

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE RESEARCH IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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Abstract

The history of literature written and published specifically for Kenyan children began in the 1960's with independence from the colonial rule. Pre- colonial literature for children was oral in nature, passed down by adults in the form of folktales, myths, songs, riddles and proverbs. During the colonial period, children's reading was confined to textbooks and Western literature which promoted western culture and values. Political independence led to the development of an intellectual climate that firmly insisted that children's literature should work out word from the home base of the African child so that they will not become culturally stateless persons. This paper sets out to asses and describes critical studies that have been carried out in children's literature at Kenyatta University. It should be noted that criticism and reviewing of any literary genre, including children's literature, contributes immensely to the improved development of the literature, (Haviland, 1974: 391).

1. Definition and role of Children's Literature

Townsend (1990: 60) defines literature as all works of imagination which are transmitted primarily by means of the written word or spoken narrative, which is novels: stories and poetry with the addition of those works of non-fiction which by their quality of style or insight may be said to offer experience of a literary nature. In explaining what literature offers, Townsend (Ibid) says that literature is above all enjoyment. The kind of enjoyment is not only in the shallow sense of easy pleasure, but enjoyment of a profound kind; enjoyment of the shaping by art of the raw material of life, and enjoyment, too, of the skill with which that shaping is performed; enjoyment in the stretching of one's imagination, the deepening of one's experience, and the heightening of one's awareness. This of course is the general definition of literature.

So what then is children's literature? The problem of defining children's literature arises from the fact that, some books meant for adult literature are read by children and vice versa, (Oberstein, 1996:17; Townsend, 1990:61). However, according to Oberstein, children's literature is, "a category of books, the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: Children" (Oberstein, 1996: 17). This definition of children's literature means that it is underpinned by purpose, in that it wants to be something in particular because this is supposed to connect it with that reading audience, the child, with which it declares itself to be overtly and purposefully concerned.

Osazee (1991) is particular in her definition of children's literature because she focuses on the African children's literature and defines it as:

that piece of literary creation which draws its subject matter from the African world view and which is written in a language and style the African child can comprehend. It must be seen as promoting African culture and enable the child or Young adult to understand and appreciate his or her environment better and it must give him or her some pleasure, (Osazee, 1991: 74).

Osazee defends herself by saying that this definition does not mean that literature from other places will be meaningless for the African child. This is because children might find such works entertaining and educative. However, the works cannot be regarded as African children's literature because they do not seek to promote African culture.

According to Mwanzi, (1982:3) literature is crucial to the mental, psychological and social development of a child. Literature stimulates children's imagination and sharpens their awareness of the world around them. These are important social functions that make literature an essential tool in the process of socialization. It is a means of gaining deeper understanding of other people's culture, which can serve as a basis for building better understanding between communities and even nations. It is through literature that one finds himself or herself projected fully inside another human being, looking out on the world through their eyes. In the cause of reading about others, one learns about himself; one also discovers that other people have the same thought and feelings as theirs.

Literature plays the role of strengthening the formation of values and feelings of solidarity, equity and firmly establishes the qualities of tolerance, compassion, sharing, caring, civil responsibility and ability to resolve conflicts through non-violent means and critical acumen, (Brooks et al, 1982:306). Children's books are one tool among others to achieving this goal.

Other scholars who show interest in Children Literature have tried to highlight its significance in the life of a child. They argue that childhood is an important stage of human development. Okolie (1998 quoted in Muleka 2001: 13), for example says this, “In the beginning, there was childhood and childhood makes the man or woman”. This means that the stage of childhood could determine the kind of adult to be expected in future. This therefore calls for greater attention from scholars to children’s literature which is an important factor in shaping the character of children.

Since childhood is a crucial stage in the development of an individual, the quality of books availed to children at this stage becomes a major concern because children respond to what they read, (Muleka 2001: 4). For instance, Tucker (1976:180) observes that children have to learn conventions and some stories with clear conventions are helping children who are trying to build up some ways of predicting the immediate future...

