



INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE ON MASTERY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN RWANDA

Ndamage John, Cyubahiro Augustin and Prof. Oniye Abdulrazaq,

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of mother tongue on mastery of English language among lower primary school pupils in Rwanda. A case study of Nyamata Sector-Bugesera District. The study used a descriptive survey design which used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect the data. The participants included school head teachers and lower primary teachers. The research questions of the study wanted to know how is mother tongue used in teaching-learning process in lower primary school pupils in Rwanda. The research found out that mother tongue is the language used mostly at home and at school. About the level of performance of pupils in English subject, the study found out that the level of performance in English is too low as shown by table no 4. The research wanted also to know to what extent mother tongue influence the performance of pupils in English. Here, according to result obtained, the study found out that use of mother tongue had a negative influence on performance of English in lower primary pupils.

Key words: *Mother Tongue, performance, English, Pupils, lower Primary school.*

Background of the Study

In Rwandan education system, Mother Tongue (M T) “Kinyarwanda” is used as language of instruction from nursery section up to primary three. At this level, English is taught as a subject. From primary four up to primary six, the language of instruction is English, and Kinyarwanda language is taught as a subject, Cabinet decision (2010). The relationship between those two languages should be clearly established and not ignored or taken low. In the process of teaching a foreign language, the teacher’s use of mother tongue can influence the learner’s acquisition of the target language and this lead to it performance.

In this thesis the researcher discuss the influence of mother tongue on these languages especially English language as second language and finds out to what extent the mother tongue can influence it performance (Ball, J. 2010).

In May 1998, the government began to promote multilingualism in the Rwandan education system. At this point, the education system was operating as smoothly as it had before because English was introduced and taught as one subject among several others. At that time one teacher of English was enough to serve the whole school.

After the 1994 genocide, many Rwandans returned from where they had lived in exile for more than 30 years. Some of them came from Anglophone countries that why, English language could appear in official language. So the new policy mandated the addition of English to Kinyarwanda and French as official languages of Rwanda, (LeClerc, n.d.; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010).

In school year of 2008-2009, the government made a shift in the education system. At a cabinet meeting held on October 28, the decision was made that English would replace French as the language of instruction (LoI) at all levels of education in Rwandan schools and French would be taught as a subject (Gahigi, 2008). The reason of changing the official school language from French to English, it is because English is used more internationally, such as by the East African Community (EAC) and regional intergovernmental organizations of which Rwanda is a member.

However, even thus the language shift was very practical and came when it was needed for various reasons; its implementation posed very challenging problems for a country that was originally Francophone. In addition, implementation of this language shift has

been obviously more difficult in rural schools than in urban ones because of some issues that particularly affect rural schools (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011). That might be the reason why the Government of Rwanda decided to go back to Kinyarwanda as a medium of instruction (MOI) in lower primary (LP) by 2010 (MINEDUC, 2010). This decision aligned with the recommendations of UNESCO on the use of vernacular languages in education (UNESCO, 1953) which emphasize the importance of mother tongue in basic literacy and in learning other subjects efficiently.

As it has been shown by various scholars, Mother tongue instruction is the best way for children to learn as it bridges the gap between home language and language of instruction. It's used at home, at school, where most of materials are written and manipulated in mother tongue, where pupils and teachers communicate using mother tongue, even on the streets with friends.

There are no television programs, no street signs, no newspapers, and no conversations in any foreign language outside the classroom in rural areas. Therefore, at school, in order to help the pupils in their future life, they are requested to learn as subjects, different foreign languages including French and English, as English is their instructional language later. So the researcher wanted to know the influence of M T on those foreign languages, especially English language.

Objective of the study

1. To find out the level of performance of pupils in English subject, in lower primary public schools of Nyamata Sector

Research Question

1. How is the level of performance of pupils in English subject in primary public schools of Nyamata Sector?

Methodology

Research methodology is the way researcher proceeds to facilitate the research process.

The researcher found out, the description of the study in term of the area of study, research design, population study and sampling techniques, data collection and analysis.

The researcher used largely quantitative research approach as well as qualitative research approach. A survey of all nine primary schools in Nyamata sector was used to study how and the extent to which the uses of mother tongue influences performance of English.

