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Influence of Home-Based Mother Tongue Use on English Vocabulary Acquisition among Early Grade Pupils in Public Primary Schools in Masaba North Sub-County, Nyamira County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of home-based mother tongue use on English vocabulary acquisition among early grade pupils in public primary schools in Masaba North sub-county, Nyamira county, Kenya. The study was guided by the following research question: How does the use of mother tongue at home influence early grade pupils' English vocabulary acquisition in public primary schools? The study was anchored on transfer theory, while employing a mixed method in specific convergent parallel design. The study targeted 150 public primary schools, 2,850 grade 1-3 pupils, and 980 grade one to three teachers, 150 head of institutions, and one sub-county director of education. Sample size comprised 15 public primary schools selected using stratified sampling, 15 head of institutions, and 1 SCDE selected using criterion purposive sampling, 98 grade 1-3 teachers selected using simple random sampling, and 185 grade 1-3 pupils selected using systematic sampling. Data collection instruments included questionnaires for teachers, interview guides for heads of institutions and SCDE, and focus group discussion guide was used to collect data from pupils. Reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α = 0.81). Quantitative data was a nalyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data was subjected to thematic content analysis. Ethical considerations were observed before, during and after the study. The study found that home-based mother tongue use has significant influence on early grade pupils' English vocabulary acquisition by facilitating comprehension, communication confidence and language development. But too much dependence on the mother tongue may limit the students' exposure to the English vocabulary practice. It concludes that a balanced use of both languages improves the learning outcomes. It suggests that parents and teachers should encourage supportive bilingual practices which use the mother tongue but offer ample opportunities for exposure to English.

Key Words: Home-based mother tongue use; Mother tongue; Home language practices; English vocabulary acquisition; Early grade pupils; Language development; and Bilingual learning

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Background to the Study

Mother tongue is the first language that a child learns through interaction with family members and the immediate community. Within the home environment, mother tongue offers children a familiar linguistic environment that they use to learn communication, conceptual understanding and social interaction skills (UNESCO, 2024). Early grade pupils are learners in Grades 1 to 3, generally between six and eight years old, and are at a critical stage of language development (UNESCO, 2025). The process of acquiring English vocabulary means that learners are able to know English words, their meanings, pronunciation, and how to use them properly in communication, reading and writing (Colorado, 2023). Understanding the relationship between home language practices and English vocabulary development is crucial for explaining how early learners acquire additional languages in multilingual educational contexts.

Home-based language practices are important for children's early language experiences, as the home environment is where children first develop their vocabulary, communication patterns and language attitudes. According to the research of UNESCO (2025), children who receive strong linguistic support in their native language develop cognitive and literacy foundations that can be built upon for the acquisition of other languages. However, it has been argued that the overuse of mother tongue at home might limit the children's exposure to English especially in communities where they have limited access to English outside school. Consequently, some learners may find it difficult to develop sufficient English vocabulary to participate in the classroom and to progress academically.

The impact of the use of the mother tongue at home on English vocabulary acquisition is contingent on a range of contextual factors such as the degree of exposure to English, the language practices of parents, the availability of reading materials and the language support systems at school. UNICEF (2025) states that when home and school environments provide consistent opportunities for real communication, children's language development is supported. In schools where children are speaking mostly mother tongue at home and are not exposed to much English the development of vocabulary may be slower. In effective bilingual settings, however, pupils may be able to transfer linguistic knowledge from their first language to English and thus improve their understanding and vocabulary development.

International research has shown that home language practices impact children's ability to learn other languages. Wealer (2024) investigated the relationship between children's development of home language and later proficiency in English and German in Luxembourg. The study found that children who developed a strong vocabulary and language awareness in their home language had better literacy outcomes in other languages. The results showed that a strong first language can help with cross-linguistic transfer, and that children can connect concepts and meaning across languages. But the study also suggested a lack of exposure to other languages could affect a child's rate of learning vocabulary in those languages.

Similarly, Preusler (2024) studied language practices of early-grade pupils in bilingual primary school contexts in Germany. The research showed that controlled use of the pupils' first language, alongside structured exposure to English, supported vocabulary development and comprehension. Preusler (2024) found that children did better when teachers and families

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supported language development in both languages, instead of fully replacing one language with the other. However, learners had difficulty enriching their English vocabulary because of inconsistent language support. These findings suggest that the effect of mother tongue use is not only dependent on the presence of the first language, but also on the balance between home language use and English exposure.

In South Africa, Sibanda (2025) researched literacy development of early-grade pupils raised in multilingual rural communities. The study found that children who developed strong foundational skills in their indigenous language had a better understanding of language concepts when they were introduced to English. But the study also highlighted challenges when English is used in contexts outside formal learning environments. For pupils who had less chances to practise their English vocabulary pronunciation, sentence construction and understanding was a challenge. These findings indicate that mother tongue is an important basis for learning but balanced exposure to English is still necessary for successful acquisition of vocabulary.

Humble (2024) investigated the link between home language practices and early English language development in lower-primary pupils in Uganda. The study found that children whose parents engaged them in storytelling, conversation and reading activities in their home language had better communication skills and conceptual understanding. But students who had little opportunity to use English outside the classroom had trouble learning new English words and making sentences. The study found that home language use does not necessarily prevent the development of English, but the degree to which pupils increased their vocabulary was affected by the opportunities for interaction they had in English. This implies that supportive bilingual practices at home can help rather than hurt English learning.

