

## **Integrating multilingual/multicultural literacies in the school curriculum to build cohesive African society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Lessons from Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Due to globalization, rural urban movement and internationalization trends, the cultural, racial and ethnic composition of schools, colleges and universities in Africa has become increasingly diverse. Because of this heterogeneity, there is need for multilingual/multicultural literacy to become an important component of education systems in Africa.

Multicultural literacy, as noted in available literature in the field, comprises the skills and ability to identify the creators of knowledge and their interests, to uncover the assumptions of knowledge, to view knowledge from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives, and to use knowledge to guide action that will lead to a humane and just world. Multicultural literacy, therefore, leads to the understanding of different cultures through exposure to aspects such as the history, values, language, religious beliefs and oral literature of different communities. This implies that multicultural literacy is premised on cultural pluralism.

A research done in Kenya in 2015 showed that learners at all levels of education in the country lacked multilingual/multicultural literacy despite the diverse dynamics of the Kenyan society. They, for example, accepted many of the stereotypes associated with other African languages and cultures due to lack of exposure to such languages and cultures in schools and elsewhere.

To address such challenges, the just approved national school curriculum in Kenya purposes to integrate multilingual/multicultural literacy in schools with the aim of building a society that will embrace diversity; a society that will aspire to remain cohesive despite this diversity.

This chapter purposes to do the following: Give a brief on the diverse languages and cultures in Kenya; share findings of a study done in 2015 on the state of multilingual/multicultural literacies in schools and universities in Kenya; Give a preview of the integration of multilingual/multicultural literacy in the revised Kenyan curriculum; share lessons that have

been learned in Kenya regarding the role of multilingual/multicultural literacies in building a cohesive society; and propose strategies that can be put in place for successful acquisition of multilingual/multicultural literacies in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Introduction**

Kenya's Constitution (2010) recognizes the importance of language and culture in promoting national integration and cohesion. In its preamble, the Constitution recognizes ethnic and cultural diversity and the determination of Kenyans to live in peace and unity as one indivisible sovereign nation. The same is anchored in the country's vision 2030 where cultural values, which are expressed in Kenya's indigenous cultures, and define who the Kenyan people are, inform the values that embody and define the ideal Kenyan citizen who will receive the promises of Vision 2030.

The Constitution gives guidance on language policy and recognizes language diversity that characterizes her people. First, the Constitution spells out the official and national languages in Kenya. In this regard, Chapter 2, Article 7 of the Constitution notes that the national language of the Republic is Kiswahili and that the official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English. This is a dramatic shift from the previous state of affairs where English was the only official language. Thus Kiswahili was elevated to the official language status.

Further, the Constitution directs that the State shall promote and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya and promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities. This move in the Constitution elevates the indigenous and sign languages, and other formats used by people with disabilities to communicate, such as Braille.

As noted above, the Constitution gives provisions for the official use of Sign language. Chapter 4, Article 54, for example, notes that a person with disability is entitled to use Sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication. The elevation of sign language is further captured in Chapter 8, Article 120. The Constitution notes that the official languages of Parliament shall be Kiswahili, English and Kenyan Sign language, and the business of parliament may be conducted in English, Kiswahili and Kenyan Sign Language. This position of giving much status to sign language had not hitherto been considered for parliament.

The Constitution recognizes the need for Kenyans to be affiliated with the cultures of their choice. Chapter 4, Article 44 of the Constitution states that every person has the right to use the language, and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice. In addition, a person belonging to a cultural or linguistic community has the right, with other members of that community, to enjoy that person's culture and use the person's language; or form, join and maintain cultural and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society. Such provisions in the Constitution will aid in revitalization of indigenous languages and see to it that hardly any community languages become extinct.

Kuo (2016) reports that some Kenyan languages are at the risk of becoming extinct. The Constitution is conscious of this fact and gives direction for the revitalization of such indigenous languages. In this regard, the Constitution in Article 56, mandates the State to put in place affirmative action programmes designed to ensure that minorities and marginalized groups develop their cultural values, languages and practices. This move is critical especially because Kenya has some languages with less than 5,000 speakers and need to be documented and described. For example, the Yakunte language, which is spoken in the Rift Valley region in

Kenya has less than 4,000 speakers and only seven people (and they are over 70 years) can speak the language fluently. Such languages need the State's attention and their culture preserved. Indeed when a language is lost, much more is lost than just its basic function as a tool of expression. As Njoroge (2011) notes, there is, therefore, need for revitalization of the marginalized languages, bringing all of them forward, so that they too can play a vital role in the global village because every one of the world's languages is unique and invaluable.

