How English Language as a Medium of Instruction Affects Performance in Secondary Schools
Title: How English Language as a Medium of Instruction Affects Performance in Secondary Schools

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Keywords: English language – language of instruction – performance - Tanzania
Open Note of the IBE

The IBE has launched the Diploma Alumni Series to create a shared space to involve local education professionals into a global dialogue and inspire original research and meaningful discussion. It intends to position the diploma alumni as active and distinct researchers, producers and disseminators of local knowledge and mastery. These through the elaboration of small-scale innovative research projects that will eventually enrich and advance the development of quality curricula for all.

The Diploma Alumni Series is the result of a Diploma Alumni Grant established by the IBE in 2015 with the hopes of providing professional development opportunities for the diploma alumni. The idea of promoting a grant for small-scale innovative research derives from the valuable contributions of the case studies written by the participants of the Postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development as part of their coursework. During the past years, participants have been producing comprehensive and unique case studies, sharing a variety of approaches, strategies and practices in curriculum initiatives across regions. These products have become essential tools and reference materials of the Diploma and Masters programmes, as they allow the participants to reflect on diverse contexts and perspectives and further apply these new ideas into ongoing curriculum reform and worldwide discussions on current and critical issues in curriculum, learning and assessment. Echoing the success of the case studies, the Diploma Alumni Grant enables and encourages the animated participation of diploma alumni in continuing with their professional development through evolving their case studies and research topics into small-scale in-depth research.

Endorsed and produced in the three official languages of the Diploma and Masters Programmes, English, French and Spanish, the series of research primarily presents effective and relevant practices around (i) curriculum policy and reform and (ii) teaching, learning and assessment. Through their research projects, fourteen Diploma Alumni, 9 from Africa and 5 from Latin America and the Caribbean, shed light on teaching and learning approaches used at local level as well as on the state of education and curriculum reforms in these two regions. The Diploma Alumni Series becomes, therefore, an invaluable asset as it highlights concrete education practices across regions, fostering inclusive and holistic approaches that are simultaneously community-based and an extension of the global discussion on the concerns of Member States. Along with the series In-Progress Reflections on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment, the Diploma Alumni Series aims to facilitate online interactions through continuous reflection and exchange of ideas between local and international experts.

Dr. Mmantsetsa Marope: Director, International Bureau of Education
How English Language as a Medium of Instruction Affects Performance in Secondary Schools

Abstract: English is the language of instruction from secondary through tertiary education in Tanzania. However, despite the fact that Tanzania is a multilingual country with more than 150 ethnic languages, Tanzanians don’t have the necessary English language skills, which often causes difficulties in teaching and learning. This report examines whether and how the English language as a medium of instruction affects students’ performance in secondary education. In order to investigate this, primary and secondary data was collected, assessed, and analysed. Literature review was conducted for the collection of background information. Data was gathered from qualitative interviews and from a structured quantitative questionnaire for both teachers and students, from ten randomly selected community government schools in Kinondoni municipal. The report shows that various issues lead to the poor performance of secondary school students when English is used as a language of instruction, among which are the poor command of the English language in the school environment, inadequate English learning materials, and limited English language skills of teachers. The study concludes that the lack of English proficiency is one of the major barriers for students in achieving higher performance. Considering its international importance, the study highlights that English should be used as a language of instruction in Tanzania schools starting from the lower level of education.

Keywords: English language – language of instruction – performance - Tanzania
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Background of the study

The problem

Tanzania is a multilingual country with 150 ethnic languages spoken within its borders. As the language that unifies all Tanzanians is Kiswahili, the majority of people in Tanzania use Kiswahili as their first language and English as their second language. Other ethnic groups may use vernacular languages as their first language and Kiswahili as their second language. English is used as a second or third language, which comes after Kiswahili and vernacular language. However, both Kiswahili and English are official languages. The parliament of Tanzania uses English for writing laws and regulations, but members use Kiswahili for discussion of making laws in the parliament. The same happens in court, where English is used in judgment. Even though most of the laws, agreements, memorandums of understanding and treaties are written in English, most Tanzanians have a poor working knowledge of English.

Status of English in secondary schools

Before the independence, the colonial master of the Tanzania mainland (formerly Tanganyika), used English language in all levels of education. After the independence, the government passed the Education Act of 1962 to regulate the provision of education. This Act repealed and replaced the 1927 Education Ordinance, and one of the intended objectives was to promote Kiswahili language as Tanzania’s national language by making Kiswahili and English the medium of instruction in schools. Kiswahili was used at the primary level, whereas English as a medium of instruction was used in fewer primary schools, especially private schools. English was the language of instruction in all secondary schools, because of the education ordinance that was emphasized in the education policies of 1995 and 2015.

