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## ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS ON THE USE OF LOCAL LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN THE LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWANIA DISTRICT, UGANDA

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Chief Editor</b> Web: <a href="http://www.ijsdc.org">www.ijsdc.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@ijsdc.org">info@ijsdc.org</a></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Editing Oversight</b> Impericals Consultants International Limited</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> <i>Children are most likely to succeed in learning when they are given an opportunity to learn in their mother tongue from early years. The use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction boosts children's self-confidence and school performance. Despite English being the language of instruction and a major factor in enhancing good academic performance in schools, there is need to establish the opinions and attitudes of the key participants - the teacher and the pupil- regarding the efficacy of local language use in school. This paper sought to investigate the attitudes of teachers on the use of local language as a Medium of Instruction in Lower Classes of Primary Schools in Kwanja District, Uganda. Data was collected and analysed using the mixed method approach and the study utilised triangulation as a research design. Data collection was done by means of questionnaires, observations of lessons, interviews and document analysis. Purposive sampling was used to get a total number of 24 respondents consisting of teachers, and head teachers learners. The study was guided by the Linguistic Interdependence (LIH) by Cummins (1979 and 1981). Results of the study indicated that teachers and learners have positive attitudes on the use of local language as a medium of instruction underpinned by limited support by the government in training of teachers, material development and assessment of local language at the end of the primary cycle, since local language is used only in the lower primary classes. Teachers and learners are of the opinion that the promotion of local language as a medium of instruction in schools is meant to fulfill the study recommended by the intervention of government in empowering teachers to effectively use of local languages as LoI yet the support by the government in LL as a Medium of Instruction is inadequate.</i></p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> <i>Language of instruction, Local language, Attitudes, Second Language</i></p>
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## 1.1 Introduction

Language is a system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other. It is a means of communication through which people express their desire, ideas excitements, amusements, disappointments and exchange of information. It is a tool for thinking and concept development in children. Children think and talk in a language that is familiar to them. It is a vehicle for many different kinds of learning. Language development in children is very essential. It is the process by which children come to understand and communicate using language during early childhood (Njogu, 2015).

Encouraging the young children to learn in the local language, according to Teachers Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa - TISSA (2013), helps the learners to develop confidence, communication skills, and active participation in class, self-esteem and their unique identity in a multicultural community. When the children learn an unknown language at the beginning of their schooling with the new cultural pattern, they become anxious, fearful and have psychological barrier to language which later affect the communication of the child. Knowledge of local language helps the children to avoid psychological language barriers caused as a result of forcing children to learn and communicate in the language that they do not use at home and the children would not be competent to learn as stated by World Bank (2005). Brock-Utne and Alidou (2006) support this point saying that; Numeracy and literacy are skills that learners must acquire as a demand to progress well in their education and livelihood and this can be achieved using the local language as Medium of Instruction early years of the lower classes of the primary schools.

Learners need sufficient proficiency in the Medium of Instruction for them to effectively manage classroom tasks and examinations respectively and this can be done through the local language as the Medium of Instruction. The language the child uses in the classroom needs to be sufficiently developed so that the child is able to process the cognitive challenges of the classroom, (Alidou and Brock-Utne, 2011). Altinyelken, Moorcroft, and Van der Draai, (2014) argue that the government of Uganda implemented the thematic curriculum in 2007, emphasising the use of local languages (LLs) as the medium of instruction at lower primary classes of primary one to primary three. One of the aims of introducing thematic curriculum in Uganda was to improve on the literacy and numeracy levels of pupils at lower classes of the primary schools in Uganda (Namukwaya and Kibirige, 2014).

The policy of language in education proposed by Uganda Education Commission in 1963, limited the many languages in Uganda to some few mutually intelligible languages such as, Ateso/Akaramojong, Luganda, Lugbara, Luo, Runyankore-Rukiga and Runyoro-Rutoro (Ssentanda, 2016). The fact that these languages do not have sufficient materials to be used as LoLT points towards fluctuating levels of effort to develop Ugandan languages. Moreover, speakers of the mutually intelligible languages in a certain group were expected to engage in MT teaching and learning under a certain language label. For instance, speakers of the minority languages Soga, Samia and Luuri (among others) were expected to engage in Luganda as LoLT as their languages were categorised as mutually intelligible with Luganda. Such an arrangement violates linguistic justice and linguistic human rights because it denies speakers of minority languages an opportunity to learn in their MTs. There are also no guidelines on how urban schools choose a language to be taught as MT when in fact they cannot choose one to use as LoLT. The

current language-in-education policy would be introduced simultaneously with a theme-based curriculum which is purportedly more child-friendly than the old subject-based curriculum (Kateeba, 2009; National Curriculum Development Centre, 2006c). Against this background, this study attempts to show how teachers, as principal implementers of the county's language policy, felt about the use of local languages as LoI at lower primary school level and the effect this has on learning and instruction.

