

Rwandans' Attitudes Towards Swahili: An Occupational Perspective

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Abstract

This paper reports findings from a study examining Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili across different occupational groups. The study hypothesized that there would be a relationship between Rwandans' occupations and their attitudes towards Swahili. Data were collected from 252 respondents representing six occupations: teachers, civil servants, traders, journalists, Catholic priests, and Muslim leaders. The respondents' attitudes were elicited using a questionnaire containing ten Likert-scale statements (e.g., "*Swahili is the language best suited for administration*"), with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". For analysis, "agree" and "strongly agree" were classified as positive, "disagree" and "strongly disagree" as negative, and "can't tell" as neutral attitudes. A chi-square test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis. It yielded a value of 450.5 with 10 degrees of freedom, significant at both $p < .05$ and $p < .01$, thus confirming a relationship between occupation and attitudes towards Swahili. Comparatively, 53% of overall attitudes were negative, 21% were neutral, and only 19% were positive. Traders were the only occupational group with more positive than negative attitudes towards Swahili.

Keywords: language attitudes, Swahili, occupations, Rwanda

1 Introduction

Swahili today serves as a lingua franca in East Africa and the Great Lakes Region of Africa, with more than 200 million speakers worldwide (Lisanza 2021). According to Shabani (1983), cited in Mukuthuria (2009, 41), its diffusion in Rwanda began in the late nineteenth century when the Rwandan king allowed German colonizers to enter. Rwanda was ruled by Germany from 1898 to 1918; it was later placed under Belgian mandate in 1920 by the League of Nations (MINEPRISEC 1984, 57–58). Muslim Swahili porters and interpreters accompanying the Germans facilitated the spread of the language through trade and religious activities. King Yuhi Musinga, the Rwandan ruler at the time, and his royal court learned Swahili to strengthen relations with the Germans, who established the first primary school in Nyanza in 1907 and introduced Swahili as a subject. It later became the language of colonial administration (Alexis Kagame, cited in Niyibizi and Dupont 1980, 189). Consequently, Swahili instruction during German rule led to a notable expansion in its use (Republic of Rwanda 1999).

This development was reversed under Belgian administration, when Swahili was removed from schools and replaced by French as the language of administration, thereby slowing its growth (Mulaudzi and Mbori 2008; Mlaga 2017). The change was motivated by the perception that Swahili was closely associated with Islam, whereas the Belgian authorities promoted Christianity, particularly Catholicism. As a result, Swahili lost its prestige and was only associated with marginalized groups, especially the Muslims, casual laborers, and small traders (Kimenyi 2003, cited in Mlaga 2017, 4).

During the First Republic (1962–1973) and until 1979 during the Second Republic, little institutional support was given to Swahili (Niyibizi 2014). A shift occurred in 1979 when Swahili entered the education system following a memorandum of understanding between Rwanda and Tanzania, which was aimed at promoting the language (Mpiranya 1990, cited in Niyibizi 2014, 19). In the early 1980s, Tanzanian teachers were deployed to teach Swahili in secondary schools and in the Department of African Languages and Literature at the National University of Rwanda.

From 1996, the post-1994 government increasingly supported Swahili, culminating in the 2017 Organic Law that designated it as Rwanda's fourth official language, alongside Kinyarwanda, English, and French. This recognition was expected to enhance its visibility and use despite the competition from the other official languages. Swahili is now expected to play a strategic role in Rwanda, in regional and economic integration, especially since Rwanda is a member of the East African Community, in two of whose members (Kenya and Tanzania) Swahili is both a national and an official language, which obviously gives it a lot of prestige in these two countries. But in the case of Swahili in Rwanda, whether this broader, East African sociolinguistic environment gives it any prestige in the country remains to be established through an empirical study of the kind envisaged in this paper.

2 Previous studies on attitudes towards Swahili

Several studies have examined language attitudes towards Swahili in multilingual contexts. In Tanzania, where Swahili enjoys high prestige, Wamalwa et al. (2013) investigated students' perceptions of the language in the Mtwara region. They found that most students held favourable attitudes towards Swahili and that its status among secondary school learners had not declined. Similarly, Ideh and Tibategeza (2022) analysed the use of English and Swahili across communication contexts in schools in the Mwanza region. Their findings showed that although

more than 85% of the respondents preferred English in classroom instruction, Swahili dominated communication outside school settings.

In Kenya, where Swahili became a national language in 1974 and an official language with the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution (although in the face of strong competition from English; see Buregeya 2019), Mukhwana (2014) examined urban attitudes towards Swahili. He reported these to be generally positive, motivated more by integrative considerations (because Swahili, given its national status, serves as a lingua franca in Kenya) than instrumental ones. This is what about 70% of the respondents aged 60 and above, for example, reported: they viewed Swahili as facilitating integration among Kenya's diverse ethnic groups.

Still in Kenya, Wamalwa (2020) studied primary school pupils' attitudes towards Swahili as a second language in Siaya County. They were found to be positive with respect to Swahili's communicative and integrative functions. Nevertheless, the same pupils rated English more highly than Swahili in relation to academic advancement and future careers, which reduced the perceived importance of Swahili and negatively affected its learning.

In Rwanda, only two studies on attitudes towards Swahili have been conducted so far. Mbori (2008) investigated university students' attitudes towards languages used in post-conflict Rwanda, including Swahili. Using a questionnaire administered to 53 students from four public universities, the study found that despite Swahili's regional lingua franca role in eastern Central Africa and the East African Community (EAC), attitudes were largely negative. For example, only 11% of the respondents reported being fully engaged with Swahili-based materials.

