

National Identity and Unity in Kiswahili Textbooks for Secondary School Students in Kenya: A Content Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines how issues of national identity and tribal identities are handled in Kiswahili textbooks for secondary school students in Kenya. Kenya is a multi-ethnic country whose historical record does not easily provide a common narrative with which to unify the nation. To compensate for the absence of a national narrative, textbooks propagate and advance particular themes and national ideologies such as “African socialism”, “Harambee” and “Nyayoism: Peace, Love and unity” through the various genres of Kiswahili. The decision of Kenya to use Kiswahili as the national language immediately after independence came as a need to foster national identity and unity since it is the language of inter ethnic communication. Subsequent to the recommendations of past two consecutive education commissions in Kenya, the education sector strengthened the teaching of Kiswahili as a subject and a language for national unity. The Kiswahili curriculum has changed over time in the attempt to Africanize the Kenyan education. Owing to this, publishing firms have developed textbooks for Kiswahili which schools use to teach the language. To determine the extent and the nature of the inclusion of national identity in these textbooks, the study analyzed the content of 12 sampled textbooks. The findings suggest the need to improve the content of textbooks in terms of the values received in developing citizens with a strong sense of national identity and unity needed for national development. The study is useful to both scholars and the general readers in Kenya as it contributes useful knowledge on the role of language in establishing a national identity and fostering patriotism.

Keywords: national identity, unity, Kenya, Kiswahili textbooks, secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Kenya must foster a sense of nationhood and promote national unity. Much as Kenyans belong to different ethnic groups, races and religions, their differences should not divide them. They must live and interact in peace and harmony. Education is an avenue through which conflicts can be resolved. The National Goals of Education leave no doubt that national unity; identity and citizenship are formulated as the primary goal of Kiswahili education in Kenya. According to Momanyi (2004), any country that values the development of its people must incorporate them in all development processes that they can comprehend, and competently use them to evaluate themselves and to implement development projects within their area. Thus the inclusion of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum and the teaching of the genres such as oral literature, written literature and African short story was a move to Africanize education and develop national identity. Education and school textbooks have been one of the modern state’s most important vehicles for the spread of national ideology (Woolf, 1996, p. 27). Accordingly, the role of nationalism in European and North American textbooks was thoroughly studied early on (Walworth, 1938). In the period of internationalism and anti-war sentiments following the First World War, research was initiated in order to come to terms with the excessive

nationalism in European textbooks (Vigander, 1961). Recent research on textbooks has indicated that traditional national narratives have been challenged by globalization, decolonization and, in the case of Europe, the emerging construction of a European identity (Schiessler & Nuhoglu, 2005).

By now, textbooks from most areas of the globe have been investigated. For example, China was the focus of research on textbooks as far back as 1933 (Tsang, 1933), and in recent decades an increased amount of research into Middle Eastern, Asian and Latin American nationalism in textbooks has been conducted (Nava, 2006). Despite this proliferation of research, there is, however, still a lack of data on the African continent. In addition, almost all existing research into African school textbooks has focused on South Africa (Auerbach, 1965). Woolman (2001) has, in a comparison of curriculum reforms in Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria and Kenya since independence, investigated the strategies of educationalists aiming at national identity and unity in a multi-cultural environment. However, he does not focus on the content of the textbooks but on the structure of the education system. According to Woolman (ibid.), it was important to reform the educational structures from the colonial era since they functioned to maintain elitism and dependency upon the colonial powers.

The lack of research on nationalism in African textbooks is probably partly a result of the fact that African states are difficult to fit into the standard model of nation-states. It may be argued that it is difficult to find states anywhere in the world where the population shares a common history, language and culture, but African nations offer more extreme exceptions as they are often heavily ethnically fragmented constructions of recent European imperialism. Strengthened national identities are but one possible avenue of future development since tribal and Pan-African identities appear to offer equally viable and relevant alternatives. Certainly, if we want to more fully understand phenomena such as nationalism and the role of education in national identity and unity, it is richly informative to focus on the extreme circumstances of Africa, where nationalism is under pressure from other potent, collective identities. Indeed, the extent to which the relative weakness of national identity in Africa makes the educational system's role in nation-building even more crucial than in other countries is an area worthy of close investigation.