### **Brief on Kenya's diverse languages and cultures**

Africa is highly multilingual, with over 2,011 different languages being spoken in the continent (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). A country like Nigeria has over 527 languages, 520 of them living while 7 are extinct (Ethnologue, 2015). Ghana, a country in West Africa, is home to 81 languages, all of them living (Ethnologue, 2015). Kenya, an East African country, is a multi-ethnic society with five major ethnic groups - Kikuyu (19%), Luhya (14%), Luo (11%), Kamba (10%) and Kalenjin sub-ethnic groups (12%) - constituting 65% of the total population. The Kisii (6%), Meru (5%) and Mijikenda (5%) constitute 16% of the total population (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Thus, Kenya is culturally diverse and this fact is greatly reflected in the country's linguistic diversity that marks the country's language terrain.

English and Kiswahili are used in a multilingual environment in Kenya. Unlike those who use English as their only code, Kenyans use it as only one of several codes. For example, most Kenyans have a proficient command of their ethnic language, Kiswahili and English while others even speak French, German, Chinese or other Kenyan indigenous languages. Because of this phenomenon, there is bound to be much code mixing and switching, as well as lexical and phonological influences as these languages interact (Njoroge, 2011). This language situation results in the majority of Kenyans being multi-lingual.

The multilingual and multicultural diversity that defines Kenya does not mean that the multicultural literacy among Kenyans is high despite the importance of such literacy in promotion of national integration and cohesion (Njengere, 2014). Many stereotypes and myths still inform much of what Kenyans believe is true of their fellow Kenyans drawn from different language and cultural backgrounds. Below is a highlight of a study done to determine the multilingual / multicultural levels in schools and universities in Kenya<sup>1</sup> which illustrates the fact that students at all levels of education in the country have low multicultural literacy levels.

### **Multilingual/multicultural literacies levels in schools and universities in Kenya**

Multicultural literacy (ML) comprises the skills and ability to identify the creators of knowledge and their interests (Banks, 1996), to uncover the assumptions of knowledge, to view knowledge from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives, and to use knowledge to guide action that will lead to a humane and just world. Multicultural literacy, therefore, leads to the understanding of different cultures through exposure to aspects such as the history, values, language, religious beliefs and oral literature of different communities. This implies that multicultural literacy is premised on cultural pluralism. Maxim (2006), for example, describes cultural pluralism as how all the parts of society contribute to a whole.

In Kenya, the government places premium on education as a vehicle towards the acquisition of multicultural literacy, national cohesion and national integration. National

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<sup>1</sup> This study is reported in Njoroge, M. & Gatambuki, M.G (2016) paper that appears in PAC University Journal of Arts and Social Sciences. I am grateful to the editor of the journal for allowing me to reproduce this study in this chapter.

cohesion entails the constructing of an integrated citizenry with a sense of belonging amongst members of different groups and from different regions, through the regulation and reconciliation of differences as well as competing interests and demands.

To integrate is to bring together. Integration is a key contributor to community cohesion. It enables citizens to relate with each other harmoniously (RoK, 2011). Cohesion, on the other hand, is the act or state of sticking together or close union. It is cohering or being in consonance with each other. Cohesion implies positive group dynamics and positive energy that is experienced within a community. In the Kenyan context, national cohesion and integration is a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens to have a sense and a feeling that they are members of the same nation engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and opportunities. National cohesion and integration encompasses unity, equality, freedom, democracy, absence of war, just peace, social justice and the rule of law. The ultimate goal of national cohesion and integration is to create an overarching national community that renders loyalty to competing ethnic, racial, regional, class and religious communities secondary. National cohesion embraces unity of purpose in the citizenry's participation in economic, social and political processes (RoK, 2011).

First, the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on 'A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research' identifies the national philosophy of education as "Education and training for social cohesion as well as human and economic development" (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Social cohesion in Kenya is affected by the diverse cultures of the different speech communities. This presents myriad challenges for schools, which are expected to cultivate national unity (Njeng'ere, 2014).

Second, the national goals of education in Kenya provide the curriculum developers with the general intended outcomes of education (these are discussed in details below). Out of the eight goals, five provide opportunities for fostering national cohesion and integration. These are, foster nationalism, patriotism, and promote national unity, promote social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development, promote sound moral and religious values, promote social equality and responsibility, and promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures.

These goals have served the education sector since independence, except for two goals that were added during Kenya's 2002 curriculum review (Njengere, 2014). Based on these goals, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) developed the objectives of primary and secondary school (Njengere, 2014). The school curriculum (primary and secondary education) is further organized into subjects, and each has a syllabus with well-defined general and specific objectives (MOES&T, 2002a). For example, the eleventh objective of teaching English in secondary schools in Kenya is to "appreciate and respect own as well as other people's culture" (MOES&T, 2002b).

Since multicultural literacy can facilitate achievement of the national goals of education in Kenya, it is important to establish how literate learners are in understanding one another's culture. This is why the study attempted to answer the following questions: (a) What is the role of teaching/learning in the acquisition of multicultural literacy? (b) To what extent are the primary, secondary and university students literate in Turkana, Maasai and Nubian cultural issues? (c) What is the correlation between gender and multicultural literacy? (d) What is the correlation between education level and multicultural literacy?