More recently, Masezerano et al. (2023) examined Rwandans' attitudes towards the development of Swahili as a language of trade and regional integration within the EAC. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 384 participants in four semi-urban border areas (namely Cyanika and Gatuna, at the border with Uganda, Rusumo, at the border with Tanzania, and Nemba, at the border with Burundi), and in two urban centres (namely Kigali and Huye). One key finding was that 378 out of 384 respondents (98%) were willing to learn Swahili, which reflects positive attitudes towards a language which they considered to be one fostering national and regional integration.

Importantly, the two Rwandan studies were conducted at different stages in Swahili's sociolinguistic trajectory: Mbori's (2008) research was conducted before the 2017 Organic Law that granted Swahili official language status, whereas Masezerano et al.'s (2023) study was conducted after this major policy change. However, both studies are limited in terms of the social variables considered. They did not include factors such as age, gender, and occupation as independent variables in their research; however, these should be included, since they are known to influence language attitudes. By focusing on university students, Mbori's (2008) study thus limited itself to one education level, while Masezerano et al.'s (2023) study limited itself to one variable, that is the area of residence. Consequently, their findings offer only a partial picture of Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili. Therefore, the present study responds to a clear gap in the literature, that of considering more social variables in research on attitudes towards Swahili in Rwanda.

For reasons of space, though, this article reports on only one social variable: occupation.¹ The term 'occupation' covers five occupational types in this study: (a) teachers at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels; (b) civil servants working in government ministries; (c) traders; (d) journalists; and (e) religious leaders, specifically Catholic priests and Muslim imams. The study

¹ The broader PhD research examined "Rwandans' attitudes toward three non-indigenous official languages used in Rwanda" with respect to age, linguistic background, occupation, and education level.

addresses the following research question: “*Is there a relationship between Rwandans’ occupations and their attitudes towards the Swahili language?*” It tests the hypothesis that “**there is a relationship between Rwandans’ occupations and their attitudes towards Swahili**”.

3 Theoretical framework: Language attitude theory

In terms of theoretical framework, the present study draws upon the language attitude theory propounded by Baker (1992) and Garrett (2010). It posits that speakers’ beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards a language influence how it is evaluated, learned, and used in society. These attitudes can be categorized into three components: cognitive (beliefs about the language), affective (emotions towards it), and behavioural (actions or tendencies towards it). Negative attitudes may hinder learning and contribute to marginalization whereas positive attitudes facilitate language acquisition and use. In the context of Swahili in Rwanda, this framework helps to explain how occupational factors may have variously shaped individuals’ perceptions and use of the language.

4 Methodology

4.1 Sample and sampling techniques used

The study used a total sample of 252 respondents, composed of the following sub-samples reflecting the five occupational categories mentioned above: 36 teachers, among whom were 12 primary school teachers, 12 secondary school teachers from Nyamagabe district, and 12 university lecturers from Huye district; 79 civil servants selected from the districts of Nyamagabe, Huye, Nyanza, and Ruhango; 44 traders selected from the City of Kigali; 32 journalists selected from Radio Rwanda, Radio Salus, three community radios, and five private radio stations from the City of Kigali; 31 Catholic priests selected from the dioceses of Butare and Gikongoro; and 30 Muslim leaders serving at mosques in the City of Kigali and in the district of Huye. The selection of the respondents was done in two phases: it consisted of selecting respondents who were to fill in a questionnaire on attitudes and then selecting those who were to participate in the interview. Purposive sampling was used to select the questionnaire respondents: the lead researcher knew in advance whom to select for the sample and where they could be found, whether in their homes or in their places of work. This required him to visit each one of the respondents over a period of three months, during the year 2023. However, to get to know the religious officials (that is, the Muslim leaders and the Catholic priests), the lead researcher used the ‘social network’ model proposed by Milroy and Milroy (1978), according to which some subjects are approached through a third party, a friend of a friend. To this end, two research assistants were required. Furthermore, purposive sampling was used to select the interviewees: after looking at their responses to the questionnaire, the lead researcher selected ten respondents whose answers to the evaluation of each statement on the questionnaire required further explanation.

4.2 The data collection instruments

4.2.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire used to test the respondents’ attitudes comprised 10 attitudinal statements, each saying something about the Swahili language in Rwanda. The respondents were asked to rate the statement on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Each statement referred to the Swahili language using a different adjective, such as

“pleasant”. A similar method for measuring language attitudes was used in previous studies (Li and Wei 2022; Zeng et al. 2022; Huwari 2021; Mumba 2019; Garrett 2010; Lambert et al. 1960) . Below are the ten statements:

- i. *Swahili is a pleasant language to listen to.*
- ii. *Swahili is an easy language to learn.*
- iii. *Swahili is a very useful language for business interactions.*
- iv. *Swahili is a very useful language for technology.*
- v. *Speaking Swahili makes someone look highly educated.*
- vi. *Swahili is the language best suited for education in Rwanda.*
- vii. *Swahili is the language best suited for administration in Rwanda.*
- viii. *Speaking Swahili increases someone's employment opportunities.*
- ix. *Speaking Swahili makes someone be perceived as being in a position of power.*
- x. *The use of Swahili is an important factor in Rwanda's development.*

4.2.2 The interview

To supplement the questionnaire data, the study employed face-to-face interviews. In line with Creswell's (2009, 208) two-phase design, analysis of the quantitative results guided the purposive selection of participants for the qualitative phase. Ten respondents were interviewed using a guide consisting of ten open-ended questions. The interviews sought to deepen understanding of the respondents' attitudes by eliciting explanations for the ratings assigned to the questionnaire items, especially those marked “*strongly agree*” or “*strongly disagree*”. For anonymity, participants were coded with the letter *R* followed by a serial number i.e (R270) . A typical interview question was the following: “*Why did you strongly disagree that Swahili is useful for technology?*”.

