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## INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY ON TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HOMA-BAY SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the influence of language policy on teaching and learning of English in selected primary schools in Homa-bay Sub-County Kenya. A speaker tends to choose language fairly, quickly and automatically without being aware of the determiners of language choice. There is a great impact on the use of the first language in teaching and learning of English and it is a common practice that most teachers of English use to convey a complete notion or an idea while teaching or communicating. The study was conducted in the 93 sampled primary schools. Data was collected through the observation schedule, interview schedule and the questionnaire. The study was guided by Stephen Krashen's Model of second language acquisition. This study adopted a descriptive design. Data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results revealed that most schools have language policy, however, there functionality is indeterminate. Formulation and implementation of school language policy is mainly undertaken by language teachers however, school administration plays key rule during its implementation. School language policy moderately influenced teaching and learning of English. The study recommends that the school administration should come up flexible and functional school language policy where all teachers are tasked with its implementation. The ministry of education should consider upgrading seminars and workshops to continuous Teacher Development Programmes as they go a long way to address the challenges the teachers face during implementation of the national and language policies.

### KEY WORDS

Instruction, first language, mother tongue, language, policy.



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## Background to the Study

It is the duty of every English instructor, regardless of the classroom setting, to provide their pupils with the very best learning experience possible. Traditional methods of instruction have been around too long to just disappear. However, it should be complemented by other methods, such as code swapping, teaching via chorus, and the use of singing games. Despite Kiswahili's enormous appeal, it is not frequently used, especially in rural regions where mother tongue flourishes; the present socio-linguistic situation in the nation reveals that English has a hegemonic advantage. This is because English is the dominant language in the country. Mother language has a strong foothold in Kenyan culture since it is utilized for informal communication. Sheng, a code that originated among the urban young and has since swept throughout the nation like wildfire, also gives mother tongue a strong footing in Kenyan society. The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact that using first language has on the English language instruction and learning process in a selection of public primary schools.

Pupils who have a limited command of the English language often struggle academically. This is a challenge they encounter. It has been established by academics that the poor performance of English language pupils is not just attributable to a lack of linguistic ability but is also caused by the approach that is used in the classroom to teach the language. There have been several studies that investigate the viewpoints of pupils as well as the reasons they use their native language while simultaneously studying English.

A thematic and a situational as well as a structural approach are used in the Primary English curriculum. The course material covers a wide variety of topics that are relevant to real-world situations. Greetings, shopping, the climate, modes of transportation, recreational activities, professional fields, technological advancements, and technology are all examples of such topics (McDonough & Shaw, 2012).

Aspects of life at home, on the farm, at the workplace, at the bus terminal, in the doctor's office, and in the hospital are all represented on the course outline. Each lesson plan specifies what context or topic the words and phrases inside are meant to be taught in. Each unit includes its goals, vocabulary, language skills, and instructional materials. The grammar concepts and structures to be covered in each lesson plan for Grades 4 through 8 are included in the unit's syllabus, according to Gee and Gee (2007).

The study is justified on the basis that Homa-bay County consists of a homogeneous population where the first language is generally Dholuo. It, therefore, follows that most of the early teaching and learning of the learners in both pre-school and primary school is done by use of mother tongue "Dholuo" which is the dominant language of the catchment areas of most schools in the sub-county. This, therefore, justified the current study to be undertaken.

## Statement of the Problem

The manner in which instruction is delivered is one of the factors that has a significant impact on pupils' overall performance (KNEC, 2014). The instruction of pupils in English is a significant focus area for the Kenyan educational system. The presence of skills and talents in a classroom may contribute to the development of favorable circumstances for learning. In addition to its role as a testable topic, English is also used in the classroom as a medium of education (Barasa, 2005). According to the 2014 KNEC Report, English pupils do poorly on KCPE exams as compared to Kiswahili pupils. Over the years, the disima performance has persisted in both the county as a whole

and the Homa-bay sub-county in Homa-bay County. Concerned parties want to know what went wrong to bring about such dismal results. According to Eisemon et al. (1989), many Standard 6 pupils struggled to understand their instructors' directions because of the teachers' lack of command of the scientific curriculum and the English language (Muthwii, 2002). This highlights the importance of investigating how the English language is taught and learned. It has been demonstrated by Kabbell (2013) that both English and Kiswahili are utilized by English instructors during lessons in the higher primary grades. With less opportunities to utilize it outside of school, pupils are choosing to focus on studying their native languages or Kiswahili instead of English. With the aim of informing language planners and curriculum creators, this research evaluates the extent to which first languages are used in English language classrooms to teach and learn English.

