

The Implications of the Learner 100 Per Cent Transition Policy in Education to the Teaching of Kiswahili in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Cite this article in APA

Ogonda, S. S. (2026). The implications of the learner 100 per cent transition policy in education to the teaching of Kiswahili in secondary schools in Kenya. *Journal of education and learning*, 5(1), 39-44. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jel.v5i1.972>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 2026-02-21

Accepted: 2026-03-17

Published: 2026-04-24

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the implications of the 100 per cent transition policy on Kiswahili instruction in secondary schools, with a specific focus on teaching methods (pedagogy), follow-up exercises (assessment practices), and classroom interaction. The implementation of the 100 per cent learner transition policy in Kenya, a government initiative requiring all pupils completing primary education to enrol in secondary school, has led to a sharp increase in student enrolment. This has resulted in overcrowded classrooms that hinder effective Kiswahili teaching. A descriptive research design was adopted. The study drew its sample from a professional WhatsApp group of Kiswahili teachers in Sabatia Sub-county, which was used as an accessible sampling frame of practising teachers. 20 participants from 99 eligible members (with at least two years' teaching experience) were selected through systematic sampling by choosing every sixth member from an ordered list of group participants. Data were collected through structured, sequentially administered questions on the platform, functioning as an asynchronous questionnaire. Data were analysed using thematic coding. This involved the identification, categorisation, and interpretation of recurring patterns in teachers' responses. Findings revealed that large class sizes reduced the frequency and scope of follow-up exercises and encouraged the use of teacher-centred methods such as lecturing, thereby limiting meaningful classroom interaction. The study concludes that overcrowding undermines effective Kiswahili teaching and learning. It recommends increased teacher recruitment and improved school infrastructure to reduce congestion.

Key terms: 100 per cent transition policy, assessment, classroom interaction, Kiswahili teaching, pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Kiswahili has evolved significantly from the pre-independence period to the present. The recommendations of the Mackay Report (Government of Kenya, 1981) made Kiswahili, which had initially been a non-examinable subject, compulsory. Subsequent curriculum reforms, including the 2002 syllabus developed by the Kenya Institute of Education, expanded the scope of the subject and increased both content demands and teacher workload (K.I.E., 2002). As a language subject, Kiswahili requires interactive pedagogical approaches that actively engage learners in speaking, reading, and writing activities (Kesal, 2003; Lantolf, 2000). Gathumbi and Musembe (2005) argue that such approaches depend heavily on manageable class sizes that can facilitate teacher–student interaction, continuous assessment, and individualised feedback.

The implementation of the 100 per cent learner transition policy has significantly increased student enrolment in secondary schools. This has resulted in overcrowded classrooms (Ndolo & Simatwa, 2016). This shift has practical implications for classroom instruction. For instance, in large classes, teachers are more likely to adopt teacher-centred methods, such as lecturing, due to time constraints and classroom management (Adhikari, 2017). At the same time, learner-centred approaches such as group discussions, oral practice, and individualised writing tasks become difficult to implement effectively. Similarly, the administration and marking of follow-up exercises, which are essential in language learning, are often reduced in frequency and scope due to the increased workload associated with large student numbers (Gathumbi & Musembe, 2005). Consequently, the conditions created by the policy may disrupt core components of effective Kiswahili pedagogy, including interaction, continuous assessment, and learner participation.

Although previous studies in Kenya have examined the broader effects of increased transition rates on infrastructure and access to education, limited attention has been given to how these changes translate into actual classroom practices (Oketch & Somerset, 2010). In particular, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how the 100 per cent transition policy shapes the choice of teaching methods, the

nature of classroom interaction, and the use of follow-up exercises in Kiswahili lessons. It remains unclear how teachers negotiate the tension between curriculum demands and overcrowded classrooms, especially in upper secondary classes (Forms three and four), which form the final cohorts of the policy. This study seeks to address this gap between policy implementation and subject-specific classroom realities by examining how increased student enrolment influences teaching methods, classroom interaction, and assessment practices in Kiswahili instruction.

Theoretical Framework

This work is guided by three interrelated theories, specifically Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Sociocultural Theory, and Constructivist Learning Theory. Collectively, these theories explain the role of interaction, learner participation, and assessment in effective language teaching. They provide a basis for understanding how large class sizes influence pedagogical practices.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) underscores the importance of interaction in language acquisition. It advocates for teaching approaches that promote real-life communication through speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). CLT emphasises learner participation, use of authentic language, and continuous assessment through tasks such as compositions (*insha*) and comprehension (*ufahamu*). However, the successful implementation of CLT depends on conditions that allow for active engagement, manageable class sizes, and timely feedback. In overcrowded classrooms, teachers may struggle to implement communicative activities effectively. This, in the long run, leads to reduced use of learner-centred strategies and limited follow-up exercises.

Sociocultural Theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), stresses that cognitive growth is largely shaped by social interaction. At the heart of this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the distance between independent and assisted performance. Learning is understood to occur through collaboration with more knowledgeable others, including instructors and fellow learners.