The study employed the quantitative research design because of the need to correlate social variables with multicultural literacies. The pre-test-post-test paradigm was employed to

measure the multicultural literacies. The target population comprised learners of different gender from class 8, form 4 and fourth year university students. The following three institutions were purposively sampled: A primary school in Nairobi, a secondary school in Kiambu County and a university in Eldoret, all in Kenya. The pre-test comprising 30 items was given to all the 25 sampled students of each education level. The test was marked and scores recorded. The students were then taught about the Maasai, Turkana and Nubian cultures. A week later, the post test, having the same questions as the pretest, was administered to the learners, marked and scores recorded. Data were analyzed using the SPSS. To test the correlation, Levene's test for equality of variances was used to establish whether the observed differences among gender and educational levels were purely random or whether there were real differences between the means.

The emerging findings showed that there was general improvement for all sampled participants across the three education tiers after exposure to multicultural content. Knowledge in Turkana culture also appeared to be higher than in the other two cultures, Nubian and Maasai. There was general improvement for all candidates after exposure except for a few candidates whose score did not improve much. Thus, the findings imply that exposing learners to information on the three cultures influenced performance in the posttest. Thus, learners became more literate in multicultural issues after the teaching. We assume they learned more about Nubian, Turkana and Maasai cultural backgrounds during the teaching hence improvement in performance. They got to know more about their history, customs, values and cultural issues.

These findings concur with Taylor and Hoechsmann's (2012) study in Canada, which demonstrated that learning institutions are the primary contributor to acquisition of multicultural literacy. Perhaps this is because when schools teach concepts to the learners, they stay in their minds and remember them for a long time. This is in agreement with Taylor and Hoechsmann's (2012) conclusion that schools represent the most consistent source of multicultural literacy. Given this argument, schools in Kenya, therefore, should be a great vehicle for acquisition of multicultural literacy among learners in all levels of education. Such a move is in tandem with the principle advanced by Hirsch (1987) that shared cross-cultural literacy is necessary for mutual understanding and harmony in multicultural settings.

### **Goals of education in Kenya**

A number of goals inform Kenya's education. The first is to Foster nationalism, patriotism, and promote national unity. Kenya's people belong to different communities, races and religions and should be able to live and interact as one people. Education should enable the learner acquire a sense of nationhood and patriotism. It should also promote peace and harmonious co-existence.

The second is to promote social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development. Education should prepare the learner to play an effective and productive role in the nation. It should, for example, meet the social needs of the learners. Education should instill social and adaptive skills in the learner for effective participation in the family, community, national, regional and international development. Further, education should address the economic needs. Education should prepare a learner with requisite competences that support a modern and independent growing economy. This should translate into high standards of living for every individual. It should also focus on the technological and industrial needs. This is because education should develop in the learner necessary competences for technological and industrial development for the nation in tandem with global trends.

The third goal of the national education is to promote individual development and self-fulfillment. Education should provide opportunities for the learner to develop to the fullest potential. This includes development of one's interests, talents and character for positive contribution to the society.

The fourth is to promote sound moral and religious values. Education should promote acquisition of national values as enshrined in the Kenya Constitution. It should be geared towards developing a self-disciplined and ethical citizen with sound moral and religious values.

The fifth is to promote social equity and responsibility. Education should promote social equity and responsibility. It should provide inclusive and equitable access to quality and differentiated education; including for learners with special educational needs and disabilities. Education should also provide the learner with opportunities to develop and practice shared responsibility and accountability through community service learning.

The sixth is to promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures. Education should instill in the learner appreciation of Kenya's rich and diverse cultural heritage. The learner should value his or her own culture and respect other people's culture as well as embrace positive cultural practices in a dynamic society.

The seventh is to promote international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations. Kenya is part of the interdependent network of diverse peoples and nations. Education should empower the learner to respect, appreciate and participate in the opportunities within the international community. Education should also enable the learner to operate within the international community with full knowledge of the obligations, responsibilities, rights and benefits that this membership entails.

The last but by no means the least is to promote positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection. Education should inculcate in the learner the value of physical and psycho-social well-being for self and others. It should promote environmental preservation and conservation, including animal welfare, for sustainable development.

These national goals of education are in tandem with the principles of national values and governance which are aimed at ensuring that all Kenyans, despite their diversity, continue living together in harmony as one people, one country. Thus if they are all achieved at the end of the schooling, the Kenyan child will have been prepared to live in a cohesive and value based society.

### **Brief on the new curriculum in Kenya**

As noted by the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (2011), Kenya has gone through a review of the existing 8-4-4 (8 years in primary school, 4 years at high school level and 4 years at the University level) curriculum in the recent past. This move was informed by several curriculum review reports (1992, 1995 and 2002). From these reports, it emerged that the 8-4-4 curriculum was academic, exams oriented and had veered off the primary objective of producing self-reliant graduates. Hence, there was need to reform the curriculum to align it to the societal needs (ROK, 2017).

