

Impact of the use of Multilingual Advocacy on the Realization of Peaceful Coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract: *The role of language is paramount for human's existence. It is a means of communication and social activities. The effect of language is undeniably extraordinary both for preserving or damaging peace. This study sought to assess the impact multilingual advocacy on the realization of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Mombasa County. Integrative ties theory, environmental theory and secular nationalism theory were used to guide the study. Descriptive research design was used in the study. The study targeted Madrassa teachers, Imams, church leaders, Sunday School teachers, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) leaders, Al - Wahda Muslim Teachers Association (AMTA) members, Al - Azhar delegation members, Members of Inter - religious Council of Kenya, security personnel, women leaders and youth leaders. A total of 384 respondents were targeted by the study out of which 327 participated by responding to questionnaires. Additional data were gathered using interview guides where 3 inter - religious council of Kenya members, 2 SUPKEM leaders and 3 AMTA members participated. Thus, a total of 335 respondents participated giving a response rate of 87%. Piloting was done to test on the validity and reliability of the study instruments. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for the study. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 26 where descriptive statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data while content analysis techniques will be used to analyze qualitative data collected through open ended questions. Regression and correlation analysis were used to test on the relationship between the studies variables. The analyzed data was presented in the form of tables and bar graphs with frequency and percentage distributions. The study found that the use of different languages in advocating for peace has a positive influence on the relationship between Muslims and Christians and therefore should be encouraged.*

Keywords: Use of different languages, advocating for peace, peaceful coexistence, Christians and Muslims

1. Background to the Study

Language is one of the most special blessings to us. A language allows people to express themselves. Thus, the communication process and its moral ramifications belong to the importance of language. By a language, people are able to communicate their aesthetic feelings, philosophies, moral, social and religious, cultural and their views and values to others and vice versa. Therefore, the acquisitions of language of use are the basic requirements for people's survival as specie. Regarding this, it is a known fact that language could be a tool to unite people in a nation because the national unity is strengthened when people hear and understand themselves. Conversely, if they do not understand and respect to each other, the national unity will get lost. It is in line with Damboama (2010), advocating that Language is the key to the heart of the people and if such a key is lost, the people are lost as well. On the other hand, when we treasure the key and secure it, it unlocks the door to untold riches. Language embodies one's culture, values and future. Therefore, it can be deduced that the role of language is crucially needed in interaction and communication.

The effects of language are also undeniably extraordinary both for preserving or damaging a peace. If language users are not aware of the aspects of language such as, pragmatic, sociolinguistic in interaction, the language they used will

cause chaos, conflicts, and problem and damage a peace. Moreover, if the language is shared in a social media, it will spread out rapidly that enable a group of people knew and get it. In line with it, the language users should adopt and use the language which is based on the language use to avoid conflict and promote a peaceful life among the community.

Al - Azhar, since its establishment in 972 CE, has been the heart of religious education, not only in Egypt but also in the Muslim world (Hud - hud, 2015). Its function was not only to guide the religious life of the Egyptians, but also to play an important role in the Egyptian political and social order. On the political scene, Egyptian politicians and statesmen were keen to draw their legitimacy from al - Azhar. The Egyptian public, on the other hand, looked at al - Azhar as a source of protection and representation mainly during difficult political and social upheavals (Abdallah, 2014). The role of al - Azhar and its scholars in the Egyptian life made al - Azhar a contesting place for those in power, trying to sometimes accommodate and other times control it. Such an attempt to gain control over al - Azhar can be observed clearly in the modern history of Egypt, since the 1800s until the present. This was a very critical time, not only because of the relationship between al - Azhar and the emerging political order, but also because of the modernity that had started to make its way into the Egyptian society. Al - Azhar had to respond to these challenges— political pressures and

modernity—in many subtle ways to maintain its status in the new world. One of the key issues that were at the center of these challenges was the ongoing debate to restructure and reform al - Azhar education system and to adopt education curricula changes. This process of developing al - Azhar educational system to accommodate educational pedagogical updates and to correspond to political and social changes continued throughout the last two centuries.

In Europe, Al - Azhar top leadership has been hosted by both the political and diplomatic realm in several occasions. The grand Imam of Al - Azhar has been invited to give speech. This he did in Britain, Germany and France. Such invitation made the French media refer the imam as “the man with the keys to true Islam”. The Germany chancellor reciprocated the visit by paying a visit the renowned cleric at the head office of Al - Azhar. This was followed a visit by the president of France senate. Many people have seen these movements as an important declaration that Al - Azhar is on the forefront in matters of peace.

