

MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN KENYAN SCHOOLS: WHICH WAY TO GO?

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Abstract

Many African countries, Kenya included continue to propagate the dominance of a single foreign language in the education sector as the language of instruction in schools. This paper interrogates the use of foreign language versus mother-tongue as language of instruction. Various studies and scholarly sources have been reviewed to advance the discourse in this paper. Through this paper, the place and position of different languages in relation to medium of instruction has been pointed out. The arguments and conclusions drawn in this paper are meant to arouse academic and policy debate in this subject matter. It is anticipated that this will culminate in shaping language policy as far as medium of instruction is concerned in Kenya and in other parts of the world and more so in Africa.

Key Words: Mother – tongue, language right, colonial languages, language death, Africanization of knowledge,

Introduction

The Kenya Institute of Education (2002) defines mother tongue as “the first language a child is expected to learn or the language of the schools’ catchment area” (p. 117). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1953) defines this same term as “the language which a person acquires in the early years and which normally becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication” (p. 47). Because numerous discussions about the definition have not resulted in an agreed-upon definition, for the purposes of this paper, adopt the definition proposed by UNESCO. Many scholars refer to someone’s mother tongue as First Language (L1). Using L1 in school as the Language of Instruction (LOI) will be simply referred to as Mother Tongue Education (MTE) here. English use as the LOI will be designated as L2.

To obtain a quality education, UNESCO (2004) declared that all children of the world should be taught in the language they understand best. Tubeza (2010) insists that when children are taught in the language they know best, they have the capacity to build up: critical thinking, drawing conclusions, making comparisons, and understanding cause and effect and sequencing. This paper gives a lengthy discussion on why teaching Kenyan children in English or any other foreign language could not only be marginalizing and silencing them, but it could also reduce their ability to think critically and draw conclusions.

Benson (2004) lamented that although language is one of the key factors in delivering quality basic education, many developing countries, including Kenya, continue to allow a single foreign language to dominate the education sector. Consequently, these developing countries do not only continue the colonial legacy of language hegemony but also contribute to illiteracy among

their citizens denying them a chance for success. For instance, Godwyll (2002) argues that the colonial schools in Africa are producing a class of people who believe they are inferior in respect. This is because the education system produces graduates for the job market with inadequate skills, thus minimizing their chances to become both locally and globally competitive. Adult and children alike struggle to communicate their ideas both in spoken and written language simply because school system does not affirm their initial language skills.

Today, unemployment is the last thing that parents want for their children. To better their chances in the job market, parents are looking for the finest schools for their off-springs, which are packaged in English, French and others. Moreover, researchers argue that when people learn these “big” languages such (English, French, and Spanish), they increase their chances for social mobility because their communication horizons get wider. It true that learning a new language can aid in social mobility. But, is it quite easy to master a new language (L2) when you are not meticulous in L1? Learning a new language without mastery of one’s L1 could be confusing to young people who may need more time to master the new language. In discussing the process of L1 mastery by children, Tubeza (2010) uses the analogy of a pyramid. For him, children need a strong foundation to learn new concepts. Thus, language is like a bridge that must have a strong base to support more weight (many new languages).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) likens delivering instructions through a foreign language to “submersion,” which is similar to holding learners under water without teaching them how to swim. Though Skutnabb-Kangas’s analogy, perfectly captures the Kenyan classroom situation, it is a deep expression of dissatisfaction and frustration about the challenges associated with learning and teaching a new language, coupled with poor resources. This author’s views are convincing in that when both the learner and teacher are lost in LOI, language become a tool for silencing them, turning the classroom into a place of confusion and frustration.

This kind of situation in the Kenyan classrooms especially, is well captured by Ngugi (1986). In his book: *Decolonizing the mind*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues that colonization subjugated Africans physically through the bullet and spiritually through language and western education. In Kenya for instance, most Kenyan literature in indigenous languages withered away. This situation is not only devastating but also has lead to the failure to transmit culture and the entire body of knowledge and values by which we perceive ourselves, our identity and our place globally. Consequently, Ngugi (1986) wonders how African experiences can be expressed perfectly in other languages. By extension, one may wonder how Kenyan children can express their ideas and values in a “borrowed” language which is required of them in Kenyan classrooms.

