

## Original Research Article

# Working Towards Collaborations in the Teaching and Development of African Languages for Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge

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**Abstract:** While the importance of taking deliberate steps aimed at ensuring improved living standards is widely appreciated, less attention is given to the question of the numbers enjoying the upgraded standards. Consequently, in many developing nations, the majority of citizens live in abject poverty. Indeed, the divide between the developed and developing countries is best expressed in the quality of life that obtains in these two sets of countries. Further, success in engaging the masses and involving them in striving for development calls for an understanding of the local environment. It is in this context that indigenous knowledge becomes critical and issues of indigenous languages assume centrality. In order for African languages to play their rightful role in the continent's development, they must be empowered. This, therefore, calls for concerted efforts in the development of African languages. This paper explores the role of collaborations both regionally and internationally in the teaching, research and development of African languages. Using Swahili as an example, it discusses how well-crafted collaborations between universities and other relevant stakeholders can contribute in the teaching and development of African languages to enable their continued use in harnessing indigenous knowledge for development. It concludes that there are several opportunities for innovation in developing collaborations that in turn have the capacity to develop African languages for driving the development agenda in Africa.

**Keywords:** Collaboration, African languages, indigenous knowledge, development, research, empowerment.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge that is found in all societies in the world has a very central role to play in a society's wellbeing. It is, therefore, imperative that it is not lost as many societies continuously move to the acceptance of modern western knowledge and ways of knowing as if they were or are+ the only way. Equally important is the truth that the said indigenous knowledge, in the case of Africa, is best described and discerned through local African languages. This calls for a relook at our position with regard to the place of local languages in the current civilization. Acknowledging that language is critical in development, just like indigenous knowledge is, we have to conclude that the best way for Africa to develop its people is to accept the significance of indigenous knowledge and the languages that carry it along as unavoidable ingredients in its development.

This paper delved into a discussion on indigenous knowledge, the role of language in making

use of it, and the place of collaborations in developing African languages for development. After the introduction, a brief statement is provided on how the research was conducted. The section is then followed by a discussion on what indigenous knowledge is and how it fits into the central argument of the need for collaborations in the teaching and development of African languages. The next part dealt with the available opportunities for collaborations, challenges in the establishment of collaborations, creative ways that can be used to establish collaborations before giving a way forward in the form of steps that can be taken to deal with the current situation. Lastly, a conclusion is provided.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

Data used in this paper was collected mainly from secondary sources, which included books, articles and other publications in the area of indigenous knowledge and collaborations in higher institutions of learning. The paper also utilized the author's

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experiences as a language teacher in several universities in Africa and America for 26 years to date, and his involvement in local, regional and international initiatives in the teaching and development of African languages. In addition, discussions were held with 5 colleagues on the topic, as well as an electronic communication with the CEO of one of the institutions championing the promotion of Kiswahili in East Africa and beyond.

### **3.0 Indigenous Knowledge and the Teaching and Learning of African Languages**

The concept of indigenous knowledge has attracted a lot of debate over time. To some it is basically the ways of knowing that are associated with natives or traditional societies, which have not been fully exposed to the international or modern way of knowing. Mawere (2015) alludes to the fact that many definitions of indigenous knowledge have been suggested, and proceeds to offer his by referring to it as "... a set of ideas, beliefs, and practices (some of which have indigenous religious underpinnings) of a specific locale that has been used by its people to interact with their environment and other people over a long period of time." Mawere (2015:59).

Mawere (2015:58) contends that indigenous knowledge has an important role to play in public education because of its potential in "... motivating, raising interest, and promoting both innovative thinking and a sense of self-consciousness in learners." The import of the above is the understanding that each community possesses indigenous knowledge, although some seem to be moving very fast on the road of downplaying its value to their existence. Equally important is the fact that such knowledge has driven different communities' wellbeing, alongside modern knowledge, albeit with decreasing recognition, and will continue to do so for a long time. This paper holds that the said role of indigenous knowledge above is not limited to public education. Indeed, even before what is now known as formal education, it is indigenous knowledge that was utilized in educating people in Africa and elsewhere, equipping them with an understanding of their environment, and ways of conquering it for their own good and for posterity.

