

## Original Paper

# Emphasizing Kiswahili as a Medium of Instruction for Effective Education Output in Tanzania

Catherine David Hiza<sup>1</sup> & Mahona Joseph Paschal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for international Education, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom

<sup>2</sup> Department of Educational Foundation, St. Augustine University of Tanzania

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### Abstract

*The use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction is usually encouraged by scholars and educationists for its many benefits that include intellectual growth of students, and promoting national development, amongst others. In some cases, however, it can lead to problems when not properly implemented. In preparing this policy brief, we built on our intimate knowledge of Tanzania and its language situation as both are teachers and citizens of the country. We also relied on internet research using search engines, particularly Google scholar using key terms like 'Education Policy in Tanzania', 'Kiswahili in Tanzanian Education', 'Mother Tongue Influence in Schools', 'Language Policy in Tanzania' and the like. In addition to this, we made extensive use of the University of Sussex library services. This is the case of Tanzania where Kiswahili is primarily used as the medium of instruction in primary schools with English as a subject of study. However, at the secondary school level, there is usually an abrupt change as students are formerly taught in English, with informal use of Kiswahili. This policy brief reviews the language of instruction in Tanzania highlighting problems of secondary school students due to the switch to English in secondary schools. It advocates for continuous use of Kiswahili formally up to university level without neglecting English but allowing it to be offered as a subject. The study concluded that there is an obvious problem of the language of instruction in Tanzania that is leading to several issues in the educational sector. A determined and deliberate step in adopting either English or Kiswahili as a continuous language of instruction with proper implementation will lead to overcoming most of these obstacles. The study recommended that Kiswahili should be used as a medium of instruction throughout the educational process of students, right up to tertiary institution.*

### Keywords

*Education Policy in Tanzania, Kiswahili in Tanzanian Education, Mother Tongue Influence in Schools, Language Policy in Tanzania*

## 1. Introduction and Background

In order to ensure active teaching and learning, Language is one of the most powerful tools that can be used by teachers to support students' engagement as they are learning. This paper is based on a critical review and synthesis of current literature related to policy and the language of instruction in Tanzania highlighting problems of secondary school students due to the switch to English in secondary schools. It advocates for continuous use of Kiswahili formally up to university level without neglecting English but allowing it to be offered as a subject. Driven by the published policy by the Ministry of Education that spoke of the aim of the nation's education to be: "Building a nation with high quality of education at all levels, this study seeks to understand and deliberate step in adopting either English or Kiswahili as a continuous language of instruction with proper implementation will lead to overcoming challenges related to the language of instruction in Tanzania.

Tanzania is a multilingual nation with over 126 languages spoken. Kiswahili, a language spoken in Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Mozambique, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa was adopted as a national language for the country and as a language of unity. This has been seen as a positive sign especially with the upholding of a 'local' language as a lingua franca to unite people with different ethnicities. In this regard, shortly after independence, the language was adopted as the official language of government and also the language of instruction in schools with English used as a subject of study (Barrett, 1994). Over the years, the role of English has come to take a more important place in the Tanzanian educational system with its official use as the medium of instruction in post-primary education. In this wise, the ministry of education's policy notes that "The medium of instruction in pre-primary schools shall be Kiswahili and English shall be a compulsory subject... The medium of instruction for secondary education shall continue to be English except for teaching of other approved languages and Kiswahili shall be a compulsory subject up to ordinary level" (MEC, 1995, p. 35, p. 45).

The policy aimed at insisting the use of Kiswahili in lower learners which will enable students to understand their culture and preserve it and also to free Tanzanians from colonialism ideologies and later use English language as medium of instruction in secondary education which will be good for international use and the capital after graduating school to look for a job. This point of view has been supported by Paschal (2022), who noted that English language is essential to student success, collaboration and internationalization.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education published a policy that spoke of the aim of the nation's education to be: "Building a nation with high quality of education at all levels; a nation which produces the quantity and quality of educated people sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to solve the societal problems, meet the challenges of development and attain competitiveness at regional and global levels." By 2015, the Tanzanian government launched a more formal education and training policy (2014) which promised to give more roles to Kiswahili in education. Despite this, the 1995 policy remains in full effect giving more emphasis to English as a medium of instruction in public schools at

post-primary levels. This brief looks at some of the problems that arise from this and recommends that Kiswahili should be taken more seriously and students given the chance to learn in the language without an abrupt change to English in secondary school when they have a weak foundation in it, thereby causing a myriad of problems.

