

Questioning the Representation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Introductory Swahili Syllabi

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Abstract

This study addresses the gap in previous research by examining the representation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in introductory Swahili language syllabi. Existing studies have largely overlooked the representation of DEI in language syllabi, particularly in Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs). Qualitative analysis was conducted on three beginner-level Swahili syllabi from different public universities in the USA. The study revealed several limitations in reinforcing DEI within the analyzed syllabi, such as the selection of expensive learning materials, a focus on the standard dialect, neglect of non-native speakers, failure to acknowledge diversity, and absence of specific elements showcasing a commitment to diversity. The implications of these findings are significant for language educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. The

study highlights the need for substantial changes in language syllabi and learning materials by incorporating DEI principles. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives in language education, fostering an inclusive and equitable space for language learners. This research contributes to the broader conversation on DEI in language education and serves as a call to action for improving the representation of DEI in syllabi and other teaching and learning materials. By embedding DEI principles into language teaching and learning, educators can create more inclusive and culturally responsive environments for language learners.

Keywords: Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs); Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); Introductory Swahili Syllabi; Language Syllabus

Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have gained crucial considerations in various educational contexts, including second language (L2) education. Studies have shown that embedding DEI principles in language classrooms is essential for creating inclusive learning environments that value and respect the diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives of students, which in turn increases the chances for students to succeed in a language classroom (Bouamer and Bourdeau, 2022; Corbett, 1999; Guo and Jamal, 2007; Meyer and Hoft-March, 2021; Smith, 2020). While previous research has made significant contributions to understanding the importance of DEI in second language education, there are still significant gaps that need to be addressed. This study aims to fill some of these gaps by examining the representation of DEI in language syllabi, with a specific focus on the Swahili language.

One notable gap in the existing literature is the limited attention given to the representation of diversity in

LCTLs. Previous studies have predominantly focused on major languages and cultures, such as French (Bouamer and Bourdeau, 2022; Meyer and Hoft-March, 2021; Prasad, 2012) and English (Coady, Harper, and De Jong, 2016; De Costa, Green-Eneix, and Li, 2021), and often overlooked underrepresented languages and cultures, including Swahili and other African languages. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the representation of diversity in the Swahili language syllabi in order to amplify the voices of LCTLs speaking communities and offer a more comprehensive understanding of how DEI is represented across a broader range of language education settings.

Moreover, previous studies appear to underestimate the contribution of the syllabus as a fundamental document that can reinforce DEI in L2 education. Despite the syllabus being one of the key documents that serves as a blueprint for the course, shapes the learning experience, and guides instructional practices, most DEI studies have overlooked its potential as a tool for promoting diversity and inclusion.

Existing studies have primarily focused on classroom practices (Asgarpoor *et al.*, 2021; Meyer & Hoft-March, 2021) and other teaching and learning materials, particularly textbooks (Bowen, & Hopper, 2022; Dillard-Wright & Gazaway, 2021; Stauffer, 2020). Taylor *et al.*, (2019) acknowledge the significance of the syllabus by arguing that “if teaching... is a political act..., syllabus is a manifesto of that politic”. This analogy demonstrates the significance of the syllabus as a substantial document that can be used by teachers to signal the commitment to DEI. This study also recognizes the significance of the syllabus in shaping the learning environment and aims to analyze the representation of DEI in language syllabi. By doing so, the study aims to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current practices and offer recommendations for improving the inclusion of DEI principles in language syllabi and teaching materials in general.

The findings in this study have both theoretical and practical implications as they are intended to inform language

educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers about the existing language practices and offer new perspectives on the importance of incorporating DEI principles in language syllabi, instructional materials, and teaching methodologies. The study contributes to the ongoing discussion on how to create an equitable and conducive learning environment for all learners, regardless of their ethnic, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. This goal can be achieved by creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive language learning environment.

Conceptualizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Before delving into how DEI is represented in language syllabi, it is significant to understand the meaning of these key terms. These terms have been viewed differently by various scholars and in different contexts. Beginning with the term “diversity,” Davis (2022) defines it as “the collection of unique attributes, traits, and characteristics that make up individuals.” These attributes encompass values, beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences, behaviors, race,

gender, abilities, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, age, and more. Davis (2022) compares diversity to an iceberg, where 90 percent of what constitutes it is invisible, and only 10 percent is visible. The visible part includes aspects like age, race, gender, and behavior, while the invisible part encompasses aspects like values, education, parental status, marital status, personality, communication style, and so forth. Moreover, Schools (2021) views diversity as the concept that involves honoring the presence of different types of people with differences in perspectives, work and life experiences, as well as religious and cultural differences. According to Schools, diversity involves aspects like race, color, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information, and learning styles (Schools, 2021, p. 4). Based on these two views, diversity can simply be viewed as the concept that involves honoring and respecting individual differences. With regard to diversity, this

paper analyzes how introductory Swahili syllabi incorporates and accommodates diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.

Continuing with the second term—Equity, the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (2018) simply defines equity as fairness. Davis (2022) extends this definition by arguing that equity involves offering opportunities or assistance so that everyone has a just and fair chance to be successful. Moreover, Schools (2021) state that Equity involves identifying barriers, eliminating the barriers, and providing support to historically marginalized groups. Based on these perspectives, the term equity mainly involves treating all individuals fairly, regardless of their social, political, ethnic, and cultural background. When examining equity, this project will specifically explore whether the structure and elements of the syllabus create a just and fair chance for every student to succeed.

Regarding the last term—inclusion, Davis (2022) sees this term as the degree to which every individual is fully

capable of participating in the organization, and their presence and opinions are valued and respected irrespective of their origin and background. Schools (2021) views inclusion as the state where all individuals work together as a team to build an environment that values every voice. These two definitions suggest that inclusion means the practice of valuing all voices and providing equal opportunities, access, and consideration to all individuals. From the term inclusion, the concept of “inclusive teaching” has evolved in the field of SLA. The University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) defines inclusive teaching as a type of teaching that involves deliberately cultivating a learning environment where all students are treated equitably, have equal access to learning, and feel valued and supported in their learning. Considering inclusion, this paper will analyze whether introductory Swahili syllabi value students’ voices and provide equal opportunities for all students to succeed.

The Origin and background of DEI

While it is challenging to attribute the origin of the concept of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to a specific event or period, scholars argue that DEI emerged as a response to systemic discrimination, inequalities, and exclusion experienced by marginalized groups (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014). Scholars agree that several political and social movements greatly contributed to the rise of DEI. Some of these movements are discussed below.

The civil rights movement of the mid-20th century in the United States of America (USA) is one of the movements that propelled the rise and growth of DEI. Led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, George Mason, etc., this movement is a critical force that played a significant role in highlighting the need for equality and justice for racial minorities (Crenshaw, K. W. 2010; Omi and Winant, 2014). The USA has a long history of discrimination, particularly against the Black population. Oppressive laws, such as the Jim Crow law, legalized the discrimination of the

Black population and led to several wars and struggles for social justice. These movements influenced several amendments aimed at promoting justice and equality. For example, the 13th Amendment was introduced to abolish slavery, the 14th Amendment in 1868 granted African American citizenship, and the 15th Amendment in 1870 granted Black American men the right to vote. Despite these amendments, African Americans continued to experience exclusion, including the right to vote, through measures like poll taxes and voter literacy tests. It wasn't until the civil rights movement that significant changes were made to promote DEI (Bernini, Facchini, & Testa, 2023; Calderon, Fouka, & Tabellini, 2023). This is why the period between the 1950s and 1960s, during the civil rights movement, is termed as one of the most significant eras in US history. For example, in this era, the Civil Rights Act was adopted in 1957 to allow federal prosecution of anyone trying to prevent anyone from voting. This movement paved the way for discussions on diversity

and equal rights in various domains, including education, employment, and society at large.

In the 1970s, the women's rights movement gained momentum, advocating for gender equality and challenging gender-based discrimination (Friedman, 2003; Taylor and Rupp, 1987). This movement also played a pivotal role in reinforcing DEI as it emphasized the importance of including women in all aspects of society, from the workplace to educational institutions. The women's rights movement made a remarkable contribution to the increased direct participation of women in all societal domains, including leadership, administration, and education, which is one of the principles of DEI.

