



Influence of Lwisukha as an L1 on Pupils' Ability to Meet Kiswahili Curriculum Expectations in Primary Schools in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Kenya's multilingual education context recognizes the use of indigenous languages in lower primary education, but learners transitioning from their first language (L1) to Kiswahili may experience difficulties in acquiring the language. In Kakamega East Sub-County, Lwisukha is widely spoken as an L1, creating a need to examine its influence on learners' attainment of Kiswahili curriculum expectations. The study examined how Lwisukha as L1 influences pupils' ability to meet curriculum expectations in Kiswahili in public day primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County. The study was guided by Cummins' Interdependence Theory. The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design involving 9 public day primary schools, 9 headteachers, 9 Kiswahili teachers, and 90 learners selected through purposive sampling and stratified sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi structured interviews, and observation checklist and analyzed using frequencies and percentages for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Findings showed that 62.5% of teachers reported that Lwisukha interfered with pupils' ability to meet Kiswahili curriculum expectations, with pronunciation (37.5%) and reading comprehension (25.0%) being the most affected areas, followed by vocabulary, sentence structure and writing (12.5% each). Further, 75.0% of teachers reported difficulties in pupils' comprehension of simple Kiswahili texts, while 57.5% of pupils found learning Kiswahili difficult or very difficult. The study concluded that Lwisukha as L1 negatively influences pupils' attainment of Kiswahili curriculum expectations, particularly in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. The study recommends targeted teacher training on L1 interference, remedial Kiswahili instruction, increased exposure to Kiswahili at school and home, and provision of appropriate Kiswahili learning materials.

Keywords: Curriculum Expectations, Lwisukha, L1, Kiswahili, Pupils' Ability

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in lower primary levels as stipulated in Kenya's language-in-education policy aims to make the learning process easier for students who are fluent in the language of the catchment areas of the schools (Bahrani, 2013). In Kakamega East Sub-County, the indigenous Lwisukha language is widely spoken and used as the first language (L1) of students in the area (Domke & Cerrato, 2026). However, challenges are experienced by students when transitioning from the use of the first language to the national language, Kiswahili. The subject of Kiswahili requires students to acquire specific communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These communication skills have an influence from the students' first language and the way they pronounce words that may interfere with their learning of the national language, leading to their poor performance in the subject (Hamrick et al., 2018).

Many language studies have demonstrated that the proficiency that an individual has in their first language positively impacts the acquisition of their second language. For instance, learners from countries such as Belgium and Mexico who speak either French or Spanish as their first language exhibit mastery of their second language when they employ the structures of their first language (Caira et al., 2023). However, challenges to language acquisition from second languages have been reported in countries such as the United States, Canada, and several that are home to African ethnic groups (Barrett et al., 2022). Kenyan educators have employed various strategies to improve the performance of learners in their language classes such as the deployment of teachers, the use of language learning materials, and the development of learning infrastructure. However, the performance of Kenyan learners in rural areas continues to be low. Many learners who speak Lwisukha as their first language struggle with constructing sentences in the target language of Kenya; this is likely due to their transfer of their first language structures to the second language (Ezeh, 2021).

Given these factors, it is important to investigate the possible influence of the Lwisukha language upon the learning and performance of Kenyan students in their Kiswahili language classes. While many studies have explored the concept of language transfer between languages from different mother tongues in multilingual countries, few have explored the specific impact that the Lwisukha language has upon the learning of Kiswahili (Truphosa, 2022).



Consequently, the goals of this research study are to determine the influence of the Lwisukha language as the first language of learners on the learning of the Kiswahili language, to assess the performance of pupils who are learning the language, to investigate the challenges that exist in the learning of the language, and to explore the strategies that can be employed to address those challenges.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kiswahili is a national language and a core subject in Kenya's basic education. Kiswahili enjoys a unique position that has seen the government staff schools with teachers who are able to teach Kiswahili in order to ensure learners can speak, write, and interact effectively in the language. However, despite these efforts, performance in Kiswahili has remained average nationally and consistently below average in Kakamega East Sub-County (KCPE results: 2019 = 37, 2021 = 38, 2022 March = 35, 2022 November = 36). This persistent low performance is a concern because Kiswahili is essential for communication, academic progression, and national cohesion, and poor mastery limits learners' ability to meet curriculum expectations. Limited attention has been given to the practical challenges faced by both learners and teachers in this context, as well as the effectiveness of strategies used to address these challenges. This study therefore sought to address this gap by examining the influence of Lwisukha as L1 affects pupils' ability to meet curriculum expectations in Kiswahili in public day primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County.

1.2 Research Objective

To examine how Lwisukha as L1 affects pupils' ability to meet curriculum expectations in Kiswahili.

1.3 Research Questions

What is the influence of Lwisukha as L1 on pupils' ability to meet curriculum expectations in Kiswahili?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Cummins' Interdependence Theory regarding a learner's first language (L1) and second language (L2) development was used to guide this study. The hypothesis suggests the child's acquisition of L2 is through and because of L1 (Cummins, 1979). Further, concepts acquired in L1 can be applied to L2. In this study, L1 is represented by Lwisukha, while the target language L2 is Kiswahili. This theory thus used to account for how Lwisukha phonology, syntax and vocabulary probably transferred to Kiswahili resulting in the learners' grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, reading comprehension and writing performance. A fundamental aspect of the theory is the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) which states that the cognitive and academic skills developed in the L1 help acquisition in the L2. It is possible that learners' conceptual understanding in Lwisukha may facilitate learning in Kiswahili. However, the two languages differ structurally, which may also lead to negative transfer. This may cause errors in, for example, pronunciation, sentences, and writing. This relates directly to study's focus on the effect of Lwisukha on Kiswahili academic performance in Kakamega East Sub-County (Kibigo et al., 2019).