Survey research could be descriptive, exploratory or involve advanced statistical analysis.

Besides, interview has been used. Interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation, (Mertens, 1998).

In this research the target populations is made of sixty six teachers (66) and nine (9) Head teachers from all these nine primary public schools located in Nyamata Sector, Bugesera District. The researcher intends to use the entire population.

Table 1.The school name, teachers’ status and headteachers

School name	Teachers			Headteachers		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Femele	Total
G.S Nyamata catholic	0	9	9	1	0	
G.S Nyamata EPR	0	4	4	1	0	
G.S Maranyundo	0	8	8	0	1	
G.S Murama	4	12	16	1	0	
E.P. Kanazi	4	2	8	1	0	
E.P Gitwe	1	6	7	0	1	
E.P Kayenzi	1	5	6	0	1	
E.P Nyiramatuntu	2	5	7	1	0	
E.P Karambi	3	0	3	0	1	
TOTAL	15	51	66	5	4	9

Table 1. Distribution of respondents

Source: Author’s compilation from Nyamata sector (2021)

The table 1 indicate that within the 9 primary public schools located in Nyamata Sector, there is a total number of 66 lower primary teachers including 15 males and 51 femeles, with 9 headteachers including 5 males and 4 femels.

The questionnaire contains 2 sections. Section A is talking about the perception of teachers on use of mother tongue; section B has items on perception of teachers on the performance of English.

Interview is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation, Mertens (1998). Interviews are useful when you want detailed information about a person’s thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in depth. In this study the interview has been given to all Head teachers of these nine (9) primary schools.

Results

This branch recognized the findings got from the analysis of questionnaire concerning the influence mother tongue on the performance of lower primary learners in the English subject. Their perceptions were represented in the form of mean and standard deviation within the tables.

Perception of trachers about use of mother tongue as home language

Here, the teachers provide their opinions about the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction and how it affects the performance of English as a subject in lower public primary schools.

Table 2. *Perception of teachers on use of mother tongue as home language*

Assertions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
At home children perform all activities in mother tongue.	3.68	0.469	Strongly agree
Lower primary parents prefer talking to their children using mother tongue at home.	3.61	0.492	Strongly agree
By using Mother Tongue, parents are involved in their children's teaching-learning process.	3.55	0.505	Strongly agree
As children join lower primary they are fluent in mother tongue.	3.30	0.463	Agree
Overall mean	3.53	0.482	Strongly agree

Source: Primary data, July 2017

Table 2 shows all assertions and different perceptions of teachers about the use of mother tongue as home language. The perceptions of teachers on the first assertion shows the perception of teachers with the mean of 3.68, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.469.

The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that at home children perform all activities in mother tongue. For the second assertion, the perception of teachers has the mean of 3.61, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.492. It indicated that the mean is strongly agree indicating that the lower primary parents prefer talking to their children using mother tongue. The third assertion shows the perception of teachers with the mean of 3.55, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.505. The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that by using mother tongue, parents are involved in their children's teaching-learning process.

The fourth assertion is shown by the mean of 3.30, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.463. Here, the mean is interpreted as agree, indicating that when children join lower primary, they are fluent in mother tongue.

The overall mean is 3.53, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.482. The mean overall mean is interpreted as strongly agree meaning that, mother tongue is mostly used at home. The researcher concludes by saying that the Kinyarwanda as mother tongue is the language more utilized at home by parents and their children, English is not known or remembered.

Perceptions of teachers about mother tongue as a medium of instruction

The teachers provided their perceptions about mother tongue as a medium of instruction on the performance of pupils in English as a subject taught in classes of lower primary pupils.