## Literature Review

The KNEC's annual results have consistently validated pupils' dismal showings in the KCPE English language section. Stakeholders' main worry is the falling quality of written English, which is highlighted in the statement of the issue. When analyzing the MoI in a number of African countries, Rubagumya (1994:p.1) notes that the LoI "acts to different degrees as a barrier to effective learning." Eisemon et al. (1989) note that many Standard 6 pupils had trouble following directions in English because of teachers' imprecise and nonsensical speech, which they attribute to their lack of mastery of the scientific topic and proficiency in the English language (Muthwii, 2002). When the MoI is a European language, some educators recognize that this might be a significant barrier to their pupils' learning and development (NCCRD, 2000; Probyn, 2001). Only 9.7 percent of Nigerian high school graduates met the English proficiency requirement for admission to four-year institutions, while 64.3 percent did not (Bamgbose, 2004). The results of a pedagogical experiment conducted by the Applied Linguistics Institute of the University of Cocody in late 1990s Côte d'Ivoire revealed that when the LoI is familiar to pupils, communication improves not only with teachers (Bergmann et al., 2002) and it is easier for teachers and learners to negotiate meaning in an effective way (Baker, 2001), but also with parents and between teachers and parents, allowing for greater participation from both group.

Kenya's linguistic landscape includes both indigenous tongues and recognized state languages. Africans make up 99.1% of Kenya's population, with Asians making up 0.4%, Europeans making up 0.2%, Arabs making up 0.2%, and other people making up 0.1% (Kenya Statistical Abstract 1995:19). Kenya is home to over forty unique native languages. Bantu, Nilotes, and Cushitic are the three linguistic groups into which these words fall (Abdulaziz, 1982). In addition, English and Kiswahili are recognized as legal languages. Despite Kiswahili's official status as the national language, English is the LOI at all educational levels. According to research (Abdulaziz, 1982). In 1985, Kiswahili was transformed into an obligatory examinable topic in elementary schools, secondary schools, and institutions for the training of teachers. This served to further elevate the prominence of the language. Successful graduates of the Kenyan education system are bilingual in English and Kiswahili, the national languages. Both Kiswahili and English are included. Most speakers also have a working knowledge of English or Kiswahili, in addition to one of the local tongues.

Despite the fact that only around a quarter of Kenyans can speak English, it is used as the primary official language and the medium of instruction across the nation. As opposed to Kiswahili, another official language of Kenya (Ogechi 2002) The question of whether or not Kenya has a clear language policy has been hotly debated since the 1970s. The lack of written documentation that might indicate the existence of an official policy was the primary factor in the discussion. However, there are language educators and policymakers who contend that the success of a country's language policy may be inferred from the extent to which its official languages are spoken. Because of this, it is safe to

claim that Kenya has a policy that protects the linguistic rights of various minority groups as well as encourages the use of several languages. In this particular instance, Kenya has categorized language usage as shown below;

- a) Official language-English
- b) National language-Kiswahili
- c) Mother tongue-Community languages.

In accordance with Kenya's policy on languages, each of these languages has been given a place in public communication (Mutahi, 2006). When it comes to radio broadcasts, the official communication always makes room for the government policy. Mutahi also cites additional areas in which language policy is now being implemented. These include the legislature, public schools, and public offices. Most language educators disagree with you on this point of view. Substantial data point to a discordance between what is expected of English teachers in Kenya and what they actually get in terms of training and support (Barasa, 2005). Example: Kenya's catchment area policy is vague at best. During implementation, it might be interpreted in several ways (Okombo, 1996). Bamgbose (1991 P.113) noted that the same haziness may be seen in Kenya's stance on the country's plan to designate Kiswahili its official language.