The theory is further developed in the form of the Threshold Hypothesis. According to this theory, learners require sufficient proficiency in L1 and L2. Once attained, one may experience the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. In the context of this study, the use of Lwisukha rather than Kiswahili may limit mastery of Kiswahili on the part of the learners, hence, failing to reach this threshold may be a reason for the low performance in Kiswahili. This supports the view that learners draw heavily on Lwisukha structures when generating their Kiswahili sentences (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Cummins also differentiates between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Primary learners acquire conversational skills in Kiswahili (BICS) but find it hard to cope with academic tasks such as reading comprehension, essay writing, and grammar application (Cummins, 2017). The importance of this distinction for this study is evident in the fact that it can account for poor performance in formal Kiswahili by Lwisukha-speaking learners who can speak Kiswahili.

Despite its popular application, the theory was critiqued, labelling it as an oversimplification of the complex nature of second language acquisition, which considers it as transfer from L1 to L2 (Ali, 2021). It also doesn't take into account all sociocultural, pedagogical and individual learner differences that influence second language acquisition. This limitation highlights that Lwisukha is not the only factor affecting the Kiswahili learning outcome. It suggests that teaching methods and other factors may also contribute to learners' performance in Kiswahili. The study related to Cummin's Interdependence Theory. Thus, Lwisukha as L1, influence Kiswahili learning outcomes. The study of Ls transfer aids in analyzing the effect of linguistic transfer on learners' performance in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, while also studying the methods of teaching that teachers adopt to mitigate L1 influence in learning Kiswahili.



2.2 Empirical Review

The design of the Kenyan Kiswahili curriculum, especially CBC, is a curriculum designed to train communication, comprehension, and writing skills for better growth. It describes age-appropriate learning outcomes for each grade with increasing complexity in vocabulary, grammar, and functional language use. By the end of every learning phase, learners are expected to demonstrate mastery in listening, speaking, reading and writing Kiswahili (Ali, 2021). Nonetheless, despite the national uniformity of these expectations, evidence gathered from multilingual education contexts suggests that learners' first language backgrounds strongly influence the extent to which these competences are achieved. This appears to be so more so in rural contexts such as Kakamega East Sub-County, where Lwisukha is dominant.

In classes one to three, the oral language forms a major component. Other components include basic grammar and listening comprehension. As the students move higher up in grade levels, they are taught reading fluency, paragraph writing, and literacy across different genres. It is assumed that learners have some exposure to Kiswahili before they undergo formal schooling (Lumbuye, 2018). Subsequently, however, for instance, in Lwisukha-speaking community settings, the assumption does not hold as learners join school with little Kiswahili exposure. These early gaps in learning could be carried throughout the schooling cycle, which essentially affects learners' development of Kiswahili as compared to those in more Kiswahili-exposed environments.

For Lwisukha learners, these curriculum demands are critical and challenging. Numerous students join school with a strong L1 dominance and a weak Kiswahili vocabulary to keep up with increasingly complex language tasks. To this end, learning difficulties build up over time and affect not only Kiswahili but also other learning areas where it is the medium of instruction (Duarte et al. 2023). Though some studies broadly attribute such problems to multilingualism, this study will profile the specific case of Lwisukha as a linguistic system and its effect on Kiswahili learning outcomes that have been left untouched in literature. The rigidness of time instructional teachers often face for not being able to fill deep language gaps in learners affect curriculum implementation. Due to the need to cover the syllabus, the learner does not master the most basic of the languages. This is why learners feel competent to continue learning in Kiswahili, whereas in reality, they don't. Although CBC is learner-centered in theory, a lack of differentiation is frequently evident in classroom reality. This exacerbates the mismatch between the expectations of the curriculum and learner readiness in Lwisukha-dominant contexts.

The study by Msuya (2023) on the motivation of Kiswahili learners South Korea found high influence of intrinsic motivation. Although the observation emphasizes the significance of learner motivation in foreign language acquisition, it nevertheless departs from the focus of this study, whose focus is not motivation, but rather the influence of Lwisukha as L1 on pupils' ability to meet Kiswahili curriculum expectations in Kakamega East Sub-County. Essentially, while motivation might explain performance in foreign language settings, it does not adequately account for the L1-related learning difficulties experienced in local multilingual contexts. On the contrary, the study leaves a contextual gap pertinent to this study by failing to deal with African indigenous languages like Lwisukha. According to Niyotugira et al. (2023), teachers in Rwanda frequently resort to L1 or the learners' first language to speed up Kiswahili teaching. The use of L1 helps learners to understand the content better. However, there would be confusion due to similarities between L1 and Kiswahili. Although this finding is relevant to multi-lingual instruction in Kenya, it does not specifically explain how Lwisukha as an L1 influences learners' abilities to meet Kiswahili curriculum expectations in Kenya. As different Bantu languages have different degrees of structural similarity to Kiswahili, different interference patterns arise. As a result, while it is widely accepted that L1 is helpful, it is not uniformly effective in specific communities.

According to Ali (2021), learners experience challenges in speaking and writing Kiswahili as a result of lack of teaching/learning materials and influence of first language. Although this supports the broad general role of L1 in the Kiswahili learning outcomes, it is not a study of Lwisukha speaking learners in Kakamega East Sub-County which is the focus of the study. This makes it less applicable because L1 influence may not have the same effect in every linguistics group and linguistic effects may vary. L1 interference is confirmed yet how this interference manifests in learners has not been explored in Lwisukha-speaking learners. Ezech (2021) showed that performance of learners in Kiswahili is negatively influenced by the use of mother tongue in Nandi North Sub County. Though this finding confirms the generalized statement that L1 affects Kiswahili learning outcomes, it ignores how Lwisukha as a first language influences Kiswahili learning outcomes in relation to the curriculum expectations in Kakamega East Sub-County. This creates a gap in context as the different mother tongues would interact differently with Kiswahili due to their proximity and structural features.