Obiakor (2024) studied the use of indigenous language and English language development among pupils of public primary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. Findings indicated that students who developed language foundations through their home languages had improved vocabulary recognition, spelling and reading comprehension in subsequent grades. The study also found that children had difficulties when they were moved suddenly from familiar languages into English without support. Obiakor (2024) said that children need ongoing opportunities to link new English words to their prior linguistic knowledge. This implies that the use of mother tongue at home can contribute positively to the acquisition of English vocabulary provided it is accompanied by appropriate exposure to English language.

In Kenya, language practices in the home continue to impact on children's experiences in learning English. The Kenyan language policy acknowledges the role of indigenous languages in early learning but still views English as an important language for learning and communication in formal education (Republic of Kenya, 2010). However, Githinji et al., (2024) noted that language practices variations in families and schools affect the chances given to learners to acquire English skills. In some communities, children speak local languages at home, and only experience English when they go to school. Thus, differences in home language exposure may explain differences in English vocabulary development for early-grade students.

Mwangi and Mwakira (2025) found that multilingual environments in Kenyan communities offer both opportunities and challenges for learning English. Mother tongue allows

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children to freely communicate ideas and grow their understanding of concepts but limited exposure to English may limit vocabulary growth. Researchers discovered that if students switch between languages frequently and without structured support, this can affect their pronunciation, word choice and confidence when they communicate in English. Thus the role of home-based mother tongue use needs to be explored in the light of other factors such as parental involvement, reading practices and availability of English learning resources.

Muchemi (2024) researched the effect of home language on English language skills of early-grade pupils in Nyamira County public primary schools in rural areas. The study revealed that Ekegusii was the most commonly used language in households to support children's oral communication skills, cultural identity and participation in family interactions. However students with limited opportunity to practice English outside of school struggled to expand their vocabulary and pronounce correctly. Muchemi (2024) suggested encouraging balanced multilingual practices where children can draw on the benefits of their home language, while also having enough opportunities to develop their English vocabulary. The findings are relevant to other rural Kenyan settings where household communication is primarily in local languages.

Okoth (2023) studied language practices that influence learning of English among pupils in public primary schools in Masaba North Sub-County. The study established that a number of learners used Ekegusii as a medium of communication in their daily lives which improved participation in the classroom and understanding of instructions. But limited English exposure at home made it difficult for students to build vocabulary, increase confidence in speaking, and improve their written communication ability. The study also found that for some learners, differences between home language practices and school expectations created difficulties when English became the dominant language of academic instruction. These findings suggest that understanding home-based language practices is critical in addressing the challenges of English vocabulary acquisition among early-grade pupils.

Although previous research has shown the significance of mother tongue in facilitating children's cognitive and linguistic development, little consideration has been given to the effect of home-based mother tongue use on English vocabulary acquisition among early grade pupils in Masaba North Sub-County. Previous research has mainly focused on language policies in classrooms, mother tongue as a medium of instruction or general literacy outcomes. There has been less attention to the language practices of households, parental communication patterns and children's exposure to English vocabulary in the home environment. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the effect of home-based mother tongue use on English vocabulary development of early-grade pupils in public primary schools.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of home use of mother tongue on English vocabulary acquisition among early grade pupils in public primary schools in Masaba North Sub-County. The study acknowledges the mother tongue as a strong foundation for learning and also acknowledges the importance of sufficient exposure to English for academic success. Through an examination of household language practices, parental involvement and pupils' vocabulary development, the study aims to generate evidence that can inform teachers, parents

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and educational stakeholders to develop effective bilingual approaches that can support both indigenous language preservation and English language acquisition.

Statement of the Problem

Research from a variety of settings shows that mother-tongue instruction in early grade can promote the growth of English proficiency when done well. pupils who develop excellent literacy skills in their first language are better able to transfer reading and understanding skills to English, according to studies from nations like Finland and the Philippines (UNESCO, 2025; Cummins, 2023). According to research conducted in Africa, pupils who initially learn to read in their native tongue frequently adapt to English-medium instruction in subsequent grades more successfully (UNICEF, 2023). These results imply that a solid foundation in the mother tongue can help with later language learning, especially when it comes to the development of reading and understanding skills in foreign languages.

But not every situation exhibits this upward trend, especially in some regions of Kenya. Ekegusii is frequently spoken at home and in some classroom interactions in Kisii and Nyamira counties, particularly Masaba North sub-county, which may limit pupils' exposure to English in the early grades (Githinji et al., 2024). Education stakeholders are concerned about pupils' poor English proficiency as a result (MOE, 2023). Difficulties in literacy development and academic achievement may continue as pupils go to higher grades where English becomes the primary medium of instruction. The current study is necessary because, despite these worries, few studies have looked at how instructional transitions, mother-tongue use, and family language practices together influence English competency in Masaba North Sub-county.

Research Question

How does the use of mother tongue at home influence early grade pupils' English vocabulary acquisition in public primary schools in Masaba North sub-county?

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on Transfer Theory. Transfer theory was developed by Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) to explain the effect of previous knowledge and skills on new learning experiences. The theory suggests that if there are similarities between two situations, learning in one can be transferred to the other. In multilingual settings, the theory accounts for how knowledge from a child's first language can influence the acquisition of a second language. Cecilio-Fernandes et al. (2024) state that learners use their existing linguistic knowledge to understand and acquire new language skills. The present study is relevant to this theory because the early grade pupils in Masaba North Sub-County acquire language abilities through mother tongue interactions at home that may have an influence on their English vocabulary acquisition.

