

## STATE OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Article History</b> Received: April 2024 Revised: May 2024 Published: July 2024	<i>African languages have long been marginalized and underrepresented in higher education curricula, in Africa and globally. However, there is a growing recognition of the significance of African languages in academic settings, particularly as a means of preserving and promoting cultural heritage and facilitating communication and knowledge transfer among diverse communities. Studies have shown that language plays a critical role in shaping individuals' identities and their ability to access and engage with education. Therefore, there is a dire need for inclusion of African languages in higher education curricula to promote cultural diversity and equity in education. The use of African languages can enhance the relevance and impact of academic research and facilitate greater community participation in educational programmes. This article critically analyses the status of teaching and learning African languages in 2 institutions of higher education in Kenya and South Africa. It adopted a qualitative methodology and comparative case study as a design. It generated data through documents analysis. The study revealed that the two countries are not at the same level in implementing African languages in their curriculum. Whereas universities in South Africa have African languages Programmes, the Universities in Kenya have no such programmes. Moreover, there are several challenges, including lack of resources and infrastructure to support language instruction and research, as well as a need for greater support for African languages in academic institutions. This study, concludes that the significance of African languages in higher education curriculum cannot be overstated. By promoting linguistic diversity, cultural heritage, and enhancing the relevance and impact of academic research, the inclusion of African languages in higher education curricula can contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge and equity in education.</i>
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### INTRODUCTION

A lot of research and recommendations have been presented that support the teaching of African languages in schools including, Linguistic Rights, Psychological development, Cultural and Linguistic endangerment or loss, educational equity, Economics, Labour Force Participation and Civil Society sustainability. Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal supports the reduction of disparities and inequities in education, both in terms of access and quality. Universities being the centre of research and dissemination of knowledge are supposed to be in the forefront of teaching African languages

with the aim of achieving these recommendations. Teaching African languages in universities if implemented or enhanced could trickle down to lower levels and contribute to getting human resources for the primary teacher colleges. Moreover, teaching of African languages has been embraced globally in Europe, America and by the United Nations. This article explores the curricula of two universities in Kenya and South Africa with aim of examining the status of teaching African languages in these institutions. The following research questions are addressed: what is the state of teaching and learning African languages in Higher Education Institutions in Kenya and South Africa? What is the level of commitment to teaching and learning African languages by the two countries? What kind of training in mother-tongue education do the two countries offer? What teaching materials and resources exist for teaching African languages in the two countries? What challenges face the teaching and learning of African languages in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)? What does the literature say about the attitudes of users and stakeholders to Mother-tongue education in the two countries?

### **Mother-Tongue in Education**

Literature is replete with evidence of the benefits of using mother languages in education, like studies by Wa Mberia (2016), Muthwii (2002), Cummins (2000), and Baker (2001). Mother tongue, also known as indigenous language, is the first language one learns as a baby, the language one grows up knowing and using. In most multilingual contexts, besides their mother tongue, they acquire one or two more languages. Multilingual contexts refer to situations where more than two languages are used. In this article, the mother tongue is defined as the language the child feels most comfortable and familiar with. Mother tongue education (MTE) is beneficial to the child's progress and development in school. MTE programmes use the learner's first language (L1) to teach reading and writing skills along with academic content (Uwezo, 2015). It is indicated that, "knowledge and skills gained in the mother tongue can transfer across languages and multilingual children perform well at school when the school teaches the mother tongue effectively" (Tembe & Norton, 2008).

Studies have also proven that children, who first learn in their first language and for a longer period, understand concepts better even when such concepts are taught later in a second language. Hence, Cummins (1981), one of the advocates of mother-tongue-based bilingual learning, maintains that bilingual learners ought to be supported to make use of their mother tongue to attain new knowledge. The connection between language and learning is driven by the fact that students go into a learning process when already they know their first language with its conventional linguistic and theoretical knowledge. The execution of MTE in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) remains a challenge across Africa. The mistaken beliefs and negative attitude concerning MTE are essentially as result of many African countries, allowing foreign languages to dominate instruction instead of a fully applied MTE. For instance, English has been elevated and used to the disadvantage of African languages in Kenya and South Africa.

In Kenya and South Africa, HEIs are characterized by multilingualism, linguistic and cultural diversity in terms of student population. Yet, a quick survey of African Universities' curricula shows that universities have not embraced instruction using African languages. English is the default language of instruction. This situation continues despite the benefits, among them, facilitating second language learning, increasing additive bilingualism and continuous cognitive growth. No wonder, in South Africa, it has been a major concern that large numbers of students are academically unsuccessful (Alexander, 2013). The right of students to instruction in the language of their choice, where it is practicable (Constitution, RSA 1996) should not be ignored. Almost all the students in African universities are not first-language English speakers and Kenyan and South African universities need to manage language diversity in a functional manner. This article addresses the state of and the

possibility of implementing African languages in curricula in HEIs and lays bare the situation of the inordinate usage of English in Kenya and South Africa. It brings in a historical perspective and proposes a framework for the development and boosting of African languages inclusion in higher education curricula and pedagogy of African languages as a prelude to the development of viable language policies.

