

LANGUAGE ISSUE AND GLOBAL EDUCATION: A DILEMMA TO KENYA

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Abstract

Most multilingual African nations face challenges in the attempt to participate in global education. One of the major challenges is that of language, which is central in global education. This paper aims at making explicit the dilemma that faces Kenya with regard to language and global education. It is based on the premise that most multilingual nations find themselves at cross roads as they try to participate in global education. A descriptive research design has been used in the study, with some statistical analyses that are based on the Kenyan situation. The critical social theory, whose focus is on unearthing the changing power relationships with a view to offering a voice to the 'unheard' and challenging inequalities in the society, has been used. Findings show that Kenya does not fit in the global society because of the incompetence of most of her population in the use of the preferred global linguistic system. which only favors the few that are socially privileged. The paper recommends that multilingual African nations such as Kenya put emphasis on the provision of the 'right' global linguistic system to all if these nations are to fully participate in global education. Thus, it should not just be about the quantity but the quality of what is offered. I also recommend that Kenya concentrates on improving and maintaining her own social, cultural, economic and political structures even as she seeks to participate globally. It is hoped that recommendations made in this paper will be of benefit to language planners and policy makers in multilingual African nations.

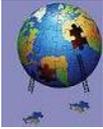
Key Terms: Globalization, global language, Global Education, Dilemma, multilingual.

Introduction

Global education involves learning concepts and skills that are necessary for one to function in a world that is increasingly interconnected and multicultural. It involves learning about problems and issues that cut across national boundaries and about interconnectness of systems such as, ecological, cultural, economic, political and technological. In other words, global education is an education that goes beyond the borders, an education whose products are meant to participate in the global market. This is an education that is pegged on collaborations between and among nations that encourage the exchange of goods, services, knowledge and information as well as skilled labor across nations depending on the demands of the global market. Products of a global education are expected to fit in an information based society.

According to the Council of Europe's North-South Centre, global education is an education that opens people's eyes and minds to realities of the world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, and human rights for all. Similarly, global education enables the unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirming of social justice and human rights, building peace and actions for a sustainable future in different times and places (Global perspective, 2008).

In some way, many African Nations participate in global education. For instance, over the years, Kenya as a nation has participated in different global education fora, with the aim of improving



on her education standards. Such include, being a member of Education for all working group (EFA), whose aim is to mobilize financial, technical and political support towards the achievement of the EFA goals. She is also a member of the Southern-Eastern Consortium for monitoring education quality, whose aim is to share experiences and expertise in developing capacities of education planners to apply scientific methods. Likewise, she belongs to the International Bureau of Education (IBE), whose aim is to contribute to the attainment of quality in education for all. She is also a member of UNESCO, among other global education fora. Basically, Kenya's global participation in international education bodies is meant to boost her education quality. However as things stand, this has not been fully realized; partly because of the language of instruction that is used.

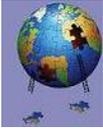
Global education demands involvement beyond national borders. Consequently, the role of a 'global' language is very important. Currently, dominant languages are the ones that are predominantly used for instruction in most multilingual African nations, especially those that are open to other societies; none and if any, very few of the indigenous languages functions in such a capacity. As a result, increased dependency instead of interdependence has become characteristic of global education.

In this paper I argue that global education has never been about equal participation on the global scene but about dominance and influence by a few nations. I also argue that the language(s) of global participation has/have disadvantaged many multilingual African nations, who have ended up not fully benefitting from the advantages that have come with global education and globalization in general. I suggest in this paper that the best that multilingual African nations such as Kenya can do with regard to global education is to offer the 'right global' linguistic system equitably to its citizens in order to fit in as they work towards maintaining their own social, cultural, economic and political structures. This is because as it is, they are neither in nor out; they are at cross-roads.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the critical social theory; a theory that focuses on unearthing the changing power relationships with a view to challenging inequality and offering a voice to the less powerful. According to Capper, Hanson and Hurlman (1994: 346), "critical social theory calls into question power relationships that exists in society and vies them within social, historical and economic context." It is a theory that examines and critiques societal practices with a view of championing for equality against dominance or dependence. It is a theory that advocates for human emancipation.

