Kenyan elementary school teacher's strategies in a multilingual environment

Martina Nisser Hollowell
Abstract
This qualitative study looks into some Kenyan school teachers strategies in the multilingual environment they work in. The school of this study uses a foreign language as the medium of instruction, instead of the mother tongue culturally spoken by both teachers and students. It presents some of the strategies observed and at the same time looks closely into the possible positive and negative outcomes it has on the students learning. It also looks into the reason for why the medium of instruction is another than mother tongue and the cultural effects of this. By observations and interviews data has been collected and presented aiming to show the teachers thoughts about their working situation, and also their thoughts about their role in the classroom.

Keywords: Language learning, Language teaching, Mother tongue. Medium of instruction.
Table of contents

1 Foreword ........................................................................................................................................ 5
2 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 6
  2.1 Aim of this study ...................................................................................................................... 7
    2.1.1 Specific objectives ........................................................................................................... 7
  2.2 Terminology ............................................................................................................................ 7
  2.3 International recommendations on language in education .................................................... 8
3 Background ..................................................................................................................................... 9
  3.1 Kenyan history ......................................................................................................................... 9
  3.2 Kenyan educational system ..................................................................................................... 9
  3.3 Language in Kenya ................................................................................................................ 10
  3.4 Language policy in education ............................................................................................... 10
4 Previous research ........................................................................................................................ 12
  4.1 Language, culture and identity ............................................................................................ 12
  4.2 The importance and role of English ..................................................................................... 12
  4.3 Language usage in the educational system ....................................................................... 13
  4.4 Attitude towards language and medium of instruction ....................................................... 14
  4.5 Potential problems associated with the educational system ............................................ 14
  4.6 Second language learning and the benefit of using mother tongue .................................. 15
  4.7 The teachers role ................................................................................................................. 16
5 Theories ....................................................................................................................................... 19
  5.1 Language development ......................................................................................................... 19
  5.2 Second language learning ..................................................................................................... 21
  5.3 Learning a subject in a second language ........................................................................ 22
  5.4 Teaching strategy .................................................................................................................. 23
6 Methods ....................................................................................................................................... 26
  6.1 Participant selection .............................................................................................................. 26
  6.2 Interview method .................................................................................................................. 26
    6.2.1 Implementation ............................................................................................................... 27
  6.3 Observational Method .......................................................................................................... 27
    6.3.1 Implementation ............................................................................................................... 28
  6.4 Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 28
  6.5 Ethical considerations ........................................................................................................... 28
7 Results .......................................................................................................................................... 30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>General observations and impressions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1</td>
<td>The teachers role</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2</td>
<td>The classroom</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.3</td>
<td>Attitude toward language use</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.1</td>
<td>Example 1: Rote-learning</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.2</td>
<td>Example 2: Rote-learning</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.3</td>
<td>Example 3: Total physical response</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Teaching strategies used by the teachers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1</td>
<td>Rote learning</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.2</td>
<td>Total physical response</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>The Kenyan educational system</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Mother tongue as medium of instruction</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>The teachers' situation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>References</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Foreword

"That girl over there (points at a little girl sitting in the classroom), she is retarded. She is 8 but she looks like 4. The malnutrition has damaged her and she has very hard time to follow class. I sit with her and I explain but next day it’s all gone. It is very hard." (Madame D, interview 2015)

Even if this quote has little to do with language learning it says a lot about the situation teachers deal with in the Kenyan public school system. When I came to Kenya I wanted to learn from teachers who work in a multilingual environment and investigate what strategies they employ in the classroom. What I have learned has a lot to do with language, however the difficulties of daily life have taught me the most.

“Children cannot learn when they are hungry” (Madame O, interview 2015). They can certainly not learn effectively when they are hungry and sit on a wooden bench tightly squeezed in with classmates for eight hours a day in a dark classroom. Additionally the education is in a language these children do not even speak. They sit there every day and some do not understand a word the teacher says. I was not prepared for this kind of reality. The teachers are performing a job that is irreplaceable and has to do with teaching, naturally, but there is much more than that. Where would these children be if it were not for these women and men who have dedicated their lives to educating Kenya's future?
2 Introduction

Africa has been singled out as the only continent in the world where the majority of children begin school in a foreign language medium and the only continent where the entire population has to struggle to make "technological or informational progress through the medium of someone else's language" (UNESCO 2010, 28).

In the Kenyan education system language is an essential part of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education states that language is the key element of education and also essential to all aspects of everyday life (KICD\textsuperscript{1}). The essential languages in the Kenyan curriculum are considered in following descending importance: English, Kiswahili and mother tongue (KICD). A majority of Kenyans have very poor knowledge of the English language, previous studies show varying figures where only between 15-25\% are able to adequately speak English (Nabea 2009, Trudell 2007). Despite this, English remains one of the official languages in Kenya (Nabea 2009). Mainly, children grow up with one of the more than 40 local tribal languages as their mother tongue (UNESCO 2010). When they reach school age, they are immersed in an education system that uses English as the medium of instruction and Kiswahili as a subject (UNESCO 2010, Spernes 2012). This despite the recommendations and declarations from for example UNESCO and the UN children's convention that give every child the right to be educated in their mother tongue. UNESCO (2010): 'Every pupil should begin his [or her] formal education in his [or her] MT\textsuperscript{2} because 'MT instruction is essential for initial instruction and literacy' (UNESCO 2010, 31).

This study will present the results of classroom observations and interviews with Kenyan primary school teachers and the strategies they employ to involve every student in their education using a second language as medium of instruction. It will also present problems encountered with the use of a second language rather than mother tongue. The teachers are required to follow the language policy and curriculum established by KICD while they, at the same time, are expected to educate the children in various subjects and also respect cultural expectations. The interviews presented will provide some of the teachers' thoughts about their situation and how they handle everyday life in the classroom.

\textsuperscript{1} Kenyan Institute of Curriculum Development
\textsuperscript{2} Mother tongue
2.1 **Aim of this study**

The aim is to study three primary school teachers opinions on their roles as teachers and to study their pedagogic strategies they use in their multilingual classroom where English is the medium of instruction.

2.1.1 **Specific objectives**

1. What strategies are used by the teachers when instructing in English as a second language?
2. What are the teachers' thoughts about their role?
3. Why do teacher's use English as medium of instruction and which positive and negative effects do they experience?

2.2 **Terminology**

Before proceeding with the background to this study, some terms require definition.

Today, Kiswahili is used to refer to the language and the word "Swahili" is an adjective. Thus we have "Swahili" culture and Swahili speakers, yet the language spoken is Kiswahili. However, in most books written during colonial times, "Swahili" is used to refer to the language (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2004).

Mother tongue is defined as the language spoken at home and in everyday life (Nyaga & Anthonissen 2012) and traditionally, mother tongue has referred to ‘the language which a person acquires in early years’ (UNESCO 1953, 2003).

Medium of instruction is the language the teacher uses to teach a specific subject (Nyaga & Anthonissen 2012).
2.3 International recommendations on language in education

“It is increasingly obvious that the language of instruction at the beginning of one's education at such a crucial moment for future learning should be the mother tongue” (UNESCO 2010, 11).

There are a number of commissions that declare the importance of the use of mother tongue for personal development as well as its role in preserving cultural heritage and identity.

- Article 5 of the 1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education specifically recognizes —“the right of the members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including … the use or the teaching of their own language” (UN Declaration on Human Rights, 1948).
- The Dakar framework for action 2000 states: “…promote the use of the mother tongue in the early childhood education, early years of primary education and adult education; link personal development to the learners' cultural heritage and strengthen their self-confidence” (Peppler Barry 2010, 28).
- The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child article 30 states “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language” (The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child 1989, 10).
3 Background
This chapter contains a review of Kenyan history including language usage and its impact on the educational system.

