

A Second or Foreign Language? Unveiling the Realities of English in Rural Kisii, Kenya

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1. Introduction

This current study explores the presence and accessibility of English in rural Kisii, Kenya. A total of 111 youths were surveyed by use of a questionnaire. The respondents were asked to report the presence and use of English in their immediate environment such as its presence at home, at school, in the media, and in other social places. The findings show that there is limited presence of English in this rural context. Modern technology, which is indisputably a great resource in the global spread of English, is lacking. Although it is too early to draw generalized conclusions, the findings show that rural Kisii leans more toward English as a foreign language (EFL) context calling for a need for a re-evaluation of the choice of the language of instruction in rural Kisii schools and maybe other rural contexts as well.

At independence, in 1963, Kenya adopted a capitalist economy, which consequently means that wealth is not equally distributed. As Prewitt (1974) observes, there are several geographical and educational inequalities in Kenya and a big gap between the haves and have-nots. The majority of the wealthy Kenyans live in Nairobi or other big cities where there is easy access to resources and development opportunities. However, a large percentage (70 to 75%) of the Kenyan population is rural and only 25% of the population lives in the cities (Ember & Ember, 2001; Gall, 1998,). Unlike the urban areas, most rural areas are remote, making it difficult for people who live there to enjoy public services such as education, better transport, and communication. Unfortunately this unequal distribution of wealth is also reflected in the distribution of English, the language of instruction.

Kachru (1992) proposes research that seeks to investigate the extent to which English has penetrated into various social classes in non native contexts. Although English has continued to spread rapidly around the world, and this spread has been widely documented, research that specifically addresses rural contexts is still crucial.

1.1. Context of study: Rural Kisii

Kisii is the highest part of the South Nyanza highlands. The region is a rolling, hilly landscape, with steep-sided hills intersected by very fertile valleys and an equatorial climate. Even though Kisii is among the most productive cash crop regions in Kenya, transportation to this area remains a major issue of concern. Due to the hilly terrain and the heavy rains in the area, transportation, especially by road, is very difficult. The roads, most of which are unpaved, get very muddy and impassable during the rainy season.

Kisii is one of the largest ethnic groups in Kenya forming about 6% of the national population. Kisii district, the home of the Kisii people, has one of the most rapidly growing populations in the world with an increase of about 3-4% per year. About 50% of the population is under 15 years of age similar to the national population trends in Kenya.

Although Kisii lies in very rich lands, its dense population has led to an overuse of the land and the depletion of soil fertility. The yields from this overused land have continued to decrease resulting in a poor economy. Many people now live below the poverty line with an average income of about Ksh.2000 (28 US dollars) a month.

Where a person happens to grow up sharply affects his or her chances of benefiting from the educational system (Prewitt, 1974). Allocation of government resources in Kenya has always followed an ethnic pattern; those in administration tend to favor their ethnic groups and direct more government

resources there (Alwy & Schech, 2004). These resources include improved educational facilities in a given area. Public wealth is largely determined by the ruling elite and the government that prevails. Kisii has never been in the forefront of political development and thus has not been at the forefront of enjoying national resources either. History shows that Kisii were among the most unreceptive tribes to the missionaries and colonial rule (Nyamwaya & Were, 1986) and this rejection resulted in the lack of the economic and educational advantages that came with missionary/European education.

Kenya's educational policy emphasizes intellectual accomplishment as the measure of advancement within the system. As long as Kisii were not in favor with the missionaries who ran the Western education, they could not do well academically, and thus they could not rise in the social ranks in society. It took a long time before educated elite could develop in Kisii district. Although the Kisii people did not suffer any alienation from their land, they failed to engage in the Western education that would later have an impact on the leadership of Kenya. They did not form a big part of the elite class that took over the political and economic administration at independence. Kisii's situation, however, is not unique and might, in fact, reflect life in most rural settings.