4.2.3 Data analysis procedure

On the 5-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire, the following were the five response options to choose from: “strongly disagree” (SD), “disagree” (D), “can't tell” (CT), “agree” (A), and “strongly agree” (SA). No numerical value (e.g., from 1 to 5) was assigned to each response option. Instead, the frequencies at which each option was selected were individually counted and added up to produce the raw figures and their corresponding percentages; these are reported in tables in Section 5. Since the data collected were in the form of frequencies, the chi-square statistic was used to test the hypothesis of a relationship between Rwandans' occupations and their attitudes towards English. For the purposes of the chi-square computation, the frequencies for “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were merged to represent ‘negative attitudes’, while the frequencies for “agree” and “strongly agree” were merged to represent ‘positive attitudes’. The frequencies for “can't tell” stood on their own to represent ‘neutral attitudes’. The chi-square results are also reported in Section 5.

5 Results presentation and discussion

5.2 Results presentation

The results of this study are presented in four tables: Table 1 presents detailed statistics of Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili according to their occupations, Table 2 the overall

attitudes (positive, neutral, and negative) per attitudinal statement, and Table 3 the overall attitudes towards Swahili per occupational category, while Table 4 displays the layout of the chi-square statistics used to test the study's hypothesis that, "there will be a relationship between Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili and their occupations".

To present Table 1 in more detail, for each occupational group, namely, teachers (n = 36), civil servants (n = 79), traders (n = 44), journalists (n = 32), Catholic priests (n = 31), and Muslim leaders (n = 30), the table reports the raw frequencies, and their corresponding percentages, regarding how often each group chose one of the five Likert scale-type options to evaluate the statements. At the bottom of the five rows corresponding to the groups' answers to the five choices, a row for the total frequency counts is given. The percentages are given in bold to enable a quick comparison of which answer was more popular for which occupational group at a glance.

From Table 1, the following main observations can be made. First, for 7 out of 10 attitudinal statements (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), the ratings were more negative than positive for at least 4 occupational categories, namely; teachers, civil servants, Catholic priests, and Muslim leaders. 'More negative' refers to the higher percentages for the "strongly disagree" (SD) option than for any other response option. In fact, all six occupational categories rated 3 of the 7 statements as more negative than positive. These three are: *Swahili makes someone look highly educated* (No. 5), *Swahili is the language best suited for administration in Rwanda* (No. 7), and *Swahili makes someone be perceived as being in a position of power* (No. 9). Second, only three attitudinal statements were rated more positively than negatively. They are: *Swahili is a pleasant language to listen to* (No. 1), *Swahili is an easy language to listen to learn* (No. 2), and *Swahili is a very useful language for business interactions* (No. 3). But even for these three, the (negative) SD rating was the highest for two occupational categories: the teachers and the Catholic priests. It is worth adding that for the same three statements, the most positive ratings, reflected in the higher percentages for the "strongly agree" (SA) response option, came from two occupational categories: the journalists and the Muslim leaders. Third, the neutral attitudes response option, namely "can't tell" (CT), was the most frequent response for two occupational categories: the journalists and the civil servants.

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Table 1: Detailed statistics of Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili according to their occupations

		Teachers		Civil servants		Traders		Journalists		Catholic priests		Muslim leaders	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Attitudinal statements													
1. <i>Swahili is a pleasant language to listen to.</i>	SD ²	17	47.2	25	32	3	7	4	12.5	14	45	0	0
	D	3	8.3	7	9	0	0	0	0	3	10	0	0
	CT	8	22.2	31	39	10	23	16	50	11	35	0	0
	A	3	8.3	2	2.5	7	16	7	22	2	6	3	10
	SA	5	14	14	18	24	54	5	16	1	3	27	90
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100
2. <i>Swahili is an easy language to learn.</i>	SD	13	36	22	28	2	4.5	3	9	13	42	0	0
	D	1	3	3	4	0	0	0	0	3	10	0	0
	CT	11	30.5	30	38	6	14	15	47	11	35	0	0
	A	3	8.3	16	20	9	20	4	12.5	2	6	3	1
	SA	8	22.2	8	10	27	61	10	31	2	6	27	90
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100
3. <i>Swahili is a very useful language for business interactions.</i>	SD	12	33	22	28	3	7	8	25	14	45	0	0
	D	1	3	3	4	0	0	0	0	3	10	0	0
	CT	6	17	24	30	7	16	7	22	11	35	0	0
	A	10	28	24	30	0	0	4	12.5	1	3	3	10
	SA	7	19	6	7.5	34	77	13	41	2	6	27	90
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100

² SD= Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, CT= Can't Tell, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

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		Teachers		Civil servants		Traders		Journalists		Catholic priests		Muslim leaders	
Attitudinal statements		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
4. <i>Swahili is a very useful language for technology.</i>	SD	30	83	56	71	18	41	21	66	15	48	8	27
	D	1	3	5	6	0	0	1	3	2	6	7	23
	CT	5	14	14	18	9	20	9	28	12	39	6	20
	A	0	0	2	2.5	3	7	0	0	2	6	3	10
	SA	0	0	2	2.5	14	32	1	3	0	0	6	20
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100
5. <i>Swahili is the language best suited for education in Rwanda.</i>	SD	29	80	45	57	7	16	11	34	16	52	17	57
	D	1	3	5	6	0	0	0	0	3	10	5	17
	CT	6	17	28	35	26	59	20	62.5	11	35	6	20
	A	0	0	0	0	2	4.5	1	3	1	3	0	0
	SA	0	0	1	1	9	20	0	0	0	0	2	7
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100
6. <i>Swahili is the language best suited for administration in Rwanda</i>	SD	30	83	46	58	12	27	11	34	16	52	15	50
	D	1	3	5	6	0	0	0	0	3	10	5	17
	CT	5	14	27	34	21	48	20	62.5	11	35	8	27
	A	0	0	0	0	3	7	1	3	1	3	0	0
	SA	0	0	1	1	8	18	0	0	0	0	2	7
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100