The issues raised various studies confirm that first language influences Kiswahili learning and performance results. Nonetheless, there is little attention to how particular L1s, such as Lwisukha, affect learners' L2 abilities as per the curriculum in Kiswahili. Given the lack of context-specific analysis, it presents a clear empirical gap as the existing studies fail to adequately explain how Lwisukha relates to Kiswahili learning outcomes in the context of CBC implementation in Kakamega East Sub-County. As such, the study assesses the impact of Lwisukha as a first language on pupils' Kiswahili curriculum expectations at Kakamega East Sub-County.



III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods design. This is a type of mixed methods research method that allows for qualitative and quantitative methods to be used. The data and analysis use a design where both data types are gathered simultaneously, analyzed separately, and later combined in the interpretation stage. This design is the most applicable in the study since it allows for the collection of adequate data to understand how Lwisukha as first language influence performance in Kiswahili.

3.2 Study Area

The research was carried out in Kakamega East Sub- County. This Sub- County is one of the thirteen sub-counties in the region and is the area where Lwisukha language is commonly used. There are both urban and rural wards in the sub-county with learners from varying backgrounds physically, economically, and socially. The schools in this location are either privately owned or public, boarding or day, and same-gender or mixed. Private schools and public boarding schools have well-established policies that have minimized the use of Lwisukha in school, thus reducing the effect of Lwisukha on Kiswahili performance. Private and boarding schools also have learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds across Kenya, limiting the dominance of Lwisukha in classroom interaction. Due to this, the study focused only on public day primary schools since most of these schools are located in remote rural areas where Lwisukha is the dominant language of communication both in school and at home. This location was chosen because it provided a natural setting where the use of Lwisukha is highly prevalent, allowing for a more accurate assessment of its influence on Kiswahili learning and performance. Furthermore, the learners in these schools are more likely to have limited exposure to other languages, making it easier to isolate and analyze the specific impact of Lwisukha on Kiswahili performance.

3.3 Study Population

The study population was made up of 91 primary day schools in Kakamega East Sub-County. The schools were stratified into three categories based on their location and accessibility: urban schools, semi-rural schools, and rural schools. From each category, three schools were selected, giving a total of nine schools to be included in the study. In each of the nine schools, the target population consisted of one head teacher, one Kiswahili teacher, and ten Grade 4 learners (selected from one stream in schools with multiple streams). This resulted in a total of 9 head teachers, 9 Kiswahili teachers, and 90 learners participating in the study. This clearly defined target population facilitated an in-depth examination of the influence of Lwisukha as a first language on Kiswahili learning, as well as the challenges encountered and strategies employed by teachers in different school settings. The study population is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Study Population

Category	Number
Head teachers	9
Kiswahili teachers	9
Primary pupils who speak Kiswahili	90
Total	108

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample

Sampling is the process of selecting people or objects from a population in order to make inferences or generalizations based on a representative portion of the population (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The study employed a purposive sampling technique, justified by the need to select participants with direct and relevant experience in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili in a Lwisukha-speaking environment. The adoption of this technique was appropriate as the study solicited for information-rich cases that is; the head teachers, Kiswahili teachers and Grade 4 learners directly involved in classroom language practices. Also, stratified sampling by the school location (urban, semi-urban, and rural) was employed to enhance representativeness of contextual variations in language exposure across Kakamega East Sub-County which strengthens the comparability of findings.

Nine schools were selected (three from each stratum) in order to achieve an equitable representation of the linguistic and environmental backgrounds of the county. The sample was made up of 9 head teachers, 9 Kiswahili teachers and 90 learners which were drawn from a total of 9 schools. 1 head teacher, 1 Kiswahili teacher and 10 Grade 4 learners were selected from each school. This sample was an appropriate size for mixed methods research as it engaged in depth qualitatively and would also generate sufficient quantitative data to identify patterns in learner performance.



The choice was based on feasibility, depth of investigation and a need to obtain varied views on the effect of Lwisukha on Kiswahili learning outcomes in differing school settings.

3.5 Instruments for Data Collection

The study used primary data which was gathered through questionnaires, observation checklist guide and interview schedule.

3.6 Questionnaire

Questionnaires were mainly used to collect data from teachers and students. Utilization of closed-ended questions helped me to ask structured questions and get quantifiable answers. Further, it became easier to analyze trends in relation to the Lwisukha language and Kiswahili performance. Pupils are the main important social information who provide information about their personal experience on Kiswahili learning. In contrast, teachers can provide knowledgeable insight into learners' capabilities, language problems and curriculum alignment. These groups are directed to use questionnaires because data can be collected from a larger sample in less time with more uniformity in response. Sample items included phrases such as, "I often use Lwisukha when thinking before answering Kiswahili questions" and "Lwisukha hinders my ability to construct the correct Kiswahili sentences."

3.7 Interview Schedules

The selected teachers, head teachers, and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) were interviewed. It helps the researcher to delve deeply into the challenges and strategies of teaching Kiswahili in a highly Lwisukha-speaking community. Teachers can provide more detail about their classroom experiences, the methodology they used for teaching lessons, and pupils' responses. Head teachers can provide more administrative information on the ways the curriculum was implemented, performance trends, etc. The involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) is crucial since they have an overview of the delivery of the curriculum. They can also identify the language-related problems causing poor performance in Kiswahili. Interviews are a suitable data collection technique for these respondents because of their leadership capacity, and they can provide more subtle, in-depth information than questionnaires. How does Lwisukha affect learners' performance in Kiswahili? Sample Interview Questions "What problems do you face by teaching Kiswahili in a Lwisukha-speaking environment?"

