

## *Original Paper*

# Intervening Strategies to Cope with the Challenges of the Medium of Instruction

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### **Abstract**

*English is a medium of instruction in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Some institutions put in place some strategies to help students improve their English. This paper is a result of the study conducted at Archbishop Mihayo University College of Tabora. The objectives of the study were to assess the impact of the Basic English course on the students' English, to scrutinise the course contents and to analyse the teaching methods and techniques to see if they help students to outshine in the English language. The study employed questionnaire, interview, focus group discussions and documentary review as instruments of data collection. The findings indicate that Basic English course has not helped students to improve their English for academic and professional communication and the course content is beyond what ought to be included in a basic course. It was further established that due to large classes, Basic English course is taught through lecture method, which does not give the students an opportunity to interact. The paper recommends that a serious review for Basic English course be done and be taught by qualified staff with appropriate teaching and learning materials in manageable groups to allow meaningful interaction and language usage.*

### **Keywords**

*medium of instruction, language policy, basic English, teaching methods, academic performance*

## 1. Introduction

St Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), of which Archbishop Mihayo University College of Tabora (henceforth AMUCTA) is a constituent college, is one of the higher learning institutions in Tanzania. As it is the case in many other universities, students at AMUCTA face challenges in using English as a medium of instruction (Telli, 2014; Brock-Utne, 2010; Qorro, 2008; Brock-Utne, 2005). Therefore, to minimize the challenges, AMUCTA established a Basic English course for all the undergraduate students, except those taking Bachelor of Laws. The course is taught to all first and second year students as an institutional course.

The course was designed to raise English language competence and proficiency among students in both academic and professional communication. It was envisaged that it would raise such skills through reduction of language problems and impart necessary mastery of English grammar competency. The intention was therefore to help students master the English language, which is a medium of instruction at a university level and solve grammatical and communication problems across other courses and programmes taught in English. It was further envisaged that, with a proper competence in English language, the students' academic performance would correspondingly improve.

In spite of studying Basic English course for four semesters, the students' English proficiency at AMUCTA leaves a lot to be desired. The students learn linguistic components but they hardly use them in well-structured ways with ease in speech fluency, writing accuracy and appropriate word choice when working on their assignments across all courses where English is the medium of instruction.

The components taught to students are more related to those they must have studied in their primary and secondary education. However, when it comes to examination results and normal communication interaction in the target language, few of them make it to a satisfactory level. As Mtallo (2015, p. 122) indicates in his study, "...English language seems to torture students' mind and thus they do not enjoy the language but they are forced to use it in a slavery way". This is the case for AMUCTA students when it comes to English as medium of instruction.

Therefore, this study which was evaluative in nature, intended to assess the impact of the Basic English course on the students' English proficiency and to scrutinise the course contents and see if they fulfil the intended purpose of the course. It further intended to analyse the teaching methods and techniques used by lecturers to see if they give the students adequate opportunity for them to outshine in the English language.

## 2. English as a Medium of Instruction

Language plays a significant role in the learning process and if the learner is handicapped in language use, then learning may not take place at all. This is because the learner and the teacher will not be communicating. Wolff (2006, p. 9) correctly indicates "Language is not everything in education but without language, everything is nothing in education". It is the language the students and teachers have

to use to negotiate meaning in the classroom setting and beyond. Telli (2014, p. 10) argues “There is a strong relationship between the medium of instruction and the quality of education in a country’s education system”. He stresses that learners can only participate actively in knowledge creation if they are allowed to use a language they understand, especially the one used in their day-to-day life.

Referring to English language teaching in Nepal, Bista (2011, p. 5) reports that there is frequent and considerable use of Nepali language, thus making students hardly exposed to English, the target language. The participation of students in the class is reportedly limited due to poor mastery of the language of education. That is why national policies and the selection of languages to be used as media of instruction in schools are of considerable importance (UNESCO, 2005).

English has taken a great role worldwide in various avenues and is therefore considered a global language. Kumar (2014, p. 20) argues metaphorically that “The way oxygen is important to survive, so is English to survive in today’s competitive world”. English is not merely a global lingua franca today; rather it has become a tool of progress and a key to success in every walk of life. English now is the first language of about 400 million people in Britain, USA and the Commonwealth and has become the language of communication, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy and internet (Guo & Beckett, 2007). In support of this trend of English language globally, Imam (2005, p. 479) submits “Undeniably, today English is increasingly becoming the dominant global language whereby both the west and east have become equally busy promoting it”.

Due to the increasing use of English in various domains, Doms (2003, p. 2) correspondingly asserts “English has become part of the lives of millions of people and the multiple crucial roles it now fulfils affect societies at every level”. He further argues that the influence of internet has played a tremendous role in spreading information and the English language itself.

