

Original Research Article

The Influence of Punishment on the Enforcement of School Language Policy: Its Impact on the use of Kiswahili Language in Secondary Schools in Bungoma County

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Abstract: Kiswahili is a very important language in Kenya. It is both a national and official language in the republic of Kenya. However, there are concerns that the poor performance in Kiswahili in national examinations is partially attributed to the laxity in the enforcement of the school language policy. Recent research has shown that Kiswahili language is faced with lack of full implementation of language policy at various levels yet scholars have argued that language policy performs a substantial role in the enhancement of performance as well as the comprehension of the language. The study objective was to examine the influence of punishment on the enforcement of the school language policy in secondary schools. The study was conducted in 30 out of 300 public secondary schools found in Bungoma County. The respondents were 360 form three students, 90 teachers of Kiswahili and 30 principals. Cluster, stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample the target groups. The study established that the influence of punishment on the enforcement of the school language policy was dependent on the type of the school.

Keywords: Punishment, Language Policy, Language, Enforcement.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Studies conducted all over the world indicate that there is still the use of punishment in schools. Karmakar (2016) reported that a catholic school in Assam in India learners were literally barred from having lunch and were made to stand for 90 minutes. That was because they broke the institution's rule of speaking only in English. In another part of India, teachers at a catholic school put a board around the neck of students who were violated a standing order to speak only in English. According to DeGraff (2016), in the Haitian classrooms, Kreyol speaking students were punished and humiliated and even expelled for speaking their mother tongue in school. Miranda, a twelve year old member of the Menominee tribe in Wisconsin, USA, was slammed her hands on the desk by her teacher and benched from the basketball game later that day for using the native language at school (Deena and Ellen, 2020).

Bwesigye (2014) revealed that in Uganda, school children who were found flouting the school language policy were forced to wear dirty sacks, sometimes filled with dead animals. The learners were

tasked to find someone else speaking their mother tongue and pass the sack to them. Apart from that, they were tasked to compile lists of fellow pupils speaking their mother tongue for their teacher to punish them. It was reported that whenever Evans Kwarisima, 13, spoke Runyangore, which was her native language while at school, she would be forced to lie down as the teacher beat her backside.

Tibetegeza (2010) presents various views of teachers and head teachers regarding the tendency of punishing students speaking Kiswahili as a way of enforcing school language policy as follows:

- i. All teachers and heads of schools were of the view that the aim of punishing students was not bad because it endeavored to help them improve their language skills. They claimed that if the students were allowed to speak Kiswahili, they would get problems in the examinations which they have to write in English as per the current language policy.
- ii. They said that punishment was meted out in realization that Kiswahili is well understood by students and therefore they needed to take

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more time and effort in learning a foreign language which is English.

- iii. Iii. Punishment was not seen as a hindrance to learning as they unveiled that it was like a tradition in Tanzania for the learners to be punished in order to make them learn what the teacher wanted them to. They insisted that what was needed was carefulness in administering the punishment to ensure that there were no physical injuries.

Ng’owo (2013) carried out a study in Tanzania to find out the effect of punishment as a school management to on secondary students’ behavior. In his study, he discovered various forms of punishment administered in secondary schools, namely; slapping with hand, hitting with the hand, pinching with fingers, suspension from school, caning with the stick, kneeling down in class, written warnings, squatting verbal warnings and not eating with others. This resulted into poor class attendance, conflict between teachers and students, fear of teachers, displeasure among students, hatred and destruction of school properties.

Muaka (2011) opines that language policies in Kenya are clearly realized in institutions such as the school where children are required to use English at all times. He states that those who fail to adhere to the school language policies are punished. To him this approach is based on a false belief that local languages are useless and can hinder the learners’ success.

Dhillion and Wanjiru (2013) found out that teachers used whole school initiatives and policies such as demanding that learners use only English at school. This was followed by punishment of learners who failed to adhere to the policy. In their findings, it was revealed that school used other strategies to promote good use of English. This included the establishment of school clubs, composition writing, competition and encouragement of all subject teachers to use proper English when teaching their subjects.