This observation could mean that children internalize what they read in books and this internalization may mould their behavior as adults. In addition, Benton & Fox (1985) point out that children project through their behavior, what they read in stories, and through such projection, one determines the kind of image they form out of the story. It can be concluded from these statements that children are influenced by what they read.

2. The development of children’s literature in Kenya

Children’s literature in Kenya has had to accommodate three value systems. Odaga (1985) describes these three phases of the development of children’s literature in Kenya as: the pre- colonial or traditional, the colonial and the emergent or the post colonial value system. These three value systems have affected the nature of children’s literature in Kenya in Kiswahili in various ways.

2.1 Pre-Colonial Children’s Literature

Pre-colonial children’s literature, otherwise referred to as oral literature is the old form of the Kenyan children’s literature, and in consequence, the oldest form of Kenyan children’s literature that was available to children, (Njoroge, 1978:47). Long before the publication of novels, poems, short stories and plays, the oral literature revealed the creative genius of the African artist. These traditions also revealed the integral connection that life has to art in African societies, (Harris and Cornel, 1993:104).

With its multi-faceted genres, children learnt the societal virtues of patience, honesty, obedience hard work and generosity, among others. They also learnt about such vices as greed, disobedience and lies, and their consequences. The children learnt what society considered good and evil; and how to relate to and care for the environment (Mbure, 1997:4).

Pre- colonial children's literature was not only valued because of its social focus and performance quality but for its aesthetic character as well. This literature was artistic, for example, it employed poetic language which helped to capture and sustain the child's interest. The oral artist made use of repetition, imagery, similes and other stylistic devices to enhance the aesthetic quality of the narrative (Akinyemi, 2003:167). These stylistic devices did not only serve to make the moral of the story more memorable, but through the creative language employed, the child's enjoyment of the story was made more certain.

All in all the historical, economic, and social issues of a society were effectively inculcated among the young generations through oral literature. The society's philosophy towards life and its relationship with neighboring societies was aptly captured in narratives, poems, riddles and even taboos. The fact that the themes and characters in certain oral stories are found in several cultures, attest to their universality and wide appeal. The tales' are archetypes that convey fundamental themes of human desires and feelings across the centuries and over the borders of nations.

Today Oral literature can be seen as a background and source for written literature for children both in Kiswahili and English language. There is now a large collection of the why, how and what stories in both languages. Some folk stories interweave with present day circumstances, achieving both balance and bridge between old and contemporary (Killam & Rowe 2000: 65).

2.2 Children's literature during colonial period

The introduction of written material in Kenya dates back to the arrival of Christian missionaries nearly a century ago (Kola 1998: 55). The missionaries set up printing facilities mainly to print evangelical materials for distribution to their new converts. These were mainly in Kiswahili and the local languages (Chakava 1994: 6). In addition these were supplemented by books used in European schools and imported into African schools without modifications (Osazee 2004: 2). This means that during this colonial period, the African children in government and missionary schools were introduced to literature

that was alien to their experience. This was one of the reasons why African children did not enjoy reading these stories because the books were irrelevant to their needs. Achebe (Quoted in Osazee 2004: 2) puts it more succinctly when he wrote about the Nigerian child:

Before 1960 Nigerian children read nothing but British children's books and had to be left to figure out what was meant by Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square and the Thames. The poems he was forced to memorize talked about bleak and chilly mid-winter, snowflakes, men who galloped by whenever the moon and stars were out, great ports and swarming cities, and of course the Pied Piper – subjects and images which convey no meaning and no feeling to the average Nigerian (African) child in his natural environment.

Although Achebe refers here to Nigerian children, this statement can be applied to many children in various countries of the African continent. This literature was based on foreign cultures. The children could not therefore, identify themselves with the characters in the books. It was, therefore difficult for most of them to appreciate the reading material since it was detached from their culture and environment. The unfamiliar settings and images are some of the critical issues in children's books.