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		Teachers		Civil servants		Traders		Journalists		Catholic priests		Muslim leaders	
Attitudinal statements		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
7. <i>Speaking Swahili increases someone's employment opportunities.</i>	SD	28	78	49	62	21	48	14	44	17	55	24	80
	D	1	3	3	4	0	0	2	6	3	10	2	7
	CT	7	19	23	29	8	18	15	47	11	35	1	3
	A	0	0	2	2.5	4	9	1	3	0	0	1	3
	SA	0	0	2	2.5	11	25	0	0	0	0	2	7
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100
8. <i>Speaking Swahili makes someone be perceived as being in a position of power.</i>	SD	28	78	51	64.5	27	61	15	47	17	55	25	83
	D	1	3	3	4	0	0	3	9	3	10	3	10
	CT	7	19	23	29	6	14	14	44	11	35	0	0
	A	0	0	1	1	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SA	0	0	1	1	8	18	0	0	0	0	2	7
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100
9. <i>The use of Swahili is an important factor in Rwanda's development.</i>	SD	26	72	51	64.5	22	50	13	41	17	55	25	83
	D	1	3	2	2.5	0	0	3	9	3	10	2	7
	CT	8	22	25	32	9	20	16	50	10	32	0	0
	A	0	0	0	0	3	7	0	0	1	3	1	3
	SA	1	3	1	1	10	23	0	0	0	0	2	7
Total		36	100	79	100	44	100	32	100	31	100	30	100

SD= Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, CT= Can't Tell, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

Table 2 offers a summary of information from Table 1, specifically from the perspective of the extent to which the attitudes towards any one of the ten statements were positive, negative, or neutral. It offers a quick picture of which statement was most, or least, popular among the respondents, all six occupations combined.

Table 2: Overall attitudes (positive, neutral, and negative) per attitudinal statement

	Positive attitudes		Neutral attitudes		Negative attitudes		Total	
		%		%		%		%
1. <i>Swahili is a pleasant language to listen to.</i>	100	40	76	30	76	30	252	100
2. <i>Swahili is an easy language to learn.</i>	119	47	73	29	60	24	252	100
3. <i>Swahili is a very useful language for business interactions.</i>	131	52	55	22	66	26	252	100
4. <i>Swahili is a very useful language for technology.</i>	33	13	55	22	164	65	252	100
5. <i>Speaking Swahili makes someone look highly educated.</i>	16	6.5	67	26.5	168	67	252	100
6. <i>Swahili is the language best suited for education in Rwanda.</i>	16	6.5	97	38.5	139	55	252	100
7. <i>Swahili is the language best suited for administration in Rwanda.</i>	16	6.5	92	36.5	144	57	252	100
8. <i>Speaking Swahili increases someone's employment opportunities.</i>	23	9	65	26	164	65	252	100
9. <i>Speaking Swahili makes someone be perceived as being in a position of power.</i>	16	6	61	24	176	69.5	252	100
10. <i>The use of Swahili is an important factor in Rwanda's development.</i>	19	7.5	68	27	165	65.5	252	100
All 10 statements together	488	19%	709	28%	1,323	53%	2,520	100

The following main observations can be made from Table 2. First, the figures in the bottom row suggest that Swahili is largely perceived negatively by Rwandans, with the negative attitudes ratings being more than twice as common as the positive attitudes: 53% for negative attitudes against only 19% for the positive ones. This very low percentage of positive attitudes reflects the fact that for only 3 out of the 10 statements (i.e., statements 1 to 3) is the percentage of positive attitudes higher than either that of the negative attitudes or that of the neutral ones. Conversely, for the remaining statements (from 4 to 10), the percentages for the negative attitudes are (much) higher than those for positive attitudes: from 55% upwards. It follows from these two observations that not a single statement prompted neutral attitudes as the prevailing ones. It is worth pointing out that only the attitudinal statement that *Swahili is a very useful language for business interactions* (No. 3) resulted in an (absolute) majority of positive attitudes, at 52%.

Table 3 is another summary of the information detailed in Table 1, but this time combining both the overall attitudes (without linking these to specific attitudinal statements) and the rates (in percentages) at which each occupational group is associated with which type of attitude. For a quick, but global, view of the paper, this is the table to look at.

Table 3: Overall attitudes towards Swahili per occupational category

	Teachers		Civil servants		Traders	
Negative attitudes	255	71%	457	58%	135	31%
Neutral attitudes	68	19%	249	31%	114	26%
Positive attitudes	37	10%	84	11%	191	43%
Total	360	100%	790	100%	440	100%

	Journalists		Catholic priests		Muslim leaders	
Negative attitudes	125	39%	186	60%	165	55%
Neutral attitudes	147	46%	109	35%	22	7%
Positive attitudes	48	15%	15	5%	113	38%
Total	320	100%	310	100%	300	100%

	All together	
Negative attitudes	1,323	53%
Neutral attitudes	709	28%
Positive attitudes	488	19%
Total	2,520	100%

It transpires from Table 3 that for 4 out of the 6 occupational categories, attitudes towards Swahili were clearly negative, considering the fact that their negative ratings (as a combination of the “strongly disagree” and “disagree” response options) are higher than 50%. The four categories are: the teachers (71%), the Catholic priests (60%), the civil servants (58%), and the Muslim leaders (55%). Only for traders (31%) and journalists (39%) were negative attitudes less pronounced. In fact, the traders’ attitudes were more positive (at 43%) than negative (at 31%), while the journalists’ attitudes were more neutral (at 46%) than negative (at 39%). Overall, the

highest negative attitudes were expressed by teachers, the highest positive attitudes by traders, and the highest neutral attitudes by journalists.