It is the duty of every English instructor, regardless of the classroom setting, to provide their pupils the very best learning experience possible. Traditional methods of instruction have been around too long to just disappear. However, it should be complemented by other methods, such as code swapping, teaching via chorus, and the use of singing games. Despite Kiswahili's enormous appeal, it is not frequently used, especially in rural regions where mother tongue flourishes; the present socio-linguistic situation in the nation reveals that English has a hegemonic advantage. This is because English is the dominant language in the country. Mother language has a strong foothold in Kenyan culture since it is utilized for informal communication. Sheng, a code that originated among the urban young and has since swept throughout the nation like wildfire, also gives mother tongue a strong footing in Kenyan society.

The proposed actions for carrying out the choice may be used as a yardstick to evaluate how open-ended it is. Among them was the mandate that all interactions between Kenyans of a certain height and other Kenyans must be conducted in Swahili (impossible in practice because of the complexity of the criteria involved in determining which language to use in each given interaction) that all official activity related to the government would be performed in Kiswahili, and that the language would be taught in schools with a higher priority than English would be. There is no explanation of the steps that need to be taken to fulfill these prescriptions, and the reality on the ground is in direct opposition to the recommendations.

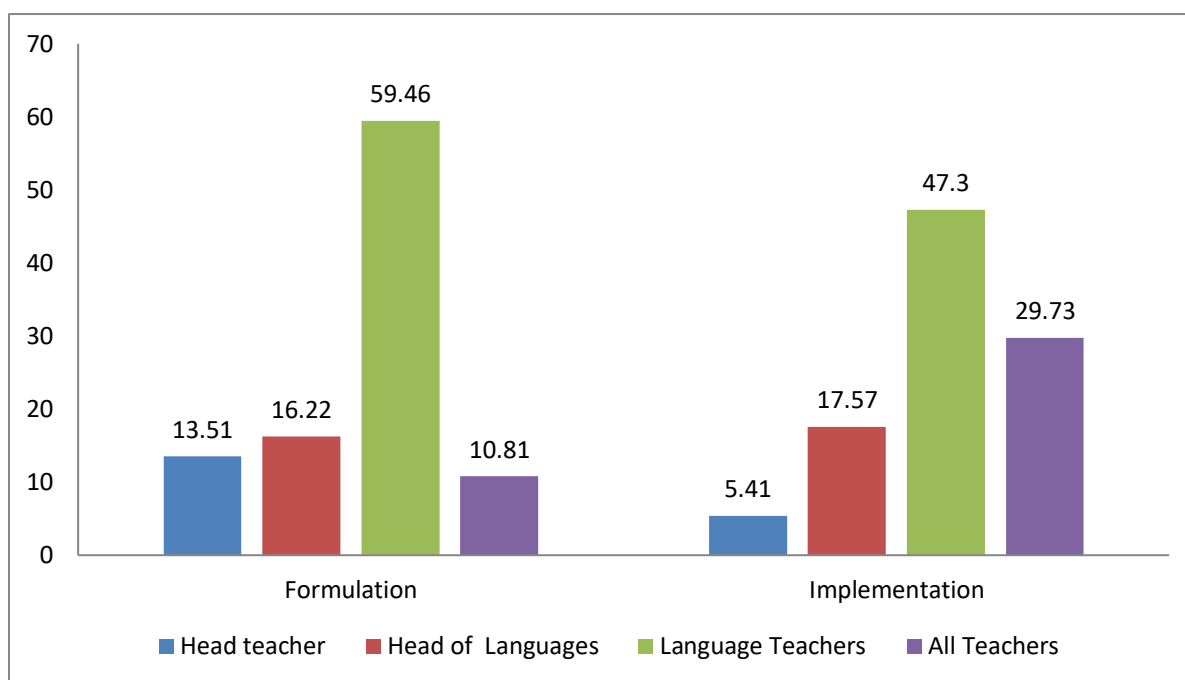
A language policy has to be preceded and backed by active social-marketing initiatives in order for it to get support and adoption from all of the relevant stakeholders (Bamgbose, 1991; Rubagumya, 1996). A subsection of the Bill of Rights in Kenya's newly enacted constitution (Republic of Kenya, 2010) deals specifically with linguistic and cultural concerns. This clause, however, received almost little discussion throughout the referendum campaigns. Successful implementation of a language policy relies heavily on the establishment of an atmosphere favorable to that end. The new charter does not address linguistic diversity in the classroom.