## 1.2 Literature Review

Several studies have examined attitudes of teachers and learners on the use of local languages for instruction. Khejeri (2014) investigated teachers' attitudes towards the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction in lower primary schools in Hamisi, Vihiga County, Kenya. The findings of the study revealed that respondents saw more disadvantages than advantages in the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. A study carried out in Ethiopia by Bachore (2014), however, revealed that learners, teachers and parents had positive attitudes and perception on the use of mother tongue. Another study by Manyonyi, Mbori and Okwako (2016) in lower primary schools in Bungoma South Sub-County in Kenya indicated that teachers believed that mother tongue did not add any value to the academic performance of learners. The current study will specifically examine teachers' and learners' attitude towards the use of local languages as LoI.

Altinyelken (2010) conducted a study in Uganda on 'Curriculum Change in Uganda: Teachers' perception on new thematic curriculum.' Altinyelken conducted the study in eight primary schools and interviews and classroom observations were used for data collection. The findings of the study showed that the teachers were enthusiastic about the new thematic curriculum which emphasised the use of local language as the medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools in Uganda but felt that there was lack of support from the government of Uganda for proper implementation of the use of local language as a medium of instructions in the lower classes of primary schools. The present study examined whether the teachers were still enthusiastic about the thematic curriculum as it was the case at the beginning when the use of local language was introduced as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools in Uganda.

For learning to take place, there must be an effective communication between teachers and students. This is a two-way communication in which teachers and students establish conversation about the matters at hand. Additionally, Malik, Gasana, Raab, Cha and Goldenberg (2014) in their survey, reported that students do not ask questions during lesson in classroom—language barrier being partly a major factor. It can be argued that without the mastery of the language, the situation for the students to learn becomes very critical and even worrying.

Interaction is a key element to successful instructional process. According to Singh and Mohammed (2012), knowledge is best constructed when learners involve in negotiation of meaning. More recently, emphasis has been placed on social learning and learner-centred learning in knowledge construction. Studies have shown that classroom interaction promotes improved learning outcomes, and critical thinking (Kay and LeSage, 2009), and captures students' attention and interest. Individual learning styles influences interaction and participation in the classroom (DeBourgh, 2008). There are active learners (learn by doing), sensing learners (learn by discussing possibilities and relationships), visual learners (learn when they see things), and the sequential learners who gain understanding in linear steps (Felder and Spurlin, 2005). In the context of the

present study, linguistic communicative competence refers to the use of language as an oral and written instrument of communication, of representation, interpretation and comprehension of the reality, of construction and communication of the knowledge and of organization and auto regulation of the thought, the emotions and the behaviour Mayo and Barrioluengo (2017). It was with this definition in mind that the study examined oral communication among the learners as a measure of communicative ability.

Loveness and Marvin (2016) conducted a study in Zambia on ‘The positive impact of using local language as a medium of instruction in primary schools in Zambia.’ Triangulated methodology approach was used to carry out the study where by simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used to sample the population for the study. Loveness and Marvin used questionnaires and interviews for data collection and thematic analysis used for qualitative data while STATA and excel used to analyse quantitative data. Findings by Loveness and Marvin showed that teaching in local language follows firm education principles of teaching from known to unknown. This study though similar to the study of Loveness and Marvin (2016), was specifically to examine the attitudes of teachers and learner on the use of local language as the medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools in Uganda, the impact of these attitudes on the communicative ability of learners and the challenges of using local language as a medium of instruction.

Nyenje and Nkata (2016) carried out a study on “Attitudinal variables affecting education reforms and quality of primary education in Uganda.” The paper was based on the views of a wide spectrum of different education stakeholders including: policy analysts, Members of Parliament, education officers, Head teachers, teaching staff, school directors, parents, and school management committees. The variables under study included: school culture, religion of the school, freedom of expression, parents’ attitude towards the school, the learners’ attitude toward the school and achievement of expectations. It was realized that the reform of Uganda’s Primary Education System is mostly determined by three elements within the attitudinal dynamics. First, majority of the respondents 336 (93.1%) agreed that parents’ attitudes toward the school affect quality of primary education; 331 (91.7%) concurred that learners’ attitude toward the school affects the quality of primary education and lastly; 320 (88.6%) agreed that achievement of expectations affects the quality of primary education. While the above mentioned study strove to identify the attitudinal factors that influenced educational reforms, the current study did not investigate attitude alone but looked at teachers’ and pupils’ attitudes with regard to the efficacy of using local languages as LoI.