The language policy in Kenya requires that in lower primary school, the mother tongue from the catchment area is to be used as the LOI (up to class 3, equivalent to grade 3 in the United States). English and Kiswahili are taught as subjects, but from class 4 to 8, English is adopted as the LOI (Republic of Kenya, 1976). It seems this policy pays less attention to the importance of Kenya’s rich resource: its many indigenous languages. Also, the MTE instructions take too short a period in the school system such that the emersion period of learners into their Ls is too short. Because Kenyan children have almost lost their native languages and are struggling with English in school, they have reverted to what is popularly known as ‘Sheng’, a language that emerged recently among Kenyan youth and is a mixture of Kiswahili, English, and local languages.

Many people ask why ‘Sheng’ cannot be given the rank of a national language despite its being widespread among the youth and cutting across all the many languages spoken in Kenya? Momanyi (2009) argues that “While some people have advocated the growth of ‘Sheng’ as an indication of societal growth in Kenya, others, including scholars, researchers and educationists are of the opinion that the spread of this code impacts negatively on the learners in Kenyan schools and

colleges” (p. 127). Among the reasons given for not accepting the use of ‘Sheng’ as a national language is its failure to follow the grammatical rules found in other languages such as English and Kiswahili. This makes it hard for examination purposes.

Mathooko (2009) supports the idea that long-term emersion into MTE is educationally beneficial to learners. However, looking at the Kenyan language policy where MTE is in operation in the school system for three years only (Republic of Kenya, 1976), this lead to the question: Is this time long enough for these children to master the language? This short-term emersion suggested by the language policy as stated above may imply that Kenyan learners may not understand what they are taught in school best because they lack a strong and stable base in L1. Because Kenyan children do not have adequate emersion into their L1, based on the policy, it may be hard for them to make connections of what they learn with what happens in their real life. The concepts learned when they were young using their natural instrument of thought and communication tends to be useless in school. This experience may not only be confusing but silencing because what these children know is in another language which is not required in this situation.

Teaching foreign languages calls for proper teacher training and adequate resources. Mathooko (2009) describes the teacher preparation in Kenya as not adequate to help students achieve the goal of Free Primary Education and Education for All (EFA). Teachers in Kenya are few in number, poorly paid, and poorly distributed especially in “less desirable” areas. With this in mind, reverting to languages that children know already may yield better results. However, such a move calls for suitable policy reforms. Abagi (1997) suggests that education experts in Kenya can think of expanding the use of MTE in the education system in order to give learners a strong foundation. However, is the government ready to think about changing the language policy?

A description of the language situation in Kenya might help provide a clearer picture of the situation. What is in it for Kenyans by adopting mother tongue education? Why are Kenyan elites silent about this situation while they are required to be the eyes and ears of the society? Why is it hard for Kenyans to address the issue of language policy? Who are the custodians of education in Kenya? What is the attitude of Kenyans toward their culture and languages? Lastly, what is the writer’s suggestion for a way forward?

1. Kenya’s Languages Situation

According to Michieka (2005), the official languages in Kenya are English and Kiswahili. Kiswahili and other indigenous languages are supposed to be LOI in basic primary while English becomes the LOI starting from class 3 in primary schools up to the university level of education, (Mbaabu, 1996; Michieka, 2005, and the Republic of Kenya, 1976). It is important to note all these authors concur that Kiswahili and MTE are losing ground over English in the country. Consequently, English (L2) is the language of big business, higher education, and government matters.

Mbaabu (1996) argues that although Kiswahili was permitted for use in offices and parliament proceedings. However, most bills in the National Assembly are drafted and presented in English. Why is this so? Why are these bills not in Kiswahili? Kiswahili language is almost universal in small-scale trade and in the media and schools. If this language is that widely used in Kenya, why is it only a subject at higher levels of education and not LOI? Many people in rural Kenya closely connect Kiswahili with urban life and with certain inferior occupations. The media in Kenya (both print and audiovisual) has done a good job in using both Kiswahili and English. However, only radio broadcasts may be heard in Kiswahili, English, and various Kenyan languages (Michieka, 2005). It’s encouraging that these languages are being used in local television stations, though not in the main stations. If schools are encouraged to use more of these local languages,

maybe we would have the situation change. The more these languages continue to lose grip, the more they will stop becoming important tools of communication and custodians of native knowledge.