3.1 Kenyan history
Kenya has a long history of colonial occupation, like most other African countries. The British government controlled a large number of regions around the world and in Kenya British colonization took place between 1901 and 1960. The British settlers came to modern day Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania because of the comfortable climate and the rich resources. In the early 1900s, before colonial rule, East Africa consisted of no real borders, but rather many small tribal communities. The different tribes had their own languages and their own culture. When the Europeans arrived, borders were drawn in straight lines to divide the land between the colonizers. Though it did not have any instant impact on the tribes and their culture, daily Kenyan life would change dramatically for future generations (Percox 2005). In the 1950s there was a rebellion against British ruling in Kenya. The largest tribe in Kenya, the Kikuyo, formed a rebel group called the Mau-Mau, and forced the British to accept Kenyan independence. In 1964, Jomo Kenyatta, President of the African National Union, became the first President of Kenya (Johnson & McEnroe 2002).

3.2 Kenyan educational system
The Kenyan school system is organized in an 8-4-4 system, 8 years of primary school called standard levels, 4 years of secondary school and 4 years higher education. At the age of seven, children start standard 1. Those who achieve high enough grades and pass their exams satisfactorily may continue to secondary school and those who can afford it may after secondary continue to a higher education at one of the countries universities or colleges. In 2001 a law was passed giving access to free and compulsory basic education to every child in Kenya. The primary school completion rate was 81% in 2007, with 60% continuing to secondary school in 2006. The Nyanza province, where this study was performed, is the area in Kenya with the highest repetition rates. Nationwide, there was a 40:1 student-teacher ratio in 2004 (UNESCO 2010). The school system is, like most levels of Kenyan society, penetrated by corruption and a dysfunctional social system. Kenya ranks #139 out of 168 in the list of most corrupt countries in the world and it affects all levels of society (Transparency International 2014).
3.3 Language in Kenya
There are 40 different tribal languages spoken in different regions and they are for the main part of the population their first language, also referred to as mother tongue. The multicultural upbringing forms a multilingual environment where a national language has to be chosen for countrymen to be able to communicate. The Kenyan constitution lists the official languages as Kiswahili and English (NCLR³ 2010).

English was introduced during the British colonization and Kiswahili was initially introduced in the coastal region where it was originally a common trade language and it is in the coastal region and urban areas where the use is most widespread due to the large amount of different ethnicities. Kiswahili is often acquired informally as the national language in regions where members of the varying tribes meet, predominately urban areas. In rural areas the population is generally more ethnically homogenous and here the local tribal language is the most prevalent. In peri-urban areas, which are rurally located yet near to neighboring tribal areas and with some ethnic diversity, again Kiswahili is often used as the main language to facilitate intra-ethnic communication (Ogechi 2009).

3.4 Language policy in education
The language issue in the realm of education was discussed as early as 1909 during the United Missionary Conference in Kenya. The Conference advocated the use of mother tongue in the first three classes in primary school, Kiswahili in two of the middle classes in primary, while English was to be used in the rest of the classes up to the university level. After World War II the British rule realized the imminent risk of Kenyan independence and identified Kiswahili as the language being used to unite the Kenyans in their freedom movement. This led to Kiswahili being eliminated from the education, except in areas where it was used as mother tongue, and introduced English to be taught alongside mother tongue from lower primary school. A decade later policy was once again changed, endorsing English as the only medium of instruction in all school grades. Since then language policy has undergone only minor alterations (Nabea 2009).

In modern Kenya, official language policy in education as stated in the curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education and Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) has declared that the

³ National Council of Law Reporting
mother tongue should be used as medium of instruction in standards one to three of primary school while English is introduced as a subject. From grade four and onward, English takes over as medium of instruction and Kiswahili is taught as a subject only. The Kenyan Language in Education policy supports the use of mother tongue or the language of the school 'catchment area' (that is, the language of wider communication such as Kiswahili) as medium of instruction and as a language subject for the first three years of formal education only (KIE 2002).
4 Previous research

4.1 Language, culture and identity

Language and identity have long been closely linked, language providing affiliation to a culture or a geographically and socially determined identity, locally or nationally (De Kadt 2005). Language is an effective means of transmitting values and perceptions between generations and also an instrument for preserving social values. Similarly, language can be used to alter them. As a child grows up, values and identity are built. As an individual becomes part of a community, a culture, its language develops based on the cultural heritage that the learner is surrounded by (Wellros 2007, De Kadt 2005).

Many Africans are concerned about the lack of promotion and development of African languages (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2004). It seems like the colonial era left a void in African cultural heritage. Some experts claim that colonial education led to the loss of the indigenous people's identity and self-confidence, and that Western cultural imperialism filled African minds with identity complexes related to cultural belonging and language (Spernes 2012).

A study performed in the Nandi hills region adjacent to the area studied in this paper by Spernes in 2012 looked into student experiences and attitudes towards being multilingual and their thoughts about their language identity. The study also indicates that the mother tongue is the language, ‘to express feelings of anger and excitement, to curse, to insult, to swear, to complain and to threaten’ (Spernes 2012, 193). Mother tongue is also the language that is used to express positive feelings and the language used to tell stories and anecdotes (Spernes 2012).

4.2 The importance and role of English

Naturally the British colonization has had a great influence on Kenyan culture and language after many years of dependency and the language situation in Kenya is complicated. In large part due to the economic inequality that divides the population. Nabea shows in his article "Language policy in Kenya: Negotiation with hegemony" (2009) that those who use English are mainly the advantaged. While those who are not able to use it are the majority in society, who remain disadvantaged. Non-English speakers or poor English speakers are left behind in their chances of a higher education and a spot in the upper classes of society. In view of this, therefore, English has been used to perpetuate the class divide in the Kenyan society. Nabea
states that the choice of English as medium of instruction is a political one. During the colonial era the British made no effort to introduce the indigenous languages in the school system or any high status functions (Nabea 2009).

Similar issues are seen in Kenya's neighboring country Tanzania, a study from 2004 analyzed language policy in Tanzania, where the majority of the population speaks Kiswahili. They found that the usage of English as medium of instruction creates a barrier for knowledge which they imply was traditionally used to benefit the English-speaking elite. Left behind are the majority of people who do not speak adequate English and are hindered from achieving the education that would be possible if given in their mother tongue. This has continued to be the main language policy adopted by the policy makers in a way similar to the Kenyan situation (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2004).

There has been no serious attempt by Kenyan policy makers to make language classless, as a way of bridging the gap between the elite and the general population. It continues to be used for exclusion purposes, especially in most of the official domain. The ability to speak English has become an important key to entering the higher levels of Kenyan society and is also essential for studies at the countries universities and colleges (Nabea 2009).

### 4.3 Language usage in the educational system

A study from a rural region of western Kenya looked at language attitude amongst teachers and found that the teachers were united in their belief that English holds a central role across all class levels. The policy adopted by teachers in lower primary was to move the students to English as soon as possible, yet at the school studied there was a transition from mother tongue to Kiswahili and finally to English during the first year of schooling (James 2013). Another study highlights the differences between urban and rural regions, where mother tongue (i.e. the local tribal language) is more often used as medium of instruction in rural areas and either Kiswahili or English as medium of instruction in urban areas during the initial years of primary school, yet English is the predominant goal everywhere. It is clear that there is no clear consensus and that large regional differences occur in official medium of instruction policy (Ogechi 2009).

A study from Nairobi highlights the fact that many schools, to promote the usage of English, adopt a system of banning Kiswahili, which is considered mother tongue in the Nairobi area, from being used and punishing students who use it, despite its recognition by the Ministry of
Education as a legitimate and significant language in education and its inclusion in the curriculum as a subject. This has been identified as an issue nationwide (Otieno 2010).

4.4 Attitude towards language and medium of instruction

The study by Spernes referenced earlier in this paper showed that English as the medium of instruction in early years is preferred both by parents and the students. The interviews showed that the main opinion in Kenya is that mother tongue should not be used in school. According to Spernes study, the main reasons seem to be the status of English in the Kenyan society. And, as some of the children explain in her study, all the textbooks are written in English and the yearly exams are held in English. The curriculum established by the Ministry of Education is published in English and all books used in school are written in English, even in the lower grades (Spernes 2012). Some parents believe their children would not take the education seriously if they were taught in their mother tongue. The parents are also aware of the employment opportunities as well as possibilities for a higher education that follow upon having good linguistic skills in English. They see English as the language of globalization and the ticket for their children to reach higher education or go abroad. English as the medium of instruction is considered the hallmark of a good education. The same study showed that teacher's also prefer using English as soon as possible despite the recommendation from KICD\(^4\) to use mother tongue as medium of instruction in the first 3 standards. Even though Benson (2004) showed in his study that the perspective would be different if the parents were aware of the benefits of mother tongue based education. Now, parents focus on the reality in which the children ought to learn English as soon as possible to prepare them for the future and mistakenly they believe that the best way to learn is to have English as the language of instruction (Jones 2013, Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2004, Spernes 2012). Every school has their own policy regarding language in education and prohibiting native languages is a common policy in primary schools in Kenya (Jones 2013, Otieno 2010).

