The East African Framework in the Context of Plurilingualism: A case of University Education in Regional Integration from St Augustine University of Tanzania focus

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Abstract: The paper addresses the subject of Integration and Plurilingualism. The general purpose of the paper is to analyse the advantages of plurilinguism in order to prove that such approach contributes to regional integration.

Key words: Integration, Plurilingualism, Historical Institutionalism, Cultural identity.

L'Afrique de l'Est dans le contexte du plurilinguisme: une affaire de formation universitaire en matière d'intégration régionale - focus sur l'Université Saint Augustin, Tanzanie

Résumé : L'objectif général de cet article est de montrer les avantages du plurilinguisme dans la société. Le plurilinguisme favorise en effet l'intégration. L'auteur focalise son étude sur les aspects de développement de langues, échanges, transmission, dissémination et diversité au sein des universités Est-africaines et leur impact sur le renforcement de l'intégration régionale. L'université Saint Augustin de Tanzanie sera la principale référence.

Mots-clés : Intégration, plurilinguisme, identité culturelle.

Introduction

Integration leads to the necessity of interaction between our students, from rural or urban areas , with students from other European or world countries and to the attempt at understanding the psychology of other nations and cultures with the purpose of a better interpersonal understanding and a possible further integration on the international labour market. Plurilingualism designates the use of several languages by an individual as opposed to multilingualism which refers to the co-existence of several languages within a given social group. It is a European value according to which all languages are equal means of communication and expression of identity, being based on tolerance and acceptance of the differences and minorities. The European charter of Plurilingualism outlines the following standpoints:

- Language diversity ensures the plurality and richness of representation
- It is a form of freedom
- It is a means to assert durability of national entities in Europe which are privileged places for the practice of citizenship
- The media must facilitate the expression of a wide range of cultures.
- Education systems must provide plurilingual education.
- It ensures economic progression in a pacified world.
- The right to a language and to linguistic diversity can't be divided.

The charter has given regional authorities powers to give regional language communities and minority language communities the resources to ensure their continued existence with respect to cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. We need to talk about plurilingualism at two levels; school and individual. Maintenance of the language of origin is one's right and its fundamental instrument for one's growth and has a positive effect of learning the second and third languages e.g. communitarian languages like French, English, German, Spanish, Russia, Chinese, Japanese amongst others..

The great opportunity offered by plurilingualism turns to be a challenge for our scholastic institutions, a challenge the East African community can not absolutely lose. The activity of learning a foreign language makes sense when the knowledge is valued in a given context and certain circumstances. Language is part of our identity and culture and its learning is synonymous with understanding other people and their way of thinking. Understanding is a more powerful weapon against racism, xenophobia and intolerance. East African universities need to be coherent and unified to take as its starting point the linguistic mix of local communities concerned and to give importance to language skills and the practical skills of using language among others.

1. Theoretical framework and the regions historical perspective

Historical institutionalism is well placed to develop a regional integration theory. The paper proposes the use of this theory and present findings from preliminary testing on the East African community at the level of university education with focus on SAUT. The basic element in this theory is recognizing phases of institutions' origin, development and change and their relationship to each other. The paper argues historical institutionalism's treatment of institutions' origins, path dependency and critical junctures and contribution to formal and informal change within the regional political and social framework. The theory looks at institutions' such as universities as forming a 'web' of structure, relationships and meaning within which political actors move. Such institutions whether formal or non-formal do not just carry political actors along a defined path, but channel political actor's access and purposefully interact with political actors so that the resultant change or confirmation of the path already chosen is a combination of actors and institutional intent.

Historical circumstances matter; later development and change is as much a response to those initial conditions as it is to contemporary demands. Regional integration is described as a process. Pursuit of regional body objectives are

subject to changing political personnel, socio-political context and the saliency of the issues originally nominated for regional action. Institutions' such as universities once created become actors in a mutually constitutive integration process between the member states and institutions' of the regional body.

Universities disseminate knowledge and ideas by way of student education faculty instruction, collaboration with industry and community activities. The inter-university council of East Africa formed at the inception of the EAC was meant to facilitate collaboration among the three main universities before its demise in 1977. When the committee was re-established later in 1980, it was tasked among other tasks to :

  - Facilitate contacts
  - A forum of academic issues
  - Maintain high and comparable academic standards
  - Solicit for funds
  - Encourage collaboration in research
  - Promote collaboration between member universities, governments and other institutions.