3.8 Observation Checklist

The study employed an observation checklist to systematically assess the reading and writing behaviour of Lwisukha L1 pupils in Kiswahili. The study mainly employed observation as it will enable the researcher to witness how pupils interact with Kiswahili texts, how they form sentences, use punctuation, and respond to reading allocation first hand in real classroom settings. This technique was capable of yielding objective information in real-time, something that cannot easily be captured through self-reports or interviews. Young learners often aren't able to articulate their language difficulties. Also, the checklist was used to ensure that we were consistent when recording particular language behaviour to facilitate comparisons of performance between learners and schools. Indicators of the research and learning tasks included correct application of Kiswahili noun classes, proper sentence construction, the pronunciation of Kiswahili words affected by Lwisukha, and instances of code-switching during tasks.

3.9 Pilot study

A pilot study is a smaller study conducted prior to the major analysis to determine the viability of the research instruments and, if necessary, to fine-tune the study (Dannels, 2018). To determine the reliability of the research, a pilot study was carried out in Ivono primary School which has similar characteristics with the targeted population.

3.9.1 Validity of Research Instruments

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Kothari, 2014). In this study, content and face validity were established through expert review. The research instruments (questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation checklist) were submitted to language education experts and the study supervisors to assess their clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives on the influence of Lwisukha L1 on Kiswahili performance. The experts assessed whether the items were suitable for the constructs of L1 interference, Kiswahili performance, and learning impediments. In addition, they evaluated the language suitability of the target respondents. Instruments were revised by rewording ambiguous items, improving the clarity of wording and ensuring that all the questions were strictly based on the objectives of the study based on feedback given out by them. The items were removed if they do not match or overlap. Results were deemed valid for data collection after revision. The expert validation results confirmed that the instruments were considered appropriate to measure the variables in the study.



3.9.2 Reliability of Research Instruments

Reliability is the degree to which research instrument yields same results on similar condition (Kothari, 2014). The research instruments of the present study were subjected to test–retest for reliability. The same group of respondents were subjected to the research instruments on two different occasions in similar conditions. The first and second administration of responses was compared for analyzing the instruments' consistency under temporal aspects. The comparison suggested a good deal of consistency between the two sets of responses or that respondents were giving similar answers to both sets of items. The stability of the instruments was demonstrated by the findings, indicating their reliability in measuring L1 interference, Kiswahili performance, and learning challenges. The small difference between the two responses indicated that the instruments were not considerably impacted by random errors or external factors. In light of these outcomes, the instruments were sufficiently reliable for use in the main study; when given at different times, these instruments yielded similar findings.

3.10 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire so that any ambiguity in the instructions could be clarified. Also, the researcher was trying to develop a rapport with them. The questionnaires were directly administered to teachers and pupils in selected primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, how to fill in the closed ended questions, and were promised confidentiality by the researcher. Filling of the questionnaires was allowed to be done in two weeks, after which the researcher collected the filled-up questionnaires. The higher the response rate, and participants have the time to think through their answers.

The selected teachers, head teachers, and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) made an appointment for the interview. These interviews were one-on-one interviews with the respondents at a time and place of their own convenience, mostly either in their schools or offices. Before the meeting, the respondents were informed about the purpose of this study and consent was sought. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, which permitted them to probe deeper into the topics while at the same time noting all necessary topics divergent. With consent, there were audio recordings made beside taking notes to improve accuracy during data transcription and analysis.

3.11 Data Analysis

The data which was both quantitative and qualitative were systematically collected and analyzed in this study to provide an understanding of the way Lwisukha language influence on Kiswahili performance among primary school pupils. To determine the level of performance of the learners enrolled in Kiswahili, quantitative data was collected from the learners and teachers by means of a structured closed-ended questionnaire. The data was sorted, cleaned, coded, and exported to the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. Statistical analyses involving means, frequencies and percentages are computed to summarize the performance trends and demographic variables of the learners. The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with Kiswahili teachers, head teachers and the Curriculum Support Officer were thematically analyzed. The analysis revealed consistent patterns, ideas, challenges and coping strategies around the teaching and learning of Kiswahili in a Lwisukha-speaking environment. By conducting thematic analysis, they were able to capture the rich lived experiences as opposed to just the quantitative data.

Both data types were triangulated enabling validation of findings and enhancing credibility and richness of study conclusions. In the end, findings were clearly presented using tables, charts, and graphs. This will help to visualize trends and make comparisons as well as understand better the influence of linguistic background on curriculum implementation and Kiswahili performance.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

A letter of introduction was prepared from the School of Graduate Studies, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology to the Sub County Education office before the collection of data. The Sub County Director of Education issued a mandate and clearance to gather data from the sampled schools' teachers and learners. The authentication of study intention formal letter ensured approval is granted by the institution to carry out the study in the identified primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County. One of the key ethical considerations in this study is informed consent. Through providing written guidance, the researcher succeeds in ensuring that all leaners (via their guardians) are thoroughly informed about the study's purpose nature and scope. The adult participants were asked to provide their consent in writing, and the pupils provided assent with their parent or guardian consent. The participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can refuse to participate without penalty.

Researcher ensured anonymity and confidentiality of data during research. No report, publication or presentation that arises from study will disclose the identity of any of the participants. Instead, they will be referred to by pseudonyms or codes. The researcher will keep all collected data stored safely and accessible only by them and where needed, the research supervisors. The identities of participants will not be revealed nor will any of their other information be used in any way. Participants were also assured that they could leave the study at any stage without providing any

reasoning or suffering any consequences. This precaution combats ethical violations of voluntary withdrawal which allows participants to withdraw their consents at any point during the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Teachers were asked whether their learners' L1 (Lwisukha) makes it hard for them to satisfy Kiswahili curriculum specification. Table 2 displays the results of the study.