4.5 Potential problems associated with the educational system

Many potential issues arise from being educated in a second language. A study from South Africa showed social-emotional problems and increased dropout rates associated with schooling in a foreign language. Young learners with limited English language skills face difficulties following instructions and completing tasks in the classroom. This can also

---

\(^4\) Kenyan Institute of Curriculum Development
contribute to a feeling of cultural insecurity and loss of self-confidence, originating in problems in the student's ability to express themselves (O'Connor & Geiger 2009). When children are forced to switch abruptly, the first language is at risk to be lost. More importantly, self-esteem and interest to learn may decline. When the children lose their motivation because they do not understand the medium of instruction school failure and dropout rates increase (Ball 2010). A study performed in South Africa in 2002 looked into the outcome of a mother tongue-based education combined with second language education. It found that the importance of developing literacy, to be able to understand the concepts of reading and writing, is a significant factor for successful future education. When the students are being educated in a language they do not speak, the focus is easily transferred from the essential parts of early education, like literacy. Instead of concentrating on literacy, students are expected to learn the relationship between familiar oral sounds and spoken words from their mother tongue with learning unfamiliar sounds from a new language (Bloch 2002). The students who are given a chance to develop their own literacy, in their own language, are better prepared to learn a new language later on. Literacy based on understanding and experience increases the quality of education (Ball 2010).

4.6 Second language learning and the benefit of using mother tongue

In 2005 a review of bilingual and multilingual education in early years was performed which investigated preferable ways of giving every child a decent early education. It found that the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction in early education is the most advantageous method for children. It gives the possibility to engage and to succeed in school in a better way than if their lessons are held in a language they cannot fully understand. Early education in mother tongue benefits the disadvantaged children, especially in rural areas where children do not encounter English in everyday life (Ball 2010).

Research shows that the process involved in learning a second language is very much influenced by the learner's relationship to their first language. A small child that learns to speak has no expectations or prior knowledge of a language. Therefore their environment is the only source of their learning. Older children and adults who have already learned a language have preconceived notions about how a language functions and how it is composed. This generates expectations on their second language and on themselves and their conceptual development. Expectations like how to communicate and express their thoughts and feelings
If the student has positive expectations for themselves, their language learning also becomes a positive process. With the support of their surroundings and in a context where the learning takes place in a safe environment the student has a good chance to develop well-functioning language skills. Furthermore, exercises should focus on the learner and their surrounding world. Research shows that language learning that takes place in a context the learner already understands is the most effective (Askland & Sataøen 2003). A child's ability to learn a second or third language does not suffer from using mother tongue as medium of instruction. To be fluent and to have understood literacy lays a cognitive and a linguistic foundation and prepare students for the future and higher education. When children receive formal instruction in their first language throughout primary school and gradually transit to academic learning in a second language, they will learn the second language quickly. When they continue to develop their first language in additional to the second language, they will became fully bilingual, or multilingual, learners (Ball 2010).

Another study performed in South Africa shows that the first four years of education using mother tongue as the medium of instruction increases students' ability to read and write as well as learning a second language (Pluddemann 2002).

According to a study regarding former British colonies and the benefits of education in mother tongue, a clear key to a qualitative education is language. It states that there are many factors involved in a quality education, but that communication and understanding in the classroom is an essential part of basic education. The study compares teaching in a second language to holding the students heads under water without teaching them how to swim. Classrooms where students are allowed to be themselves promote creativity as well as increasing motivation. Use of mother tongue helps the students develop their personalities and their intellects, unlike in submersion classrooms where silence and mechanical repetition is the norm. Children's affective domain, identity, confidence and self-esteem, are closely connected to their mother tongue (Benson 2004).

4.7 The teachers role

"Teachers play a powerful role as language managers" (Jones 2013, 24)

Since language is used as support for thinking and communication, it is a great advantage if a learner meets the language in situations that are meaningful for that particular individual. When a learner has control of his/her language usage, for example by having the
understanding and joint attention, the interaction between two (or more) individuals gets more communicative. This puts major responsibility on teachers working in a multilingual environment. Not only because they need to use a medium of instruction that includes different types of language backgrounds, the teachers also need to create subjects and topics that all children can relate to. In a role of "language manager" the teachers also play a powerful part as they seek to modify language practices of learners (Ball 2010).

A Foundation of Literacy study performed by Weigel & Martin (2005) found that teachers play a crucial part in the development of young children's literacy and language skills. The years before a child turns 8 are essential for the future literacy and language development. The study identified some important factors teachers use to strengthen children's skills:

- Value their role in children's literacy and language development.
- Regularly engage children in literacy and language enhancing activities.
- Organize the classroom to support literacy and language.
- Actively engage parents in the school.
- Act as role models for literacy.

The Swedish school inspection performed a review of research, “Success in education: A summary of research findings that support the investigation on a scientific basis in school,” which reveals various factors and highlights characteristics that are essential for successful teaching. The review shows that teachers that have good subject knowledge and didactic skills are necessary for students to succeed in the classroom. The teacher should also have the ability to balance them so that they create a context that is meaningful for the students. Another decisive factor in this study is that successful teachers are undeniable leaders in the classroom. They manage to create a structure in classroom work and that they clarify for students which goals they are working towards and what is expected of students’ performance. Teaching should be individualized so that all students must meet challenges that are consistent with their own abilities and knowledge (Johansson 2010). That includes all teachers regardless nationality, as the UN children convention states that every child has the right to “access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods” (UN children convention article 28 §3).

The challenges faced by teachers who work in a multilingual environment are many. A study from 2009 identified the challenges teachers meet in the classroom. The study refers to it as “language disorder”, which, according to the researchers, can be just the fact that the students
have not yet learned the language of instruction. But instead of feeling sympathy for the students who are struggling with the new language, teachers get frustrated (O’Connor & Geigel 2009). Some find it impossible to complete the syllabus for the year. On one hand they need to teach the language and the vocabulary for specific content, which places understanding and knowledge in second place regarding priority. The curriculum is written with the assumption that the learners are fluent in the medium of instruction which is English. The tests, the books and the curriculum assume that language is not an issue. They are formed in the same way as if the students have the medium of instruction as their first language. This leaves the teachers to teach the language explicitly alongside all the other subjects. There is often not enough time and the teachers are placed in a position where they teach in a language they know the students cannot fully comprehend (O’Connor & Geigel 2009).
5 Theories
There have been many theories regarding children's development and language learning. Psychologists and various other professionals have been studying children's development for centuries. The conclusions vary yet there are some that have influenced education systems around the world. Some of these are important issues to consider in education and the choice of medium of instruction.

5.1 Language development
In recent research, exploring the social context has become more frequent. The communicative needs entailed to different social contexts and also the co-construction of identities in a multilingual environment (Herschensohn & Young-Scholten 2013). Lev Vygotsky's (1962) theories regarding children's learning and development discuss different impacts on language and interaction. The starting point of these is the socio-cultural context which, according to him, is of great importance for children's development. He argues that cognitive development occurs in interaction with the environment and that a child's language development and communication skills are a crucial factor when the child grows up.