African indigenous knowledge and African languages are closely intertwined. This stems from the fact that it is language that is used to create, carry and transmit indigenous knowledge for the benefit of society. As such, we can't set out to trace the value and uses of indigenous knowledge in disregard of the vehicle that carries it along. Recognition of the importance of indigenous knowledge in Africa must be accompanied by recognition of the importance of African languages. Research in African indigenous knowledge should, therefore, go hand in hand with research in African languages. Their development and teaching will be useful in assisting to extract the wealth

of knowledge that abound in communities and utilize it in tackling existing challenges. Secondly, the teaching and development of African languages will enable Africa document its indigenous knowledge and share it with the rest of the world through publishing in the local languages, and translating it into other languages; hence contributing to the production of knowledge globally.

Furthermore, Indigenous knowledge has a role in language learning and in one's identity. Mawere (2015: 63) states it as follows, "indigenous knowledge could also be used to teach language, recount history, reclaim humanity and dignity, and promote a sense of self-consciousness and cultural identity in learners." It can be safely added that using indigenous knowledge in the teaching of African languages will also offer learners an opportunity to know and appreciate more the cultural diversity that is a characteristic of a majority of African nations. This is particularly the case since a number of African languages are increasingly being taught to students from different cultures. The same would apply to foreign students of African languages both in Africa and the rest of the world, mainly, America, Europe and Asia. Besides, unknown by many people is the wealth of wisdom that our ancestors had as well as their contribution to the advancement of humanity. All these can be brought to the fore by taking a critical look at our indigenous knowledge systems.

Busia (1964) and Woolman (2001), both cited by Mawere (2005) hold the view that education in Africa should have been rooted more to the continent's cultural heritage and value systems, and this could only be done by maintaining African languages because they are best suited for teaching the mentioned values and cultures. Wolman (2001:41) supports the importance of ensuring oral and written fluency in African languages, and proceeds to state that "the importance of African language development is further underscored by the historical reality that early-nation building in Europe was closely linked to the cultivation of vernacular languages and literature."

In this light, Chimwone's assertion that Africa needs to evolve its own language of development since it can't claim to be on a path to development using borrowed intellectual, technological and financial resources becomes very persuasive. Neither can it do so by relying on the goodwill and generosity of donors (Zegeye and Vambe, 2006:330). In fact, as early as in the 1970s, scholars had started questioning the absence of African cultural productions. Examples of such scholars include Cheikh Anta Diop and Foucault (cited in Zegeye and Vambe, 2006:331). Diop (1974) wondered what Africans were being taught in schools and universities while Foucault (1972) decries the practice of emphasizing Europe's memoirs as the "archeology of knowledge."

Downgrading or disparaging African knowledge systems was further entrenched in the European Academe by fronting the superiority of the written word over the oral tradition that was largely practiced in Africa and the rest of the third world. This, therefore, created the impression that whatever is not written was not knowledge; which is false. Discussions of indigenous knowledge have led to indigenism, a related concept. Broadly, it refers to an acceptance of the universality of indigenous people's culture and individual rights: attention to issues like cultural relativism, and implications of indigenous people's agitation for self-determination.

There is a lot of value in exploring local indigenous knowledge systems, which can be manifested in different genres like: African dreams, drumming, song, music, ancestor veneration, spirit mediums among others, and using them in modern life. However, there is a challenge in that many Africans have chosen to disregard the value in the wealth of African knowledge systems in preference for modern western knowledge, forgetting that they are still very critical in facing current challenges and readying its people for the future. In order to be able to take advantage of the rich African indigenous knowledge, the languages that carry it must be appreciated. In addition, indigenous knowledge needs to be explored in depth and local languages used to explain it to the majority, especially the younger generation that seems to be running away from anything indigenous. In turn, this cannot happen if African languages are not taught and developed well. Fortunately that situation can be remedied, and one avenue of doing so is that of engaging in collaborations in the teaching and development of local languages, which will then lead society in its development journey.