The concept of inclusion started to gain prominence in the 1980s, particularly in the field of disability rights (Barnes, and Mercer, 2005; Scotch, 1989). Disability activists advocated for equal opportunities and access for individuals with disabilities, pushing for their inclusion in society, education, and employment.

Over time, the concept of diversity expanded beyond individuals with disabilities, race, and gender to encompass various dimensions, including age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, religion, and more. It recognizes that individuals bring different perspectives, experiences, and identities to the table, and promoting equity and inclusion involves valuing and respecting these differences while addressing systemic barriers.

Today, DEI has become a prominent framework in organizations, educational institutions, language education, and communities worldwide. The concept continues to evolve as societal understanding and awareness of various forms of discrimination and inequality advance. The main goal of DEI is to create inclusive environments where individuals from all backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to participate fully and equitably.

Significances of DEI

There is no doubt that DEI holds significant benefits in workplaces, educational institutions, communities, and society as a whole. Some of the benefits of DEI include the following.

One of the benefits is that DEI promotes exposure to diverse perspectives, experiences, and cultures (DeLuca, 2012). DEI challenges stereotypes, biases, and limited worldviews, fostering greater empathy, understanding, and appreciation for different cultures, backgrounds, and identities. This expanded perspective allows individuals to navigate multicultural and global environments with sensitivity and respect, thereby influencing the attainment of desired goals as individuals feel valued, appreciated, and respected in their organization.

Furthermore, DEI promotes social justice and equality (Barnabe, et al., 2023). Rooted in principles of social justice and equality, DEI aims to address systemic barriers and inequalities that have historically disadvantaged certain

groups based on factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and more. Promoting DEI helps create fair and just systems and societies where everyone has equal opportunities, rights, and access to resources. Therefore, DEI promotes peace and security in society by avoiding conflicts and opposition to unjust systems.

Moreover, studies show that DEI promotes social cohesion and harmony (Green, Preston, and Sabates, 2003). By valuing and respecting all individuals, DEI helps build connections, trust, and mutual understanding among community members. This inclusivity contributes to stronger social bonds, reduced discrimination, and enhanced social well-being.

Cunningham (2023) summarizes the benefits of DEI by classifying these benefits into three major groups: individual, group or team, and organizational benefits. Starting with individual benefits, Cunningham states that DEI allows individuals to participate in decision-making, promotes a sense of belonging, ensures job satisfaction, commitment,

autonomy, and work performance. Regarding group benefits, Cunningham mentions that DEI promotes creativity, learning from others, idea generation, access to information, and task performance. Finally, concerning organizational benefits, Cunningham notes that DEI promotes the attraction and retention of diverse workforces, attracts new consumers, serves as a role model, contributes to revenue generation, and enhances organizational effectiveness.

Generally, with globalization and increased intercultural interactions, individuals need to be equipped with cross-cultural communication skills, intercultural competence, and the ability to collaborate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. DEI is vital for preparing individuals to thrive in diverse and multicultural environments. Additionally, DEI is significant for fostering innovation, enhancing performance, expanding perspectives, promoting social justice, building stronger communities, and preparing individuals for a globalized world. By embracing diversity, ensuring equity, and creating inclusive environments,

organizations, institutions, and societies can unlock the full potential of individuals and work towards a more just and harmonious world.

Previous DEI Studies in Language Education

Since the inception of DEI in language education, studies have examined several areas relating to DEI. One of the areas that existing studies have explored is how to incorporate DEI principles in the language classroom (Benaglia & Smith, 2022; Bouamer & Bourdeau, 2022; Meyer and Hoft-March, 2021; Paiz, 2019; Sleeter, 2001). These studies have proposed several teaching strategies that foster DEI. One such suggestion is the application of inclusive pedagogies (Benaglia & Smith, 2022; Bouamer & Bourdeau, 2022; Meyer and Hoft-March, 2021). This strategy helps students learn languages while celebrating their diverse experiences and backgrounds. For example, Benaglia and Smith (2022) propose inclusive teaching in the French classroom by centering students' experiences as multilingual speakers and creative language users instead of imitating monolingual

native French speakers. Another strategy suggested is culturally responsive language teaching (Paiz, 2019; Sleeter, 2001). This approach involves incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the language classroom by integrating culturally relevant topics, texts, and activities, enhancing students' engagement, motivation, and language learning outcomes. Generally, the existing studies have emphasized the importance of acknowledging and valuing students' diverse linguistic and cultural identities in language classrooms.