According to Alcock (2005: 407), the first children's books in Kiswahili were produced in 1901. They were mainly Sunday school texts which emphasized on Christian literature, for example, *Kusoma Kwa Watoto Kwa Siku ya Jumapili*. These Sunday school service books in Kiswahili were produced by Christian Knowledge Society. Other than the Christian material, books in Kiswahili for children were written by other Europeans such as Isabelle Fremont who wrote *Paka Jimi* (1945) and *Mbwa Tomi* (1947). These books were widely used in primary schools because they had an African setting, characterization and themes. But like colonial literature, most of them failed to evoke and bring out an authentic, genuine African spirit and also failed to formulate the sort of image that children and young people in Kenya needed at that time. The children needed an image that was not imported and which they would readily emulate.

On the other hand, the kind of literature produced by the colonial masters slighted Africans, thus it was prejudiced and biased. This kind of literature sought to expose and explain the primitiveness and savagery of the black man (Khorana 1994: xiv). It served the express purpose of teaching the white society that Africans were no better than animals. This kind of literature was used as propaganda, either to boost or to destroy the image and dignity of the African people.

Children were also introduced to the kind of literature that perpetuated myths and misconceptions about the geography, social organization, people's culture and civilization of the African by stereotypical themes, characters and plots in books about Africa (Khorana 1994: xiv). These kinds of literature demonstrated ignorance and lack of local experience on the part of the European writers. Through this kind of literature, children were conditioned to regard the non-white population of the world as composed not only of inferior but of conquered people who were destined to remain subject to the economic and social domination of those who have dominated them (Ngugi 1978: 13). Africans exposed to colonial literature would end up suffering from an inferiority complex because of the lies of this literature. A superiority attitude led the white people to prescribe the kind of literature African children were to read and the songs they were to sing, totally disregarding the fact that the Africans had their own literature (Khorana 1994: xx).

Colonial literature definitely had a distorting effect on the psyche of the African child because it ignored the experience of the African child and his world. Alembi (2007: 15) refers to this period as a period of constricting and suffocating the African oral literature. The suffocation also happened at the language level. That all the books were in English means the children were conditioned to see English as a superior language. Conversely, they were made to see their own languages as inferior- and speaking in them was a mark of inferiority.

Preference for imported children's literature reflected the Eurocentric preoccupations of the colonial educators just as westernized values and ideologies permeated the structures and process of schooling, so too imported literatures embedded themselves in the curricular fabric of school life (Alembi 2007: 16). Under these circumstances the commercial market for indigenous literature remained limited because, for one, most black children did not go to school and few could read. The major commercial market for children's literature was in schools and colonial schools had set very clear parameters as to the kinds of books they wanted. The resulting disadvantage was circular; the production of indigenous children's literature was not viable, therefore the authorship of literature was discouraged; in consequence, reliance on imported literature was further entrenched (Chakava 1998: 42; Killam & Rowe 2000: 66).

Despite all the negative comments that can be made about colonial literature, there is need to recognize the work done by numerous missionaries and anthropologists who collected, transcribed, translated, recorded and composed folktales such as folk stories, proverb, riddles, myths, songs and poems from various regions of Africa, (Mazrui 1984: 340; Bertoncini 1989: 12). For example, in Kiswahili, Jan

Knappert, Carl Buttner and Carl Velten studied the diaries of travelers and put them together to obtain a coherent picture of traditional stories. According to Bertoncini (1989: 13), some of the early collections of Kiswahili tales include: *Swahili tales, as told by natives of Zanzibar* by Edward Steere (1970); and *Kibaraka, Swahili Stories* by University mission, Zanzibar (1885) among others. Many of these translated tales exhibited Arabic influence. Many of them have become so deeply rooted in Kiswahili literature that by the Waswahili themselves they are no longer treated or even perceived as something alien (Bertoncini 1989: 19). Bertoncini observes that modern Kiswahili literature feeds upon these ancient stories as if created by the Swahili proper. For instance, she notes that *Adili na Nduguze* by Shaaban Robert was framed using the fairy tale of “The Story of Abdalla ibn Fadhil” from the *Thousand and One nights*. For the next hundred years these stories would be the main subject of Kiswahili books in print (Bertoncini 1989:31).

