopting them fully. On the same note, changes to the current primary school teachers' training curriculum should be made to prioritise L1 methodology in the use of mother tongues as LoI.

Furthermore, in order to improve the provision of quality education, that is, quality MTE, an adequate pool of teachers and reasonable pupil/teacher ratios are crucial. Equally important is ensuring that teachers are well trained, motivated and supported in order to implement MTE policy. Policies and strategies should be implemented to ensure that teaching is attractive to highly qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds with good MTE knowledge, who are ready to live and work in remote areas, and teach disadvantaged children. This calls for the recruitment of teachers from within local communities because locally recruited teachers are more likely to be socially and culturally akin to MTE in their respective schools. Also, salaries have a direct impact on the attractiveness and prestige of teaching and effective implementation of MTE. In several sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya, lower grade teachers do not earn enough to lift their families above the poverty line. When salaries are too low, teachers often take on additional work, including private tutoring and personal businesses at the expense of their regular teaching jobs, which reduces their commitment to fully implement MTE. Appropriate remuneration among lower grade teachers who are supposed to implement MTE should be embraced to attract and retain them by both the national and county governments.

To add to the training aspect, it seems that the subject of language-in-education policy is not discussed in TTCs. This further indicates that QASOs do not usually discuss the issue in their routine inspection of schools. Teachers' ignorance on such a basic provision should not be permissible in a situation where MTE is taken seriously. If teachers could understand the value of mother tongue usage from a learning point of view, it could assist them in making informed decisions around other sociolinguistic considerations, for example, in their decisions regarding which languages to use as mediums of instruction.

Linguistic mapping in Bungoma County and other regions of Kenya is vital in determining the languages spoken and degree of heterogeneity of homes and schools. This is in view of collecting and responding to ethnographic data, and moving policy formulation towards a bottom-up approach. A serious investment of time and resources, along with a commitment to collaboration between linguists, educators and members of the community, is required to prepare L1 teaching/learning materials with age-appropriate language that reflects cultural situations familiar to learners. This can be achieved through materials production workshops where materials will be

reproduced for schools using simple, readily available and cheap methods. Involving the community gives non-school members a sense of inclusion in the country's MTE reforms which would help them preserve their culture while still communicating concepts that meet national curriculum targets (Young 2009).

To address the challenge of multilingualism and its cost implications for MTE, the orthographies of core indigenous languages should be harmonised to make it possible, among other things, to produce learning materials for MTE at a reduced cost. Rubagumya (2009, 19) reports that Uganda has transcribed a language called Runyakitara, which standardises four related languages: Runyankore, Rukiga, Runyoro and Rutooro, which are also closely related to Kihaya and Kinyambo spoken in Tanzania, presenting the chance for cross-border language development. The same idea could be borrowed by Kenya where linguists can collaborate with policy makers to harmonise languages that have a grammatical affinity in order to save on the cost of teaching/learning materials. On the same note, besides funding for the production of the teaching/learning materials by the national government, county governments could be called upon to financially support the production of such materials. This will be based on the fact that basic education is one of the devolved public service sectors; therefore, such an expenditure would be within the county's constitutional mandate and obligations.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has supported the argument that teaching learners' mother tongue as a subject and using mother tongues as the LoI in lower grades of formal learning in Kenya is the best option for children's education and is a way to preserve the African cultural heritage. However, as already indicated in the introduction, the recommendation to use MTE in early years is not a new policy. An emphasis on using mother tongues as the LoI in early classes runs through all the major education commissions since the colonial era and is present in the Constitution of Kenya 2010. The Kenyan policy makers have produced a language policy entrenched in the Constitution, but the policy has not been supported by careful implementation strategies that take care of the following challenges: teacher training, the cost and availability of teaching/learning material, attempts to change the attitudes of parents, teachers and learners, teacher shortages and placement, multilingualism and a lack of recognition of strategies of communication. The article calls for the need to empower African languages through intellectualisation and a recognition of the different strategies of communication used for content delivery. Of equal importance is the establishment of influential pedagogic zones as a way of providing teachers with platforms for experience sharing, cross-fertilisation of ideas and in-service training opportunities, linguistic mapping, adequate teacher remuneration and provision of L1 teaching/learning materials. In a nutshell, this paper supports Wa Mberia's (2016) suggestion that in order to overcome the challenges that impede the implementation of MTE policy, a firm commitment, informed planning and adequate funding by both the

national and county governments, as well as proper coordination between the two levels of the devolved system of government, should be adopted.

## References

- Adegbija, E. 2008. "Language Policy and Planning in Nigeria." *Current Issues in Language Planning* 5 (3): 181–246.
- "The Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures." 2000. Declaration produced at the Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century Conference, Asmara, January 11–17. Accessed January 9, 2019. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/asmara-declaration-african-languages-and-literatures>.
- Baker, C. 2001. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Benson, C. 2004. "Do We Expect Too Much of Bilingual Teachers? Bilingual Teaching in Developing Countries." In *Bilingualism and Language Pedagogy*, edited by J. Brutt-Griffler and M. M. Varghese, 112–29. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853597565-007>.
- Bloch, C. S. 2002. "Concepts of Early Childhood Development (ECD), Literacy Learning and Materials Development in Multilingual Settings." PRAESA Occasional Papers No. 8. Cape Town: PRAESA.
- Blommaert, J. 2006 "Language Policy and National Identity." In *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, edited by T. Ricento, 238–54. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bunyi, G. 1999. "Rethinking the Place of African Indigenous Languages in African Education." *International Journal of Educational Development* 19 (4–5): 337–50.
- Bunyi, G. W. 2005. "Language Classroom Practices in Kenya." In *Decolonisation, Globalisation: Language-in-Education Policy and Practice*, edited by A. Lin and P. W. Martin, 131–52. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598265-010>.
- Brock-Utne, B. 2000. *Whose Education for All? The Recolonisation of the African Mind*. London: Falmer Press.
- Cummins, J. 2000. *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853596773>.
- DAE (Development of African Education, Association for). 1996. "A Synopsis of Research Findings on Language of Instruction and Their Policy Implications for Education in Africa." Working paper for the meeting of African ministers of education and the Seminar on Languages of Instruction, Accra, Ghana, August 26–30.

