Tensions experienced by Sabaot teachers as they implement the Kenyan language-in-education policy in a context of language shift

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Outline of session
- Background to study
- Methodology
- Context
- Findings
- Implications
- Your questions and feedback

Background

Aim of study
To investigate the different responses of Sabaot teachers to the language-in-education policy and the process by which it is being implemented.

Language-in-education policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium of instruction</th>
<th>Language subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Mother tongue or language of catchment area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards 1 to 3</td>
<td>Mother tongue or language of catchment area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards 4 to 8</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodology

Ethnography is ‘the study of people in naturally occurring settings’ (Watson-Gegeo 1988, p.576).

Local implementation
- Advocacy
- Materials development
- Teacher education

‘Sumaneet’ School
March – September 2007
- 6 teachers
- ECD, Standards 1 & 2
- 85% Sabaot
- Class sizes: 90-130
**Methodology**

**Methods**
- Observation: Informal Lessons (65)
- Semi-structured Interviews (50)
- Focus Group Interviews (3)
- Document Analysis

**Sequence of analysis**
- Coding for themes
- Looking for patterns
- Making interpretations
- Building theory

**Context**
- Situation of unrest. By May 2007:
  - 30 primary schools closed
  - 140 killed
  - 51,000 displaced

"The father is a Sabaot, the mother is a Sabaot but it is very funny that I find that the parents are talking with the children Kiswahili. … And you see that thing [Sabaot] is collapsing in that way" (Mary)

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**Factors leading to language shift**
- Mixed ethnicities
- Discrimination against Sabaot
- Negative attitudes towards Sabaot language
- Only recent development of Sabaot writing system
- Prestigious languages in education
- Kiswahili spoken in many homes and in most public meetings

**Teachers’ perception of their own difficulty in Sabaot compared to Kiswahili and English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sabaot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jennifer M Jones, September 2009, BAAL presentation
Implementation of Mother Tongue subject and medium of instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Tongue subject</th>
<th>Medium-of-instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taught Sabaot</td>
<td>Moved learners from known languages to unknown languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilled local goals</td>
<td>Achieved national and international goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus of lessons: To teach English lexical items

Blackboard display

Standard 2 Science lesson

Proportion of time teachers speak different languages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECD</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>KIS</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>KIS</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>KIS</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>KIS</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers code-switch to facilitate understanding

“...when you saw me, even when I was teaching English I was mixing. So to make them understand better than when they could use foreign language alone. The teaching part is now easy and the children understand more quickly” (Nelly, Class 1 teacher).

Teachers code-switch to facilitate understanding:

- **With the whole class. For example,**
  1. To provide translations of the English vocabulary:
     T: Nimesema eye ku koong’ta, nose ku sēruut, tongue ku kiy nee? (I have said eye is an eye, nose is a nose, tongue what is it?)
   (Science test)
  2. To give lesson instructions:
     T: Chensay fuku “This is a bag.” (You say, “This is a bag”) (English lesson)

- **With individuals. For example,**
  1. To clarify that learners are on task:
     T: Koowaaery kiny? (Are you already finished?) (Science lesson)
  2. To check that they understand:
     T: Roots ku shikwa chu, Kookas? (Roots, Roots here. Have you seen?) (Science lesson)
Implications

Local
• Local stakeholders need to agree on way forward for policy implementation.
• Strengthen local implementation efforts (advocacy, teacher education, materials development).
• Find ways of meeting needs of linguistically and ethnically diverse learners. (e.g., develop materials for L1 and L2 speakers (Hornberger & King, 1996)

Demonstrate to national policy-makers effectiveness of mother tongue education.

National
Increased commitment to mother tongue policy implementation.

References