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Research Application Summary

**Diasporas' contribution in the establishment of PhD Programme of Kiswahili language: a case of the State University of Zanzibar**

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**Abstract**

The State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) is a fast growing university in East Africa. Nevertheless the norm of lacking professors in some disciplines has not been escaped in the establishment of some programmes. This paper presents an analysis of the contribution of Diasporas in the establishment of PhD programme in Kiswahili language. Analysis shows that apart from relying on the academic staff employed by the university, Diaspora can play a positive role in the establishment of the programme by both developing curricula and teaching. This article also presents the findings that to run the programme by using more Diasporas than local based instructors is possible and can work with positive results. However, in such programme students are required to have ICT knowhow in order to be able to engage themselves in discussion for example by using skype and dropbox. This article therefore suggests that when the young universities in developing countries in particular want to establish programmes they should reconsider engaging Diaspora to facilitate their programmes.

Key words: African universities, Diaspora, establishing academic programme, SUZA, PhD in Kiswahili

**Résumé**

L'Université d'État de Zanzibar est en croissance rapide en Afrique de l'Est. Toutefois, les normes en termes de manque de professeurs pour certaines disciplines n'ont pas été réglées lors de l'établissement de certains programmes. Cet article analyse la contribution de la diaspora à la mise en place d'un programme de doctorat en langue kiswahili. L'analyse montre qu'en plus de compter sur le personnel académique employé par l'université, la diaspora peut jouer un rôle positif dans l'établissement des programmes en développant les curricula mais aussi en contribuant à l'enseignement. Cet article conclut également que l'exécution du programme en impliquant plus la diaspora que les autochtones est possible et peut donner des résultats positifs. Cependant, dans un tel programme, les étudiants doivent avoir un savoir-faire en TIC afin de bien pouvoir s'engager dans la discussion, par exemple à travers l'utilisation de Skype et de Dropbox. Cet article suggère donc que les universités naissantes en particulier celles des pays en développement, reconsidèrent l'engagement de la diaspora dans l'établissement et la facilitation de leurs programmes.

Mots clés: Universités africaines, Diaspora, Mise en place des programmes académiques, SUZA, doctorat en kiswahili

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## **Background**

Kiswahili is the language spoken as a native language by more than 99 per cent of its population. Kiswahili is used as an official language in Zanzibar and the entire Tanzania. It is an African language which is used as a language of instruction in Primary schools of Zanzibar up to grade Six for some subjects but for other subjects up to grade Four. In Tanzania Kiswahili is used as a language of instruction in all primary schools. In Zanzibar and Tanzania at large, Kiswahili is taught as a subject from preschool up to university level.

**Programme rationales.** In Zanzibar, there are three universities which offer first degree programmes of Kiswahili namely the State University of Zanzibar, Sumait University, and Zanzibar University. The number of students who join these degree programmes of Kiswahili is getting higher and higher. Consequently, there has been influx of students who apply for Master's programmes in Kiswahili from outside Zanzibar or neighbouring countries such as Tanzania Mainland, Kenya, and Uganda. This is contrary to the situation in South Africa where there has been a dramatic decline in enrollments in African languages (Wright, 2002; Nkuna, 2010). The increasing number of students from Zanzibar who study Master Degree in Kiswahili outside Zanzibar is directly proportional to those students who apply for the PhD programmes in the same countries. This situation has led some applicants of Master's Degree programme of Kiswahili as well as PhD programmes not to afford to study outside Zanzibar due to the high cost of their living standards.

Likewise, the importance of improving African languages such as Kiswahili has been highlighted in different documents of the East African Community. The Protocol on the Establishment of the East African Kiswahili Commission (2007) emphasizes the importance of conducting research in Kiswahili and subsequently developing the language. Along similar lines, the East African Treaty (1999, amended 2006) highlights the need for development and promotion of indigenous languages especially Kiswahili as a lingua franca. This may be through conducting research on Kiswahili language. Since PhD programme largely engages students to conduct research, the establishment of this programme offers students opportunity to comply with the East African Treaty (1999, amended 2006).