Two examples will suffice to show what Africa is bound to miss if it does not reverse the trend of disregarding indigenous knowledge. After years of research and interaction with their environment, our forefathers developed a body of knowledge that helped them weave through very hard situations. Near Lake Victoria in western Kenya, lives the Luo who are a Nilotic community. Its main activity is fishing although they also kept livestock and engaged in agriculture. They actively conserved their environment and lives by using various traditional systems. For instance, there were special trees that were used in making boats used for fishing. These trees had several characteristics that were friendly to the activity involved. They did not soak water so much, hence were light and could float easily on water. That way, they reduced instances of drowning and saved lives. The said trees, and others used for other activities were not cut at will by everyone. There were members of the community, usually those of age who were allowed to supervise the felling of trees for specific purposes to avoid wastage. Additionally, such activities were accompanied by traditional rituals that

made the whole affair spiritual. All these served to ensure that the environment and lives were protected for the benefit of the entire community.

The Kuria of south western Kenya were farmers and livestock herders who were exceedingly committed to cattle especially. They had a very rich tradition in food preservation, and preparation of seed for planting. In this community too, it is only the elderly, mainly men who were in charge of activities that had the potential to impact the community negatively. Like their Luo neighbors, the Kuria invoked various traditional practices, and engaged in song and dance in a number of their activities, with strict teachings on what is allowed and what is prohibited. These and other African communities used their indigenous knowledge effectively to live complete lives. All these practices were expressed in indigenous languages. Specific vocabulary and expressions were put to use in carrying the knowledge and conveying it to the next generation. There is a real danger of losing all that because many people no longer know and use their languages. That is why there is a critical need to revisit the African languages in order to salvage the knowledge associated with them. As the languages are being revitalized, efforts should also be made to carefully document important texts and translate them for posterity.

#### **4.1. Available Opportunities in Institutional Led Collaborations**

There are several opportunities for collaborations that are driven by different organizations willing to partner with institutions of higher learning in their academic endeavours. Such opportunities can be used in starting collaborations that will greatly benefit African languages. These include the Carnegie Diaspora Exchange Programme (CADFP) and the Staff Mobility Programme by the Inter University Council for East Africa and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Inter University Council for East Africa, and the East African Kiswahili Commission, among others.

The Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (CADFP) is a fellowship program for educational projects at African higher education institutions in selected countries. Sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), the fellowship program involves African institutions in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda in an arrangement that enables them to host an African-born scholar living in the United States or Canada to work in projects in research collaboration, graduate student teaching/mentoring and curriculum co-development. Since its inception in 2013, it had awarded 385 scholarships by July 2019. The scholarship is offered by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in collaboration with the United States International University-Africa (USIA-Africa), and

involves a scholar coming to an institution in the named countries for a period of between 21 and 90 days. It is designed for African born scholars who are currently living and working in the United States or Canada. Scholars of African languages are many in the two eligible countries but not many have applied to take advantage of the opportunity. On the other hand, African institutions are allowed to apply to be matched with a scholar; hence there is room for those working in institutions in Africa to initiate the request. Why are scholars of African origin not taking full advantage of the arrangement? In 2016, communication between Rongo University in Kenya, and a scholar based in New Jersey ended in disappointment when the scholar simply abandoned the application process mid-way. A lot can be accomplished in the 90 days allowed with regard to the development of African languages; hence different universities in the eligible countries should be flooding the secretariat with applications.

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), an organization that gives many scholarships for study in Germany and in local universities in many countries in Africa runs a programme that scholars of African languages, who are DAAD scholars, can take advantage of. It involves a sponsorship to spend up to 3 months in an institution of higher learning in Germany. Such a visit offers an opportunity to establish collaborations in many aspects of teaching and developing African languages.

Several international universities have programmes in their departments and centers which involve hosting of scholars from universities abroad for short periods. For instance, the University of Leiden in the Netherlands has had such an arrangement, called the Visiting Fellowship Programme which is run by the African Studies Centre (ASC), for a long time. Others include the six months Center for African Studies Visiting Fellowship at the University of Cambridge and the AfOx Visiting Fellows Program at the University of Oxford among others. These arrangements are not limited to African languages, but they are open, meaning that scholars of African languages can apply for them alongside those from other fields.