Psychological development occurs in relation to language and depends on teaching and learning. Language is an important tool in cognitive development according to Vygotsky. He argues that the small child begins its development in the proximal development zone. The proximal development zone is referred to as the world the child knows and the environment surrounding the child. Vygotsky's theory proposes that the development takes place when the child builds an understanding of the world and its closest surroundings. As the rest of the world grows, the child can entangle old experiences with new and create an image of their own reality. The people who are in the child's immediate environment therefore have an important task in supporting the child in the processes that together combine to provide the ultimate social development and are there for development of communications skills such as language (Vygotsky 1962). Richard Towell (Herschensohn & Young-Scholten 2013) states that simply growing up in a community gives a child sufficient input to develop linguistic skills that match the speech of the community they live in. The community can be ones family, neighbors or ones tribe. It can also refer to school-based groups, the classroom, where a variety of people with different backgrounds create their own community of agreed values and rules. This also supports Lev Vygotsky (1962) and his ideas about the proximal development zone. The theories about children and their needs to recognize their surroundings
is an important issue for teachers to consider in students' language development. Especially regarding social development that, according to Vygotsky, is essential for children's progress to become owners of their own emergent process. He states that learning awakens cognitive processes that operate when the child is interactive with people in his or her environment. For example conceptual development is based on the idea that induced learning experiences correspond with the students' prior knowledge. That implies that prior knowledge already exists in the student's minds. In a second language learning context, the conceptual change is slowed down when the student does not yet understand the concept. Constructivism is based on knowledge constructed by them and on the basis of that constructs own concepts and understanding. This is difficult in a foreign language because concepts are not yet created (Kozulin & Gindis & Ageyev & Miller 2003). Some theories indicate that a second language learner is depending on the first language and its linguistic system. The developmental stages follow a transfer from one language to another (Herschensohn & Young-Scholten 2013). By observing and imitating its surroundings the child constructs awareness and understanding based on their own reality. When growing up a child imitates his or her parents, siblings, relatives and friends. Vygotsky proposes that imitating, or a copying process, is a key process through which social patterns are presented by others and then reconstructed by the child itself. Learning, including language learning, awakens a development process that is dependent on interaction and cooperation with people in its surroundings. He states that a child has very little chance to develop concepts independently, therefore the socio-cultural context surrounding the child is very important for its development. As one example Vygotsky argues that a child's play is essential for development. He says that it is not an “accidental whim, a pastime, but an important vital necessity” (Kozulin & Gindis & Ageyev & Miller 2003, 355). Vygotsky proposes that play is a portal to the zone of proximal development and that it works as a preparation for the future life in a socio-cultural context. By playing, the child constructs knowledge as a solid foundation for a lifelong process of building and processing new knowledge (Kozulin & Gindis & Ageyev & Miller 2003). It is during play and interaction a construction of concepts takes place. Every child develops and creates concepts in everyday life as a solid foundation for creation of new knowledge (Bråten 1998). In the context of the culture the child grows up its values, concepts and also its language is formed, developed and passed on (Trudell 2007).

The psychologist John Dewey states that individual development is based on a context of shared goals and values. He proposes, such as in Vygotsky's idea about the proximal
development zone, that shared goals are referred to as a collective issue where the group is aiming for the same destination (Dewey 1938). In social pedagogy there are theories where an individual's adaptation to the group is one of the objectives (Eriksson 2004). Languages are formed along the context that surrounds the individual and this is where the identity is created. Dewey saw the school as an institution where students are molded into individuals with personalities that fit the expectations of society. It is where habits are formed, concepts are learned and emotions develop. He meant that knowledge is to serve the future. And it is in the collective context that composes a classroom that knowledge is built and where student's consciousness is shaped. Therefore it is, according to Dewey, in the context of the classroom a community is formed. It is in interaction with others language is created and developed. Those are crucial ingredients in the process where a child forms its identity and a community is shaped (Dewey 1938).

5.2 Second language learning

The level of development of a child's mother tongue has a strong correlation to their future second language development possibilities. Children, who start school with a solid foundation in language skills and self-confidence, develop stronger abilities in a second language. Students who know how to tell the time in their mother tongue understand the concept of telling time. In order to tell time in the second language, they do not need to re-learn the concept, they simply need to acquire new words for an intellectual skill they have already learned (Cummins 2001). It is called additional language learning context which means language learning that does not take place at the expense of the first language. The new language is added to, as an extension of, the first language and its concepts. This requires education in both languages (Bråten 1998). That approach referred to as "Full transfer/Full Access Model". In this approach, the second language takes a point of departure of the first language. It requires to a fully available grammatical understanding in the first language (Herschensohn & Young-Scholten 2013). A second language should be taught systematically so that learners can gradually transfer skills from a familiar language to the unfamiliar one (Benson 2004). It is also suggested that in the first stages of second language learning, the skills should be divided into four categories, comprehend, speak, read and write. If the new learners start with listening and understanding, they can indulge on that only. When the listening is fluent, then it is time to move on to the oral work of talking (Asher 1969). When the language of instruction in subjects that has little to do with language learning is a foreign
Language, it makes the explicit teaching inefficient. The new language should be learned through communication rather than memorization (Benson 2004).

Language learning, whether it concerns a first or a second language, is a process that is best applied through interaction and repetitive communication in various settings and environments. There are some factors and mechanisms that are key to communication, and thus language learning. In a communicative situation common pre-understanding, mutual attention, feedback and working memory are important ingredients. In order to understand each other and to discover how linguistic units are used there are some common preconceptions, such as shared experiences, needs, values and skills. And joint attention is a factor that is crucial for both parts in a conversation (Strömquist & Wagner & Uppstad 2010). According to Cummins (2001), an education that discourages students from maintaining their mother tongues, takes away the essence of the education. The belief that students who want to maintain their language and their culture are less capable of taking the step into the mainstream and higher society. Schooling built on knowledge and experiences from outside the classroom are an advantage in capturing the children's will to learn and make them build new experiences and knowledge. By using their own language the educator can utilize their abilities and talents. Whether intentional or inadvertent, overlooking the ability to understand what is said in the classroom destroys the children's language and ruptures their relationship with their own culture (Cummins 2001). “To reject a child's language in the school is to reject the child”. When the message, implicit or explicit, communicated to children in school is “leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door”, children also leave a central part of who they are - their identities - at the schoolhouse door. When children feel this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction (Cummins 2001, 5). Also, when children are asked to leave their familiar language outside the classroom, their development stagnates and it also undermines their personal and conceptual foundation for learning (Cummins 2001).

5.3 Learning a subject in a second language

To receive education in the mother tongue is beneficial not only for the students' language development and literacy, but also for the importance to understand what is said in class during all subjects (Cummins 2001). Cummins proposes that when a child is taught in a language it does not speak it is undermining of development and the will to learn. He states that it is obvious that comprehension of the vocabulary of mathematics is a foundation to
succeed in the subject. Cummins (2001) claims that a good education in the mother tongue helps the child develop a deeper understanding of the subject than if it is taught in a second language. If the language of instruction were in mother tongue or a language the students understand, this would not be an issue. The teacher can then focus on the new vocabulary for that specific subject and does not have to make sure students have understood simple instructions. In a classroom where the language of instruction is foreign to the students focus needs to be at understanding what the subject is about and not the subject as a whole. If this is not done properly students are at risk at going through their education without knowing what a subject really is about (O'Connor & Geigel 2009).

5.4 Teaching strategy
It is not enough for teachers to passively accept the diversity among students in their class, they are also responsible for being proactive and taking initiative to affirm linguistic identity by encouraging students to write in their mother tongue in addition to the medium of instruction. They need to create an instructional climate where the linguistic and cultural experience of the whole child is actively accepted and encouraged (Cummins 2001). In modern second language education, there are several schools of thought regarding the most appropriate method to teach children a second language. Many agree that oral development should be a primary focus, suggesting that children learn best by listening to the correct pronunciation and usage of the language by an orally competent teacher, yet the focus on an oral approach relies heavily on the competency of the teacher in the language being taught. Another method is to expose the children to reading early, focusing on phonics and grammar, yet most agree that this method requires a stable knowledge of literacy in one's mother tongue to be effective as the knowledge must be transferred over to the second language using the basics already acquired in one's first language. Taking English as an example, the oral approach is often preferred in areas where the mother tongue is in fact English while English as a second language is often taught with varying methods (Motteram 2013).

During recent years, more focus has been given to a learner-centered method of teaching second languages, where the students' needs and experiences are central to the process of language learning and where student activity is the measure of lesson quality rather than the teacher's performance. An example of this is where the students are given tasks to work on, with the teacher functioning as a facilitator, a resource to assist rather than an authority. This requires the teacher to be mature, intuitive and open to student input. A more traditional
approach is found when the teacher acts as controller, taking charge of the teaching, organizing drills, reading aloud and telling the students facts outright, in other words a teacher-fronted classroom and transmission teaching (Harmer 2001). There are a number of common teaching methods recognized within second language learning, some of the most common are listed here in short.