On this basis, the need for starting a PhD programme in Kiswahili was in line with the following objectives at SUZA. The first objective of that programme was to prepare experts in Kiswahili language who can teach that language in schools, colleges, and universities in Zanzibar, Tanzania, East Africa and around the world. The second objective was to prepare experts in the field of translation and interpretation, as well as publishing in literature and linguistics in Kiswahili. The third objective was to study the prescriptive and descriptive use of Kiswahili in both spoken and written.

Considering the above, this paper has the following objectives: a) to delineate Diasporas' contributions in the establishment of the PhD programme in Kiswahili at SUZA, b) discuss the nature and operation of the PhD programme in Kiswahili at SUZA, and c) discuss benefits and challenges of that programme. The subsequent paragraphs examine procedures which were followed during the establishment of the PhD programme in Kiswahili at SUZA.

**Diasporas' contributions to the establishment of the programme.** The idea of the establishing the PhD programme in Kiswahili was initiated by the Chancellor of SUZA, who is also the President of Zanzibar, under the backdrop that Diasporas can contribute right from the preparation stage to operation stage of that programme. As such, the Chancellor advised the management of the SUZA to invite Diasporas and organize meeting with them in order to sell that idea. The team of Diasporas involved famous professors of Kiswahili from universities around the world. To mention a few some were from the University of Bayreuth in German, Uppsala University in Sweden, SOAS in United Kingdom, Fatih University in Turkey, and Indiana University in the USA.

Those Diasporas met the Chancellor of the SUZA and welcomed the idea on March 2012. Thereafter, the first workshop was organized to develop curriculum for that programme. The curriculum document was submitted to the Tanzania Commission for University Education for approval. Fortunately, interim approval was granted and in 2012 / 2013 the programme commenced. All invited Diasporas were willing to volunteer in both development of curriculum and teaching in general. They were paid return tickets from where they lived and accommodation when they were in Zanzibar for giving lectures. The first intake of that programme had eight students.

**Nature and Operation of the Programme.** SUZA's PhD programme in Kiswahili programme has two specializations, Linguistics and Literature. However, in view of providing a student with wider knowledge of the language and because of the relationship between the two fields, the student is required to study both set of courses. A Kiswahili Linguistics student is required to take Literature courses and at the same time the Kiswahili Literature student is supposed to take Kiswahili Linguistics courses. Students' research and their respective dissertations are the ones that determine their specializations.

The PhD Programme of Kiswahili comprises of 25 courses. Eighteen (18) of the course are taught in the first year of study between two semesters. The taught courses are subdivided into 7 core courses in which four are taught in the First Semester and three in the Second Semester. There are also 11 Elective courses, four of them are taught in the first Semester and five in the Second Semester.

Apart from the taught courses, the students are required to prepare and present one seminar in each semester from First to Third year of study. The seminars normally lead to the publication of paper in a journal. Finally, every student must conduct a research in the area of study of his/her preference and eventually write a dissertation. The following Table summarises the SUZA's PhD in Kiswahili courses and their credit weights:

