

THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN KENYA: A CASE FOR USING THEM AS LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION THROUGHOUT PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

In the situation that currently prevails in Kenya, English is the prestigious language, the mastery of which is a prerequisite for social and economic advancement. Kiswahili, for its part, as the national language of Kenya and now an official language alongside English, is used for communication between people of different ethnic groups, in the courts, in the lower primary school, as well as in such areas as the market, the neighbourhood, the transport industry and work. As for the other indigenous languages of Kenya than Kiswahili, they are used in the family, the local community, lower primary school, adult literacy courses, the church, the media, and at the work place. This paper, while recognizing the huge challenges that would be involved, argues for the use of these indigenous languages as languages of instruction beyond the lower primary school, that is up to at least the end of primary school. This would ensure that they are more stable languages capable of being used more productively by the learners later in life in both their further education and their professional lives.