

## **THE TREATMENT OF KISWAHILI IN KENYA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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This paper intends to evaluate the treatment of Kiswahili in the education system in Kenya. The need for this evaluation arises from the fact that although English and Kiswahili are co-official languages under the Official Law Reports of the Republic of Kenya (2010)<sup>1</sup>, English seems to remain prominent in the conduct of official communication in Kenya's public and private formal discourse. The paper examines language policy documents containing information on the place of Kiswahili in official communication within the Republic of Kenya. Some of these documents show the status of Kiswahili before and immediately (approximately 20 years) after independence while others are more recent documents. The paper then assesses the implementation of the policy documents as far as Kiswahili is concerned, noting that the treatment of Kiswahili has not been a fair one especially when contrasted with that of English. Possible reasons for the unfair treatment are suggested, noting that although the treatment (of Kiswahili) has not been very fair, Kiswahili has still developed, its use has increased and there are significant achievements that can be identified. Other ways of elevating Kiswahili are suggested and discussed. The paper concludes by observing that all Kenyans need to participate in the promotion of Kiswahili if it is to continue growing as it should as one of Kenya's two official languages, Kenya's only national language, and a mother tongue to many Kenyans.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Kiswahili is spoken in many parts of Eastern Africa, including (as shown on the map below): Kenya, (mainland) Tanzania, Zanzibar, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and parts of Somali, Mozambique, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (<http://faculty.virginia.edu/swahililanguage>). It is also spoken in the Comoros Islands. Most of the mother tongue speakers of Kiswahili are mainly found in the coastal region of Kenya and Tanzania. Like any other language, Kiswahili has dialects. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2016), there are about 15 of them, including: Kimvita, Kiamu, Kiunguja, Kimrima, Kisiu, Kipate and Kibajuni (Palome 1967: 19-25; Chiraghdin and Mnyampala 1977: 25-52; Nurse and Spear 1985: 57-64). In Encyclopedia Britannica, Kiunguja (spoken in Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania), Kimvita (spoken mainly in Mombasa and other areas of Kenya) and Kiamu (spoken in the island of Lamu and the surrounding mainland regions of the coast) are identified as the three most important dialects. The reasons for their importance are not given. The

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<sup>1</sup>The Official Law Reports of the Republic of Kenya (2010) is also popularly known as the Constitution of Kenya, 2010.

Standard Kiswahili taught in Kenyan institutions is based on the Kiunguja dialect.



Map 1: Regions where Kiswahili is spoken (Taken from Wairungu, M. Swahili website, University of Virginia)

In Kenya, it should therefore be noted that it is used by some speakers especially in the coastal regions as a mother tongue. There are about 8 dialects in Kenya used as mother tongues along the coastal region from the Lamu archipelago to the southern coast near the border of Kenya and Tanzania (see Bakari, 1982). These dialects are Kivumba, Kimvita, Kiamu, Kitikuu, Kipate, Kisiu, Kijomvu and Kingare. It is also widely used as a second language in Kenya. English, its main competitor in the education system in Kenya, is not an indigenous language. The latter was introduced in Kenya mainly during the colonial period and is still the language of education today.

The paper traces the treatment of Kiswahili in written documents before and after independence up to the 1980's. It gives attention to the treatment of Kiswahili in some of the recently written legal documents such as the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Languages of Kenya Bill and the Languages of Kenya Policy. The paper then discusses the implementation of the various language policies at different levels. Four reasons are then identified in an attempt to explain why Kiswahili faces unfair treatment. It is demonstrated that even though Kiswahili has faced a lot of unfair treatment, there are a number of achievements that can be pointed out. The paper ends by giving suggestions for the use of Kiswahili as an official language in Kenya.

## 2. THE TREATMENT OF KISWAHILI IN POLICY DOCUMENTS

This section reviews the treatment of Kiswahili in various Kenyan policy documents starting from the period before independence to the period after the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

### 2.1 Before and after independence

A discussion of the treatment of Kiswahili in Kenya's policy guidelines necessarily entails a comparison with the treatment of English, which has for a long time been used in the education system in Kenya, and remains its main rival as a lingua franca in Kenya's public life. The Kiswahili language has had a long history in Kenya, first as its original birthplace and also as a territory within which it serves as a language of wider communication, including its use in the education system. The entry of Kiswahili into the mainstream formal education in East Africa on a significant scale was facilitated by the European colonial enterprise in this region and the infiltration of African societies by the missionaries.

At the beginning, the language policy of the colonial administration in East Africa was in favour of Kiswahili. The directors of education in East and Central Africa met in Dar-es-salaam in 1929 and recommended the establishment of an Inter-territorial Language Committee whose concern was to carry out research on the language, and standardize it especially in the area of orthography. The committee was formed in 1930. Soon after, government officials, educationists and missionaries accorded Kiswahili total support (Mbaabu, 1996: 62). The formation of the committee gave Kiswahili a firm base which enabled it to survive the change of policy as illustrated in the next paragraph in the period after the Second World War. From that time onwards, Kiswahili as a language of education did not benefit very much from the policies of the European rulers and it was left largely to remain undeveloped.