- i. Furthermore, Tibetegeza (2010) further noted that teachers and head teachers have a tendency of punishing students speaking

Kiswahili as one way of enforcing the school language policy. The same is echoed by a report from standard paper February 11, 2013 where a 15-year-old student at a private secondary school in Kericho County was beaten and injured for speaking Kiswahili, forbidden language in the institution. The victim was photographed showing the physical injuries on his back.

1.1 Objective of the study

To examine the influence of punishment on the enforcement of school language policy and the use of Kiswahili in secondary schools.

1.3 Sampling of Principals and Teachers of Kiswahili

Once the schools are selected, all the principals in the selected schools automatically qualified to participate in the study. Therefore, purposive sampling method was used to select the 30 head teachers of the participating schools. The head teachers were sampled for the study because of being the accounting officers and implementers of the government policy at school level. Out of 600 teachers of Kiswahili, 90 (15%) teachers of Kiswahili participated in the study. These were willing and available teachers of Kiswahili from the participating schools. Teachers of Kiswahili were selected to participate on the ground of being specialists and enforcers of the school language policy. According to Israel (2013), 15% are a fair representation of the target population.

1.4 Sampling of Students

Simple random sampling method was used in selecting the students to participate in the study. In every school, only one stream of form three was sampled to participate in the study. Kerlinger 2000 says that a focused group discussion should consist of 6-12 participants. The current study used 12 form three students from every sampled school who were randomly selected to participate in the focused discussion. A total of 360 students participated. The study sample is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Sample Frame

Category of respondents	Target population	Sample size	
		F	%
Principals	300	30	10%
Teachers	600	90	15%
Students	16,588	360	2.17%

The study sample consisted of 360 students, who were selected using simple random sampling technique. Then students sample was determined using a formula (Israel, 2013).

1.5 Research Instruments

The questionnaire, focused group discussion guide and document analysis guide were used to collect the data.

2.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

2.1 Responses from the teachers of Kiswahili

From the qualitative data obtained from the open question in the teachers' questionnaire on whether punishment was meted or not, the researcher was able to transform the data into quantitative data. The finding is presented in Table 1.2.

Findings in 1.2 showed that majority of the schools as indicated by 58 (64.4%) teachers' punished students for not observing the school language policy, 25 (27.8%) indicated that they did not punish students while very few 17 (7.8%) indicated that they were not sure. It is evident from the findings that schools gave out punishments to those who were not observing the school language policy. It is useful to argue that a substantive number of schools were passive in terms of giving out punishment. The percentage of schools indicating a score of not sure, shows that they are not aware of anything regarding the language policy.

Table 1.2: Punishment for those not observing the School Language Policy

Punishment	Frequency	Percent
Yes	58	64.4
No	25	27.8
Not sure	17	7.8
Total	90	100.0

Given that the majority of the schools had punishment given to students who were not observing the school language policy a subsequent open question was asked to gather responses on the various forms of punishment that were given. The following excerpts from teachers indicated various forms of punishment that were given.

a) Weeding of flowers

A number of teachers mentioned weeding of flowers to students who were found to break the language policy. Teacher 41 from school 15 pointed that: -

When a student is forwarded by the class secretary or the dorm captain to us we normally tell the student to weed flowers at the administration block or within the area that she was found committing the offense. This is enshrined in the school language policy. It is no haphazardly done. Given the guidelines from the Ministry of Education on punishment, the students will be required to carry out the punishment outside class hours. That is the exercise will be done after classes at 4 pm.

Still on the same one of the teachers said that weeding of flowers is done at lunch break. This is the excerpt from the teacher 55 from school 19: -

Weeding of the flowers is done during lunch break so that student doesn't lose class time. These were some of the sentiments from three teachers which

notably reflected on the responses of the teachers who mentioned weeding as a form of punishment.

a) Sweeping and Mopping Dormitories

Teachers also mentioned mopping as a form of punishment for those who broke the school language policy. Teacher 5 from school 2 mentioned that students were given the punishment of mopping dormitories.