- Gachathi, P. 1976. *Report of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Government of Kenya. 2007. *Total Integrated Quality Education and Training. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Hornberger, N. H. 2006. "Frameworks and Models in Language Policy and Planning." In *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, edited by T. Ricento, 24–41. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Statistical Abstract*. Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2009. *Statistical Abstract*. Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.
- Kembo-Sure. 2002. "Language Planning and National Development in Kenya." In *Languages in Contact*, edited by I. Rissom, 27–35. Breitingen: Bayreuth African Studies.
- Khejeri, M. 2014. "Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Mother Tongue as a Languages of Instruction in Hamisi District, Kenya." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4 (1): 75–85.
- Koegh, D. K. 1999. *Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training, TIQET: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Mugenda, O. M., and A. G. Mugenda. 1999. *Research Methods. Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Nairobi: Acts Press.
- Muthwii, M. J. 2002. *Language Policy and Practices in Education in Kenya and Uganda*. Nairobi: Phoenix.
- Muthwii, M. J. 2007. "Language Planning and Policy in Kenya: Living with Unresolved Paradoxes." In *Language Planning and Policy: Issues in Language Planning and Literacy*, edited by A. J. Liddicoat, 46–62. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.  
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599781-005>.
- Mose, P. N. 2017. "Language-in-Education Policy in Kenya: Intention, Interpretation, Implementation." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 26 (3): 215–30.
- MOEST (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology). 2005. "Study of Teacher Staffing Norms: Draft Report." TSC: Nairobi.



- Nikiema, R. 2011. "A First-Language-First Multilingualism Mode to Meet the Quality Imperative in Formal Basic Education in Three 'Francophone' West African Countries." *International Review of Education* 57: 599–616. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-011-9253-5>.
- Njoroge, M. 2012. "The Inferior Stone in the Language Hearth: The Quest for Recognition of Indigenous African Languages in the Global Arena." In *Language in African Performing and Visual Arts*, edited by S. Sanneh, K. Wanjogu and O. Adesola, 20–8. Connecticut: Yale University.
- Phelps Stoke Commission. 1924. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*. Nairobi: Government Press.
- Prah, K. 2003. "Going Native: Language of Instruction in Education, Development and African Emancipation." In *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITSA)*, edited by B. Brock-Utne, Z. Desai and M. Qorro, 14–34. Dar es Salaam: E & D Publishers.
- Probyn, M. 2005. "Language and the Struggle to Learn: The Intersection of Classroom Realities, Language Policy, and Neo-Colonial and Globalisation in South African Schools." In *Decolonisation, Globalisation: Language-in-Education Policy and Practice*, edited by A. M. Y. Lin and P. W. Martin, 153–72. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598265-011>.
- Rubagumya, C. 2009. "The Politics of Language and Literacy in Africa: The Experience of Tanzania." In *Reading in Africa, Beyond the School*, edited by K. Parry, 11–23. Kampala: Fountain.
- Republic of Kenya. 2010. *Constitution of Kenya*. Nairobi: National Council for Law Reporting.
- Santiago, P. 2002. "Teacher Demand and Supply: Improving Teacher Quality and Addressing Teacher Shortages." OECD Education Working Paper No. 1. Paris: OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/232506301033>.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 2000. *Bilingualism or Not: The Education of Minorities*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Thomas, C. 2009. "A Positively Plurilingual World: Promoting Mother Tongue Education." *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, 82–91. Accessed July 5, 2017. [www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=662](http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=662).
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization). 1953. *The Use of Vernacular Language in Education*. UNESCO Monographs on Foundations of Education, 8. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization). 2005. *Challenges of Implementing Free Primary Education in Kenya: Assessment Report*. Nairobi: UNESCO. Accessed June 15, 2010. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000151654>.

- UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization). 2014. "Report on Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Kenya." Nairobi: UNESCO.
- Uwezo. 2015. *Are Our Children Learning? The State of Education in Kenya in 2015 and Beyond*. Nairobi: Twaweza East Africa.
- Wa Mberia, K. 2016. "Mother Tongues as Media of Instruction: The Case of Kenya." *The University of Nairobi Journal of Language and Linguistics* 5: 46–59. Accessed January 9, 2019.  
[http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/96015/Kithaka\\_Mother%20tongues%20as%20media%20of%20instruction.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/96015/Kithaka_Mother%20tongues%20as%20media%20of%20instruction.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).
- Waruingi, G. 2009. "Book Donation in Africa: What Are East Africans Reading?" In *Reading in Africa, Beyond the School*, edited by K. Parry, 29–34. Kampala: Fountain.
- World Bank. 2005. *Expanding Opportunities and Building Competencies for Young People: A New Agenda for Secondary Education*. Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
- Young, C. 2009. "Good Practices in Mother Tongue-First Multilingual Education." In *Mother Tongue as Bridge Language of Instruction: Policies and Experiences in Southeast Asia*, edited by K. Kosonen and C. Young, 120–35. Bangkok: The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).