Transfer Theory assumes that knowledge and skills learned in one language can either help or hinder the learning of another language. Tung et al. (2022) found that vocabulary knowledge, phonological awareness and communication skills obtained in the first language could contribute to second language development when there are similarities between the two languages. In this

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study context, pupils who build strong vocabulary foundations through their use of mother tongue at home may transfer these skills when learning English vocabulary. Darici et al. (2024) argues that the differences between the mother tongue and English may cause negative transfer in terms of pronunciation, word use and sentence structure. The theory therefore provides a framework for understanding how home language experiences influence the acquisition of English vocabulary.

Transfer Theory also posits that learning transfer is affected by similarity, practice, and the learner's ability to relate prior knowledge to new information. Cecilio-Fernandes et al. (2024) found that children are more likely to successfully transfer language skills when they recognize connections between their first language and other languages. This study suggests that the use of home language in homes can provide pupils with conceptual understanding and communication skills that support the development of English vocabulary. However, effective transfer needs adequate exposure to English through conversation, reading and school experiences. Nīmante (2025) argues that encouraging learning environments produce positive transfer effects and reduce problems related to language interference.

This study is relevant to the Transfer Theory in that it accounts for the ways in which the home-based mother tongue practices affect the pupils' acquisition of English vocabulary. In Masaba North Sub-County, early grade pupils acquire their first language knowledge from interaction with parents, siblings and community members in their mother tongue. According to Fitri and Alawiyah (2024), knowledge of the first language can be helpful for learning the second language when learners can associate the existing language structures with the new language concepts. The theory thus helps to explain the use of mother tongue at home may contribute or restrict the development of English vocabulary. It offers a convenient base for exploring the links between household language practices and the English learning outcomes of early grade pupils.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

In order to investigate the influence of mother-tongue-based multilingual education on early pupils' core skills, such as reading and vocabulary, Igarashi et al. (2024) carried out a nationwide study in the Philippines. The goal was to assess if literacy outcomes were enhanced by instruction in the learners' native tongue. Using extensive assessment data from public elementary schools, the study used a quantitative quasi-experimental method. Pupils in grades 1-3 made up the target population, and stratified sampling was used to create a nationally representative sample. Standardized literacy exams with reliability coefficients greater than 0.80 were used to gather data. The results showed mixed results: mother tongue training did not consistently improve English reading and vocabulary performance, but it did support conceptual understanding. To boost literacy, transfer, the authors suggest better teacher preparation and closer curriculum alignment between mother tongue and English.

Igarashi et al.'s study employed national assessment data from the Philippines using a quantitative quasi-experimental approach to examine the influence of mother-tongue-based multilingual education on literacy outcomes. However, neither classroom practices nor teacher viewpoints were carefully examined, nor was the influence of mother tongue as a medium of instruction on learners' English ability within localized school contexts. The current study addressed this gap by producing both quantitative and qualitative data using a mixed-methods

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methodology. In particular, the study offered statistical data on learners' English performance along with contextual perceptions from teachers and students, providing a in-depth understanding of the relationship between mother tongue instruction and English language acquisition within the local educational context.

Abbas (2024) looked on how Pakistani students' mother tongue affected their ability to learn English. The purpose of the study was to investigate how learning English vocabulary and grammar is impacted by linguistic transfer from the first language. Targeting secondary school students at public institutions, a descriptive survey design was used. About 200 students were chosen using purposeful and random sampling procedures. Questionnaires, language tests, and classroom observations were used to gather data, and Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.78$) was used to verify the instrument reliability. Significant lexical and syntactic interference from learners' mother tongues was found to have a detrimental effect on English competence. Explicit contrastive analysis, more exposure to English, and instructional approaches that recognize rather than repress first-language effect are all suggested by the study.

While Abbas (2024) offers valuable insights into mother tongue interference in English language learning, the study is limited by its exclusive focus on learners, thereby overlooking the perspectives of other critical stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, and parents who actively shape language acquisition and classroom practices. By using a multi-stakeholder approach and combining data from learners, teachers, and head of institutions, this study deviates from Abbas's work. The study goes beyond a learner-centric analysis to offer a more detailed understanding of how mother tongue training affects early-grade English language ability by incorporating these many viewpoints. In addition to strengthening the findings' contextual and statistical depth, this more inclusive analytical lens makes it easier to identify more useful and context-sensitive methods for enhancing English language proficiency in early grade.

In order to investigate how mother tongue use influences the acquisition of English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) in Grade 1 classrooms, Mulaudzi et al. (2026) performed a classroom-based study in South Africa. Examining phonological and lexical transfer effects from learners' native tongues to English was the goal. Targeting Grade 1 learners and teachers in primary schools, the study used a mixed-methods methodology. A sample of about 120 students and 12 teachers was chosen from the schools using a criterion purposive sampling technique. Oral language tests, teacher interviews, and classroom observations were used to gather data. Triangulation was used to guarantee reliability. Strong phonological and vocabulary transfer from mother tongue was found to have an impact on English word usage and pronunciation. The study suggests early phonics support and controlled translanguaging techniques.

