

The Treatment of Indigenous Languages in Kenya's Pre- and Post-independent Education Commissions and in the Constitution of 2010

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Abstract

An indigenous or community language is the language that nurtures the child in the early years of his or her life. The UNESCO land mark publication in 1953 underscores the importance of educating children in their community languages: an education that is packaged in a language which the child does not understand is simply difficult for the child. Kenya has had a number of education commissions that significantly address the place of indigenous languages in a child's education. Further, Kenya Constitution on its part tackles language issues too. This paper, therefore, examines how the Constitution and the various colonial and post-colonial educational commissions that have been undertaken in Kenya treat indigenous languages. Should these indigenous languages be used as a medium of instruction? What are their benefits to a child's life? To answer these questions, the historical method of study which utilizes mainly secondary and primary sources of data is adopted. The main sources of primary data which form the basis of the discussion and analysis in the paper are Kenya's constitution (2010) and the educational commissions and reports in the two epochs: colonial and post-colonial periods. The main sources of secondary data scrutinized include: written documents such as books, journals and newspapers. The paper notes that the various educational commissions contain numerous recommendations that have informed Kenya's education sector over the years on the way indigenous languages should be utilized for both individual and national development. This notwithstanding, the paper concludes that indigenous languages in Kenya have been given a short shrift to the advantage of English language hegemony. The paper proposes a sound implementation of the commissions' recommendations in order to revitalize indigenous languages so that a Kenyan learner can reap benefits that accrue from the use of indigenous languages in education

Key words: Indigenous Languages, Treatment, Colonial, Post-colonial, Education Commissions, Constitution

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