At the global stage, Al - Azhar has been engaged by the United Nations Security Council. The institution was privileged to be the only Islamic institution to be invited by the United Nations to discuss efforts focused in addressing terrorism. The institution was represented by Dr. Muhieddin Afifi, the head of the High Council on Islamic Affairs. The institution has further engaged with UNESCO and UNICEF in many matters concerning peace, extremism and rights of women and children. It has also cooperated increasingly with UNESCO and UNICEF to promote tolerance, tackle violence and terrorism, fight Islamophobia and work on women’s and children’s issues. Al - Azhar further enjoys a lot of influences especially in regions that are affected by terrorism and sectarian divisions. This can be seen from many visits by government officials of Middle East states to Al - Azhar head office.

In Africa, al - Azhar has been actively engaged restoring peace in Libya. It is in the world attention that extremist groups have been operating in the country. The institution launched a campaign to promote peace and counter extremist ideologies. The university has taken bold steps in spreading moderation in east and West Africa, where there is a growing rise of extremist groups.

In Africa, the university has been recognized on bringing peace in Central African Republic. This country had face political violence and religious wrangles. The delegates from Al - Azhar were able to mediate and a truce was arrived.

In November 2020, there was a terrorist attack near a synagogue in Austrian Capital Vienna. Ahmed al - Tayeb led Al - Azhar in condemning the attack stated that “killing one soul is as if killing all of humanity and the human right to life is one of the highest purposes in all laws. ” In December 2020, Sheikh Ahmed el - Tayeb again condemned the knife attack in France that killed three people. He was quick to inform the world that the heinous attack was a complete contradiction of the values of Islam. And further, the statements were reiterated by other renowned Muslim leaders who reminded the extremists that Islam is a faith of peace and advances teachings of tolerance.

It is this aggressive relationship that has caught the eyes of Al - azhar University over time. In 2017, Dr. Ahmed Al - tayeb, the Sheikh of Al - azhar, attended Christian celebrations in Germany capital city. At the meeting he held discussions with the president and other government officials. This event took place just a few months after the Pope had honoured a visit call from the Imam. The conference discussed peace matters in context of Muslim - Christian relationship. Such high end political and religious meeting emphasized the role of Al - Azhar University in global peace initiatives. The world commended Al - Azhar’s efforts in fighting terrorism and extremism in religions. This followed the rapid rise of Islamic state in Iraq and other Middle East states. The fight against the groups resulted to refugee and irregular migrants to Europe. It is in this regard that European states rely on Al - Azhar to address the social, political and economic challenges that resulted from the rise of Islamic state due to its neutral position on geopolitical issues in the Arab world.

Due to these attacks over time, Al -Azhar University through the Islamic Research Academy has been conducting a campaign to encourage religious tolerance in Kenya. In 2019, while giving a lecture on “The Moderation of Islam in the Face of Extremism”, Professor Nazir Muhammad Nair pointed that the collaboration between Muslims and Christians will help in discrediting religious extremism and dissuading potential recruits. He also warned against violent extremism in religion noting that it resulted in the surge in numbers of the young people joining extremist groups and the tension between different faiths. The scholar was alive to the fact that there is a steady rise in extremist groups in Africa, and that in east Africa al Shabaab was posing a great threat to peaceful coexistence between the two religions.

Faith to Action Network (FAN), Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), and Pwani University have partnered with Al - Azhar University in addressing this rift between these two major religions in Mombasa. In summary, given the waves of terrorism that have struck many areas of the world, it appears that the world is betting on al - Azhar playing a moderate role and challenging the extremist ideology adopted by terrorist groups such as Daesh, Al - shabaab among others and undermining their religious legitimacy to prevent them from attracting more recruits. This study aimed at assessing the impact of the use of different languages in advocating for peace on the realization of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Mombasa County.

2. Literature Review

Use of different Languages

In the same African vein, the organization succeeded in making a deal with the Radio Network targeting Africa, broadcast in local languages such as: Hausa, Swahili, Amharic, Yoruba, Afar and Somali, to host Al - Azhar senior scholars in its programme to clarify the true essence of Islam and its moderate message as well as clear some misconceptions against Islam. These programmes have been translated into the African local languages mentioned above as well the Arabic, English and French languages. These programmes also hosted African students studying at Al -

azhar University in order to transfer the bright image of Egypt and Al - azhar in their effort of promoting peaceful coexistence.

In the same context, the organization established several branches all over Africa. Its global presence has been expanding since 2019, where it succeeded in opening 20 branches in the following countries: Nigeria, Comoros, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Mali, Somalia, Cameroon, Ghana, Brunei, Sudan, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Libya and UK. In addition to that, many of Al - azhar graduates in other countries have submitted their requests to open branches of the organization in their countries. It is significant to note that this study examined Al - azhar Kenya office role in enhancing Muslim - Christian co - existence with an emphasis on Mombasa County.