The achievement of such tasks requires political actors and will for them to be realized. Integration being a process demands attention of each of the actors to achieve its set goals. EAC common market protocol spells out the requirement on partner states ministries responsible for education and training to achieve a designed harmonization of its education system so that the attendant benefits of regional integration and harmonization can be attained.

The protocol encourages and supports the mobility of students and teachers within the community and importantly harmonization of curricula, examination, certification and accreditation of education. Universities should strive to promote inquiry and advance the sum of human knowledge.

Faculty members undertake research, teaching and service roles to carry out academic work thus generate and disseminate knowledge to peers, students and external audiences. Colleges and schools are a borderland between family and society, an open system of integration and learning. Maternal languages are a means of communication, instrument of building identity, language of relationships, family belonging of roots and memory of the past. Universities championing acquiring of 2L's and 3L's would be instrumental languages for school and living together, bridging interaction, access to other cultural contents and building plural belongings and citizenship in a region.

Significant presence of students in our universities across the region has created in time a complex and dynamic educational content, characterized by a plurality of language and cultural diversity which need to be harnessed as a sure tool towards regional integration. With the entry of Rwanda and Burundi- with their cultural diversities- in 2007 as full members of EAC, the community's mission and vision of *one people, one destiny* should come to pass with an expected over 130 million people to benefit in the region. All these lend credence to

Historical institutionalism which demands purposeful interaction of all actors pursuant to the regions set objective. Plurilingualism will be at centre stage in realizing integration for posterity with high centers of learning setting pace of understanding one component which is hard to teach- Civilization and Culture within the realm of regional integration.

2. Objective

This paper is aimed at establishing the place of plurilingualism at the level of university departments of languages and linguistics in enhancing integration in the East African region with SAUT as a point of reference.

3. Methodology

The study zeroed on students from SAUT, Tabora campus. 100 Students were sampled from the department out of the total 900 students between January 15th and February 16th, 2012. The sample cut across 50 first years and 50 second years representing 40 ethnic groups. Three lecturers in the department were also sampled. The total sample size was 103. Purposive sampling was employed to arrive at the sample. The respondents provided useful information for the study.

Both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data was obtained from the field, oral interviews and informal group discussions were used by the researcher to supplement secondary data. A structured interview guide was used. Oral interviews generated into discussions which helped in cross –checking responses. Library research involved published and unpublished material that were read and analysed. The data was obtained from text books, journals, periodicals, government records where the history and information concerning integration, plurilingualism and language was obtained. The facts about the theory of historical institutionalism was also obtained.

Data obtained through oral interviews and interview schedule was compared, contrasted, categorized, and synthesized into themes based on objectives. The data was interpreted within the articulation of the concepts of plurilingualism and integration under the aegis of the EAC. Conclusions were then drawn.

4. Findings and discussions

Full process of globalization is not just being able to speak the native languages. Its insufficient. The study shows plurilingualism as a necessity of interpersonal relationship. EAC integration is an important motivation to approaching a much more personal perspective on all levels of E.A. Colleges and universities. The globe is now a bigger village. The only difference being that in order to reach an understanding with its inhabitants, students and members of EAC have to know all notions in other languages too, aside from their native ones.

One hundred students interviewed have proved this assumption right. 41 students favoured the use of Kiswahili in the region as a language of integration. 45 students strongly advocated for the use of maternal languages and all foreign

languages as a basis of integration. 4 students were not sure , so to 4 students who advocated for the use of English. Of the 39 communities the Sukuma, the Haya, the Jita, the Ha and the Chagga were fairly represented. The Sukuma and Chagga came strongly in support of Kiswahili as opposed to the Haya, the Jita, and the Ha . At the individual level, 50 students preferred learning French whereas 42 students preferred English language. 8 students were divided between learning Arabic, Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian.

The interview schedule also revealed that out of the 100 students sampled, 88 students confirmed that all languages are the same but twelve of them were of the contrary opinion. Discussions arising out of the oral interviews revealed that the Sukuma prefer Kiswahili because they are a very conservative group, pastoral and populous in almost three provinces. Advocating for Kiswahili will also allow them preserve their native language of Kisukuma which they highly use even in schools as opposed to other communities coupled with the fact that despite the numbers many of them are not educated and would prefer the two languages to maintain their status quo.