Table 4 presents the figures, in terms of frequencies, in a typical chi-square computation layout (see, e.g., Best et al. 2017, 409). The hypothesis to be tested, namely that “there is a relationship between Rwandans’ attitudes towards Swahili and their occupations”, has one dependent variable, namely ‘attitudes’, which in turn has three options, called ‘values’ in the literature, which are ‘negative’, ‘neutral’, and ‘positive’. Its independent variable is ‘occupations’, which has six values, namely ‘teachers’, ‘civil servants’, ‘traders’, ‘journalists’, ‘Catholic priests’, and ‘Muslim leaders’. The observed frequencies (f_{obs}) are the real ones counted by the researcher, while the expected frequencies (f_e) refer to “the number of cases that would appear if there were no systematic relationship between the variables, a pure chance relationship” (Best et al. 2017, 409). Both are required in chi-square computation.

Table 4: The chi-square test layout for the hypothesis that “there will be a relationship between Rwandans’ attitudes toward Swahili and their occupations”

Occupation	Attitudes						Total
	Negative		Neutral		Positive		
	f _{obs}	f _e	f _{obs}	f _e	f _{obs}	f _e	
Teachers	255	189	68	101.3	37	69.8	360
Civil servants	457	414.8	249	222.3	84	153	790
Traders	135	231	114	123.8	191	85.3	440
Journalists	125	168	147	90	48	61.9	320
Catholic priests	186	162.8	109	87.3	15	60	310
Muslim leaders	165	157.5	22	84.4	113	58	300
Total	1,323		709		488		Grand total 2,520

The chi-square computation formula is: $\chi^2 = \sum \left[\frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e} \right]$. Thus, if we replace the symbols in the formula with the corresponding figures, we get to the final value of 450.5.

This calculated χ^2 value (of 450.5) is much higher than either the critical value of 18.31 at $p < .05$ or that of 23.21 at $p < .01$ at 10df (see Appendix G, “Abridged Table of Critical Values for Chi Square”, in Best, at al. 2017, 409). It can thus be concluded that the hypothesis of a relationship between Rwandans’ attitudes towards Swahili and their occupations was strongly supported, which means that the null hypothesis of no relationship has been rejected.

5.2 Discussion

As shown in the previous section, a chi-square test clearly indicates that there is indeed an association between Rwandans’ occupations and their attitudes towards Swahili, that is, whether these are positive, negative, or neutral. Furthermore, the direction of this relationship is known, from the overall picture that transpires from Tables 2 and 3: negative attitudes towards Swahili prevail, at a rating of 53%, against 28% for neutral attitudes and only 19% for positive attitudes. Underlying these statistics are four key observations, discussed below, which best summarize how Swahili in Rwanda seems to be viewed by the six occupational categories selected to represent the Rwandan population.

5.2.1 Swahili does not appear to be associated with a high education level.

This statement is backed by the fact that the ratings for the attitudes towards Swahili are clearly more negative than positive for all the statements that connote the idea of being highly educated (see Table 2). These are statements which refer to Swahili being used for technology (No. 4), to it making someone look highly educated (No. 5), to Swahili's potential to increase someone's employment opportunities (No. 8), to Swahili allowing someone to be perceived as being in a position of power (No. 9), and to Swahili being an important factor in Rwanda's development (No. 10). For all these statements, the negative attitudes occur at more than twice the frequency of either positive or neutral attitudes.

These statistical ratings resonate with the views of the interviewees. These offer us insights into why Rwandans seem to not want to associate Swahili with a high level of education. When asked why he disagreed with Statement 5, namely *Swahili makes someone look highly educated*, R256 (R256, interview, July 17, 2023), responded by posing the following question to the lead researcher (in the latter's translation from Kinyarwanda; see Extract 6 in Appendix 1):

Swahili cannot make someone appear highly educated, as it is primarily spoken by individuals from lower social classes, who cannot be trusted, people like thieves and street vendors who survive on small jobs. It is a poor language which does not have enough vocabulary required for technology. Therefore, speaking Swahili would not elevate my status; on the contrary, it would diminish my prestige and make me look like a swindler or trickster.

It should be noted that this very negative image the Catholic clergy in Rwanda seems to have of Swahili totally contrasts with the positive image Swahili enjoys in Tanzania and Kenya, where it is hailed as a lingua franca, an integrating, international, ICT, and web language (Chebet-Choge 2012).

For his part, when asked why he disagreed with Statement 9, namely, *Speaking Swahili can make someone be perceived as being in a position of power*, a secondary school teacher, responded: "It is impossible. How can speaking a local African language [Swahili], not used in international science and technology schools make me appear a smart and powerful person?" (R88, interview, July 20, 2023). Such a perception by a teacher clearly rejects any link between Swahili and advanced education in Rwanda because the language is seldom used in scientific and academic fields, ones which confer social and educational prestige.