Islam calls on all mankind to know each other, because they all come from one grandparent ancestor. Islam regards all human beings as one family. In fact, Islam makes the goal of creation humans is that they know each other and live together. The teachings of the Kor'an lead us to the peace. Allah SWT said, "It has come unto the light of God and the book that explains. With that book, Allah gives guidance to those who follow His good pleasure to the road of full safety; removing them from darkness into the light by His leave; and give them clues to the straight path." (Q. s. Al - Maidah: 15 - 16).

From the verse above, it can be deduced that Islam also gives the teachings to create a peaceful life that can be achieved by using the language for peace. The role of language for a peace can be appreciated when people recognize that language becomes an integral part of people's culture and as a medium of interaction and ways of expressing thoughts and feelings in a society. It is strengthened by Cohen (2010) in Ani (2015) gave more light on this assertion when he states that communal life is possible only because members of a community possess a set of shared meanings which enables them to make coherent sense of the world. It is in line with Ani (2015) commenting on the role of language as peace, war and conflict resolution stated that language can cause war and breed peace.

Further, she remarked that having too many languages and diverse dialects within a nation can affect mutual co - existence and understanding and this may lead to conflict. Having considered a variety of conflicts, we should look the solutions peacefully to resolve it. One of the solutions is the use of effective stylistic approach to address a contending issue. This solution is also sharpened by Cohen (2001) stressing that in interconnected chain of non - verbal and verbal messages, conciliation can advance only when there is synchronized and consecutive understanding at every stage of the process. People should maintain the information and message comprehensibly and the parties must be able to draw a shared store of meaning. On the other hand, in some societies, possibly equivalent words have variations or differences in meaning and when these variations in meaning are not explained in an understandable term to other people, there will be conflict based on the wrong

perceptions on the meaning of the word. In addition, the cultural gaps between the ways of life of society will lead to the potential semantic gap between concepts and their labels across languages. That is why the equivalent concept in language is needed to have same meanings. What people expect of reconciliation will be determined by the local knowledge that informs their understanding of the term.

In line with Cohen (2011), Jija (2012) emphasized that language should be carefully, responsibly and politely used so as to advance individual and group co - operation in social affair. From this statement, it can be referred that the effective communication of skills is necessary pre - requisite in suppressing conflicts. Referring to Jija's statement, it is clear that words which are considered as being segregate and divisible linguistically should be changed by the more accommodating and unity enhancing the words. Further, the inflammatory language or wrong and misconceived words should not be used when referring to our relationship. Consequently, the best way for achieving peace and resolving conflict is the use of languages that honors and respects human dignity, tolerance, truth and national integration.

Besides the use of language of peace, there are a variety of ways to promote a peaceful life. According to UNESCO (2013), there are several ways to achieve a peace. These ways include:

Recognition of and Respect for Knowledge

Traditional and indigenous knowledge contributes to safeguarding biodiversity and to promoting sustainable development. Pilot projects highlighting the place of science in the process of dialogue as a universal language are envisaged. For instance, activities underlying the importance of the history of science in raising awareness on the role of science for the rapprochement of cultures and its significance in helping to understand the close interconnection of science with the growth of civilization and the flourishing of cultures. The history of science and scientific thought should be regarded as an instrument for the new humanism which is celebrated every year on the occasion of the World Science Day for Peace and Development.

Development of an interactive educational program to stop violence in schools

Using the UNESCO Associated School - Network (ASPnet) as an outreach tool, develop a model interactive educational programme for adaptation and implementation at local/ community levels to stop violence and involving schools, including students and teachers, parents, the media and professional bodies. Students are the main actors in this exercise. Through interviews, testimonies, etc., they document on their own the problems inside/ outside schools and possible solutions in working with parents, the media, police, municipal education boards, municipal administrators and councilors through online platforms and school - based activities.

Learning from the past: Promoting Dialogue for Reconciliation and Intercultural Understanding

Building on the experience of the on - going Transatlantic Slave Trade Education project and the Slave Route: Resistance, Liberty Legacy project, this activity continues to provide opportunities for networking and exchange to increase awareness and deepen knowledge about the causes, modalities and consequences of the Slave Trade and Slavery in order to work towards a future free from racism, discrimination and intolerance. A specific focus is given to increase interregional student and teacher exchanges via ICTs. As a consequence, peace should be more and more recognized as the cornerstone of all people's daily lives both in terms of prevention and reconciliation, particularly in contexts characterized by social and economic unrest, ethnic or religious hostility, post - conflict situations, contested electoral processes, and other forms of violence - prone environments. Addressing those situations through activities at the global, regional, national and local levels, a culture of peace has the potential to result in everyday peace, a peace crafted by all members of societies.

Encourages Internal Reflexivity

As a space to perceive the possible gaps or deficits in one's own cultural system. Indeed, cultural diversity must incorporate a certain degree of epistemological multi perspective, that is, recognition that there are other legitimate ways to see the world than one's own.