### **Dominance of non-mother tongue education**

Education systems favour using ‘global’ languages instead of national and mother tongues for instruction; usually, the attending colonial language, and many times, an international language, like English or French; which most learners do not speak at home. This is based on the belief that certain internationally ‘important’ languages give learners an edge over others in later life. As much as global languages are important in curriculum delivery and content learning, mother tongues need to be given their respective place in the same. UNESCO (2023), in its ten-year action plan draws the world’s attention to the “critical loss of indigenous languages and the need to preserve, revitalize and celebrate them” (Indigenous Languages Decade, 2022-2032). Hence, the need of emphasizing integration of mother tongues in HEI curricula.

### **Benefits of Using and Teaching Mother-tongue in Higher Education**

While discussing the role of indigenous African Languages in higher education where language plays very high functions, the extent to which these languages can be essential and valuable for socio-cultural, cognitive and economic benefit is considered, especially for the benefit of those speaking them as primary languages (Alexander, 2013). Mother tongue is therefore, valuable in higher education due to several reasons.

#### ***Socio-cultural, cognitive and economic value of a language.***

Socio-cultural value is the worth of the language as a manifestation of identity, culture and beliefs of its speakers while cognitive value is the advantage the language offers for its speakers to be able to be the producers and consumers of knowledge in the process of learning. Therefore, in learning students are not just consumers but producers of knowledge. Economic value refers to the extent to which language makes it easier to get a job, and to participate in production in the labour market. Higher education plays a key role in this regard, and this perception of value for languages is an indication of the socio-economic position of its speakers (Alexander, 2013). It would therefore be commendable that graduates of higher education institutions produce new knowledge in the courses they study and in their African languages.

#### ***Mother tongue is vital in framing the thinking and emotions of people.***

Fluency in one’s mother tongue connects one to his culture, ensures improved cognitive development and supports the learning of other languages. In order to reduce language death of most African languages, language policies must take account of mother-tongue teaching and learning at HEIs. This is because the adults at HEIs should be trail blazers, role models and propagators of mother tongue use and growth. Models of education which disregard their indigenous languages in HEIs can be unproductive, ineffective, and ultimately, have an undesirable effect on citizens’ growth and development.

#### ***Developing personal and cultural identity***

Mother language cultivates a personal and cultural identity. Not only does knowledge of the first language motivate one’s confidence but also builds awareness of their distinct and cultural identity developing the base of immediate association with family, society, culture, and identity. Its strong footing makes it easy to accept oneself through an appreciation of the social foundation and character in the simple and natural manner.

### ***Stronger connection with culture and development of solid family bonds***

Mother tongue helps boost one's confidence and creates awareness in their minds and develop cultural identity. It has a positive impact in defining personality. However, the medium of instruction which is English, in the case of Kenya and South Africa, encourages families to converse in their second language. Hence, when a person grows up with specific stress on communicating in a language different from their mother tongue, the result is a linguistic gap and emotional disconnect with family members.

## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

### ***A Sociolinguistic Context of Kenya and South Africa***

The indigenous languages spoken in Kenya range from 30 to 60 (Heine & Möhlig, 1980; Whitely, 1974; Mbaabu, 1996 and Gordon 2005 as quoted in Ngugi, 2010). Roughly, 66% of the Kenyan population speaks one of the many Bantu languages spoken in the country. About 30% speaks Nilotic and 3% speaks Cushitic languages and the rest of the population speaks languages of the Indian sub-continent (Gorman, 1974). Although orthographies have been developed for many of the languages, written literature in them is scanty. Hardly any scholar engages in promoting the status and use of African languages or engaging in discourse on linguistic diversity and pedagogy in higher education in Kenya. These are some of the reasons Kenya has not progressed in using and teaching in African Languages in the schools and universities.

In South Africa, African languages have a rich and diverse history deeply rooted in the country's indigenous communities. Prior to colonization, hundreds of African languages were spoken across the region, representing the linguistic diversity of various ethnic groups (Makalela, 2020). These languages played a crucial role in communication, cultural expression, and identity formation within local communities (Roberge, 2021). The arrival of European colonizers, particularly the British and Dutch, brought about significant language shifts and imbalances. Colonial powers imposed their languages as dominant means of communication, administration, and education, leading to the marginalization of African languages (Motsomi, 2021). English and Afrikaans became the languages of power and privilege, while African languages were often stigmatized and devalued (Siegrühn & Heugh, 2022). The suppression of African languages resulted in limited access to education, economic opportunities, and cultural participation for those who spoke them (Rugege, 2022). The dominance of colonial languages perpetuated a divide between the elite who accessed English and Afrikaans education and the majority who spoke African languages (Makalela, 2020). In recent years, efforts have been made to promote use and development in various domains, including education, media, and public life. Language policies and frameworks have been established to redress historical imbalances and ensure the preservation and revitalization of African languages (Motsomi, 2021). Through research, language documentation initiatives, and community-driven language movements, there has been a renewed focus on the significance of African languages (Rugege, 2022). Scholars and language practitioners are actively engaged in promoting the status and use of African languages, contributing to the broader discourse on linguistic diversity and social justice in South Africa (Makalela, 2020).

