

Lean syllabus is okay, but save local languages

THE revised primary school curriculum unveiled by the National Curriculum Development Centre is timely. The decision to reduce learning areas from eight to four at lower primary will correct our education system that has, for years, placed excessive strain on young learners to cram theoretical concepts without gaining serious practical competence.

By prioritising literacy, numeracy, religious values and livelihood skills, the new framework will give children a stronger, more relevant foundation. This is long-overdue. For too long, the thematic curriculum has suffered from poor implementation, particularly the part of local language instruction in lower classes. In many schools, this was honoured more in theory than in practice, with teachers defaulting to English drilling at the expense of comprehension. The revised curriculum, with its integration of English, local languages and Kiswahili under a unified literacy framework, offers a more balanced approach. Introducing Kiswahili at Primary Three (P3) is strategic because it will expand future opportunities for



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learners within the wider East African Community.

Equally commendable is the shift from rote learning to competence-based education. The inclusion of practicals, projects and oral assessments will help to nurture critical thinking, communication and real-world problem-

solving skills. These are the attributes the labour market increasingly demands.

However, there is concern about the future of many local languages.

The proposal to streamline languages of instruction from over 50 to just 22 may bring efficiency, but it may also increase the marginalisation and eventual extinction of languages for smaller communities. Besides being used as a tool of instruction, language helps to sustain culture, identity and history.

If certain languages are to be excluded from formal school instruction due to lack of orthography or teaching materials, then deliberate efforts must be made to develop them. This includes investing in research, compiling dictionaries, producing reading materials and training teachers.

Communities, cultural institutions and local governments should be actively involved in preserving and promoting their languages. Without such interventions, the country could lose a significant portion of its cultural heritage.