Regionally, the Inter University Council for East Africa has a Staff Mobility Programme, which allows scholars to move within member universities in the EAC Partner States. Section 6 (i) of the IUCEA Act, 2009, stipulates that the council shall “encourage the exchange of students and staff between member universities”. The programme’s objective is to encourage the sharing of academic human resources, exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences and hence contribute to the EAC regional integration while at the same time helping address capacity gaps in member universities. Participants in the exchange programme are expected to offer their services in teaching, research, external examination, and

community engagement. The programme lasts up to 3 months and is only open to staff in paid up member universities. Scholars of African languages are eligible to participate in this programme for the good of their languages of specialization.

Modeled along similar lines is the mobility programme that is run by the East African Kiswahili Commission that is based in Zanzibar. The East African Kiswahili Commission (EACK) started its operations in 2015 as an institution of the East African Community (EAC) charged with the mandate of coordinating and promoting the use of Kiswahili for regional integration and sustainable development. The programme is a great opportunity for the commission to contribute in developing capacity of stakeholders in the development of the language. The objective of the programme is captured as “... to provide opportunities for Kiswahili stakeholders to interact in a creative and innovative manner so as to establish strategic partnerships, sustainable collaborations and strong and broad co-operation as a means towards the development and use of Kiswahili for regional integration and sustainable development” (<https://kiswacom.org/>). Its broadness, which had 18 areas for mobility in 2019, makes it easy for interested scholars to send in applications. Their first call in March, 2019 attracted 126 applications from individuals and 3 institutions. Out of these 23 individuals and the 3 institutions were successful. Another advantage of the programme is that it involves stakeholders beyond the universities, including journalists, high school teachers, and writers, among others.

Although individual universities in Kenya and the entire East African region have structures that allow collaborations on different aspects via the signing of Memoranda of Understanding, there are no known strong collaborations in the area of African languages. This is despite the reality that individual members of academic staff and departments have the ability to initiate different collaborative arrangements. Collaborations can be worked out in joint research and hosting of conferences.

Scholars in African Languages from different institutions can collaborate with their counterparts locally, regionally, and globally in proposing joint research on different aspects of language studies. In fact this can go a step further by roping in scholars from related fields, which would bode pretty well with the current trend that emphasizes multidisciplinary and multi institutional research. For example, the National Research Fund (NRF) in Kenya gives up to Ksh. 20,000,000 (\$ 195,852) for such research projects. There are several other organizations that would be more than willing to consider such proposals for funding. Besides joint research, universities can also work together and with industry in holding conferences on different themes that are relevant to the role that

African languages can play in developing the world. This would not be a problem in Kenya, for instance, where many universities are located in close proximity. As a way of illustration, Kibabii University (KIBU), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), and Alupe University College (AUC), all in Western Kenya are within less than 80 kilometers from each other, a fact that makes it possible for them to carry out many activities together.

Indeed this can also be done internationally. The collaboration between the University of Rwanda and Rongo University, which is discussed further below, chose a series of joint conferences (Two Universities Joint International Kiswahili Conference by the University of Rwanda and Rongo University, Kenya) as the first activity to be undertaken in the linkage. A write up was made on the inaugural one, which was to be hosted by the University of Rwanda between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2018 with the proposed theme being *The Role of Kiswahili in the Development of East Africa and the Great Lakes Region*. After endorsement of the idea by the relevant schools in the two institutions, one of the partners simply went quiet. Many advantages would be realized by such initiatives. Besides combining the expertise in these different institutions in planning and running conferences efficiently, such an event would attract more scholars to the conference owing to the combined networks of the two institutions; not to mention the pulling together of resources in the exercise.

#### 4. 2 Challenges in Establishing Collaborations

While acknowledging that several different strategies are employed in language development, we hasten to add that they are often faced with numerous challenges. Developing collaborations in an effort to improve the teaching and development of languages is no exception. As noted above, collaborations are a great strategy that presents many benefits to the language development exercise. Given their level of development, African languages call for the establishment of meaningful and innovative collaborations to spur their continued growth. Efforts to establish the kind of collaborations described above have faced numerous challenges, including those discussed below.