## Methodology

The population of the study consisted of pupils and teachers of English in public primary schools, and the research was carried out in Homa-bay Sub County, which is located within Homabay County. The study involved all the 93 heads of English department in the selected schools in Homa-bay sub-County. Census sampling technique was used in the selection.

## Results

All sampled respondents affirmed that their schools have language policy which as an influence on teaching and learning English. Further, the study sought to find out who is responsible for formulation and implementation of school language policy. The results are as shown in Figure 1.0



**Figure 1:** Formulation and Implementation of School Language Policy

As indicated in Figure 1, majority of the respondents indicated that school language policy should be formulated by languages teachers as shown by 59.5% while 16.2% of the respondents indicated that head of languages should formulate the policy, 13.5% School head teacher should formulate and 10.8% indicated all teachers in the school should participate in the formulation of school language policy.

Further, as indicated in Figure 1, majority of the respondents indicated that school language policy should be implemented by languages teachers as shown by 47.3% while 29.7% of the respondents indicated that all teachers in the school have a role to play in regards to implementation of school language policy. In addition, 17.6% of the respondents indicated that head of language should implement and 5.4% indicated that head teachers should implement school language policy.

The study noted that all the language teachers should have the authority to make its school language policy. Therefore, their beliefs regarding school language policy making should be dealt with at the micro-level. Justifications that were provided were, for example, because the department knows which policies best suit it; it is an internal issue; the department has experts in the field of English language unlike other councils who are not likely to be specializing in English; the department can

ensure the success of school language policy since members of staff will agree on them, and the department can develop them, practice and alter them if necessary, and then generalize them at national level. With regard to these responses, it does indeed seem logical to give English departments the authority to make their own school language policy, since they have the appropriate skills and expertise to design what will be beneficial to, and applicable in, a working environment.

### *School Language Policies*

To ensure pupils spoke English in school, head teachers reported that schools had their own language policies. In some of the schools, it was compulsory for learners to speak English from Monday to Thursday, and Kiswahili on Fridays. In other schools, Kiswahili speaking was allowed for two days and for the rest of the week learners were expected to speak English.

Learners were encouraged to communicate in English in school as English was the medium of instruction and also the language of examinations. The school administration said they set an example for learners by making announcements in English at morning assembly and using English during meetings and in the classrooms to teach. To promote the standards of English, pupils who excelled in English would be awarded gifts and prizes.

To discourage speaking vernacular languages, schools used discs and monitors to catch those who broke the rule. Sometimes those found speaking Mother Tongue would be rebuked by teachers or issued with English storybooks to read.

Despite these efforts to promote English, teachers reported that English was facing stiff competition from Kiswahili, which was also the national language and a compulsory subject at primary and secondary school levels. Kiswahili was also an official language and continues to gain prominence internationally.

### *How important is it for School Language Policy to Exist in School?*

The respondents were asked to indicate how important it is for school language policy to Exist in the school. The results are as shown in Table 1

**Table 1: Importance of School Language Policy that Exist in School**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Create Suitable Working Environment	55	74.3
Create a suitable learning environment for Pupils	52	70.3
Provide unified, easy to follow regulations on when to use English in different department encounters that will ensure consistency	28	37.8
Encourage members of staff to use English more often	22	29.7
Allow staff members to maintain their linguistic competence	9	12.2
Allow pupils to maintain their linguistic competence	74	100.0