On the other hand, the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA), which publishes the Examiners’ report on the performance of candidates CSEE and FTSEE in all subjects every year, showed that English is one the main factors of students’ poor performance in national examinations.

Location of the study

This research was conducted in ten government community schools within the Kinondoni municipality. Most of these schools were established in 2005, following the massive enrolment at primary school level, which began in 2000 deriving from the education objectives promoted internationally by the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals. These initiatives promoted the right of all children to primary education. Successfully, enrolment in primary education was 4,839,361 in 2001 to 7,959,884 in 2006 (Sumra and Rajan, 2012). The net enrolment ratio in primary schools increased from 65.5% in 2001 to 96.1% in 2006 (Sumra and Rajan, 2012), which means that nearly all children of primary school age are now enrolled in schools. This had a great impact in secondary schools, as 43,860 pupils in 2014 were selected to join secondary education (EATV, 2014).

The increased rate of enrolment in primary schools creates increased pressure on the secondary level. Expansion of secondary enrolment has been similarly extraordinary. Enrolment in Form I, the first year of secondary education, increased from 99,744 in 2003 to 503,914 in 2015 (Mwananchi newspaper, 2015). This increase of enrolment created a big demand of increasing secondary schools and their facilities. The government took measures to build community government schools in each ward, recruit teachers as well as provide teaching and learning materials.
In the case of Kinondoni districts, there were only two community government secondary schools since the independence of Tanzania to 2004. From 2005 to the present, the number of government secondary schools increased to 48 (Kinondoni Municipal Secondary education officers, 2016), which also led to an increase in the enrolment in primary education. However, the increase in the number of schools has brought many challenges to the education system of Tanzania.

Objectives of the study

i. To explore factors affecting performance due to the use of English language.
ii. To recognize the impact of using English as a medium of instruction.
iii. To raise awareness regarding which language of instruction is the most suitable to use in secondary schools in Tanzania.
iv. To suggest strategies for the government to improve the use of language for instruction in order to increase student performance.

Research significance- Expected impact and professional significance of the research

i. It will reveal the different impact different languages of instruction can have on student performance and, consequently, it will enable policy-makers to formulate better language policies.
ii. It will provide the foundations for other researchers on the use of second language as a medium of instruction.
iii. It will raise awareness among owners and managers of private and public schools on how to use language to improve student performance.
iv. It may help to foster curriculum change and development in relation to the language of instruction.

Research questions

The study is guided by the following research question:

How does the use of English affect the performance of secondary school students in their examinations?

This main question is accompanied by the following sub-questions:

i. Are teachers and students competent enough in using English as a medium of instruction in schools?
ii. Are there any existing efforts that governmental or other education stakeholders have made towards improving the use of English in secondary schools?
iii. What are the impressions and suggestions of teachers and students regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools?
Literature review and conceptual framework

Language and education

Language is a tool for communication and knowledge transmission, plays a fundamental role in cultural identity and empowerment. Language can be expressed through spoken or written words. IBE–UNESCO, through the Training Tools for Curriculum Development Resource Pack (2013), adopted three approaches to language and education:

i. To support mother-tongue instruction as a means for improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of learners and teachers.

ii. To support bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality, and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.

iii. To support language as an essential component of intercultural education in order to encourage understanding among different populations.

In other words: No language, No Education.

English language, teachers and learners in the classroom situation

Teacher is a figure in the language course. Literature indicates that it is the teacher who sets the tone for learning activities (Allen and Valette, 1997; Quist, 2000). Taking into consideration that the act of teaching is relied on communication, English language teachers must have maximum communicative competence. A teacher must also be knowledgeable in the language itself so that he/she can make useful decisions regarding what should be taught and how. Research demonstrates that among the factors that lead to poor students’ performance, one of the most significant barrier is the language communication between teachers and students (Harmer, 2003; Mosha, 2014). Moreover, empirical studies show that the right foundations for learning should be provided during the early years of schooling. If this does not happen, no amount of special provision at later stages will be able to achieve the full potential of children in terms of how their learning will proceed and how beneficial their attitudes will be towards their future life and learning (Quist, 2000).

