

Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, Leads With Kiswahili/ English International Baccalaureate



Coastweek-- The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, has broken new ground with the first ever Swahili – English version of the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for the International Baccalaureate (IB), the world's most prestigious university entrance qualification, by developing and pioneering a Kenyan-relevant version of the programme at a time when all other IB schools in the country are using an English language version.

The programme's development in collaboration with the International Baccalaureate Organisation, has been driven by the Academy's vision of offering world class education that spans both global and local expertise.

Learning in two languages has additionally been proven to aid the development of children's intelligence and thinking, with bilingual children able to solve problems that contain conflicting or misleading cues at an earlier age, and more easily, than monolingual children, according to research by the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, which is one of a global network of academies dedicated to the development of leaders, began developing the new PYP programme in 2009.

It now has the curricula approved and implemented for Years 1 - 4.

As these children progress through the school, they will proceed into the IB Middle Years programme, they will proceed into the IB Middle Years programme and will have the opportunity to complete a bilingual IB Diploma in English and Swahili.

“When His Highness started the Aga Khan Academy network of schools, he had the vision of educating future leaders, who would later be able to drive positive development in their societies and this would only be possible if the children had a powerful grasp of their local language, which in this case is Swahili,” said Esther Kariuki, a teacher of the dual language programme.

The benefits of the dual language programme extend beyond advanced cognitive abilities to include cultural and social gains, with the new IB-PYP programme encompassing the Swahili culture.

The 2013 UNDP Human Development Report states that Swahili is the most widely spoken language in Africa, with 150m speakers, and is an official national language in four countries.

Such a large body of Swahili speakers gives future entrepreneurs at the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa a further advantage in doing business and in playing leadership roles on the continent.

The Aga Khan Academy in Maputo is likewise pioneering a dual language English and Portuguese PYP, as the Academy in Hyderabad pioneers an English and Hindi PYP.

The dual language program works by using two languages for teaching.

“The school has adopted the 50-50 model of dual language education, which means that half of the instruction is done in Swahili and half of the instruction is done in English.

“One day the children learn the curriculum in English and the next day they continue their studies in Swahili,” said Esther.

Different capabilities in Swahili have seen teachers additionally deploy new teaching methods.

“One of them is differentiated instruction, where a teacher plans a lesson according to the children's different proficiency levels in Swahili.

“Students in a class will be grouped according to their level of understanding in Swahili then taught using learning activities fit for their proficiency,” said Esther.

Another method is dramatization, where the teacher acts out whatever might not be understood by the students.

“For instance, when reading out a Swahili comprehension, the teacher can ask the students who have understood to role play it out to those who have not,” she said.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to use all available methods to make sure the children understand without simply giving a translation, even if it means using body language, as this helps to build deeper learning of the language.

For subjects such as mathematics and the sciences, teachers can use other teaching aids.

“Here, teaching aids are used to help students better understand.

"For instance, a model of the human body can be used to explain the digestive system, or a big protractor can help in teaching how to draw angles.

“Even if the children are still developing their understanding of Swahili, they can learn from what they are seeing,” said Esther.

Teachers at Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa also make use of peer teaching.

“This is known as co-operative learning, whereby students are divided into small groups and led by those who better understand the concepts, who help all understand,” said Esther.

Through this, all students are able to build a more complex understanding of the topic being covered.

Before the launch of the program, a lot of preparation was done.

“First the teachers had to be trained in the dual language program and we also had to look for any type of resources, such as textbooks, that would help us in delivering the curriculum in Swahili,” said Esther.

Intensive training took place for three days, followed by continuous in-house training at the academy’s Teacher Professional Development Centre, which also teaches educators from across the public schooling sector.