Table 3. *Perception of teachers on use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction*

Assertions	Mean	SD	Interpret.
Mother tongue is emphasized in lower primary school as a medium of instructions.	3.62	0.489	Strongly agree
Learners feel confident / comfortable and motivated when learning in mother tongue.	3.56	0.500	Strongly agree
Teaching materials are written and manipulated in mother tongue.	3.50	0.588	Strongly agree
It is advisable to teach all subjects in mother tongue in lower primary rather than teaching in English.	3.50	0.504	Strongly agree
Children prefer using mother tongue when playing and socializing.	3.47	0.503	Agree
Most of lessons are prepared and given in Mother tongue.	3.45	0.502	Agree
Teachers are motivated to teach in lower primary using mother tongue.	3.39	0.579	Agree
Lower primary parents prefer mother tongue to be used as a language of instruction.	3.36	0.486	Agree
Teaching and learning is best done in lower primary using mother tongue.	3.21	0.731	Agree
Teaching and learning through mother tongue in lower primary enhances learner's academic achievement.	3.21	0.713	Agree
	3.42	0.488	Agree
Overall mean			

Source: Primary data, July 2017

Table 3 indicates the perceptions of teachers about mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The first assertion has the mean of 3.62, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.489. The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that the mother tongue is

emphasized in lower primary school as a medium of instructions. The second perceptions of teachers has the mean of 3.56, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.500. The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that learners feel confident / comfortable and motivated when learning in mother tongue. The perceptions of teachers on the third assertion have the mean of 3.50, homogeneous standard of 0.588. The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that teaching materials are written and manipulated in mother tongue.

The perceptions of teachers on the fourth assertion have the mean of 3.50, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.504. The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that it is advisable to teach all subjects in mother tongue in lower primary rather than teaching in English.

The fifth assertion also has the mean of 3.47 and homogeneity standard deviation of 0.503. The mean is interpreted as agree indicating that children prefer using mother tongue when playing and socializing. The sixth assertion has the mean of 3.45, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.502. Here, the mean is also interpreted as agree indicating that the most of lessons are prepared and given in mother tongue.

The seventh assertion have the mean of 3.39, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.579. The mean is interpreted as agree indicating that teachers are motivated to teach in lower primary using mother tongue. The eighth assertion has the mean of 3.36, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.486. The mean is interpreted as agree, indicating that lower primary parents prefer mother tongue to be used as a language of instruction.

The perceptions of teachers on the ninth assertion have the mean of 3.21, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.731. The mean is interpreted as agree indicating that teaching and learning is best done in lower primary using mother tongue.

The perceptions of teachers on the tenth assertion have the mean of 3.21, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.713. The mean is interpreted as agree indicating that teaching and learning through mother tongue in lower primary enhances learner's academic achievement. The overall mean is 3.42, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.488. The researcher concludes by saying that the use of Kinyarwanda as a medium of instruction can influence the level of performance of English for pupils as the use of English is limited.

This point was supported by Cummins (2000), where he said that by using Mother Tongue children can be assessed easily because they can express themselves easily to tell what they have acquired and not acquired. L1 strengthens child's affective domain, which involves confidence, self-esteem and identity which helps to increase motivation and initiative as well as creativity to the child.

Concerning the interview with the school head teachers about the language that the learners use as a medium of instruction, they have answered that Kinyarwanda is the language of medium of instruction. They also asserted that Kinyarwanda used as a medium of instruction is far dominating English at school which affect English performance as a subject. A language cannot be performed without practicing it.

Perceptions of teachers about challenges of mother tongue in education

As the teachers provide the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, here the teachers present the challenges which hinder the performance of English subject.

Table 42. *Perception of teachers about challenges of mother tongue in education*

Assertions	Mean	SD	Interpret.
Lack of appropriate vocabularies.	3.59	0.526	Strongly agree
Lower primary school teachers may not have solid training in mother tongue.	3.50	0.504	Strongly agree
The use of mother tongue hinders young children from exposure to the rest of the world.	3.48	0.533	Agree
Textbooks are not distributed equally to all the learners.	3.48	0.504	Agree
Mother tongue is not native language for some learners.	3.38	0.548	Agree
Mother tongue may not be perceived as important for formal education in Rwanda.	3.26	0.664	Agree
Instructional materials are not readily available in the majority of mother tongue.	3.20	0.684	Agree
Overall mean	3.41	0.566	Agree

Source: Primary data, July 2017

Table 4 shows all assertions and different perceptions of teachers about challenges of using mother tongue in education. The perceptions of teachers on the first assertion have mean of 3.59, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.526. The mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that the pupils don't have enough vocabularies in Kinyarwanda language. The perceptions of teachers on the second assertion have the strong mean of

3.50, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.504. Here, the mean is interpreted as strongly agree indicating that the lower primary school teachers may not have solid training in mother tongue.