In the African perspective, schools are shaped by the society and they reflect the societal cultural characteristics, needs and values. Thus they are instruments of society regardless of whose interests or needs are served and regardless of how society is defined. The major instructional resources in Kenyan secondary schools are textbooks. The knowledge packaged into 'facts' is taken to be contained in textbooks and transmitted by teachers who tend to view these same textbooks as reflecting the beginning and the end of the entire human stock of accumulated facts. Textbooks are also characterized by uniformity of message throughout national school systems and their availability is increasingly taken to be the most consistent and positive determinant of academic achievement. Text books are also good indicators of 'core values' which the country's leadership wishes to inculcate in its young generations. They are conceived as defining attitudes, social mores, expectations, values and behaviour patterns that are 'congruent' to the ideal citizens as defined by leadership's world view and ideological orientation.

Textbooks form the main medium of instruction and learning resource in most parts of post-colonial African countries (Rotich, 2004) yet there are no studies to determine whether or not Kenyan secondary school textbooks and teachers' guides address issues core to identity and equip students with the necessary skills to analyze and evaluate these issues. Historically, the Kenyan government has been keen to control textbook publication for schools in order to meet the cultural needs of Kenyan students (Rotich, 2004). Therefore, textbooks, particularly published by a state-owned publisher,

may offer a clear description on how the state fosters its sense of nationhood through particular content and skills. Before and immediately after independence, multinational publishers dominated textbook publication in Kenya (Ogechi & Ogechi, 2002). However, with the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985, two government publishers, the Kenya Literature Bureau (KLB) and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF), took over most of the school textbook publication. Until 1997, school textbook publication in Kenya was dominated by KLB and JKF, to ensure that textbooks' content was culturally relevant to the Kenyan students (Ogechi & Ogechi, 2002). Prior to the year 1999, the Ministry of Education categorized school textbooks into two: core and supplementary.

The core textbooks consisted of textbooks that were written by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), and published by KLB and JKF whereas the supplementary were textbooks published by non-government publishers (Rotich, 2000). With the liberalization of markets, the Kenyan government allowed other publishers to equally compete for their textbooks' adoption. However, for the textbooks to be approved for use in Kenyan schools, the publishers had to write their textbooks following the guidance of the syllabi produced by the Ministry of Education through the KIE. These textbooks must also be approved by the Ministry of Education. Despite government liberalization of textbook production, Rotich (ibid.) notes that a group of consultants approved by the Ministry of Education found that the government's control of textbook production was still in place. This was confirmed by the highest percentage of school textbooks, published by KLB and JKF on the market. Currently, Kenya has two state-owned, a number of local and multinational publishers. The Ministry of Education publishes a list of recommended textbooks every year and distributes it to all schools. Schools are then required to choose from a list of recommended textbooks. This choice usually depends on the content and the price among other factors. For our study, three series of Kiswahili recommended textbooks were randomly selected for content analysis and a total of twelve textbooks were sampled. The paper examines the extent and the nature of the inclusion of issues of national identity and national unity in the selected Kiswahili recommended textbooks noting that Kiswahili is a core and compulsory subject in Kenyan secondary schools.

The core objectives of the study were: to determine the extent to which Kiswahili textbooks include issues of national unity and identity in its content, and to establish the nature of inclusion of issues of national unity and identity in the Kiswahili textbooks. The study offers new insights into how national

identity is constructed in school textbooks in an African country.

Theoretical Issues on Textbook Content and National Identity

The theory underpinning the study was Smith's model (1986). The most renowned theorists of nationalism, Anderson and Smith, developed competing theories of how national identity arises. Anderson (2006) emphasizes the nations' constructed nature, regarding them as products of intentional political attempts at nation-building. Smith (1986) believes that nation-building requires the pre-existence of a core "ethnie" who share a common denomination, a myth of origin, a common history, a distinct common culture, a territory and a sense of solidarity. Some critics have argued that Smith's model is not applicable to Africa, where a central "ethnie" does not exist in most states (Palmberg, 2009). However, Smith frequently refers to the continent in his writings such as when he explains the distinction between "full" and "depleted" ethnies. The first category is represented by Ethiopia, rich in myths and history, while depleted ethnies like Kenya and Tanzania lack traditions of a common ancestry. Since, in the case of these countries, ethnicity could not form the basis of national unity, they have attempted national identity through the creation of one-party states and national language which Smith describes as a form of political religion (Smith, 1986, p. 11). Smith (1986, p. 148) describes Kenya as a depleted ethnie.