Although Mulaudzi et al. (2026) offer insightful information about the impact of mother language on English acquisition, the study primarily examined phonological and lexical transfer, leaving other facets like literacy development, speaking abilities, and more comprehensive instructional methodologies unexplored. Furthermore, generalizability was diminished because the sample was restricted to a small number of institutions. In order to fill these gaps, the current study used a bigger, more varied sample, looks at several aspects of language development, and

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incorporates viewpoints from students, teachers, and school administrators in Masaba North sub-county.

The impact of home language on vocabulary acquisition in English as a Second Language (ESL) in Nigeria was investigated by Owoeye and Olagbaju (2023). The purpose of the study was to ascertain how learners' English vocabulary development is impacted by regular usage of their mother tongue at home. Targeting upper primary pupils in public schools, a correlational research methodology was employed. A sample of 180 pupils was obtained using stratified random sampling. Parent surveys and language achievement exams were used to gather data, and the reliability coefficients were more than 0.75. The results showed a strong correlation between the development of English vocabulary and home language practices, with balanced bilingual exposure yielding superior results. To enhance the acquisition of English vocabulary, the authors advise coordinated home-school collaboration and parental participation in language development.

Although Owoeye and Olagbaju (2023) find a connection between home language use and ESL vocabulary acquisition, their study's correlational design and concentration on Nigerian upper primary learners limit its wider applicability. Furthermore, it does not address broader learning competencies or take into account mediating factors at the instructional or institutional level. By investigating the influence of home language practices in Kenyan public junior schools and expanding the analysis to learning-to-learn competency, this study deviates from their work. The study offers a more detailed and contextually relevant knowledge of how home language use influences overall learner competence development by expanding both the context and breadth.

The impact of mother language education on literacy rates in Kenyan public primary schools was examined by Muchemi (2024). The study's goal was to determine whether teaching indigenous languages in the early grades promotes literacy development and aids in the learning of English. Teachers and pupils in lower primary were the focus of a mixed-methods study design. Using stratified sampling 240 pupils and 20 teachers were chosen for the study. Interviews, questionnaires, and literacy tests were used to gather data. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.82$) was used to verify the instrument's dependability. The results showed a favorable correlation between increased reading and vocabulary growth in English and solid mother-tongue literacy foundations. The study suggests better teacher preparation and ongoing mother tongue education in the early grades.

Although Muchemi (2024) shows the beneficial effects of mother tongue instruction on literacy development, the study's small and tightly defined teacher sample limits the generalizability of its findings, especially when it comes to teachers' methods of instruction. In contrast to Muchemi's research, this study used a bigger and more varied sample of teachers from various public schools in a variety of settings. In addition to addressing external validity concerns, the current study offers a more detailed examination of how mother tongue instruction influences literacy outcomes in various instructional contexts by expanding the scope of teacher representation. This method allows for a more in-depth investigation of pedagogical variety and teacher readiness, two issues that Muchemi's study does not fully address.

Makokha (2024) investigated issues with mother tongue instruction in Kenyan public primary schools. The goal of the study was to pinpoint policy-related, instructional, and attitude-

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related obstacles to successful implementation. Targeting head of institutions and early childhood educators, a descriptive survey approach was used. Thirty schools were chosen from a sample of 150 respondents using criterion purposive sampling. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to gather data, and reliability indices were greater than 0.80. The results showed that low learner involvement in the mother tongue, poor teaching resources, and unfavorable teacher attitudes hindered the growth of English vocabulary. The report suggests community sensitization, curriculum support, and improved teacher preparation.

Although Makokha (2024) used a descriptive survey design to identify major obstacles to utilizing mother tongue as a medium of instruction, the methodology did not allow for a thorough explanation or integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. By using a mixed-methods convergent design that combines phenomenological qualitative research with cross-sectional quantitative data, the current study closed this gap. This enables a more thorough and nuanced understanding of how instructional, attitudinal, and environmental factors affect mother tongue implementation and related learning outcomes by examining statistical patterns in conjunction with teachers' lived experiences.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods approach with convergent parallel research design to investigate the effect of home-based use of mother tongue on acquisition of English vocabulary among early grade pupils in public primary schools in Masaba North Sub-County. A mixed methods approach was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to combine quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a richer understanding of the relationship between home language practices and pupils' English vocabulary development. Creswell and Plano Clark (2023) describe a convergent parallel design as the process of collecting quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, analyzing them separately, and then combining them during interpretation. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires to investigate the patterns of mother tongue use at home and its effect on English vocabulary acquisition. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis to explore the experiences and perceptions of pupils, teachers and education stakeholders.

The study was conducted in Masaba North Sub-County, Nyamira County, Kenya. This is an appropriate study area to explore the home language practices and early grade English vocabulary development. The region is predominantly rural and Ekegusii is widely spoken in many homes and communities. These linguistic and socioeconomic characteristics influence children's exposure to English outside of the school context and may affect their vocabulary development. The target population were pupils in early grades, teachers, head teachers and Sub-County Director of Education from public primary schools in Masaba North Sub-County. Sampling was conducted using both probability and non-probability techniques. Stratified and systematic sampling were used to select pupils and teachers while purposive sampling was used to select the head teachers and key education officials who had relevant knowledge of language practices and English learning.