The review of related literature identified knowledge, methodological and theoretical gaps which the present study sought to fill. The review of related literature also acknowledged the contribution of other researchers on the use of local language as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The study used convergent parallel Mixed Methods Research Designs (MMRDs) to get overall results as proposed by (Creswell, 2014; Wao and Onwugbuzie, 2011). MMRDs allow the researcher to examine more closely and deeply on the use of local language as a medium of

instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools. Six primary schools in Kwanja District in Uganda were used in this study for full description and explanation on the use of local language as the MoI in the lower classes of the primary schools in Kwanja, Uganda.

Kwanja District was purposively selected due to its proximity to the researcher. Purposive sampling therefore implies that participants that are selected to take part in the study ought to be relevant in relation to the subject matter under inquiry. The researcher selected six schools to constitute a sample that was 10% of the total number of schools in the study population. Creswell (2009) asserts that, for qualitative studies, a study sample of 10% – 20% is adequate to make generalisations about the population. From each of the six primary schools, three teachers were identified as respondents making a total of 18 teachers for the study. Six head teachers participated in the study because they are the administrators and supervisors of the use of LoLoI in the lower classes of the primary schools in Uganda. The total sample was, therefore, 24 respondents.

The researcher used questionnaires, in-depth interview guide as well as document analysis guide. Information from qualitative tool helped to shed light, triangulate and add value to the findings. The raw data were first processed into numerical data using quantitative approach through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0). The qualitative data were transcribed and categorised into themes, coded, organised and summarised according to the responses given by the study participants. The data collected from document analysis were analysed and presented qualitatively in explanatory and descriptive way and recorded into themes. The sorted data were analysed accordingly, presented in form of narratives and direct quotations. Analysis of data was done independently for the researcher to gain insight to the answers to the research question.

## 1.4 Findings

The main objective of the study was to examine the attitudes of teachers and learners towards the use of local language as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of primary schools in Kwanja district, Uganda. The study targeted 78 respondents that constituted head teachers, teachers and learners and all the respondents successfully provided the required information.