5.2.2 Swahili seems to be viewed most negatively by teachers, Catholic priests, and civil servants.

This observation is evident from Table 3. This shows that the teachers' and the Catholic priests', and civil servants' ratings were the most negative, at 71%, 60%, and 58%, respectively. Conversely, the three occupational groups' positive ratings were the lowest: 11% for civil servants, 10% for teachers, and 5% for the Catholic priests. It should be noted in passing that though the Catholic priests' positive attitudes were lower than those of the teachers, their neutral attitudes were the highest: 35%, versus 31% for civil servants and only 19% for the teachers.

The interviewees' responses can help us make sense of why these three occupational categories seem to perceive the use of Swahili in Rwanda more negatively than the others. For example, when asked why he had negatively evaluated many statements, a university teacher (R270, interviewed, July 20, 2023) responded in the following way: "I evaluated almost all the

statements negatively because I neither speak nor understand Swahili. It is a difficult language. When I listen to it I do not understand anything.” When asked why he thought that the vast majority (86%) of the respondents had strongly opposed the statement that Swahili was a useful language for technology, the same interviewee explained:

My second language is English. I evaluated this statement negatively because of my limited knowledge of Swahili. How can I determine whether Swahili is a language needed for technology when it is not used in this field? Moreover, Swahili is an African language, spoken by a few people in the world. How can it be suitable for technology? (R270, interviewed, July 20, 2023).

R270's response reveals not only a lack of familiarity with Swahili but also a lack of awareness of its recent advancements in the field of technology, as thoroughly documented by Chebet-Choge (2012, 189), and the reality that Swahili is used well beyond East Africa. For example, today, Swahili is recognized as a language of ICT, widely used on the web and within the Global Voices virtual community,³ with computer software developed in the language (Chebet-Choge 2012, 189).

On the other hand, though, R270's claim that Swahili is marginalized in Rwanda, or at least used to be marginalized, is corroborated by some research findings: for instance, Ntahonkiriye (1996), cited in Sebazungu et al. (2023), observed that Rwanda systematically marginalized Swahili through the influence of Catholic missionaries. In the early 1930s, during a period of tension between Christianity and Islam, missionaries viewed Swahili as a powerful tool for spreading Islam across Rwanda. In response, they sought to suppress its use, propagating the belief that “Swahili is an Arabic language, full of deceit, lies, cunning, and hypocrisy” (Sebazungu et al. 2023, 2).

As a further example, when asked why he disagreed with the statements that Swahili was a suitable language for administration and that speaking it increased employment opportunities, R198 (interview, July 15, 2023), a civil servant, replied (in the lead researcher's translation from Kinyarwanda; see Extract 3 in Appendix 1):

I have never had a chance to be in close contact with Swahili, which would have enabled me to know and appreciate it. Secondly, Swahili cannot be a suitable language for administration because it is spoken and understood by very few Rwandans, whether administrators or ordinary citizens. Thirdly, Swahili cannot increase employment opportunities because no public or private company uses Swahili as its working language, and no service is offered in the Swahili language only.

The above claim that Swahili cannot increase employment opportunities can be countered by Chebet-Choge's (2012, 188) finding that the globalization of Swahili has created numerous career opportunities and sources of income worldwide. The author adds that Swahili has enabled employment in various fields, including lecturing, teaching, translation, interpretation, content writing, and many others.

³ The *Global Voices virtual community* is an international network of bloggers, translators, and citizen journalists who share and translate news from underrepresented communities worldwide, often in local languages such as Swahili.

5.2.3 Swahili seems to be viewed most neutrally by journalists.

As Table 3 shows, the journalists' ratings for neutral attitudes are the highest, at 46%. In fact, neutral attitudes towards Swahili are the prevailing ones for the same occupational group of journalists: they are higher than for both their negative attitudes (at 39%) and their positive attitudes (at 15%).

We can understand why this is the case by looking at what R173 and R88, both journalists, had to say when interviewed. First, here is the view from R173 (interview, July 17, 2023):

Swahili could contribute to Rwanda's development if a significant number of Rwandans knew and spoke it. Even within the EAC [East African Community], how many people are truly proficient in Swahili? Primarily Kenyans and Tanzanians. Although Swahili holds official status in several countries, a large percentage of the population neither speaks nor understands it. Given these linguistic barriers, Swahili cannot significantly drive Rwanda's development. Moreover, it is unsuitable as the language of education or administration, as communication with the local population would be nearly impossible. Only a small fraction of Rwandans understands Swahili. Furthermore, many elites in administration do not speak the language.

In line with the journalist's comment above, it is worth noting that, according to the 2022 Rwanda General Census, it is indeed only 4% of Rwandans who are literate in Swahili (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda 2023).

Second, when R88 was asked to comment on why 39% of the journalists had said they were unsure (i.e., couldn't tell) whether Swahili was a pleasant language to listen to and 38% whether it was an easy language to learn, he invoked the lack of proficiency in the language: "How can someone determine whether Swahili is pleasant to hear or easy to learn if they cannot read or write in that language?" (R88, interview, July 20, 2023).

5.2.4 Swahili seems to be viewed most positively by traders and Muslim leaders.

This observation is highlighted by 43%, and 38%, ratings, the only highest ratings for positive attitudes, respectively produced by traders, and Muslim leaders, (see Table 3). To put things into perspective, even though the two percentages are relatively low (being below 50%), they are far higher than any of the other four occupational groups' ratings, which range from only 5% to 15%. The 43% positive rating by traders, which is the highest of the six ratings, is easier to understand than the 38% rating by Muslim leaders, because it mirrors the traders' negative ratings of 31%, the lowest of all the 6 ratings.

