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

Background

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. However, even though English is the language used for instruction in schools from secondary to tertiary education, the majority of Tanzanians don’t have the necessary English language skills, which often causes difficulties in teaching and learning. This study investigates factors associated with students’ performance and recognizes the impact of using English as a medium of instruction in Tanzania. In order to investigate this, literature review was conducted for the collection of background information, and data was collected, assessed, and analysed through interviews and a questionnaire addressed to both teachers and students, from ten randomly selected community government schools in Kinondoni municipal.

Key Findings

1. Teachers’ Qualifications Teaching Methodology and Educational Materials
   
   I. Teachers’ qualification: The majority of teachers in the sample 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).

   II. Teaching methodology and Educational materials: According to the research findings, the ratio of students to books is very low about 1:4, which leads to difficulties for teachers to adopt suitable teaching methodology in class.

2. Student Language Background and Class Participation
   
   I. Students’ language background: 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 as a language of instruction. This made for poor/slow mastering of the new language of instruction (English) in secondary school.

   II. Class participation: 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. 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.

What was the language used for instruction during primary school?

- English
- Kiswahili

91%
9%
3. Frequency in the Use of English

The majority of teachers and students only speak English in class. In addition, only 23% of students said that they have the habit of speaking English outside the class.

4. Students and Teachers’ Attitudes towards English

I. **Students** have a great desire to know how to read, write, and speak in English.

II. 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.

**Recommendations**

Several recommendations are provided to all stakeholders in education:

- 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.
- Use of English at all times in the school compound, by subject instructors and teachers.
- Increased emphasis (through changes in education policy) on the use of English from primary to university level to create a strong basis for students.
- Strong supervision of different school programmes aimed to improve the use of English. Provision of positive reinforcement to students with good English-command, and vice-versa to the Kiswahili speakers.
- Improvement of pre- and in-service teacher training to improve teachers’ confidence and comfort in speaking English.
- Enforcement of school policies that guide teachers and students to use English at all times in the school compound.