When we receive a report of a student who failed to follow the school language policy intentionally we tell the student to sweep then mop the dormitory. Of course after the punishment the student will sit for a random test in the particular language for thirty minutes before he is allowed back in class.

c) Writing Compositions and Reading Them on Parade

Teacher 27 from school 11 said the following in regard to this form of punishment: -

Our form of punishment is geared towards academic and by extension enhancing the school language policy. Students are required to write a composition or insha depending on the policy that was broken. For instance, if a student was supposed to be speaking Kiswahili and is found using a different language then he will be subjected to writing an insha. The vice versa is true.

d) Cutting Grass on the Compound

Another form of punishment was the cutting of grass in the school compound. Teacher 45 from school 16 reported the following regarding this form of punishment: -

Students who violate the school language policy are subjected to cutting of grass as a punishment.

Teacher 63 from school 22 commented that: -

A place has been set aside for students who violate school language policy for them to cut grass

e) Putting on a Sack

Teacher 80 from school 27 pointed out that they have a sack that they use for those breaking the language policy. The following excerpt indicates the sentiments: -

There are specific students tasked with compiling lists of fellow pupils and students speaking mother tongues. This list is then handed over to a teacher responsible for punishing these language rule-breakers. The most common form of punishment in our school is wearing a dirty sack until you meet someone else speaking their mother tongue and then you pass the sack on to them.

f) Putting on Aprons

Almost related to putting on of sacks is the putting on of aprons that are labeled. Teacher 46 from school 16 mentioned that: -

In our school there are aprons that read: “Shame on me, I was speaking vernacular” handed over to an offender of the No Vernacular rule, who then is tasked with finding the next culprit to give the apron.

The teachers of Kiswahili reported that there were varied forms of punishment given to the students. The modes of punishment differed in the various schools.

2.2 Responses from the principals

Principals were asked to respond to a closed ended question on the various forms of punishment for those who broke the school language policy. Their response is presented in Table 1.3.

It is important to mention that of the selected forms of punishment (in Table 19) that were given, cleaning of classroom (Mean = 4.9), spot on correction to rectify the mistake (Mean = 4.3) and reciting poems

on the parade (Mean = 4) were ranked as the commonly performed forms of punishment.

This may have been attributed to the short time of administering the punishments thereby not interfering with class time. On the other hand, amongst the least performed forms of punishment included buying text books and story books (Mean = 1.433), reading of story books in the library (Mean = 2.1667) and notification send to parents (Mean = 2.3333). These finding shows that there is a possibility of lack of libraries in many of the schools that may have contributed to low levels of punishment associated with reading in the library. Besides, the MOE policy on purchase of teaching and learning resources may have contributed to the low levels of schools sending students home to purchase story books and textbooks. Lastly, notification of parents requires that the school use bundles or SMS that needs finances. Given the strict protocol on the use of institutional funds schools could have opted not to engage on this form of punishment.

Moderately meted forms of punishment entailed cleaning of sanitation blocks (Mean = 3.6333) wearing of a disk (Mean = 3.6667), denial of privileges such as students’ council (Mean = 3.7333).

Table 1.3: Forms of Punishment

Forms of Punishment	Very low		Low neutral		Neutral		High		Very high		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Cleaning sanitation block	3	10	6	20	2	6.7	7	23.3	12	40	3.6333
Wearing disk	4	13.3	4	13.3	0	0.0	12	40.0	10	33.3	3.6667
Buying text books and story books	18	60	11	36.7	1	3.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	1.4333
Wearing bibs	6	20	4	13.3	3	10.0	11	36.7	6	20.0	3.2333
Spot on correction to rectify the mistake	1	3.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	12	40.0	15	50.0	4.3
Cleaning classrooms	3	10	4	13.3	2	6.7	10	33.3	18	60.0	4.9
Reading of story books in the library	11	36.7	10	33.3	4	13.3	3	10.0	2	6.7	2.1667
Denial of privileges such as students council	3	10	3	10	2	6.7	13	43.3	9	30.0	3.7333
Reciting poems on the parade	2	6.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	12	40.0	12	40.0	4
Notification send to parents	8	26.7	12	40.0	4	13.3	4	13.3	2	6.7	2.3333