The existing DEI studies have also examined the representation of DEI in language textbooks (Otlowski, 2003; Yamada, 2010). Several studies have analyzed language textbooks to assess the representation of diverse cultures, identities, and perspectives. These studies examine whether the content reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of the learners and promotes intercultural understanding. They often identify gaps and biases in the representation of

different groups and advocate for more inclusive and culturally sensitive materials.

Previous studies have also investigated the role of race, power, identity, and social justice in language education, using the critical language pedagogy approaches (Godley and Minnici, 2008; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Von Esch, Motha, & Kubota, 2020). Studies in this area analyze how language materials can integrate critical perspectives that challenge oppressive language ideologies, stereotypes, and social inequalities. They explore the potential of critical language pedagogy to empower learners, foster critical thinking, and promote social change.

While these studies contribute to our understanding of DEI in language syllabi, it is important to note that research in this specific area is still emerging. Further research is needed to examine the implementation of DEI principles in language classrooms, the effectiveness of inclusive language teaching strategies, and the impact on learners' attitudes, motivation, and language learning outcomes.

Gaps in Previous DEI Studies in Language Education

Previous studies on diversity in language education have broadened our perspective on the significance of DEI in language education. However, there are still notable gaps that need to be addressed. One significant gap in the existing literature is that the studies have not adequately focused on the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs), such as Swahili and other African languages. Since all languages deserve a voice, specific attention should be given to underrepresented languages and cultures. Moreover, the studies have overlooked the crucial role of teaching materials, particularly the syllabus, in fostering equality and justice within learning environments. While existing studies have examined DEI across campuses (Charity Hudley, & Flores, 2022), classroom practices (Bouamer and Bourdeau, 2022; Godley and Minnici, 2008; Meyer and Hoft-March, 2021; Paiz, 2019; Sleeter, 2001), and some teaching materials, notably textbooks (Otlowski, 2003; Yamada, 2010), they have often undermined the role of the syllabus in advocating for

DEI and creating an equitable learning environment where all students have equal chances to succeed. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by specifically addressing the underrepresentation of LCTLs and examining the potential of the syllabus as a tool for promoting inclusivity and equity in language education.

Methodology

This study analyzes three beginner-level Swahili syllabi obtained from research-intensive public universities in the United States. You can access these syllabi through this [link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EJOuXDzXZEBjqz-zKBpNMbvCgaVWTF0wwl8m8sTNIa0/edit) (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EJOuXDzXZEBjqz-zKBpNMbvCgaVWTF0wwl8m8sTNIa0/edit>) (The instructors' and university's details have been omitted for confidentiality purposes). To gather the syllabi, the researcher reached out to six Swahili instructors from different universities in the USA and requested their syllabi for analysis. All instructors were informed about the study's purpose, and out of the six, three agreed to participate in the study by providing their syllabi for analysis. This study analyzes syllabi

from these three instructors. To ensure confidentiality, the syllabi will be identified as Sample 1, Sample 2, and Sample 3 throughout the study.

The author intentionally decided to focus on beginner-level syllabi mainly for two reasons. The first reason is to ensure specificity. The author acknowledges that beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels are distinct stages, and DEI practices may vary across these levels. The second reason is that the author believes that the introductory level is the most crucial level because at this stage students are introduced to the Swahili language and culture, forming their initial impression of the class, which may influence their decision to continue or drop the course.

Analysis

The study mainly utilized the content analysis method. The data were coded based on the main themes and sections identified within the syllabi. The data were primarily analyzed qualitatively, to allow a detailed exploration of the representation of DEI in the syllabi. Descriptive statistics

were also employed to present the results in a concise and informative manner. Through combining qualitative analysis with descriptive statistics, a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which DEI principles are incorporated in the syllabi was obtained.