The new curriculum was informed by Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015 on 'Reforming Education and Training in Kenya'. This Sessional Paper notes that education that Kenya needs should provide for the development of the individual learner's potential in a holistic and integrated manner, while producing intellectually, emotionally and physically balanced citizens (KICD, 2011). The sessional paper made more recommendations for adoption in the proposed

curriculum, among them being the introduction of national values and national cohesion and their integration into the curriculum, the key focus of this chapter.

The vision of the Kenya curriculum reforms is to enable every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered and ethical citizen. The reformed curriculum seeks to ensure that the next and future generations of Kenyan citizens shall be both patriotic and global, equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values to thrive in the modern world, confident about their proud and rich cultural heritage and contributing this heritage to make the world a better place for everyone (ROK, 2017).

In so doing, the reformed curriculum seeks to ensure that the next and future generations of Kenyan citizens shall be both patriotic and global, equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values to thrive in the modern world, confident about their proud and rich cultural heritage and contributing this heritage to make the world a better place for everyone.

Internationally, there has been a rise in the challenges and issues related with cultural integration, as well as ethnic and religious diversity. In Sub-Saharan Africa, scholars have argued that the way ethnic groups interact has been responsible for Africa's low economic growth, political instability and conflict, high inequality, and low provision of public goods and services (ROK, 2017).

In the new curriculum, students will be guided to learn about and appreciate the effort and sacrifice that built the country and to see beyond their self-interests to the needs of the community. As a result, they will be provided with opportunities to contribute fully to the world around them – economically, culturally, socially and politically (ROK, 2017). The teaching of values as envisioned in the new curriculum, for example, will enable the learners to value diversity in all people, and to demonstrate respect, empathy and compassion for all people.

One of the learning outcomes of education in the new curriculum is to demonstrate appreciation of the country's rich and diverse cultural heritage for harmonious co-existence. As noted in introduction, the Constitution of Kenya, Chapter 2, Article 7 (3) commits the Government to promote and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya and promote the development and use of the indigenous languages. In addition, a people's culture is best passed on through their language. This is supported by the Constitution in Article 11 that provides for the promotion of all forms of cultural expression through literature, the arts, traditional celebrations, science, communication, information mass media, publications, libraries and other cultural heritage. In addition, mother tongue, like any other language, is central to the success or failure of education and development programmes.

The new curriculum focuses on areas that will enable a Kenyan student become a global citizen by exposing him or her to the following: Peace education, integrity, ethnic and racial relations, social cohesion, patriotism and good governance, human rights and responsibilities, child's rights, child care and protection, gender issues in education.

### **Integration of multilingual/multicultural literacy in the revised Kenya's educational curriculum**

Literacy is the ability to read, write and use language proficiently. According to UNESCO, literacy is a basic human right. Literacy as a subject addresses the ability of the learner to make meaning of letters and sounds thus making sense of written codes. Given the diversity of languages and cultures in Kenya, embracing multi-cultural/multilingual literacies in the curriculum is critical for inclusivity and optimal understanding of what a child learns, especially when they are introduced to formal learning in a language that they understand.

The new curriculum proposes that literacy be taught in the first language of the learner. Thus it adopts a multilingual approach. At this foundational level, literacy aims at equipping the learner with basic skills in reading and writing to aid in all other Subjects. It will assist the learner to communicate with others as well as promote learning to learn.

The new curriculum appreciates that Kenya is a multi-ethnic community where people speak various languages and dialects. These languages and dialects communicate valuable cultural values and norms that need to be transmitted across successive generations. In this regard, indigenous language activities will therefore be carried out in the language of the catchment area. Such activities will include listening, speaking, pre-reading and pre-writing (KICD, 2017). This will enhance the acquisition of language and relevant vocabulary as well as the acquisition of foundational skills and knowledge in speaking, reading and writing in indigenous languages.

The new curriculum gives guidance on the use of Kiswahili, the national language and one of the two official languages of communication in the country. Learners should be exposed to the language at the earliest possible time in their schooling. Kenya Sign Language (KSL) is included in the curriculum as the alternative language for learners who are deaf.

English is one of the official languages of communication in country. It is also the second highest spoken language globally. Learners should be taught the foundational skills of reading and writing the English language at the earliest opportune time. Kiswahili and English play a key role in Kenya whether one is living in a rural or an urban context. As noted elsewhere, both languages are accorded the status of the official languages in Kenya, with Kiswahili being further elevated to the status of a national language. It is desirable, therefore, that learners acquire acceptable competences in both languages at the critical grade levels in basic education owing to the importance attached to the two languages.

As noted in the new curriculum, research shows that strong and well-planned MT-Based MLE programmes help students to build a strong educational foundation when they: 1) Enable and encourage students to develop oral fluency in their L1; 2) Introduce reading and writing in the L1; help students to become fluent and confident in L1 literacy; and Build their capacity to use the L1 for everyday communication and for learning in school (Malone, 2007).