### ***Constitutional Context in Kenya and South Africa***

When the British colonized Kenya, they formulated the policy of Kiswahili and other indigenous languages as Language of instruction in lower primary school classes (Colony Protectorate of Kenya, 1953). There were three separate education systems, that is, for Africans, Europeans and Indians (Ominde, 1964. Gachathi, 1976). The African education system had the lowest status in terms of quality and content.). There were only four Indigenous Languages (Kiswahili, Dholuo, Kikuyu and Luhya) used to teach Kenyans in the

lower primary classes (Ngugi, 2012). This was done intentionally by the colonial administrators to keep Africans at the lowest level of the social classes.

After independence, the Ominde Commission (1964) recommended changes that were implemented; one of which was removing Kiswahili and indigenous languages as languages of instruction in lower primary and replacing them with English. The Commission relegated the indigenous languages to storytelling session in classes 1 to 3 (Kobia, 2017). English was considered as the language of prestige. The Gachathi Commission (1974) recommended the 8-4-4 system and made Kiswahili a compulsory subject in Primary and Secondary school. It also recommended use of mother tongues as languages of instruction in lower classes of Primary schools. However, many parents opposed this as they wanted their children to speak fluent English so as to be seen as educated and civilized (Babusa, 2010).

Chapter 2, Section 7(3), of the Kenyan Constitution (2010), stipulates that the state shall develop, promote and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya as a human and cultural right and the link between language and culture and to promote the development and use of indigenous languages. It recognises Kenyan Sign Language (KSL), Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities (Republic of Kenya, 2010). This is in line with the United Nation's affirmation of protecting and promoting diversity, cultural identity and linguistic diversity (Ngugi, 2012).

Considering the Kenyan language situation, it was envisaged that the 2010 constitution would act as a catalyst in the development, promotion, and protection of the indigenous languages through their inclusion in the curriculum. However, the government has failed to formulate relevant and political laws and policies to give life and meaning to the constitutional provisions of language matters (King'ei, 2012) The Kenya Constitution (2010) steers clear of use of mother languages in higher education. Kenya needs to apply her constitutional stipulations and declarations regarding indigenous languages to practical use at all levels of education.

In South Africa, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu have gained recognition as a result of the country's commitment to linguistic diversity and inclusivity. The Constitution, adopted in 1996, serves as a cornerstone for promoting and protecting the rights of all citizens, including language rights. It recognizes the linguistic diversity of the country and affirms the value of African languages as a crucial part of the nation's heritage and cultural identity. It acknowledges the need to develop and promote the use of African languages, along with other official languages to foster national unity and promote multilingualism (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This constitutional recognition has laid the foundation for language policies and legislation aimed at redressing historical imbalances and empowering African languages. The Language Policy for Higher Education (2002) was a significant milestone. Building upon the Language Policy Framework in Higher Education (2020) provides guidance and strategies for promoting language diversity and inclusivity in higher education. It emphasizes the importance of African languages in teaching, research, and community engagement, encouraging universities to develop language plans that prioritize the use and development of African languages (Language Policy Framework in Higher Education, 2020). The recognition of African languages in the Constitution has sparked conversations and initiatives that promote the use, preservation, and revitalization of these languages in everyday life, media, literature, and cultural expressions (Makalela, 2020). The constitution and policies have provided a framework for integrating African languages into academic programs and activities, enabling universities to create an inclusive and linguistically diverse learning environment (Roberge, 2021).

### ***Academic Context in Kenya and South Africa***

In Kenya, the exposition of the policies governing the use of indigenous languages in education goes back to the colonial period, specifically 1935, when the government directed rural schools to use mother tongues as media of instruction for the first 4 years of school (Mbaabu, 1996; Ngugi, 2012). The colonial policies accorded status to some African languages at the expense of others. Only four African languages; Kiswahili, Kikuyu, Dholuo and Luhya were used during the stages of early instruction. The African Union Cultural Charter for Africa Article 6 (2) states that member states should, “promote teaching in national languages in order to accelerate their economic, political and cultural development” (Musau, 1999). Yet, post-colonial Kenya’s language policy in education exhibits a trilingual arrangement in which indigenous languages, Kiswahili and English are pitted against each other. For a long time, the indigenous languages and Kiswahili have been assigned a very limited role even in adult education programmes. Kiswahili, which is an official and national language, is not used as a medium of instruction at any level in the education system except in teaching Kiswahili, (Ngugi, 2012).