1.2. ESL versus EFL contexts

Although Kenya is considered an English as a Second Language (ESL) context, availability of the English language varies from context to context making it necessary for research that addresses specific contexts. Whereas English is truly a native language or a strong second language for a number of Kenyans especially those born and raised in metropolitan cities, the same fact may only be a myth for rural language users. Angogo and Hancock (1982) classified the varieties of English (es) spoken in East and West Africa into four kinds:

1. Native English for African-born whites and expatriates
2. Native English of locally-born Africans
3. Nonnative English spoken fluently as second language (in several styles)
4. Nonnative English spoken imperfectly as a foreign language (in several styles)

While the line between a foreign and a second language can be blurry especially, in this era of globalization, there are some basic differences between the two contexts. What can be considered an ESL context? According to Stern 1983, "A second language is usually learnt with much more environmental support than a foreign language...it is often learned informally (picked up) because of its wide use within the community". (p.16). An English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context on the other hand is one where English is mainly acquired in the classroom and not much of it is available in the learner's immediate environment; it is not the language of instruction or interpersonal communication nor is it the language of administrative or legal systems. This foreign language tends to become the language of the younger people in the community because they are taught when they start school while their parents maintain little to no proficiency because they never learned it.

2. The purpose of the study

Based on the assumption that easy accessibility to a language facilitates language learning, the purpose of this study was to survey the presence and availability of English in rural Kisii. The main research question was: How available is the English language in rural Kisii Kenya? From this main question several sub questions were developed.

- (i) What is the reality of English accessibility through the media?
- (ii) How much English is available in rural homes?
- (iii) Who uses English in rural Kisii and what is the frequency of use?
- (iv) Based on this reality, can rural Kisii be considered an ESL or EFL context?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The subjects in this study were 111 students from a vocational training institution in rural Kisii. These students had completed primary school or had a few years of high school, but for some reason, mainly financial or difficulties with class work, they could not complete high school education. The

group therefore was representative of typical rural settings where a majority of students do not have the opportunity to go beyond primary school or complete high school. In most cases these are the people who end up staying and raising their families in the rural villages while their counterparts who complete high school move to urban areas in search of jobs and better opportunities. Out of these 111 subjects, 33 were female and 78 male. Their ages ranged between 18 and 25 years, with an average age of 20. The institution offers several technical courses including secretarial, computer, building construction, driver education, electrical installation, carpentry, motor mechanics, leatherwork, and shoe making. Students pay Ksh 9000 (the equivalent of 128 US dollars) per year for tuition to enroll in one of the courses offered. By Western standards, this tuition might not appear to be high, but for parents who earn an average of Ksh.2000 (28 US dollars) a month, the tuition is an equivalent of 5 to 6 months' earnings.

Data were collected by use of an extensive questionnaire which asked respondents to indicate how often they used English in various contexts: at home, at school, in other social places, in reading and in writing. The purpose of this survey was to elicit information on the uses and contexts of use of English in rural Kisii. The responses were in a 5-point Likert scale with the rubrics All the time (1), Most of the time (2), Some of the time (3), Never (4), and Not applicable (5).

The collected data were entered into a database using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences program (SPSS). Frequency reports were generated on all the questions for statistical analysis. These frequencies were then represented in several tables for easier observation of the patterns that were emerging.

4. Results and discussion

A detailed analysis of the questionnaire results yields a comprehensive description of the presence of English in rural Kisii, its uses and its users.

4.1. English in the radio and television

Some of the media domains in which English as a global language has been used are television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet. These have also been some of the ways of spreading English around the world. The participants were asked to report on the types of media they have in their homes and the amount of time they spend listening to English programs.

As Table 1 shows, only 18% of the respondents reported having television sets at home (20 out of 111). The radio was the most owned form of media while the computer and TV were the least owned. In total, 66% of the participants said that their families owned a radio and 56.8% owned a radio cassette. The radio is the most available and affordable source of local news, including local weather news, transmitted in the local language

Table 1: Media Availability in the homes

Type of media	Count	Percentage
Radio	74	66.7
Radio cassette only	63	56.8
Cell phone	25	22.5
TV	20	18
Computer	1	0.9
No media at home	1	0.9

When the respondents were asked to give an estimate of the amount of time they spent listening to programs in English, the time varied across subjects, with the average time reported being one hour per day. Out of the 111 respondents, over 78% of the subjects reported that they listen to English programs for less than one hour a day.