Because of the seemingly importance of English worldwide, most countries in Africa have adopted it as a medium of instruction in their education system. With the internationalisation of business, politics and academics “English is increasingly used at the university level to equip graduates to function effectively in the global competition for capital and customers” (Huntington, 1996, p. 63). Since English is a medium of instruction, Nga (2008, p. 264) says “...as English plays a vital role in every field [business, tourism, politics, economics etc.] success or failure in English may be decisive in the students’ future career prospect”. That means, with good knowledge of English language, a student can have a good job and can get an opportunity to train in other English speaking countries.

According to Canagarajah (2005, p. 196), “Globalisation has made the state borders permeable and therefore reinserted the importance of English language for all communities through multinationals, market forces, population culture, cyber space and digital technology”. Despite the adoption of imported languages in education systems in Africa, such languages have merely remained a minority. This is because they have not reached the masses of the population in most African countries.

According to Heine (1990, p. 175) “Less than 20% of African people are able to make use of their ‘imported’ official languages. This implies that people in their communities still make use of their languages, unlike what is contained in the language policy documents”. Wolff (2002, p. 136) argues that, “Since knowledge of the African languages is shared by the teachers and the learners, the English only policy in the schools remains a myth despite the requirement by the language policy”. He underlines that the reason is that in practice teachers revert to a language other than English (or any other foreign language) when students indicate that they do not understand the instruction given in English.

Mateene (1999, p. 170) underscores that some people would justify interrupting the use of a language and replacing it with a new one on the pretext that the first language is not well developed for secondary education. However, he is of the view that it is such interruption which stops the scientific development of that language as it is the practice of a language in classroom that makes it develop. Through transitional language programmes, an African language is mostly replaced by an “imported” language in the African educational setting.

Despite the adoption of one of Africa’s largest languages as a national and official language, in this case Kiswahili, the Tanzanian government has constantly insisted that English should remain the only medium of instruction at post-primary level (United Republic of Tanzania, 1995, p. 45). This decision is attributed to its tremendous power and prestige in the global market.

Similarly, the decision to cling to English as a language of education at post-primary level can be attributed to what Wolff (2006, p. 186) considers to be the experience the post-colonial elites had because they were successful in a foreign language-based system in which the colonial language was the dominant medium of instruction. Students are therefore compelled to use English in secondary schools and higher learning institutions, a language neither the learners nor educators have properly mastered. This situation has been detrimental to the learning and teaching process.

There are many challenges related to English being a medium of instruction at post-primary education in Tanzania. For instance, Mtallo (2015, p. 121) argues “...classroom practice sometimes go against declared official language”. This is motivated by teachers’ need to help learners to have a clear understanding of some concepts. The teachers normally do this through code-switching between English and Kiswahili.

The language policy in Tanzania is frequently reported by scholars to exhibit some weaknesses when it comes to implementation (Tibategeza, 2010; Brock-Utne, 2005; Qorro, 2008). The most reported area of weakness is the transition from Kiswahili medium of instruction in primary schools to English medium of instruction in secondary schools. Some researchers and educationists (Tibategeza, 2010; Telli, 2014) have aired out their outcry on this problem. For instance, Telli (2014, p. 1) reports that “When a student in public schools (primary) advances to secondary school, the MoI swiftly changes from Kiswahili to English”. This situation affects students’ efforts to attain English as Tibategeza (2010,

p. 128) asserts that “The language experience the students acquired in primary schools through the use of Kiswahili, which is at that level used as the only MoI is not used as a springboard in secondary schools but rather the medium of instruction is changed to English”.

In Tanzania, English is the second co-official language on top of Kiswahili (Tibategeza, 2010). English is used as a medium of instruction in secondary schools and tertiary levels, and as a compulsory subject in primary schools (United Republic of Tanzania, 1995). Despite the government’s efforts and political will to promote the teaching of English for learners to develop proficiency in English language, students and teachers at all levels of education are reported to perform poorly in English and other subjects taught in English (Qorro, 2008, 1999; Brock-Utne, 2005, 2010; Sa, 2007). Therefore, English is said to be wrongly acquired by both students and teachers, the problem which leads to the dwindling performance in not only English subject but also in other subjects taught through English.

English is also perceived by educational stakeholders as language of wider international communication, language of the cyber society, globalised village, science and technology and as a means to shine in the job market (Canagarajah, 2005). Responding to the question of “why English?” Canagarajah (2005, p. 196) asserts that “Globalization has made the state borders permeable and therefore reinserted the importance of the English language for all communities through multinationals, market forces, popular culture, cyber space and digital technology”.

This situation is revealed in the parents’ preference to enrol their children in English medium schools in the country and in neighbouring countries like Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi (Qorro, 2008; Brock-Utne, 2010). Telli (2014, p. 12) referring to Tanzanian parents’ preference of English argues that “...they accept the status quo not because their children enjoy high quality education, but because they understand the need and importance of English for their children”. He argues further that parents are hoping for better jobs in the globalised world. Therefore, parents on their side prefer English language alongside the learning of Kiswahili hoping for good jobs for their children. Tanzanian parents are reported to wrongly associate English with good performance, knowledgeability and quality education (Qorro, 2008; Brock-Utne, 2010). Telli (2014, p. 12) points out that, “They [parents] are not able to distinguish between learning English and learning in English”.

