



## East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences

[ejass.eanso.org](http://ejass.eanso.org)

Volume 7, Issue 1, 2024

Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285>



EAST AFRICAN  
NATURE &  
SCIENCE  
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

### Potentials for Globalization of Kiswahili Language

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Article DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.7.1.2143>

**Date Published:** ABSTRACT

26 August 2024

**Keywords:**

Kiswahili,  
International  
Language,  
Lingua Franca,  
Globalization,  
Diaspora.

This paper aims to discuss the potential for globalization of Kiswahili as one of the fastest-growing languages in the world in terms of domains of use. Kiswahili is among many African indigenous languages whose prominence is substantially cutting across international frontiers. Being a national language of Tanzania and Kenya, Kiswahili has drawn attention and enthusiasm from various people, institutions, mass media, and nations to be adopted for communication in various matters. From having been used in international organisations like the East African Community (EAC), SADC, and the AU to recognition by Microsoft, used by the world's big mass media such as the SABC, BBC, DW, VOA, UN Radio, Radio Japan, RFI, and many others and being taught as a subject in various international universities in USA, United Kingdom, China, and Germany. Despite the widespread of Kiswahili, literature has not fully shown the proper ways on how to improve this language to reach the status of other languages like English in this world. This study used documentary review and secondary data collection methods. The findings of the study show that there is still a long way to go to attain a full achievement in making Kiswahili a full equitably competitive globalised language as other international languages like English and French. The paper recommends areas of improvement which include an increase in the use of language by the diasporas and an improvement of teaching resources like textbooks.

#### APA CITATION

Mwalongo, L. J. (2024). Potentials for Globalization of Kiswahili Language. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 541-547. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.7.1.2143>

#### CHICAGO CITATION

Mwalongo, Leopard Jacob. 2024. "Potentials for Globalization of Kiswahili Language". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 7 (1), 541-547. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.7.1.2143>.

#### HARVARD CITATION

Mwalongo, L. J. (2024) "Potentials for Globalization of Kiswahili Language". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 7(1), pp. 541-547. doi: 10.37284/eajass.7.1.2143.

#### IEEE CITATION

L. J., Mwalongo "Potentials for Globalization of Kiswahili Language". *EAJASS*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 541-547, Aug. 2024.

#### MLA CITATION

Mwalongo, Leopard Jacob. "Potentials for Globalization of Kiswahili Language". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, no. 1, Aug. 2024, pp. 541-547, doi:10.37284/eajass.7.1.2143

## INTRODUCTION

Kiswahili is a language that is spoken by a group of Bantu people called the Swahili who are mainly found in Tanzania and Kenya. The language is also spoken in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Mozambique, and the Comoro Islands. According to Shillington (1995:49), 'Bantu' is a term used by modern linguists to refer to "a particular family of African languages belonging to the wider Niger-Congo group". This group stretches across sub-Saharan Africa. This language group is identified by its own language values. According to Bloomfield (1933:151-7), languages have what are called unique values. The voiceless nasal stem '-ntu', the singular prefix 'mu-' and the bilabial plural prefix 'ba-' which is sometimes realized as labio-velar 'va-' are common values to the languages that belong to this family, hence, 'Bantu'. This literally means people, though it is sometimes realized as 'muntu' denoting a singular human being or 'person'. Kiswahili is one of the 450 languages belonging to this language group (Shillington 1995:51). Bantu is, therefore, the parent name of all the languages belonging to the proto-Bantu. The language evolved from present-day Cameroun, though there are speculations that it was a language that was being spoken in the Niger-Congo area. From there, two Bantu streams emerged, one stretching west and then southwards while the other one stretched East and then South as well. Kiswahili belongs to the eastern stream having been influenced by a variety of other languages including Arabic, Portuguese, German, English and numerous native languages. The name Swahili originates from Arabic Swahili (a plural adjectival form of Arabic word meaning the coast). The language dates from the contacts of Arabian traders with the inhabitants of the east coast of Africa over many centuries. During colonial rule, The Germans used the Kiswahili language extensively as the language of administration in Tanganyika, thus laying the foundation for its adoption as a national language of independent Tanzania. However, in Kenya and Uganda, other local languages also received official encouragement during the colonial rule

though the British emphasized the use of the English language. In a bid to try and 'civilize' the indigenous African people, the British then introduced new concepts through institutions of education, technology, public administration, urbanization, social work, and soon (Chikanza, 1986:8). The Africans had to respond by attending formal education in schools. Some were converted to Christianity and were also compelled to conform to the demands of the new forms of governance, and technology and to adopt new values of life. They were also compelled to speak English since it was the medium of instruction in schools and other public gatherings. To this Mazrui (1966:295-311) says:

an African in British Africa was regarded as an intellectual if he had acquired some fluency in the English language. Nor was this a simple case of using literacy as the ultimate test of intellectuality. An African who was widely read in Swahili but who could not speak English was likely to be considered further from intellectual than a poorly read African who had acquired fluency in spoken English.