In the period between 1940 and 1963 for example, there was less support for Kiswahili (Mbaabu 1996: 74). In fact, the Beecher Report (1942), quoted by Gorman (1974:429), recommended that emphasis be placed on the teaching of vernacular and that English takes the place of Kiswahili as the colony's lingua franca. This was supported by the Departmental Reports of 1950 and 1951 (Nuffield Foundation, and Colonial Office, 1953, quoted in Mbaabu, 1996: 85). This essentially meant that the other mother tongues were elevated to operate at the same level as Kiswahili. The colonialists, therefore, tried to use a 'divide and rule' policy because the use of Kiswahili would have meant that the Africans in Kenya would have had a common language to use while the other mother tongues definitely denied Kenyans this uniformity in language. Hence the colonialists favoured the use of

different mother tongues because it did not give native Kenyans the sociopolitical advantages that go with having a uniform language. English was also elevated at the expense of Kiswahili. The result was that Kiswahili was used less widely as the medium of instruction in lower classes except in areas where it was used as a vernacular language. Thus the British in Kenya only allowed Kiswahili to be used in the first few classes of formal schooling in the education system.

In 1957, the Ministry of Education created the Nairobi Special Centre whose specific aim was to promote English as a medium instruction. Kiswahili's role as a medium of instruction was brought to an end by this development (Mazrui and Mazrui 1995: 58). Though it continued to be taught as a second language in secondary schools, it was not an examinable subject.

In this paper, it is argued that these policies contributed a lot to the situation Kiswahili finds itself in today. The debate about whether or not to use Kiswahili or English as a medium of instruction is not new as Mazrui and Mazrui (1995: 49) say:

The great debate then got underway about the media of instruction for Africans ... and the comparative merits of Kiswahili as against the English language. The debates which began at the turn of the century are continuing to the present day.

The first commission, which was formed after independence in 1964, was the Ominde Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1964). It was mandated to survey the country's educational resources and advise the government on the formation and implementation of the national educational policies. As far as language is concerned, firstly, it recommended the teaching of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject in primary schools since it was a language which united the East African Region. Secondly, it recommended the training of Kiswahili teachers during school holidays. Thirdly, it recommended the establishment of the Department of Kiswahili at the University College of Nairobi. It also reaffirmed the importance of using the English language as an instructional medium throughout the school system. The Ominde Commission must have had good intentions as far as its provisions for Kiswahili go. However, since Kiswahili was not examinable, the time allocated to teach it was used to teach the other subjects and the other two recommendations were not implemented. On the whole, the Ominde Commission gave English a supreme position in the education system. Unlike Kiswahili, English was both a taught subject, as already stated and the medium of instruction.

In 1975 another committee was formed to identify more realistic goals for Kenya's education system. Its result was the Gachathi Report (Republic of Kenya, 1976), which tried to accord a substantial role to Kiswahili. It recommended that Kiswahili be introduced as an examinable subject and be made compulsory in primary and secondary school education. Once again these two recommendations were not implemented. They were ignored for

ten years.

The recommendations of the Gachathi report were only recognized in 1984, when the Mackay report (Republic of Kenya, 1984) also recommended that Kiswahili should be made a compulsory and examinable subject in the country's primary and secondary schools. The implementation took place in 1985 in the 8-4-4 system of education in Kenya. The Mackay Report also recommended that Kiswahili be made a compulsory subject in the second university. This has never been implemented. Moi University in Eldoret was the second university and to date Kiswahili is not a compulsory subject in any university in Kenya, whether public or private. Furthermore, in all these universities, English is the only medium of instruction and Kiswahili is taught as a subject only to those who choose to do it as a professional course.

After considering the various reports that touched on Kiswahili in the education system in the past, more recent developments are stated in the next three sections. These are the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Languages of Kenya Bill and the Languages of Kenya policy. All these have suggestions for English, Kiswahili and the mother tongues as languages in use in Kenya.

## **2.2 In the current legal texts**

The Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Languages of Kenya Bill and the Languages of Kenya Policy contain policy statements that touch on the use of Kiswahili. As we discuss them in this section, it should be noted that the policy statements treat the language in a generic manner without recognizing the varieties. The roles given to both Kiswahili and English are given to them as languages without considering the dialects. For this reason, when discussing the treatment of Kiswahili, we consider the Standard Kiswahili dialect as well as the other varieties of Kiswahili spoken in Kenya.

### **2.2.1 *Kiswahili in the Constitution of Kenya 2010***

According to the Official Law Reports of the Republic of Kenya (2010: 22):

- (1) The national language of the Republic is Kiswahili.
- (2) The official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English.
- (3) The state shall -
  - (a) promote and protect the diversity of language of the people of Kenya; and
  - (b) promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan Sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities.

Therefore, in the Official Law Reports of the Republic of Kenya (2010), Kiswahili maintains its role as a national language in Kenya. This means that it should still be used for general or social communication between

communities. It is also an official language alongside English unlike in the past where English was the only official language. This means that, currently, the two languages should have equal status as languages chosen for official use by the Government of Kenya. They should be the languages used in Parliament, law courts, education, government meetings, etc. The status of Kiswahili as an official language in the Constitution has implications for education because it is expected that English and Kiswahili would then operate at the same level as media of instruction in primary and secondary schools and even at the university level. However, the reality is that English is still used more than Kiswahili in all the areas mentioned in this paragraph even after the inauguration of this constitution.