Although African languages other than Kiswahili are not taught at the university level in any of the Kenyan universities, it is imperative to acknowledge efforts in research on and documentation of various indigenous languages in Kiswahili and Linguistic Departments at Kenyatta University and other universities (Ngugi & Wamalwa, 2014). This could be the starting point in having materials written in these languages. In addition, the Basic Education Curriculum Framework of 2016, (Republic of Kenya, 2016) has incorporated the teaching of Indigenous language activities in the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC). However, the criteria for determining the medium of instruction has been a nightmare. Lack of books and poor or no preparation of teachers to teach in their mother tongue has been a major challenge. Given this scenario, it can be observed that the Kenya’s position on mother language use and teaching in HEI is not yet addressed. This lack of commitment to upscaling the statements to HEIs level is a major challenge.

The history of African languages in South Africa has been shaped by various factors, including colonialism, language policies, and efforts towards linguistic empowerment. Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a growing recognition of African languages and efforts to promote their inclusion and usage in academia. Incorporating African languages in academic contexts can facilitate the decolonization of knowledge and contribute to a more inclusive and diverse educational system (Makalela, 2020). The Language Policy for Higher Education (2002) set the groundwork for integrating African languages into higher education institutions. It emphasized the importance of multilingualism and encouraged universities to develop language plans that prioritize use and development of African languages (Heugh & Siegrühn, 2021). The Language Policy Framework in Higher Education (2020) has provided guidance and strategies for promoting language diversity and inclusivity in academic settings (Sibanda, 2022). Scholars have also examined the challenges and lessons learned in integrating African languages into academic context. These challenges include limited resources for language development, a lack of qualified language practitioners, and the need for supportive language policies (Chikoko, 2021).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Trends in African languages integration in Multilingual Education in Kenya and South Africa***

Kenya is a multilingual society in nature with English, Kiswahili and over 60 African languages spoken. Sheng which is preferred by the young people over the years has evolved and it is widely used in Kenya. And as Kiswahili remains part of the curriculum, indigenous languages still remain optional. Though the policy states so, many parents prefer their

children to be taught in English and Kiswahili and not African languages which are assumed to have minimal benefit to the children. There is neglect of use of African Languages in curriculum. Adoption of Kiswahili language as a national and official language has not stopped English from being the most preferred and dominant language used in all the institutions in Kenya.

In 1967, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) which is now known as Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) began writing primary school textbooks in African languages and in 1968, the first book *Tujifunze Kusoma Kikwetu* was published as a series in 15 African languages (Mwaniki, 2014). The total series includes 22 African languages (Kibui, 2014). Currently, KICD, has Kiswahili, English and Kenyan Sign language, foreign languages: Arabic, French, German and Mandarin (KICD, 2020). Kiswahili is the only African language being taught at all levels. In the CBC, indigenous languages still remain optional. It is important to note that the KICD is not mandated to develop curriculum guidelines for HEIs. This therefore means that the onus to make decisions and pronouncements over use of and teaching of indigenous languages at HEIs lies with the HEIs themselves. The initiative is yet to start in the HEIs of developing the courses and the guidelines for approval by the Commission for University Education.

In Kenya, the policy on language of instruction is weak and does not cover HEIs education. Its implementation is nondescript and is inundated with many challenges. There is no Language in Education Policy in the HEIs, leaving students and staff to use English, Kiswahili and even Sheng. It is interesting to listen to conversation between a student and a lecturer as a student speaks in Sheng or Kiswahili and is reprimanded by the latter for addressing them in a “non-official language” Clearly, a language policy needs to be developed at HEIs. The same situation exists in Teacher Training Colleges whereby little effort is put on the importance of teaching and use of Indigenous Languages.

Literature consistently emphasizes the importance of multilingual education in South Africa, acknowledging that it is a critical aspect of promoting inclusivity, cultural preservation, and academic success. Language policy, teacher training, curriculum design, and community engagement is crucial for the effective implementation of multilingual education (Heugh and Siegrühn, 2021). Such a comprehensive approach ensures that the linguistic and cultural diversity of students is valued and incorporated into the education system. Ndlovu (2020) emphasizes that embracing linguistic and cultural diversity enhances the learning experience, encourages critical thinking, and prepares students for a globally interconnected world. Therefore, multilingual education in higher educational institutions provides opportunities for students to engage with a broader range of perspectives and knowledge systems. There is a need to move beyond the dominance of English in the South African education system and explore the integration of other languages (Rensburg, 2022). Effective teacher training programs that address the challenges and possibilities of multilingual education are crucial for building teachers' competencies and confidence in implementing multilingual approach. Effective policies that support multilingual education are crucial for addressing issues of language hierarchy, promoting the use of indigenous languages, and creating a more equitable educational landscape (Motsomi, 2020).