Many scholars of Kiswahili, especially in Tanzania and Kenya have always argued that Kiswahili is the undisputed lingua franca of Eastern and Central Africa. They have also claimed that the language is spreading fast across Africa and beyond hence gaining the status of an international language. However, the real international status of Kiswahili is questionable as efforts to promote it within the Swahili-speaking countries are also questionable. Chimera (1998:87) captures this well when he says:

Whereas Tanzania has been characterized by a realistic approach to Kiswahili, Kenya has been suffering from what psychologists call 'the approach-avoidance conflict'; a conflict that slowed the development of the language in this country. Consequently, Kenya is still in the process of getting out of this situation, an unfortunate situation decried by the country's leading Kiswahili scholars.

However, no concrete language policies have been put in place by the Kenyan government to actualize the official status of Kiswahili. Even though Kiswahili is widely used in informal spaces English remains the language of administration and communication in both public and private institutions. This paper traces the development of the Kiswahili language in terms of its widespread, making it a potential globalizing language.

In the twentieth Century, Kiswahili was readily accepted in Kenya and Tanzania where it has played key roles in national development (Mukuthuria, 2006:154). Its rise, development and spread in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the rest of Eastern, Central, Southern parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world Khakisen sufficiently dealt with by Whitley (1969), Khamisi (1974), Chiraghadin & Mnyampala (1977), Heine (1990), Mbaabu (1991), Mazrui & Mazrui (1995), Chimera (1998) and Mulokozi (2004) among others. Mulokozi (2004:1–2) outlines the following as being the factors that assisted the development and spread of Kiswahili in Tanzania and thereafter the rest of Eastern Africa: the maritime trade; the caravan trade into the interior; the rise of Zanzibar as East Africa's commercial capital; the Bantu cultural complex, with its affinity to the Swahili complex, and its cultural and political tolerance; the relative cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the Swahili communities; the factor of Islam; colonial language policy, especially by the Germans in Tanzania; Christian missionary activity, including alphabetization, book printing and publishing; mass media; cultural activities such as music, games, sports and ceremonies; economic and social change, including urbanization and new infrastructure; national politics; the school system. Through all literature visited, it has been noted that Kiswahili language is very popular in the world, but most of literature did not show the proper ways on how to improve this language to reach the status of other language like English in this world.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a documentary review methodology where different library documents, journals, books and research papers were reviewed. The study used web of science core collection database where 40 published papers were randomly selected both qualitative and quantitative papers based on languages and Kiswahili language content. Furthermore, 10 books were used to search the related information on Kiswahili language, 30 papers and 6 books were directly included in this study. The study used keywords to search the information, the keywords used including potential of Kiswahili language, globalization of Kiswahili language, effects of Kiswahili language, effects of Kiswahili language and spread of Kiswahili language. Where facts were used, acknowledgement was made through in text citations and referencing. Data were analysed using metadata analysis techniques and were presented in systematic order following the study specific objectives.

## FINDINGS

### **Kiswahili as the Rapidly Growing Language in Prominence**

Kiswahili is a lingua franca of the East African community and has achieved widespread use in almost every country within the East African Community. It has spread to many parts of East Africa and the rest of Africa through informal and formal trade, governance, education and religion (Whiteley, 1968).

Currently, there is no doubt that Kiswahili has gained ground as a language of choice by millions of people in East Africa and its neighbours (Moshi, 2006). It has been transported to different parts of Africa and the West due to migrations, both voluntary and as a consequence of ethnic wars, including the fight against colonialism and apartheid. Refugees from neighbouring countries learnt Kiswahili during their short stay in Kenya or Tanzania and kept the language when they finally immigrated to England, the United States, or other Western countries. There is evidence of the increase in demand for Kiswahili translators

for agencies like the American-based Language Line Incorporated and Pacific Interpreters Inc. that offer services to law enforcement, hospitals, legal services, immigration services, airline companies, and schools.

