

# THE CENTRALITY OF TEACHER PERSONALITY IN THE LEARNING OF KISWAHILI: IS THERE AN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN THEORY?

*PUBLIC LECTURE PRESENTED BY PROF. ISAAC IPARA ODEO ON THURSDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2020 AT THE MULTI PURPOSE HALL, KIBABII UNIVERSITY.*

1. **Introduction:** Kiswahili, a language that has been in existence since 50AD (Massamba, 2014) has faced many impediments in the process of growing to attain its current status. Despite its fame, the teaching and learning of this language has many challenges in areas including: irrelevant curriculum, poor learning environment, lazy students, poor performance in examinations, interference of other languages, negative impact of western theories and more critically the problems associated with teachers. In the recent past, critics have focused on teacher personality as one of the contributing factors. In this paper, we argue that the indigenous African theory of poetry may provide a solution and foster the learning of Kiswahili especially at secondary school level.

2. **Experience of the presenter:** Presenter has had opportunity to teach at various levels in the last 42 years, witnessed academic and professional growth through membership of various associations and panels. During this period he has been able to expand scope of knowledge in Kiswahili education, curriculum development, teacher training, examinations and publications.

3. **Kiswahili curriculum:** Primary and secondary school Kiswahili curriculum received emphasis in 1963. At University level focus was enhanced in 1970 following the establishment of the University of Nairobi. Since then there has been concerted effort to improve the curriculum. Radical moment came in 1984 with the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education whose hallmark was practical approach and preparation of learners to face environment.

4. **Critical phases of curriculum development:** The introduction of the revised and rationalized curriculum in 2002. Intention to make learning interesting and relevant to world outside the classroom. Hinged on two theories: communication and interaction. Had new content, new arrangement of content and interactive approach to learning.

## 5. Weakness of 8-4-4:

- Content: abstract, overloaded and irrelevant.



- Learners: Lack competence.
- Methods: Rote learning.
- Environment: Weak learning background.
- Teachers: Not committed. Interested in learners passing examinations.
- Curriculum: Does not prepare learners for life, does not motivate and does not impart practical skills.

6. **BECF (2018):** Government forced to design the BECF 2018. Emphasis on competency based learning and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

### 7. Contribution of the presenter to Kiswahili education:

First stepped in a classroom as graduate teacher in 1978.

Challenges: Learners had admirable fluency but remained silent in class. Teacher relied on notes. Kiswahili proscribed. Learners exposed to 40 minutes of Kiswahili each working week day.

At Moi University:

- ✓ Grappling with new/key concepts: Language learning, language teaching, language acquisition.
- ✓ Introduced new ideas: integration, vocabulary not to be taught as a standalone topic, introduction of oral literature
- ✓ Most important contribution: Played role in producing revised secondary school Kiswahili syllabus through: Arguing for theoretical foundation, generating new terminology and suggesting new content: oral literature, short story, emerging issues and sociolinguistics.

8. **Have things changed?** No. Odeo (2003); Osebe(2006); Kang'ahi (2012;2017) Odeo and Agessa(2017), Odeo (2019): Have found that teachers and learners exhibit many errors in spoken and written Kiswahili

Blame on western/foreign system of education which is different from indigenous African system.

Attendant method: grammar translation. Outcome is poor competence manifested through errors in spoken and written Kiswahili.

Errors in language not entirely new phenomenon. Selinker (1972) introduced concept of interlanguage. Meaning: Language that manifests features of L1 and L2.

What contributes to interlanguage:

- L1 interference i.e kura shakura
- Transfer of rules from L1 to L2. i.e rutoto rutoko
- Weak foundation. i.e vitu hizi.



- d) Ignorance of grammatical rules. Mtu mgani.
- e) Overgeneralization of rules. i.e Sisi tutasija.
- f) Ignorance of cultural aspects of language use. Habari Rais Uhuru.

Errors occur across all levels including: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.

### **9. Why it is important to ensure quality learning of Kiswahili:**

Status of Kiswahili: official language, national language, lingua franca

African Unity: Kiswahili is working language

Language rights provide for that.

**10. Why is teacher's role critical:** Complexity of information arising from new technology, congestion in the classrooms, complexity of content, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

**11. Teacher personality becomes critical:** Stronge (2007). However, there is possibility that teachers do not execute work based on theory.

Why is theory important: Odeo (2008) helps direct inquiry, describes elements, reveals relationship among elements, sets principles that direct action, defines terminology, provokes new thinking.

Relationship between theory and related elements, Richards & Rodgers (1986):

- Theory.
- Approach.
- Method.
- Techniques.
- Personality traits.

Exemplified through selected theories that have been used extensively Richards & Rodgers (1986): Structural, Functional and communication.

These have not provided any remedy. Reason being they originated from the west.

**12. Demerits of western education:** Nsamenang and Tchmobe, (2011). Degradation of values, neglect African culture, belittle languages, relegate indigenous knowledge, and culture of aping foreign ways of doing things.

There is need to explore indigenous methods of learning language along the attendant theory.

**13. For now we have the theory of African Poetry:** From the theory we decipher three major tenets: Mulokozi, M. M. (2008); Mulokozi and Sengo (1995); Shitemi, N.L. (2010).



- A. The role of poetry was to educate, address issues of cultural and socio-historical reality, to propagate good language use and usage.
  - B. Elements of good poetry: Aesthetic value, rules of Kiswahili prosody and linguistic competence.
  - C. Characteristics of a good poet: High mastery of language, know how to manipulate the language, possess a large vocabulary, exhibit high linguistic and stylistic standards, have wide stock of knowledge and be people to be emulated. Also be master of dramatic effect.
- From these we can pick the following personality traits for a good teacher of Kiswahili.

**14. Personality traits of good Kiswahili teacher:** Fluency of language, good oratory skills, linguistic competence, wide knowledge of issues, ability to be role model and mentor, Innovative, readiness to understand and address learner challenges, exemplary performance skills, ability to control learning environment.

**15. Conclusion:** There is need therefore for Kiswahili scholars to carry out more research into Kiswahili oral literature and especially poetry in order to generate principles that will guide the preparation of teachers with personality traits that can foster effective learning of Kiswahili.

Let me say like Prof. Kezilahabi liked saying: These are my reflections, these are my dreams. I invite you to reflect and dream with me.

Thank you.