The stories that were translated included; *Hekaya za Abunuwas* (first published 1935): *Alfu Lela Ulela* (by Johnson and Bren 1922); *Mashimo ya Mfalme Suleiman* (F. Johnson 1929); *Mashujaa: Hadithi za Wayunani* (C. Kingsley, 1929); *Safari za Msafiri* (Bunyan 1888); *Hadithi ya Allan Quatermain* (F. Johnson 1934); *Safari ya Gulliver* (F. Johnson) and *Elisi katika Nchi ya Ajabu* (Conan-Davies, 1940) were also translated during the colonial period (Mkangi 1884: 340; Mudamulla 2001: 173).

When Kiswahili literature started to be written by Africans in the 1940’s and 50’s, after the standardization of the language (Mbaabu 1996: 69), writers like Shaaban Robert, wrote *Adili na Ndunguze – Adili* and his brothers (1952). Later, in 1960 *Kurwa na Doto- Kurwa* and *Doto*, written by Muhammad Saleh Farsy was published (Mazrui, 1984: 340). Bertoncini (1989:35) points out that the majority of African writers of this period can be considered as didactic-moralistic writers who were preoccupied with expressing their moral messages that they relegated aesthetic considerations to the background. These two authors were from Tanzania and Zanzibar respectively. However the story books were also used in Kenya.

Although most of these books were not meant for children at that time, they have now been appropriated by children as the education system progresses and they are used in the class as supplementary readers. One can say that this was an attempt in effecting changes in literature so that it could suit the children in Kenya. Most books in Kiswahili were published after the approval of the Inter-Territorial Language (Swahili) Committee that was set up to standardize Kiswahili in 1930 (Mbaabu 1996: 68).

2.3. Post-colonial children's literature

Three categories of literature have been identified within this period (Khorana 1994: xxii; Ngugi 1981: 15). First, there was the good European literature, the product of the most sensitive minds of European culture such as, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and Ibsen to mention a few (Ngugi 1981: 15). These represented the best and the most refined tradition in European culture and thought. But of necessity their definition of social reality was rooted in their European history, race, culture and class. When they talked of human conflicts and tensions, the human condition and the human anguish, they were talking of these tensions and conflict and anguish as expressed and emerging in the European experience of history. As a result the African child was daily confronted with the white image in literature, (Ngugi 1981: 15-16).

The second body of literature had a distorting effect on the African child's psyche. These are those books that continued with the colonial tradition of glorifying white superiority over the Africans. Some of them talked of very irrelevant issues which were unfamiliar to the African child. Also in this category, one finds literature that tried to define the colonized world for the white colonizers. This was as Ngugi (1981: 16) puts it, "down right racist literature and made no effort to hide it". It included the works of writers such as Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mine*; Rudyard Kipling's *The Mowgli Stories*; Robert Ruark's *Uhuru and Something of value* and Nicholas Montserrat's *The Tribe that lost its Head*, among others (Ngugi 1981: 16).

The third category of literature was aimed towards an African image-formation. This category of writers was committed to addressing the issues of negative self-image among African children by publishing books that offered positive, accurate and reader able lessons from the history of the African man (Khorana 1994: xxx). This literature was written by those Africans whose aim was to re-interpret and re-define African man from the African point of view, with the express purpose of re-asserting African pride and dignity (Odaga 1978: 44).