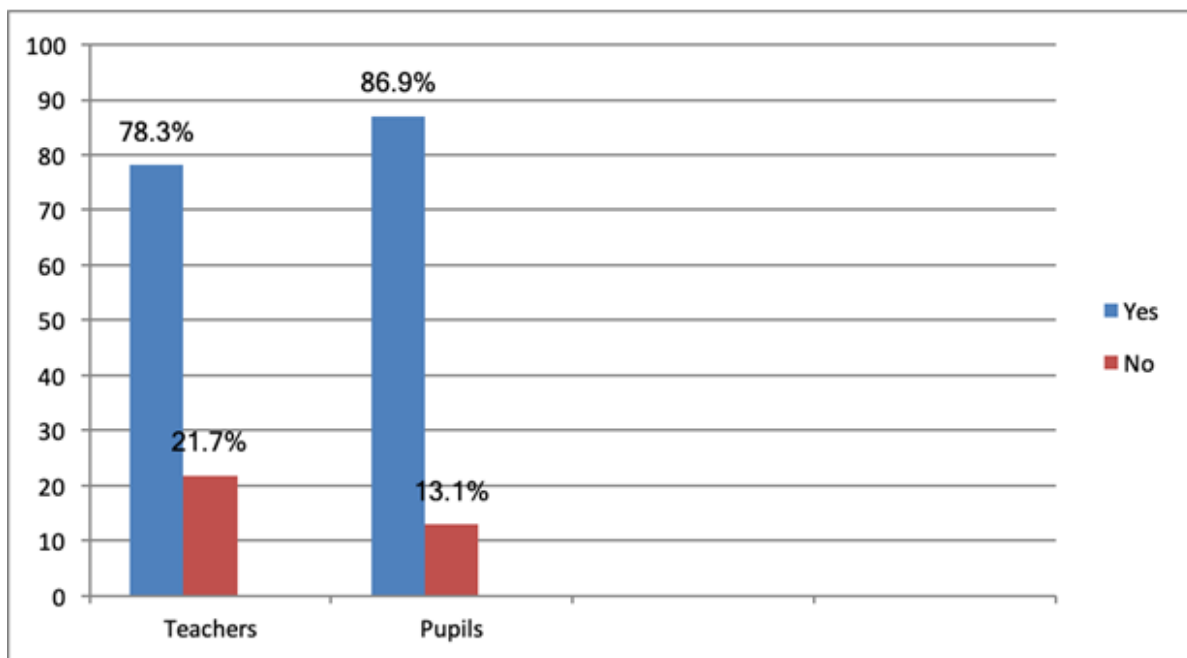
**Table 1. Response Rate**

Category	Sample size	Number of respondents	Response rate
Head teachers	6	6	100
Teachers	18	18	100
Learners	54	54	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field data, 2019*

The summary of the response rate for the study in Table 1 indicates that data was collected from enough respondents; hence the collected data and the findings from it can be relied on. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), a response rate of 50 per cent is adequate for analysis and

reporting; a rate of 60 per cent is good and a response rate of 70 per cent and above is excellent. The response rate is good enough for the study to draw judgment regarding the study questions. The researcher sought to characterize the use of local languages as mediums of instruction in the primary schools in the study area. The findings presented were derived from the questionnaire administered on teachers and head teachers, as well as the responses from the interviews administered on pupils in the schools in the study sample. In order to identify the attitudes of teachers and learners on the use of local language as a medium of instruction in lower classes of primary schools in Uganda, the researcher collected data from teachers, pupils and head teachers. The researcher sought to establish whether local languages were used as mediums of instruction within the schools in the sample. The responses by the teachers in this regard are presented in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Is local language used as LoI?**

*Source: Field data, 2019*

Figure 1 shows the responses regarding the question as to whether or not the local language was used as a language of instruction in lower primary. When learners and teachers were asked whether local language was used in lower classes in their school as the medium of instruction, the majority of the teachers, 78.3% indicated that it was used and similarly, the majority of the learners, 86.9% indicated that it was used. The teachers were also asked to indicate the frequency at which their children used mother tongue as a language of instruction in lower primary, they responded as Table 4.8 presents the results.

**Table 2: Teachers Responses on the Frequency at which their Children Used Mother Tongue as a Language of Instruction**

Response	Frequency	%
Quite often	3	13.0
Often	7	30.5
Rarely	10	43.5
Never	3	13.0
Total	23	100.0