An international perspective, Kiswahili is gaining prominence even more rapidly. The number of people learning Kiswahili at institutions of higher education in the United States has also attained impressive numbers. In Europe and Asia, the enthusiasm is stronger where many of the European institutions of higher education, including private organizations, have included the study of Kiswahili in their programmes. European institutions offer a more serious programme of African languages, with Kiswahili on the top of the list.

In international media, Kiswahili is one of the languages topping the list. Kiswahili has dominated world media such as the Voice of America, Radio DeutscheWelle, the BBC radio and Television, and Asia radio and TV programs that come to many homes in East Africa. In addition, Kiswahili has been identified by Microsoft for the development of scanner OCR that would identify Kiswahili text. Majira Newspaper (June, 2004:2) noted that Kiswahili was selected because of its status, a strong African language that can stand a global test as a language of business and communication in East Africa.

Through its resolution 71/328 of 11 September 2017, The General Assembly of the United Nations and UNESCO through resolution 41 C/61 on 23RD November 2021 proclaimed the 7th July of each year as the World Kiswahili Language Day being the first African Language to be recognized in such a manner by the UN. This day was recognized due to the fact that the founding father of Tanzania Mwalimu Julius Nyerere announced the use of Kiswahili as a nationalist language during the struggle for independence, at the 7th of July 1954 conference of the Tanganyika African National Conference (TANU).

### Reasons why Kiswahili Gaining Prominence?

With more than 200 million speakers, Kiswahili is among the 10 most widely spoken languages in the world. Lisanza (2021) argued that Kiswahili is the most widely spoken language in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kiswahili is one of the lingua franca in many countries within East, Central and Southern Africa and the Middle East. It is also one of the official languages of the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU). The United Nations in the 1950s established the Kiswahili Service Radio broadcasting in Kiswahili for listeners in all countries where Kiswahili is used.

These contexts demonstrate that Kiswahili is attaining a prominent status. Not only is this language powerful but also very symbolic. It has and continues to be used to shape the understanding of the world about Africa (even when we view this as being done at the expense of other African indigenous languages). Undoubtedly, Kiswahili will achieve a recognized global power. The challenge is to establish a sustainable global need for it and ensuring its importance of other global languages.

Literary, Kiswahili is growing rapidly. There is a number of textbooks and computer-assisted programs for Kiswahili language and literature (Moshi and Omar, 2003). Several scholars like Ali&Mwakilo (2001) and Chuwa (2003) have developed manuals in Kiswahili that are intended to facilitate the understanding of how the computer works and how other writing programs such as Word Perfect could be utilized in Kiswahili. Microsoft (MS Word Journal, 2002) listed Kiswahili as one of the prime targets for the development of a user-friendly operational manual in the local language. Kiswahili leads the pack while it offers both the model and encouragement to other languages.

In East Africa, Kiswahili serves as a lingua franca among different ethnic communities, and it is usually the language of the workplace, marketplace, educational systems, and in



Tanzania-more than the other East African countries, the language of government business. There is also historical evidence of the power of Kiswahili as demonstrated by its ability to penetrate areas like the Francophone countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Burundi, where French was introduced through the Belgians.

### **Teaching and Learning Resources of Kiswahili in Schools**

When we look at Kiswahili as a rapidly growing world language, we have to make a detailed examination of the teaching and learning resources in Kiswahili in our schools. Teaching is very important in curriculum implementation. If there are challenges in teaching, then learning is affected, and good performance may not be realized. Increasing the effectiveness of teaching would have a large enduring impact on performance (Murphy & Machin, 2011). Teachers of Kiswahili and students are faced with challenges of resources that make it difficult for them to realize good performance in national examinations. Inadequate resources reduce teachers' effectiveness. Farrant (2006) says that resource-based learning encourages the teacher to take pride in how well students can learn. It makes teaching and learning to be student-centred rather than teacher-centred. Materials offer more opportunities for learners' participation in class. Where teaching and learning resources are not adequate teachers are likely to use teacher-centred methods such as lecturing. In lecturing, students are largely passive hence very little can be observed from them. Farrant (2006) asserts that in teacher-centred approaches there is a tendency to regard students as uniform groups of learners rather than individuals with different needs and talents. Arends (2007) sees this as a big challenge for teachers as students have different abilities. The student-centered teaching and learning can be made possible by the use of a variety of teaching and learning resources.