Table 1

Kiswahili curriculum expectations

Response	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Strongly agree	3	37.5
Agree	2	25.0
Disagree	2	25.0
Strongly disagree	1	12.5
Total	8	100.0

The results show that a majority of the respondents (62.5%) think that Lwisukha affects the ability of pupils to meet Kiswahili curriculum levels significantly, meaning that most learners experience challenges due to L1 interference; specifically in pronunciation, vocabulary development and understanding standards of grammar. The finding confirms L1 centrality to the position of the study on Lwisukha slowing down pupils from acquiring curriculum competencies in Kiswahili as pupils may transfer phonological and syntactic patterns from Lwisukha into Kiswahili. According to Lumbuye (2018), the patterns of an early or first language often interfere with the process of learning a second language. This is because the structures of the first language have been established. However, these are not compatible with the expectations formed based on the second language so they result in errors, disfluent production in the second language when speaking it (160). The fact that 37.5% of teachers disagreed shows that L1 interference while influential is not always viewed as the biggest hindrance. Rather, these teachers feel that other factors such as low exposure to Kiswahili, differences in teaching approaches or learners' attitudes are to blame. Some students ascertain that they speak Kiswahili often in their homes indicating its importance at home. The findings were depicted in Figure 1.

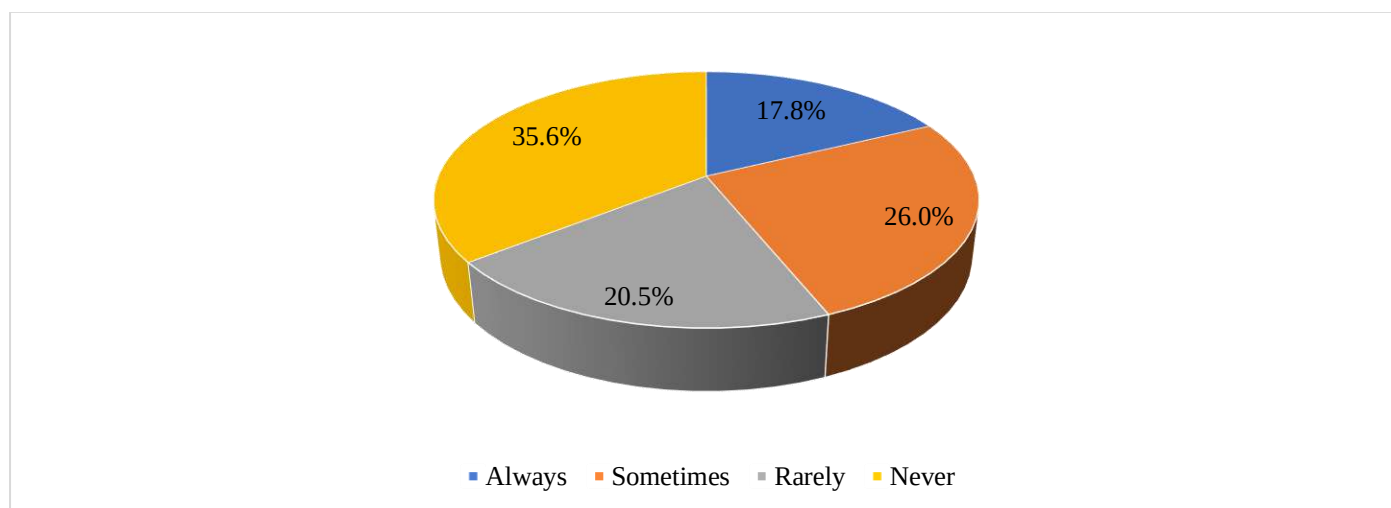
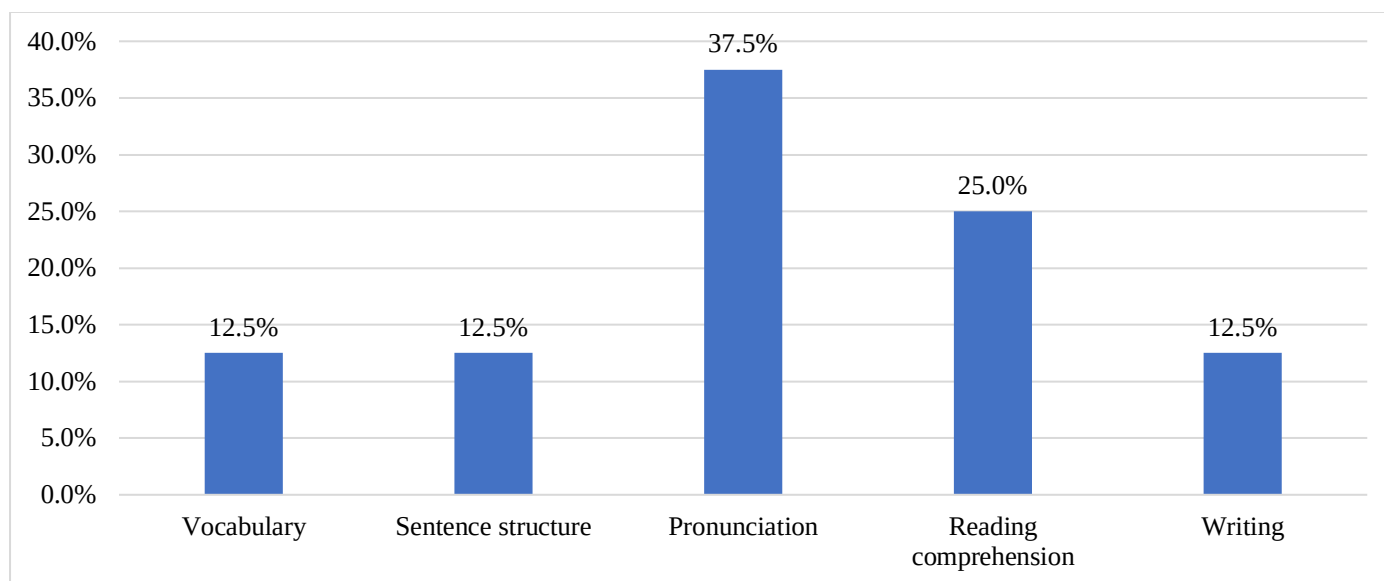