Table 1. Courses and their credit weight in the SUZA Kiswahili PhD programme

S/N	Course title	Code	Status	Credits	Semester
FIRST YEAR ( CORE)					
1	Nadharia za Lughawia (Theoretical Linguistics )	L K 8101	Core	15	I
2	Mbinu za Utafiti ( Research Methodology)	LK 8102	Core	20	I
3	Nadharia ya Fasihi (Theory of Literature)	L K8105	Core	15	I
4	Mbinu za Utafiti wa Fasihi na Uchunguzi wa Uwanjani (Techniques and Field Work in Literary Research)	L K8106	Core	15	I
5	Lughawia linganishi ya Kibantu (Comparative Bantu Linguistics)	L K8201	Core	15	II
6	Lughawia ya Jamii (Sociolinguistics)	L K8202	Core	15	II
7	Maendeleo ya Ushairi wa Kiswahili, Hadithi Fupi, Riwaya na Tamthilia (History and Development of Kiswahili Poetry, Short Story, Novel and Drama)	LK 8207	Core	15	II
8	Semina I (Advanced Seminar I)	LK 8108	Core	15	I
9	Semina II (Advanced Seminar II)	LK8212	Core	15	II
FIRST YEAR ( ELECTIVE)					
1	Pragmatiki ya Kiswahili (Kiswahili Pragmatics).	LK 8103	Elective	15	I
2	Historia ya Lughawia ya Kiswahili (Kiswahili Historical Linguistics)	LK 8104	Elective	15	I
3	Fasihi Simulizi ya Kiafrika: Mfutilizo wa Fasihi ya Kiswahili II (Swahili Oral Literature)	L K8107	Elective	15	I
4	Uchambuzi wa Diskozi (Matini) (Discourse Analysis)	LK 8203	Elective	15	I
5	Lahajia ya Kiswahili (Swahili Dialectology)	LK 8204	Elective	15	I
6	Utamaduni na Antropolojia ya Mwambao wa Waswahili: Cultural and Social Anthropology of the Swahili Coast	L K8205	Elective	15	II
7	Hati za Kiarabu: Lugha ya Kiswahili, Fasihi na Utamaduni (Arabic Scripts in Swahili Language, Literature and Culture)	LK 8206	Elective	15	II
8	Tafsiri Mpya Kupitia Utamaduni na Siasa, Utapta na Fasihi ya Kiswahili (New Trends in Swahili Translation and Interpretation.)	LK 8208	Elective	15	II
9	Vipengele vya Ulinganishaji katika Matini za Fasihi ya Kiswahili (Swahili Comparative Literature)	LK 8209	Elective	15	II
10	Uandishi wa Kubuni (Creative Writing)	LK8210	Elective	15	II
11	Majaribio, Usasa na Usasa-Baadaye katika Fasihi ya Kiswahili (Modernism and Post-modernism in Swahili Literature)	LK8211	Elective	15	II
SECOND YEAR (Lazima)					
1	Semina III (Advanced Seminar III)	LK8301	Core	15	III
1	Semina IV (Advanced Seminar)	LK 8401	Core	15	IV
THIRD YEAR (Lazima)					
1	Semina V (Advanced Seminar V)	LK8501	Core	15	V
1	Semina VI (Advanced Seminar VI)	LK8601	Core	15	VI
	Tasnifu (Dissertation)	LK 9000	Core	250	I – VI

For the student to complete this programme, he/she is required to acquire 540 credits of which 110 credits come from seven core courses, 90 credits come from six Advanced Seminars, 250 credits come from final Dissertation, and 95 come from any seven of 11 Elective courses. However, a student can study as more additional Elective course as he/she wishes.

**Course Instructors.** One of the main challenges in the establishment of any new course in any University is the availability of academic personnel who are qualified to run the course. That was not an exemption in the SUZA's PhD programme of Kiswahili. The programme was offered with the support of Diasporas who were willing to come to Zanzibar, teach and supervise the students. The programme, originally began with eight professors, five of them Diasporas. Apart from Diasporas, three other professors joined the team. One was from the Open University of Tanzania, and two were visiting professors – one from Newcastle University, Australia and another was from City, University of London.

**Mode of delivery.** The mode of the Programme is by Course work and Dissertation and hence, there are classroom interaction between professors and students. As it has been indicated in the Table above almost all the courses, except Mbinu za Utafiti (Research Methodology) which carries 20 credits, carry 15 credits which are equivalent to 45 hours of study. In normal situation, the hours are covered in 15 weeks, i.e., three hours per week. Yet, as mentioned earlier, majority of the instructors are Diasporas who have limited time to come to Zanzibar to teach their respective courses. Consequently, there are two ways by which the courses are taught. One way is for the instructors to come to Zanzibar and spend shorter time than 15 weeks – they normally spend between one to three weeks. In the case of three weeks, three hours are used every day from Monday to Friday for all the three weeks. The classes always start at 9:00 and end at 12:00. On the other hand, if the instructor is available for two weeks, five hours are spent a day; two hours in the morning session (9:00 – 12:00) and two hours in the afternoon session (14:00 – 16:00). For one week meeting between the instructors and the students, the morning session starts early at 8:00 and ends at 12:00 (4 hours) while the afternoon session starts at 14:00 and ends at 17:00 (3 hours). There are, however, 10 to 15 minute health breaks after every 2 hours of study.