One would describe the Kenyan population as multilingual. This is because the African languages spoken in Kenya alone could be grouped into four broad linguistic groups: Bantu, Para-Nilotic, Nilotic, and Cushitic (Mathooko, 2005; Mbaabu, 1996; Michieka, 2005). Non-African languages spoken in Kenya include Asian, European, and Arabic languages. The Bantu group forms the largest linguistic group out of the four African language groups. This group includes Kikuyu, Kamba, Luyha, Kisii, Embu, and Kiswahili. The Para-Nilotic groups are Teso, Masai, and Kalenjin. Luo is Nilotic language, while the Cushitic group is made up of languages such as Borana, Somali, and Rendille. The population of speakers of dominant indigenous languages in Kenya include: Kikuyu 20%, Dholuo (14%), Luhya (13%), Kikamba (11%), Kalenjin (11%), Ekegusii (6.5%), Kimeru (5%) and the remaining percentage is of foreign languages (Mbaabu, 1996; Michieka, 2005).

These figures, according to Michieka (2005), are only rough estimates considering the complexities of deciding on who speaks what language in the multilingual society of Kenya. Each cultural group in Kenya has a place to call home where language use is almost uniform. If the language resources in Kenya are to be enjoyed by all, Bamgbose (1998) advises that an even distribution must be ensured and that people should care about the geographical spread, language prestige, and their development status. For this reason, Kenyan policymakers should consider the geographical spread of Kenyan languages before rendering them useless. If the language policy has no place for Kenyan languages, we lose a big resource. Also, we remain silenced as a country because we cannot share the widely varied and creative ideas found in our native languages with the world.

Mathooko (2009) outlines some of the problems facing schools, teachers, and pupils in relation to the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in Kenya. In her article, wonders if FPE policy will become actualized amidst some glaring gaps that may eventually slow down its success. If the glaring gaps derailing FPE in Kenya are to be dealt with, language policy change would be a good starting point.

2. What Kenyans and their Children could Gain by Adopting Mother Tongue Education (MTE)

Why should Kenyans care about MTE? This question has been the bone of contention for long in the country. Based on Kenya's colonial legacy of language policy, all parents in this former British colony are always happy when their children express themselves in perfect English as early as three years of age. Viewing English as a tool for social mobility and an avenue for getting jobs in the globalized economy as stated earlier, they cannot be convinced to change their minds. However, Kenyan parents and teachers may be, to some level, misinformed and misled by these global dreams which never come true in many cases. Is it logical for all Kenyans to learn English when very few get the chance to interact with the global world? This is a clear indication that many Kenyans do not have the slightest idea that MTE provides the best basis for their children's ability to learn.

It seems that most Kenyans need to be educated about the value of indigenous languages. If African languages were not important at all, then UNESCO could not have declared the year 2006 the Year of the African Languages. It is unfortunate that 50 years after independence, many African countries are still stuck in the quagmire of using their colonial master's language, as is the case in Kenya. Although English is classified as an international language and may seem beneficial to developing countries, there is still the evidence that those countries that have a multilingual

population keep code switching to their mother tongue (Mbaabu, 1996). This practice makes learners lose tremendously especially in their attempt to process whatever they are learning in a foreign language. For instance, what one does when in an English class is may be process the information into mother tongue then translate it in English to make meaning. One would wonder if language affects the thinking process in learning, why then are some languages viewed as less important and hence pushed aside or marginalized?

Many scholars today are concerned about decolonizing research which includes reclaiming voices and foregrounding and retaining people's identities and languages that spell out their ways of knowing (Mutua & Swadener, 2004). If Kenyan policymakers do not change policies to accommodate MTE, when will the world listen to the voices of many Kenyan children and adults who cannot speak English? By not using MTE, many ideas and stories in these languages remain untold and may never see the light of the day.