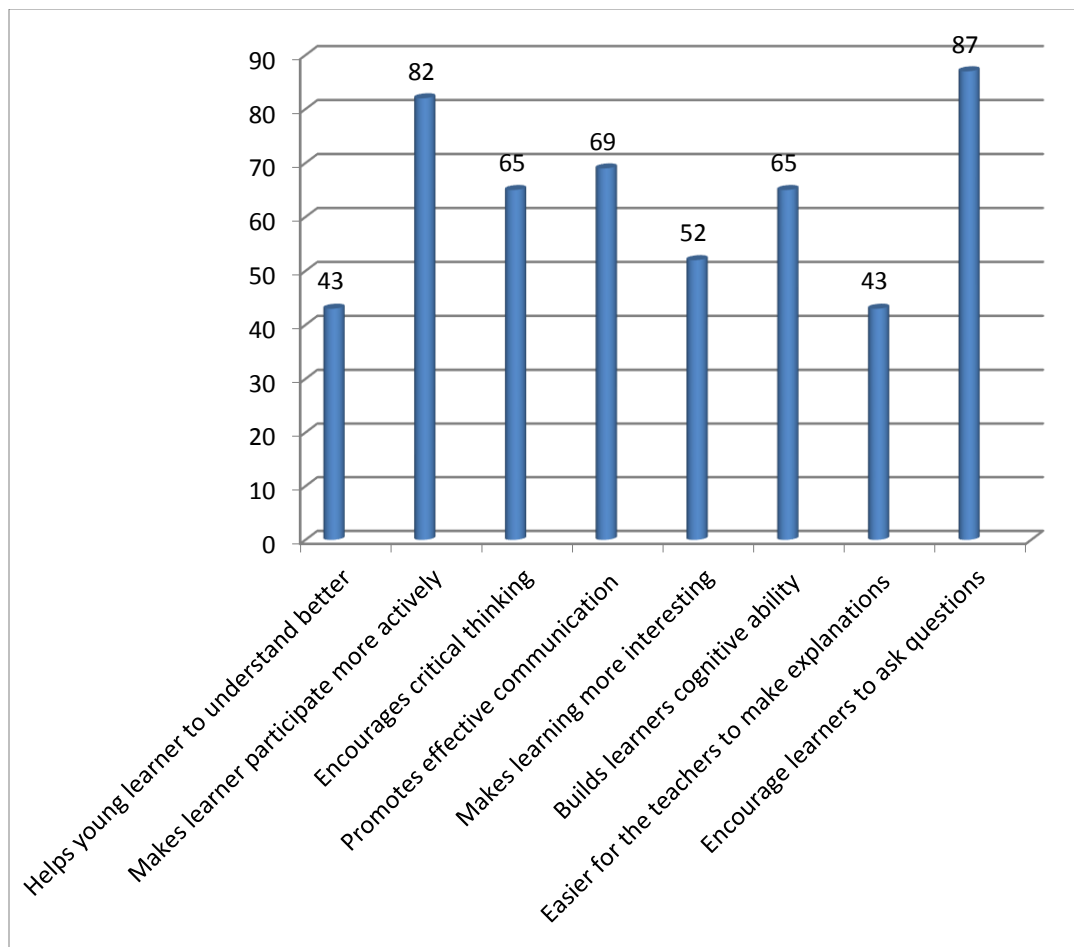
*Source: Field data, 2019*

Findings above show that (13.0%) of teachers indicated that their pupils used mother tongue as a language of instruction in lower primary schools quite often; (30.5%) of teachers indicated often; (43.5%) of teachers indicated that children rarely used mother tongue as a language of instruction in lower primary, while (13.0%) of teachers indicated that children never used mother tongue as a language of instruction in lower primary. These results show that almost half the number of schools (a cumulative 43.5%) used mother tongue which influenced effective learning that is consistent with a study conducted by the UNESCO (2003) on Mother Tongue Matters which concealed that mother tongue is the key to effective learning. Pinnock H. (2009) in his study on Language and Education found out that language used in schools threatens the achievement of education, for all which is a World Declaration (1990) foreign language constitutes barriers to successful communication and children should be taught in a familiar language for meaningful learning to be realised. Several reasons were cited by learners for using the local language for instruction in lower classes, amongst them were; they understood the lessons better, it made learning more interesting, it made all the learners active, there is freedom of expression during class activities, it was the same language used at home, they could easily ask questions when they did not understand the teachers.

One learner said,

*“When the teachers use local language to teach I understand the lessons better and it makes the lessons more interesting and all of us in class become very active.”*

Several reasons were advanced by the teachers that made them prefer the use of local languages as LoI in the lower classes of the primary schools. These are presented in figure 2.



**Figure 2: Reasons for using local languages as LoI**

*Source: Field data, 2019*

According to the data, 43% indicated that using local language for instructions helps the young learners to understand better; 82% indicated that it makes learner participate more actively; 65% felt the use of local languages encourage critical thinking; 69% felt it promotes effective communication amongst learners; 52% thought it made learning more interesting, 65% it builds learners cognitive ability faster; 43% suggested it made it easier for the teachers to make clear explanations during lessons; and 87% felt it encouraged learners to ask questions.

One teacher noted:

*“When we use local language, it promotes close interaction between learners and teachers and that way the learning becomes more interesting and it is also easier for the teachers to make clear explanations during classes.”*

These findings corroborate those made by Loveness and Marvin (2016) which assert the positive impact that giving instruction in the local language adds on the overall learning of the primary school child. However, some teachers indicated that they did not use local language for instruction because it was sometimes difficult to interpret content in local language because teachers were trained in English. Moreover, there are inadequate materials available in local language and this is



done to promote English fluency at an early age and that the school have some learners who cannot speak the local language. Similarly, the learners indicated that they did not use local language for instruction and that all areas of learning were in English.

One learner said,

*“I understand what the teacher is teaching much better, I also have freedom of expression during class activities and can ask teachers questions when I do not understand them.”*

One teacher added,

*“Local language promotes effective communication and interaction amongst learners and teachers and it is easier for the teachers to explain whatever they are teaching to the learners.”*

One of the head teachers emphasized the importance of using local language as a medium of instruction thus,

*“Local language is the most appropriate medium of instruction in lower classes because it eases explanation of the content; it promotes sharing among learner and also eases interpretation of the work by the teachers.”*

These findings echo the sentiments made by Akello and Timmerman (2017) with regard to the use of local languages for instruction in primary schools. In their opinion, learners were unable to read and write in the local language because they prefer English due to the benefits attached to it (examination and wider communication). Despite the enactment of policy to make local language the medium of instruction in Ugandan primary schools, learners were not able to read and write using the dominant local language of a heterogeneous urban community. This could partially explain the minority opinion on the difficulties encountered when using local languages for instruction.