- Audio-lingualism is based on a stimulus-response-reinforcement model and uses patterned, habit-forming drills to continuously give positive reinforcement and protect the students from making mistakes by design. A commonly noted flaw in this method is the absence of language processing it provides the students.

- Presentation, practice and production (PPP) is a variation of audio-lingualism using situations presented which contextualize the language to be taught. Repetition and cue-response drills provide practice and finally the students produce their own sentences using the words and phrases practiced.

- The communicative approach is a learner-centered method aimed at improving communication skills yet has a very wide definition and can be performed in many different ways. In general, group work and role-playing are central parts. The method promotes language fluency yet has received criticism for not emphasizing grammar and accuracy.

- Task-based learning (TBL) uses non-linguistic problems to aid in language learning. For example receiving a question regarding a random topic such as a time-table ("When does the bus to Nairobi leave on Saturdays?") and having to find the answer in a table. Afterwards the language used is analyzed, making corrections and adjustments. There is criticism regarding the applicability to lower learning levels however.

- Four methods are generally described together as humanistic approaches due to their common design focused on lowering the learners affective filter, removing psychological barriers to learning.

  1. Community language learning is an open method where the students in a group are allowed to talk about anything they chose, with a teacher as an outside observer who can provide translations to a word or phrase the students cannot figure out, acting as a facilitator.

  2. The silent way is characterized by the teacher saying as little as possible, the theory being that the students learn best by helping each other and
being given time to solve the problems themselves. The teacher can model sounds, use phonemic charts or silently let the students know whether they are right, however they are first encouraged to use their classmates for help regarding phonation.

3. Suggestopaedia uses infantilization, or creation of a parent-children environment where the main focus is placed on creating a comfortable, relaxed arena where affective filters are lowered. The teaching is based on oral review of the previous lessons content and dialogue and discussion on the topic, finishing with relaxing music while the teacher reads the material for the next lesson.

4. Total physical response (TPR) is a method used to teach second languages and is based on direct action following short commands, in order to reduce student inhibitions and lower their affective filter. The theory is to reduce stress and insecurity regarding language use, instead keeping a high tempo and providing students with short questions and requiring rapid responses.

- Humanistic teaching involves the students’ own lives and feelings in teaching, designed to promote positive feelings while learning grammar. For example creating sentences with active and passive sentences which are then shared with classmates and discussed, and eventually the students create new topics and sentences on their own connected to their own personal experiences and daily lives (Harmer 2001).
6 Methods

This qualitative study is based on interviews and observations from classrooms with a select number of teachers. The interview and observation methodology and the selection process are presented in this chapter. To triangulate the study's aims, both semi-structured interviews and observations were used.

6.1 Participant selection

The school selected for this study is an urban, public primary school on the outskirts of a major city located in western Kenya. I was granted permission to visit the school where I met with the head teacher who introduced me to the staff. I presented my project plan to the entire staff and they granted me free access to observe their work and interview any teachers who were interested in participation. To narrow the selection, primarily focus was directed at all teachers in Standards 1-3 who were informed about the study aim and were asked if they wished to participate. Due to many interested participants a selection had to be made to confine the amount of teachers to follow, and one teacher from each Standard was randomly selected to provide perspective from all three grades. The selected teachers are listed in table 1 by coded names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Madame O&quot;</td>
<td>Standard 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Madame D&quot;</td>
<td>Standard 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Madame B&quot;</td>
<td>Standard 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 Interview method

To investigate the teachers' views of their language situation and their strategies in managing the everyday life in the classroom, interviews were held. The study is built upon qualitative semi-structured interviews with a phenomenological perspective. A phenomenology is a general term used for qualitative studies and indicates a social phenomenon in the perspective of the actor. In a situation where the interview is held as a conversation between two equals with the same interests, a phenomenological perspective gives the interviewees an opportunity to describe their own reality and experiences, also referred to as life-world. A phenomenological approach gives both interviewer and interviewee a chance to reflect upon...
all that is said during the interview. Finally the intention is to interpret the meaning of the
described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). To create a comfortable interview setting
where interaction by mutual trust is an important factor, the interviewer formulates the
implicit and returns it to confirm his or her interpretation. A qualitative study refers to words,
not numbers and a phenomenological perspective gives the reader an input to a person's
everyday life and his or her thoughts and experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). Negative
effects of the phenomenological approach include potential exclusions in the results due to the
need for the interview questions to have a valid and understandable answer. Additionally,
rather than presenting own thoughts and opinions there is a risk that the interviewees answer
what they think the interviewer wants to hear.

6.2.1 Implementation

The interviews were held privately in a closed classroom and steps were taken to avoid any
outside disturbances. During the interview the entire conversation was recorded
electronically. The teachers were informed of the purpose of the study and the importance of
their personal opinion and point of view was pointed out. A standard set of questions was
developed and asked during the interviews, with all participants receiving the same questions
in the same order. The questions used were open, allowing for additional freedom in
responses and allowing spontaneous storytelling, an important aspect of phenomenological
interviewing (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). The main focus of the questions was to gather
information regarding opinions and thoughts on the use of English as medium of instruction,
the role of English in Kenya, instructing in a multilingual environment and difficulties
encountered as well as highlighting specific situations and experiences of the teachers.

6.3 Observational Method

To get a broader and more objective picture of the teachers' educational strategies,
observations were held in the classroom during lessons. The purpose of the observations was
to see how the teachers give instruction and what types of strategies they use to attempt to
make all the students understand and follow the lesson. Kylén (2004) talks about
observational studies and points to the role of the observer, stating that influence and relations
to the subject are important issues in an observation, and that notes taken are dependent on the
observer's ability to select the observations that are relevant. As Kylén (2004) points out, even
a structured observation is affected by different aspects like timing, surroundings and the
experiences of the person who performs the observation and collects the data.
6.3.1 Implementation

During the observations I had a seat at the front, at the right hand side of the classroom. I could see the students' faces and expressions, at the same time as I was following the teacher's movement, expressions and what she wrote on the blackboard. During the two-week time I sat in the classroom I took notes of what the teachers were saying and doing, and also the students responses to what the teachers said and did. I was an outside observer with no connection to the students nor the teachers involved. During observations I was uninfluenced by what was going on in the room. The ongoing class did not take notice of me after I introduced myself, told them what my purpose was and then sat quietly by the wall. During the period I have followed the teachers and observed their pedagogical methods and interaction with their students. I have taken notes during the lessons I observed and kept a protocol of what was said and done. The focus of the observations was their work with the pupils' language learning. To be given a full picture of the teachers work with language I observed three different subjects, English, mathematics and Kiswahili in all three classes. The three class teachers taught all the subjects to the same class in the same classroom.

6.4 Analysis

All interviews conducted were recorded and transcribed in full. At the end of the study period all transcripts were gathered and read through thoroughly. Key words and sentences were coded based on content analysis. Based on the coding generated, categories of topics were gathered and grouped allowing analysis of the different teacher’s responses to reveal shared trends as well as individual opinions and experiences. The observations were not recorded, yet key observations and discussions within the classroom were transcribed including the use of body language and intonation. Pedagogic methods were identified and compared between the 3 classes as well as student responses and observed student behavior.

6.5 Ethical considerations

Confidentiality has been fully respected when the results of this study are discussed and presented. All participants are strictly anonymous, as are their location of work and living. Therefore names, age and ethnic background are not mentioned. This is done with strict caution and with careful consideration regarding personal life (Swedish research council). The interviewees' were provided written and oral information beforehand that the study was voluntary and strictly anonymous. The participants were informed that if they at any point
wished to terminate their participation in the study they were free to do so at any point. They were also provided full information regarding the aim and purpose of the study before deciding to participate.
7 Results

The results from this study are presented here. The chapter starts with a collection of selected interview results and continues with a selection of observed lessons performed by the three teachers. The selected results aim to answer the question of the teachers’ strategies and thoughts about their role and also what methods they employ to teach in a language the students do not fully comprehend.