For Kobia (2007), the importance of mother tongue in the cognitive, linguistic, personal, and educational development of children cannot be overemphasized. Language is a bond connecting us to our culture and the environment. We use language in naming animal and trees and communicating our values. By failing to use MTE, Kenyans and other African groups risk losing this bond to their environment. If this link is lost, it will become difficult to safeguard the interdependence relationship between the environment and the people. Negash (2005) asserts that "biodiversity, multilingualism, and multiculturalism are interconnected" and insists on "the need for safeguarding them in contemporary society" (p. 5). This makes language a powerful symbol in society. Unfortunately, its potential is not often fully recognized by some policymakers, especially those who come from Africa (Bamgbose, 1998). In this sense, when policymakers ignore children's native languages, they reduce the children to beggars in the new language.

Mathooko (2005) maintains that society stands to gain when most of its people are multilingual. Yet, ignoring the teaching of our many local languages in Africa reminds us of a Kiswahili proverb, "*Kwenye miti hakuna wanjenzi*". The literal meaning of this proverb is "Where there are many trees, there are no constructors." This proverb could be the best description of what is happening to the many languages and cultures in Africa. these actions should be surprising to many because when other communities are leaning toward becoming multilingual and multicultural, Africans are struggling hard to lose theirs.

Kenya's population is multilingual and by using English as the LOI, which has not been mastered and may never anyway, we forget the Kiswahili proverb, "*heri kibaya chako kuliko cha mwenzio*", which means "you are better off using your own broken axe than using a borrowed golden axe." Bamgbose (1998) asked some provocative questions that apply to the Kenyan situation. Are our children comfortable as they use L2 (English) as the LOI in school? When will all our "rainbow" home languages listed earlier find their place in our classrooms? When will our children learn freely without being unfairly labeled as "unintelligent" as they learn in these "big" languages? When will we stop keeping bad language policies for economic reasons?

Mathooko (2009) argues that MTE is culturally compliant to the learner's background knowledge and environment. If employed, it has the ability to make learners more active in class and culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay (2000) as incorporating the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of the children in diverse communities. This approach emphasizes the importance of academic achievement as well as maintaining cultural identity and heritage (Hollins, 1996). A study by Ladson-Billings (1992) demonstrated that when classrooms are designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence, students' expectations are clearly expressed and skills gained in subject areas are well articulated. The students show greater sense of

belongingness, human dignity, and individual self-concept. Why then do we still fail to learn these advantages and why is it hard to slip back to culturally responsive teaching?

Studies have demonstrated that children in rural indigenous communities perform lower in science compared with economically and linguistically endowed children (Luft, 1998). The use of culturally responsive science instructions and teaching materials can facilitate science interactions in preschools and in elementary classrooms in non-English-speaking children (Lee, 2004). In rural preschools, for instance, children with diverse cultural backgrounds such as those found in Kenya usually have limited English speaking skills that can hinder their effective engagement in science lessons. But employing MTE may indeed be the answer to facilitating science learning in Kenyan schools.

One may argue that the world has been turned into a “global village” and we all need the international languages. The Internet is one tool that has managed to shrink distance and space so that people can communicate to others from any corner of the globe in seconds. This is the necessity of learning L2, as it is the language that many use to define their academic self. With L2, one develops a different linguistic self, and can think differently and express himself or herself differently to his or her advantage. Nevertheless, it is important to learn that as much as people would want to learn new languages, a “foster language, just like a foster mother, even if she loves you or not, can rescue you” (Besemeres & Wierzbicka, 2008, p.158). This means that a new language could be one's strength in many situations in life, including being in a new place as well as looking for a job. For instance, today's job advertisements insist on multicultural competence and other languages; and the last part of the ad is always, “Knowledge of X language will be an added advantage.”

If we look at language as a resource, as claimed by Bamgbose (2000), we then can liken it with agricultural and natural resources in a country. Starting to view native languages as “valuable assets” or “stocks that can be drawn on” might change our attitude toward them (Bamgbose, 2000, p. 84). The more resourceful a country is, the more chances it stands to get rich. Consequently, a country's many languages can be sold (supplied) and purchased (demanded) just like other goods and services (Bamgbose, 2000). It is true that many of the Kenyan languages may not be internationally recognized as is English. In any case, how can indigenous languages become popular if they are never used officially on Kenyan soils? If these languages will ever share the same market with the global languages, then Kenyans should strive to develop and market them more aggressively starting from their own backyards. This way, slowly people might become interested in what value these languages have for them in terms of the benefits of learning them.