Time spent listening to English programs is constrained by several factors, but I will mention two main constraints. The first reason is if the rest of the family members cannot understand English programs, then it is not possible to have only a few people enjoying the English programs. If family

members want to listen to news, it is expected that they will tune to a language that everybody in the family understands: the local language or in some cases Kiswahili, the national language.

The second factor that could influence the amount of time spent listening to programs in English is the economic factor. Rural electrification has not been achieved in most parts of Kenya including rural Kisii. People have to buy batteries to operate their radios or televisions, making every minute spent listening to any kind of media expensive. To reduce the expenses radios are reserved for important programs and for period when most members can benefit. Besides, some of the most entertaining youth programs broadcast from the capital city, Nairobi, and extend to areas within a few kilometers' radius. Stations like Capital FM, and Family FM are not accessed in Kisii, although this may be possible in the near future. Limited access applies to television programs as well.

4.2. *English through the Internet*

The Internet has become an essential source of information and a quick way to spread English around the world. Only one participant (0.9%) reported having a computer in his home although there was little likelihood that this computer was used to access the Internet since there is no service provider in the area. The main users of the Internet in Kenya are the multinational corporations and international organizations, most of which are located in the big cities. The high cost of computers and that of subscribing to the Internet services deters many Kenyans from using the Internet. While most people around the world find the Internet to be an important resource for learning English, it is not an accessible resource in rural Kisii yet. The respondents did not have access to the Internet, a service many youths around the world cannot imagine life without. So while we talk of globalization and global connection, not everyone is connected.

4.3. *English through newspapers*

The daily newspapers that circulate in Kenya are mainly in English. The main ones are, *Daily Nation*, *East African Standard* and *Kenya Times*. These papers are published in Nairobi and distributed around the nation. Distribution problems limit the press to an urban and elite audience. How often a paper gets to any given region depends on the accessibility of the area. Due to inaccessibility, a daily newspaper does not always get to its destination on the same day and in essence, then, it does not really maintain its name "daily". As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Kisii is not easily accessible, especially during rainy seasons. In response to the question whether they buy newspapers, 64.9% of the participants said they bought newspapers, while the other 35.1% said they never buy newspapers. At the time when this study was conducted a newspaper cost as much as a loaf of bread, a commodity that is too precious and afforded by this rural population only on very special occasions such as at Christmas. *The Daily Nation*, one of the most popular papers, cost Ksh.35 (\$ US.50) and *The Sunday Nation* was Ksh. 45 which is more than 50% of the daily income of a number of rural residents. Being able to buy a newspaper is prestigious because of what the purchase implies. Firstly, it means that one is literate and can read a newspaper, especially if it is in English. Secondly, it also means that one is rich and can afford to buy a paper when most families would rather use that money for basic necessities. A third implication is that one is modern and in touch with the world since one has an update of the news. Considering the realities of the high costs and based on the author's personal experience in the area while conducting the study, there is a possibility that the high percentages of participants reporting that they bought newspapers might be an instance of exaggeration.

When asked how often their families bought newspapers, about 9% did not respond to the question which might imply that maybe they could not remember the last time their family bought a newspaper, or they intentionally wanted to avoid a question they thought was rather provoking. I noticed a consistent pattern in the "No Response"; respondents refused to respond whenever items seemed to get personal. As illustrated in Table 2, 31.5% of the subjects skipped this question because it was not applicable in their situation as they had already indicated that they never buy newspapers. The remaining 60% said their families bought a newspaper at least a few times a month. While it is true that most salaried workers, especially teachers, are likely to bring home newspapers once a month

when they get their pay, such salaried people, however, do not account for a big percentage of the rural population.