In the Tanzanian social context, English is also perceived as language of the educated. This is partly evident in the parents’ preference to send their children in English medium schools, considering English as the language of wider communications (Telli, 2014, p. 12). Similarly, Swilla (2008, p. 8) asserts that “...English (unlike Kiswahili) is not the mother tongue of any segment of the population; and access to the language is limited”. With this assertion she implies that English is not acquired anywhere except in schools and colleges. As a result, those who happen to speak English are perceived as prestigious in the eyes of the masses in Tanzania.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Design and Approach*

This study used the descriptive research design to investigate the teaching of Basic English course based on its founding purpose and the impact accrued to the targeted students. This design was not only restricted to fact findings but would as well result in formulation of principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems related to the medium of instruction.

This study used, to a large extent, qualitative approach and in a narrow sense the quantitative approach. Qualitative approach dominated this study because it helped the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the issues being investigated. The use of the mixed approach was considered important because variation in data collection would lead to greater validity and reliability.

#### *3.2 Sampling Procedure*

The study used simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Simple random sampling gave an equal chance for all undergraduate students to be part of the selected sample without the influences of other considerations such as personal preferences of the researchers. The purposive sampling selected respondents of this study from the lecturers, whether teaching or not teaching Basic English. This is because the researcher thought such lecturers had relevant information needed in this study.

#### *3.3 Sample Size*

The researchers randomly selected 150 students from Bachelor of Arts with Education (BAED), Bachelor of Arts in Sociology (BASO), Bachelor of Public Relations and Marketing (BAPRM), Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Education (Special Needs)-BEDSN. The students were selected based on the fact that they were the beneficiaries of the Basic English course. 15 lecturers were selected purposively from across the available six departments. The departments were: Languages and Linguistics, Educational Foundations, History and Geography, Sociology and Philosophy, Business Administration and Public Relations and Advertising. The lecturers were involved in the study because they are the main assessors regarding the students' medium of instruction.

#### *3.4 Research Instruments*

In order to get data from the field on the present study on the Basic English course, four research methods were used. These were: questionnaire, interviews, focus group discussions and documentary review. The questionnaires were prepared and administered to undergraduate students in order to get their opinions and perceptions of the Basic English course within the framework of the founding objectives of the course. The students were involved in the questionnaire because they were directly affected by the challenges of the medium of instruction.

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with selected lecturers from AMUCTA in order to get their views as to whether the envisaged objectives of the Basic English course have been achieved. Also got lecturers' opinion on how best the course could be improved to help the targeted group to benefit from their programmes through the current medium of instruction.

In this study, the researcher guided group discussions for students and academic staff during which group members were encouraged to talk freely and spontaneously about the introduction of Basic English course at AMUCTA. There were two groups where each group comprised of six to eight members. Guide questions were prepared prior to the discussion to initiate open-ended discussion on the introduction of Basic English at AMUCTA. Each group included individuals of similar background or experiences.

Documentary review is one of the research instruments which was applied in this study to gather important information on the teaching of Basic English course to cope with challenges of the medium of instruction. It focused on obtaining relevant documents such as the Basic English course outlines and examination booklets for 2012/13 to 2015/16 academic years. The course outlines for the course in question would inform the researcher on the contents of the course and see if they are in line with the intended purpose to establish the course. Examination booklets would supplement the information gathered from the interviews and questionnaires in relation to students' competencies in the English language.

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1 Basic English Course and Students' English Competence

The first objective was to assess the impact of Basic English course on the students' English proficiency. Students were therefore subjected to questions that aimed at finding out how important the course was for them. Responding to the question whether Basic English had helped them to improve their English for academic purposes, students' responses are as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Whether Basic English Had Any Impact to Students' English Proficiency**

| Yes          | No  | Undecided |
|--------------|-----|-----------|
| <b>128</b>   | 15  | 01        |
| <b>88.8%</b> | 10% | 0.7%      |

The results in Table 1 show that the majority (88.8%) of the respondents indicated that Basic English had helped them to improve their English for academic purposes. However, those who thought that Basic English course did not help them to improve their English for academic purposes gave the following reasons:

They further claimed that there were too many courses to take per semester (10 to 11 courses per semester), they therefore had to focus on other courses because they had a feeling that what was covered in Basic English was presumed to have been covered in the lower levels of education. They also emphasized that Basic English is a foreign language and this contributed to their unwillingness to learn the language. Students also submitted that the time allocated (3 hours per week) for the course

was inadequate. That was also compounded by inadequate teaching and learning materials including relevant books in the library. Lack of confidence in students towards English language was also mentioned as a hindrance to the attainment of the intended Basic English goals.