As such, multilingual language educational programs help learners build a “good bridge” when they: 1. Introduce oral L2 through meaningful, non-threatening activities; 2. Introduce reading and writing in the L2 by building on what the children have learned about the oral L2 and their foundation in L1 literacy; 3. Build fluency and confidence in using oral and written L2 for everyday communication and for academic learning (Malone, 2007). Such programs ensure that students achieve educational competencies or standards established by education officials for each grade when they: 1. Use the L1 only for teaching in the early grades, as students are learning basic communication skills in the L2; 2. Use the L1 with the L2 for teaching in later grades, as students gain fluency and confidence in using the school language for learning academic concepts.

In view of this, the following progression plan is proposed for the 3 languages i.e. a local language (L1), English (L2) and Kiswahili (L3):



**Table 1: Proposed progression plan in the new curriculum**

<b>PP1</b>	<b>PP2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Build fluency in oral L1	Continue oral L1  Begin written L1	Continue Oral and Written L1	Continue Oral and written L1 and L2	Continue Oral and Written L1 and L2	Continue Oral and written L1 and L2	Continue oral and written L1, l2 and	Continue oral L1, L2 and L3
	Begin oral L2 (late in the year)	Begin written L2 (late in the year)		Begin oral L3	Begin Written L3		
Use L1 for teaching	Use L1 for teaching	Use L1 for teaching	Use L1 for teaching	Use L1 for teaching	Use L1-L2-L1 for teaching	Use L1-L2-L1 for teaching	Use L1 for teaching

Source: Malone (2007:5) – with slight adaptation

### **Contexts for language learning**

Since language acquisition and learning in rural and urban areas may be dissimilar for learners considering their varied environments and experiences, the following paths are proposed in offering the first and second languages at different levels of Basic Education in Kenya. The end result is the same with students in both urban and rural contexts possessing and using a local language, Kiswahili and English proficiently.

### **Language learning for rural settings (English and Kiswahili)**

The following will be the scenario in rural schools during the early years:

1. Literacy, English and Kiswahili will be compulsory subjects from classes one to six. The language of the catchment area will be the language of literacy.
2. The medium of instruction from PP1 to P3 shall be the language of literacy.
3. From P4 onwards, English shall begin to be used alongside the language of literacy (L1) as the media of instruction.
4. Since research has shown that learners who are exposed to learning of Mother Tongue for a long period perform better, even in other subjects, the language of the catchment area will continue to be taught as a compulsory subject from Grade Four to Six. This way, the

language of literacy provides the necessary learning support for English and Kiswahili, and also in the learning and comprehension of the other subjects.

**Table 3: Literacy, English and Kiswahili in basic education in rural contexts**

	<b>PP1- grade 3 Early Years</b>	<b>Grades 4–6 Middle School</b>	<b>Junior Secondary</b>	<b>Senior Secondary</b>	<b>Universit y</b>
Literacy	Languages of the Catchment Area	Subject (Compulsory) Learning support	Optional Subject	Optional Subject	Optional Subject
English	English As Subject (Compulsory)	Subject (Compulsory) Medium	Subject (Compulsory) Medium	Optional Subject Medium	Optional Subject Medium
Kiswahili	Kiswahili as Subject (Compulsory)	Subject (Compulsory)	Subject (Compulsory)	Optional Subject	Optional Subject

**Language learning in urban setting (English, Kiswahili and an indigenous language)**

In urban areas, the scenario for English, Kiswahili and Literacy instruction in Basic Education will be similar to that of rural schools except for the following:

1. Kiswahili shall be the language of literacy in urban areas. The choice of Kiswahili is informed by the fact that most children in urban areas can speak Kiswahili by the time they start schooling. In addition, this will ensure equity since no learner will have the advantage of having English as both a subject and the language of literacy.
2. Urban schools shall choose an indigenous/local language which will be a compulsory subject from Grades three to Six. This will be geared towards enhancing national cohesion and promotion of multi-cultural literacy.

**Table 2: Literacy, English and Kiswahili in basic education in urban contexts**

	<b>Grades 1 – 3 Early Years</b>	<b>Grades 4 –6 Middle School</b>	<b>Junior Secondary</b>	<b>Senior Secondar y</b>	<b>University</b>
Literacy	Kiswahili As Language of the Catchment Area	Subject (Compulsory) Learning Support	Subject (Compulsory)	Optional Subject	Optional Subject
English	English as Subject (Compulsory)	Subject (Compulsory) Medium	Subject (Compulsory) Medium	Optional Subject Medium	Optional Subject Medium
Indigenous Language	Subject (Compulsory)	Subject (Compulsory)	Optional Subject	Optional Subject	Optional Subject

Learning English and Kiswahili as first and second languages, from classes one to six will also be guided by the following:

1. Kiswahili and English as subjects should, to begin with (when learners are admitted in class one), focus on oral skills in readiness for teaching of reading, writing and acquisition of grammar, except in situations where Kiswahili functions as the language of literacy from classes one to three.
2. English will begin to become the medium of instruction from class four to six.
3. Since Class One is an extension of pre-primary, language activities that will enhance learning while at the same time making it fun will be used.
4. Transfer of knowledge and skills attained during literacy instruction will be critical in reading and writing instruction for English, Kiswahili and the indigenous language. Jim Cummins (1991, 1999) in his Common Underlying Proficiency Theory and Interdependence Theory affirms that knowledge of language, literacy and concepts learned during the learning of the first language can be accessed and used in second language once the oral second language skills are developed, and no re-learning is required.