Results

Course description

All three syllabi emphasized the development of all language skills, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Additionally, all syllabi aimed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the “standard” Swahili language and culture. For example, Sample 1 states that:

“This course will expose you to the Standard Swahili language and culture”

Learning Outcomes

All three syllabi aim to achieve the proficiency level set by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which focuses on helping students acquire

conversational ability in Swahili, particularly on basic topics essential for survival in a Swahili-speaking environment. These topics encompass greetings, introducing oneself and family members, counting, describing nationalities and languages, discussing different means of transportation and housing, and other relevant themes. For example, Sample 2 states that:

“More specifically, the course is designed to help students acquire conversational ability on basic topics necessary for survival in a Swahili setting.”

Required materials

In all three syllabi, the average mean price for the required materials was \$142.25, with \$51.87 being the lowest book price and \$243.15 being the highest book price. Notably, sample 2 requires students to buy a dictionary, although a free version with the same quality is available online. Furthermore, all three syllabi include several OER resources as presented on the last column in Table I below. Table 1 below presents a descriptive summary of this finding.

Sample	Required Materials		OER (Free)
	Type	Price	
Sample 1	Book 1	Unavailable	<u>Dictionary</u> (currently unavailable). <u>Dictionary</u> . <u>Online Swahili lessons</u> (KIKO). <u>Survival words and phrases</u> <u>list</u> .
	Book 2	51.87\$	
Sample 2	Book 1	243.15\$	<u>Dictionary</u> (currently unavailable). <u>Book</u> <u>African Story Book</u> <u>Online Swahili lessons</u> (KIKO).
	Dictionary	30.84\$	
Sample 3	Book 1	243.15\$	<u>On-line Swahili language</u> <u>and Culture Resource</u> .

			<u>On-line Kiswahili course:</u> <u>KIKO.</u>
Average Price		142.25\$	

*The prices listed on this chart were obtained from Amazon.

For reference, the titles for the required materials in all three samples are as follows:

Sample 1

1. Kiswahili Na Utamaduni (KIU) Ltd.; 6th edition
(2011). *Swabili Book for Beginners*: ISBN-13:
978-9987911318.
2. Hinnebusch, T. J., & Sarah, M. M. (1998). *Swabili: A Foundation for Speaking, Reading and Writing/ Kiswabili: msingi wa kusema kusoma na kuandika*: UPA—ISBN-13:
9780761809722.

Sample 2

1. Senkoro, F.E.M.K. 2003. *Tuseme Kiswabili*. Madison:
NALRC
2. Awde, N. 2000. *Swahili-English English-Swahili Dictionary*.
New York: Hippocrene Books

Sample 3

1. Senkoro, F.E.M.K. 2003. *Tuseme Kiswabili*. Madison:
NALRC

Representation of Keywords Words Related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

To further examine the representation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in beginner-level Swahili syllabi, the researcher conducted a thorough examination using keyword searches. The premise was that instructors who prioritize DEI as an important aspect of language teaching would explicitly acknowledge and incorporate related statements and terms within their syllabi. Approximately 80% of the keywords used were adopted from Teasley and Archuleta's (2015) study. The findings are presented in Table 2, offering a

comprehensive breakdown of the frequency of appearance for each keyword in each syllabus.

Upon reviewing Table 2, it becomes apparent that neither of the syllabi included the key terms “diversity” and “equity,” while only sample 1 made a single reference to “inclusion.” Moreover, none of the syllabi incorporated a diversity statement or any other form of acknowledgment pertaining to DEI. These results underscore the absence of explicit recognition and integration of DEI principles within the analyzed beginner-level Swahili syllabi.