## 2. Methods

In preparing this policy brief, we used a qualitative approach by building on our intimate knowledge of Tanzania and its language situation as both are teachers and citizens of the country. We also relied on internet research using search engines, particularly Google scholar using key terms like ‘Education Policy in Tanzania’, ‘Kiswahili in Tanzanian Education’, ‘Mother Tongue Influence in Schools’, ‘Language Policy in Tanzania’ and the like. In addition to this, we made extensive use of the University of Sussex library services.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 Language Policy

As noted earlier, the Tanzanian educational system uses two languages in teaching: Kiswahili at the primary level with English taught at post-primary levels. The switch to English at the secondary level is abrupt without students having a strong knowledge of the language since it was only taught as a subject of study. This is against the projection of the system which believes that they should be able to know English when no measure has been put in place to actualize this (Msanjila, 1990; Yogi, 2017). Indeed, there is a policy gap during the transition from primary education where language of instruction is Kiswahili to secondary education where language of instruction is English. The current policy does not look on the level of language proficiency most students, particularly those in public schools, have. It is almost taken for granted that children of the affluent can go to private schools where they will learn English or take private lessons while those who are poor will be forced to get what they can learn from the public schools. This latter group form the majority of students in the educational system.

Majority of students get admission into secondary schools and are meant to learn essential subjects in the sciences and arts like Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Literature-in-English and the like in a language that they can barely have a conversation in (Telli, 2012; Yogi, 2017). Also, Paschal and Gougou (2022) noted that the lack of proficiency makes teachers to use rote pedagogic methods that do not aid adequate learning. Yogi (2017) narrates that in a series of research, the system of teaching was largely by copying to a blackboard with little communication taking place between the teachers and students. The students would copy verbatim, many times not understanding what they had written and later, failing the exams.

It is important to note that language plays important role in ensuring students understanding, performance and communicating better in school between themselves and their teachers but lack of understanding the English language can cause student’s dropouts, repeating class and even lack of

interest and increase rate of absenteeism in schools, code mixing and code-switching during teaching. From this noted standing point (Ofodu, Fatimayin, & Paschal, 2022) pointed out that in order to ensure active and interactive learning, the effective use of language helps teachers make more engaging, meaningful and productive learning. Therefore, in order to ensure responsive learning, teachers from lower to higher education are required to use language effectively in their classroom.

This is noteworthy since Tanzania has a high rate of drop-outs in terms of children generally and especially in terms of lower secondary school age. The number of students reported to start secondary school in 2007 to 2011 was 50.2% of the total population enrolled in school and the number weakened to 35.8% at the time they are entering form four and one of the reasons for students' dropout was the language of instruction (Gibbons, 2017). The Human Rights Watch (2017) notes that "Millions of Tanzanian children and adolescents do not gain a secondary education or vocational training. It is estimated that a total of 5.1 million children aged 7 to 17 are out of school, including nearly 1.5 million of lower secondary school age."

**Table 1** Percentage of dropouts in all secondary schools (government and non-government) by sex, 2012

	Form I		Form II		Form III		Form IV		Form V		Form VI	
M	14,144	26.9%	17,249	32.8%	11,878	22.6%	9,004	17.1%	182	0.3%	123	0.2%
F	11,681	27.5%	14,003	33%	9,645	22.7%	6,951	16.4%	85	0.2%	45	0.1%

Source: MoEVT (2013, pp. 87–88)

**Table 2** Total dropouts by numbers and percentage in 2012

	Secondary class level						Total	
	Form I	Form II	Form III	Form IV	Form V	Form VI	Male	Female
Total no. of dropouts per level	25,825	31,252	21,523	15,955	267	168	52,580	42,410
Total % of dropouts per level	27.2%	32.9 %	22.7%	16.8%	0.2%	0.2%	55.4%	46.4%

Source: MoEVT (2013, pp. 87–88)

**Figure 1. Percentage of Dropouts in Secondary Schools (From MoEVT in Vuzo 2018, p. 809)**

However, the problems of learning and teaching are not exclusive to the linguistic incompetence of the students alone also but also that of teachers too, most of whom do not have proficiency in the use of English or teaching generally. In a few select cases, though, there are teachers who try to translate the

English syllabus into Kiswahili for easier understanding by the students. Interestingly, research shows that students were more enthusiastic in learning when teachers balanced the teaching of modules by translating (Hilliard, 2014; Tibategeza & Du Plessis, 2018). The idea of using code-mixing and code-switching is supported by students as it helps them to understand what the teacher is teaching in the class as is seen in Figure 2.