Textbooks for instance are the main resource for any teacher and student. Books are important before, during and after the lesson. Teachers need

textbooks to plan for lessons while students need them to prepare for lessons. In languages including Kiswahili, some aspects such as comprehension cannot be taught without passages found in textbooks. After the lesson, students need the textbooks for reference, revising what has been taught and doing assignments. Tomlinson (1998) observes that teachers rely on course books for content and order of the content. Where books are inadequate, the teacher arrives with a copy or a few copies and reads from the front of the class or select a few students who read aloud as the others follow. Then the teacher requires the students to answer the questions from what has been read. This denies the student a direct experience with the book and opportunities to improve their reading skills. Textbooks are also important in the cultivation of reading culture among learners.

### **Strategies for Coping with the Challenges in Teaching and Learning Kiswahili**

Despite the challenges teaching and learning has to take place. Therefore strategies for coping with the challenges in teaching and learning Kiswahili have to be applied. School administrations are vital in the provision of teaching and learning resources using funds from the government. Ambuko (2008) observes that the majority of teachers, rely on school authorities to provide materials. The school authorities in this case use funds from the government which provides funding.

Another strategy for coping with the challenges of resources is improvisation. The Kiswahili syllabus should recommend that the teacher comes up with as many teaching and learning materials as possible depending on the nature of learners. In Turkey, Ozsevic (2010) observed that teachers did not have adequate time to develop instructional materials. This posed difficulty in the implementation of the curriculum. However, the study was based on the English language while this study is based on Kiswahili. Furthermore, the study was done in a different setting (Turkey). Improvisation requires creativity among teachers. However, a study carried out in South Africa in

relation to classroom assessment noted that only 10% of teachers thought they were successful in generating their own materials (Reyneke et al, 2010). Though teachers felt well-equipped after theoretical training, practical implementation remained a challenge. Unlike this study which was based on assessment, the current study was broader in that it covered the four elements of the curriculum. A teacher helps in planning, identifying problems or new areas of study, locating materials, supplying needed information and teaching new skills. The teacher studies the needs of students in class and responds to them appropriately.

Therefore, textbooks are the main resource for any teacher and student. Books are important before, during and after the lesson. Teachers need textbooks to plan for lessons while students need them to prepare for lessons. In languages including Kiswahili, some aspects such as comprehension cannot be taught without passages found in textbooks. After the lesson, students need the textbooks for reference, revising what has been taught and doing assignments. Tomlinson (1998) observes that teachers rely on course books for content and order of the content. Where books are inadequate, the teacher arrives with a copy or a few copies and reads from the front of the class or selects a few students who read aloud as the others follow. Then the teacher requires the students to answer the questions from what has been read. This denies the student a direct experience with the book and opportunities to improve their reading skills. Textbooks are also important in the cultivation of reading culture among learners.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

When we anticipate the globalization of Kiswahili, one may look forward to investing in Kiswahili. Though on a small scale, there is a movement to incorporate Kiswahili in technological advancement. The recent investment by Bill Gates in the development of a Kiswahili version of Microsoft (July, 2004) and the utilization of new technologies like cell phones are encouraging aspects that create

opportunities for Kiswahili as well as establishing an important role for Kiswahili in the 21st Century. It is also testimony to the current and future power of Kiswahili, dispelling the myth that technology and modern science can only be achieved through colonial or European languages, something that is a concern to many as the winds of globalization surge.

There is also a need to encourage those in the Diaspora who advocate for the global use of Kiswahili to refrain from being contented with the minimal utilization of Kiswahili as is often demonstrated in the US in the adoption of Kiswahili names, words, and phrases in naming practices, the scattered use of Swahili words in children's books, children's theatre and films, and product labels (especially beauty products). Also, if Kiswahili is to be one of the global languages, we cannot be contented with the teaching of Kiswahili as an academic subject when its major accomplishment is to enable the learner to name objects. While we encourage those small steps, we should also cultivate the interest of those who want to learn the language because of their interest and hope to use it purposefully. Such learners are the likely global users of Kiswahili. As scholars we need to encourage life-long learners, those that are willing to go beyond the object naming exercise. Accuracy in usage and the need to be functional in the language should be the key objectives both for the teacher and the learner.

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