Responding to the question as to whether Basic English course was helpful to the students to attain the required proficiency in English language, lecturers who were teaching the course said that the course was important to the students and would be appropriate to them if taken seriously by both the learners and lecturers.

As for the students' proficiency in the English language for the students, lecturers who were teaching Basic English were of the view that the majority of the students had very low competence/proficiency in the English language. They raised a serious concern that when they read students assignments they found it hard to believe that such students had gone through the normal education system in Tanzania. Also they said that students' English language was very poor as demonstrated during seminar presentations and question and answer sessions.

Commenting on whether Basic English had helped students to improve their English language for academic purposes, lecturers not teaching Basic English were of the view that the improvement in their English language was negligible. Their views corresponded with the poor English that students displayed in their examination scripts.

#### *4.2 Achievement of the Intended Goal*

Responding to whether introduction of Basic English course had achieved the intended goals, there were mixed responses from students. Those who had indicated that the intended goals had been achieved pointed out that they could identify grammatical errors in their speech/written works and do corrections on their own on the same. They further said that when they compared their proficiency and competence before being introduced to Basic English and after being taught the course they realised that they had improved in using the English language.

However, the students who argued that the introduction of Basic English course had not achieved the intended goals because their performance in Basic English assignments, tests and examinations was still very poor. They further said that they were still poor in using English language during oral presentations such as micro-teaching, oral comprehensive examinations, research defence and conversations amongst themselves. These views were in line with the lecturers' responses who had indicated categorically that Basic English course had not helped students improve their English for academic purposes since only about 10% of them had shown some improvement. They also argued that the English they used in other courses taught in English could not be attributed to Basic English.

Academic staff involved in group discussion suggested that since there is less opportunities for students to practise the target language, there is need to initiate opportunities for them to be involved in debates, symposia and tutorial presentations. They further emphasised that all academic staff should be strict in observing grammatical errors when marking students assignments, tests and examinations and penalize



those whose English is poor.

#### 4.3 Contents of the Basic English Course

Respondents were also required to give their views on the contents of the Basic English course as to whether they were in line with the intended goals to establish the course. Their responses are indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2. Students' Responses on the Contents of Basic English Course**

| Yes          | No    |
|--------------|-------|
| <b>124</b>   | 18    |
| <b>87.3%</b> | 12.7% |

From the results in Table 2, the majority of students (87.3%) were satisfied with the content included in the Basic English course outlines. However, those who said that the content of Basic English was not in line with the intended goals of establishing the course pointed out what they thought was missing in the course outlines.

Some of the topics in the course outlines were beyond what should be covered in Basic English. Therefore, they felt that those topics were inappropriate for students not taking linguistics.

Students did not consider Basic English as an extension of knowledge but rather a duplication of what was covered at lower levels of education. Students said that the content was more theoretical as it did not provide for skills in oral presentations, dramatization, debates and correct pronunciation. Therefore, the course did not encourage creativity among the students.

On the contents of the course outlines, the lecturers teaching the course were of the view that it was inadequate to equip students with language skills and knowledge that could help them to understand and perform well in the courses taught in English as a medium of instruction.

The researcher also reviewed course outlines for BE course for all the four semester in order to ascertain whether they reflected the intended goals for establishing the course in the university college. From the review, it was discovered that course descriptions in all the course outlines had the same focus; hence, did not show progression in terms of competence from one level to another.

Although the course objectives in the outlines had indicated that the course was supposed to improve students' oral communication skills, this had not been captured in both content and assessment; that is the speech component was not reflected in the content neither was it in the assessment.

It was also noted that, in each BE course outline, there were various shortcomings in terms of the contents covered. For example, in LG 112, tense had not been reflected; instead what was covered is the verb classification which was wrongly placed under "Tense formation".

There was also misplacement of some sub-topics such as subject-verb agreement, passive formations and transitivity which should be under sentence formations but were placed under "verb forms". Also

use of articles has been placed under the module on “sentence structures”.

There was also the problem of repetition of topics. For example, the topic of “parts of speech” has been reflected in both modules 1 and 3. Some of the topics covered under LG 122 course outline were beyond what is really supposed to be Basic English. For instance, transitivity, dangling modifiers, parallelism and affixation can be seen to be beyond the scope of Basic English. Moreover, Module 2 of LG 212, which was on punctuation and capitalization, was repeated under module 4 of LG 122 which was titled “Writing Skills”. Moreover, Module 4 of LG 212 titled “Writing Skills” with sub-topics of minutes, memorandum, diary, personal journal fit to be under Communication Skills where they were actually already covered.

Some topics in the course outlines were vague. For example, in LG 122 module 3 which was titled “Dictionary Use” was not specific what was exactly to be taught under that topic. Nevertheless, dictionary use should be covered under Communication Skills.