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The data were collected using structured questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, observation guides and document analysis guides. The instruments focused on the key study variables of frequency of mother tongue use at home, parental language practices, pupils' exposure to English, vocabulary development and challenges that affected English acquisition. The validity of the instruments was enhanced through expert review, alignment with the research objectives and pilot testing in comparable schools. The reliability of quantitative instruments was established by Cronbach's Alpha. The credibility, dependability and triangulation procedures ensured quality of qualitative data. These methods ensured that the data collected were representative of the experiences and views of participants regarding home-based mother tongue use and English vocabulary acquisition.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics were used to establish relationships between home-based mother tongue use and English vocabulary acquisition. Qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying common themes in language practices, vocabulary development and learning experiences. During interpretation, findings from both quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated to gain a holistic understanding of the influence of home-based mother tongue use on English vocabulary acquisition among early grade pupils in public primary schools in Masaba North Sub-County.

Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings

The influence of mother tongue usage at home on early-grade pupils' acquisition of English vocabulary in public primary schools in Masaba North sub-county was investigated in this section. Teachers were asked to rate how much they agreed with statements on exposure to their native tongue, vocabulary growth, translation, and the influence of mother tongue on learning English. A five-point Likert scale was used to gage responses: 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Uncertain; 2 = Disagree; and 1 = Strongly Disagree. Table 1 displays the findings.

Table 1
Teachers' Responses to Mother Tongue Use at Home and English Vocabulary Acquisition (n=85)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Pupils use mother tongue at home.	22 (25.9%)	33 (38.8%)	12 (14.1%)	10 (11.8%)	8 (9.4%)	3.60	1.26
Home mother tongue use influence pupils' English vocabulary.	16 (18.8%)	37 (43.5%)	10 (11.8%)	12 (14.1%)	10 (11.8%)	3.44	1.28
Frequent mother tongue use limits pupils' English words.	23 (27.1%)	35 (41.2%)	11 (12.9%)	9 (10.6%)	7 (8.2%)	3.68	1.22
Learners translate mother tongue words to English.	24 (28.2%)	34 (40.0%)	10 (11.8%)	8 (9.4%)	9 (10.6%)	3.66	1.28

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Home mother tongue use slows pupils' vocabulary growth.	25 (29.4%)	29 (34.1%)	12 (14.1%)	13 (15.3%)	6 (7.1%)	3.64	1.25
MT use supports understanding new words.	12 (14.1%)	24 (28.2%)	11 (12.9%)	20 (23.5%)	18 (21.2%)	2.91	1.39
Pupils mix mother tongue and English vocabulary.	18 (20.0%)	28 (31.1%)	15 (16.7%)	15 (16.7%)	14 (15.6%)	3.23	1.37
English vocabulary develops slowly at home.	14 (16.5%)	29 (34.1%)	11 (12.9%)	16 (18.8%)	15 (17.6%)	3.13	1.38
Mother tongue exposure influences pupils' English learning.	22 (25.9%)	34 (40.0%)	10 (11.8%)	10 (11.8%)	9 (10.6%)	3.59	1.28
Home language shapes English vocabulary size.	17 (20.0%)	27 (31.8%)	13 (15.3%)	15 (17.6%)	13 (15.3%)	3.24	1.37

Source: *Researcher (2026)*

According to Table 5, the first statement looked at whether pupils speak in their mother tongue at home. The findings revealed that while 12 (14.1%) were unsure, 22 (25.9%) strongly agreed and 33 (38.8%) agreed, indicating a definite favorable response. On the other hand, 8 (9.4%) strongly disagreed and 10 (11.8%) disagreed. The data show that pupils frequently utilize their mother language in their homes, with a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 1.26. Transfer Theory, which maintains that linguistic habits and knowledge learned in one environment may affect learning in another, can be used to analyse this finding. Thus, regular use of the first language at home gives pupils a linguistic foundation that they may employ when learning English. This finding is in line with the findings of Owoeye and Olagbaju (2023), who found that while balanced exposure to both languages provided superior results, home-language activities were substantially associated with English vocabulary development.

On the statement whether home mother tongue use influenced pupils' English vocabulary tongue at home was reflected in Table 5. According to the results, 37 (43.5%) agreed, 16 (18.8%) strongly agreed, and 10 (11.8%) were unsure. On the other hand, 10 (11.8%) strongly disagreed and 12 (14.1%) disagreed. The mean of 3.44 with a standard deviation of 1.28 shows moderate agreement that home language activities influence English vocabulary acquisition, as the positive responses outnumbered the negative ones. This pattern is explained by Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory, which postulates that because basic linguistic talents can be shared across languages, expertise and information acquired in one language may aid in the development of another. Therefore, depending on the pupil's linguistic experiences, the influence could be either encouraging or limiting. The findings support Muchemi's (2024) findings that strong mother-tongue literacy foundations were negatively correlated with later English reading and vocabulary development, indicating that the home language can significantly influence the acquisition of a second language.

Findings show that 23 (27.1%) strongly agreed and 35 (41.2%) agreed with the statement vocabulary is limited by frequent usage of their mother tongue. Just eleven (12.9%) were unsure,

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nine (that pupils' English 10.6%) disagreed, and seven (8.2%) strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.68 and standard deviation of 1.22 further demonstrate that teachers usually believed that pupils' English vocabulary was limited by excessive use of their mother tongue. According to Transfer Theory, pupils may be encouraged to transfer pre-existing lexical patterns into English rather than creating their own English lexical resources if they frequently rely on well-known first-language terminology. This could happen more frequently when there are little opportunities to come across and practice English vocabulary. The outcome validates the findings of Abbas (2024), who discovered significant lexical and syntactic interference from pupils' mother tongues that adversely influenced English competence. The findings should not, however, suggest that mother language usage is detrimental in and of itself; rather, over-reliance without adequate exposure to English may limit opportunities to learn and practice new vocabulary.