During the early periods of independence, pressure was mounted against the colonial literature. It all began by a need to decolonize the literature syllabus. The Kenyan education administration and teachers agreed with the Kiswahili proverb that states, "Muacha Mila ni Mtumwa" (He who abandons his/her culture is a slave) (Nandwa 1994: 14). The debate to Africanize the literature curriculum at the University of Nairobi was spearheaded by eminent scholars such as Grant Kimenju, Van Zirimu, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Taban Lo Liyong, Okot p'Bitek, Owour Anyumba and Ngugi wa Thiong'o among others

(Ngugi 1982: 42). They called for a strong cultural bias in literature for adults and children. The main objective was to make the core of the literary studies Afro centric rather than Eurocentric as they had been in the colonial period. The main argument as put forth by Ngugi (1993: 9) was that knowing oneself and one's environment was the correct basis of observing the world.

As a result of this new intellectual climate a number of African writers came up with many works of literature for children and young people in the form of short stories, novels, drama and poetry, with varied themes and topics written mostly in English and a few story books written in Kiswahili . Some took as their themes the contemporary issues that arose, as a result of colonialism and conflicts created by interaction between the western cultural value system and the African traditional set up and conventions (Gachukia and Akivaga 1978: 45). For instance, some authors explored the effects of urbanization on the traditional structures of indigenous life.. While others opted to focus on topical issues of the time. Others embarked on the collection of folktales in an attempt to renew the oral traditions of the African heritage. The aims was to ensure that young African people born in the shadow of colonialism should understand and appreciate the literary mythology of their own more ancient inheritance (Killam& Rowe 2000: 65). At the heart of all such works was the desire to provide African children with an Afro centric view of the world, one that may balance and rectify the cultural, ideological and other content of non-African texts (Khorana 1994: xxx).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that those who were advocating for the localization of literature did not do it for the sake of Africanizing everything. Rather the idea was that it was important for the young people to start education by reading literature about what was familiar and closest to them, before they moved to literature of the world.

3. Publishing children's books in Kenya

In the early years of independence, the publishing industry was dominated by overseas firms like Oxford, Macmillan, Longhorn, Heinemann and Evans Brothers (Ogechi & Ogechi, 2002: 170). They propagated a new form of colonialism that determined what Africans could read or write. Since the multinational companies were in Africa to make money, they focused mainly on textbooks where they were assured a ready market for their products or they published only those indigenous writers and books that would sell internationally. Under such circumstances, the indigenous literatures remained limited.

However, in the 1980's and 90's many indigenous publishing firms were established in Kenya. For example, East African Publishing House resulted from the indigenization of Heinemann in 1982

(Chakava 1998: 42) while Longhorn, Kenya emerged in 1992 through the localization of Longman (Njoroge 1998: 47). The role of these publishing houses was crucial because it enabled the local production of relatively low cost texts. This was also another way of enabling Africans to write for Africans and not for foreign publishers. With that, children's books in English, Kiswahili and in indigenous languages began to be published especially by the East African Publishing House (Chakava 1998: 42).

In many of these publishing firms, one finds a number of important series of readers for English and Kiswahili for young people; Phoenix initiated the successful 'Phoenix Young Reader' for English and 'Hadithi za Kikwetu' for Kiswahili; Longhorn has *Utamu Kolea*; East African Publishing House has a series in Kiswahili, at three levels: *Vitabu vya Paukwa* (up to age 7), *Vitabu vya Nyota* (for age 7-9) and *Vitabu vya Sayari* (for age 10-13), 'Tusome kwa Furaha'; Oxford University Press has "*Mradi wa Kusoma*" while Longhorn has *Sasa Sema*. Other publishing firms also contributed to the publication of children's books in Kiswahili. Moreover, the policies announced by the government which are geared towards localization and curriculum reviews have provided further opportunities for local authors and publishers.

What is notable here is that children's literature within the post colonial period is seen as exhibiting more sensitivity to the child and also the experiences that inform him. Children's literature written after this period and during the current period has tried to give the child the opportunity to be him/ her self and to have the right to his feelings and thought by not imposing upon him adult ideas. These developments in the awareness of the child and his world have been largely caused by critical works relating directly or indirectly to the sphere of children's literature.

