

The Demands of a Changing Society: English in Education in Kenya Today

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Abstract

English plays a key role in Kenya's educational system, not only as an important subject but especially as the medium of instruction. It has been claimed that the model and the norm of the English used in Kenya, apart from pidgin varieties, is the British Standard variety and in particular, Received Pronunciation (RP) (Schmied, 1990; Zuengler, 1982). Is this indeed the case? If not, what are the actual norms of correctness and appropriateness with regard to pronunciation, grammar, semantics, or pragmatics within the Kenyan community? There exists a discrepancy between the theoretical norm and the actual language behaviour, what challenges does this state of affairs present to an education system that relies heavily on the use of the English language? In examining these issues the paper adopts a historical perspective and discusses the factors that indicate the presence of a discrepancy between a theoretical norm and the actual language behaviour and then explores the consequences of such a situation. It also considers the valuable lessons that could be learnt, firstly from local creative writers' adaptation to the sociolinguistic/sociocultural reality, secondly from the move towards the democratisation and Africanisation of education in Kenya's history, and thirdly from what is happening in other non-native English contexts.