According to Lantolf (2000), this interaction in language learning is essential for developing communicative competence and internalising linguistic structures. However, large class sizes limit meaningful teacher–student and student–student interaction, thereby constraining opportunities for scaffolding and individualised support. This has significant implications for Kiswahili classrooms, where effective teaching relies on continuous interaction and feedback.

According to Constructivist Learning Theory, learners do not simply receive information; instead, they construct understanding through active involvement and interaction with their surroundings (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1970). In the context of Kiswahili instruction, this implies the use of learner-centred methods such as group discussions, problem-solving activities, and writing tasks. These approaches require active learner participation and continuous teacher facilitation. However, such pedagogical practices depend heavily on manageable class sizes to enable monitoring, guidance, and feedback (Gathumbi & Musembe, 2005). In overcrowded classrooms, teachers are often constrained to adopt teacher-centred methods such as lecturing, which limit opportunities for active knowledge construction.

These theoretical perspectives suggest that effective Kiswahili teaching relies on interaction, learner participation, and continuous assessment, elements that are highly sensitive to class size. The 100 per cent learner transition policy has increased student enrolment and contributed to overcrowded classrooms. This may therefore disrupt the application of these pedagogical principles in practice. This paper applies these frameworks to examine how increased class size influences teaching methods, classroom interaction, and assessment practices in Kiswahili instruction.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a defined population in order to describe existing conditions, practices, and perceptions without manipulation of variables (Kothari, 2004). In this study, the design was suitable for examining how the 100 per cent learner transition policy influences teaching practices, classroom

interaction, and assessment in Kiswahili classrooms as experienced by teachers.

The target population consisted of Kiswahili teachers in secondary schools in Sabatia Sub-county. The sub-county has 39 secondary schools with approximately 120 Kiswahili teachers, all of whom are members of a shared professional WhatsApp group. The group was used as a sampling frame due to its accessibility and its composition of actively practising teachers within the sub-county. However, it is acknowledged that reliance on a WhatsApp group may introduce sampling bias and limit generalizability.

Eligibility criteria were applied based on teaching experience. A total of 99 teachers had been members of the WhatsApp group for more than two years, which was taken as an indication that they had at least two years of teaching experience in the sub-county. From this pool, a sample of 20 teachers was selected using systematic sampling. To determine the sampling interval (k), the population size of 99 was divided by the required sample size of 20, giving an estimated interval of about six. An ordered list of eligible members was generated based on duration of group membership, and the first respondent was selected randomly from the first six members. Thereafter, every sixth member was selected until the required sample size was achieved. This procedure ensured a degree of randomness and minimised selection bias (Kothari, 2004).

Data were collected using a structured asynchronous questionnaire administered via the WhatsApp platform. A separate WhatsApp group comprising the sampled participants was created for the study. Questions were posted sequentially, allowing respondents adequate time to provide detailed responses before the next question was introduced. This approach enhanced clarity, reduced response overlap, and facilitated organised data collection in an online environment.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Responses were first transcribed and subjected to open coding, where meaningful units of data were identified and labelled. The codes were subsequently organised into broader categories that corresponded with the study objectives, specifically teaching

methods and follow-up exercises. Through an iterative process, recurring patterns and themes were identified and interpreted to generate insights into the implications of the 100 per cent transition policy. Where appropriate, simple frequency counts were used to indicate the prevalence of particular responses across participants, thereby complementing the qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical issues were upheld throughout the study. Participants were briefed on the aim of the research and informed that their involvement was voluntary. Informed consent was first secured prior to collecting data, alongside guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity for all respondents. The analysis and presentation of findings excluded any personal identifiers. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. The study adhered to standard ethical principles for research involving human participants, including respect for persons, beneficence, and confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All respondents (n = 20, 100%) agreed that the 100% transition policy had posed challenges to the teaching of Kiswahili, particularly in relation to follow-up exercises and choice of teaching methods. These challenges were mainly attributed to large class sizes, time constraints, and strict syllabus completion deadlines.

Follow-Up Exercises in Teaching

All respondents reported a reduction in both the frequency and scope of assignments given to students. Most teachers indicated that they avoided giving exercises, especially in *Insha* (90%), *Sarufi* (80%), *Ufahamu* (72%), *Fasihi* (46%), and *Ufupisho* (35%). In cases where exercises were given, they were fewer, mainly once or twice per week, compared to up to four exercises previously. In some instances, no exercises were given at all. One respondent (*Teacher A*) stated:

"I cannot give out many assignments like before. Why should I? In some cases, a week may even elapse before I even think of giving out one."

Another (*Teacher B*) noted:

"I have reduced the range of exercises I give and the number of items in each exercise."

Teachers further explained that marking workload and congestion in classrooms influenced these decisions.

One teacher (*Teacher C*) explained:

"The many students enrolled hinder me from giving many exercises; I have to give what is convenient for me to mark."