#### 4.4 Teaching Methods

Through questionnaires, the students were required to indicate the methods used by the lecturers to teach the Basic English course. Their responses are indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3. Teaching Methodologies Used to Teach Basic English Course**

| Method             | Lecture | Group Discussion | Presentations | Others |
|--------------------|---------|------------------|---------------|--------|
| <b>Respondents</b> | 88      | 32               | 27            | 3      |
| <b>Percentage</b>  | 59%     | 21%              | 18%           | 2%     |

Table 3 indicates that the lecture method was dominantly used (59%) to teach Basic English course. The least preferred method was question-answer method which respondents mentioned under the category of others. During interview with members of the academic staff, the lecturers who were teaching Basic English course said that they mostly used lecture method to teach the students. This was due to the nature of the large classes (mostly between 400 to 600 students) which made it impossible to use other participatory methods such as class discussions, group discussions, etc.

From the documentary review, the researchers intended to see the teaching methods suggested in the course outlines. However, it was noted that the teaching methods were not reflected at all in the Basic English course outlines. Furthermore, although the course descriptions in the BE course outlines indicated that they would take a practical approach and regular exercises, these did not feature in the course evaluation section. Similarly, though presentations were also indicated as part of assessment of the course in the course description section, they were not indicated in assessment and methodology sections.

To avoid large classes where students cannot have meaningful interaction and to allow participatory teaching methods, it was recommended that the management should split large classes into manageable

groups to facilitate easy interaction between the lecturers and students as well as amongst students themselves.

#### 4.4 Poor Performance

In their response to the possible reasons for poor performance in the Basic English course, the lecturers teaching the course outlined the following reasons:

- The content taught was beyond the required Basic English skills and knowledge. Therefore, the examination set was fit for students taking linguistics and no other academic fields.
- The lecture method which was predominantly used when teaching the course was inappropriate. As a result, students lacked motivation to learn English.
- Some lecturers teaching the course were not motivated enough to teach the students this course. This is because they only teach it since it was allocated to them by the head of department.
- Lack of practice by the students since they prefer to use Kiswahili in their group discussions and normal conversations.
- Some lecturers teaching the course also have poor background in the English language.
- Students perceive the course as a burden since their curriculum was already overloaded with many courses.

From the review conducted on students' examination results in Basic English course from 2013/14 to 2016/17, the findings are as indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4. Basic English Examination Results 2013/14-2016/17**

| YR      | PRG   | SEM | G R A D E |     |    |     |    |     |     |     |    |     |    |      |
|---------|-------|-----|-----------|-----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|----|------|
|         |       |     | A         | %   | B+ | %   | B  | %   | C   | %   | D  | %   | E  | %    |
| 2013/14 | BAED  | I   | 0         | 0   | 2  | 0.8 | 31 | 12. | 104 | 41. | 94 | 37. | 19 | 3.6  |
|         |       | II  | 8         | 3.1 | 23 | 9   | 60 | 23. | 105 | 41. | 34 | 13. | 25 | 5    |
|         | BASO  | I   | 0         | 0   | 0  | 0   | 2  | 28. | 2   | 28. | 2  | 28. | 1  | 14.  |
|         |       | II  | 0         | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0  | 0   | 4   | 57. | 3  | 42. | 0  | 0    |
|         | BAPRM | I   | 0         | 0   | 1  | 2.7 | 14 | 18. | 23  | 31  | 26 | 35. | 10 | 13.  |
|         |       | II  | 3         | 4.2 | 9  | 12. | 11 | 15. | 26  | 36. | 15 | 20. | 8  | 11.1 |
|         | BBA   | I   | -         | -   | -  | -   | -  | -   | -   | -   | -  | -   | -  | -    |
|         |       | II  | -         | -   | -  | -   | -  | -   | -   | -   | -  | -   | -  | -    |