The perceptions of teachers on the third assertion have the mean of 3.48 and homogeneity standard deviation of 0.533. The mean is interpreted as agree indicating that the use of mother tongue hinders young children from exposure to the rest of the world. The perceptions of teachers on the fifth assertion have the mean of 3.38, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.548. Here, the mean is interpreted as agree indicating that mother tongue is not native language for some learners as some learners are refugees from Burundi and others from Tanzania.

The sixth assertion shows the perception of teachers with the strong mean of 3.26, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.664. The mean is interpreted as agree indicating that the mother tongue may not be perceived as important for formal education in Rwanda. The perceptions of teachers on the seventh assertion have the strong mean of 3.20, homogeneity standard deviation of 0.684. Here, the mean is interpreted as agree indicating that instructional materials are not readily available in the majority of mother tongue.

The overall mean is 3.41, homogeneous standard deviation of 0.566. The researcher concludes by saying that teachers agree that all mentioned challenges affect negatively the mastery of mother tongue which affect the use of English and it's performance.

The point mentioned above was supported by Dutcher (2004), asserted that the teachers need training in using first language in the classroom and that the materials have to be

appropriate, available and interesting to the pupils as well used. If they are not being used learning is not progressive.

Most teachers need training in methodology so that they can exploit the advantages of teaching in the language that children can understand. Having limited background in using mother tongue as a medium of instruction can hinder in becoming an effective teacher. Those challenges do not allow learners to master their mother tongue and this may lead to the low performance of Kinyarwanda.

Ntakirutimana, (2012) cited by Niyomugabo (2015) also supported this: Besides the inefficient methods of teaching and learning Kinyarwanda, there are numerous challenges that hinder its full success. Some of them are inadequate and insufficient terminologies. Even many efforts have been so far made in terminology development, for the time being all areas have not been covered mainly in science and technology.

This lack of terminology in Kinyarwanda needs to be adequately addressed by all stakeholders in the Rwandan education system. Another challenge is the lack of reading materials in Kinyarwanda as well as pedagogical teaching and learning aids. Moreover there is lack of qualified teaching staff as well as motivated students to learn Kinyarwanda at all levels of education.

Concerning the interview with the school head teachers about the challenges brought by using mother tongue on the pupils' performance in English as a subject, they have answered that the biggest challenges are those with the background of families of the pupils, the training on English teaching methodology for teachers of lower classes and finally the initiative of teachers and pupils to use English, they often use mother tongue. So how to perform English without practice it? They added that teachers do not like to

use English while communicating and yet that should be a way of helping children to copy some vocabularies.

Headteachers said that they agree with mother tongue as medium of instruction but the problem is that even teachers do not value the use of English. One of head teacher said *“Mother tongue is really very important for young pupils and remember that at their age they are able to learn even more than two languages at the same time, so, once teachers own the English, value it and change the mind of our children which is already corrupted that they do not know English, surely they will perform it very well. So it’s up to us not to MINEDUC to do that.*

Conclusion

The entire study has two variables which are the use of mother tongue and the performance of English.

Considering the first variable which is *use of mother tongue*, we have found the following results: for the mean of perception; teachers agree that Mother tongue is used as home language and as language of instruction and that to use Kinyarwanda in term of instructional in lower primary is better.

For the second variable, performance of English: we have found the following results: for the mean of perception, teachers disagree that learners perform well in reading, writing and communicating in English.

According to the findings, the use of Kinyarwanda as a medium of instruction in lower primary classes in Nyamata Sector affect negatively the performance of English as a subject where all subjects are given in mother tongue and finally English also as a subject is taught most of time using Kinyarwanda in order to help the pupils to understand more.

This was supported by Emmanuel (2013) in his research on challenges faced by rural science teachers, identified challenges including a very low English language proficiency that led secondary teachers to consistently use their mother tongue rather than English in class. This poor level of achievement in English subject area may be due to this poor foundation in English language at the primary school level.