It is this heterogeneity in Kenya leading to diversity in language, dialects and culture that led Kiswahili to gain the status of national language and a language for unification after independence. Adopting Smith's model for our study meant that Kiswahili becomes the ethnie in the study and can be used to promote nationalism. This unifying aspect is also echoed in the National goals of education which emphasize that Education in Kenya must foster a sense of nationhood and promote national unity. Much as Kenyans belong to different ethnic groups, races and religions, their differences should not divide them. They must live and interact in peace and harmony. Education is an avenue through which conflicts can be prevented or eliminated.

The National Goals of Education leave no doubt that national identity and unity are formulated as the primary goal of Kiswahili education. Thus this paper examines the extent and ways in which textbooks contribute to external and internal formations of tribal, cultural and national identities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The specific research questions were addressed through qualitative content analysis of twelve Kiswahili students' textbooks. Generally,

Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use" (p. 18). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) offer an elaborate definition of qualitative content analysis as "a research method for subjective interpretation of content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278).

Content analysis has an advantage of producing data that is not obtrusive (Insch *et al.*, 1997; Krippendorff, 2004). Therefore, the author used content analysis to examine data that was produced without the respondent's or a writer's prior knowledge that the information could be used as research data. The unobtrusive nature of content analysis reduces a researcher's biases (Insch *et al.*, 1997). In addition, content analysis is valued for its ability to evaluate the presentation of a certain issue in a large number of texts (McKee, 2003; Carley, 1993). Content analysis can generate analysis categories from an existing theory or available research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since this is a grey area, lack of literature on the topic of study was a limitation but literature on research done in other related areas and subjects were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Extent of Inclusion of Issues of National Unity and Identity

Content analysis was done on 12 recommended text books for teaching Kiswahili in Kenyan secondary schools. The content analysis was done at conceptual level to ascertain the extent and the nature of the inclusion of issues of national identity and unity in the Kiswahili course textbooks. At first words and phrases that connote national unity and identity were sampled. These sampled words were: *umoja* (unity), *kuleta jamii pamoja* (to bring the society together), *kusuluhisha matatizo katika jamii* (to resolve problems in the society), *kuondoa uhasama kati ya wanajamii* (to discourage conflict among members of the society), *Kushirikiana kwa pamoja* (togetherness), *kujivunia nchi yako* (to be proud of your country), *uzalendo* (patriotism). Any other words that brought in the concepts of national unity and identity were also considered.

The presence of these words and the themes that attributed to national unity and identity were considered as topics for national unity and identity. Topics that did not have these words in their content or their themes did not attribute to national unity and identity and were considered as topics that were not for national unity and identity. The data on Table 1 shows the findings of this content analysis.

Table 1: Topics for and those not for National Unity and Identity in Kiswahili Recommended Course Books

TEXBOOK	No. of topics for national unity and identity	No. of topics not for national unity and identity	Total
Chemichemi Kiswahili 1	07(6%)	105(94%)	112(100%)
Chemichemi Kiswahili 2	11(9%)	107(91%)	118(100%)
Chemichemi Kiswahili 3	29(25%)	86(75%)	115(100%)
Chemichemi Kiswahili 4	23(23%)	77(77%)	100(100%)
Total	70(16%)	375(84%)	445(100%)
Kiswahili kitukuzwe 1	09(13%)	60(87%)	69(100%)
Kiswahili kitukuzwe 2	10(14%)	59(86%)	69(100%)
Kiswahili kitukuzwe 3	11(11%)	92(89%)	103(100%)
Kiswahili kitukuzwe 4	23(21%)	87(79%)	110(100%)
Total	53(15%)	298(85%)	351(100%)
Johari ya Kiswahili 1	12(10%)	111(90%)	123(100%)
Johari ya Kiswahili 2	14(11%)	109(89%)	123(100%)
Johari ya Kiswahili 3	26(20%)	104(80%)	130(100%)
Johari ya Kiswahili 4	18(15%)	102(85%)	120(100%)
Total	70(14%)	426(86%)	496(100%)