4. Integration of Kiswahili language and children's literature in primary school curriculum.

In the year 2002, the Ministry of Education through the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) formulated a new syllabus in Kiswahili and English language, (Ministry of Education 2002). Among the major changes was the re-emphasis and integration of the two languages and children's literature from class one to class eight. This was after it had been observed that literature had been underrated as a valuable subject in primary schools. What mattered then was a good command of the language and skills which facilitated passing the examination.

In the new syllabus, all pupils are supposed to be taught all the genres of literature including poetry, adventure stories, short stories, riddles, jokes, proverbs and songs and other relevant materials that focus

on emerging issues in the society such as children's right, child abuse, drug abuse and HIV / AIDS. As the syllabus clearly states, "Literature helps the child to use language properly, to expand his ideas and to enjoy different forms of writing". It was felt that children need to be exposed to language as it used in the context of the people. By so doing, the Kiswahili language lessons should generate an intense love for literature and vice versa. Other than these aspects, it was observed that literature also enhances a child's social skills through interaction with other pupils.

The literature aspect was re-introduced in the revised syllabus in order to equip the learners with literary skills and at the same time to show the pupils that reading can be a source of pleasure and so a love of reading is fostered in them (Ministry of Education 2002: 90). These literary texts can be used to develop critical and analytical thinking and reasoning to issues and appreciation of a variety of literary works. Some of the type of thinking and reasoning that pupils can be exposed to include, looking for main points and supporting details, comparing and contrasting, looking for cause and effect relationship, judging and evaluating a text (Ghosn 2003: 3).

The provision of supplementary reading materials and especially story books in Kiswahili has seen a tremendous growth in literature for children in Kiswahili in Kenya since the implementation of free primary education program in 2003. For instance, by 2010, the number of Kiswahili and English story books found in the *Approved list of Primary and Secondary Schools Textbooks and Other Instructional Material* was 450 and 850 respectively (Ministry of Education 2007).

5. Teaching of Children's literature in Kenyan Universities

Children literature is now being taught in some of the Kenyan Universities both at undergraduate and Masters level. Some of these universities are Kenyatta University, where children's literature is taught both in the department of Literature and Kiswahili and enthusiasm for the course is high especially in the department of Kiswahili. Other Kenyan universities that offer the course include, Laikipia University and Marist College which offer the subject at Masters and undergraduate levels respectively. However, although other universities have children's literature as a unit course, it is not taught at all.

6. Research in Children's Literature

Despite the positive development made in publication of children's literature not much has been done in Kenya by way of review and evaluation on children's literature especially in Kiswahili although the books are circulating among children. Children's literature, as argued by Mpesha (1996: 2) needs the same critical evaluation and theoretical attention that adults' literature is accorded. It deserves even more attention and analysis because its consumers are at a more critical period of growth and development and the literature they are given must take into consideration their cultural lives, their psychological states and their literary development. Thus the main aim of this paper is to briefly describe and assess the research work in children's literature that has been going on at Kenyatta University in the department of Literature and Kiswahili.

6.1 Research done in the Department of Literature

Critical writing and commentary on children's literature in Kenya has been meager although there now seems to be a growing interest among literary critics. The total number of dissertations found in the department of Literature was one for PhD and 11 for masters. The dissertations from the department of Literature at Kenyatta University examine different literary aspects of children's literature, e.g. themes, styles and characterization. While a number of the dissertation focus on style (Alembi 1991; Oiyoo 2006; Wangari: 2006) others focus on characterization as seen in portrayal of girl characters (Muleka 2001) and boy characters, (Atamba 2010). Others seek to describe various themes in children's literature, such as conformity and Subversion (Mbugua 2007 PhD), meaning in children's literature, (Wangari 2006), social significance of children's oral poetry, (Alembi 1991; Oiyoo 2006), themes on HIV/AIDS (Tonui 2010) and children's literature as an image forming force (Oyoo 2000). Other studies focus on children's theatre and drama (Kabui 1997; Tsikhungu 2008) and children's response to their literature, (Akoleit 1990).