The following views from trader respondents provide insight into why the traders seem to rate Swahili in Rwanda more positively than the other occupational groups. First, here is the response (in the lead researcher's translation from Kinyarwanda; see Extract 4 in Appendix 1) from R117 (interview, July 15, 2023) to why he had positively rated the statement that *Swahili is easy to learn and pleasant to listen to*:

I have evaluated Swahili as pleasant to listen to and easy to learn because it is my second language after my mother tongue; in addition, Swahili sounds like Kinyarwanda. I enjoy listening to it, and its orthography is similar to that of Kinyarwanda.

Second, below is the response (in the lead researcher's translation from Kinyarwanda of Extract No. 5 in Appendix 1) from R148 (interview, July 16, 2023) to why he had positively rated the statement that *Swahili is useful for business interactions*:

Swahili is a very useful language for us who cannot speak English. Thanks to my fluency in Swahili (which I learnt while living in Biryogo), I am able to go to Kenya and Dar es Salaam, to transact business with my fellow business people. When I am back home from East Africa, I telephone them in Swahili to follow up on the progress of my businesses. So, Swahili facilitates our business transactions and helps us to feel free in East Africa.

R148's explanation above reinforces the idea that Swahili has served as a lingua franca in the East African Community (EAC) for centuries, facilitating trade and gaining recognition beyond its traditional borders (Ashton 2000). The highest ratings by traders obviously have to do with the fact that traders benefit most from the use of Swahili, given that Rwanda trades heavily with East African countries (Kenya and Tanzania), where Swahili is used as a lingua franca.

On the other hand, the 38% rating by the Muslim leaders for positive attitudes, though the second highest, does not mirror the 55% negative-attitudes rating by the same occupational group, which is not the second lowest. On the face of it, these apparently ambivalent attitudes on the part of Muslim leaders are intriguing. However, these seemingly ambivalent views can be explained by the fact that it is for the same Muslim leaders that the neutral attitudes toward Swahili were the lowest, at only 7%. Thus, it seems that for the respondent Muslim leaders, opinion was clear-cut as far as the content of those attitudinal statements was concerned.

In relation to such "mixed views" about Swahili from Muslim leaders, R239's response below (in the lead researcher's translation from Kinyarwanda of Extract 7 in Appendix 1) can be taken to be representative:

Although I am a Swahili speaker, I must admit that it has weaknesses and limited use in areas such as ICT, technology, and education, and even in administration. Despite Swahili being an official language in our country, it has yet to attain the same level of use as English or French. It is worth adding that no official documents are published in Swahili, except for textbooks meant to teach Swahili at school. (R239, interview, July 18, 2023).

The absence of official documents published in Swahili and the lack of knowledge among the general public in Rwanda are among the findings reported in Tabaro (2019), which highlights the fact that the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda* continues to publish in Rwanda's other three official languages, but not in Swahili. Indeed, since Swahili has been granted official status in the country, no administrative documents have ever been published in it. The Rwandan government's decision to make Swahili an official language in 2017 was driven by two key factors: fulfilling its obligations as a member of the East African Community (EAC) and maximizing the economic benefits of regional integration. Currently, though, the reality is that "Swahili is primarily used in [some] administrative contexts, appearing in some official

documents, while a presidential order is expected to outline its integration into the school curriculum" (Uwacu⁴, cited in Bishumba 2017).

6 Conclusion

The present study has investigated Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili according to their occupations. The term 'occupation' here covers six categories: teachers (N= 36), civil servants (N= 79), traders (N= 44), journalists (N= 32), Catholic priests (N= 31), and Muslim leaders (N= 30). A questionnaire, comprised of ten attitudinal statements, was used to elicit the respondents' attitudes. The statements in question are of the type *Swahili is very useful for business interactions*. The questionnaire required the respondents to choose one of the following options: "strongly disagree", "disagree", "can't tell", "agree", and "strongly agree". The answers to the questionnaires were used to test the hypothesis that there was a relationship between Rwandans' attitudes toward Swahili and their occupations. The chi-square statistic was used to test this hypothesis. It returned a calculated value of 450.5 at 10df, which is higher than the critical chi-square value of 23.21 at $p < .01$ at 10df.

Underlying this high statistical significance of the chi-square test are two overarching findings reflected in Tables 2 and 3: firstly, overall, Rwandans' attitudes towards Swahili seem to be largely negative: while the percentage of negative attitudes is 53%, it is only 19% for positive attitudes and 28% for neutral ones. Behind this overall finding are the following notable observations: the statement (No. 5) that suggested that Swahili would make someone look highly educated, and the one (No. 9) that suggested that it would make someone be perceived as being in a position of power, were the most negatively rated. The least negatively rated, and, conversely, the most positively rated, were the statement (No. 2) that suggested that Swahili was an easy language to learn, and the one (No. 3) that suggested that Swahili was a very useful language for business interactions. The statements that attracted the most neutral attitudes (though only at a percentage below 40%) were the one which suggested that Swahili was the language best suited for education in Rwanda (No. 6) and the one which suggested that it was the language best suited for administration (No. 7). Secondly, the respondents' attitudes were more negative (with a rating of 55% and above) than either positive or neutral for 4 out of the 6 occupational categories: the teachers, the civil servants, the Catholic priests, and the Muslim leaders. The attitudes were most positive for traders, but with a rather low rating of only 43%. They were most neutral for journalists, with a rating of 46%. Despite the latter rating, it is worth noting that even for journalists the attitudes towards Swahili were much more negative (at 39%) than positive (at 15%). So, all in all, only traders seem to have not too negative attitudes towards Swahili in Rwanda, presumably because they need it for their trade across Kenya and Tanzania, two countries where Swahili is both a lingua franca and an official language.