### **1.5 Summary of the findings**

The study findings revealed that local language is used by the majority of the learners and teachers in lower classes in their school as the medium of instruction. Local languages are used in lower classes in schools in preparation for teachers to start using English as a medium of instruction in upper classes. Use of local languages in lower classes is therefore in agreement with Cummins (1979, 1991) whose study suggests that the linguistic ability acquired through the use of local language as a medium of instruction supports learning of English as a second language and other subject. Cummin’s theory of LIH is relevant to this study because when the local language is used as the medium of instruction, then learners will be able to think in the local language and transfer the knowledge and concept easily to L2. Cummins iceberg analogy argues that linguistic differences are only on the surface and peripheral, but that deep down language combine to function in harmony since what appear to be different phenomena in language on the surface are actually interdependent psychologically.

The findings also revealed that the majority of the people think that local language is the appropriate language for instruction in lower classes of primary schools. Some of the reasons cited for use of local languages were; helps young learner to understand better, makes learners participate more actively, to promote close interaction between learners and teachers, to make learning more interesting and to encourage learner to ask questions. The above findings are in line

with Goodman (2018) that found out that language is more difficult to regulate than other aspects of education because they were linked to identity, patriotism and opportunities in ways that people were highly sensitive about.

Likewise, findings revealed that most schools use local language as a medium of instruction in lower classes of the primary schools for 3 years. The study further revealed that both learners and teachers were happy about learning and teaching in local language, although there were some inadequacies in terms of learning materials and insufficient numbers of teachers. These findings are in line with Altinyelken (2010) whose study findings showed that the teachers were enthusiastic about the new thematic curriculum which emphasised the use of local language as the medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools in Uganda. However, they felt that there was lack of support from the government of Uganda for proper implementation of the use of local language as a medium of instructions in the lower classes of primary schools. Current findings have established the same regarding government support in respect to the use of local language as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools in Kwania, Uganda.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

Local language or mother tongue should be used when teaching and learning is taking place in lower classes of primary schools because it helps the children to acquire and understand various skills easily. It helps them to learn English language easily since skills gained from local languages (L1) can be transferred to the second language (L2) since both languages, that is L1 and L2 nurtures each other. Effective communication leads to more successful learning opportunities in classrooms where languages familiar to both children and teachers are used as Language of instruction at least in the first three years of education.

Local languages still maintain a low status not only in the education sector but in other sectors as well. This may have influenced learners' attitudes about the use of local languages for instruction. This situation is of great importance if the policy is to be embraced and therefore sustained by many stakeholders in the country. The concern on the lack of teaching and learning material coupled with incompetent personnel cannot be overemphasised. The study concludes that if not given due attention, this situation may pose a threat on the sustenance of the policy on use of local languages as LoI.

Findings presented in this study indicate that using local languages as a MoI is not working well in some government schools. This study's data demonstrate that using local languages in education was poorly planned. Theoretically, learners in government schools, in which MT education is practiced, should be outperforming those in private schools, who are instructed in English from the beginning of their schooling. However, as using local languages in education is not well facilitated the benefits of using local languages in education are not experienced by learners in government schools. Therefore, these learners are disadvantaged for that matter.

## **1.7 Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions made above, the study made the following recommendations:

- a) All schools should be encouraged to use local languages in lower classes in their schools as the medium of instruction so that learners and teachers can enjoy the several benefits that go

with it. The local language should be used in lower classes of the primary schools for a duration of at least three years so that learner of primary 1 – 3 can benefit from its usage and be grounded in local language which act as the foundation for learning English.

- b) Examinations in lower classes should continue being conducted in local language and there should be a smooth transition to conducting examinations in English in the upper classes in primary schools.
- c) Teachers should attend refresher courses to help them improve on their understanding and grasp of local languages.
- d) The MoES should procure reference books and instructional materials that are in local languages. Moreover, teachers should be sensitised on the importance of using local languages as a medium of instruction in lower classes in primary schools. Furthermore, the MoES should come up with new strategies to counter the challenges learners, teachers and other stakeholders are facing in the use of local languages as medium of instruction in lower classes in primary schools.

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