The Constitution also proposes to promote the diversity of language and the development and use of indigenous languages. Kiswahili is one of these indigenous languages which need to be promoted with the rest of the indigenous Kenyan languages. The Constitution of Kenya therefore accords Kiswahili, unlike all the other languages of Kenya, the highest chance for development and use as follows:

- (i) As a national Language;
- (ii) As an official language; and
- (iii) As an indigenous language with its own dialects or varieties.

No other language in Kenya is given this opportunity by the Constitution. It is hoped that in the immediate future it will be used like Amharic in Ethiopia or Mandarin in China. These two languages have been allowed to develop extensively and are also used extensively in their countries because they have been allowed to grow and develop in these three ways. The two are also widely used as media of education in their respective countries.

As we shall see in the next section, Kiswahili has not made a lot of progress in the education system even after the year 2010. In other words, its use has remained largely as it was before 2010. It would have been our wish that the government would pick it up and run with it, i.e. use it extensively. All of us Kenyans should do the same because a government cannot do much without a willing people. The initiative to use it is seen in research carried out by independent Kiswahili scholars and other Kiswahili scholars found in certain universities and the media.

The issues addressed in the next two sections are offshoots of the Official Law Reports of the Republic of Kenya (2010). They deal with documents entitled 'Languages of Kenya Bill' and 'Languages of Kenya Policy'. Since some parts of the two documents are similar, they seem to have been developed together or to serve almost the same purpose.

### **2.2.2 Kiswahili in the proposed Languages of Kenya Bill**

The Languages of Kenya Bill is a document that is still under preparation for presentation to Parliament. It is defined as:

An Act of Parliament to provide for the establishment of the legal and institutional framework for the promotion of Kiswahili and English as the official languages of Kenya; Kiswahili as the national language of Kenya; and the promotion and protection of community languages, Kenyan Sign Language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities and for connected purposes (p. 3).

The bill recognizes that Kiswahili should be promoted and therefore used as both a national and official language. It also supports and attempts to define the use of English as Kenya's other official language.

As earlier stated Kiswahili is also an indigenous language and therefore must be developed and promoted just as the other mother tongues in Kenya. It is hoped that the organizations involved in these efforts will not forget that Kiswahili is also a mother tongue with varieties.

The document also states the purposes of the proposed act. It should be noted once again that there has been not much change in the use of Kiswahili in the education system even after being named as a co-official language with English. For Kiswahili specifically, the document indicates that its purpose is to promote the 'equitable treatment of Kiswahili and English as the official languages of Kenya' (p. 4). The desired equitable treatment is still lacking in practice. The other purposes of this act worth mentioning are in the quotation below.

... initiating and sustaining dialogue on multilingualism with all language communities; encouraging the learning of Kiswahili, ... national unity, cohesion and cross linguistic and cultural literacy; strengthening and promoting the use of Kiswahili and other languages and communication systems in media; and developing and promoting community languages [Kiswahili included] for use as media of instruction in early childhood and lower primary education (pp. 4-5).

It is also indicated that English and Kiswahili should be used for business transactions in public offices. We assume that the variety of Kiswahili used for this purpose in public offices is Standard Kiswahili but the ones that should be used as media of instruction in early childhood and lower primary school are the varieties spoken in each catchment area, i.e. the area where the school is located.

Once again it should be recognized that in the past people were not encouraged to learn Kiswahili. It should be noted that in the text quoted immediately above, emphasis is on learning Kiswahili and promoting it alongside the other mother tongues. This then means promoting the mother tongue dialects of Kiswahili as well. The preceding quotation is evidence to show that Kiswahili had been neglected unlike English which is not mentioned

in the quotation. This could mean that as far as education is concerned, there are probably feelings that the country is not yet ready to use Kiswahili as a co-medium of instruction alongside English. As far as we are concerned, Kiswahili is very ready because it is already codified, standardized and reasonably modernized.

### ***2.2.3 Kiswahili in the proposed Languages of Kenya Policy***

The proposed Languages of Kenya Policy and Languages of Kenya Bill are in the same document since they are intended to be presented to Parliament together. In principle, the approval of the two proposals by Parliament should take place at more or less the same time, since none of them can work without the other. The Languages of Kenya Policy recognizes Kiswahili as one of the languages of the African Union (AU) and its institutions and as a working language in the Great Lakes Region (pp 7-8). It recognizes multilingualism as a norm in the Kenyan society. When multilingualism is referred to, it calls to mind the fact that the most common languages for a multilingual Kenyan are English, Kiswahili and one of the community languages (mother tongues). The Languages of Kenya Policy:

... takes into consideration the constitutional provisions on ethnic diversity and multilingualism and is aligned to government's goals for economic, socio-political and educational growth as well as Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (p. 11)