The data indicates that very few topics in the Kiswahili course books have content on national unity and identity. A total of 70(16%) topics were for national unity and identity in the Chemichemi za Kiswahili textbook where as 375(84%) topics had no themes on national unity and identity. Fifty-three (15%) topics in Kiswahili Kitukuzwe were for national unity and identity while 298(85%) topics were not. In Johari ya Kiswahili, a total of 70(14%) topics were for national unity and identity whereas 426(86%) topics had no themes on national unity and identity.

The analyzed data also indicated that the content in the various Kiswahili genres do not advocate for national unity and identity. For example, the writing skills section of Kiswahili only highlighted on the major writing skills and had no aspects of national identity and unity. The grammar part of the language was basically on grammatical rules and had nothing to emphasize on national unity and identity. The only aspects that were noticed in this section of the language were the diverse examples on the various nouns/names that were used as examples in various sentences. It was evident that the nouns/names that were used in all the 12 textbooks were representative of the diverse communities in Kenya. The content in the oral literature part also catered for the diverse cultures in Kenya in all the sampled text books though not all Kenyan communities were captured. The bias was on the majority and minority ethnic groups. Most of the examples were from the majority groups for example topics on legends covered the heroes from the majority ethnic groups, like Lwanda Magere (Luo), Nabongo Mumia (Luhya), Mekatilili (Meru) among others. In certain series of books, for example Chemichemi za Kiswahili, there were no examples from some minority groups like the Boran, Rendile, and Turkana among others.

Therefore, there is need for African schools to acknowledge diversity in African societies as strength and not as a threat to national unity (Berman et al., 2004; Ntarangwi, 2003; Dei et al., 2006; Woolman, 2001). Dei et al. (2006) argue that there is scarcity of information on how schools in African countries can serve diverse students in an equitable way. According to Dei et al. (ibid.), recognizing and respecting differences will ensure long lasting solutions to some of the social and political problems in Africa. With reference to Ghana, a country similar to most African countries in terms of multi-ethnic and multilingual character, Dei et al. (2006) observe that ethnicity still privileges some groups over others in terms of access to educational opportunity. They therefore argue that emphasizing nation-building without considering differences can make the dominant group fail to admit its privileged status.

Woolman (2001) admits that national unity is still an important goal for African countries. According to Woolman (ibid.), national unity can be achieved through education that teaches "African economics, geography, culture and history, cultural heritage of dance, music and visual arts, literature, and natural resources" (p. 41). Woolman (ibid.) notes further that social studies should balance the understanding of different cultures and the acknowledgment of similarities among the cultures in order to facilitate unity. Oral literature may include genres such poetry, legends, praise songs, and narratives. Okafor (2004) asserts that African traditional/pre-colonial society contained forms of civic education that were practiced through the use of various forms of African oral literature. Thus the oral literature in Kiswahili that is taught in secondary school can be used to enhance national identity and unity.

What comes out clearly from the data is that schools should encourage multicultural education because it is a way of acknowledging diversity and encouraging social stability among African students. Pai (1990) has discussed four aims of multicultural education. First, multicultural education nurtures respect for, and appreciation of cultural diversity. The appreciation of different cultures enables us to effectively deal with our problems by learning from other cultures. Secondly, it promotes the inherent worth of each person and interest in the well-being of the society. This second aim is based on the assumption that people's identity is rooted in their culture. Third, multicultural education equips us with multicultural competencies that allow us to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. Last, multicultural education is instrumental in ensuring educational equity for all regardless of ethnicity, race, age or other exceptionalities. Dei et al. (2006) note that ethnicity is relevant in discussing education in the African context. With reference to Ghana, Dei et al. (ibid.) argue that it is problematic for students to view

themselves as Ghanaians without considering their ethnic identifications (which is the same for Kenyan students) because focus on national integration without considering ethnic differences blurs the reality of uneven power relations that exist in a society, which, in turn, maintains power inequalities among ethnic groups. With the emergence of tribal conflict in Kenya (2007-2008 post election violence), there is need for the government to also emphasize on issues of national unity and identity in the recommended secondary school textbooks. This suggests that a lot has to be done in improving the content in Kiswahili so as to attain the national goal of education of national unity more so Kiswahili being the national language whose main purpose in education is to enhance national unity.