When, for any reason, the instructor cannot come to Zanzibar, the lessons are provided through social media, specifically through Skype. This was possible because, at the time the programme started, as shown before there were only eight PhD students. This required small space, and because the internet was available at SUZA so it was easy to manage the communication. But, most of the these type of lessons were more like consultation where students discuss with the instructors issues that emerged from the previous meeting or getting feedback about submitted assignments.

**Programme assessment.** Different assignments are given to the students during and at the end of each course. Normally, during the course, each student is given a task or question and he/she has to work it out and presents it before the class. These types of assignments are not given any marks but they are used as part of learning. At the end of each course

an instructor may provide a list of topics or questions for the students to pick and write a long academic paper. Some instructors prefer that a student chooses a topic he/she likes but related to the course and write a long publishable paper. This counts for 100% of the students' grade of the respective course. In addition, a student is required to present a seminar in every semester on the topic related to his/her final research topic. Each seminar is equivalent to 15 credits of the course. Most of communication between students and instructors related to assignments is conducted through e-mails, Skype and Dropbox.

**Success and challenges of the Programme.** So far the programme has been successful despite the use of more Diasporas than local based instructors. First, for the first time in the history of the University and in Kiswahili point of view, a PhD in Kiswahili student who learnt the programme using Kiswahili as the language of instruction has graduated. This was in 2016. All remaining seven students from the first batch of the programme are expected to graduate this year. This will help to increase the number of academic staff who will help in running the programme and in the near future taking over the programme from the Diasporas.

The programme also helped the State University of Zanzibar to improve its human capacity towards one of its goal to be the number one Institution in the provision of Kiswahili course at all levels of education. SUZA has been able to train its six academic staff using less cost compared to the cost that it could incur if the staff were to be trained abroad or in other institutions. Moreover, there is increase in the number of candidates who apply for the programme. In the second batch of the programme, for instance, the number of students increased to 11, two of them coming from outside Tanzania, namely China and South Korea. More students are expected to join when the programme announces new admission. Additionally, many professors from within and outside Tanzania have shown interest in participating in the programme, many of whom come from East African countries, Tanzania Mainland and Kenya in particular. This is partly due to the University's efforts to find more academicians who can help in the supervision of the students' dissertations as main or assistant supervisors. On the other part, the Diasporas have played a greater role in identifying and convincing their academic colleagues from different institutions to support them in the running of the programme, even as research supervisors.

The programme also is privileged to be run by some of the respected scholars in their field of studies, most of them being professor emeritus from respected Universities in Africa and Europe. It is rare to find Kiswahili scholars from different parts of East African to join forces and support each other in order to develop their precious language. Nevertheless, the establishment and operation of the Kiswahili PhD programme at SUZA was not able to escape some challenges. First, sometimes Diasporas were not able to come to SUZA and give lectures as scheduled due to some other academic commitment at their permanent workplace or elsewhere. Likewise, provision of students' assignments, feedback as well as students marks were delayed for the same reason. In addition, students who had limited knowledge of ICT especially in the use of Skype and Dropbox hardly coped with the programme. Because of these challenges some students had to extend one or two years in

their programme.

Based on the analysis of the establishment of Kiswahili PhD programme in SUZA presented in this paper one can safely argue that the programme successfully addresses some of the problems highlighted in the section of background. Added to that the experience shows that developing countries such as Tanzania, in this case Zanzibar, when they establish new programmes in their universities have to consider the role that Diasporas can play in the inception of their new programmes. In conclusion, the involvement of Diasporas in establishment of African programmes in universities may enhance the provision of quality education at low cost.

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