Conceptual framework

Bloom’s (1982) model of evaluation (see Figure 1) is the conceptual framework used as the basis of this research. This model is suitable for the process of language learning and teaching, as well as for examining the interdependence of variables, teaching and learning process to student performance in English language subject. The model consists of three items: predictor variables, mediating variables and performance. According to Bloom (1982), predictor variables and mediating variables influence student performance greatly. The idea contained in the model is that if the predictor variables and mediating variables were of high quality, then teaching and learning processes would produce good performance in language comprehension, production and attitudes towards English.
Figure 1. A model for explaining students’ Performance in English language learning

This model shows that the language of instruction determines much of the performance of the learner, meaning that poor mastery of the language of instruction could lead to poor performance of students.
Research methodology

Research Design

The study employed a multivariate approach, aiming at investigating how English as a language of instruction affects performance in secondary school. The study collected, assessed, and analysed both secondary and primary data. Existing research and literature was reviewed when conducting the study’s background.

The study randomly chose community government schools from Kinondoni districts. Such schools were chosen because it seems that most of the students of these schools had previously attended public primary schools, where the language of instruction is Kiswahili. This report aims to explore the students’ ability to master a new language in the secondary level, despite having been taught in Kiswahili during primary school.

An exhaustive analysis was conducted, throughout the study, of published and unpublished secondary sources, including published materials in libraries, relevant reports, and journals. Unpublished ‘raw’ administrative data were also reviewed, particularly, official records from national and municipal-level records from the field. This helped the researcher to reverse the information as well as to inform the research while formulating the questionnaires.

Primary data, both qualitative and quantitative, was also collected, through interviews and questionnaires. The research began with conducting unstructured informant interviews with key stakeholders, including officials from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA), the Zonal Inspectorate (Currently known as Zonal Quality Assurer Board), and municipal level education officials. The aim of the interviews was to obtain preliminary information on constraints faced by the students on the use of English as a language of instruction in secondary schools. The information collected was used to develop the questionnaires.

Questionnaires were administered to collect data for providing comparisons, associations, and regression analyses of responses from the field. Two groups of questionnaires were designed: one for teachers and one for students. The research formulated two questionnaire items for the purpose of avoiding bias from either side.

Sample design – Structured questionnaires

The technique of stratified random sampling was employed to collect data from teachers and students from ten secondary schools in Kinondoni district Ward. These two groups of respondents helped to get answers based on real information through comparing answers from respondents on both sides.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>SCHOOL PARTICIPATED</th>
<th>NUMBER OF STUDENT RESPONSES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF TEACHER RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mbezi Inn Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kibweheri Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kibwegere Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Salma Kikwete Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Luguruni Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kwembe Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kinzudi Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Goba Mpakani Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mpiji Magoe Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kibamba Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Schools and number of respondents*

**Data analysis techniques**

Data from the structured questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). The analysis involved drawing comparisons, associations, and making generalizations based on the different variables measures through the questionnaires.
Analysis and discussion of study findings

Teachers’ qualifications, teaching methodology, and teaching and learning material

Teachers’ qualifications, teaching methodology, and students to books ratio are related to student performance (Bloom, 1992). As such, a teacher who is not qualified enough, has difficulties in choosing and applying suitable teaching methodologies, which could possibly hinder the teaching and learning process. In addition, if schools have enough qualified teachers but the number of books is not enough, it is difficult to apply suitable ways of teaching based, for instance, on the competency-based approach. For this reason, the report examines these three issues.

Teachers’ Qualifications

![Figure 2: Teachers’ educational qualifications](image)

The majority of teachers in secondary schools are well qualified. About 4% hold a Master’s degree, 7% hold a postgraduate diploma, 73% a Bachelor’s degree, and 15.5% hold a diploma (Figure 2). This means that most of the teachers in secondary schools are fit to teach that level of education.
Teaching Methodology and Teaching Materials

The low students to books ratio does not allow students to practise self-learning. The report shows that the ratio of books is not suitable compared to the teaching methodology applied. More than 75% of the teachers applied participatory methods of teaching, however the ratio of students to books was 1:4, meaning that there is one book shared among every four students. The lack of books for students to practise self-learning is also encouraged by the teachers. As shown in Figure 3 below, 78% of teachers state that they are not satisfied with the number of books per student, as the lack of books to support their chosen teaching methodology hinders the learning process. It is therefore difficult to foster discussion in the classroom, as this disconnection may motivate discussion in students’ native language or hinder students’ understanding of what has been read by other members of the group.