One challenge witnessed is a perceived unwillingness to share information. This appears to be a trait that is common among many African scholars. In most countries in the developed world, information on programs, activities and opportunities in different fields is shared easily and widely. The same cannot be said about institutions in Africa. The amount of information in most institutions' websites, including those of universities, is rather shallow. A look at most university websites in East Africa, for example, will not quench your thirst with regard to the character of the said university, school or department. Very few have clearly

spelt out details about programmes, staff and their research interests, research studies in progress, activities that the relevant department is involved in, to name a few. This kind of information would be very useful in decision making on whether a specific institution has interests that agree with one's institution, whether there are people there who a scholar can benefit from in terms of working together, or simply exchanging views on a particular topic.

Somewhat related to the above challenge is poor communication. It is not uncommon for some people to take weeks to respond to an email. That comes with consequences since as we are aware some calls for applications for research, abstracts, short visits and other activities in the academia come with deadlines, some very short. The writer has personally written emails to two popular universities in South Africa, making inquiries about the possibility of establishing some framework on collaboration in language studies but has not received a meaningful reply to date. Is it a cultural practice for Africans not to do things promptly? Is it a case of failure to appreciate the value of working with others? The latter would be the opposite of the African culture, which is celebrated as one that brings people together. Is there a sense of insecurity arising from a fear of exposing oneself or the institutions represented?

Two other examples, from the experiences of the author, will further illustrate the difficulties one has to surmount in attempts at establishing collaborations. In May 2015 the author visited one of the colleges of the University of Rwanda, and held discussions with a representative of the relevant department, the Dean of the school and the Principal of the college. The discussions mainly centered on collaborations in the teaching and development of Kiswahili, a language that is increasingly becoming important in the wider East African region and beyond. Proposed activities to be undertaken by the University of Rwanda and Rongo University in Kenya, where the author was based then included: joint research, student and academic staff exchanges, joint curriculum development, among others. After a lot of back and forth in communication that involved plenty of bureaucracy a Memorandum of Understanding was finally dully signed by the Vice Chancellors of the two universities in 2017, two years later.

Another scenario, perhaps stemming from the already discussed challenge of reluctance to share information, is that of the same people in a department or institution at large benefiting from certain programmes severally yet their colleagues are not even aware of the existence of such opportunities. You therefore get the same person or people applying for certain travel grants, exchange programmes over and over again as if they are the only active scholars in the institution. A closer scrutiny may reveal that they hoard

the information and are therefore the only applicants whenever such calls come out. Under the Staff Mobility Exchange Programme run by the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), Kibabii University got a Kiswahili Scholar from a university in Uganda for three months in 2018. The same scholar made a second visit in 2019. On the other hand, a Kiswahili scholar from Kibabii University in Kenya made a similar visit to a university in Uganda in 2018 and in another in Burundi in 2019. Off course such return visits are good as they enable the concerned academic to finish what they had started and explore further collaborations by cementing the established partnerships. However, the question is where are the other scholars in the whole mix? Wouldn't an involvement of a different set of scholars afford the involved institutions opportunities for new ideas?

A related challenge, and one that may be contributing to the above scenario of the same people taking advantage of available opportunities, is that of dormant scholars who never apply for anything. These appear to be contented with their teaching positions and may be involved in some side hustles to augment their often very meager earnings. To such, the issue isn't lack of opportunities or failure to know about those that are in existence but simply lack of interest. There are complaints from the mentioned IUCEA on low uptake of the exchange programme that they are running. They do not get as many applicants as they would have wished to get.

It is also the case that the Management Boards of most public universities in Kenya, though aware of the significance of collaborations in the development of their institutions, do not commit funds to the process of seeking for opportunities to establish them. The trip to Rwanda alluded to above in search of collaborations was individually supported. This applies to internal collaborations too. In 2017, the German Academic Exchange Programme in Nairobi, indicated willingness to work with the Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature at Rongo University in establishing the teaching of German language in the institution. The only demand that was placed on the University is the employment of a Tutorial Fellow of German. The DAAD would then offer support in terms of equipment, books, and other teaching materials. It took far too long for the staff to be employed and after she left no replacement has been made to date. In the same year, the Kenya National Society for the Deaf expressed willingness to work with the same department in seeking funds for the establishment of a Centre for the Study of Sign Language. One proposal was jointly written but upon failing to win the grant, the University abandoned the idea and there has been no follow up made. While working at Rongo University, the author of this paper wrote to Kibabii University, his current employer, with a draft MoU for review in a quest to establish a linkage between the two in the teaching and

development of Kiswahili. No response ever got back to Rongo University on the same. The unavoidable conclusion is that universities do not value these initiatives as expected.