|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     |      |     |     |    |      |    |      |
|----------------|-------|----|---|-----|----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|----|------|----|------|
|                | BEDSN | I  | - | -   | -  | -   | -   | -    | -   | -   | -  | -    | -  |      |
|                |       | II | - | -   | -  | -   | -   | -    | -   | -   | -  | -    | -  |      |
| <b>2014/15</b> | BAED  | I  | 0 | 0   | 7  | 1   | 55  | 7.9  | 220 | 31. | 26 | 38.  | 14 | 20.  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     |      |     | 9   | 6  | 7    | 0  | 3    |
|                |       | II | 3 | 0.4 | 13 | 19. | 381 | 53.  | 167 | 23. | 10 | 1.4  | 10 | 1.4  |
|                |       |    |   |     | 9  | 6   |     | 7    |     | 5   |    |      |    |      |
|                | BASO  | I  | 1 | 7.1 | 0  | 0   | 4   | 28.  | 7   | 50  | 0  | 0    | 2  | 14.  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     | 6    |     |     |    |      |    | 3    |
|                |       | II | 2 | 14. | 3  | 21. | 7   | 50   | 1   | 7.1 | 0  | 0    | 1  | 7.1  |
|                |       |    |   | 3   |    | 4   |     |      |     |     |    |      |    |      |
|                | BAPRM | I  | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 0    | 7   | 35  | 8  | 40   | 5  | 25   |
|                |       | II | 0 | 0   | 1  | 5   | 8   | 40   | 6   | 30  | 4  | 20   | 1  | 5    |
|                | BBA   | I  | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   | 4   | 20   | 9   | 45  | 3  | 15   | 4  | 20   |
|                |       | II | 6 | 27. | 6  | 27. | 4   | 18.  | 5   | 22. | 0  | 0    | 1  | 4.5  |
|                |       |    |   | 3   |    | 3   |     | 2    |     | 7   |    |      |    |      |
|                | BEDSN | I  | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   | 4   | 8.5  | 12  | 25. | 17 | 36.  | 14 | 29.  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     |      |     | 5   |    | 2    |    | 8    |
|                |       | II | 1 | 1.9 | 11 | 21. | 27  | 52.  | 9   | 17. | 1  | 1.9  | 2  | 3.9  |
|                |       |    |   |     | 6  |     | 9   |      |     | 6   |    |      |    |      |
| <b>2015/16</b> | BAED  | I  | 0 | 0   | 15 | 5   | 120 | 40.  | 114 | 38. | 28 | 9.5  | 18 | 6.1  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     | 7    |     | 6   |    |      |    |      |
|                |       | II | 0 | 0   | 25 | 8.5 | 100 | 34   | 110 | 37. | 51 | 17.  | 8  | 2.7  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     |      |     | 4   |    | 3    |    |      |
|                | BASO  | I  | 0 | 0   | 3  | 60  | 1   | 20   | 1   | 20  | 0  | 0    | 0  | 0    |
|                |       | II | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   | 2   | 33.  | 2   | 33. | 2  | 33.  | 0  | 0    |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     | 3    |     | 3   |    | 3    |    |      |
|                | BAPRM | I  | 0 | 0   | 1  | 12. | 4   | 50   | 1   | 12. | 0  | 0    | 2  | 25   |
|                |       |    |   |     |    | 5   |     |      |     | 5   |    |      |    |      |
|                |       | II | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   | 1   | 11.1 | 6   | 66. | 1  | 11.1 | 1  | 11.1 |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     |      |     | 6   |    |      |    |      |
|                | BBA   | I  | 1 | 6.7 | 2  | 13. | 6   | 40   | 1   | 6.7 | 3  | 20   | 2  | 13.  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    | 3   |     |      |     |     |    |      |    | 3    |
|                |       | II | 0 | 0   | 1  | 6.3 | 6   | 37.  | 4   | 25  | 4  | 25   | 1  | 6.3  |
|                |       |    |   |     |    |     |     | 5    |     |     |    |      |    |      |
|                | BEDSN | I  | 1 | 1.8 | 8  | 14. | 13  | 23.  | 23  | 41. | 10 | 18.  | 0  | 0    |
|                |       |    |   |     |    | 5   |     | 6    |     | 8   |    | 1    |    |      |

|                |              |    |           |          |           |            |            |            |            |            |           |            |           |            |
|----------------|--------------|----|-----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|                |              | II | 1         | 1.8      | 4         | 7.3        | 17         | 30.        | 20         | 36.        | 10        | 18.        | 3         | 5.5        |
|                |              |    |           |          |           |            |            | 9          |            | 4          |           | 1          |           |            |
| <b>2016/17</b> | BAED         | I  | 31        | 13       | 70        | 29.        | 75         | 31.        | 47         | 19.        | 10        | 4.2        | 4         | 1.7        |
|                |              |    |           |          |           | 5          |            | 6          |            | 8          |           |            |           |            |
|                |              | II | 51        | 22.      | 93        | 41.        | 56         | 24.        | 23         | 10.        | 2         | 0.9        | 1         | 0.4        |
|                |              |    | 6         |          | 1         |            |            | 8          |            | 2          |           |            |           |            |
|                | BASO         | I  | 0         | 0        | 0         | 0          | 0          | 0          | 4          | 100        | 0         | 0          | 0         | 0          |
|                |              | II | 1         | 25       | 2         | 50         | 1          | 25         | 0          | 0          | 0         | 0          | 0         | 0          |
|                | BAPRM        | I  | 3         | 25       | 1         | 8.3        | 4          | 33.        | 2          | 16.        | 2         | 16.        | 0         | 0          |
|                |              |    |           |          |           |            |            | 3          |            | 7          |           | 7          |           |            |
|                |              | II | 6         | 50       | 5         | 41.        | 1          | 8.3        | 0          | 0          | 0         | 0          | 0         | 0          |
|                |              |    |           |          |           | 7          |            |            |            |            |           |            |           |            |
|                | BBA          | I  | 2         | 14.      | 2         | 14.        | 5          | 35.        | 3          | 21.        | 0         | 0          | 2         | 14.        |
|                |              |    | 3         |          |           | 3          |            | 7          |            | 4          |           |            |           | 3          |
|                |              | II | 3         | 25       | 2         | 16.        | 4          | 33.        | 3          | 25         | 1         | 8.3        | 0         | 0          |
|                |              |    |           |          |           | 7          |            | 3          |            |            |           |            |           |            |
|                | BEDSN        | I  | 7         | 10       | 27        | 38.        | 19         | 27.        | 16         | 22.        | 1         | 1.4        | 0         | 0          |
|                |              |    |           |          |           | 5          |            | 1          |            | 9          |           |            |           |            |
|                |              | II | 18        | 26.      | 33        | 47.        | 14         | 20.        | 4          | 5.7        | 0         | 0          | 0         | 0          |
|                |              |    | 1         |          | 8         |            |            | 3          |            |            |           |            |           |            |
|                | <b>TOTAL</b> |    | <b>14</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>13.</b> | <b>106</b> | <b>28.</b> | <b>109</b> | <b>29.</b> | <b>60</b> | <b>16.</b> | <b>28</b> | <b>7.7</b> |
|                |              |    | <b>9</b>  |          | <b>6</b>  | <b>4</b>   | <b>1</b>   | <b>8</b>   | <b>1</b>   | <b>6</b>   | <b>8</b>  | <b>5</b>   | <b>5</b>  |            |