Critical social theory is used in this paper to show how powerful nations use their equally powerful languages in the global society to dominate and influence the less dominant nations in areas of linguistic and cultural rights. Given that most native languages in multilingual African nations are not as open and do not carry prestige, they end up being relegated to other functions rather than that of communication in global education. This has put its users in a state of continuous dependency as well as partial participation in global education, which is pegged on a 'global' linguistic system. The theory is also used to critique the Kenyan society and by extension most multilingual African societies for championing inequality through selective provision of the 'right' language of education, a practice that has led to unequal relationships between members of the society; with one group being dominant over the other. Based on this theory, I propose that there is need for multilingual nations to emancipate themselves by preserving their own structures as they make effort to fit into the global society; otherwise as it is, they are in a dilemma.



Discussion

Language Issue, a Dilemma

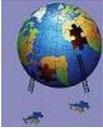
Language is at the nerve centre of globalization, without which it is impossible to have a global society, whose existence is hinged on the possibility of interaction across the globe; whether at the cultural, social, economic or political scene. The success of any debate at global level is determined by the linguistic code that is used, which in turn determine who becomes a participant and a spectator. The issue of language in a global society becomes even more complex in multilingual societies because of the diversified linguistic situation. In such contexts, the type of language that is chosen for global interaction and the competence of the citizens in the same, determine how far the nation participates at the global level.

It is a fact that global education has opened people's eyes and minds to realities of the world. It is also a fact that global education has equipped products of the same who are able to function globally. However, with regard to justice and human rights, the opposite is true and this is in contradiction to one of the aims of global education, which is to have a shared global ethics that is used to govern socio-economic decision making. As it is, global education has brought with it increased linguistic and cultural imperialism with developed nations transferring their language and culture to the developing and the underdeveloped nations. This has meant less appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity. Given that language and culture are part of the basic human rights; the contravention of this means that the basic human right is compromised in the attempt to enhance global education system. With regard to the same, Waters (1995: 3) says; that, "Globalization is a direct consequence of the expansion of European cultures across the world via settlement, administration and cultural mimeses". As a result of this the affected citizens have not been able to fully participate and benefit from globalization. In other words, their social, cultural, economic, technological and political position at the global scene is a disadvantage to them.

The multilingual nature of most African nations has forced them to adapt foreign languages as media of instruction in their education system. This is seen as the best option since besides being foreign, such languages are neutral to all and hence their use does not disadvantage any. Apart these languages being used as media of instruction at the national level, the same have been found 'suitable' in global education and since global education demands that a global language be used, they are the ones that end up taking this function. In the attempt to use the preferred global language in education, most multilingual African nations have found it difficult to completely fit into the global system.

Currently, education policies in most multilingual African nations are designed to favor foreign languages. The hope is that the African child will grow to engage in the global market as their language skill develops. However, the challenge is with regard to the teaching of these languages that is inadequate. This inadequacy makes it impossible for products of this education to competently engage in the global language. In the long run, their participation at both national and global level becomes dismal.

Global education is quite expensive and very few African nations can comfortably afford. For instance in Kenya, being educated is having a formal western education that is primarily in English, which happens to be the global language. Traditional education that is offered via indigenous languages is no longer regarded. Given the economic status of the nation, it is only those that are socio-economically advantaged that can afford such an education and the language (that is, the 'right' language) that comes with it. Those that attempt and yet lack the capacity



(linguistic or otherwise), end up either dropping out of school or not succeeding at all. Consequently, very few have access to higher education, translating into very few being able to fully participate in the development of the nation. This is despite the fact that there has been an upward trend with the transition rate for both boys and girls from primary to secondary school having increased from 66.8% in 2009 to 76.6% in 2012 (MoEST, 2015: 9). The progression rate is much lower from secondary to tertiary level. With such a scenario, not many Kenyans are able to fully participate on the global educational scene. This is in contradiction to Kenya's vision 2030, where focus is on having a link between the quality of education at all levels of learning and the labor market, the need to create entrepreneurial skills competence and strong public and private sector partnership.

Global education is meant to provide students with opportunities to develop knowledge and also understand the existing contentious issues; among them being culture and language. Given what is happening in global education, one is tempted to ask what knowledge and understanding this entails. The reality is that the demands of global education have led to the deterioration of cultures and languages in multilingual African nations. Instead of unity and interdependence among players, global education has increased the rate of dependence of weaker nations on those that are socially, economically, technologically and politically strong. For instance, with regard to knowledge creation, this is mainly done by dominant nations; and the same knowledge is acquired by the less developed nations through foreign linguistic systems of communication. This poses a challenge to the recipients who are unable to interpret and maximally utilize such knowledge. Consequently, the receptive level is quite low. To make matters worse, most of those who acquire this knowledge through a formal education (which in most African nations is synonymous to getting an education in a foreign language) end up transferring their skills to the already developed nations. The asymmetrical relationship between players in global education makes it difficult for most multilingual nation to benefit from the advantages that come with such an education.