The aims of the Languages of Kenya Policy as far as Kiswahili is concerned are the same as those of the Languages of Kenya Bill. Some of the aims of this policy that we would like to mention in this section are to:

- facilitate access to public services, knowledge and information;
  - ensure affirmative action for the community languages of Kenya;
  - promote effective language management and use for national development and efficient public service administration to meet the expectations and needs of citizens;
  - promote public participation in development by all citizens;
- (pp. 11-12)

The stipulated aims cannot be achieved without using all the languages of Kenya. They can only be achieved if the languages the citizens understand are used. The mother tongues cannot be left out. Concerning the languages of wider communication, Kiswahili has an important role since most Kenyans readily understand Kiswahili more than English. In the market places, Kiswahili and the mother tongues are used more than English but in some offices and other official domains, English dominates. Some of the principles, which the Languages of Kenya Policy is based (see p. 13) are:



- Commitment to the promotion of the national and official languages as well as Kenyan Sign Language, and community languages and the respect of language rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya.
- Recognition of the role of language in the acquisition of knowledge, expertise and effective participation in the political, economic, social, cultural and technological spheres.
- The importance of partnership with national, regional and international institutions to implement constitutional provisions on ethnic and linguistic diversity.
- The recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity and the determination of Kenyans to live in peace and unity as one indivisible sovereign nation.

The Languages of Kenya Policy and the Languages of Kenya Bill are attempts to implement the language-related provisions of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. The three documents are well intentioned as far as languages of the people of Kenya are concerned. The Language Body that has been proposed in the Languages of Kenya Bill, it is hoped, will ensure that its principles are maintained and its aims achieved. So far in reality as seen in the sections that follow, the implementation of language policies in the area of education has been wanting.

### **3 THE TREATMENT OF KISWAHILI AT THE LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION**

After looking at the recommendations of the various task forces, language commissions, the constitution, the Languages of Kenya Policy and the Languages of Kenya Bill, the implementation at the various levels within the education system is discussed.

In this section, the treatment of Kiswahili at the level of policy implementation is dealt with at primary school level, secondary school level, teacher training colleges for primary school level, university level, and as it affects teachers of Kiswahili and Kiswahili as a mother tongue. Each level is discussed separately.

#### **3.2 Primary school level**

Both English and Kiswahili are compulsory and examinable subjects in primary schools. Looking at the number of lessons in lower primary school, one would notice there is no disparity between English, Kiswahili and mother tongue as each is allocated 5 lessons of 35 minutes each per week. But in upper primary, Kiswahili has five lessons and English has seven lessons. In many schools, English lessons are mostly conducted before break time and Kiswahili lessons mostly in the afternoon. Many primary schools insist that English

should be the language of communication within the school and some have gone to the extent of putting up notices which say they should only use English. Some public and private primary schools, however, have set aside a day for speaking Kiswahili. Kianda School, Aga Khan Primary School and Strathmore School in Nairobi are examples of such schools. However, even in these schools, sometimes the resolution to have a Kiswahili day is sometimes forgotten. One main problem facing schools in Kenya is that no one insists on the use of standard Kiswahili. The possible reason could be that most teachers are not competent in Standard Kiswahili or are not interested in it.

It should be noted that Kiswahili is still not treated in the same way as English. At least for a start, the number of lessons should be the same for English and Kiswahili because both of them are official languages. (For further comments see 3.3.)

### 3.3 Secondary school level

Though English and Kiswahili are compulsory and examinable, there are discrepancies in the number of lessons allocated to them. According to Kenya Institute of Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2002:4): "The time allocated for the teaching of this [English] syllabus is 6 lessons a week in Form 1 and 2 and 8 lessons a week in Form 3 and 4." For Kiswahili, the syllabus is written in Kiswahili, which is quite commendable, and the time allocated for Kiswahili is stated as follows:

Katikakidato cha kwanza na cha pili, mwalimu anavipindi vitano vya kufundisha lugha. Katika kidato cha tatu na nne anavipindi sita (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2002: 28).

This means that in Forms 1 and 2, a teacher has five lessons for teaching Kiswahili and in Forms 3 and 4, six lessons. The quotations above show the treatment of the two subjects in terms of the number of lessons for each. In Forms 1 and 2, English is allocated 6 lessons while Kiswahili has 5. In Forms 3 and 4, English is allocated 8 lessons and Kiswahili 6 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2002) yet both languages are taught and examined at the same level and they also have the same number of papers in the relevant examinations. The reason for this difference is probably the fact that while both of them are subjects, English has the extra load of being the language of instruction for the teaching of all other subjects. Therefore, for the number of lessons to be the same for the two subjects, since they have the same status as official languages, Kiswahili needs to share, with English, the load of being a language of instruction.

When it comes to perception and implementation, in some schools it is English that is given special preference in terms of being allocated lessons on the time table early in the morning (together with Maths), and Kiswahili is

allocated lessons in the late afternoon when the students are already tired and not in the mood to learn. However, some schools such as Kianda school, Precious Blood Girls' School (Riruta) and Strathmore school have realized the need to teach Kiswahili just as any other subject and so it is placed anywhere in the timetable whether in the morning or afternoon.