It is sad that the only vibrant collaborations among universities in Africa are in the area of external examination. Here, scholars move freely across countries externalizing examination scripts or theses. Could this be because there are financial implications in the exercise, and that it contributes to one's professional growth? In many universities in Kenya and elsewhere the number of theses supervised and examined is a consideration, albeit with minimal contribution, to the overall score during reviews for promotion. As such, these may be factors influencing scholars' willingness to participate in this exercise that is often carried out annually.

### **4.3 Creative Methods of Starting Collaborations**

Over and above the more common ways of establishing collaborations, it is possible to come up with new and creative methods of working together in the teaching and development of African languages.

One such method is teaching across Universities. The student-to-staff ratios in most African countries are well below accepted international and local standards. The situation has been made worse in countries like Kenya where a rapid expansion of the university sector has been witnessed in recent years. The country has a total of 74 universities and university colleges, 33 of which are public. Because of this growth universities do not have enough faculty to serve their students. Most have ended up relying on part time lecturers, many who are MA holders teaching in Teacher Training Colleges and Secondary Schools. A number of audits by the Commission for University Education (CUE) in Kenya have shown that reliance on part time academic staff has compromised the quality of teaching in universities. This can be cured if only we bothered to think more creatively in the use of the lecturers and professors that are available. Rather than expecting one lecturer to teach several courses in university A, some of which he is not very well grounded in, simply because there is a shortage of staff, the lecturer should be allowed to teach what he is best at in more than one university. If that leads to an extra load in terms of classes being handled, the extra classes can be paid for as an overload. The advantage of this arrangement is that students will be taught by someone who is an expert in the area, hence benefiting much more from the experience. Secondly, students will benefit from this exposure to tested and experienced lecturers as opposed to high school teachers. In fact, there have been cases of students complaining because they are not happy with high school teachers "following them to the university." While the intention here is not to condemn all part time lectures since some have been known to do a great job, the quality of instruction in

public universities will be greatly enhanced if this or an improved version of the same was implemented.

Another way is more utilization of technology in teaching Kiswahili and other African languages, by involving those based locally in Africa and the diaspora. Using Skype, Google meet, zoom, blogs, and other internet communication platforms can make it possible for students of African languages in the diaspora get exposed to the language they are studying from other sources based in the target culture instead of relying on their classroom instructor only. This can be enhanced by establishing mechanisms of pairing up students of Kiswahili and other African languages abroad with bright students in Africa, where the concerned languages are spoken. In his study carried out at Stanford University Mohochi (2016) established that the use of technology has progressively become very central in the teaching of second and foreign languages for pedagogical considerations; because of the characteristics of the modern language learner, and for pragmatic considerations. It became clear in his study that technology enhances the learning experience and is liked by students because it gives them a great environment for language learning.

Besides its use for beginners in the language learning exercise, technology, especially teleconferencing can also be utilized in making it possible for scholars of African origin currently living and working in the diaspora to give talks/lectures to postgraduate students locally. Given the abundance of books and other materials at their disposal such scholars would serve to greatly improve the quality of graduate programmes in local universities by exposing graduate students to new experiences and diverse sources of knowledge. A good example of institutions that have worked together on several projects, including the teaching of African languages is the Five Colleges Consortium in the United States.

These include: Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, University of Massachusetts Amherst and Hampshire College. The Consortium teaches over fifty languages in their Five College Center for the Study of World Languages. From Africa the center teaches Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, Shona, Swahili, Twi, Wolof, Xhosa, Yoruba and Zulu. These languages are taught to students of all the five colleges in a collaborative way. The five colleges do share educational and cultural resources and facilities, including a joint automated library system, open cross registration, and open theater auditions; Joint departments and programs; and inter-campus transportation. Local institutions can start with a less elaborate arrangement by having discussions on how to share lecturers and other resources.