Whether pupils convert terms from their mother tongue into English was determined by the fourth statement. Ten teachers (11.8%) were unsure, while 24 teachers (28.2%) strongly agreed and 34 people (40.0%) agreed. On the down side, nine (10.6%) strongly disagreed and eight (9.4%) disagreed. There is strong agreement that pupils frequently rely on translation when learning or utilizing English vocabulary, as indicated by the mean of 3.66 and standard deviation of 1.28. This finding is explained by Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, which states that pupils cannot acquire new language in a meaningful way unless they receive understandable linguistic information. Translation can be used as a first strategy to link new English words with first-language meanings. However, relying too much on translation could lead to less direct interaction with English. In a similar vein, Mulaudzi et al. (2026) found that Grade 1 pupils had strong lexical transfer from their native tongue into English and suggested regulated Translanguaging. Their findings, which demonstrate how pupils' processing of English words automatically incorporates first-language vocabulary, corroborate the current findings.

Twelve (14.1%) were unsure, whereas 25 (29.4%) strongly agreed and 29 (34.1%) agreed with the assertion that pupils' vocabulary acquisition is slowed by using their mother tongue at home. On the other hand, 6 (7.1%) strongly disagreed and 13 (15.3%) disagreed. With a mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 1.25, the majority of teachers believed that prolonged use of the mother tongue at home was a factor in the slower growth of English vocabulary. According to transfer theory, pupils' ability to pick up new language patterns may be influenced by their prior linguistic habits. Mother-tongue lexical patterns may predominate in everyday communication and limit opportunities for pupils to apply newly acquired English vocabulary in everyday situations when they have little exposure to English outside of the classroom. The findings partially corroborate Abbas's (2024) research, which demonstrated that first-language lexical interference may have a detrimental influence on English proficiency. It is considerably different, but, from Muchemi's (2024) findings that English literacy could be facilitated by strong mother-language foundations, indicating that the effect depends more on balance and instructional support than mother tongue uses alone.

The sixth statement addressed whether using one's mother tongue facilitates learning new terms. Just 12 (14.1%) strongly agreed, 24 (28.2%) agreed, and 11 (12.9%) were unsure. On the other hand, 18 (21.2%) strongly disagreed and 20 (23.5%) disagreed. A comparatively split

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reaction is shown by the mean of 2.91 and standard deviation of 1.39, with the total negative replies marginally outweighing the positive responses. According to Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory, because fundamental cognitive and linguistic knowledge may transfer between languages, conceptual knowledge learned in the first language might aid comprehension in a second. According to the current findings, teachers might not always see this theoretical advantage in real-world situations. Igarashi et al. (2024), who revealed that mother-tongue training enhanced conceptual understanding but did not consistently increase English reading and vocabulary outcomes, are closely reflected in this mixed pattern. According to the research, mother tongue support may help with understanding, but it does not always result in improved vocabulary acquisition in English.

Regarding whether pupils combine terminology from their mother tongue with English, 18 (20.0%) highly agreed, 28 (31.1%) agreed, and 15 (16.7%) were unsure. On the other hand, 14 (15.6%) strongly disagreed and 15 (16.7%) disagreed. Responses were more scattered than for some other claims, but the mean of 3.23 and standard deviation of 1.37 indicate considerable agreement. Because pupils typically rely on pre-existing linguistic structures when speaking a second language, transfer theory offers a helpful explanation. Therefore, rather than indicating a total lack of English proficiency, mixing vocabulary may show active transfer of lexical resources. Persistent mixing, however, might also be a sign of trouble finding the right English words. Mulaudzi et al. (2026), who found significant phonological and lexical transfer from mother tongue into English word use, corroborate this conclusion. According to their suggestion for controlled Translanguaging, language mixing can be beneficial from a pedagogical standpoint when handled carefully, but it could become problematic if pupils don't have enough opportunity to build their own vocabulary in English.

The idea that English vocabulary grows slowly at home was the subject of the seventh statement. Indeed, 14 (16.5%) strongly agreed, 29 (34.1%) agreed, and 11 (12.9%) were indecisive, according to the data. On the down side, 15 (17.6%) strongly disagreed and 16 (18.8%) disagreed. Only moderate agreement and significant heterogeneity in teachers' experiences are indicated by the mean of 3.13 and standard deviation of 1.38. The significance of enough understandable input for language acquisition is emphasized by Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory. Pupils may receive insufficient English input, which slows the growth of their vocabulary, if English is infrequently spoken, heard, read, or practiced at home. On the other hand, homes with well-balanced bilingual practices might offer more developmental opportunities. Owoeye and Olagbaju (2023), who discovered that balanced multilingual exposure provided superior results and that home-language practices were substantially connected to English vocabulary expansion, confirm this interpretation. Therefore, slower vocabulary growth may be explained by restricted exposure to English rather than the use of the mother tongue.