7.1 General observations and impressions

The school where this study took place is a public school in Kisumu, the third largest city of Kenya and the largest city in the Nyanza province, traditionally home to people of the Luo tribe. Dholuo is their primary language and is the language referred to as mother tongue in this study. Dholuo and other locally spoken languages are not included in the Kenyan curriculum. The school where this study took place has adopted a general policy that English is to be used as medium of instruction from day one in Standard 1. In all three classes observed, the medium of instruction is mainly English, except in the Kiswahili subject, where the teacher uses the language of the subject. During mathematics and English the teachers used English as the main language, however occasionally some code-switching, changing of language, with Kiswahili could occur, yet never with Dholuo which is the mother tongue of nearly all the students and teachers.

The school is located in an urban area, on the outskirts of the city slum. It contains a small nursery with about 20 children age 3-6 and about 600 students in Standards 1-8. Every class has approximately 40 students and 1 class teacher. The teachers who I have talked to, and worked with, are dealing with a reality where they are not only facing educational issues, but also a political climate that affects every aspect of their daily life. The teachers have shown me which basic needs the school is suffering from, which are easily solved with a small amount of money. Unfortunately, the money does not reach the school as it is lost somewhere on the way, due to corruption and a dysfunctional social system, a widely experienced issue in Kenya (Transparency International 2014). The school has no electricity or running water for the students to wash their hands after visiting the bathroom. Basic necessities such as chairs, tables, pencils and books are not adequately provided so the students sit four or five side-by-side on a bench built for two. In some classrooms the students had to stand up during class and there were several children sharing each textbook. Many of the students are orphans and come from extremely poor conditions. Many do not receive food on a daily basis and suffer
from malnourishment, some are born with HIV. There are approximately 30 staff members at
the entire school. In the lower primary grades every teacher has their own class and they teach
all the subjects themselves. In the upper primary grades there is one teacher for each subject
and they move around to the different classrooms.

7.2 Interviews
The interviews are presented in different categories according to the major themes that were
found during the coding and content analysis of the transcriptions. The teachers' role, where
the teachers give their view on their role as professionals and how it is intertwined with the
difficulties associated with poverty and public schooling. Secondly, the classroom, where
pedagogy is in focus and the teachers present thoughts on their professional role and
pedagogic strategies and finally, thoughts about language use, where the teachers give their
thoughts on English as medium of instruction.

7.2.1 The teachers role
This part presents some of the specific answers the teachers gave during interviews, which
highlight general trends apparent throughout the interviews. It has become an emotional and
important part of this study though it shows a reality that is hard to absorb. The teachers were
nervous and a little tense at the beginning of the interview but when we got started they
became more relaxed and excited to answer questions. The three teachers I interviewed were
all very devoted to their profession and proud of being schoolteachers. They felt determined
to tell me about how they work. Because of the widespread poverty in the area, the teacher's
role is more than ‘just’ teaching. The teachers face problems that go beyond their duty to
teach. They have a major responsibility for the children, and their role in the children's lives
can sometimes be life-changing for the child.

"Sometimes I can see one pupil sleep in class, and I ask ‘Why are you sleeping’
and the pupils answer ‘Teacher, I am hungry’. They don't afford food at home. It
can be days in between meals. Sometimes I have to give them some shillings so
they can run and buy some food. They are children, they can't learn when they
are hungry and it is my job to make them learn. So I buy them food” (Madame
D)

A teacher's pay check is small, but still they are giving some of the children money to buy
food. This school is part of the largest slum of Kisumu and many of the children live under
very difficult circumstances. Addiction, theft and child abuse is part of their everyday lives, even the smaller children. Sometimes the teacher is the only safe and secure adult in the children's lives. The following example shows how a teacher can affect students through more than simply tutoring.

“As a teacher I have a lot of responsibilities. I'm not only teaching English, I'm trying to teach them so that they can become responsible members of the society. I'm trying to teach them about being good children, I advise them. At times there are some children that have problems, and I have to help them when they come to me. There are challenges. There are some things that they can't discuss with their parents. Let's say they have some problems at home. I tell them, the teacher is your best friend, tell me your problem so that we can discuss. The world is so big and there are people who try to misguide you and take you to the wrong path. As a teacher I have to help the children so they don't be misguided.” (Madame B)

Poor health is also one of the difficulties that teachers have to deal with. Many of the children suffer from malnutrition and some have poor health. The orphans have usually lost one or both parents in HIV/AIDS or other diseases. The teacher becomes the main person in the children's life.

“At the same time you are a primary teacher, you are at the same time a nurse, the children are sick and you have to take care of them. You are also like a parent and you have to be role model for the children.” (Madame O).

This is another example of a teacher's role in the life of a student. Many of them do not have guardians who take responsibility for their well-being.

7.2.2 The classroom
The teacher's interviewed are all in lower primary, Standards 1-3. When they start a new class, the majority of the children do not speak English. We are talking about how they manage the language situation in the classroom. I ask how they start with the very new learners who do not speak English at all.

“In the beginning is very difficult. I have to know my class and know their ability. They cannot write or read and some of them don't speak English and sometimes not even Kiswahili. In the beginning I have to use very easy language
and easy words. I use pictures and I repeat myself a lot. That's so they can hear the words and sometimes they understand and sometimes not. Some pupils learn faster than others.” (Madame D)

We were talking about the focus in the classroom. In every subject (except Kiswahili), English is used as the medium of instruction and the subject itself can easily fade away to make room for language understanding. When teaching a subject in a language the students do not understand, a lot of the focus is put into creating understanding. The vocabulary is an important issue in the earlier years, and it is not only the subjects which are new for the young learners, it is also a new language and vocabulary.

“In every lesson I want the children to understand the concept. Let's say we practice vocabulary. I want the student to understand and be able to use the words in sentences correctly. I want them to practice so they surely understand the new concept.” (Madame B)

This is one of the issues in the debate of mother tongue as language of instruction, when students are supposed to develop and learn different subjects in school the language barrier is a major obstacle on the way to successful understanding of the subject itself. The difficulties in understanding the concept of a new subject are increased when it is taught in a language the students do not fully understand.

The classes are big and the ages are very mixed. Due to poverty, domestic issues, or lack of guardians some children do not start school until age 8 or 9. There are large differences in their level of ability. We were talking about how to make sure everyone can follow and how to help those who fall behind.

“After teaching we give exercises. That is a good way to know if the students have understood what we have been talking about during the lesson. We also give oral questions in class; if their answer is right then I know they understand. If they are slow and have a hard time following, I help them one-to-one, in the afternoons. Then I get the time to sit with them who need extra help and explain again. I help them one-to-one.” (Madame O)

Many of the teachers use the blackboard more than books because there are not enough books for everyone. Therefore exercises are performed in front of the whole class and often the classes solve problems together. That makes it easy for teachers to see if the exercise has been
understood by the student in the front of the class. The other students are participating in the exercise but it is hard for the teacher to see if everyone really has understood. We talk about how to make sure the students gets what they need in their education.

“The students have different abilities. There are those who are good, so good that they finish their work before the others. I encourage them to work ahead, to continue the work. The ones that are weak, I try to create time for them after school, or on Saturdays, or even in the evening. So that I try to guide them. At times you have to go back to lower grades so that they can start again and repeat. I encourage them to write a lot.” (Madame D)

School days in this school are long. The lessons start at seven thirty after a morning prayer, and it is not over until four in the afternoon. That gives the teacher a lot of time during the day to create time to sit with someone who needs extra support. Still some of them take time at night to sit with some that need them.

7.2.3 Attitude toward language use
In this school English is used as medium of instruction from day one in first grade. We were talking about language and why English is preferable for them. It is very hard to get a straight answer. The teachers are aware of expectations on them and what they are supposed to answer. As mentioned earlier in this text both parents and also the students expect the language in school to be English. The Kenyan society has adapted English as the main language in higher education and society expects the teachers to handle that.

“When they learn in English I think they learn to understand English better. At times there are words in their mother tongue that don't exist in English, so I think that would confuse them.” (Madame B)

This comment goes against what most researchers have found regarding second language learning at the same time as it verifies the apprehension that tutoring in English would make the students learn faster.