Table 2: Frequency of newspapers purchase

Frequency	Count	Percent
Twice a week	34	30.6
Once a week	21	18.9
A few times a month	11	9.9
Not Applicable	35	31.5
No response	10	9.0
Total	111	100.0

4.4. English in other forms of printed media

Other opportunities for use of English include the amount of reading people do. The question on how often respondents visited the library received different responses. As shown in Table 3, 17.1% gave no response, 17.1% reported that they did not know any library around, 15.3% had never been to the library, while 11.7% said they rarely visit the library. Only 11.7% reported visiting the library often, and some (27%) said they visit the library sometimes. That some participants did not know any library around was an interesting point. All the students live within a walking distance of school, and if some do not know any library around, then chances are that those who have visited a library either travelled outside the area or they lived outside the area at some point. Further inquiry about the area showed that there was no library within a radius of several kilometers.

Table 3: Frequency of library visits

Frequency of library visits	Count	Percent
No response	19	17.1
Often	13	11.7
Sometimes	30	27.0
Very rare	13	11.7
Never	17	15.3
I don't know any library around	19	17.1
Total	111	100.0

4.5. English use at home

This study was conducted in a typical rural area where interethnic marriages are not common and the language is homogeneous. Out of the 111 respondents, 92.8% reported that both of their parents were of the Kisii ethnic group; only 6.3% reported having one parent and a mother in particular, from a different ethnic group. Generally a woman married into another ethnic group in such a rural setting is expected to learn the language of her marital home. Although the question about the main language used at home did not receive a unanimous response as I had expected, 81% of the respondents reported that they mainly used Ekegusii at home. Only 9% reported that they mainly used Kiswahili at home and there was an even smaller percentage (3%) that reported using English at home.

Respondents were asked to check from a list given all their family members who can communicate in English (can speak, read, and write in English). The question of who uses English in rural Kenya is difficult to answer because of the other questions that arise from this one question. What does "use of English" mean? How much English do the users know? The question could easily have been interpreted by the subjects as asking who in their families had completed primary school or had spent at least 6 to 7 years in school. The highest percentage reported of members who can communicate in English was with older brothers, followed by older sisters fathers were in third position. Only 37% reported that their mothers can communicate in English. As expected, just a very small percentage reported that their

grandparents could communicate in English. The younger people were reported to be using English more than their parents. Another interesting finding was that the female family members used less English in comparison to the males.

The next questionnaire item asked respondents to report how often they used English in various contexts beginning with English use at home. As can be seen from Table 4, as expected, English is not the language used at home; although there were some respondents who reported using English at home all the time. Surprisingly, three participants (6.1 %) reported using English with their fathers all the time. Respondents showed a consistent pattern of using more English with males in the family than with females. The figures for men were consistently higher than those for women. For instance, the cumulative percentage of the subjects who reported using English “Sometimes”, “Most of the time,” or “All the time” with their fathers was 79%, while the percentage for the mothers was only 53%. There were more respondents reporting never using English with their mothers (39%) than with their fathers (16%). The same pattern was true with grandparents and siblings. Subjects consistently used less English with their female relatives than with their male relatives. The cumulative percentage of English use with older brothers was the highest, with 91%, while that of older sisters was 88.3%. The percentage of younger brothers was 67.6% and younger sisters 58.6%. Grandmothers had the lowest cumulative percentage of 8.1% as compared to 11.7% of grandfathers. As with the previous question, the figures show that fewer females speak English as compared to the males, and yet in rural contexts, it is the mothers and sisters who spend most time at home to provide a language environment for learners.

Table 4: English use at home (%)

English use at home	All the time %	Most of the time	Sometime	Never	Not applicable	No response
1. with father	6.3	8.1	64.0	16.2	4.5	0.9
2. with mother	0.9	6.3	45.9	38.7	3.6	3.6
3. with older brothers	15.3	38.7	36.9	4.5	0	4.5
4. with older sisters	18	36	34	7.2	0.9	3.6
5. with younger brothers	9.0	15.3	43.2	20.7	9.0	2.7
6. with younger sisters	7.2	11.7	39.6	27.0	9.0	5.4
7. with grandmother	0.9	0.9	6.3	65.8	19.8	6.3
8. with grandfather	0.9	1.8	9.0	61.3	20.7	6.3
9. with family members at dinner	4.5	14.4	49.5	19.8	5.4	6.3
10. when you listen to the radio	17.1	28.8	42.3	5.4	2.7	3.6