Knowledge is very important in the development of a nation and it becomes even more relevant when it is natively created and transmitted using one's native language. This is because indigenous and/ or contextualized knowledge prepares learners to fit into their society better; which in turn positively contribute towards its development. It is against this backdrop that "the Kenya vision 2030 envisions that Kenya will provide globally competitive quality education, training, and research to her citizens for national development as well as individual development (MoEST 2015: 106). Despite this, what is in the offing in education is not sufficient enough to ensure that the envisioned objective is achieved. There is need for Kenya to come up with a strategy that that will enable her contextualize foreign knowledge that is received and also a strategy that will make it possible for her to use languages that are familiar to the citizens in the dissemination of knowledge. The dilemma facing Kenya as well as most other multilingual African nations with regard to this is the fear of isolation from global participation. This fear has forced Kenya to fall back to what is readily available, which does not sufficiently meet her needs. This raises the question of whether multilingual African nations can still participate in global education and at the same time be able to maintain their indigenous structures.

As it is in the 21st C, English is the vehicle behind global education. Many non-English speaking nations have embraced western education with English as the medium of instruction. In Kenya today, education has become elitist. This has contributed to social stratification since 'good' education that is offered in national and Private schools, is only available to the few privileged, from well placed families. Though privileged, they are seen as the 'academically strong' that



succeed not just in education but also in life. For instance, data from the 2004 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam shows that 77% of private school candidates qualified to join secondary schools, while from public schools; only 45% of the candidates did qualify. Likewise, the majority of those who joined National schools were from private and not public schools. Statistics show that before 2011 (when the government of Kenya ordered National schools to reserve at least 70% of their slots for poor students from public schools), students from private primary schools accounted for 90% of the total Form One admissions in National schools. The same is replicated in the transition rate from secondary education to the university. For instance in 2008, 11% of the students from District schools scored at least C+ (minimum Grade for university admission in Kenya), 43 % scored the same Grade from Provincial schools, while, 90% scored the same Grade from National schools (World Bank, 2009). It is evident that at the end of the day, it is the few successful ones that manage to participate in development both nationally and globally. This successful group is the one that has access to the ‘right’ English; that is, the language of Education both at the national and global level. So despite the fact that English is the socially privileged language in Kenya; it still remains a minority language, one that is mastered by only a small group of people. With the majority of the population unable to access the same, this has put the nation in a dilemma as its citizens are not able to fully participate in global education. So, besides other prevailing factors, language is a very important factor in Kenya that acts as a sieve, separating the privileged few from the underprivileged majority.

Studies carried out in the Kenyan education system have shown that many students who drop out of school or those that do not succeed in primary and secondary education are mainly those that are weak in the language of instruction; that is, English. This is demonstrated in the 2010 report that was released by Uwezo Kenya in conjunction with the National Assessment Centre (NAC), which was established by the Kenya education sector to monitor quality in education. The report gives details of an assessment that was done on literacy and numeracy skills of children aged 6-16. It was set at STD 2 level, where a child is expected to have basic competence in reading English (the official and the language of instruction in Kenya), Kiswahili (the official and national language in Kenya) and complete simple arithmetic problems. The table below shows the percentage of children’s performance.

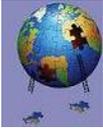
Table 1: Percentage of children’s performance

Level of children Assessed	Cannot read English paragraph	Cannot read Kiswahili paragraph	Cannot do subtraction
Std 2	85%	81%	79%
Std 5	27%	23%	30%
Std 8	4%	4%	10%

Based on this Assessment, some of the findings were:

- i) Low literacy level but lower in certain regions
- ii) Literacy level was lower in public than in private schools
- iii) 5% of children were not enrolled in school but in certain regions
- iv) North Eastern and arid Districts in Rift Valley and Eastern provinces have particularly low performance. Many older children, especially girls are not attending school.

