

THE ROLE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN IMPARTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LITERACY IN KENYA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

One of the aims of primary school education in Kenya is to impart English literacy to all primary school learners. For this aim to be achieved, instruction should be handled by qualified teachers, learning resources should be adequate and there should be a clear language of instruction. However, a look at the teaching and learning in primary schools shows that many teachers are not qualified to teach English and they lack commitment to the teaching profession. Teachers' lack of commitment results from poor remuneration, poor working conditions and a degraded teaching profession. Classes are large and therefore teachers employ teacher-centred approaches that reduce learners to passive listeners. Shortage of teachers means that many English lessons are not taught. Due to shortage of learning materials learners lack adequate exposure and stimulation necessary for optimal learning. The situation is worsened by non-adherence to the language policy and the use of Sheng (a mixture of English, Kiswahili and local languages). Teachers spend considerable time coaching and drilling pupils to pass KCPE at the expense of teaching them to master English language. Studies have shown that many primary school pupils are graduating from primary school without acquiring basic skills in literacy. The objectives of this paper were to: discuss the role of primary school education in imparting literacy, highlight challenges of teaching English language literacy at primary school level, explore opportunities for improving achievement in English literacy and to make recommendations based on the discussion. The paper will use secondary data to guide discussion.

Key Words: Primary School education, English Literacy, Teaching, Learning, Challenges, Opportunities