

## **Arguments for Multilingual Policies in Africa**

by

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Except for a handful of nations (including Algeria, Ethiopia, Morocco, South Africa, and Tanzania), the remaining 47 have invested very little effort and funds to address the issue of the place and role of African languages in the socio-economic development of these nations and the continent in general. Repeated attempts at the national and continental levels in the past forty-five years have been either tepid, or thwarted by more pressing political (e.g., civil wars, political oppression, state failure) and economic crises (failure of infrastructure, marginalization of principal commodities). While a large body of research literature on language planning in Africa since the heydays of political emancipation (1959-1960) has addressed the nature of language planning in the continent and their *raison d'être*, that research has largely overlooked the long term effects of globalization on the possible demise of indigenous African languages and the benefits that can be accrued from them in all domains, and especially in university education.

This paper will attempt to argue in favor of multilingual policies that advocate the rational utilization of selected European and indigenous African languages in the key domains of societal interaction, including especially higher education. The paper maintains that African languages, just like other languages of wider communication (LWC), represent invaluable linguistic capital à la Bourdieu (1991) that must be fully invested in all key domains lest we lose them and the cultures that they encode. It argues further that to maintain the status quo on the exclusive use of the former colonial languages as official media of instruction and administration is counter-benefactive to educational and socio-economic developments. To counter these destructive practices by African nations, it is proposed that they adopt language policies that will potentiate the kind of participatory democracies and socio-economic development that is commensurate with the continent's immense natural resources. The best agent through which such policies can be implemented and perpetuated is education. The paper further maintains that multilingual policies that involve the rational utilization of European and African languages are cost-effective in the long-run, not expensive as generally claimed by African politicians.