Current Kenyan policy espouses universal education, with equal opportunity for all. The core goals reflect traditional values of training in social justice, morality, and responsibility, along with acquisition of life skills needed in the local environment. Modern policy goals include national development and unity along with individual service to the nation. Kenya's social diversity has brought a collateral concern for preservation of cultural heritage, social justice, human dignity, political equality and multicultural education. Critical reviews of the 8-4-4 system in 1990 and 1995 resulted in recommendations for reorganization of content and reduction of subjects due to student overload. A recent high level reform effort, the Koech Commission, made various recommendations. These included new efforts to build patriotism, national unity, mutual social responsibility, morality and ethical standards; education for all among others. The report emphasized on integration and improvement of content especially in Kiswahili where topics like oral literature and emerging issues in society were emphasized. Current policy calls for modification of the 8-4-4 system and strengthening curriculum with emphasis given to industrialization, environmental education, AIDS awareness, gender equity, and elimination of child labour and poverty. With the 2007-2008 post election violence, national unity in Kenya has been an area of concern and has become an emerging issue that needs to be addressed in all the sectors of the society. The education process in Kenya was adversely affected by the violence and hence there is need to integrate issues of national unity and identity in school content so as to educate Kenyan children and citizens on the need of national unity.

The Nature of Inclusion of Issues of National Identity and Unity in the Textbooks

Regarding the nature of representation of these issues, it was noted that the section on oral skills and oral literature had majority of the topics for national unity and identity. It was evident in oral literature that

there were examples from many cultural communities in Kenya. The books also acknowledged diversity by noting that Kenya did not have one culture but had as many cultures as the number of ethnic groups. Oral literature topics also had short stories, myths, proverbs and sayings with themes that emphasized peace, unity, patriotism, togetherness, love, and community cooperation among other themes that encourage unity.

The sampled textbooks also discussed national heroes. It was evident in all the sampled books (Kiswahili Kitukuzwe - Kidato cha 2 pg. 60; Kidato cha 3 pg. 122-123; Kidato cha 4 pg. 125; Chemichemi za Kiswahili - Kidato cha 2 pg. 199; Kidato cha 3 pg. 68; Kidato cha 4 pg. 116 and 162; Kiswahili Fasaha - Kidato cha 1 pg. 54; Kidato cha 2 pg. 74; Kidato cha 3 pg. 92; Kidato cha 4 pg. 95 and 111) talked about the various Kenyan heroes and heroines and also showed the pictures of some of these heroes. The mainly mentioned heroes were: Fumo Liyongo (Swahili), Lwanda Magere (Luo), Mekatilili (Meru), Sakawa (Kisii), Syokimau (Kamba), Elijah Masinde (Luhya), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), and Wangare Maathai among others. The study of these heroes/heroines enables students to identify with their communities, country or nation and even Africa in a wider perspective. This creates a sense of pride, identity and appreciation of these legends. It was noted that the sampled books had the same legends discussed a scenario that showed lack of representation of legends from other Kenyan communities. This calls for the inclusion of legends from other Kenyan communities so as to give a wider representation of Kenya as a nation. Mbuyi (1987) indicates that national heroes have often played a part in national identity. The study of these heroes/heroines enables students to identify with their communities, country or nation.