Bamgbose (2000) does not advise anybody to stop using his or her language because the “big” languages of today must have started somewhere and their users must have developed, marketed and used them at home, school, and in public places. This means that users of big languages must have viewed them as a “resource” (p. 30). They must have planned and made language choices strictly based on economic grounds. They must have used their languages as commodities to create wealth in their culture and literature (Negash, 2005). I argue that the perception of Kenyan languages as resources is lacking, and there is a danger of them still remaining as such, so long as we do not welcome them in our classrooms while developing a positive attitude toward them.

Since the colonial period, Kenya has been using English as the LOI at the expense of her own Kenyan languages. Consequently, some Kenyan men and women from all communities are very proud of their flawless writing in English and their eloquence in speeches in the English language. Yet, surprisingly, eyes might never turn to a Kenyan who has full mastery of a local language. The hegemonic position given to foreign languages in Kenya is huge. Cases have been in

schools where students who scored grade “A” in English and French were rewarded while those who scored the same high grade in Kiswahili were not. This unequal treatment clearly shows how we have learned to marginalize our own languages. If Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) was asked, he would suggest that we need to decolonize our minds and attitude towards these languages.

Many Kenyan elites stigmatize native languages. As a matter of reflection, one would wonder how many Kenyans would be comfortable reading this paper in Kiswahili? Many Kenyans rarely read matters written in Kiswahili in the local dailies. For instance, *Taifa Leo* (a Kiswahili News paper in Kenya and the equivalent of Daily Nation) is mostly read by less educated men and women who have not mastered English. Ngugi wa Thiong’o would object the view that Kiswahili is a language of the less educated in Kenya. When asked why he wrote his book in Kikuyu (his native language), he responded, “I’m using my language as a base from which to talk about the world,” “I’m not going to the English language as a beggar,” and “I have my own language. I write in it” (Duke, 2006, p. 3). By these words, Ngugi wa Thiong’o is telling the world that he is quite proud and has an identity when he speaks or writes in his mother tongue. Sadly, this is not the case with many elites who are tempted to think their prowess in foreign languages reflects their high levels of education.

Puja (2003) posits that Kiswahili speaking among Tanzanian masses is seen as the language of the less educated, which is similar in Kenya. Yet it appears that we have been using our own hands to dig the graves of our own languages and culture. If this is not true, where are the young African writers, the likes of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe, whose work tells about the African culture? If we are not producing such writers, then we are silenced and excluded from the knowledge economy. If we use foreign languages to express our thoughts, experiences, and ideas, then we join foreigners in developing their languages while neglecting those of our own people (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1998).

Many of our native languages are not being spoken and they are likely to die in the near future. Are any attempts and efforts to popularize Kiswahili in Kenyan and Tanzanian populations yielding any fruit? Why do people in these countries prefer to speak English and read print media in English as opposed to Kiswahili if they are serious about getting decolonized? We are forgetting that very soon, our languages will be dead. A “language is said to be dead when no one speaks it any more” (Crystal, 2000, p. 11). If we want change, then we should heed a Kiswahili saying that “*mwacha mila ni mtumwa*”, that is, “an individual who denounces his language and culture is a slave.” As Kenyans, we must reject the colonizing efforts being advanced to our people through language.

The importance of language as a learning tool in schools cannot be overemphasized. Schooling in a “foster tongue” limits the effectiveness of schooling and makes it more difficult for learners facing a “language disability” to conceptualize things. As Bamgbose (2000) rightly noted: “For many learners, the available language is not the one they need; and hence they end up learning the language they can get rather than the one they need” (p. 31). This environment is not favorable for pupils who have to sit passively for hours listening to the teacher speaking a language they do not understand.

In a multilingual population such as Kenya a multilingual education policy should be adopted. As a result of denouncing our Kenyan languages, the majority of them could be termed “moribund” language because, according to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), a moribund language is that which is “no longer being learned by children” (p. 47). This is very real for Kenyan languages because they are “pushed into disuse” (p. 50). However, because many jobs value proficiency in English, many parents, especially the elites in Kenya today, prefer their children to speak Kiswahili and English for schooling purposes. These parents ensure that they use only Kiswahili and English

at home to help their children learn the languages faster. Consequently, almost all other Kenyan languages are withering away, a situation referred to as “linguistic genocide” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 312).