### ***Language Policy and Planning***

Language policy and planning play a pivotal role in shaping the integration of African languages into the curriculum in South Africa, promoting linguistic diversity, and fostering inclusive education (Leibowitz, 2022; Mncube, 2021; Heneveld & Heneveld, 2022; Prinsloo, 2022). As such, policies are essential for preserving linguistic diversity and revitalizing indigenous languages, empowering African languages, creating inclusive education systems, enhancing learning outcomes (Heugh, 2021; Makoni, 2022; Makalela, 2022), and promoting cultural understanding and social cohesion (Kamwangamalu, 2021; Rugege, 2021; Roberge,

2021). Consequently, recognizing the importance of African languages and implementing comprehensive language policies, South Africa can create an educational system that values and incorporates the linguistic and cultural heritage of its diverse population (Heugh, 2021; Makoni, 2022; Roberge, 2021). Policies empower indigenous languages by providing them with a rightful place in the curriculum, affirming cultural identity, and fostering a sense of pride and belonging (Makoni, 2022). By promoting the use of African languages as mediums of instruction, South Africa can improve comprehension, engagement, and overall academic achievement (Makalela, 2022). Language policy and planning that integrate African languages also foster cultural understanding and social cohesion (Kamwangamalu, 2021; Rugege, 2021). Thus, valuing and incorporating African languages into the curriculum, South Africa promotes intercultural dialogue and respect for diverse cultures (Kamwangamalu, 2021).

### ***Technology and African Languages Learning***

The role of digital technologies in promoting African languages have potential of revitalizing and preserving these endangered languages (Dwyer, 2020 and Makalela, 2020). Digital technologies can support pedagogical approaches, promote student engagement, and foster intercultural understanding (Janks, 2020). The potential of digital technologies in teaching and learning African languages is evident in a case study of Lubisi (2021), that investigated the potential of digital technologies in teaching Tsonga in South Africa. Digital tools can enhance language acquisition, provide interactive and authentic language materials, and facilitate personalized learning experiences (Lubisi, 2021). Their use enhances translanguaging practices in multilingual South African classrooms through facilitating communication, collaboration, and language integration among learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Reddy, 2021). Chikoko (2021) thinks teachers face various challenges, including inadequate resources, limited training, and linguistic diversity within classrooms. These challenges hinder the effective implementation of multilingual education and highlight the need for innovative approaches. Therefore, there is a need of training, support, and context-specific approaches to leverage the potential of digital technologies in African languages education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The qualitative research design using a comparative case study methodology was used. Qualitative research can be defined as the study of the nature of phenomena, including “their quality, different manifestations and the context in which they appear. Qualitative research generally includes data in form of words rather than numbers. It is was found appropriate for answering questions of why something is (not) observed. Data was collected from documents and literature from and about Kenya and South Africa.

### **Data Collection**

The qualitative methods of data collection used in this study were document study and literature review. Two universities, one in Kenya and one in South Africa were involved due to their similarities in terms of linguistic diversity. The two countries have a similar history of colonization: one by the British and the other by the Dutch respectively.

The document analyses included annual reports, guidelines, policy documents, of the two countries’: among them, constitutions, education policy papers, curricula, Commission Reports on Educational reports. Further, a review of research literature in the two countries on language-in-education policy was done for background information and possible implications of the provisions of the language policy at HEIs. Recent curriculum

developments were analysed as well as various policy papers, educational reforms, and political linguistics documents.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analysed qualitatively. An in-depth qualitative text analysis to uncover hidden patterns and themes was conducted. This enabled us to gain a deep understanding of the status of African languages teaching in African HEIs. Recurring themes, language, opinions and beliefs were isolated. The following themes were presented under the sub-topics: State of African Languages Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: level of commitment; training in mother-tongue education, teaching and learning materials and attitude, lack of ownerships and prestige. This is presented in the section below.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the results and main findings from the study. They are presented thematically addressing the following questions: what is the state of teaching and learning African languages in Higher Education Institutions in Kenya and South Africa? What is the level of commitment to teaching and learning African languages by the two countries? What kind of training in mother-tongue education do the two countries offer? What teaching materials and resources exist for teaching African languages in the two countries? What challenges face the teaching and learning of African languages in HEIs? What are the attitudes and preferences of users and stakeholders to Mother-tongue education in the two countries?

The results generally indicate that the two countries have had a fairly similar background and language history. They are both highly multilingual and the languages of instruction in their schools have been foreign, emanating from a history of colonization. Despite this shared background, results show that South Africa has made greater strides in teaching African languages not just in lower levels but also in HEIs. It is also clear from policy documents from both countries that there is more political goodwill by South Africa than by Kenya. There is a dearth of teaching and learning materials for African languages in HEIs in both countries and almost non-existent in Kenyan HEIs, except for Kiswahili. This goes alongside training of human resources for implementing teaching of African languages, not just in HEIs but also in lower levels, where there is no specific teacher preparation for the same. It is also clear that attitudes to MTE in both countries are varied. These are discussed below, separately for each country followed by a comparative analysis.

### **African Languages Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Kenya**

The survey established that the status of language policy in HEIs in Kenya does not exist and what is relied on is what exists in the Constitution of Kenya and from various education commissions. English is the main language of instruction across all the education programmes from the basic education, tertiary and university institutions. Kiswahili is taught as one of the official and second language but for only learners taking Swahili courses at HEIs. Little is done about other indigenous languages due to vocabulary challenges especially in this era of technology, innovation and industrialization. Little research exists about indigenous languages and where it exists its written in English apart from those in Kiswahili. Besides, there are no modules and courses developed to teach indigenous languages in Kenya apart from Swahili which is taught to only students taking Kiswahili as a subject. Many students prefer communicating in Kiswahili and Sheng. Indigenous languages are rarely used by young people on campus which is likely to disconnect them with culture and reality.