Given that one recurrent comment from the respondents is that they disagreed with most of the attitudinal statements about Swahili on the questionnaire because they simply did not speak the language and did not see the need to learn it, and given that Swahili is not used in official documents despite the fact it is taught at school, the present study recommends that a structured framework should be set up within which the functions of Swahili in Rwanda are clearly defined as part of a strategy to operationalize the making of Swahili into an official language.

⁴In 2017, Julienne Uwacu served as Rwanda's Minister of Sports and Culture.

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Interviews

R88, interview by Mbonankira Gregoire, Nyamagabe, July 20, 2023

R117, Interview by Mbonankira Gregoire, Huye, July 15, 2023

R148, interview by Sekamana Abdul, Nyarugenge, July 16, 2023

R173, Interview by Mbonankira Gregoire, Kimihurura, July 17, 2023

R198, Interview by Ruzigamanzi J.B, Nyamagabe, July 15, 2023

R270, Interview by Mbonankira Gregoire, Huye, July 20, 2023

R256, interview by Ruzigamanzi J. B, Nyamagabe, July 17, 2023.

R239, interview by Sekamana Abdul, Nyamirambo, July 18, 2023

Appendix I: Respondents' answers to interview questions (Kinyarwanda version)

Extract 1 (produced by R270)

Ziriya nteruro hafi ya zose nazihaye amanota make bitewe n'uko ntavuga igiswahili kandi n'iyo bavuze urwo rurimi sindwumva. Ni ururumi rugoye. Iyo nteze amatwi aho baruvuga, ntacyo ntaramo.

Extract 2 (also produced by R270, as an explanation of what he had said in Extract 1)

Icyongereza nirwo rurimi rwanjye rwa kabiri. Igitekerezo gikubiye muri iriya nteruro nakibonye nabi bitewe n'uko ntazi igiswahili. Namenya nte ko igiswahili ari ururimi rw'ingenzi mu ikoranabuhanga kandi kidakoreshwa muri uru rwego? Ikindi kandi, igiswahili ni ururimi rutitaweho, ruvugwa n'bantu bake muri Afurika y'uburasirazuba. Rushobora gute kuba ari rwo rutoranywa gukoreshwa mu ikoranabuhanga?

Extract 3 (produced by R198)

Sinigeze ngira amahirwe yo kuba aho bavuga igiswahili bityo ngikunde kandi nki-menye. Icy a kabiri, igiswahili nticyakoreshwa mu butegetsi bw'igihugu kuko ruvugwa kandi rukumvwa n'abanyarwanda bake, baba abategetsi cyangwa abaturage basanzwe. Icy a gatatu ni uko kuvuga igiswahili bitongerera amahirwe yo kubona akazi ukivuga. Ibyo biterwa n'uko nta masosiyete ya Leta cyangwa yigenga akoresha

igiswahili mu kazi kayo ka buri muni; kandi nta na serivisi n'imwe mu Rwanda itangwa muri uru rurimi.

Extract 4 (produced by R117)

Nemeje ko igiswahili kiryohera amatwi kandi cyoroshye kucyiga kubera ko arirwo rurimi rwanyije rwa kabiri nyuma y'ururimi kavukire, kandi rumeze nk'ikinyarwanda. Numva ruryoheye amatwi kandi rufite intego nk'iyi Kinyarwanda.

Extract 5 (produced by R148)

Igiswahili kidufitiye akamaro cyane twe tutazi icyongereza. Bitewe no kuvugaga ndategwa (igiswahili nakigiye mu Biryogo) nshobora kujya Kenya na Dar es Salaam gutereta imari na bagenzi banjye b'abacuruzi. Iyo nagarutse mu Rwanda, mbahamagara kuri telefone mu giswahili kugirango menye aho imari zanjye zigeze. Mbona rero ko igiswahili kidufasha mu bucuruzi bwacu no kumva twisanzuye muri Afurika y'uburasirazuba.

Extract 6 (produced by R256)

Kuvuga igiswahili ntabwo byakwerekana ko umuntu yize cyangwa ko afite imbaraga kubera ko uru rurimi rukoresha cyane na rubanda rwo hasi rutagirirwa ikizere rugizwe n'ingegera, n'inzererezi zitunzwe n'uturimo duto duto. Ni ururimi rukennye, rudafite amagambo ahagije amagambo ahagije mu rwego rwa gihanga. Niyo mpamvu kuvuga igiswahili bitazamurira ubwema bwanjye ahubwo cyabumamurira nkagaragara nk'umushukanyi ccyangwa umunyamanyanga.

Extract 7 (produced by R239)

Nubwo mvugaga igiswahili, nemera ko kigifite intego nke kandi hari ahantu henshi kidakoreshe nko mu ikoranabuhanga, tekinojiji, uburezi, ndetse no mu butegutsi. Nubwo igiswahili ari ururimi rwemewe mu gihugu cyacu, ntiruragera ku rwego rwo gukoreshwa nk'icyongereza cyangwa igifaransa, ikindi kandi mu gihugu, nta nyandiko nimwe itangazwa mu giswahili uretse ibitabo by'amashuri byigisha urwo rurimi.

Extract 8 (produced by R88)

Ntibishoboka. Bishoboka bite se ko kuvugaga igiswahili, ururimi rwo muri Afurika, rudakoreshe mu mashuri mpuzamahanga ya siyansi n'ikoranabuhanga byatuma ngaragara nk'umuntu w'umunyabwenge n'icyubababaho