



Indigenous Languages and Equitable Research Partnerships: Lessons from Ekegusii in Kenya



Author: Dr. Naftal Nyakundi

Affiliation: Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kenya

Email: nyakundinaftali1986@gmail.com

Abstract

International research collaborations involving indigenous languages often reproduce structural inequalities in which local communities and scholars remain marginal to knowledge production. This poster draws on research experiences with Ekegusii, an indigenous Bantu language spoken in western Kenya, to examine how inequities manifest in linguistic research partnerships and how they may be addressed. Using community-engaged linguistic documentation and analysis, the study reflects on issues of authorship, data ownership, epistemic authority, and benefit-sharing between Global North and Global South collaborators. The findings demonstrate that equitable partnerships require more than funding or institutional agreements; they demand deliberate attention to trust-building, transparent communication, ethical reflexivity, and meaningful inclusion of local researchers and language communities across all stages of research. By foregrounding Ekegusii speakers as knowledge holders rather than data sources, the poster argues for partnership models that are locally grounded, socially accountable, and sustainable. These lessons contribute to broader conversations on decolonizing research practices and advancing equitable international collaboration in the humanities and social sciences. Screening behaviors and awareness.

Introduction

Indigenous languages are central to cultural identity, social organization, and knowledge systems, yet research on these languages is often conducted within unequal global academic structures. African languages, including Ekegusii, have historically been studied through externally driven agendas that prioritize academic outputs over community benefit. This poster situates Ekegusii research within debates on equitable partnerships, highlighting how power asymmetries shape collaboration, representation, and knowledge circulation in international linguistic research.

Methods and Materials

The study employs a qualitative, community-engaged research approach grounded in linguistic fieldwork, discourse analysis, and reflexive scholarship. Data were collected through recorded narratives, interviews with Ekegusii speakers, and collaborative discussions with local researchers and community members. The methodology emphasized informed consent, shared interpretation of linguistic data, and ongoing dialogue with participants. Reflexive field notes were used to document partnership dynamics, decision-making processes, and ethical challenges encountered during the research.

Results

The analysis revealed three key findings. First, power imbalances persist in agenda-setting, funding control, and authorship decisions within international collaborations. Second, community participation increases research relevance when speakers are treated as co-producers of knowledge rather than informants. Third, equitable partnerships are strengthened by transparency in data use, recognition of local expertise, and sustained engagement beyond project timelines. These practices foster trust and improve both research quality and social impact.

Key Insights

Insight	Implication for Equitable partnerships
Recognition of local expertise builds trust and ensures methodological relevance.	Partnership must formally acknowledge and integrate indigenous knowledge systems
Co-designed research agendas increase sustainability and local impact	Research questions should emerge from collaborative dialogue not external imposition
Transparent leadership structures, mitigate power imbalances	Clearly defined roles, rotating leadership and shared decision making are essential
Capacity building initiatives enable skills transfer and co-authorship	Training resource sharing and mentorship should be bi-directional

Discussion

The Ekegusii case illustrates that equity in research partnerships is relational rather than procedural. While institutional frameworks matter, everyday research practices—communication styles, attribution of credit, and ethical accountability—are equally crucial. The findings align with calls to decolonize knowledge production by repositioning indigenous communities and Global South scholars as central actors in research collaboration.

Conclusion

Equitable research partnerships in indigenous language studies require intentional restructuring of power relations. Research on Ekegusii demonstrates that fairness, mutual respect, and shared ownership enhance scholarly outcomes and community benefit. Future collaborations should prioritize long-term relationships, ethical reflexivity, and locally grounded leadership to ensure sustainable and just international research

Recommendation

1. Develop partnership charters that formalize equity principles
2. Implement co-authorship and joint dissemination protocol
3. Foster long-term engagement beyond project timelines
4. Advocate for funding models that support capacity building in Global South Institutions

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Contacts

Name: Dr Naftal Nyakundi
Institution: Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology
Email:nyakundinaftali1986@gmail;.com
Phone: +254716966701