Figure 1

Kiswahili speaking at home

The findings about how frequently pupils speak Kiswahili while at home further buttresses the findings of the study that highlights the limited home-language environment not supportive of Kiswahili acquisition. Only 17.8% of pupils speak Kiswahili at home always with most either sometimes (26.0%), rarely (20.5%) or never (35.6%) using Kiswahili. The data show that learners have limited opportunities to communicate in Kiswahili outside the classroom. The participant views this limited access as lessening the opportunity of making such meaningful use of the language frequently and in quality that enhances vocabulary and fluency, and internalizes grammar. The considerable number of pupils who rarely or never use Kiswahili at home means that the Lwisukha is the L1 used predominantly in the home environment intensifying L1 influence identified by the teachers. Kiswahili teachers are requested to mention areas of Kiswahili affected by L1 interference most. Figure 2 presents the results of study.

**Figure 2**

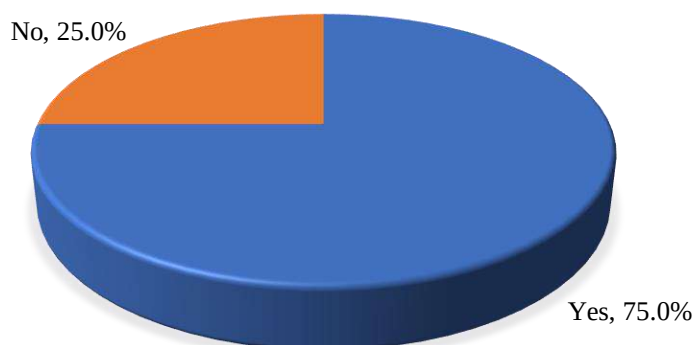
Areas of Kiswahili most affected by L1 interference

The data collected show that the concept of pronunciation (37.5%) is the most affected area of Kiswahili as a result of Lwisukha interference according to teachers. Following pronunciation is reading comprehension (25.0%). The area of vocabulary (12.5%), sentence structure (12.5%), and writing (12.5%) were also identified by the teachers. The implication of these results is that the extent of L1 influence is greatest in oral language production, as pupils probably draw upon Lwisukha phonological patterns during Kiswahili production, thus producing marked accented speech or phonological miscastings, resulting in impeded communication. When researchers observed a pronounced dominance of pronunciation errors in student assessments, it seems logical to them that phonological transfer could be the first L1 interference they witness, which could affect the other skills in turn. Using the wrong pronunciation could affect the decoding and meaning-making abilities of students, which could in turn be reflected in reading comprehension. Although they are discreet, the smaller proportions with respect to the vocabulary, the sentences, and the writing suggest that transfer is not just phonological, but also extends to less visible dimensions of language. The results can be better understood in light of Cummins' Interdependence Theory which states that the underlying cognitive and academic skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the other. When teaching Kiswahili, children's Lwisukha phonology and syntax can be scaffolding tools if they are strong. On the other hand, bad LI pronunciation may interfere with accurate Kiswahili literacy by creating incorrect habits. Thus, although pronunciation shows the most immediate impact, the theory also reinforces the idea that strengthening L1 can also strengthen L2 skills such as reading, writing and vocabulary.

The discussion above was supported by the information provided by the teachers during the interview when they were asked to give out particular aspects of Kiswahili (grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary) that the Lwisukha speaking pupils find most difficult. According to Teacher 1 on 4th September 2025;

"The most challenging part is grammar, especially the noun classes and correct use of verbs. The sounds of some Kiswahili words are hard to pronounce due to their absence in Lwisukha. Many pupils find it difficult to acquire and retain vocabulary which leads to incomplete sentences and a pause in expressing what they want to say in spoken and written Kiswahili".

The teacher's insights add depth to the data that points out how Lwisukha interferes with various dimensions of learning Kiswahili, especially grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. According to the teacher; the fact that Lwisukha has different noun classes and verbs used appropriately is particularly difficult means that the structural difference between Lwisukha and Kiswahili is interfering with learners' ability to master crucial grammatical rules. As a result, they often form inaccurate sentences. The cited problems in pronouncing Kiswahili sounds that are absent in Lwisukha further confirm the phonological transfer's marked effect observed in the broader data as they are normally not fluent in these sounds and thus affect them orally. The essay reveals that because students have difficulty learning and remembering words, they fail to speak and write effectively as a deficiency of vocabulary leads to hesitation and incomplete sentences that only lowers their confidence. Teachers were asked whether pupils who speak Lwisukha at home will have difficulties in comprehending simple Kiswahili texts. Figure 3 shows the presentation of results.