A major challenge to the academic tradition in Africa is lack of, or insufficient supply of books in

many fields of study. It is not uncommon to visit a library in a university only to find a few copies of very dated publications. As a result, there are students who go through their undergraduate studies without interacting with publications of great linguists like Noam Chomsky, Ferdinand De Saussure, Joshua Fishman, and Ralph Fasold among others. Unfortunately, the fact that a lot of materials are available electronically does not seem to have helped in many instances because of lack of reliable internet connectivity and limited bandwidth. In such circumstances, an established collaboration arrangement can be very handy with scholars abroad endeavoring to share materials that are available abroad, provided copy right concerns are taken care of, because there is unlimited access to publications in the West.

Another possible area of collaboration is working on short visit programmes between institutions. These could involve inviting scholars from Africa for short visits in universities abroad for exposure. Those in the diaspora can write proposals in their institutions to start such an arrangement, which will enable scholars in Africa to take advantage of the infrastructure in more developed universities, present their ongoing research and establish networks with people working in the same field. Existing programmes like the Summer Study Abroad programme by Princeton in Dar es Salaam, Yale in Mombasa, and several others like them in other parts of Africa are one sided. In these programmes students of Kiswahili and other African languages travel to Africa for several weeks to further sharpen their language skills. To what extent do the local institutions benefit from such visits besides the little money that a few local teachers are paid to assist Professors from the visiting universities in teaching their students? It would be more impactful if the visiting institutions offered scholarships to bright language students to do graduate studies in their universities abroad or at least offer opportunities for short student exchanges in the opposite direction.

There are many bright students in universities locally who would wish to proceed for graduate studies in the west but fail to actualize their dreams for lack of mentorship. Language specific committees can be formed composed of local and diaspora scholars of different African languages to assist good students to make competitive applications for admissions and scholarships abroad. Given their experience in matters admissions and applications for scholarships, those in the diaspora can give guidance to younger academics who are interested in proceeding with their studies. By so doing, the next generation of scholars will be better prepared for the task of maintaining the continued development of African languages.

In order to give language students a clear picture of all the regions in which different African languages are spoken, it is advisable to expand the

scope in terms of areas that institutions take students abroad for further study of the language. For example, there has been a false belief among many that study abroad programmes in Kiswahili are best done in Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, and Mombasa. The true position is that Kiswahili seized to be a language of the coast of East Africa long time ago. Consequently, a holistic understanding of the language and its use in society needs to involve much more than Zanzibar, Mombasa and Dar es Salaam.

Another possible route to consider is to have departments abroad adapting or partnering with departments in universities in Africa, more like the sister city arrangement between cities. This would give the more established departments a chance to mentor and assist local departments in developing strong programmes as well as assisting in capacity building of faculty and staff.

It is with the realization of the need to work together that we laud the recent decision by the African Union (AU) and the East African Community (EAC) to partner in the recognition and promotion of Kiswahili as a Language of Wider Communication in the whole of Africa. Under the Dar es Salaam Framework of Action, adopted by the Academy of African Languages (ACALAN) on behalf of the AU and the East African Kiswahili Commission for EAC during a Consultative Meeting on the Promotion of Kiswahili as Africa's lingua franca held in Dar es Salaam Tanzania between June 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the two organizations committed to promoting the language as a Pan-African language of integration and development. The same meeting noted that Kiswahili should be promoted in the whole of Africa, without forgetting the important role played by other African Languages as it has the potential to become a catalyst to achieving AU's agenda 2063. Developing a Pan-African lingua franca would greatly aid the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledge in the continent's quest for development.

#### 4.5 Way Forward

Given the current situation with regard to the contribution of efficient and active collaboration to the teaching and development of African languages, there is need to take specific steps in order to involve more experts, working together. Below are some of those steps that can move us to another level.

To cure the inaction witnessed among many scholars, those in leadership positions, as well as those who are in the know of available opportunities should take responsibility in sensitizing colleagues about those available opportunities and how to go about applying for them. Associations like ALASA, *Chama cha Kiswahili cha Afrika Mashariki* (CHAKAMA-The East African Kiswahili Association of East Africa), *Chama cha Kiswahili cha Kenya* (CHAKITA- the Kenya National Kiswahili Association), and similar

professional associations in Africa need to make it a point of discussion in their meetings, and organize workshops on such initiatives.