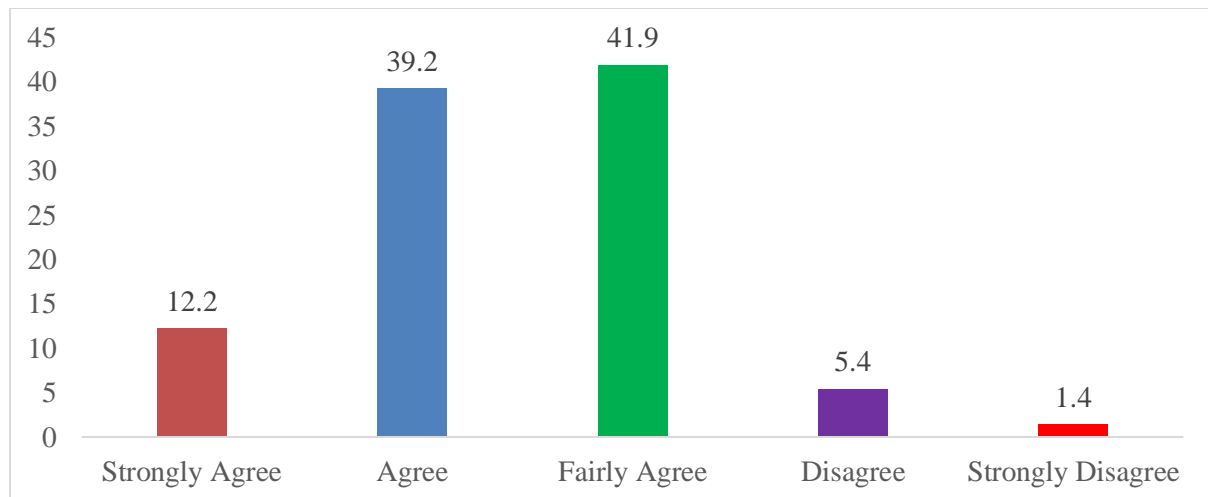
**Source:** Field Data (2023)

All the respondents reported that the existence of School language policy is important in primary schools in Homa Bay County. Reasons for their views varied: for example, School language policy



can: create a suitable working environment (74.3%); create a suitable learning environment for pupils (70.3%); allow staff members to maintain their linguistic competence (12.2%); provide unified, easy to follow regulations on when to use English in different department encounters that will ensure consistency (37.8); encourage members of staff to use English more often (29.7%) and most importantly allow pupils to maintain their linguistic competence.

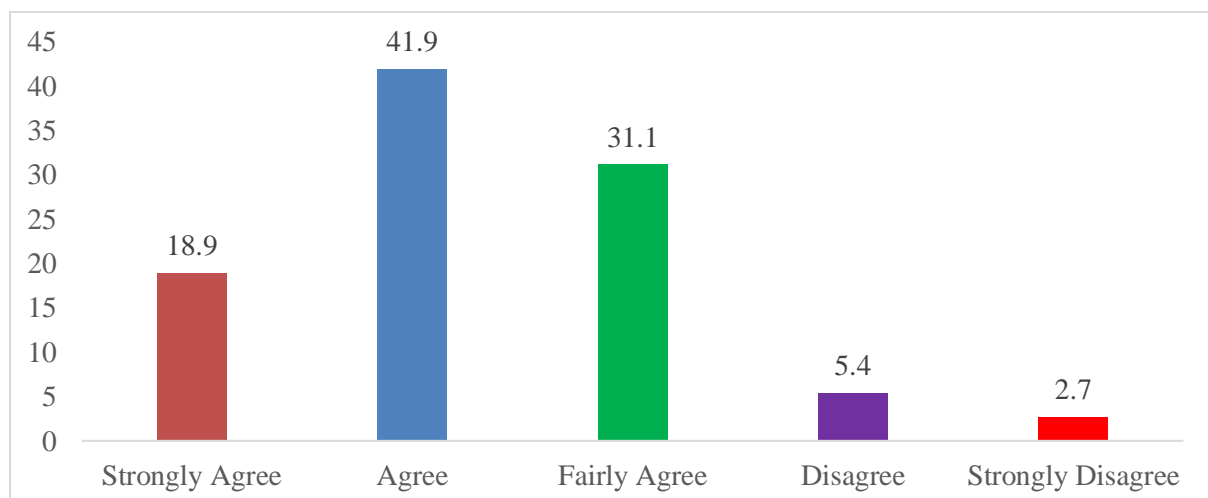
Further the study sought to find out whether English language teachers abide by English language policies. The results are shown in Figure 2



**Figure 2:** English language teachers abide by English language policies

The slight majority of the participants (41.9%) fairly agreed and a larger proportion (39.2%) agreed with this statement (see Figure 2). Thus, 93.2% of the total number of participants agreed that when there are school language policy staff members should abide by them. It thus appears that school language is seen as being important to English departments and their staff members. A very small number of respondents (6.8% of the population) either disagreed with the statement or were not sure about it, which may suggest their lack of acceptance of the necessity for having school language policy, or, which seems more likely, that they saw no need for having them at all.