### **The role of multilingual/multicultural literacies in building a cohesive society: Lessons from Kenya**

According to the training manual developed for raising awareness of the national cohesion and integration in Kenya, national cohesion and integration constitutes unity, equality, freedom, democracy, just peace, social justice, the rule of law and absence of war. It helps cultivate in members of a community shared values, challenges and opportunities (ROK, 2011). Education is an appropriate avenue for raising awareness of the beauty of diversity and the need to live together in peace and harmony. The manner in which the new curriculum is crafted, the learner will have been exposed to L1, L2, L3 and with a possibility of L4 (other indigenous language). The learner will be exposed to other cultures as he or she learns the languages, for we cannot divorce the culture from the language. In this way, the nation will be able to discourage all forms of discrimination, foster tolerance and understanding, and curb hate speech. Learners in schools will be educated and sensitised on matters relating to national cohesion and integration, even as they learn more about cultural diversity.

According to Njengere (2014), a country's education should serve to enable society to achieve its needs and aspirations. One such need in Kenya, which has remained largely elusive, is national cohesion and integration. Research has revealed that education contributes to the development of social capital by increasing individual propensity to trust and be tolerant. Acquisition of multilingual/multicultural literacy will be an appropriate vehicle towards building of trust and cohesion among the diverse Kenyan population. Learning as a social activity has a strong influence on the development of shared norms and the value placed on tolerance and understanding within a community and such an understanding will certainly promote integrity and cohesion in the society.

Globally, a major purpose that education has been identified to achieve is national cohesion and integration. I pick one of the four pillars that speak to the need for a cohesive and integrated society that is contained by The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors, 2013): learners should be socialised to live together. This implies that education should expose individuals to the values implicit within human rights, democratic principles, intercultural understanding and respect and peace at all

levels of society and human relationships to enable individuals and societies to live in peace and harmony. This is the spirit that is contained in Kenya's Constitution and in the new curriculum that has been crafted for adoption in Kenya. The outcome of the curriculum is having citizens who value the rights of others and who will work hard to promote peace, integration and cohesion in the society. Exposure to multicultural literacy and dealing with the stereotypes that at times divide Kenyans because they have not been brought to the open will be a good direction towards actualising this spirit of the Constitution.

As Njengere (2014) observes, it is the pillar of learning to live together that focuses on issues related to cohesion and integration. The Kenya government lays a lot of emphasis on using education as a vehicle towards the achievement of national cohesion and national integration. Indeed, the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on 'A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research' identifies the national philosophy of education as "Education and training for social cohesion as well as human and economic development." (ROK, 2005). Thus 'cohesion' is a major purpose of education and training in Kenya and multicultural literacy is an appropriate vehicle towards this end.

The need to achieve national cohesion and integration occupies a pride of place in the spirit of the new curriculum, especially in the teaching of languages and cultures. The fact that students will be exposed to diverse Kenyan languages and a few international languages such as Chinese, French, English, and German will make the students exposed to the cultures that these languages represent. The same is happening in other contexts. In Latin America, for example, the importance of the development of inter-cultural or multicultural competences has been emphasized, in addition to bilingual or multilingual competences in the context of youth and adult literacy programmes (see López and Hanemann, 2009).

The promotion of inter-cultural or multicultural approaches to literacy acknowledges that programmes need to cater for learners from a diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as the need to go beyond the mere co-existence of people of different cultures in a community or society. It calls for teaching and learning strategies that include opportunities for cultural exchange, cross-fertilization and enhancing awareness of mutual dependence and inter-relationship (Pérez, 2009). The implementation of the curriculum in Kenya, particularly handling of multilingual/multicultural literacy in Kenya will require well thought out strategies for success to be ensured.

The move to adopt a multilingual curriculum and the benefits that this direction will accrue may counter the reports from the summative evaluation of the primary and secondary school curricula carried out by KICD. The report reveals that the negative practices learners encounter outside of school do not enable them to internalize the values of nationalism, patriotism and national unity as spelt out in the national goals of education (Njengere, 2014). On the contrary, when children watch opinion leaders in society talk ill of some ethnic groups, defy court orders and get away with it, the children start to internalise that it is not wrong to stereotype ethnic groups and disobey authority. These negative practices undermine the opportunity to foster cohesion and integration and the benefits acquisition of multicultural literacies by learners in Kenya may accrue in the long run.