This marginalization of indigenous languages in HEIs does not only privilege English language, but it makes its learning difficult and divorced from utilizing by the local community. Instructors on the other hand seem to prefer English and Swahili and are

reluctant to introduce the indigenous languages though the learners maybe willing to learn if introduced.

According to the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2016), the rationale for English as Language of Instruction stems from its position as “the language of education, information, trade, diplomacy, and social networking”. Currently the KICD is working with 18 out of 85 identified Kenya languages and dialects on the basis of availability of established writing systems. So far, the KICD (2023) has developed a curriculum design for indigenous languages up to grade 10 and for Diploma in Primary Teacher Education and has embarked on grade 11. However, the content of the design is given in English language which is likely to lead to English taking the dominant role in education and erasing the unique linguistic and cultural identity of indigenous languages. In addition, by making indigenous languages optional or by forcing every Kenyan to not only learn English but devote most of their educational attention to it in the form of content and language courses, students are being shown, at the very least, that their indigenous language, culture, and identity are not important, and at worst erasing them.

The languages being taught in the Competency Based Curriculum in Kenya are Pokomo, ChiDuruma, Ki’Giriama, Ki’Taveta and Chi’Digo, Ki’Kamba, Somali, Ki’Borana, Gikuyu, Nandi, Dholuo, Maa, Lu’Bukusu and L’llogooli. Although this does not cover all the 60+ indigenous languages in Kenya, it is a positive indication that effort is being made by the relevant bodies to embrace Indigenous Languages.

The KICD is also developing textbooks and teachers’ guides for these languages in all the grades, hence promoting the status of Indigenous Languages in education. It is hoped that by 2029 when the first cohort of the CBC learners reach the universities, the teaching of the indigenous languages will be adopted as learning areas at university. The only African language that has gained momentum in the world of being taught at all levels of education is Kiswahili. Despite these efforts, African languages have not borne fruits; they have remained as options in lower levels of education.

There is fear among some stakeholders that if African languages are taught in the universities, it may bring ethnicity and divide the students. This is supported by the rise of students’ tribal societies and clubs in local universities in Kenya. This can be encouraged by showing that if several languages are taught in universities, it will bring diversity of different cultures and communities living together in peace and harmony as reflected in one of the goals of education in Kenya that is, to appreciate the diversity of different languages and culture. Lack of textbooks, storybooks and dictionaries is touted as the main reason affecting the teaching of African languages in Kenyan universities. This can be solved by encouraging University lecturers to develop materials for teaching of African languages at the university.

Most developed countries use their own first languages in education and official business. Like China uses Chinese, France uses French, and Germany uses German. It is only in Africa where the colonial languages are ranked higher than the African languages. This makes students learn some scientific and mathematical concepts that are taught only in foreign languages. This creates a barrier for them to understand the concepts early in life because of the language barrier one has to learn the foreign language as well try to learn the scientific and mathematical concepts at the same time. This may be the reason why African countries do not have inventors and innovators and only consume what has been invented from the Western countries. It is a high time, all universities in Africa started developing strategies of teaching African languages and be proud of their heritage and identity.

### ***Language Policy and Stakeholder Engagement***

Unfortunately, unlike in South Africa, interventions by Language organisations in Kenya such as the Multilingual Education Network (MLEN) and Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL) Kenya and SIL Africa Area do not have HEIs as their area of interest in

language development. Language activists such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o who champion the use of African languages as an issue of identity as well as learning and development do not pay much emphasis to HEIs.

The HEIs in Kenya ought to come up with a language policy that will provide requisite statutes and relevant resources that may make selected indigenous languages as languages of instruction. If adopted, the HEIs require awareness and sensitization for them to be embraced by all the stakeholders. The students should be at liberty to study and take units in indigenous languages and present their assignments, research projects/dissertations and take examinations using the languages. All the stakeholders in HEIs in Kenya should be conversant with the changes and realize the contribution of indigenous languages in an individual's growth and how learning in familiar language can lead to quality education as it is being embraced in basic education.

### **African Languages Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in South Africa**

South Africa has made significant efforts to address the African languages situation in higher education, aiming to promote linguistic diversity, exclusivity, curriculum transformation, knowledge production and cultural heritage. These efforts have been guided by various policies and initiatives, beginning with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which enshrines the right to use and develop African languages. Section 6 states that "everyone has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of their choice", while also recognizing the rights of linguistic and cultural communities to enjoy and develop their languages and cultures. Section 30 emphasizes the right to education in the language of one's choice, where reasonably practicable, and the importance of the government taking practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of historically marginalized languages.