English is seen to be the official language in many schools and learners are punished for using Kiswahili or mother tongue. By so doing, the school administration is already planting a negative attitude towards Kiswahili in the students. This attitude may discourage them from working hard. Some may end up hating Kiswahili or may think that it is not as important as English. As already stated, in schools, such as Strathmore School, one day is allocated for learners and teachers to interact in Kiswahili. This is a day where Kiswahili is supposed to be promoted through encouraging everyone in school to speak Kiswahili. In Precious Blood Girls' School, Riruta in Nairobi, the School administration decided to extend Kiswahili day from one to two days a week.

What emerges from the discussion in this section, just as in the previous one, is that in the Kenyan school system, Kiswahili definitely does not have the place accorded to English yet both of them are the official languages of the Kenyan schools (The Official Law Reports of the Republic of Kenya, 2010: 22). We suggest that Kiswahili, as already stated, should be used as the medium of instruction in teaching some of the subjects taught in our institutions. If this does not happen, then many people may fail to realize that it is another official language and hence it will remain an official language in the policy documents only.

### 3.4 Teacher training colleges for primary school level

It is appreciated that English and Kiswahili are both compulsory subjects at the college level. However, there are differences in time allocation for lessons as well as examinations administered. Teacher training for primary school teaching is a two-year course. In the first year of this course, both English and Kiswahili have four lessons each but in the second year of study, English has five lessons while Kiswahili retains four. This means that there is some discrimination in the lessons given for the two subjects. English is favoured yet Kiswahili is its co-official language.

Learners have to sit for two examination papers in each subject. It should be noted that the time allocated for the two papers is not the same. The differences in the time allocation for each paper are indicated below.

- English Paper 1 - 2 ½ hours
- English Paper 2 - 3 hours
- Kiswahili Paper 1 - 2 hours
- Kiswahili Paper 2 - 2 ½ hours

The English paper has two compulsory compositions while the Kiswahili one has only one, and the English paper has a summary exercise while the Kiswahili one does not have any. Though the differences in time seem to be based on the amount of work expected in each paper, there is the impression that the kind of content tested in Kiswahili is less than that of English because, possibly, the content coverage during the teaching of the former is less than that of the latter.

It should be noted that the course content for Kiswahili was revised in 2004. Before this revision, English had 2 examination papers while Kiswahili had only one. After the revision Kiswahili had an additional paper, thus making them two. It is our assumption that an additional paper for Kiswahili meant that more content had to be provided for it as a subject. This then must have been an improvement as far as the teaching of Kiswahili in teacher training colleges is concerned.

### **3.5 University level**

Despite the constitutional position that Kiswahili is the national language as well as an official language at the moment, a lot needs to be done to concretize this ideal. In the universities, all information regarding the structure of the administration, rules and regulations, are in English. A few schools, colleges, sections of the administration, etc. at the University of Nairobi have translated into Kiswahili some of their documents, including service charters, mission statements, visions and core values. This is quite commendable. The course descriptions and even titles of the units in some Kiswahili departments are unfortunately in English. They should all be in both English and Kiswahili. If we have really embraced the Constitution of Kenya 2010, then all documents, including syllabi, at the universities should be in both English and Kiswahili. This means that not only the Kiswahili syllabus but also the syllabi in the school of Medicine, Engineering, etc. should be in English and Kiswahili.

At the University of Nairobi, the situation for a long time was unfortunate yet it is the biggest university in the Republic of Kenya. The only Department of Kiswahili within the university was dissolved in 2005. After the dissolution of the Faculty of Social Sciences which housed the Department of Kiswahili at Kikuyu Campus, Kiswahili was moved to the Department of Linguistics and Languages in the Faculty of Arts within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The name 'Department of Kiswahili' ceased to exist in the structure of the University of Nairobi, at a time when some of the universities established after the University of Nairobi had departments of Kiswahili. The department was re-established in 2013 after a series of meetings and lobbying to convince the university administration of the importance of this department. There was a similar occurrence in Maseno University College.

When it was established in 1991 there was a Department of Kiswahili but in 2004 it was merged with five other departments to become the Department of Linguistics, Languages and Literature.

Undergraduate students studying Kiswahili either in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) or Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) programme are disadvantaged compared to students studying (English-based) linguistics. At the University of Nairobi for example, a B.Ed. student studying Kiswahili as a teaching subject has to take course units in both Kiswahili linguistics and literature in Kiswahili. They have to additionally take another teaching subject such as history, geography, physical education, Christian Religious education, etc. Conversely, a B.Ed. student studying English as a teaching subject takes course units in general linguistics, English linguistics and (as a separate subject) literature in English. Thus the B. Ed. Kiswahili student seems to study three subjects while the B.Ed. English student studies two (subjects), making the Kiswahili student seem to be overburdened. Owing to this burden, the Kiswahili student can cover enough units in neither Kiswahili linguistics nor literature. This student is not as well prepared as the English one for the job market and has to read extensively on his/her own to gain the required competence or to be at the same level as the one who is trained as an English language and literature in English teacher.