### **Benefits of exposing learners to multicultural literacies**

The new curriculum in Kenya adopts a multicultural/multilingual approach and this move is expected to bring with it many benefits. As Pinnock (2015) advises, in countries where children need to use local, national and international languages, the curriculum needs to be

multilingual. This means using the language a child already understands for teaching and gradually introducing second or third languages in a communicative way. This can be done from an early age, as long as it continues for the whole of basic education without abrupt changes. The new curriculum in Kenya, which already adopts a multilingual/multicultural approach, will lead to acquisition of multilingual/ multicultural literacy, which will certainly have special impact on both students and teachers, society and for the nation generally.

First, all learners even from the marginalized language groups will feel that their cultures and languages are recognized and understood in the wide spectrum of the languages used in education. This is more so in the early grade years where the learner is introduced to formal learning in the language they understand and they speak at home. They will know that their languages and cultures are as good as any other. As Hirsch (1987) explains in his theory, exposing people to varied cultures promote shared knowledge and this will certainly be beneficial to the diverse population in Kenya. The exposure will provide learners with a sense of affirmation about themselves, their culture and other people's culture (Colby and Lyon, 2004). Learners will be able to make connections between the multicultural content and their everyday lives because multicultural literacy is a powerful medium for understanding the world. It accurately portrays the history, customs, values, traditions and way of life of a particular society. Thus, as Banks, (1999) observes, learners are able to appreciate a heritage that comes from diverse backgrounds. They reflect on their own and other's cultural backgrounds basing this reflection on facts that they have learned through multilingual/multicultural literacy in the classroom.

Second, the students from the larger language groups and cultures in the country will learn and respect all cultures. They will get to understand that there are other cultures and perspectives beyond their own which are just as valuable and as good as any other. There are many stereotypes associated with various language groups and cultures in Kenya which are not founded on any facts. Learners get fed with these stereotypes and at times they may take them to be factual. Exposure to various languages and cultures in the classroom will dispel such stereotypes as one realizes that such stereotypes are not based on facts. Such a move will contribute to the quest for integration and cohesion agenda in Kenya.

The inclusion of multilingual/multicultural literacy in the new curriculum in Kenya will be a tool that will help open the learners' mind to understanding of diversity that represents the face of Kenya. This move will build an acceptance and respect of other people's cultures and make integration and cohesion as envisioned in the Constitution (2010). Educating the children in the beauty of diversity is a sure way of weakening and dissolving negative ethnicity and promoting inclusion, equity and equality. Multicultural education has a way of helping the children develop an understanding and respect for people who are different from them. Further, children will be better to work harmoniously in groups as they get to know more about one another's cultures. As they grow up, the children, even if drawn from diverse cultures, will be able to co-exist despite their cultural differences. They will also be able to think from multicultural perspective and transact their businesses in harmony later in life for school will have prepared them for such.

Studies suggest that providing literacy instruction that is culturally responsive promotes high achievement among culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Banks, 1999). Thus, teachers should demonstrate socio-culturally centered teaching awareness to make learning relevant and effective. As Gay (2000) argues, teachers must understand that "culture is at the heart...of education" (p. 8) and that "teaching is a contextual and situational process" (p. 21).

With suitable multicultural literature available, for example, learners can embrace diversity (Mendoza & Reese, 2000). This is because multicultural literature “helps children to identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 24). It is also a resource for “promoting learners’ inter/intra-cultural understanding and appreciation” (Fang, Fu & Lamme, 1999, p. 259).

Kenya being a diverse country, her people knowing more about other’s cultures is a good step towards tolerance and deeper understanding of one another. It will help build a cohesive society and discourage the negative stereotypes that characterize multicultural settings. Learners get to share more about cultures, thus expanding multicultural literacies. Learners get to appreciate cultural heritages of people from diverse backgrounds. As noted by Boles (2006) learners feel recognized and understood when their culture is acknowledged. By being introduced to other cultures, learners learn that there are other perspectives and ways of doing things advanced by different cultures that are just as valuable as their own. Multicultural literacy opens dialogue on issues regarding cultural diversity. Learners are able to develop concepts based on knowledge of and a sense of pride in cultural backgrounds. Multicultural literacy exposes learners to differences and similarities between their culture and others.

The teachers, on the other hand, benefit from multicultural exposure too. One, by learning about other cultures that learners represent in the classroom is an eye opener for the teacher for what he or she may consider as ‘not a good behaviour’ from a student may be explained from the perspective of the learner’s cultural background. In some African cultures, for example, it is seen as a sign of disrespect if a child looks at a senior person in the eye when speaking to them. The child is supposed to look down and avoid eye contact, with for instance, the teacher. But in other cultures, the child perhaps is encouraged to maintain the eye contact when speaking to people. Thus exposure to multicultural aspects may bring to light the source of what some may consider as “misbehaviour” from one cultural perspective yet is a sign of respect in another culture. Exposure to such multicultural behaviour from diverse communities in Kenya has a role to play in promotion of cohesion in the country because the learners will know what non-verbal behaviour will work in culture X and what will work in culture Y.