*Staff Members’ Familiarity with School Language Policies, If Any, Will Contribute to Accomplishing Institutional Goals*



In response to this statement, a large proportion (41.9%) of the respondents agreed, in addition to another large proportion (31.1%) who fairly agreed with it (see Figure 3), which means that a total of 91.9% of the population were of the opinion that familiarity with school language policies can contribute to accomplishing institutional goals. This suggests that school language policies can have a positive impact at institutional level and, therefore, school language policies do have importance in English departments. It also suggests that if school language policies exist, staff members should become aware of them. A very small number of respondents either disagreed with the statement or were not sure about it, forming 8.1% of the population, which may be because they were not, or had not been exposed to, school language policy and, therefore, did not appreciate their significance. It could also mean that these participants did not attach any importance to having school language policies at department level.

### *Medium of Communication*

The sample respondents were asked to indicate the medium of communication by teachers and pupils when in school. The results are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Medium of Communication**

	Staff		Pupil	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
English	45	60.8	39	52.7
English and Kiswahili	25	33.8	13	17.6
Kiswahili	9	12.2	7	9.5
English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue	6	8.1	19	25.7
Kiswahili and Mother Tongue	2	2.7	11	14.9
Mother Tongue	1	1.4	5	6.8

*Source: Field Data (2023)*

The results in Table 2 reveal that English (60.8%) and a combination of English and Kiswahili (33.8%) are the most frequently used modes of communication by staff when in school. The results also reveal that a majority of pupils use English (52.7%) and a combination of English, Kiswahili and mother tongue (25.7%) to communicate when in school. The results indicate that mother tongue is rarely used in schools.

### *Likert Scale Responses*

The following statements are meant to elicit information from you about the influence of school language policy on teaching and learning of English in primary schools in Homabay county. Pick the most appropriate rating from SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U(undecided), D (disagree) and SD (strongly disagree).

**Table 3: Influence of school language policy on teaching and learning of English**

	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
My school has a language policy in place	36	28	6	3	1	4.3	0.9



	(48.6)	(37.8)	(8.1)	(4.1)	(1.4)		
The language policy in this school is functional	24.3 (18)	27 (20)	16.2 (12)	20.3 (15)	12.2 (9)	3.31	1.13
Language policy influences teaching and learning of English in our school	29 (39.2)	36 (48.6)	6 (8.1)	2 (2.7)	1 (1.4)	4.2	0.8
Pupils in this school are aware of the existence of language policy	32.4 (24)	24.3 (18)	9.5 (7)	24.3 (18)	9.5 (7)	3.46	1.41
Language policy is part of the school rules	25.7 (19)	29.7 (22)	6.8 (5)	23 (17)	14.9 (11)	3.28	1.45
Teachers in this school are at the forefront of the implementation of the language policy.	23 (17)	33.8 (25)	9.5 (7)	23 (17)	10.8 (8)	3.35	1.349
The teaching and learning of English in this school has been largely improved through the effective language policy	28 (37.8)	34 (45.9)	7 (9.5)	2 (2.7)	3 (4.1)	4.11	1.0
The school administration is key in the implementation of language	28.4 (21)	24.3 (18)	9.5 (7)	32.4 (24)	5.4 (4)	3.38	1.34

**Source:** Field Data (2023)

According to the findings of the research, 48.6% (36) of the respondents strongly agreed that their school has a language policy in place and another 37.8% (28) agreed on the same statement. Moreover, 8.1% (6) of the respondents were undecided, 4.1% (3) disagreed while 1.4% (1) strongly disagreed that school has a language policy in place. With a mean of 4.3 and an insignificant standard deviation of 0.9, their school did not have a language policy in place.