The same observation is made in the MoEST (2015: 192), where it is stated that, “several assessment in Kenya reveal that learners are not mastering the skills and competencies expected at their level and hence learning is not taking place’. This report is based on the findings that



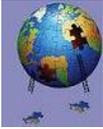
were released by Uwezo (2011) and SACMEC (2005, 2013). The findings are a reflection of what happens in the entire nation. Given this scenario, it becomes quite difficult for nations such as Kenya to fully participate in global education, whose pre-requisite is competence in a global language such as English. For nations such as Kenya to fully participate in and benefit from global education, there is need for the government to heavily invest in the language of instruction (and in education as a whole); it needs to provide the same 'right' language to all regardless of their socio-economic background as they work towards strengthening their own structures.

Given the dilemma that Kenya finds herself in, one is tempted to imagine that if the Koech report of 2000 was adopted, things would have been different and possibly better for her citizens. This report was meant to address the challenges facing education in Kenya. Koech's report recommends for "the promotion and support of the use of indigenous languages and local available resources." Researchers like Agoya (2012: 98) have argued that "learners do better when they understand the language of instruction." This being the case, there is need for Kenya to relook into her language policy and practice especially with regard to its use in education, if she has to benefit from global education. She has either to provide the 'right' global linguistic system so that her citizens fully fit in the global world or focus on her indigenous languages and forget about participating in global education. As it is, she is neither in nor out.

As earlier pointed out, Independent Kenya uses English as the official language as well as the language of instruction. Given the position of English in the nation, the use of local languages in education or cultural expression has not been given much thought as much as the same is provided for in the Kenyan constitution. With regard to the same, Trudgill (2000: 198) says, "We should not underestimate the degree of alienation that occurs in situations where people are denied the dignity of having respect accorded to their vernacular speech. Nor should we underestimate the advantage of having a population able to express itself fluently and clearly in its own vernacular." Trudgill's assertion explains the danger that comes with the adoption of foreign languages at the expense of one's native language. This practice is also in contravention to what was discussed and agreed upon during the Intergovernmental Conference of Ministers on language policy that was held in 1997 in Harare. During this conference, the following was acknowledged:

- i) The richness of the linguistic capacity in Africa and its potential as a resource for all types of development.
- ii) The necessity and urgency for African states to adopt clear policies for the use and development of mother tongues as well as community languages, national, inter-African and international languages.
- iii) That the optional use of African languages is a pre-requisite for maximizing African creativity and resourcefulness in development activities.

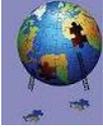
These resolutions were meant to empower African nations to be able to push the developmental agenda better; both nationally and globally. Now that this was never implemented by most multilingual African nations, most of them (Kenya included) have found themselves in a dilemma as they have not been able to fully embrace their mother tongues or the preferred global language(s). The question that lingers in one's mind is what would have happened if these guidelines had been followed to the later. It is possible that such a move would have benefitted most multilingual African nations in the sense that this would have paved way for all citizens to participate in the development of the nation. This would as well have prepared them better for transition to the global language of education.



Besides the selective provision of the 'right' English in the Kenyan education system, there is the problem of the increased number of variants of the same code. Most of these variations are as a result of the media, while others are associated with the various ethnic groups that use English. These versions of English are taught in schools; and since there is no target form for approximation, products of the Kenyan education system end up with competence in the various versions of English, which they even use in national examinations. Given that examinations make use of the standard variety of English, most candidates end up not performing well because of their linguistic deficiency. This limitation is reflected in either their partial or non-participation in national and global development.

Global demand in education has forced many multilingual African nations to take up foreign languages, especially those that seem global and more developed. Consequently, local languages have found themselves on the receiving end. Currently, most Kenyan ethnic languages have been adulterated by the influence of English. This is mainly observed in the linguistic behavior of the young people who are neither competent in their mother tongue, nor in the 'right' global linguistic code; which is English in Kenya. Essentially, they have lost their linguistic identity as they are unable to identify themselves through their native languages or the preferred global language, which they lack competence in. Though the usual language pattern in Kenya is that of trilingualism, which involves the use of English, Kiswahili and one's mother tongue, for most of the young people, this is not the case. Most of them have lost their mother tongues and by so doing, their social and cultural identities have as well been lost. Besides linguistic genocide, there is linguistic suicide that is taking place from within. This is observed in the mixing of codes, borrowings and translation even amongst speakers of the same native language. What is happening in language is a reflection of the transformation that has come with globalization, where languages seem to have no boundaries. The prevailing situation has left Kenya in a dilemma; especially with regard to their participation in global education.