Syllabus pressure was also highlighted, with one respondent (*Teacher D*) noting challenges in balancing teaching and assessment due to large class sizes. In some cases, marking was delayed or incomplete. One teacher admitted:

"I am unable to clear marking in time... I at times, return the books without marking." (Teacher B).

Another added:

"It is so stressful marking many books and students write work that is difficult to understand." (Teacher A)

Teachers also noted that strict syllabus completion deadlines, combined with large class sizes, made it difficult to provide consistent feedback to learners.

Teaching Methods

Respondents indicated that their choice of teaching methods was mainly influenced by large class sizes (98%), diverse learner abilities (72%), and time limitations (76%). Prior studies (e.g., Adhikari, 2017) similarly show that although teachers may value learner-centred approaches, contextual factors such as class size often limit their use. The lecture method was the most frequently used approach (78%). Teachers justified their use as a practical necessity:

"I mainly use lecture method because it is easy in a large and crowded class; it limits movement." (Teacher A)

"It helps me move fast with the syllabus because the work to be covered is a lot." (Teacher B)

Group discussions and group work were also commonly used (70%), along with question-and-answer techniques (75%). These were mainly used to manage large classes and encourage participation. However, peer teaching (10%), dramatisation (14%), and explanation (25%) were rarely used.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the 100 per cent transition policy has significantly reshaped instructional and assessment practices in Kiswahili classrooms. The reduction in follow-up exercises reflects a shift driven by structural constraints such as large class sizes, heavy marking loads, and syllabus completion pressure. Teachers' responses suggest that this reduction is not a pedagogical preference but a coping strategy necessitated by workload demands. This is evident in statements such as "*I have to give what is convenient for me to mark,*" which highlight how assessment practices are directly shaped by contextual pressures.

The dominance of the lecture method further reflects these structural realities. Although the method is widely regarded as teacher-centred (Matiru et al., 1995), in this context, it is largely a response to overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional time rather than a preferred approach. Teachers are therefore compelled to prioritise syllabus coverage over interactive learning.

While group discussions and question-and-answer techniques are used, their effectiveness appears limited by inadequate supervision, time constraints, and insufficient feedback. Although discussions have been shown to enhance learner participation and verbal skills (Brookfield, 1999; Gathumbi, 2003), in this study they often function as workload management tools rather than fully guided learning activities. In large classes, a lack of teacher follow-up reduces their effectiveness, and some learners may remain passive.

The question-and-answer method (75%) is mainly used as a quick assessment strategy during lessons. However, its effectiveness depends on the teacher's skill in distributing questions fairly and managing participation in large classes. Without this, introverted learners may be excluded. Importantly, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the study relied entirely on teachers' self-reports without classroom observation or document analysis, which limits confirmability. In addition, the use of a WhatsApp-based sample and a small sample size limits generalizability.

Despite these limitations, the findings consistently point to a systemic challenge. The combination of large class sizes, syllabus deadlines, and limited time has created a tension between curriculum coverage and meaningful learning. This has led to increased reliance on teacher-centred instruction, reduced formative assessment, and limited individualised feedback, which may negatively affect learners' Kiswahili language development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that the 100 per cent transition policy has significantly influenced the teaching of Kiswahili in secondary schools by altering both assessment practices and instructional approaches. The findings show that teachers have substantially reduced follow-up exercises. This is due to large class sizes, heavy marking loads, time constraints, and strict syllabus completion deadlines. As a result, continuous assessment practices that are essential for language learning, particularly in areas such as *Insha*, *Sarufi* and *Ufahamu*, have been weakened.

In terms of pedagogy, teachers have increasingly relied on lecture methods and limited forms of interactive teaching such as question-and-answer sessions and group discussions. These methods are often applied as coping mechanisms rather than fully developed learner-centred strategies, mainly due to overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional time. Consequently, essential aspects of Kiswahili learning, including writing practice, individualised feedback, and active learner engagement, appear to be compromised. Although the 100 per cent transition was aimed at improving access to education, it has inadvertently created conditions that challenge the quality of teaching and learning.

Recommendations: In light of the findings, the study recommends that the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) increase the recruitment of Kiswahili teachers in secondary schools in order to lower the teacher-student ratio and enhance the effectiveness of classroom instruction and assessment. This would enable teachers to administer more regular follow-up exercises and provide timely feedback to learners. Besides, schools should be encouraged to adopt structured assessment policies that ensure

consistency in follow-up exercises across all Kiswahili strands, even under pressure on workload. Teachers should also be supported through continuous professional development programs focused on managing large classes and effectively integrating interactive teaching strategies.

The Ministry of Education should also invest in expanding and improving school infrastructure to reduce classroom congestion and ensure that learning

environments align with the recommended class size of approximately 45 learners. This would support the use of learner-centred teaching methods and improve teacher–student interaction. Finally, there is a need for policy review to ensure that the goals of universal access to education are balanced with the need to maintain instructional quality, particularly in language subjects that require continuous practice and feedback.

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