Another unfair policy to Kiswahili that has been in existence at the University of Nairobi is about dissertation writing at Ph.D. level. For a long time it has been only in this university that Kiswahili scholars are required to write their projects about Kiswahili in English. This is evidence that the power of the colonial language policy has remained with us at the University of Nairobi, while the younger Universities are on the path to liberating themselves from it. This colonial relic, to a large extent, has not only hindered the progress of Kiswahili scholars and the pace in their projects, but has also affected the way they would have articulated their arguments since their means of expression is inhibited.

However, this has changed since students of the Department of Kiswahili at the University of Nairobi can now write their thesis or projects in Kiswahili. The Department of Kiswahili was given this authority by the Board of Post Graduate Studies in January 2015.

In the admission of students to universities and tertiary institutions, it is an established practice that Kiswahili can substitute for English in cases where a student has scored better grades in Kiswahili than in English. This applies not only in the selection of students to certificate and diploma courses, but also to degree courses. However, in some schools or faculties, this is rarely the case because some degree programmes (e.g. the School of Law at the University of Nairobi) do not consider a grade obtained in Kiswahili but the English one only.

### **3.6 Teachers of Kiswahili in schools**

When language teachers and special subject teachers were being given an incentive by the government in 1997, during the harmonization of salaries, Kiswahili teachers were left out, and it took one year of waiting and lobbying before they could be recognized as teachers of special subjects and accorded the same incentive. It looked unfair when incentives were offered to some language teachers while others, in particular the Kiswahili teachers, were left to lobby before they were given the same incentives.

### **3.7 Implementation issues on Kiswahili as a mother tongue in Kenya**

As already indicated in the introduction, the Kiswahili language is a mother tongue for a good number of people in the coastal area of Kenya. In this region, it is books written in Standard Kiswahili that are used in schools in lower primary school and early childhood education. There is some confusion because Standard Kiswahili is different from their mother tongue varieties. Since each of the Kiswahili dialects they speak is a mother tongue for them, it is very difficult for them to use Standard Kiswahili as they have internalized their dialects while growing up.

In both primary and secondary schools, learning Standard Kiswahili is also a challenge to the speakers of these dialects because the majority of those teaching Kiswahili in these areas unconsciously use the relevant dialects in class. For this reason, their students do not perform well in the (Standard) Kiswahili national exams in Kenya. The learners write their compositions and answers to the grammar questions using their local dialects, leading to wrong answers judged against the official marking schemes. This causes a sense of injustice among the coastal people as they feel that they are failed intentionally by the upcountry teachers, making them regard Standard Kiswahili as a tool to oppress them.

According to the Teacher's Service Commission, any teacher can be posted to teach anywhere within the Republic of Kenya. Therefore, teachers of Kiswahili who are not mother-tongue speakers of the dialects of language, find themselves in the schools in the coastal region where Kiswahili is a mother tongue. Some learners therefore feel that being taught by upcountry teachers is not right as the latter are not first language speakers of Kiswahili. The learners assume that they know better Kiswahili than such teachers, whom they regard as not being competent enough to teach them their language, and feel reluctant to follow their instructions.

The problem is that the learners and some of the local Kiswahili teachers do not seem to separate Standard Kiswahili from the other varieties of the language that they speak. To solve this problem, the learners need to be introduced to Standard Kiswahili as a variety of Kiswahili that is different

from the mother tongue they know. They should be made aware that Standard Kiswahili is different from the mother tongue varieties, that there are differences in the mother tongue varieties and that it is not right to use their varieties in writing Standard Kiswahili.

In Kenya, Kiswahili and English are taught as second languages. The methods used for teaching Standard Kiswahili in these regions should be checked. The methods used in second language teaching should not apply because Standard Kiswahili is a dialect of Kiswahili just like their mother tongues. Therefore, the approach that is used should be in line with the ones used in teaching English or any other language to its mother tongue speakers. Comparative methods should be used to help learners to realize that the Standard Kiswahili taught in school is not the same as their local varieties.

At the same time the areas of similarity between Standard Kiswahili and the coastal learner's dialects need to be made clear to them. Thus, teachers who teach them need to be familiar with the variety of Kiswahili spoken around the school. This would mean that as the teachers undergo teacher training they get exposed to the differences between teaching Kiswahili as a second language and teaching it as a mother tongue.

These dialects, just as the other mother tongues in Kenya, should be the language of education from classes 1 to 3 in the regions where they are spoken. Standard Kiswahili should not be assumed to be the mother tongue in such places just because it is Kiswahili. It is important for educators and all the other stakeholders to recognize and appreciate the dialectal differences that exist in Kiswahili and avoid treating it as one uniform language.

Using the example of Kalenjini varieties, it should be noted that BTL has spearheaded the writing of Bibles, e.g. the Bibles in Marakwet and Sabaot. This means that each of these is given recognition as a variety. In the same vein, each of the varieties of Kiswahili should be given recognition and should be used in texts.