### **Strategies for successful acquisition of multilingual/multicultural literacies in Kenya**

Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group. UNESCO (2016) advocates a bilingual or multilingual approach to literacy as a key element of linguistically and culturally diverse societies such as Kenya. The term ‘multilingual education’ implies the use of at least three languages – the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language – in education. The new curriculum in Kenya adopts a multilingual approach as more than three languages will be taught in schools. Adopting a curriculum that embraces diversity in the use of multiple languages in teaching and learning is the way to go for promotion of cohesion and integration in the society. This is in line with what Pinnock (2015) argument that Education is important for social cohesion and language is essential for education: both education and language can be used to divide or unite societies.

According to Pinnock (2015, p.50), effective implementation of multilingual curriculum should take cognizance of the following principles based on many years of research (i) Cognitive/linguistic development in the first language is the key predictor of success in other languages (Cummins 2000). This means that children need support in school to develop their first language extremely well (ii) It takes around seven years of learning a second language to

cope with an upper primary science lesson taught in that language (Cummins 2000, Heugh 2005); and (iii) Introducing teaching of a second language (or even a third language) early is useful; but it must be built on concepts already well understood in the language with which children have been familiar from birth. This is a strategy suggested for successful acquisition of multilingual/multicultural literacy in Kenya.

Combating the cumulative effects of multiple disadvantages involves supporting the development of learning opportunities in local or indigenous languages and this is a move that is advocated in the new curriculum in Kenya. Culturally and linguistically sensitive programmes, methods and materials 'recognize and value the indigenous cultures, knowledge and methodologies, while adequately developing the teaching of the second language of wider communication' (UIL, 2010: 8). Thus, inclusion of indigenous languages in the curriculum and using them especially in the early grade years is a strategy that will promote acquisition of multicultural literacies among the learners. The rest of the languages are introduced incrementally as the learner progresses in formal learning.

To succeed in the acquisition of multicultural literacies in schools, teachers should create a classroom setting where all cultures are valued. As Boles (2006) advises, teachers should stimulate understanding of diversity in the classroom and help to build an understanding of and respect for people from other cultures. Teachers should focus on teaching more about the country's diverse cultures, learners' cultural heritage as well as pride for the past. In this way, teachers will be laying the foundation for developing cultural pluralism, condition in which many cultures co-exist within a society and maintain their cultural differences, intergroup harmony and the ability to think from a multi-cultural perspective. This direction of teaching will facilitate the achievement of Kenya's national goals that touch on attainment of national cohesion (Njengere, 2014). However, teachers should take heed of Boles (2006) caution that as they teach, they must challenge attitudes and stereotypes that are often propagated to cause disharmony and prejudice against some cultures, especially the minority ones.

Teachers should be recruited to teach the indigenous languages. UNESCO (2016) urges that there should be an adequate supply of reading material in mother tongues to learners, 'for entertainment as well as for study'. The organization also highlights the need to provide for teacher training in order to ensure 'sufficient numbers of fully competent and qualified teachers [...] who are familiar with the life of their people and able to teach in the mother tongue' (ibid.). For mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education approaches to be effective, teachers or facilitators need to be recruited from minority language groups.

In recognition of the fact that respect for the languages of people belonging to different linguistic and cultural communities is essential to peaceful coexistence, UNESCO (2016) supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education with the aim of encouraging understanding among different population groups and ensuring respect for fundamental rights. As the UNESCO (2016) reports further notes, inter-cultural approaches to teaching and learning address the needs of both majority and minority groups, including indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. Successful intercultural strategies in education promote positive attitudes and the valuing of cultural and linguistic diversity, the use of culturally appropriate teaching methods, and a deeper understanding of other cultures (ibid., p. 33) and this is an outcome that the proposed curriculum in Kenya desires to achieve.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter recommends full incorporation of multilingual/multicultural literacy in the classroom as captured in the new curriculum in Kenya for the country to build a cohesive society thereby discouraging negative stereotypes that oftentimes characterize some multicultural settings. The chapter has pointed out that exposing learners to multicultural issues through teaching is crucial since they get to learn and understand their own and other's cultures more. The findings lead to the conclusion that incorporating multicultural content in curricula as in the new curriculum in Kenya expands learners' awareness and decreases negative stereotyping of individuals. Thus, multicultural literacy enhances learners' cultural awareness, acceptance of diverse learners, and development of positive attitudes towards concepts and learners from diverse backgrounds.

As concluded by Njoroge and Gathigia (2016), by integrating multicultural literacy in the curriculum, it is easy for teachers to direct the learners in studying the past, help them understand the present and be part of making their future better. Cross-cultural knowledge, transmitted through curriculum, could go a long way in promoting inter-cultural understanding among learners in Kenya. In so doing, learners will be able to fill in all the gaps in their cross-cultural knowledge. Ultimately, the achievement of Kenya's national goals of education and realization of a cohesive society as stipulated in Kenya's Constitution (2010) and the Vision 2030 blueprint will be enhanced.

I concur with Njengere (2014) who argues that education is still a very important vehicle for fostering national cohesion and integration. However, there is always need to reflect a little more on the strategies that have been adopted in curriculum design, implementation and the context of implementationz



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