Strengthens the capacity for living together in conviviality

This capacity cannot be taken for granted; it must be consciously encouraged and nurtured. To be convivial requires the willingness to build partially shared social worlds – of work, politics, leisure and information – with people who may not share the same cherished cultural assumptions. This is an elementary requirement for practical, daily cultural pluralism.

Supports willingness to change one's cultural horizons

Engaging in creative adaptation and anticipation, which are also not to be taken for granted. Where there is openness to creative transformation within a cultural system, possibilities for new ways of learning and living together can emerge.

3. Research Methodology

Descriptive research design was used in the study. The study was carried out in Mombasa County where a total of 384 respondents were targeted by the study out of which 327 participated by responding to questionnaires. Additional data were gathered using interview guides where 3 inter - religious council of Kenya members, 2 SUPKEM leaders and 3 AMTA members participated. Thus, a total of 335 respondents participated giving a response rate of 87%. Primary data was collected using questionnaire and interview guides while secondary data were gathered from records and other data sources within the organizations.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Influence of the use of different languages in advocating for peace influences on the realization of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Mombasa County.

The study further sought to determine the influence of the use of different languages on the realization of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Mombasa County. The results of the descriptive statistics were as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Influence of the use of different Languages by Al - Azhar on Peaceful Coexistence

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The use of different languages allows for reach of different communities and cultures with the message of peace	327	4.16	.828
The use of different languages neutralizes the domination of the use of Arabic thus attracting many to Al - Azhar's philosophy of peace and acceptance	327	4.03	.979
The use of different languages is a sign of unity of purpose thus eliminating discrimination emanating from language barrier and cultural differences	327	3.96	.841
Mean		4.05	0.88

The findings on table 1 show that the respondents indicated that the use of different languages allows for reach of different communities and cultures with the message of peace (Mean 4.16) and that the use of different languages neutralizes the domination of the use of Arabic thus attracting many to Al - Azhar's philosophy of peace and acceptance (Mean 4.03) were very effective. The study further found that the use of different languages is a sign of unity of purpose thus eliminating discrimination emanating from language barrier and cultural differences was effective (Mean 3.96). An average mean of 4.05 was obtained; an indication that respondents generally thought that the use of different languages was very effective in the realization of peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims. There was no significant difference in the responses given on the aspects of the use of different languages on peaceful coexistence (Mean Standard deviation < 1).

Other ways through which the use of different languages were found to promote peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims includes: enabling Christians and Muslims to communicate fluently in times of disagreement among the two religions, a sign of unity and sense of belonging, allowing the message of peace to reach different communities, both Christians and Muslims are able to easily understand the writings in the holy books, breaking language barrier hence enhances clarity and understanding among the groups, coming up with a common language for both groups thus offering a sign of unity of purpose and attracting many to Al - Azhar philosophy, helps in understanding of other languages and easier communication, it creates freedom of expression, it eliminates enmity as people can find a proper way to express themselves and find solutions from different

ideas, it enables campaign on peace, it enables the religious leaders of both sides to set respected values to govern the people and in the native languages, it enhances capability to mobilize community support for a peace process, creates a sense of belonging, it has enabled communities to do businesses and intermarry freely hence peaceful coexistence, it has neutralized the religious barriers, it helps to preserve and promote different cultures as it breaks communication barriers, it makes it easy to spread and campaign for peace and unity in a wide range of groups, message of peace gets to be known by different groups ages and ethnics, people tend to listen when their language is used therefore use of different languages seem like a great idea and that Muslims and Christians get to understand each other by using different language as they get to live in peace.

In an interview with one of the SUPKEM leader on how the use of different languages helps in building peace in Mombasa County. He mentioned the following:

“Use of different languages neutralizes the domination of the use of Arabic thus attracting many in both groups for peace and acceptance. For example, translation of religious articles in native languages to allow for deeper understanding and also promotes information reach to different languages. It has therefore helped in neutralizing the domination of the use of Arabic and getting a common language among the people thus promoting peace”.

In an interview with one member of the Inter - religious Council, he emphasized that:

“The usage of English and Swahili has made many not to feel left out thus a feeling of belonging. As such, the use of different languages creates a lovely environment since it gives opportunity for both Muslims and Christians to relate well in understanding each other and embracing each other's differences thus promoting peace”.

These findings are in line with that of UNESCO (2013) where they found that the use of different languages is instrumental in developing an interactive educational model for adaptation and implementation at local/ community levels to stop violence and involving schools, including students and teachers, parents, the media and professional bodies.

5. Conclusions

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the use of different languages in advocating for peace has a positive influence on the relationship between Muslims and Christians and therefore should be encouraged.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends the use of different languages being one of the effective tolls in ensuring peaceful coexistence. The fact that people get messages clearly when it is packaged in a language, they understand is a win in ensuring peaceful coexistence.

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