Source: AMUCTA Examination Office.

KEY: BAED = Bachelor of Arts with Education, BASO = Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, BAPRM = Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations and Marketing, BBA = Bachelor of Business Administration, BEDSN = Bachelor of Education (Special Needs), YR = Year, PRG = Programme, SEM = Semester.

The results in Table 4 indicate that about 30% of the students in the five years scored grade C while 24% failed by scoring grades D and E.

The researchers also reviewed sampled examination scripts for undergraduate students from different programmes. It was noted from the answer scripts that most of the students had serious problems related to the use of English language in expressing what was required in the examinations. Among the grammatical problems noted included spelling errors, poorly constructed sentences, tense problems, and errors in subject-verb agreement to mention but a few which were observed from their scripts.

#### 4.5 Students' Language Background

Through the questionnaire, the students were required to indicate whether they went through English Medium Schools (EMS) or not. Their responses are as reflected in Table 5.

**Table 5. Students' Responses on Their Background for English Medium Schools**

| Went through EMS | Did not go through EMS |
|------------------|------------------------|
| 7                | 135                    |
| 5%               | 95%                    |

As reflected in Table 5, the majority (95%) of the students at AMUCTA did not go through the English medium schools.

Poor background of students in English which was also associated with incompetent teachers at lower levels of education, where Kiswahili is dominant at lower levels and English is poorly taught.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Attained Goals

The data indicate that the majority of students (88%) were satisfied that the intended goals for Basic English course were achieved. However, it was noted that students' focus in that course was not on improving their language proficiency but to pass examinations. Therefore, when the focus is diverted to passing examinations, rote learning can be noticeable. This is in line with what Igbal and Ahmad (2015, p. 510) argue that "The process of rote learning fixes the information in the memory through sheer repetition...the students with such learning styles are considered to be surface learners". This is also verified by students' claims that they had many courses to take per semester and since most the contents for Basic English were covered in lower levels of education, the course was given less attention.

It was further noted that there was poor rapport between students and staff teaching the course. This is against what Nova (2017, p. 89) proposes that "One way to maintain the teacher-student relationship is through having positive interaction between teacher and students". This implies that lecturers do not take the students as their clients for the purpose of helping them to excel in the English language, in this case a medium of instruction. This was verified by academic staff teaching the course who emphasized that some of them are not motivated enough to teach the course and sometimes they accept to teach it just because the head of department assigned it to them. We need to emphasise here that teachers and students understand each other better when there is rapport between them.

Furthermore, poor background in English was associated with incompetent teachers at lower levels of education where English is normally poorly taught. According to Mtallo (2015) English enjoys the status of foreign language as most Tanzanians use their ethnic community languages as the first

language and Kiswahili as a second language. Sometimes classroom practices go against the official language policy in the classroom where teachers switch to the use of Kiswahili on the pretext that they want to help students understand the concepts being taught. That is why Mtallo (2015, p. 122) submits that “Learning English in such a hostile environment becomes a painful experience for learners, and may end up creating negative attitudes towards the language”.

### *5.2 Contents of Basic English*

The second objective of this study focused on whether the Basic English course contents were in line with the purpose of establishing the course. Findings indicate that the content was inadequate to equip students with language skills and knowledge that would help them improve the medium of instruction. In a study by William and Hamaro (2018), it was observed that grammar was a serious challenge to learners’ communicative competence in terms of tense and subject-verb agreement. They therefore conclude that “Teachers did not properly address grammar patterns in English lessons” (p. 46).