**Figure 3**

Difficulty understanding simple Kiswahili texts

The 75.0% of teachers believe that pupils who speak Lwisukha at home cannot understand simple Kiswahili texts imply that limited exposure to Kiswahili outside school is hindering learners' reading comprehension. According to the researcher, these pupils have less exposure to Kiswahili vocabulary, sentence patterns and text forms at home. This restricts their decoding and comprehension even of simple written texts. By contrast, the 25.0% of teachers who indicated no difficulty implies that a minority of pupils may come with compensatory support like more individual motivation, more usage of Kiswahili in their communities or a stronger foundation in literacy that enables them to understand the text even if they speak Lwisukha at home. The analysis certainly confirms that Duarte et al. (2023) reports that underexposure to the language of instruction usually impedes reading comprehension since learners do not possess the required linguistic input to build the depth of vocabulary and syntactic awareness in the target language.

The above discussion concurs with what has been reported by the student when asked to provide the level of difficulty in learning Kiswahili at school. Table 3 illustrates the results of investigation.

Table 2

Level of Difficulty Students Find Learning Kiswahili in school

Response	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Very difficult	20	27.4
Difficult	22	30.1
Easy	13	17.8
Very easy	18	24.7
Total	73	100.0

The results of the study reveal that 27.4% of pupils find learning Kiswahili very difficult and 30.1% find it difficult. This means that more than half of the pupils find it difficult to learn Kiswahili. From the researcher's viewpoint, these researchers' challenges may be exacerbated by the Lwisukha predominantly spoken at home, which inhibits pupils' exposure to Kiswahili vocabulary, sentence structures, and pronunciation patterns of Kiswahili, thus compromising their acquisition overall. The school observed by the teachers for years, interference from Lwisukha affects the grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, pronunciation, and other aspects of Kiswahili. This means there are continuous gaps between the language skills that the curriculum requires and the language skills of the learners. In contrast, the 17.8% of pupils who find Kiswahili easy and 24.7% who find it very easy mean that some of the learners are able to cope with the demands of the language. Increased personal motivation, prior exposure and Kiswahili-speaking environments outside the home may be helpful. The findings of this study support Msuya 2023 which argues that learners' perceived difficulty in second-language learning is a function of how much and what kind of language input they receive, and how and in what contexts they are enabled to practice.

The results also agreed with information obtained from teachers during interview when asked to describe the Kiswahili proficiency level of the pupils that speak Lwisukha as their first language. Teacher 2 on 4th September 2025 mentioned that.

Most Lwisukha-speaking pupils have moderate Kiswahili proficiency. They are able to follow simple instructions but not express themselves well. The impact of Lwisukha is present in their sentences. Translating directly impacts one's speaking fluency. Overall understanding is stronger than speech and writing, highlighting the urgency of greater exposure and more planned language practice sessions.

The observation gives a comprehensive perspective of the Kiswahili proficiency challenges facing Lwisukha-speaking pupils. The teacher claims that learners are able to understand but not act. In simpler terms, they can comprehend the instructions given to them, but their speaking and writing skills are limited. There are many grammatical errors in their sentences. This suggests that they are transferring the structures of Lwisukha into Kiswahili which leads to syntax and verb errors. Moreover, the reliance on direct translation reveals that learners often think in Lwisukha and (or) map Lwisukha words and structures onto Kiswahili. This significantly affects their fluency and natural expression. The teacher told us that students' comprehension is better than their production. This means they can understand the language better than they can use it effectively. This guides our recommended action of giving students more oral, set writing and Kiswahili language exposure. Teachers were asked to rate the reading skills that Lwisukha affects most as a first language. Table 4 shows the outcomes achieved.

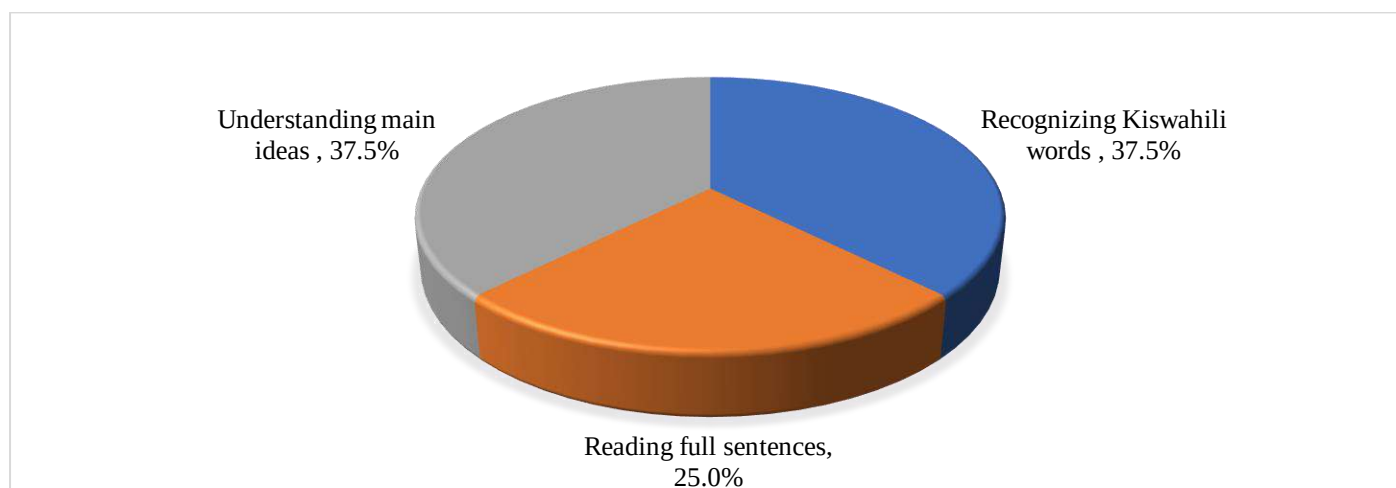


Figure 4

Reading Skills (Source: Study data, 2025)