However, the results revealed that, 24.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that the language policy in this school is not functional while 27.0% agreed on the same. Also, 16.2% of the respondents were undecided on that the language policy in this school is not functional. On the other hand, 20.3% of the respondents disagreed and 12.2% strongly disagreed on the same assertion. With a mean of 3.31 and a significant standard deviation of 1.13, the language policy in this school is not functional in some schools.

As illustrated in the table above, of all the individuals who responded to the survey, 39.2% (29) strongly agreed that language policy influences teaching and learning of English in our school, 48.6% (36) agreed, 8.1% (6) were undecided, 2.7% (2.7) disagreed, while 1.4% (1) strongly disagreed that Language policy influences teaching and learning of English in our school. This statement had an average score of 4.2 and an insignificant standard deviation of 0.8 showing that the language policy does not influence teaching and learning of English in our school

On statement that Pupils in this school are aware of the existence of language policy, 32.4% strongly agreed with the statement, 24.3% agreed, 9.5% were undecided, 24.3% disagreed, while 9.5%

strongly disagree with the statement. With a mean of 3.46 and a significant standard deviation of 01.41 pupils in this school are moderately aware of the existence of language policy.

Furthermore, on statement that language policy is part of the school rules, participants who agreed strongly were 25.7% while those who agreed were 29.7% and respondents who were undecided were 6.8%. Conversely, respondents who disagreed strongly were 23.0% and those who disagreed that Language policy is part of the school rules were 14.9%. Therefore, with a mean of 3.28 and an significant standard deviation of 1.45, language policy is not part of the school rules in some schools.

Results on the table above revealed that, 23.0% of the respondents strongly agreed and a further 33.8% agreed that teachers in this school are at the forefront of the implementation of the language policy. Moreover, 9.5% of the respondents were undecided and 23.0% disagreed while another 10.8% strongly disagreed that teachers in this school are at the forefront of the implementation of the language policy. With a mean of 3.35 and a significant standard deviation of 1.35, teachers in some schools are not at the forefront of the implementation of the language policy

Regarding the assertion that the teaching and learning of English in this school has been largely improved through the effective language policy, participants who agreed strongly were 37.8% (28) while those who agreed were 45.9% (34), 9.5% (7) were undecided, 2.7% (2) disagreed, while 4.1% (3) strongly disagree with the statement. Similarly, the statement had a mean of 4.11 and a significant standard deviation of 1.0, which indicate that the teaching and learning of English in this school has been largely improved through the effective language policy.

Lastly, 28.4% of the respondents strongly agreed and a further 24.3% agreed that the school administration is key in the implementation of language. Moreover, 9.5% of the respondents were undecided and 32.4% disagreed while another 5.4% strongly disagreed that the school administration is key in the implementation of language. With a mean of 3.38 and an insignificant standard deviation of 1.34, the school administration is not key in the implementation of language.

## Conclusion

Teachers of English are tasked with the formulation and implementation of school language policies in public primary schools in Homa-bay Sub-County, Homabay County, Kenya. The school language policy focuses mainly on what languages are to be used while in school. In this case, school language policy creates a suitable learning environment for pupils since it influences the teaching and learning of English in our school.

The national language policy requires English to be taught as an integrated subject so as to achieve communicative competence. The study concluded that listening skills were ignored by the majority of public primary schools in Homa-bay Sub-County, Homabay County, since they were not examined by Kenya National Examination Council. The majority of the respondents indicated that there is a need to restructure the national language policy in Kenya to enhance its implementation. On communicative competence, the policy is not being fully implemented as there is a lack of evaluation of both the speaking and listening skills. The study also concluded that the Ministry of Education, through Kenya Institute Curriculum Development (KICD) moderately assessed language policy, and Ministry of education through KICD do not adopt supervision of language policy implementation in schools.

## Recommendations

1. For School, the study recommended that the school administration should come up flexible and functional school language policy where all teachers are tasked with its implementation. Further, the school administration should come up with punishment geared towards students achieving communicative competence, for those students who fail to follow the school's language policy.
2. The ministry of Education should formulate a policy requiring all secondary schools to have language policies so as to enhance communicative competence. The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) should come up with an oral paper for English to assess students speaking skills and a Listening paper to assess students listening skills. That way communicative competence will be achieved as both teachers and students will be motivated to put in more effort.

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