Table 2. Descriptive Summary of the Representation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Keywords

Key Word	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
Advocacy	0	0	0
Aging/Elderly	0	0	0
Culture/multi-	5	6	3

culture			
Disabilities	3	2	0
Discrimination	0	0	0
Diversity	0	0	0
Empowerment	0	0	0
Equity	0	0	0
Ethnicity	0	0	0
Fair	1	0	0
Gay/lesbian	0	0	0
Gender	0	0	0
Homeless person	0	0	0
Rights/Human	0	0	0

Rights			
Inequality	0	0	0
Inclusion	1	0	0
Minority	0	0	0
Oppression	0	0	0
Prejudice	0	0	0
Social justice	0	0	0
Race	0	0	0
Religion	0	0	0
Respect	1	0	1
Social class	0	0	0
Vulnerable	0	0	0
Women's issues	0	0	0

Students Learning Resources

All syllabi contain various resources to support students. These resources consist of Open Education Resources (OERs) that can be accessed online for free, guidelines and resources related to COVID-19, accommodations and support for students with disabilities, a student handbook outlining university policies and guidelines (including those related to plagiarism and academic honesty), as well as resources for counseling and wellness to promote students' mental health and well-being. These resources aim to help students navigate their academic responsibilities and challenges and to succeed in Swahili classes and other courses in general.

Issue 1: exposing students to only standard dialect.

Critics argue that promoting a single standard variety neglects DEI and reinforces a hegemonic linguistic model that marginalizes 'nonstandard or local varieties' (Mallinson *et al.*, 2011; Von Esch, Motha, & Kubota, 2020). One significant

concern of the syllabi analyzed in this study involves exposing students only to the standard variety of Swahili and neglecting nonstandard and local Swahili varieties that are part of Swahili speakers' culture and are commonly used in daily interactions. This deviation reinforces global north perspectives that emphasize teaching and mastering the widely recognized and spoken standard variety (Grant and Lee, 2009; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Von Esch, Motha, & Kubota, 2020). Exposing students to a single standard variety restricts their ability to effectively use Swahili in real-life contexts. Additionally, this practice limits their opportunity to communicate with a significant number of Swahili speakers who prefer to use nonstandard varieties.

While it is important for students to learn the standard variety, it is equally crucial to expose them to other varieties that are used in everyday conversations. To align with the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, there needs to be a balance between teaching the standard variety and incorporating exposure to other Swahili varieties, including

nonstandard Swahili varieties used in everyday speech. This approach would enable students to navigate various linguistic contexts and engage more inclusively with diverse Swahili-speaking communities.

Issue 2: exposing students to topics essential for survival in a Swahili-speaking environment.

All three syllabi aimed to expose students to topics essential for survival in a Swahili-speaking environment. However, these syllabi appear to ignore the fact that Swahili is now an international language, spoken beyond its place of origin. Similarly, they fail to recognize Second Language (L2) Swahili speakers, particularly those who do not reside in Swahili-speaking communities. Learning Swahili should not solely focus on communicating with native speakers; it should also develop learners' ability to express themselves and share their experiences and cultures in various contexts.

Issue 3: selection of expensive textbooks

It is important to consider the financial burden that expensive textbooks can impose on students, especially those from low-income families. Although the syllabi included several OER resources, the fact remains that the average price for the required materials, which is \$142.25, is still quite high. It should be noted that these books are guaranteed to be used in one semester only. Expensive textbooks can potentially limit access to education and may contribute to inequalities in academic achievement based on socioeconomic status.

Another unnecessary practice observed in Sample 2 is requiring students to purchase a dictionary while a free dictionary of the same quality is available online. Requiring students to purchase any material, when similar material is available online for free, seems unnecessary and potentially unjustifiable. Teachers should prioritize affordability and accessibility when designing syllabi and selecting required materials. In this case, the syllabi should have utilized more

Open Educational Resources (OERs) or low-cost resources instead of imposing financial burden on students.

Issue 4: failing to acknowledge diversity in the syllabi

Despite the significance of DEI, none of the syllabi analyzed in this study incorporated any statement that supports DEI. Again, as Taylor et al. (2019) stated, “If teaching is a political act, the syllabus is a manifesto of that politic.” The syllabus plays a significant role as it sets the tone for the rest of the class (Ludy *et al.*, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2019). It is commonly believed that the syllabus acts as a contract between teachers and students (Eberly, Newton, & Wiggins, 2001; Ludy *et al.*, 2016); therefore, an instructor who values DEI should mention it in the syllabus to assure students that the class values diverse identities and cultures. This practice can help create a comfortable and welcoming learning environment for all students and increase the chances of attaining the desired learning outcomes. Failing to acknowledge diversity in syllabi has detrimental effects on language classrooms, such as

exclusion, marginalization, reinforcement of stereotypes, inadequate preparation for real-world interactions, and missed learning opportunities. However, even a single mention of DEI in the syllabus can make a difference by psychologically preparing students to be open to diverse opinions and respect everyone's viewpoints. Instructors should not only include DEI statements in the syllabus but also ensure that they explicitly emphasize it in class and incorporate several practices that reinforce DEI. For instance, teachers can reinforce DEI by incorporating diverse readings, assignments, and discussions. These efforts contribute to fostering critical thinking, cross-cultural understanding, and creating an enriching and inclusive language learning experience.