According to Table 5, 22 (25.9%) strongly agreed and 34 (40.0%) agreed that exposure to one's mother tongue affects pupils' acquisition of English. Ten (11.8%) disagreed, nine (10.6%) strongly disagreed, and ten more (11.8%) were unsure. There is broad consensus that exposure to the first language has discernible effects on learning English, as evidenced by the mean of 3.59 and standard deviation of 1.28. This outcome is well explained by transfer theory, which holds that

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experiences gained in one language can be applied to the acquisition and use of another. When concepts, meanings, and literacy abilities are consistent across languages, this kind of transfer can be beneficial; when vocabulary or linguistic structural differences cause interference, it can be detrimental. This balanced view is congruent with the findings of Igarashi et al. (2024), who observed mixed effects of mother-tongue instruction: increases in English vocabulary and reading were uneven, but conceptual understanding was reinforced. Therefore, the current research demonstrates that exposure to one's mother tongue is important, even though its effects are not always positive or negative.

When asked if pupils' home language influences the quantity of their English vocabulary, 17 (20.0%) strongly agreed, 27 (31.8%) agreed, and 13 (15.3%) were unsure. On the other hand, 13 (15.3%) strongly disagreed and 15 (17.6%) disagreed. Teachers' opinions were not entirely consistent, as evidenced by the comparatively large negative and neutral replies, although the mean of 3.24 and standard deviation of 1.37 indicate moderate agreement. According to transfer theory, pupils' ability to learn and remember a variety of English words may be influenced by the vocabulary, concepts, and linguistic associations they have acquired in their native tongue. However, exposure to English, the quality of instruction, and opportunities for multilingual engagement was probably determine how much of an influence this has. The positive aspect of this interpretation is reinforced by Muchemi's (2024) discovery that higher growth in English vocabulary was linked to strong mother-tongue literacy foundations. On the other hand, Makokha (2024) demonstrated that inadequate resources, attitudes, and low student participation may limit these advantages, indicating that contextual factors affect vocabulary size.

Table 5 shows that teachers generally believed that using one's mother language at home had a substantial but complicated influence on learning vocabulary in English. In the majority of statements, agreement and strong agreement outnumbered disagreement and strong disagreement, especially when it came to translation, lexical restriction, household usage of the mother tongue, and overall influence on learning English. Neutral responses across the questions indicate that some teachers were unsure of the direction of the relationship, although the results regarding mother tongue helping new-word knowledge and the rate of vocabulary development were more mixed. These conflicting findings can be reconciled by Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory, which suggests that when linguistic and conceptual abilities are properly linked, first-language knowledge can aid in the development of second languages. This general interpretation is in line with Makokha's (2024) findings that learner involvement, teacher preparedness, and resources all affect how well mother tongue education works. As a result, mother language influence doesn't seem to be intrinsically good or bad.

The researcher observed behaviours that mirrored the trends teachers indicated in Table 5 using the observation guide. When attempting to explain unknown English terminology, pupils often turned to their mother tongue. This included translating well-known words from their mother tongue into English and combining words from both languages during class discussions. These findings were in line with the comparatively high instructor agreement that exposure to one's mother tongue affects learning English and that students translate terms from their mother tongue into English. Additionally, the researcher observed that some pupils needed more explanation

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before effectively utilizing new English words, indicating that vocabulary development may be influenced by insufficient exposure to English outside of the classroom. However, depending on how it was used during learning, mother language occasionally aided students in understanding new concepts, suggesting that its influence was not wholly detrimental.

The researcher was also able to look for evidence of the influence of home language on English vocabulary acquisition in pupils' written vocabulary activities, exercises, and other pertinent instructional records thanks to the document analysis guide. The documents demonstrated situations in which pupils needed repeated repetition with novel English terminology, had limited vocabulary ranges, and substituted or blended language. These findings aligned with Table 5, which showed that teachers generally believed that regular use of one's mother tongue could restrict English vocabulary, slow vocabulary growth, and influence pupils' vocabulary size. Simultaneously, several written exercises demonstrated that pupils could make connections between new English terms and well-known concepts, suggesting potential beneficial transfer from the original language. Document analysis supported the finding that mother language influences the development of English vocabulary in both positive and negative ways.

The HOI 3 noted that students' learning of English vocabulary was influenced by their continued use of their mother tongue at home. However, the participants did not always agree, and the findings are therefore presented according to the specific respondents making the observations. HOI 6 noted, "many pupils felt more comfortable speaking in their native tongue when they first entered the classroom and consequently, they often translated common words before using English to express themselves." This finding implies that the pupils' continued use of their mother tongue may affect the way they accessed and expressed the English vocabulary, especially at the early stage of adaptation to an English-speaking classroom.

HOI 7 reported experiences similar to those of HOI 6 but with different emphases. He said that pupils sometimes mix their mother tongue with the English language when answering questions or engaging with peers. This implies that students who struggle to articulate their thoughts in English might use their native tongue as a temporary tool. The findings are similar to Table 5 where 22 (25.9%) respondents strongly agreed, and 33 (38.8%) agreed that pupils used their mother tongue at home. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative results together indicate that the use of mother tongue was relatively frequent among the pupils.