“I teach in English. In all subjects we teach in English. We insist it is English-only in school. At home they can speak in their mother tongue, but when they come to school we insist that they only speak English. When the children are together they learn on their own. They learn from each other. They imitate us and then they learn by themselves.” (Madame O)
Students are not allowed to speak any other language in school. The underlying idea is for the students to learn from each other while speaking in English during break time.

“*It is very important that these children learn in English because all the settings are in English, in all the subjects except Kiswahili. It is all done in English so we insist that the children learn as fast as possible. In a way it is our national language and to be able to succeed it is important to know good English. When you don't know how to speak English you are out of place. English must be spoken in school.*” (Madame O)

The same teacher says later in the interview: “*For me, I think it's best to teach the children in the mother tongue.*” (Madame O)

Society expects its children and young adults to comprehend and speak English. For a number of reasons, some of which are explained in this paper, the original cultures and languages are frowned upon by higher society and considered of lower status. The teachers are aware of this. But they also face a reality where they strive to do best by the children. Even if it seems like Madame O is aware of the benefits of using mother tongue as language of instruction, she is also aware of what is expected of her by society and parents.

7.3 Observations

Here follows a selection of observations made during the study. The observations presented show some typical examples of strategies used by teachers. The two strategies most common are rote-learning and TPR (total physical response).

7.3.1 Example 1: Rote-learning

The following is an example from an English lesson in first grade. It demonstrates an example of rote-learning as a method. The school has a short supply of books and every book is shared by four or five students. This example shows not only a pedagogic strategy, but also a reality where the teacher has to work with very little material. Every accentuation is apprehended by the students and the class seems very concentrated and focused. The students follow the teacher's voice and body language. The students in the class also follow each other's voices. There are some leaders in the choir and they are taking command when the class is answering the teacher's questions. Their voice is leading and the rest of the class follows. If some of the students want to answer "no", the leading voice answers yes and make everyone answer yes together.
The teacher holds up an example of the book so she can be sure that everyone can see.

**Teacher – Look at the picture. What do you see?** (The teacher is holding up an exercise book and points to a picture of two oranges)

Class (in choir) – *I see an orange.*

T – *Is it one Orange?* (She holds up one finger)

C – *No*

T – *How many are there?*

C – *I can see two Oranges*

T – *That is correct. You can see two Oranges.* (The teacher holds up two fingers) *Two oranges. How many oranges do you see?*

C – *I can see two oranges.*

T – *That is correct. I can see two...* (she is waiting for the class to finish the sentence)

C – *Oranges*

T – *Two Oranges*

C – *Two Oranges*

The above example shows one strategy all teachers used in their three classes. It intends to make the class answer the teacher and repeat in choir. The students seemed to be used to this kind of teaching and they were following the teacher's voice and every movement she made. The method is a traditional way of teaching-centered teaching. Students are expected to learn by memorizing and repeating without a deeper understanding or connection to their own reality. Some researchers claim that rote learning plays an important part in vocabulary learning strategies because it is defined as repetition, memorization, and practicing (Sinhaneiti & Kyaw 2012)

### 7.3.2 Example 2: Rote-learning

One other example of rote-learning is from an English lesson in class two, with another teacher. The class is repeating the meaning of the expressions same and different. This example is to show the same method as in example one, used by a different teacher. The method intends to make the students repeat words and meaning of words by connecting them to reality, like in the example, clothes. The teacher is standing in front of the class and pointing at her scarf.

T – *Are my scarf and my skirt the same color?* (she is specifically intonating the word “same” with her voice so that the students can understand what she means by the question)
C – No
T – No. They are different. They are...
C – Different
(The teacher takes up two boys to stand in front of the class)
T – Are their shirts the same? (She is pointing to one of the boys shirts)
C – Yes.
T – Yes, they are the same. They are the...
C – Same.

It occurred to me that the teachers use a different tone of voice and the students know when they are expected to answer in choir. This strategy is commonly used and seems well known for the students and it makes them alert and focused during the lesson.

7.3.3 Example 3: Total physical response
The following example took place in second grade. The exercise was an introduction to a theme about trees and plants. The strategy that is used in this example is total physical response (TPR). The teacher started the exercise by drawing a tree, the roots, trunk, leaves and branches on the blackboard. She wrote the words and let the class repeat them one by one. She used her body language to encourage the class to answer and to keep up the energy. After a while, when the words have been repeated a few times, the teacher took the class outside.

T – Come Quick! Hurry Hurry! (Shows with her body language that the class has to run outside, the students follow and they gather around a tree outside the classroom)
T – Where is the tree? (The students point to the tree they are standing around. The teacher is standing behind the class, not visible to the students.)
T – Point at the roots. (The students points at the roots and some of them show that they go under the ground)
T – Point at the trunk. (The students point. I can really tell they enjoy the exercise and the energy is high. They look at me and laugh)
T – Point to the branches (students point) Point to the leaves (students point). Point to the roots (students point).
(After having repeated a few times in a quick succession)
T - Sawasawa⁵. Go back inside! (Teacher shows with her body language to run inside. The class runs back inside and takes their seats)

⁵. Kiswahili for "Ok".
TPR is a method used to teach second languages and is based on the direct action following short commands, in order to reduce student inhibitions and lower their affective filter. It allows students to react to language without thinking too much and reduces student anxiety and stress (Asher 1969). The language learning method is one of the methods that take into consideration the fact that a relaxed atmosphere is an important aspect when it comes to language learning. It is based on listening comprehension by given physical response when hearing a foreign utterance. The total physical response method was founded by James Asher in the 1960s. It was designed to accelerate listening comprehension of a foreign language by giving direct response to physical orders.
8 Discussion
It may be hard for an onlooker to understand the complexity of Kenya's language situation. As pointed out earlier in this paper, in Kenya English as a language has a very important role in society. It is spoken in media, business, politics and higher education. A study by Spernes (2012) shows that English is considered a "school language" and that parents, students and also the teachers are aware that those who do not speak English do not stand a chance in reaching a higher education and a better life. The notion that banishing mother tongue and using English exclusively is the best way to learn the language is widely spread and generally accepted.

8.1 Teaching strategies used by the teachers
The following chapter presents the pedagogic strategies observed.

8.1.1 Rote learning
Some researchers claim that rote learning plays an important part in vocabulary learning strategies because it is defined as repetition, memorization, and practicing. However, Sinhaneti & Kyaw (2012) admit that the strategy is considered negative in some aspects of education. They say that only a few learners basically understand and master rote learning. To do so students have to employ certain skills, such as memorizing by reading and writing repeatedly, reviewing often, using a dictionary, and taking note of irregular verbs. Not all students have these qualifications. For those dependent on understanding and connecting to their own reality rote learning is difficult to embrace. The method is based on the idea that knowledge is consolidated by pure repetition and when all facts are learned the students are to put the knowledge in their own reality and create understanding by themselves (Sinhaneti & Kyaw 2012). Rote learning as a strategy is a debated issue. Some feel it is a strategy that gives the students the knowledge they need and they mean that understanding and putting knowledge in a context is a process that gradually takes place after the knowledge is acquired (Bjørgen 1964). There are also some different definitions about the concept of “rote learning”. Most of them tend to agree that it is a mechanical way of learning where subjects disregard meaning. This method is also known as "by-heart learning", frequent repetition is the common means to memorizing (Bjørgen 1964). However, there is some research that shows that meaning and meaningfulness is produced in the learning process. In their point of view, the learner uses his or her own strategies by finding words from his or her own language and previous knowledge. The material is studied and repeated until it is fully learned. The strategy is associated to Aristotle's Law of Frequency, written 350BBC, – the
more frequently two things are experienced together, the more likely it will be that the experience or recall of one will stimulate the recall of the second (Leonard 2002). The evidence against the method is among others that automation may be perceived with little cognitive effort. Bjørgen (1964) refers to the mechanism that is based on the use of association with already existing knowledge, and states that "rote learning" is a complete way to reach both cognitive knowledge as well as understanding. An opposite way to teach would be a problem solving based education. The difference from “rote learning” is mainly the process where the purpose is to reach a goal. By collecting knowledge and based on that knowledge reaching a conclusion (Ray 1967). To be creative and to use both cognitive, evaluative and convergent thinking it is necessary for the learner to discover new information and create own knowledge and understanding by rediscovery of old information. The rote learning strategy is a way to create a pure knowledge of fact, but to create a learning situation where the student has a full understanding for the subject, cognitive thinking is required (Ray 1967).