T: "When you go home put some water in a jar, leave it direct on sun rays and observe the decrease of the amount of water. Have you understood?"  
 Ss: (silence).  
 T: "Nasema, chukua chombo, uweke maji na kiache kwenye jua, maji yatakuaje?"  
 (I say take a container with water and leave it out in the sun, what will happen to the water?)  
 Ss: "Yatapungua." (It will decrease.)  
 T: "Kwa nini?" (Why?)  
 Ss: "Yatafyonzwa na mionzi ya jua." (It will be evaporated by the sun's rays.)  
 (Rubagumya et al., 1999).

**Figure 2. Code-mixing and Translation for Teaching (Excerpt from Brick-Utne, 2005, p. 11)**

Unfortunately, using this method of teaching is not particularly emphasized or encouraged by schools and in many scenarios, punitive measures are putting in place for anyone who speaks in the vernacular—which refers to any language that is not English (Yogi, 2017; Msanjila, 1990).

The general implication of all of this is that there is increased dropouts and inequality created in society since English is actually offered in private schools and to families that can afford to pay for after-school tutorials with teachers. Such students do better academically and proceed to the university. Upon graduation, these privileged class get jobs while most of their colleagues who had only learnt Kiswahili in the primary school and struggled in secondary school in many cases, do not have the right qualification and therefore remain jobless and/or in mediocre jobs. In turn, this leads to increased poverty in many circles and can increase crime rates when such individuals turn to crime (Barrett, 1994; Yogi, 2017).

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, one notes that there is an obvious problem of the language of instruction in Tanzania that is leading to several issues in the educational sector. A determined and deliberate step in adopting either English or Kiswahili as a continuous language of instruction with proper implementation will lead to overcoming most of these obstacles. This informs the above recommendations. Without taking these steps, there is a high risk of continued failure and dropout rates by students in post-primary institutions which can lead to a myriad of problems in society. Students' self-confidence will also be

shaken and the value of Kiswahili as a national language will be reduced. Thus, language must be taken serious with Kiswahili giving a dominant place in the curriculum and as a language of study to enhance learning and promote the language generally.

## 5. Recommendations

- a) The Education and Training Policy (2014) that emphasizes increased roles for teaching and learning Kiswahili across should be implemented widely across the country. Kiswahili should be used as a medium of instruction throughout the educational process of students, right up to tertiary institution, especially in private schools. This will give them continuity in learning as opposed to having to learn new terms in a language they are not competent in. Relatedly, learning in Kiswahili which is a mother tongue to most of the students will enhance their learning. This is in line with several studies that show that learning in one's mother tongue general increases learning and academic performance (Heugh, 2006; UNESCO, 2003).
- b) Kiswahili should also be used as an entry point examination language in order to enhance its strength in the curriculum. This measure, in particular, will ensure that all students devoid of whether they are in private or public schools will take learning of Kiswahili serious. In the end, this will promote the language and increase its value in society.
- c) The government, non-state actors and schools should invest in training teachers in both Kiswahili and English so that they can have the relevant competence in both languages to effectively teach students for better educational output. This is necessary for current students who are going into the secondary school with only the knowledge of Kiswahili and for younger students too. While this might take considerable resource to achieve, it will be an essential step in the right direction.
- d) English should also be given more learning time at the primary school level so as to enhance their global opportunities in an increasing globalized world. In essence, giving students chance to learn English language as the foreign language which will later give students access to both languages without destroying their performance in school as the good performance will give them chance to continue with their education (Hillard, 2015) not just in Tanzania but anywhere else in the world. English clubs can also be created in schools so that students can have an informal platform to practice the language and enhance their skills in it (Paschal, Nyoni & Mkulu, 2020; Adamson, 2014).

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