#### ***Language Policy and Stakeholder Engagement***

One of the key policies in South Africa is the Language Policy for Higher Education (DHET, 2002), which recognizes the importance of African languages and seeks to promote their use and development in higher education institutions. This policy emphasizes the need to create an inclusive and multilingual learning environment, where African languages are valued alongside English and Afrikaans, the dominant languages of instruction. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) gazetted another policy which is the Language Policy Framework in Higher Education (LPHE 2020). The LPHE (2020) recognizes that effective integration of African languages requires collaboration among stakeholders. It encourages the development of language plans and the allocation of resources to support the teaching, learning, and use of African languages. It highlights the need for curriculum development that incorporates African languages, as well as the provision of language support services and resources for students and educators. The importance of research and scholarship in African languages to contribute to the growth and development of these languages in academic contexts is also emphasized. Fostering the research and scholarship should be policy based (Alexander, (2003), Heugh, (2013), Msila (2012), & Madiba (2010))

The DHET utilizes various organizations to promote and monitor the development and integration of African languages within the higher education sector. These organizations play a crucial role in supporting language initiatives, conducting research, and monitoring the implementation of language policies. The organizations include: Pan South African Language Board (PanSALBP, National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS, South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC), Language Research and Development Centre (LRDC), Higher Education

Language Committee (HELC) and The Southern African Development and Languages Resource Centre (SADiLAR).

### **A comparative analysis of African Languages Teaching and Learning in HEIs in Kenya and South Africa**

There are many issues that affect the status of indigenous languages in teaching and learning in higher education that if alleviated, multi-lingual education in HEIs would be promoted. The issues are:

#### ***Level of Commitment***

In Kenya, there is a limited and lack of commitment by the government to strengthen the teaching of African languages in higher education. The subject of language-in-education policy is not discussed in higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has not engaged key stakeholders in education in decision-making. There is a lack of community-based research and collaboration between linguists, researchers, educationalists and the community poses a challenge during the implementation. On the other hand, South Africa has made a lot strides through creation of many indigenous languages in HEIs.

#### ***Training in Mother Tongue Education***

A lack of educators trained in MT teaching methodologies is a concern among key stakeholders. Kenya lacks educators with any training not just African languages but also in L1 methodology to teach MTs and in MT. Kenya still associates MTs with the low esteem that characterizes African languages contrary to foreign languages. The Kenyan system fails to recognize and equip higher education educators with specialist knowledge in and of indigenous languages. Although South Africa has made a lot of strides in integrating African Languages in the curriculum at all levels of education, they still experience the challenge of lack of training in the methodology. Without specific formal training on multilingual strategies and practices, MTE instruction is likely to be ineffective (Benson, 2004).

#### ***Teaching/Learning Materials***

In Kenya, universities lack instructional materials that needs to be addressed in order for local languages in higher education to be embraced. Many African languages in Kenya do not have an orthography. The situation is the same in South Africa although the situation is relatively better, given the number of Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations that have stood up strongly to support indigenous language development. In South Africa producing visually appealing, high-quality materials in the L1 and/or L1 plus other languages is motivational and raises the status of the L1 (Bloch, 2002).

Attempts to provide instructional materials in local languages in basic education in both countries have been challenging because of supremacy feelings, language attitudes, the influence of donor interests, strong economic interests from overseas publishing companies and global power relations (Warungi, 2009). Most donations of books and related materials are in English and any other foreign languages, making it difficult for Kenya to focus on local language development. The contrary is the case with foreign faith-based organizations (FBOs), which have played a different role in the promotion of MTE in Africa. For instance, their desire to deliver God's word in the language of the people, FBOs have been proactive in the production of religious literature like the Bible Translation and Literacy in African languages and the use of these languages in their activities. Multilingualism in Kenya also, makes it difficult and expensive to produce instructional materials in all the languages. In Kenya, there is no policy structure explicitly stating exactly which languages would be taught.

### ***Attitude, lack of ownership and prestige***

Kenya has a problem with educators, education leaders, teachers, and parents who are critical of and defiant towards the MTE policy because of their negative perceptions of African indigenous languages unlike South Africa where there is good will from most stakeholders. Such negative attitudes are a result of the high status that is accorded to English both in the Kenyan Constitution and the language in education policy. English remains a language of instruction and examinations for all subjects except Kiswahili and foreign languages in higher grades. Consequently, in both countries, English continues to be the chief screening determinant as to who accesses higher education, jobs and other social mobility mechanisms. These observations, as earlier observed, not true because countries have been able to keep up to date with technological development yet they have not resorted to using in global languages. It is therefore possible for Africa, and Kenya in particular, to attain greater socio-economic mileage by making use of its indigenous languages if proper implementation strategies in MTE are adopted.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Promotion of multi-lingual education in HEIs is crucial and this article proposes some implementation strategies which could be adopted in Kenya and South Africa. The promotion of literacy and fluency in indigenous languages should create a positive paradigm shift that would facilitate a change in the social, intellectual and psychological attitudes that parents, teachers and learners have towards their cultural heritage. This can be achieved by empowering African languages through intellectualisation so that the languages are used in various domains in society. One way the governments can use to improve indigenous language status is by increasing its functional uses (Hornberger, 2006). The governments of Kenya and South Africa could adopt a policy that makes local languages function beyond the home and as LoI. Indigenous languages can begin to be viewed as a valuable resource and thrive alongside global languages. There is a need for enhanced nationwide campaigns towards attitude change. This could be achieved now that Kenya and South Africa enjoy media broadcasts in mother tongues on African languages FM radio stations. Such campaigns could also be sustained by the government and language activists.