2.3 Influence of Punishment on the Use of Kiswahili in Secondary Schools

The fourth objective sought to establish the influence of punishment of the use of Kiswahili in secondary schools in Bungoma County. The study revealed that to some extent, punishment contributed to the use of Kiswahili in secondary schools in Bungoma County. Most students in mixed secondary schools feared being punished before peers of the opposite gender. In other schools, students did not fear punishment. Some forms of punishment, especially outlined by students in FGD were very crude. Corporal punishment was reported by FGD to be rampant although it was illegal. Denial of some privileges as a form of punishment had a significant effect on students’ behavior. Therefore, punishment had an impact on the use of Kiswahili in secondary schools.

3.0 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The fourth objective was meant to establish the influence of punishment on the use of Kiswahili in secondary schools. According to Tibetegeza (2010) all teachers and head teachers held the view that punishing students for not speaking Kiswahili could help them to improve their language skills. The missing point in the above study was that it did not show clearly what kind of punishment was administered to the culprits. From the current study, the respondents listed various forms of punishment meted on those who did not adhere to the school language policy. Some forms of crude and unorthodox forms of punishment were mentioned by students in their focused group discussions which are almost similar to those established by Ng’owo (2013) in her study on the effects of punishment as school management tool on secondary students’ behavior. She found out that some schools administered some

physical punishment such as canning, slapping with the hand, kneeling down in class, suspension from school, squatting and pinching with fingers. This could explain why a student was injured in a private school in Kenya during the corporal punishment as reported in the standard newspaper 2013 for speaking the forbidden language in the school as indicated in the background of this study.

The issue of punishment seems to be on the rise in the enforcement of school language policy. Deena and Kambel (2020) reported that Miranda, a twelve-year-old member of the Menominee tribe in Wisconsin, USA, and the teacher slammed her hands on the desk and benched her from the basketball game later that day. The same is echoed by DeGraff (2016) who found out that in the Haitian classrooms, Kreyol speaking students were punished and humiliated and even expelled for speaking Kreyol. Bwesigye (2014) further shows how children who flouted the school language policy in Uganda were forced to wear dirty sacks. The learners were to pass the sack to others found speaking mother tongue. This is similar to what the researcher found out through the FGD about how some school schools punished those who did not observe the school language policy by giving them aprons labeled with negative comments and a torn T-shirt labeled "I'm a fool, I cannot speak English".

According to Omar as cited by Ng'owo (2013), punishment leads to withdrawal mechanisms, frustrations, anxiety, displeasure and fear of school subjects, especially when the punitive teacher teaches the several subjects to the same students. The same view is supported by Simatwa (2012) who had indicated that punishment resulted to poor attendance of students, school dropouts and conflicts between teachers and students, leading to poor academic relationship between students and their teachers.

However, on the other hand, Ndembu (2013), in his study found that all the deputy principals aged 50 years and above were opposed to alternative strategies and supported corporal punishment. They held the view that corporal punishment was more effective in controlling acts of indiscipline. This is because the students feared the cane and corporal punishment corrects misbehavior instantly. This is further supported by Syamsuar (2017) who opines that punishment modifies the behavior of students, creates a positive socio-economic climate and management of certain groups. Through the FGD, the current study established that some students feared punishment while others did not. To some extent, some students improved their use of Kiswahili because of fear for punishment, especially in mixed secondary school where some of them had either girlfriends or boyfriends. There were some students who were resistant or immune to punishment. As reported by teachers of Kiswahili and principals, punishment elicited negative attitude from students

towards Kiswahili to some extent. Laxity by the school administration in administering punishment to enforce school language policy negatively affected its influence on the use of Kiswahili in schools. Punishment which is not consistent does not yield the desired results.

3.1 CONCLUSION

Depending on the nature of the school, punishment has both positive and negative impact on the enforcement of the school language policy and usage of Kiswahili in secondary schools. Punishment is more effective in mixed secondary schools more than in single sex secondary schools.

3.2 RECOMMENDATION

Mixed secondary schools should embrace the use of punishment to enforce their school language policies while the single sex secondary schools should use alternative ways to punishment such as using guidance and counseling to enforce their respective language policies.

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