References

- Adedeji, S. O., & Olaniyan, O. (2011). *Improving the conditions of teachers and teaching in rural schools across African countries*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Asher, C. (1986). *Literacy Teaching and learning language skills*. Oxford: Oxford Publishing Services.
- Aunola et al. (2004). "Development Dynamics of Math's Performance from Pre - School to Grade 2". *Journal of educational psychology*, 96,699-713.
- Baker, C. A. (2001). *Parents and Teachers Guide to Bilingualism* (2nd Edition). Clevedon: England Multilingual Matters.
- Ball, J. (2010). *Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years*, UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001869/186961e.pdf>.
- Berks, L.E. (1994). *Child Development* (3rd Edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Blake, D. and Hanley, V. (1995) *Dictionary of Educational Terms*, Aldershot, Arena
- Burt, M. (1974). *Natural sequences in child language acquisition*. Language Learning.
- Cohen, L. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th Ed.). New York: RoutledgeFalme.
- Corder, S. (1981). *Error analysis and interlanguage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cummins, J. (1991). *Language Power and Pedagogy*. Bilingual Children in the Cross Fire. Clevedon: England Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (1991). *Interdependence of first-and second-language proficiency in bilingual Children. Language processing in bilingual children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummins, J, (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy*. Bilingual children in the crossfire. Clevedon. England: Multilingual Matters.

- Cyprien Tabaro. (2013). Code-switching in Rwanda: *A Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol 13.
- David, M., & Sutton, C. (2004). *Social research: The basics*. London
- Dekker, D. et al. (2008). *Initial results of the Lubuagan project*. Paper presented to the First MLE Conference on February 18 – 20, 2001 at Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao.
- Dulay, H. & Burt, M. (1974). *Natural sequences in child language acquisition*. *Language Learning*, 24.
- Dutcher, N. (2001). *Expanding educational opportunity in linguistically diverse societies*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Ellis, R. (2001). *Form-focused instruction and second language learning*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Emmanuel Sibomana (2014). *Emotional Quality Predicting Early Reading Achievement*. University of Rwanda – College of Education.
- Faisal Abdullah Asuiadi, (2015). *Study of Factors Affecting Parental Choice of Private and Public School in Riyadh City, Saudi Arabia*
- Gahigi, M. (2008). Rwanda: *English language teaching kicks off*, Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200812010940.html>
- Gazzaniger, M. (1992). *Natures Mind*. New York: Basic books Ltd,.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (2004). *How to Teach Writing*. Pearson Education Limited. ISBN 0582 77998 7.
- Hill, N.E. (2001). Parents and Academic Socialization as they relate to School Readiness. *Journal of Education Psychology*.
- Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D. (1995). *Research and Teacher, a qualitative introduction to school-based research*. London: Routledge
- Hişmanoğlu, M. (2005). Teaching English through literature. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*.
- The IAFOR Journal of (2014). *Language Learning Volume I - Issue I - Winter*
- Kavaliauskiene, G. (2009). *Role of mother-tongue in learning English for specific purposes*. *ESP World*, Issue 1 (22).

- LeClerc, J. (n.d.). Rwanda: *L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde*. Retrieved April 3, 2010, from <http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/afrique/rwanda.ht>
- Leseman & De Jong (1998). *Home Literacy Opportunity Instruction and Socia*.
- Malone, D. (2008). *Research and evaluation in mother tongue based multilingual education programs in ethnolinguistic minority communities*. Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization, and Multilingual Education in Ethnolinguistic Communities, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Lott, D. (1983). *Analyzing and counteracting interference errors*. *Education Language Testing Journal*, 37(3), 256- 261.
- Malone, S. & Paraide, P. (2011). *Mother tongue-based bilingual education in Papua New Guinea*. *International Review of Education*, 57, 705-720. doi: 10.1007/s11159-011- 9256-2.
- McLaughlin, B. (1990). *Second language acquisition in childhood*. New Jersey: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- McMillan, J. H. (1996). *Educational Research Fundamentals for the Consumer*. Second Edition. Virginia Commonwealth University, HarperCollins College Publishers,.
- Mertens, D. (1998). *Research methods in education and psychology*. London: Sage.
- Milambiling, J. (2011) *Bringing one language to another: Multilingualism as a resource in the language classroom*.
- MINEDUC. (2010b, December 28). *Teachers to be punished for skipping English training*. Retrieved July 31, 2011, from <http://www.mineduc.rw.gov>.