Still on linguistic suicide, most Kenyans lack interest in their native languages; they perceive them as having little or no socio-economic value and instead they prefer foreign languages in which their competence is wanting. This has meant having a population that is ill prepared for global participation. This is worsened by the fact that the preferred language of global education does not take care of the interests and needs of the learners in multilingual nations such as Kenya. This is a contradiction since the language of education is meant to meet the interests, needs and values of the learners. For Kenya to come out of the prevailing situation, she must make a deliberate move. This may involve rethinking about the place of her local languages with regard to not only the demands of global education but also general participation at the global level. As it is, local languages in Kenya have not been assigned a substantive role in education. To remedy the situation, the following needs to be done: i) High investment in the training of the 'right' global linguistic system. ii) Equity be observed in the provision of the same 'right' linguistic system; that is, both in urban and rural areas. This will help the products of the Kenyan education system to better fit in the global society. iii) Deliberate effort has to be made in the implementation of the language policy so that there is a match between language policy and practice. As it is, there seem to be a mismatch between the two in Kenya. Whereas the policy has provision for mother tongue use at elementary levels of education before shifting to English, this does not happen in practice in that what is in existence is like a policy of English for all and at all levels of education. English is taught and used as a medium of instruction right from ECD to tertiary level, especially in urban-based learning institutions. This is in contradiction to what research has shown with regard to success in education; that learners learn better when they



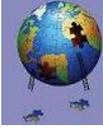
receive instruction in their mother tongue especially in formative years before taking up a second language. Mbaabu (1996) says that the language best known by a child on his entry into school life is the most effective medium of instruction. This explains why children who join Kenyan schools with competence in English (if it is the language of the home) end up performing better than those who begin school without the same linguistic knowledge. iv) The girl child in Kenya must be provided with education in the same way it is provided to the boy child. This can only be achieved if the cultural practice that favors the male gender over the female gender is overcome. From the figures released by the KNBS Economic Survey (2016:49), it is shown that there has been an increase in the enrolment of girls in secondary school between 2011 and 2015. However, the same figures show a very big margin between the enrolment of boys and girls, with the later lagging behind. The same is reflected in their KCSE performance, with boys achieving better grades as compared to girls (KNBS Economic Survey (2016:50)). This, together with their economic and linguistic deficit (as pertains to competence in English) makes it difficult for them not only to participate globally but also nationally. The few that have had a breakthrough are those who had the privilege of receiving formal education, which in this case is education in English. Consequently, the involvement of the female gender in development is marginal. This does not work well for Kenya since sustainable development can only be achieved if all the citizens in the nation are involved.

Conclusion

Global education is quite complex and expensive especially for multilingual African nations that have competing languages. In such a linguistic situation, a nation has to make a choice between the existing indigenous languages and a foreign language that is considered 'global'. This demand has had negative consequences to such nations. In Kenya, this has led to social stratification in that only a few that are privileged have access to the 'right' linguistic code that is used in global education and it is these few that have benefited from the advantages that come with global education, leaving the majority of the population uninvolved. There's need for equity in the provision of education in Kenya so that the less privileged can as well benefit. This can be done by making education accessible to all, through the 'proper/right' linguistic tool that seems a necessity for national and global participation. This must be done in both urban and rural-based schools and not just in the private and national schools as is the case.

Currently, global education is lop-sided with relationships and participation being asymmetrical. It is western in nature, with western cultures and languages being promoted against the cultures and languages of developing nations. Given this scenario, many multilingual African nations like Kenya have ended up not fully fitting in the global society. This paper argues for equal provision of the 'right' linguistic code if Kenya is to fully contribute to and benefit from global education.

The paper also advocates for the need by Kenya and by extension, other multilingual African nations to rethink about their own indigenous structures, where indigenous education that is offered in local languages is adopted. This may increase effectiveness as they prepare a people who are able to efficiently operate in their own cultures and languages and within their own environment. An alternative proposal that the paper makes is that of the need to recognize the various varieties of the 'right' linguistic code that have come up, which are understood better by the users than the prescribed standards which are far removed from them. Although this may not help them fit in the global society, it won't reduce anything because as it is, many multilingual African nations like Kenya are neither in nor out as they have not succeeded in Africanizing their own education system nor have they succeeded in fully westernizing it. This has left them in a



dilemma. To come out of this, deliberate effort has to be made from within and not from without; Kenya has to rethink about her language policy and practice in relation to the expectations of global education.

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