4.6. English use in the school

Although all the participants attended the same institution, information concerning their use and possible interaction in English varied widely. The students gave varied reports on the language their teachers use in class. When the students were asked if their teachers use Ekegusii when teaching, reports varied with 41% agreeing that some of their teachers used Ekegusii and 58% disagreeing. Why could the reports vary so widely? This was difficult to explain, but I think it must be the students' expectation that the teachers should be using English and therefore found it difficult to report that their teachers use Ekegusii or Kiswahili. Use of mother tongue in the school has stigma and generally teachers are expected to be role models in use of English in the schools. Maybe some of the students feared they might put their teachers in trouble if they reported that these teachers used Ekegusii in class when the system expected them to be using English. The other explanation would be that the teachers used Ekegusii or Kiswahili just for purposes of explaining difficult concepts and the students did not view this as actual use of Ekegusii.

Table 5: English use at school (%)

English use at school	All the time	Most of the time	Sometime	Never	Not applicable	No Response
1.with teachers	51.4	30.6	18.0	0	0	0
2. with the headmaster	55.0	27.9	17.1	0	0	0
3. in the classroom	28.8	27.9	41.4	0.9	0	0.9
4. in the playground	5.4	20.7	57.7	9.0	6.3	0.9
5.with classmates	25.2	29.7	40.5	0	0.9	3.6
6. with best friend	21.6	32.4	45.0	0.9	0	0
7 to discuss homework	26.1	32.4	39.6	0	0.9	0.9
8.with the school watchman	1.8	5.4	43.2	36.9	11.7	0.9

There were higher percentages recorded of using English all the time in school as compared to use at home. A large percentage of the subjects (51%) reported using English with their teachers all the time, and the other 49% used English with their teachers most of the time or sometime. An even higher percentage, 55%, reported using English all the time with the school headmaster. Nobody reported never using English with the teachers or with the school headmaster.

As shown in Table 5 English seems to be the main language used by students to communicate with their teachers and when they are within the hearing of the teachers. However, when the students are away from their teachers, such as when they are alone at the playground, they use other languages. Most schools in Kenya, even those where students have a minimum English proficiency, do not tolerate use of mother tongues in the schools. School is therefore the main source of English for these students as expected in a typical EFL context.

The pattern changed when it came to the reports on English use with the watchman. As illustrated in Table 5, only two students, (1.8 %), reported using English all the time with the school watchman. About 37%, however, said they did not use English with the school watchman at all, and 43.2% said they sometimes used English with the school watchman. So while the data seems to show that there is some availability of English in the schools, the schools themselves are not fully saturated with English. Not everyone within the school premises uses or even has the ability to use English.

Overall as Makoni & Meinhof (2003) have said, "For most African pupils, the educational setting is the primary domain in which they get most of their exposures to English, often delivered by teachers who in most cases are themselves second language learners of English." (p. 8). The students will therefore learn as much as they are offered by the school. The teachers, who are looked at as the transmitters of English, may not be proficient enough themselves, yet the whole burden of providing the language lies on their backs.

4.7. English use in other places

Students were asked to show their English use in social places such as at church, at the local clinic, or even at the local market. Who uses English in these places? Very few respondents reported using English all the time or most of the time in most public places. For example, only one person reported using English in church all the time as illustrated in Table 6 below. The low percentage here did not surprise me because church services in this part of the country are conducted in Ekegusii only. Most people however reported using English sometimes in most public places.

Only a small percentage reported never using English at all in public places. Most respondents reported using English "sometime" in places like churches, at the clinic, with policemen, pastors, public transport drivers (matatu driver) and with doctors. While this use of English in some of these mentioned public places might sound as excellent opportunities of language use, the occasions are likely to be very rare. An average young person anywhere will try his/ her best to avoid contact with a

police officer and the only time most of them come into contact with such officers is when they are in trouble. In any case many police officers will be very offended if young people spoke to them in English since the police force in Kenya is not made up of the elites of society.