Rote learning is presented in observation example 1 and 2. The strategy is common and used in most tutoring by the observed Kenyan teachers. It is a way to make sure all students are participating in the exercise and it is noticeable if someone is not paying attention. When the classes are answering in choir the students can hear each other and in that way they learn pronunciation and correct terms in correct situations. By repeating the same word and being expected to finish the teacher's sentence makes the whole class concentrated and they are taught to listen to everything that is said. By repeating words and sentences the students learn them by rote. Rote learning was used by all the teachers I observed and talked to.

8.1.2 Total physical response
TPR is a good way of teaching concepts and words in a foreign language. It activates the students and it establishes knowledge in the minds of the students by connecting it to things the students recognize. During the lessons I observed the TPR lesson presented seemed like the most fun for the students. They seemed comfortable and the teacher laughed a lot along with the whole class. It was also one of the few classes where the students got to be active during the lesson. According to previous studies the second language learning increased significant by a direct physical response to foreign commands compared to translating (Asher 1969). One of the ideas by Asher is that second language learning should be divided by the four language skills, talking, listening, writing and reading. TPR is a method to make listening fluency without the urge to speak. Only by obeying the commands in the foreign language the
learner develops a listening skill and learns to understand words and commands without speaking a word (Asher 1969). The concept "culturally mediate memory" was found by Lev Vygotsky and points out the advantage of constructing knowledge on prior knowledge. This refers to individual memory where new knowledge is constructed upon what the person already knows. The constructivist approach Vygotsky refers to is built upon the socio-cultural context where learning takes place by interaction and observing the closest surroundings. The culturally mediate memory means a process where a separate function, knowledge, is connected and together they create a functional system where a deeper understanding is constructed, for example, by pictures. A child sees a picture of a cat and refers directly to the cat known to them. After seeing pictures of different cats it understands that there are different kinds and not only the cat the child knows (Bråten 1998).

8.2 The Kenyan educational system

It can be difficult to grasp the complex language situation in the Kenyan school system. To understand the teachers situation and the Kenyan society more research needs to be completed. For that to occur there are more than one aspect that need to change. For example, the Kenyan curriculum was hard to find and read. Society is struggling to keep up with the modernization and an opening up of society. The fact that the country is still missing a unified national identity and one single common language also complicates matters. The curriculum contains recommendations about using mother tongue as the language of instruction through standards 1-3 and from standard 4 it states that English is to be used except during Kiswahili lessons, yet this is not the reality at the school studied, nor nationally, which is supported by previous research (Spernes 2012, Ball 2010, Benson 2004). Every year exams test the students' knowledge and ability, yet they are all in English, even from year one where the students just started school and are not comfortable using English at all. Especially not in written text when the students have not yet learned to read and write. In a way, this means the Kenyan school system goes against its own curriculum advice. On one hand they recommend mother tongue in earlier years. On the other hand there is no material provided that supports the teachers to do so. The textbooks are in English from first grade. Also the teacher education is provided in English only. On top of that the teacher has pressure from surrounding society to give the students the best chance in life and the common belief is that it can only be reached through proper spoken English. When the teachers are interviewed they are aware of what is expected of them, and they are also aware that to pass the tests and go on
with education the students have to learn English. That leaves them in a position where they do not have much choice other than to follow what is expected of them in their profession.

8.3 Mother tongue as medium of instruction

The children learn better when educated in their mother tongue, a conclusion based on theories and research preparation made in this paper when it comes to subject learning like mathematics or social studies, and also when it comes to second language learning. To be educated in one’s mother tongue gives a child the prospects it needs to embrace and develop a new language. When moderating a language with both literacy and verbal development the child has a solid ground to build new knowledge and develop on the basis of themselves and their reality. Furthermore, education with mother tongue as medium of instruction makes it easier to follow and understand the instructions given in the classroom. It gives the students a chance to develop an identity connected to their cultural heritage. Branson (2005) says that the second language should be taught systematically so that learners can gradually transfer skills from a familiar language to the unfamiliar one. They would say that the confusion lies within the fact that they do not know what the words mean in the first place. As it is now the children are losing their mother tongue and their cultural identity when they are educated in a foreign langue (Cummins 2001). They lose the chance to capture literacy in their mother tongue and at the same time they are expected to learn a different language and accommodate knowledge taught in a language they do not understand. The children are expected to learn how to read and write with a sound system they never heard and to sit and spell words they do not know the meaning of (Cummins 2001). According to most researchers and experts in the field it is not convenient to educate young children in another language than their mother tongue. Despite all existing recommendations against a foreign language as medium of instruction that is what is happening every day in schools in Kenya (Benson 2004).

8.4 The teachers' situation

Based on the answers in the interview, the opinions among teachers seem to be divided. That can be understandable. Their thoughts are deeply rooted in the surroundings, experiences and their own upbringing. The level of teacher education is low and poorly designed. The same is the curricula, which is written in English. This, combined with the lack of school facilities makes teaching extremely difficult, especially when the language of instruction also is foreign to the teacher (Benson 2004). The teachers are forced to translate and code-switch to create meaning. I believe the teachers know this, but they also know that they are expected to teach
the children English as fast as possible. When a teacher is letting go of third grade students to start fourth grade they know that all lessons are going to be held in English. That is what the curriculum states; though it says nothing about how lower primary school teachers can prepare the students for this. Everyone I have spoken to believe that use of English from first grade is the best way to learn in school. "They just have to learn English" (Madame O). Instead, many learn nothing as they do not understand what is said in the classroom, neither English nor the subjects. They miss out on the possibility to learn proper literacy in their mother tongue at the same time as they are expected to read and write in a language they do not speak. The students are expected to learn how to read with unfamiliar sounds and words they do not understand. Furthermore education is handled by teachers who do not have the medium of instruction as their first language and the teachers I met are not very good English speakers. They use incorrect pronunciation and some vocabulary is used out of context. It is expected of teachers to teach in a second or even third language they don't speak anywhere else besides work. In the teachers office they mix between Kiswahili and their mother tongue, Dholuo, but in the schoolyard the students are not allowed to speak anything but English. These are regulations every school has to follow. This school decided that when having breaks the students can speak to each other and therefore develop their English in a context they understand and on a level equal to their own. And that is a good way to learn language, by interaction and in a familiar context a new language can consolidate. Besides the fact that language learning needs to be supervised by someone who speaks the language fluently to develop in the right direction. This could be done in the classroom by the teachers. But in the classroom rote learning and TPR are the dominating pedagogic strategies and both of them leave very little room for interaction and practicing the language on their own.
9 Conclusions

The language situation is a result of cultural heritage and Kenyan history. The results from the interviews made in this study show a complex situation that teachers have to deal with. Compared to the problems they have to face every day, foreign language as medium of instruction is not highly prioritized. The fact that English is one of the two national languages and the fact that it has a very high status in Kenyan society makes it the natural choice in the eyes of most people, teachers included. The results show awareness about a complicated situation where teachers ought to teach in a language the students do not understand. But that it is a situation they just have to accept. It has always been that way and many do not see a reason for changing it. The pedagogic strategies used by the teachers are well known and the students seem comfortable in the school environment. They are also aware of the importance of a good education and during my time in this school I did not hear anyone complaining. Not even once. We have a lot to learn from this. To be grateful for what we have instead of seeing things we do not have. The teachers accept the situation and try to do their best to prepare the students for a future. “We want them to become teachers, nurses, doctors. We want them to succeed” (Madame O). In Sweden, the multilingual classroom is becoming more frequent and Swedish teachers are facing a different reality than they are used to. The question is, is the Swedish school system ready for this type of change? An ordinary teacher can meet a first grade where half of the class has another mother tongue than Swedish and some of them might not even speak Swedish yet. I believe it is important for pedagogues to get educated to be ready for second language tutoring in the early years of school. Otherwise there is a chance that some students go through their first year of schooling without understanding what is said in the classroom. Pedagogues need to be aware that to understand a new language and to develop good literacy mother tongue should be encouraged as much as the new language. Education that raises awareness about this fact would improve the starting-point for second language students in all grades.
10 References