Kenyans and many others from Africa are losing their linguistic selves, sense of belonging, and identity. For instance, how would Kenyans define themselves linguistically? Many of them face a language difference at home, at school, at work, in church, and in public, which can create confusion. Communication within family, at school, at public and social levels is in turmoil in the country. It is interesting that Kenyans always expressed their emotions in their mother tongue during cultural and burial ceremonies. Consequently, people still bury their relative in their rural homes, though not because of the language per se but because it is the place they connect best to their origins. It is where everybody in the family comes and feels at home. The language becomes important because everybody speaks native language and no one cares about any other language.

In Kenya, Kiswahili, more widely spoken than any other Kenyan language, is the most important vehicle for promoting national unity and national development. However, such a stand about a language forging national unity is being contested by Crystal (2000), who asserts that desiring a common language may not necessarily guarantee unity. Indeed, there are many examples of countries experiencing civil war despite having one language. Examples include Somalia, Congo, and Rwanda. Today, there is concern that the Kenyan national language (Kiswahili) has been neglected and is only being taught in schools as a subject (Mulama, 2006).

It is no secret that Kiswahili and other native languages are not popular language among the Kenyan elites. The Kenyan elites use English to express themselves in public, thus producing two calluses of citizens: included (advantaged) and excluded (disadvantaged) (Rubagumya, 1991 cited in Bamgbose, 2000). According to Bamgbose,

The included are those who by virtue of education are able to operate easily in the official language, and by the same token, have access to economic and political power. What is even more important is that they use this same position of advantage [privilege] to resist change and perpetuate elitism, which the use of the favored language entails. (p. 1)

To these elites in Kenya and elsewhere, no one hates to be placed in a position of advantage. However, those who know the joy of owning some personal property know that you cannot get far with borrowed property, and in this case language. Hence, this Kamba proverb: “*Mundu akolaw’a too ni kithuma kya ng’ombe yake*” meaning, One can only get enough sleep under the skins of his or her own cow. For those who come from communities where poverty is a part of life, asking someone to lend you a blanket is not strange. However, in your sleep you can only hope that the blanket owner will not need it.

3. Language and Development

Poor language policies in Africa are a challenge to development of its countries. This argument has been advanced by scholars who point out the communication gap between the elites and the masses in Africa. Elites and masses cannot work in harmony to develop their countries if they do not share a language (Bamgbose, 2000; Negash, 2005). A continued use of foreign languages as the LOI in Africa has resulted in a division between the masses and the elites. As such, all the countries in Africa, Kenya included, must learn how to deal with the division between the population (masses) and the elite group to pave their way to development. Negash (2005) argues that

Africans can do well by investing their linguistic, human and intellectual energies into the development of their languages, which are used by the majority of the masses, instead of

channeling their resources and energies into learning the imperial languages that are used by a tiny minority of the populations. (p. 5)

Walsh (2006) examined the role of language and culture in socioeconomic development in Ireland. His study was looking at the positive role that language can play in national development. According to him, all languages and cultures, regardless of their status or numerical size, can be integrated into processes of socioeconomic development and that none is inherently antidevelopment.

Both the minority and the majority need to work together for development. The question we need to ask is: Are the African elites and the masses ready to bridge the communication gap between them? The painful truth is that the biggest challenge facing the use of African languages in Africa are the African elites themselves, not the colonial masters. According to Negash (2005),

African countries are opposed to African languages because they know or are convinced that their interests, both material and ideological, are best served by keeping the sole status of colonial languages (or in some cases jointly with their own dominant language). (p. 9)

If the elites are in opposition, then what can people do when their own “war heroes” turn their war spears on them? What happens when people turn out to be their own enemies? Language debates have become more of a power issue than a tool of communication, giving the elites rights, privileges, and prestige. In fact, languages have been used as a wedge to divide the powerful and the powerless. This means elites in Kenya and other parts of Africa have learned to use language as a tool of authority. Thus, one should not be surprised when people and nations compete for control over language. Such a situation makes the Africanization and decolonization of knowledge and education more of a dream than a reality in Africa, including Kenya,