Influential pedagogical zones should be established as a way of providing linguists and educators with platforms for experience sharing. National governments could partner with universities that have best practices in financing of training and development of Schools and Departments of African Languages. Training should be in languages and in the teaching of the same. This will enable the building of networks among multilingual teachers and educators. Developments in the proposed African Languages Schools, University lecturers' training curriculum should be made to prioritize L1 methodology and use of mother tongues as LoI. Quality MTE could only be achieved by acquiring an adequate pool of teachers and educators. Lecturers would then need to be well trained, motivated and supported in order to implement MTE policy in HEIs.

Investment of time and resources, along with a commitment to collaboration between linguists, educators, teachers and members of the community, is required to prepare L1 instructional materials for schools and universities. To address the challenge of multilingualism and its cost implications for MTE, the orthographies of core indigenous languages should be harmonised to make it possible, to produce learning materials at reduced costs. Like Rubagumya (2009, 19) reports that Uganda has transcribed a language called Runyakitara, which standardises four related languages: Runyankore, Rukiga, Runyoro and Rutooro, which are also closely related to Kihaya and Kinyambo spoken in Tanzania, presenting the chance for cross-border language development. The same idea could be borrowed by Kenya where linguists can collaborate with policy makers to harmonise

languages that have a grammatical affinity in order to save on the cost of instructional materials.

The HEIs in both countries ought to come up with a language policy that will provide requisite statutes and relevant resources that may make selected indigenous languages as languages of instruction. If adopted, the HEIs require awareness and sensitization for them to be embraced by all the stakeholders. The students should be at liberty to study and take units in indigenous languages and present their assignments, research projects/dissertations and take examinations using the languages. All the stakeholders in HEIs in Kenya and South Africa should be conversant with the changes and realize the contribution of indigenous languages in an individual's growth and how learning in familiar language can lead to quality education as it is being embraced in basic education. Lastly, it can be argued that Science and technology are realms in which indigenous languages have not yet occupied a meaningful place. However, there is a great potential for digital technology to contribute to language documentation, revitalization, and promotion of the language. This would ensure greater research for wider integration.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper supports the argument that teaching African languages mother tongue as a subject and using mother tongues as the Language of Instruction in higher education is a plausible idea and is a way to preserve the African cultural heritage. This conclusion is clearly and coherently presented in a manner that addresses the key findings and insight of the paper.

The foregoing discussion has shown that efforts in teaching and learning of African languages in higher education in Kenya and South Africa needs to be jump started, augmented, and intensified respectively. This highlights the need for the two governments, especially Kenya, to provide greater support for its language policy. To do this adequately, the policy challenges that are likely to face the implementation process of MTE in higher education must be addressed. From the study, several observations can be made: as universities continue training teachers, the following questions therefore arise: how are the universities implementing language provisions as spelt out in the Constitution? What languages are taught in these universities? Is equal attention given to all the languages in terms of prominence, resourcing, preparations, teaching and assessment? These are questions that this article has strived to answer.

Kenyan and South African policy makers have produced language policies entrenched in the Constitution, but the policies have not been supported by implementation strategies that take care of challenges like teacher training, the cost and availability of instructional materials, change of attitudes of society, teachers and learners, teacher shortages, multilingualism and a lack of recognition. The article calls for the need to empower African languages through intellectualization of African languages in universities and colleges. To overcome the challenges that impede the implementation of MTE policy, a firm commitment, informed planning and adequate funding by national governments are key.

The Constitutions give guidance on language policy and recognize language diversity that characterizes a people. In this regard, the Constitutions should mandate the governments to put in place affirmative action programmes designed to ensure African languages are recognized and integrated in higher education curricula. The argument advanced in this article is that higher education institutions are best placed to drive this agenda because their mandate is to train, research and advise policy makers based on research findings.

The positive outcomes of a mother tongue instruction policy depend on people's attitudes towards the first language and English second language. Also to understand how attitudes towards a language develop, it was found necessary to consider the social and political history of the two countries, since such historical forces play a significant role. This

study found that the attitudes of administrators, instructors and trainees towards the languages.

It is also concluded that teaching and learning African languages in HEIs in both countries suffers many challenges. This is in line with Foley's (2015) findings where he revealed that mother-tongue education has been met with difficulty when it comes to implementation. Participants mentioned challenges such as language development, teacher training, society attitudes, lack of resources and curriculum development. It is important to note that languages do not develop incidentally, they require planning. In the next section, we make recommendations for policy and further research.

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