These text books also discussed national symbols such as the national flag (Kiswahili kitukuzwe - Kidato cha 1 pg. 105) and national anthem (Kiswahili Kitukuzwe - Kidato cha 4 pg. 208). The topic on the national flag explained the meaning of the colours and also stated the importance of the national flag as the symbol of unity, patriotism, nationalism and the liberation of Kenya from colonial rule. Such themes encourage students to be patriotic. The topic on the national anthem also analyzed the meaning of the words in all the stanzas and also explained the importance of the national anthem. Such themes promote national unity, identity and patriotism. Moreover, the discussion among students on the importance of the national symbols fosters national unity and identity and a sense of belonging since the national symbols make the students to feel that they belong to one community and nation. It was observed

that this topic was only in the KIE book Kiswahili Kitukuzwe series and not in the other series of books. There were also topics on national language and national unity (Lugha ya Taifa na Umoja wa Taifa, and Umoja wa Kitaifa in Kiswahili kitukuzwe - Kidato cha Tatu pg. 49-50, 147-148); also topics on national language and international relations (Lugha ya Taifa na Umoja wa Kimataifa). These topics emphasize that the teaching of Kiswahili has enabled students from different cultures to have something in common. The topics also stress on how Kiswahili has promoted interaction through school, business, politics and communication both nationally and internationally. However, Kiswahili continues to gain more status in the society in that it has been accepted as an important national and international language. Opijah (2001) explains that: Kiswahili's national stature as an ideal language for uniting people of different regions and ages has enhanced communication.

These topics also indicate that despite the many challenges today, the future of Kiswahili is bright in that it is recognized as an international language. Noordin (2001) states that Kiswahili language is now taught in many universities across the world, School of Oriental studies, University of London (SOAS), Leipzig of Germany among others are prominent in teaching and researching on Kiswahili. The works of these institutions of Kiswahili research have significant impact on the expansion of Kiswahili as lingua franca. This has also led to many trained teachers in Kiswahili. Furthermore, institutions of learning have provided funds and techniques of research into this language through exchange of faculty members and joint research projects. Kiswahili is also a language of broadcast on major world radio stations such as the BBC, Voice of America (VOA), Washington DC, and many other East, Central and Southern Africa's stations. Kiswahili is also recognized and used in OAU forums. UNESCO also supports Kiswahili as it is seen as the language that can be used to unify Africa for the sake of development and confidence in using an African language. Kiswahili is today available in Google networks signifying its development and acceptance. Another important section was the one that covered the history and the development of Kiswahili in Kenya and the world (Kiswahili Kitukuzwe - pg. 115-119, 177-180). These discussions gave the history, the development and the role of Kiswahili in the Kenyan society today. These topics clearly showed that Kiswahili as a national language promoted unity and identity because it made it easier for Kenyans from different language groups to understand each other. Noordin (2001) supports the development of Kiswahili in Africa and states that, the time has come for Africans to have serious considerations for the development of Kiswahili, which will put African unity on a firm

basis. The development of Kiswahili will eliminate not only cultural imperialism from the continent, but also ensure smooth communication among her peoples and hence lay a solid foundation for greater political and economic unity in future. The development of Kiswahili can be emphasized if many textbooks can be published since uniform textbooks with content rich in African culture can enhance African identity and unity. In examining the findings, it can be seen that Kiswahili text books covered issues of national unity and multicultural identity, although the books gave more coverage to national unity than national identity and also acknowledged Kenyan cultural diversity. Scholars (Dei et al., 2006; Adejumobi, 2001) argue that there is need to balance the pursuit for national unity and multicultural identity as a way of addressing the tensions that exist among African Countries.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The content in the Kiswahili textbooks touch on issues of national unity and identity. The content in these books also include aspects of national identity, especially in the following genres of Kiswahili: oral literature, written literature and comprehension. The presence of these aspects of national unity and identity enables students to be patriotic and learn to appreciate each other. From the analysis of findings and the subsequent conclusions made above, it is clear that there is need for the Ministry of Education, together with Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) to make the Kiswahili syllabus to clearly address issues of national unity as stated in national goals for education. In addition, there is need for the authors of the Kiswahili course books to highlight more on national unity and identity. The nature of presentation and inclusion of these issues should be evident in all the genres of Kiswahili. Apart from that, the teachers of Kiswahili should be trained on the integration of class content and the emerging issues in the society.

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