The course description in all the course outlines was vaguely and hastily done and they all had the same focus and therefore lacked progression that would indicate different levels of competence. It should be emphasised here that Basic English is taught for the first four semesters and therefore the focus would have been different in each semester.

Additionally, there was discrepancy between what was in the course objectives and the course content and assessment. For example, it was noted from the course objectives that the course intended to improve students’ oral communications skills, but the same was neither in the course contents nor in the course assessment.

Furthermore, the course outline review revealed that the topics and the subtopics were unrelated. For instance, subject-verb agreement, passive formation and transitivity appeared under verb forms. This misplacement of topics would lead to poor coverage of the course especially when the course is taught by different lecturers as it is commonly the case in programmes with large classes.

The findings also reveal that the Basic English course outlines were prepared without proper understanding of what Basic English really entail. Some topics were seen as not properly placed under this course. Researchers are of the view that some topics, such as dandling modifiers, parallelism and transitivity, were actually supposed to be reserved for students taking linguistics. This explains why there are some complaints from students regarding this issue.

Moreover, it was discovered that some topics, namely minutes, memorandum, diary and personal journal, which are already covered in “Communication Skills” course were also included in Basic English course outline. This was unnecessary package for the same students who already have many courses to take per semester. In the same line of thinking, instead of such uncalled for repetitions, students could be subjected to practical assignments which would enhance their English proficiency.

### *5.3 Poor Performance*

The results in Table 4 indicate that students' performance is not that good considering the fact that Basic English is composed of topics which are presumed to have been taught in the previous years in secondary schools and colleges. There might be various reasons with regard to the performance. First of all, students seem not to take Basic English course seriously assuming that they know what lecturers teach. For that matter, they allocate less time in their private study and group discussions. This is related to the study by Asemanya (2015, p. 5) where it was noted that "...students' learning habits, complacency on the part of students as well as negative attitudes and perception towards the learning of Communication Skills course came out as some of the factors that affect the performance of students". The second reason which is equally important is that students joining the universities in most higher learning institutions have poor background in the English language. This was evident in the sampled students' scripts where it was noted that the kind of English used leaves a lot to be desired. This is connected to what Asemanya (2015, p. 1) found out that "Some of the students admitted into the first year have weak language background which is reflected in their communicative competence and thus they do not perform well".

### *5.4 Teaching Methodology*

Teaching methodology has always been associated with students' academic progress in educational institutions. As it is currently emphasised, participatory methods are geared towards learner-centred approach to learning. However, it was noted in this study that the lecture method dominated when teaching Basic English. Lecture method, according to Okphoghol, Ezeudu, Adzape & Otor (2017) involves only oral presentation of ideas. They emphasise that "The teacher does most of the activities in form of talking while the students are passive learners" (p. 77). According to Asemanya (2015) the method used in the presentation of information play a major role in determining whether or not students would enjoy the course being taught.

It should be noted here that the nature of classes for Basic English determines the teaching methodology lecturers are likely to use. It was evident that Basic English classes are overcrowded to the extent that students' interaction is almost impossible. This is related to what Maganga (2016) indicated in his study that poor method of instruction can foster rote learning among the students.

It was also apparent from the course outlines that teaching methods were not even indicated. That would leave the decision of which method to use to an individual lecturer. It was further noted that although the course descriptions had indicated that the practical approach and regular exercises would be used, these were not included in the teaching methodology and assessment section respectively.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study had three main objectives, namely to analyse the impact of the Basic English course on the students' English proficiency, to scrutinise the course contents and see how they fulfil the intended



purpose of the course, to examine the teaching methods and techniques used by the lecturers to see if they give adequate opportunity for them to outshine in the English language. The conclusion of this paper is based on the three objectives of the study.

Although the majority (88%) of respondents indicated that Basic English course had helped them to improve their English proficiency, it was noted through documentary review of the students' examination scripts that the kind of English they use left a lot to be desired. They still used ungrammatical sentences which make lecturers marking their scripts to fail to grasp what students intended to say. All lecturers involved in the study were of the view that students' English had not improved as envisaged.

Regarding the contents of the Basic English course, this paper concludes that there are some noticeable discrepancies related to course contents. It was clear from the course outline review that some course contents were beyond what ought to be included in a basic course. Some topics were seen as inappropriate for students not taking linguistics. Moreover, students considered Basic English as more theoretical than practical, hence depriving them the opportunity to benefit from the course.

Additionally, it was noted that due to large classes, Basic English course is normally taught through lecture method. Therefore, students lack interaction among themselves, which is an important aspect in language learning.

Therefore, the envisaged goals for establishment of Basic English, which geared towards raising students' competence and proficiency in both academic and professional communication, reduction of students' grammatical and communication problems across all programmes and to improve students' academic performance had not been attained due to the challenges noted above. In order for the course to bear meaningful and intended results, a serious review for the course needs to be done. The course should be taught by qualified staff with appropriate teaching and learning materials in manageable groups to allow adequate interaction and language usage.

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