HOI 8 added that the limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom can limit the pupils' vocabulary development. However, the interview results were not entirely negative about the role of the mother tongue. Some participants discussed how pupils could use their first language to understand difficult concepts and then transfer the concepts to appropriate English vocabulary. The findings therefore have implications for the way in which mother-tongue use may have both constraining and supportive effects on English vocabulary development. One of the heads of institutions noted,

> Since their families speak their mother tongue, the majority of our students speak it after school. When they arrive to class, some students think of a word in their mother tongue before providing its English equivalent, while others combine the two languages when describing themselves (HOI 2 personal interview July, 15, 2026)

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According to this perspective, language behavior in the classroom is influenced by the linguistic environment at home. It confirms Table 5's findings that pupils translate terms from their mother tongue into English, with 24 (28.2%) strongly agreeing and 34 (40.0%) agreeing. Therefore, the response suggests that while translation and language mixing may serve as transitional tactics throughout the acquisition of English vocabulary, an over-reliance on them may restrict the use of English on one's own.

According to the SCDE, home language activities have a significant role in explaining why pupils' English vocabulary development varies throughout schools. Pupils who had limited exposure to English outside of the classroom were more likely to rely on their mother tongue for communication and vocabulary acquisition, according to the interview responses with the SCDE who noted:

> Pupils might make sense of novel English terms by applying ideas they previously understood in their first language; therefore, the influence of mother tongue was not totally detrimental. Long-term reliance on one's mother tongue without enough English engagement, however, may limit opportunities to increase one's vocabulary in English" (SCDE interview, 2026).

This view is consistent with Table 5, which shows that 34 respondents (40.0%) agreed and 22 respondents (25.9%) strongly agreed that exposure to one's mother tongue affects learning English, whereas only 19 respondents (22.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The SCDE clarified:

> The fact that kids speak their mother tongue at home is not the only issue. It counts whether they are exposed to enough English as well. Their mother tongue can aid in their comprehension of a subject, but their vocabulary tends to grow more slowly when they don't read or speak English outside of the classroom. (SCDE Personal interview, July 15, 2026)

By differentiating between mother tongue use and insufficient exposure to English, the statement offers a fair interpretation of the quantitative findings. This is especially pertinent to Table 5, where 43 instructors (50.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that vocabulary development in English occurs slowly at home. According to the SCDE, equal exposure to both languages may be more crucial than completely forbidding the use of one's native tongue.

Pupils stated during the focus group discussions that they spoke primarily in their mother tongue when interacting with their parents, siblings, and friends at home. They clarified that although some pupils met English by reading, watching television, doing homework, or speaking with specific family members, it was utilized less frequently outside of school. Additionally, students stated that before attempting to interpret a word they were unfamiliar with in English, they occasionally considered its meaning in their native tongue. Others admitted that when they didn't have the proper vocabulary in English, they would blend terms from their native tongue and English during interactions. These reports support Table 5, which shows that 46 teachers (51.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that students combine the two languages. Thus, the conversations demonstrated how pupils' everyday vocabulary choices were directly influenced by their home language practices. One of the pupils during the focus group discussions noted,

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> Since everyone can understand it, we speak our mother tongue most of the time at home. I sometimes know the answer when the teacher asks me a question in English, but I first recall the word in my mother tongue. Sometimes I combine the two languages if I don't know the English word (Pupil 12 FGD, July 17, 2026).

The pupil's sentiments highlight deficiencies in English vocabulary retrieval while also demonstrating how first-language knowledge may enhance comprehension. According to the poll, 58 teachers (68.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that students translate terms from their native tongue into English. Therefore, rather than being indicators of a failure to learn English, the focus group evidence suggests that translation and language mixing are useful tools students employ when their vocabulary in English is inadequate.

The quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the use of the mother tongue at home has a significant but inconsistent influence on pupils' acquisition of English vocabulary. The findings of the study indicated that most of the teachers believed that the regular usage of mother tongue influence the development of English vocabulary through translation, language mixing, little exposure to English and slow vocabulary growth. Focus groups with pupils and interviews with Heads of Institutions and SCDE supported these trends. For example, one pupil explained, "since everyone can understand it, we speak our mother tongue most of the time at home". "I sometimes know the answer when the teacher asks me a question in English, but I first recall the word in my mother tongue" Pupil 12 FGD). These responses suggest that pupils had different experiences of using their mother tongue and some used it to look for English terminology or to explain new ideas. Meanwhile, the qualitative data suggested that mother tongue could aid in understanding novel concepts. Taken together, the findings suggest that a balanced exposure to the mother tongue and English is necessary for effective vocabulary development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that home-based mother tongue use plays an important role in shaping early grade pupils' English vocabulary acquisition in public primary schools in Masaba North Sub-County. The use of mother tongue at home provides pupils with a strong linguistic foundation that supports communication, understanding of concepts, and development of language skills. However, excessive reliance on mother tongue without adequate exposure to English may limit opportunities for pupils to acquire new English vocabulary. The study therefore concludes that balanced bilingual practices, where mother tongue is valued while English learning opportunities are increased, are essential for improving pupils' vocabulary development and overall language outcomes.

Recommendations

The study recommends that parents should encourage supportive language practices at home by maintaining mother tongue communication while introducing children to English through storytelling, reading activities, and meaningful conversations. Teachers should build on pupils' existing mother tongue knowledge while providing structured opportunities for English vocabulary practice in early grades. Education stakeholders should develop strategies that promote

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effective bilingual learning, provide learning resources, and support parents in understanding their role in children's language development. Such measures would help ensure that mother tongue use contributes positively to English vocabulary acquisition among early grade pupils in Masaba North Sub-County.

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