The Chagga stands out as a very successful business community and their advocacy for Kiswahili stems out of that. They believe to gain economically if Kiswahili was taken as a language of integration in the region. Their preference of native language was supported by the following standpoints:

  - They are their source of identity
  - They are a sure way of communication
  - They make easy ones self expression
  - A source and avenue of development
  - A source of unity.

The Haya inhabit Kagera province which borders Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, wheras the Jita live in Mara which borders Kenya and the Ha live in Kigoma that borders, Burundi and DRC. These are communities that have interacted with people from neighbouring countries and beyond due to border conflict, NGO's, relief agencies and are properly schooled. They are proud people especially the Haya who really value their language as a means of identity and again are very educated. They value co-existence amongst themselves and other communities due to their enlightenment.

This kind of awareness has endeared them to appreciate the concept of plurilingualism as a way to go about integration in the region. The sample showed the overwhelming support for retention, dissemination and use of native languages as well as building themselves with 2L and 3L languages. Their liking of these foreign languages while retaining their own is supported by the following:

  - Distinctive class of highly educated and outgoing persons
  - This languages are superior and prestigious
  - Their geographical local is immense with a huge catchment of speakers all over the world

- Its a sure way of preparing them for the future
- They raise one's status in the society
- Highly interactive languages with the outside world
- UDSM and SAUT offer English, French, a sure way of inculcating the values of said languages
- International Relations and Diplomacy college offers English, French, Spanish, and Arabic under the aegis of the ministry of foreign affairs thus grounding the value of the international languages.

The Ngoni, Nyasa, Hehe, Nyiramba, Nyaturu support the idea that not all languages are equal and argue for the need of plurilingualism. The position that is supported by the Ha and the Haya who value co-existence with people of mixed identities. The standpoints supporting foreign languages places them above native languages but respondents appreciate the dire need of all the languages. Their support is founded on the fact that they are people from Southern Tanzania bordering countries like Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, and Zambia while others have had close interaction with people from other regions and the outside world because of urban influences.

Students learn interesting things from those who live together. They will find that although there are features that differ but they are valuable, develop positive attitudes and social perceptions to the issue of growth, development, and elimination of discrimination. Most of the respondents attribute unrest and uncertainty in the region due to the lack of this value of tolerance of each other. Most students believe that role play, students involvement in performing the tasks directly, eliminating their passivity is important. Interaction plays a central role in the process of communication; setting knowledge is a prerequisite for success, one value that so crucial for the realisation of integration in the GLR and EAC.

Conclusion

Plurilingualism is necessary for integration and professional development anywhere in the world and necessary understanding of other inhabitants of the *bigger village* that the global community has become nowadays which can be facilitated by the cooperation between schools, local communities and the international communities. These has been demonstrated by the overwhelming 90% support of the respondents.

It is evident that it should start at an early age for proficiency. Inter-cultural education is an ideological option in democratic societies, it prepares the future citizens in making right decisions and orient themselves in the contexts of multiplying systems of values which can only be achieved by communities integrating and applying tolerance and acceptance of one another. The adaptation to the mutation and to the cultural diversity is essential for the *'minorities'* but also for the majority in presented and future interactions within GLR and EAC region.

Intercultural perspectives enhance the following:

- Ability of communicating
- Cooperating and setting up the ability to trust someone, in a group or groups.
- Self respect and respect for others and tolerance towards different opinions.
- Taking decisions in a democratic way.
- Mitigation of conflicts from within and without.

Its therefore necessary that as a region we take bold steps towards achieving the goal of integration. Political goodwill is prime. Political actors should put in place legislative framework across the entire region. The political goodwill will narrow down to actual policies that includes the revision of the regions curricula for modern languages while preserving their identity in native languages through proper teaching and assessment.

When minorities congregate, language as a reason stands out. Language barrier alienates one from those you don't share a language. Its a sure key to integration. In SAUT, it might be strange to meet a student struggle in English. This is because of the stirred up call for English classes. The student considers that on national and international level, the subject of language and integration provides platform for co-existence.

It will be interesting to walk in the streets of Butare and Kigali with a keen ear listening to a group of students speak in a variety of accents and languages forming a sing-song of Kiganda and Swedish, to rushed tones of the Luhya and Chinese, to romantic tones of French and Spaniola, loudness of the American English and to sweet tones of Kinyarwanda coupled with the romance of Kiswahili and leisurely interspersed with the Queens English. This is the way to go.

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