Table 6: English use in other places (%)

English use in other places	All the time	Most of the time	sometime	Never	Not Applicable	No response
19. At church	3.6	17.1	70.3	6.3	2.7	0
20. At the clinic	8.1	16.2	62.2	9.9	.9	2.7
21. With a matatu driver	1.8	4.5	57.7	27.9	6.3	1.8
22. With a woman at the market	2.7	.9	23.4	36.9	33.3	2.7
23. With a police man	11.7	16.2	62.2	6.3	1.8	1.8
24. With your pastor/ priest	12.6	14.4	66.7	3.6	2.7	0
25. With the doctor	19.8	19.8	52.3	.9	.9	6.3

4.8. English use in writing

The items related to language used in writing asked the subjects what language they used when writing letters to family members, relatives, and friends. Writing letters may not be a very common practice, especially in families where even paper is hard to come by let alone the postage stamps. Except for a few relatives who might be living in the cities, most family members live in close proximity. Therefore, communicating through letters or other forms of distant communication is not necessary. I expected to see more “Not applicable” responses than I got. Subjects reported that whenever they wrote letters to their aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters and friends, the main language they used was English. As Table 7 shows, 43% of the subjects used English all the time when writing letters to their uncles.

Table 7: English use in writing letters (%)

English use in writing letters to	All the time	Most of the time	Sometime	Never	Not applicable	No response
26. uncles	43.2	21.6	28.8	3.6	.9	1.8
27. aunts	41.4	18.0	31.5	6.3	.9	1.8
28. grandparents	5.4	2.7	12.6	60.4	15.3	3.6
29. brothers and sisters	59.5	18.0	18.9	.9	.9	1.8
30. best friend	61.3	18.9	17.1	.9	1.8	0

A cumulative 93.7% reported that they used English all the time, most of the time or sometimes to write to their uncles. Only 3.6% reported that they never used English when writing to their uncles. The cumulative percentages of English usage were equally high with letters to other relatives, such as 91% to aunts, 96% to brothers and sisters, and 97.3% to best friends. This was not a surprising finding since English is the language of the school and the first language used when learning about the skill of letter writing. Most functional writing such as letter writing or even report writing is not introduced in the lower primary school where the language of education is the mother tongue. Therefore, students do not learn how to write letters in their native language. In a context where English is the medium of instruction and where the other languages are not well developed, it is not surprising that most writing will be in

English. In fact most people from this context might never have learnt how to write letters in their mother tongue. It is either they write in the little English they know or they do not write at all.

On the question of language used in writing, I can therefore safely conclude that whenever people write, they will normally write in English. This makes sense because, if their recipients can read, it is most likely that they have been to school and will therefore have acquired some level of English literacy to understand the language of the letters they receive.

4.9. English use in reading

Most respondents reported that they used English in reading various kinds of literature. The literature included books, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, directions for food products, and directions for medicine. As illustrated in Table 8, a large percentage of the respondents (53%) said they read books in English all the time, while nobody reported never reading books in English. With the gradual phasing out of the vernacular from the educational system, English has remained the main language of reading and writing. But how often do people read directions for food products or even directions for medicine. Other than a few over the counter pain killers, there are not many types of medicines sold in the rural stores that could require much reading.

Table 8: English use in reading (%)

English use in reading	All the time	Most of the time	sometime	never	Not applicable	No response
Books	53.2	29.7	14.4	0	0.9	1.8
Newspapers % magazines	36.0	25.2	33.3	2.7	.9	1.8
Directions for food products	21.6	20.7	46.8	7.2	1.8	1.8
Directions for medicine	29.7	18.0	45.9	1.8	.9	3.6
Advertisements	35.1	21.6	37.8	1.8	.9	2.7

5. Conclusion

I had started with one main question and several sub questions: How available is the English language in rural Kisii Kenya?