Findings revealed that the first language of Lwisukha significantly affects Kiswahili reading skills of pupils in more than a few ways. Teachers' responses show that 37.5% could not recognize Kiswahili words, 25.0% could not read a whole sentence while 37.5% could not get the main idea. According to the researcher, L1 interference has a word-level coding interference, and at the same time, it has sentence fluency interference too which has an overall comprehension interference. The reason it's hard to recognize words could arise from the limited experience of Kiswahili phonology and orthography at home, and therefore, reading sentence and getting meaning from a text. Likewise, the difficulty of understanding the main ideas indicates that comprehension is limited when pupils' decoding and fluency are weak. It shows a bigger gap between basic and higher-order literacy. Cummins' Interdependence Theory asserts that the literacy and cognitive skills acquired in the first language are useful for the second language. Therefore, strengthening Lwisukha reading and comprehension skills may provide a useful base for improving Kiswahili reading skills. In Kiswahili, teachers were requested to give observations of the writing problems of Lwisukha L1 pupils. Figure 5 illustrates the results obtained.

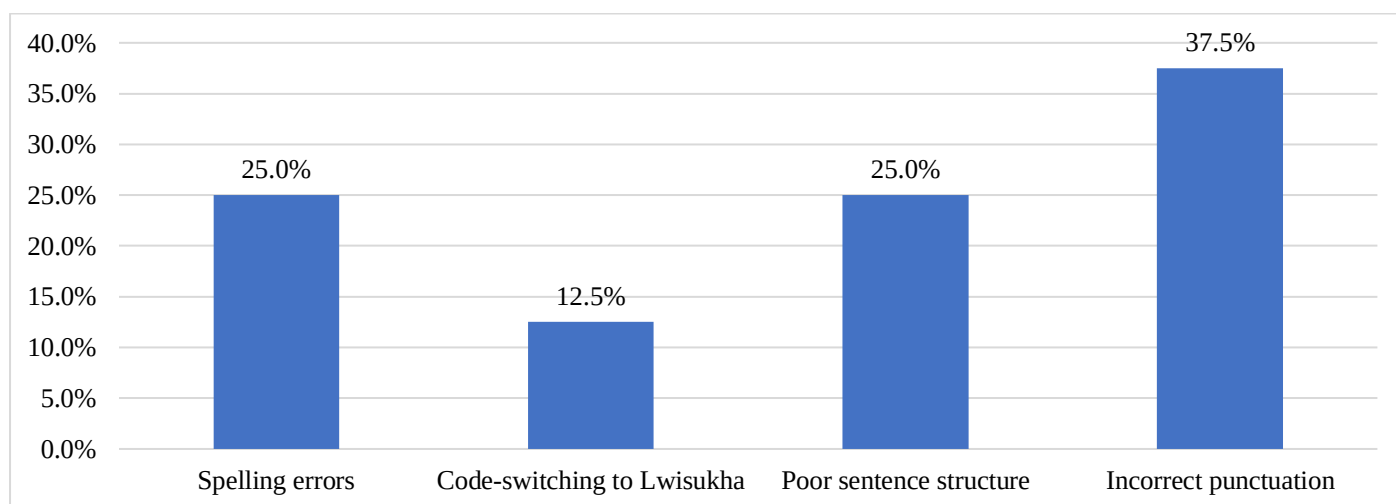


Figure 5

Writing issues



The findings indicate that the interference of Lwisukha L1 by pupils causes a significant impact on the ability of the pupils to meet the writing expectation of Kiswahili. Teachers have rated these challenges as spelling errors (25%) switching to Lwisukha (12.5%) poor construction of sentences (25%) and incorrect punctuation (37.5%). Therefore, pupils have difficulty transferring the proper linguistic forms from Kiswahili, choosing instead to use the L1 phonological and syntactic patterns, resulting in writing inaccuracies. As the researcher, the results show that without any targeted instructional support, learners will continue to make L1-induced errors which will obstruct their performance in Kiswahili as required by the syllabus. In what ways can the variance between what is evident in students' uncontrolled writing reveal the learning needs of the students? Write your answer in less than fifty words. Learners that come from indigenous language backgrounds extend the L1 structure to Kiswahili writing. Consequently, a lot of interference is evident in orthography, grammar, and sentence structure (Simiyu, 2017).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The influence of first language Lwisukha on pupils' meeting of Kiswahili curriculum expectations is significant and negative according to the findings of the study. This influence is especially seen with regard to learners' pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development and fluency of language where the continuous transfer of L1 structures interferes with the correct use of Kiswahili. Kiswahili is generally spoken only in class thus further enhancing the effect because of limited exposure. As a result, it can be established that without deliberate teaching assistance as well as prolonged exposure to Kiswahili, Lwisukha-speaking pupils will not fully meet the expectations of the curriculum.

5.2 Recommendations

Parents and guardians should intentionally create structured opportunities for the use of Kiswahili at home by creating daily opportunities for use of Kiswahili through conversations, reading Kiswahili story books and supervising homework while the Ministry of Education (MoE) should develop community-based literacy programmes and distribute age-appropriate Kiswahili reading materials to parents to support home language engagement. Kiswahili teachers should intersperse remedial lessons that involve pronunciation drill activities, noun class mastery and guided writing and Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should design and implement an in-service training module on L1 interference in Kiswahili teaching. The study results show that school managers should, as far as possible, institutionalize Kiswahili immersion programs. They can do this by instituting a functional Kiswahili club and an inter-class language competition. Besides, the use of Kiswahili in extra-curricular activities will help. Also, county education offices should assist in funding the organization of community language events to continue Kiswahili use outside the classroom.

Declaration of Interest

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