#### **4. REASONS FOR THE UNFAIR TREATMENT**

After looking at the treatment of Kiswahili in various institutions in Kenya, we try to explore the possible reasons for its unfair treatment. This will help us at some point to suggest ways of improving the use and treatment of Kiswahili in education and the country at large. There are four main interrelated problems each of which is discussed below. The first one is lack of government commitment; the second one is that we are able to work well with English alone; the third one has to do with the economic value of English as compared to that of Kiswahili; and the fourth one is attitudinal.

The government of Kenya to date has not treated Kiswahili as a co-official language with English. If it had been given this status fully by the government then we would have expected to have received a directive from

the Ministry of Education requiring all important documents in our institutions to be in both English and Kiswahili. This would have come in with timelines within which this work should be completed. In addition, our teacher training colleges and all B.Ed. programmes in the country would have started preparing teachers to teach their teaching subjects in Kiswahili. All of them are still being trained to teach using English as a medium of instruction.

The second one has to do with the existence of English as an established medium of instruction in Kenya. The feeling could be that we have English and we are able to understand each other so there is no urgency in using Kiswahili. Official documents still exist in English only. The third one has to do with the value of Kiswahili as compared to that of English in Kenya. In the job market, Kiswahili has less economic value and prestige. For this reason, the government and Kenyans at large may not see the need for the quick change. This situation needs to be changed so that Kiswahili acquires more economic value and prestige. The fourth one, which is very closely related to the third reason, has to do with attitude. Decision makers in the education sector are themselves parents. Teachers, who are decision makers and implementers, are parents as well. Therefore, parents and teachers will definitely support the use of English more because of the perception that it is more useful and advantageous to know English than Kiswahili. In other words, English appears to be more relevant than Kiswahili.

## **5. KISWAHILI ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PREVAILING CIRCUMSTANCES**

Though the foregoing discussion on Kiswahili shows that it has undergone various kinds of mistreatment, there are achievements that can still be identified. The achievements of Kiswahili are propelled first and foremost by the fact that it is already codified, standardized and modernized as stated in section 2.2.2. This means that Kiswahili is very ready for use as a national and official language, and as a medium of education for its mother tongue speakers as well as second language speakers. These achievements are discussed in this section.

Since Kiswahili is now a compulsory and examinable subject in the 8.4.4. Education System in Kenya, most Kenyans who have undergone this system are able to use it with a fairly high degree of competence. This is the first achievement. The first group of students in this system of education is in their early 40s. In the earlier system of education, Kiswahili was not examinable at the end of primary school education and in secondary schools it was an optional subject. It was not amongst the compulsory ones like English and Mathematics.

The second achievement is related to the first. Since Kiswahili is compulsory, students who otherwise would not have known that they have the potential to use Kiswahili competently have this chance. This together



with the need for more Kiswahili teachers to handle it both in primary and secondary schools has led to high enrolment of Kiswahili students in the B.Ed. programme. At the University of Nairobi for example, the number of students enrolled for Kiswahili in the B.Ed. programme is almost the same as that of English.

The third one is seen in the effort made by Kiswahili scholars. There is a lot of effort by Kiswahili scholars in publishing in Kiswahili. They publish fiction, academic books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and book chapters in Kiswahili. At the University of Nairobi, most of these scholars are in the Department of Kiswahili.

Moreover, at the University of Nairobi, and we suspect that this is or will soon be the trend in other universities in Kenya, some sections or departments are getting individual lecturers from the Department of Kiswahili to translate documents written in English into Kiswahili. This process is still a bit slow, though all those who are doing it are responding to the need to give Kiswahili the status of an official language in reality. This is the fourth achievement.

In some institutions of higher learning, a good grade in either Kiswahili or English is a requirement for admission. In such institutions, Kiswahili is accepted as an important language in Kenya. This is the fifth achievement. However, even though a good grade in Kiswahili may be necessary for entry into such programmes, it is not used beyond that. In other words, Kiswahili is not used as a medium of instruction.

The last achievement identified in this paper relates to the media. Many media houses try to air more of their programmes in Kiswahili than in English. Citizen TV, for example, does a lot of broadcasting in Kiswahili. Many young journalists are involved in this and it shows that they must have gained from the Kiswahili classes they had in the 8.4.4. system of education. This shows that the number of Kenyans who are able to speak Kiswahili competently is growing.

## **6. SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING THE USE OF KISWAHILI**

As the old saying goes, charity begins at home. The University of Nairobi has highly trained scholars and it is our belief that this is the situation in other universities in Kenya. In our view, UON's Department of Kiswahili should be ready to help other UON departments to translate their documents into Kiswahili. This department could also organize in-service and certificate courses for university staff to improve their levels of proficiency in Kiswahili. The government through the commission for higher education should set aside funds for this purpose. The department itself is also capable of raising funds towards this end. All the lecturers in this department are at least bilingual if not multilingual. Most of them engage in translation and

interpretation activities. They are actually trained to do this.

The biggest problem facing Kiswahili is lack of full implementation of language policy at various levels, which has affected the use and status of Kiswahili in Kenya's education system. As already noted in sections 2.2.2 and 5, Kiswahili is already a modernized language. It is therefore ready for use as a medium of instruction even at higher levels of education. If we do not try to use it, we cannot gauge how well prepared it is and, as Pierre Alexandre (1963: 21), cited in Mazrui and Mazrui 1995, p. 26, notes, it is wrong to state that an African language cannot be used in the teaching of science and technology. He goes on to state that their syntactic structures would also not be a problem.