![Figure 3: Number of books compared to students’ ratio](image)

Despite the shortage of books, the study shows that 50% of community schools have a library room. 78% teacher respondents reported that the book-to-student ratio is 1:4, meaning 1 book for 4 students. More so, students reported that 48% of the students have never used a dictionary at school (Figure 4). This increased students' difficulties in learning new English vocabulary. This means that a failure to understand a certain word may lead to great confusion in his/her studies. As a result, students may misunderstand a lesson and, later, this can lead to poor performance in the examinations.

![Figure 4: Use of dictionary](image)
Classroom situation and students’ involvement

Number of students in a classroom
Most of the schools have many students compared to the standard ratio of number of students in the class. It is difficult in this situation for learning processes to be facilitated.

![Figure 5: Number of students in a classroom](image)

Students’ language background
Which language did you use throughout primary school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Language used by students in primary school

The study shows that 91% of secondary school students in Kinondoni municipal community schools used Kiswahili as a language of instruction during primary school, whereas only 9% used English. This made for poor/slow mastering of the new language of instruction (English) in secondary school.
The study also shows that only 4% of students responded that their participation is high when the teacher only uses English during teaching. 57% of students believed that the use of English as a language of instruction affects their participation in a negative way and 39% said that it has a positive effect on their participation. This means that the majority of students are not participating well when the teacher teaches solely in English. This may lead to poor understanding of the lesson as the language does not motivate students to participate in it. When students were asked if the cause of poor performance in school was due to the use of English as a medium of instruction, 53% responded ‘yes’ and 47% said ‘no’. When asked to rate the level of their overall performance, 72% described their performance as ‘average’, 18% as ‘high’ and 10% as ‘below average’. Following that, they were asked whether their overall performance was hindered by the use of English as a medium of instruction. 77% of respondents said ‘yes’ and 23% said ‘no’, which means that English is still an obstacle to students’ high performance. The graphs below illustrate this explanation well.
Students’ classroom participation

When asked about their preparation prior to a lesson, 65% of students said that they are prepared, 20% answered in a neutral way, and 15% disagreed with this statement. This shows that most of the students prepare themselves before each lesson. However, only 34% actively participated when only English was used in the classroom. This percentage was much higher, however, when Kiswahili was the only language used in classroom, as it is clearly shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Students’ participation when Kiswahili is used

Frequency in the use of English

Teachers felt shy on speaking truth when they were asked whether or not they felt competent to use English as a medium of instruction. To this question, only 13% of teachers responded positively, which means that the rest are not sure whether they are competent to use English as a medium of instruction. On the other side, when students were asked if teachers use English frequently during lessons, 44% disagreed with this statement, 21% answered in a neutral way, and 35% agreed. This proves that even teachers do not use English language in the classroom. Other students told the researcher that most of what the teacher is doing is translating the points or what is written in books, thereafter, starting to lecture or to explain the lesson by using Kiswahili language. As a result, teachers act as translators rather than teachers and instructors. Even worse, English language teachers are doing the same; they are teaching English language by using Kiswahili language.

Only 20% of the respondents agreed that teachers use English language outside the classrooms, whereas 23% were neutral and 57% disagreed with this statement. This shows that the only place students and teachers use English language is the classroom. Outside the classroom, there are few cases where teachers and students use English. Figure 9 below exemplifies the explanation given above.
When asked whether there was a habit of speaking English outside the classroom, 55% of students disagreed with the question, 33% were neutral, and only 11% agreed. This shows that most of the students end up speaking English in the classroom and Kiswahili outside the classroom. On the other hand, when students were asked whether they feel at ease with speaking English outside the classroom, 53% of them disagreed, 27% were neutral, and only 20% agreed. This shows that more than 53% of students are not comfortable when the lessons are carried out in English. In addition, when asked whether students’ participation increased when both languages (Kiswahili and English) were used, 71% agreed, 16% gave a neutral response, and 13% disagreed. This statement proves two key issues. First, both languages were used in classrooms during teaching, and second, the use of English confused students. Lastly, when asked whether English contributes to poor performance in national examinations, 36% agreed, 31% were neutral and 34% disagreed.