Issue 5: incorporating learning resources that support DEI

Acknowledging DEI in the syllabus involves more than just including DEI statements. It requires teachers to incorporate concrete actions, elements, and resources that genuinely value and respect DEI. The syllabus serves as the initial impression

for students, setting the tone for the entire learning experience (Eberly, Newton, & Wiggins, 2001; Ludy *et al.*, 2016). By including specific elements that showcase a commitment to diversity, teachers communicate that inclusivity is a priority in the classroom. This promotes transparency, holds teachers accountable for their teaching practices, and helps students understand how DEI will be integrated into their learning journey.

Moreover, actively incorporating DEI principles throughout the syllabus provides structural support for students from diverse backgrounds. By including learning resources and assignments that explicitly address DEI, instructors demonstrate their recognition of the significance of representing diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices in the curriculum. This creates a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, integrating DEI principles encourages active engagement, fosters critical thinking, and promotes cross-cultural understanding. Exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences broadens

students' horizons, enriching their learning and creating a classroom environment where all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

Limitations and future studies

Despite the strength of the current study, there are several limitations. One limitation is the small sample size, which consists of only three introductory Swahili syllabi. This limited sample size may restrict the generalizability of the findings. For instance, it could be erroneous to conclude that diversity is not reinforced in the introductory Swahili syllabi. Future studies should aim to increase the number of samples to examine diversity in a broader range of syllabi, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how diversity is addressed in Swahili language education.

Another limitation is that analyzing introductory-level Swahili syllabi alone may not provide a complete picture of how diversity is represented in Swahili classes. Future studies may explore DEI practices across other levels to obtain a

comprehensive understanding of how DEI manifests across all levels. Additionally, it is crucial to consider other learning materials, such as textbooks and curriculum, and conduct class observations to gain a holistic understanding of how DEI is manifested in the teaching and learning process. A follow-up study should encompass these additional aspects, including interviews with Swahili instructors, to better assess the extent to which DEI is incorporated in the Swahili language courses and other languages in general.

Lastly, the current study employed a content analysis approach for data analysis. While content analysis provides valuable insights, using alternative data analysis methods in future studies could offer a fresh perspective on how DEI is represented in introductory Swahili syllabi. That is, different analytical approaches can help to explore DEI from diverse angles and potentially uncover nuanced findings that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of DEI in language education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the syllabi reveals limitations in reflecting the principles of DEI in language education, and for this case, beginner-level Swahili syllabi. The study highlighted several weaknesses, including exposing students to a single variety–standard variety, requiring expensive textbooks, and building learners’ capacity to communicate with First Language (L1) speakers and not other groups of speakers. These gaps create the necessity for intentional and comprehensive efforts to promote DEI in the syllabus and other learning materials.

One effective strategy for fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in language classrooms is to actively incorporate DEI principles into the course syllabus and other learning materials. This involves integrating DEI-related topics, recognizing and appreciating diverse perspectives through the inclusion of diversity statements, and offering a wide range of readings, assignments, and class discussions that address the needs and experiences of all students. By

implementing these strategies, language instructors can help mitigate the reinforcement of stereotypes and establish an environment that is inclusive and secure, promoting meaningful engagement and learning opportunities for all students.

Additionally, by proactively addressing these limitations and purposefully integrating DEI principles into syllabi and learning materials, language education can become more attuned to the varied backgrounds and linguistic practices of students. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with the multicultural and multilingual world in a more informed and inclusive way. By embracing DEI principles, language classrooms foster cultural competence and empower students to navigate diverse linguistic landscapes with confidence and respect.

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