English will always be a part of the Kenyan national fabric. On the other hand, teaching English language has become a multibillion dollar business in Kenya and abroad because the number of English speakers is getting larger at the expense of all the indigenous languages in the country. In fact, studies done in Kenya have shown that there is not as much emphasis on Kiswahili as there is on English (Mulama, 2006). However, promoting use of English as a medium of instruction in a multilingual society has been discredited by scholars because of its negative effects on student performance as well as the fact that it means teaching the colonial culture. Skutnabb (2000) discusses Edward Williams (1995), who conducted a large-scale study in Zambia and in Malawi, with approximately 1,500 students, in grades 1 through 7. Students in Zambia, who were taught through English only, had very weak or zero reading competence in two languages. However, the Malawi children, who were taught in local languages during the first four years, with English as a subject from grade 5 onwards, had slightly better test results even in the English language than did the Zambian students. In addition, they learned to read and write their own languages. This shows how a poor language policy may contribute to stunting, rather than promoting, academic and cognitive growth.

Evaluation studies in many parts of the world repeatedly show that pupils educated in their mother tongue perform better in school. For instance, in Nigeria “pupils educated through the medium of Yoruba are more proficient in school subjects, including English, than pupils educated through the medium of English” (International Language Educators’ Association (ILEA), as cited in Brock-Utne, 2000). These findings clearly explain the fact that poor performance will continue to be part and parcel of learners who use languages other than their mother tongue, especially in their basic education.

Colonization or our colonizers have done Africans a great disservice by denying them the freedom to use their mother tongue in school. Instructing their own students in foreign languages has resulted in poor performance in schools, particularly in sciences. Experts maintain that pupils

are better placed to become literate when they start learning in their first language, and then gradually move to another language, than when they try to learn directly in a second language, as is the case in Kenya (Mulama, 2006). Not knowing one's mother tongue makes one feel dispossessed, disconnected and "ashamed." It is claimed that education which "advocates separating children from their indigenous heritage or [become] ashamed [about it]" (Besemeres & Wierzbicka, 2008, p. 4); in fact, Besemeres and Wierzbicka (2008) are worried because such a move seems to be directed towards separating children from their culture and language in order to distort continuity. In such a case, the schoolchildren lose their indigenous languages, culture, and identity and are marginalized.

Thus, Kenya should change the language policy because this state of affairs may contribute to illiteracy and results in people entering the workforce in Kenya with inadequate skills. The adoption of Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) in Kenya should not be delayed. Linguistic Human Rights is the end product of Language Rights + Human Rights = Linguistic Human Rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This term has been coined because many languages in the world are getting lost due to the many migrations that are taking place. Reading Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), one will see the need for the language debate to move from LHR to "Educational Linguistic Human Rights" (p. 496).

Learning in foreign languages is like colonizing because it amounts to nurturing "ideas of superiority of colonial languages and culture versus inferiority of colonized languages and cultures" (Wolff, 2000, p. 42). As much as there is need to educate world citizens through language diversity, caution should be taken on losing precious languages and cultures at a very high rate, a situation that needs to be changed for decolonizing Africa and Kenya. Crystal (2000) points out that 90% of today's oral languages may no longer exist 100 years from now. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argues that "greater emphasis must be given to the principle of human rights, which could be understood to mean that every person has the right to be born, live, fall sick and die in his or her own language" (p. 482). If such freedom is granted to everybody, then we will have something to celebrate as far as decolonizing people's minds is concerned, especially in Africa. However, Kenyan children need not be forced in school to master the "big" languages with the objective of promoting language diversity, multilingualism, and modernization either in Kenya or in the world (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). African and Kenyan students, by extension, appear 'unintellectual,' leading to total loss of creativity as they aspire to join the 'elite club' (Alexander, 1999). To Brock-Utne (2000), it appears like development and modernization minded people are busy promoting education, which is not in line with a people's language, culture and real life situation, thus, 'developing and modernizing the people without the people.'

It is convincing where Alexander (1999) writes that African governments today are being operated by a small group of elites who have "black faces in white places," and they love the comfort of the status quo. African governments seem to act under pressure when people get organized and bring pressure for change. If left alone, they tend to forget all the problems of the masses. The reality in Kenya, and Africa in general, dictates that adoption of multilingual policies is the best way forward, something that African governments appear failing to see and take advantage of. Rather, they tend to be ignoring and pushing aside their cultural resources, and their languages. According to Alexander (1999), Africans have tended to be excellent in the art of stigmatizing their own languages and having a negative attitude toward them because languages are taken to mean ethnicity. Ethnicity in Africa is the equivalent of racism in the United States and citizens are encouraged to embrace these differences as a way of sealing the cracks that divide them. Consequently, there is the danger of making the words ethnicity and racism taboo words which should be avoided or stigmatized.