As we have seen earlier, from the time of independence, English and not Kiswahili had already taken the lead as a medium of instruction at all levels of education. Though Kiswahili has now become a compulsory and examinable subject for almost 25 years, it is still hampered by the colonial language legacy we inherited. If Kiswahili is truly an official language some classes should be taught through and through in Kiswahili, otherwise we need to accept that it is only a national language and Kenyans are incapable of using it as an official language.

Research, both extensive and in depth, needs to be carried out in and on Kiswahili, just as is done with regard to the other big languages in the world, so that we are able to get any type of information that is required for the language to be taught effectively. More Kiswahili teachers and scholars need to be trained to help to propel its use to fit its status as an official language. This will ensure that there is no shortage of personnel or scholars when Kiswahili experts are needed. We have observed earlier that in Kenya's education system, Kiswahili and English are not given the same treatment. They should be accorded equal treatment in all sectors as equal languages in Kenya's official communication. In schools and colleges they should be allocated the same number of hours. This should happen without lowering the standard of English because at the moment there is public outcry that the standards of English proficiency in schools in Kenya have fallen.

The Language committee proposed in the Languages of Kenya Bill needs to have a subcommittee dealing with issues related to Kiswahili as an official language and a mother tongue in Kenya. The people entrusted with this task should strive to make Kiswahili more market oriented and increase the economic value of the language by making competence in Kiswahili a requirement for certain jobs and positions.

County Education officers should assist in ensuring that the schools in their areas have the right books in Standard Kiswahili in order to reduce the influence of ethnic mother tongues and the various Swahili dialects on Standard Kiswahili (as spoken in different regions). The county parliaments could also use Kiswahili for some of their debates apart from English and the

regional or community languages. This is one way of ensuring that it is operating as an official language in all the counties in Kenya.

The government needs to be fully involved in the implementation of all these suggestions. As stated by Wolff (2012), quoted in Oduor (2013: 241), the Ministry of Education has the role of ensuring that proposals concerning the use of mother tongues in education are implemented as they should. Kiswahili is an official language as well as a mother tongue in Kenya. The government cannot afford to ignore the need to use it as an official language in the country. If the government does not assist, Kiswahili may remain where it is without much progress.

Apart from getting a commitment from the government to support the use of Kiswahili, Kenyans need a change of attitude. Without that, all the suggestions made in this paper cannot work. Kenyans who hold a negative attitude towards Kiswahili need to be helped to change such attitudes.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This paper has discussed the legal and policy positions regarding the Kiswahili language in the Kenyan society in general and, in particular, its role in the education system. The paper has also examined the available constitutional and policy guidelines over the colonial period in Kenya, and what has happened since independence. It has also discussed the treatment of Kiswahili in some of the recent legal documents. All of them recognize Kiswahili as a national and official language in Kenya. It evaluates the policies and practices in education that seem to favour English, arguing that Kiswahili does not get a fair treatment given its status as a co-official language in relation to English, and its unique status as the only national language of Kenya. The paper also states that Kiswahili is not one uniform language. It has mother tongue varieties, one of which is the form chosen to be the standard. All these varieties, which serve various purposes in the lives of Kenyans, need recognition.

An attempt is made to explain why Kiswahili is given an unfair treatment. The four reasons identified are lack of government commitment, the existence of English as an established medium of instruction in Kenya, the value of Kiswahili as compared to that of English, and the attitude of Kenyans. Despite all these bottlenecks, there are a number of achievements made in the use of Kiswahili. Some of them include the use of Kiswahili with a fairly high degree of competence by 8.4.4. graduates, the high enrolment of Kiswahili students in the B.Ed. programme at the University of Nairobi, the increase in publications in Kiswahili, etc. The paper has ended by giving suggestions for increasing the use of Kiswahili. Some of them are the need for Kiswahili scholars in our universities to translate documents into Kiswahili, organize in-service and certificate courses for university staff to improve

their levels of proficiency in Kiswahili and fundraise with the help of the government to sponsor such activities. Other suggestions include increased research on Kiswahili as a language and the setting up of a language committee to deal with language issues, etc.

The underlying argument in the paper is that Kiswahili, as an indigenous language, is a mother tongue to many Kenyans and deserves promotion to attain its rightful status as an indigenous language that can perform its national and international functions as one of the important languages of the world today. It takes the argument beyond the role of a mother-tongue as a language for sub-national identity and the corresponding communicative functions to the level where a mother-tongue provides the necessary communicative competence for citizens to be ambitious in national and international undertakings while speaking the same language at home, in the office, and in the world at large.

All in all, Kenyans need to work together to encourage the use of Kiswahili, which seems to be Kenya's chosen super language. All of us, i.e. the government, scholars, teachers, parents, students and all the other citizens are needed in order to succeed in practically giving Kiswahili its status as the national language, the official language and a mother tongue in Kenya.

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