- (i) What is the reality of English accessibility through the media?
- (ii) How much English is available in rural homes?
- (iii) Who uses English in rural Kisii?
- (iv) What is the frequency of English use?
- (v) Based on this reality, can rural Kisii be considered an ESL or EFL context?

5.1. Presence and accessibility

Although English is not completely absent from this rural context; that the users are immersed in an English environment as expected of an ESL context is not a reality. It is clear from this study that the English language is not easily available to most people in rural Kisii. While one can argue that the youths have access to the radio, in the current era, the radio may not be the most productive way to reinforce use of English when the rest of the world is connected through the internet. Most 18-25 year olds around the world might not even start to comprehend a world without face book or my space, leave alone one without a TV.

Since the rural context is a homogenous language context, there is even no urgency or practical need to promote English use at home. The participants in this study having dropped out of the traditional school system at 8th grade or before completing high school are likely to repeat the circle of becoming parents with minimal English proficiency and therefore not in a position to help their children master the

language. Unfortunately, these participants represent the typical rural population. Those who attain a higher education rarely stay in the rural areas except for a few professionals such as the village health practitioner, teacher or agricultural officer.

While participants reported that most of the reading and writing was done in English, it is important to explore the nature of reading and writing done. In a survey conducted among fifty recent high school graduates in Nairobi, Gromov (2009) reports that when the participants were asked how many books they had read in the past three years, most of them only listed the literature set books selected by the Kenya National Examination council. If by the time students in urban areas complete high school they have read just about four or five titles, the chances are even more limited for the students in rural areas who do not even have the luxury of electricity at home to allow for extended hours of reading. The general situation in the country as Gromov argues does not seem to develop children's reading habits and the limited selection of books available does not make reading any more attractive.

5.2. *Can rural Kisii be considered an ESL or EFL context?*

Sociolinguistic profiles of English in Kenya show that English plays several important functions including its role as the language of instruction at all levels of education especially in urban schools. English is also the language of most interpersonal communication and the language of the legal systems (Michieka, 2005). While this is true of most urban settings, this study seems to point to the fact that the presence of English in rural settings is limited to a degree that rural Kisii fits an EFL definition better than an ESL one. Trappex- Lomax (1990) defines a foreign language as a language which is non indigenous to a particular community. It is not a mother tongue of its speakers and unlike a second language; it is not used within the speech community. Clearly English is a foreign language in rural Kisii. While this rural context can be viewed as a bilingual or multilingual context, English is definitely not the strongest language of the users. It is acquired as a foreign language and restricted to the school setting. Should this foreign language then continue to be the language of instruction in the rural schools? Can the system benefit from using the local language as a medium of instruction? Often the argument has been that use of the local languages for instruction will be an expensive adventure but is illiteracy not too expensive already?

5.3. *Implications of findings*

This study has shown that the presence of English in rural Kisii is limited and this rural context can be better described as a foreign language context. More research needs to be done to confirm this finding, and if there is further and more concrete evidence that rural Kisii and other similar rural contexts reflect EFL characteristics, then there will be need to re-evaluate several aspects of language policies especially in relation to the choice of the language of instruction, language pedagogy and language testing as used in this and other rural settings. As Othman (1990) has argued, language is an indispensable component in the development process. Decisions made concerning the language of instruction will impact the overall educational outcome and consequently the development or under development of a country. It may become necessary to explore other options such as use of mother tongues as languages of instruction while making efforts to direct resources towards establishing a better EFL learning context. That way, learners from this context will benefit from an education delivered in a language they comprehend well, and the same time, they will also continue to gain mastery of the English language. Other options could be to explore strategies to overcome the deficiencies associated with using a foreign language for instruction.

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Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: African Languages and Linguistics Today

edited by Eyamba G. Bokamba,
Ryan K. Shosted, and Bezza Tesfaw Ayalew

Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2011

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Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics:
African Languages and Linguistics Today

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This paper can be cited as:

Michieka, Martha M. 2011. A Second or Foreign Language? Unveiling the Realities of English in Rural Kisii, Kenya. In *Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Eyamba G. Bokamba et al., 206-216. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. www.lingref.com, document #2576.