Scholars in institutions of higher learning need to develop a culture of open sharing of information on ongoing projects, areas of possible collaboration, and calls for different academic activities. These will go hand in hand with the sensitization campaign mentioned above in order to interest many new scholars into the active field of academic engagement on African languages.

Each university should establish directorates or comparable units to spearhead efforts at linkages and collaborations and develop those in existence in order to take the lead in seeking for opportunities to augment individual efforts by staff. Some institutions have offices dealing with collaborations specifically but many are underfunded, understaffed and under equipped making it difficult for them to fulfill their mandates. These need better funding to make them functional because it is completely meaningless to simply set up offices and fail to empower them to do what they were meant to do.

Organizations working on funding academic activities in Africa must see it necessary to reach out to these institutions more aggressively and bring on board those that are not yet involved actively. Very little purpose is served by setting aside a fund for certain academic activists and failing to shout about them in order to attract many potential beneficiaries. Perhaps funds should be set aside for purposes of marketing the available funding opportunities to potential beneficiaries. A consideration could also be made for big organizations like DAAD, IUECA and EAKC to have point persons in countries in which they operate who can be used to relay messages to the target population to avoid a scenario of a few specific people applying for funding every time there is a call.

Consider seeking resources for an elaborate digitization of African languages. The internet is arguably the biggest source of information in the current digital age. Consequently, more and more people are relying on it for entertainment, information and education. It is very attractive to many, especially the youth. In order to catch them and instill in them the passion for information on African Indigenous knowledge, there is urgency in working tirelessly in an attempt to move African languages to the digital space and encourage the youth to read in those languages. That way, some may be attracted to the wealth of indigenous knowledge that Africa possesses.

Institutions should be encouraged to establish collaborations locally and regionally, while looking out for opportunities in the international arena. It will be easier to establish them locally and with the experience



gained in handling them, since they come with several challenges too, they will be better prepared to play in the global arena.

The East African Community, through the East African Kiswahili Commission should work together in assisting nations that have expressed a desire to introduce Kiswahili in their education systems. Here we have in mind countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Sudan. Assistance can be extended in many forms, including helping in recruiting teachers from East African countries, and offering training opportunities to those from the concerned countries who may be interested in learning Kiswahili. They can also donate books and other teaching materials besides seconding curriculum developers and implementers alongside quality assurance personnel. In so doing, Kenya and Tanzania specifically need to rise above petty sibling rivalry that has been going on for so long with regard to the development of Kiswahili. None of the two can claim more ownership of the language. They need to work together in its development for the benefit of the two, the region, Africa and the world at large.

## 5.0. CONCLUSION

The paper has demonstrated that Africans, like any other people, have indigenous knowledge that has shaped their communities over time. This kind of knowledge needs to be appreciated, researched and documented for use by current and future generations. It has also shown that language is key to the whole exercise of trying to make use of indigenous knowledge, and in this case the best languages to use are African languages. Besides their importance in preserving indigenous knowledge, languages are great assets in the development endeavor. As such, both indigenous knowledge and languages are required as Africa strives to improve its people's living standards. The paper has identified several opportunities for the establishment of collaborations for teaching and developing languages. These include institutional led ones as well as those initiated by individual members of academic staff in institutions of higher learning. Joint

research, joint hosting of conferences, staff mobility programmes, and short visits are some of the ways discussed. Challenges in the establishment of collaborations like poor attitude and lack of interest by lecturers, poor or lack of support from University Management, failure to share information readily, poor communication and several others, have led to the small number of active collaborations either locally, regionally or internationally. Innovative methods of collaborations like teaching across universities, use of technology to connect the local and the internationally based scholars, mentorship of bright students in preparation for graduate study have been suggested. A way forward is also provided by fronting certain steps including, establishment of units dealing specifically with collaborations and linkages, digitization of African languages among others.

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**Cite This Article:** Ernest Sangai Mohochi (2022). Working Towards Collaborations in the Teaching and Development of African Languages for Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge. *EAS J Humanit Cult Stud*, 4(2), 40-48.