**Students’ and Teachers’ Attitude towards English**

Students have a great desire to know how to read, write, and speak in English. When asked if they have a habit of speaking English at home, 25% of them replied positively, 12% were neutral, and 63% replied negatively. They defended their point to the researcher by saying that it was difficult for them to practise English at home because most of their family members do not speak English. In the follow-up question about whether students have the habit of speaking English with their classmates outside the classroom, 57% responded negatively, 20% gave a neutral response and 23% responded positively.
Advantages and disadvantages of using English

As Figure 10 shows, 82% of teachers saw benefits in the use of English in secondary schools. When asked why, they answered with two strong reasons: 1) English helps students in school interaction and in their internal and national examinations, and 2) English is an international language; thus, it prepares students to respond to worldwide challenges. The rest, 18%, said that they do not see any benefits, and when asked why, they supported their arguments by saying that the poor knowledge of English that the majority of their students had from primary education, would hinder their understanding of the lesson. This issue may also cause their poor performance in examinations. This is also probably linked to the following question: As shown in Table 3, when teachers were asked if they would like English as a language of instruction in Tanzania secondary schools, only 71% of them responded ‘yes’, while 28% said ‘no’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Would you like English to continue to be a language of instruction in Tanzania secondary schools?

To the question regarding which advantages and disadvantages existed in relation to the use of English as a language of instruction compared to Kiswahili, most teachers responded one of the following:
Advantages of using English as a medium of instruction:
- English is a language with much richer vocabulary compared to Kiswahili language.
- English enables students to communicate worldwide, and can enable them to compete in the world market.

Disadvantages of using English as a medium of instruction:
- English is affected by the mother tongue, so it is difficult for students to understand the lesson and questions asked in the examination, hence leading to their poor performance.
- Sometimes English discourages students in studying and may cause drop out.
- Growth in the use of English may cause students to replace Kiswahili with it.

When teachers were asked to what extent the use of English has contributed to the academic performance of students in their examination, 62% of respondents said ‘average’, as Figure 11 shows.

![Figure 11: Relationship between use of English and students’ academic performance](image)

When asked to briefly explain why, they responded:
- Students had poor knowledge of English. They only used English in secondary school. This may lead to them having poor vocabulary and loss of confidence in speaking.
- Because most of the teachers are not competent enough to use English, they tend to use Kiswahili in teaching. Teachers just translate what is written in books.
- Some students are not eager to learn.
- Inadequate teaching and learning materials.
Efforts made by the schools to improve the use of English

Teachers were also asked if their schools give any incentives for the use of English language in classroom. 71% answered positively and 29% negatively. Next, they were asked to mention the efforts made by schools to increase the use of English.

When students were asked if the school had any programmes aiming to increase the use of English, 92% said ‘yes’ and 8% responded ‘no’. When asked to mention efforts made by their schools to improve the use of English, they mentioned the following:

- Presence of English debate programmes
- Morning assembly with the announcements announced in English
- Speaking English programmes
- One out of every ten schools decided that teachers would only speak English with students, and, more so, English language would be used in their meetings (however, this was either not implemented or poorly implemented).
- Students who speak English wear a sign that has the phrase ‘Speak English’ written on it. The last students to wear this are punished and mentioned by the student who gave them the board.

Even though schools made different efforts to increase the use of English, they were all challenged by the lack of sincerity between teachers and students that led to poor supervision of those programmes.
Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

This study concludes that English language is one of the major barriers that hinder students’ high achievement in internal and external examinations. However, as an international language, English should continue to be a language of instruction in schools, because it prepares students to interact with worldwide challenges. Education stakeholders should make an effort to address the challenges related to the use of English as a medium of instruction, in order to help students improve their academic performance, as well as to create a society that fits the global challenges.

Recommendations

This study concludes with the following recommendations:

i. Increase of the Education budget in order to have enough teaching and learning materials to help both teachers and students in the use of English. For example, provisions of stories and novel books will help towards the development of reading habits and improvement of vocabulary each day, which will subsequently lead to the improved use of English.

ii. Use of English at all times in the school compound, by subject instructors and teachers, when they are in contact with both students and their fellow staff members/teachers.

iii. Increased emphasis (through changes in education policy) on the use of English from primary to university level, so as to create a strong basis for students. This may help students to better understand the lessons taught and build upon what they have learned.

iv. Strong supervision of different school programmes aimed to improve the use of English. As mentioned in the study, some examples of such programmes are school and inter-school debate competitions, morning speech competitions and subject clubs.

v. Provision of positive reinforcement to students with good English-command, and vice – versa to the Kiswahili speakers.

vi. Improvement of pre- and in-service teacher training, so as to improve teachers’ confidence and comfort in speaking English.

vii. Enforcement of school policies that guide teachers and students to use English at all times in the school compound.
References