Interest in children's literature as a special discipline began around the 1970's, (Odaga 1985). A few critics have responded to it with varying degrees of interest, (Gachukia and Akivaga 1978). However it is important to note that most studies focused more on English language than Kiswahili.

One of the pioneering under-takings in the field of criticism of children's literature written in English was championed by Asaneth Odaga in her B.A. dissertation entitled "Literature for children and young people in Kenya" (1974) and later published under the same title in 1985. Odaga examines the development of children's literature, which covers roughly what is suitable for children and young

people from about the age of eight to eighteen years. Odaga confined her study to literature written in English only, due to scarcity of books in Kiswahili at the time of her study. Odaga's study presents an informative understanding the growth of Children's Literature in Kenya in general.

Other studies that have been carried out on children's literature in English in the department of literature at Nairobi University in include; Ngugi Njoroge(1978); Gathiora (1979); Mwanzi (1982); Kahenya (1992) and Githiora (1979). Ngugi Njoroge (1978) examines the changes literature for children in Kenya has undergone and how it has been manipulated to either boost or destroy image and dignity of the people. Githiora (1979) in her analysis of Cartoon Comics work was concerned with how children's worldview is, has been or can be influenced by ideas derived from literature.

6.2 Research done in Children's Literature in Kiswahili

A survey done by Musau & Ngugi in 1997 on researches that were carried out in the Kenyan public universities in the Department of Kiswahili between 1970 and 1996 revealed that no studies were done in the area of Children's Literature, (Musau & Ngugi 1997: 220). In fact, in their survey, children's literature is not even mentioned as an area of study to be considered at the university level. For a long time, the publication of books was skewed against Kiswahili. This state of affairs arose from a number of factors; the most important of which is the country's skewed national language policy at the time; an uninspired community of literary artists and lastly the lack of a patronizing reading public with a keen interest in Kiswahili literature (King'ei 2000: 89). These factors caused a barrier to the development of children's literature in Kiswahili in Kenya. However, the situation changed in the 2000s, considerably with an interest growing in the publication of story books for children. All the same there is still lack of research in this area as will be shown below.

Mpesha (1995) examines children's response to literature through various types of responses; response through re-reading, dramatization and through writing. She focuses her survey on story books written in Kiswahili from the Tanzanian perspective although the study also covers children's literature in Kenya.

Studies on children's literature in Kiswahili in Kenya have been scanty. The few that are available include; Gituku (1990) Karuga (2005); Mukami (2005), Mwanza (2007), Muthubi (2005) and Kavuria (2008). Most of these studies have subjected selected children's books in Kiswahili to literary criticism. Karuga sets out to critically analyze form and content of selected story books used in primary schools in

Kenya. Gituku (1990) focused on traditional Children's play in Kenya how the plays can be used as teaching tools in education. Mukami (2005)'s study of Ken Walibora's works explores style and how realism is realized in this author's books for children. Muthubi (2005) focuses her study on strategies used in books that have been abridged and simplified or translated and appropriated by children from adult readers. Mwanza (2007) focused on children's songs in nursery school while Kavuria (2008) studied child abuse as reflected in children's literature. Most of these studies employed various theoretical frameworks similar to the other studies that we have discussed above i.e. stylistics moral theory and reader response. Ngugi (2009 PhD) examined the reading habits of children within the classroom and at home, at the same time showing the children's preferences in their choice of stories in Kiswahili.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Kenyan children are exposed to various books, hence the need to examine the various themes that are presented to the children, what they read and how they read and their attitudes towards reading. Indeed, there is still much to be done in children's literature in Kenya. There is need for a concerted national and continent wide effort by children's scholars and educators to share ideas. There is need to unearth the richness of children's literature by offering courses and organizing conferences. It is in this spirit of sharing that true interdisciplinary criticism of children's literature will emerge.

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