4. The Way Forward for Kenya and Africa

Examining the current situation of African languages, the opinion that the Asmara Declaration on African Languages has the best strategy for rectifying the situation. Declaration one of the Asmara Declaration states that “African languages must take on the duty, the responsibility, and the challenge of speaking for the continent” (Asmara Declaration, 2000, p. 1). Africans and African states are called upon to firmly reject the incongruity of culture and language that exists in the continent. This was done with an objective of affirming a new beginning for Africa, returning to its languages and heritage. The Asmara Declaration on African Languages called upon African scholars to promote African languages by writing in them more and working to change people’s attitudes toward their original languages. If these ideas are planted on the right soil, such as the fertile soils found in Africa, and were nurtured properly, there is hope of redeeming our languages.

Changing the policy in Kenya and convincing parents to adapt to it would be of great importance. The multilingual nature of the population reflects the need for the use of a different LOI in schools because of the language diversity, which makes it difficult for children to learn. Therefore, one must know one’s mother tongue but not miss the advantages that one could acquire through a foster mother tongue.

Kenya should begin with an aggressive promotion of Kiswahili and the respective mother tongues of each and every Kenyan. The government should set a goal that each Kenyan pupil, on completing primary school education, will be able to read and write in his or her mother tongue and Kiswahili. Children should also be free to learn other Kenyan languages of their choice. In this endeavor the schools could work very closely with the parents and the local communities. The teaching of English as a subject is encouraged, but seeking excellence in the way it is taught rather than using it as LOI in schools should be considered. For instance, English instructors in the whole of Kenya and elsewhere in Africa should be English native speakers. A native language speaker would help stamp out the pidgin English taught many schools in Africa and pave the way for standard English. All Kenyans should have a good command of their mother-tongues, Kiswahili, and English, thus, enhancing cultural and educational exchanges in and out of the country.

Kenya should set up African language centers in major urban areas such as Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kisumu, and Kakamega. A full-scale Kenyan national university for African languages and linguistic research geared towards developing Kiswahili, Kenyan languages, and other African languages should be established. The university or institution would make sure that there are dictionaries for all Kenyan languages and a Kiswahili advanced learners dictionary, thesaurus and encyclopedia. This university should promote all Kenyan languages through drama festivals, grants to upcoming writers, poetry contests, more radio broadcasts, television programs, and culturally specific websites. Kenyans should, for example, also do more to develop Kiswahili search engines for those surfing the Internet. Public offices and the Kenyan parliament should use more Kiswahili in their transactions than other languages.

African linguistic diversity reflects the rich cultural heritage that can and should be harnessed for national and regional development (Asmara Declaration, 2000, p. 1). People need to understand their sociocultural, economic, and political history to appropriately come to terms with the need to employ available linguistic resources to their advantage. The role of each language in the state or community should be appreciated. Every language has a positive contribution to make in creating awareness, inculcating values, and in promoting the well-being of the people. Countries need to formulate sound language policies that will engender a cultural identity. Languages policies which promote native languages need to be adopted. According to Mwangi (2008), Ngugi is best known internationally for his advocacy of writing in indigenous languages, especially after the publication of *Decolonising the Mind* in 1986. He is African elite, who should be emulated by other

African elites because he has paved the way toward a decolonized Africa through the use of indigenous languages.

This paper has assessed the language situation in Kenya, a country whose population is multilingual, discussing the advantages and the disadvantages connected with using a foreign language such as English as the LOI in schools. The Kenyan population is embracing globalization and diversity while delving deeper into the academic world through the use of English. However, Kenya's rich resource - its many indigenous languages are diminishing. Worse still, children's performance in schools, teaching resources, and development in general are at stake. Promoting English in the education system is creating a language gap between the elite and the masses. Such actions reflect a colonized mind, rather than a 'decolonizer' of our society.

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