Language Teaching and Literacy Learning in Tanzania Primary Education: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This paper argues that there are key issues associated with language teaching and literacy learning in Tanzania primary education which have yet to be adequately addressed in the curriculum. Using theoretical and empirical evidence drawn from studies in Tanzania and beyond on language and literacy learning in primary education, the discussion reveals that the key issues hampering effective literacy teaching and learning in Tanzania's primary education includethe question of teachers' pedagogical competence on literacy teaching; choice of language for literacy teaching and learning, especially in rural areas, for example ethnic community language versus Kiswahili; language teacher education; and home-school disconnection. The discussion also shows that Tanzania's primary education curriculum does not accommodate multi-literacy competencies such as the emerging digital and media literacies. Thus, the paper recommends the use and teaching of languages that a school-beginning child speaks and understands well in early childhood education, and the inclusion of multi-literacy competencies.

Key words: Language, mother tongue, literacy, teaching and learning, primary education

Introduction

Tanzania is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country home to about 150 languages (Tibategeza, 2010), including Kiswahili the national language and language of wider inter-ethnic communication. In the context of Tanzania, minority languages are all ethnic community languages (ECLs) except Kiswahili which is a mother-tongue for about 10 percent of the country's population (Rubagumya, 1990), and used as a second language (L2) by 99 percent of thepopulation for *inter-ethnic* communication (Masato, 2004; Brock-Utne, 2005). Unfortunately, these ECLs that the majority of Tanzanians use as their first languages (L1s) or mother-tongues are strictly not used

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in schooling, media or in any other official domains, and do not have any official or formal status in Tanzania (Strom, 2009: 229). As such, pupils in a classroom tend to come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. According to *Sera ya Utamaduni* (henceforth *Cultural Policy*) (URT, 1997, p.16), languages in Tanzania are categorised into three groups: Ethnic languages, National language (*Kiswahili*), and Foreign languages (*English included*). As stated in the Education and Training Policy (1995), the medium of instruction in primary schools is Kiswahili, and English is taught as compulsory subject (URT, 1995: 35; also cf. URT, 2014) and the ECLs have no room for use in this education system.

The teaching and learning of language and literacy in Tanzania primary education has been reported as one of the problematical areas that demands intervention and reform. For instance, many children in Tanzania's primary education are not learning as much as they are expected to, and the majority of them complete primary education without the ability to read and write not only simple story written in English, but also in Kiswahili (Uwezo, 2011, 2012, 2014; HakiElimu, 2015; FinScope, 2017). Generally, there has been literacy intervention in Tanzania such as Education Quality Improvement Programme in Tanzania (EQUIP-T) (2013-2016), Literacy and Numeracy Education Support (LANES) (2015+), EGRA (USAID, 2013; 2014), KIUFUNZA intervention, Research Triangle International (RTI, 2016) [Tusome Pamoja] and Tanzania 21st Century Basic Education Programme (TZ21) geared towards improving literacy teaching and learning in Tanzania. And yet the curriculum expected competencies are still far-fetched (FinScope, 2017, p. 23). After all, the efforts that are in place remain geared towards achieving traditional literacy competencies in Kiswahili—the ability to read and write.

Although the term "literacy" has been traditionally used to mean ability to read and write, its meaning nowadays transcends that scope. Literacy is no longer just a simple mastery of decoding skills, but also a construct with broader meanings and wide ranging technological, cultural and social implications (Mills, 2010). New understandings of literacy, termed "multi-literacies" now incorporate any sign-making practices that use various technologies and also account for cultural and societal influences (Burke, 2016, p. 1). In many communities students may wish to use multi-literacies outside of the classroom; however, training for new and pre-service teachers often remains print-bound in its explicit literacy pedagogy (Ajayi, 2011) and sometimes that training is not offered to teachers. In fact, the term

'functional literacy' is an attempt to link literacy to the purpose of making it more relevant and useful. Lawton and Gordon (1996, p.108) define functional literacy as 'the level of skill in reading and writing that any individual needs in order to cope with adult life'.

Literacy and language of the everyday does not only take place in the people's homes and neighbourhoods but also in workplaces, places of trade, local government offices, religious institutional settings, community centres, sports, leisure and entertainment venues, as well as other sites and settings (Prinsloo, 2014,p. 66). Prinsloo (*ibid.*) further argues that the explicit ideological model of literacy offers a view that literacy is always embedded in particular views of the world, of knowledge and of values, and is shaped by relations of power; the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being (*ibid.*, p. 68). Literacy, therefore, is always contested, both in its meanings and practices. The ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially the new learners and their position in the relations of power (Cook-Gumperz, 2006). As such, curriculum on literacy teaching and learning in Tanzania's primary education needs to accommodate these emerging multi-literacy competencies to equip the school leavers with relevant literacy skills for them to be equipped for the cotemporary world.

According to the Cambridge Assessment report (2013), the advance of technology has led to a proliferation of 'literacies' and, indeed, the word 'literacy' is often used to mean being generally competent at having a reasonable knowledge of something (e.g., assessment literacy). The following terms appear in the literature related to *digital literacy*:

- Digital literacy/digital information literacy;
- Information literacy;
- Library literacy;
- Computer/information technology / electronic / electronic information literacy;
- Media literacy; and,
- Internet /web /network /hyper-literacy (Cambridge Assessment report, 2013, p.17).

In this era of the digital flow of information, primary school leavers in Tanzania need to be acquainted with the new technology embedded in the use of Kiswahili through the phones, computer or any other modern technology device. In this manner, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or TEHAMA as it is known by its Kiswahili acronym should be an integral part of literacy learning under digital literacy in primary school curriculum in language learning. Such integration would help school leavers access information via various media with the expected competencies (cf. MoEVT, 2013a). In this regard, Buckingham (2008, p. 277) asserts:

> [T]he increasing convergence of contemporary media means that we need to be addressing the skills and competencies – the multiple literacies – that are required by the whole range of contemporary forms of communication. Rather than simply adding media or digital literacy to the curriculum menu or hiving off information and communication technology into a separate school subject. We need a much broader reconceptualisation of what we mean by "literacy" in a world that is increasingly dominated by electronic media.

Indeed, *digital literacy* is 'a combination of skills, knowledge and understanding that young people need to learn ... to participate fully and safely in an unceasingly digital world' (Becta, 2010). Becta (*ibid.*) further describes 'digital literacy' as a combination of functional technology skills; critical thinking; collaborative skills; and social awareness. 'Digital literacy' is related to the functional skills of knowing about and using digital technology effectively to analyse and evaluate digital information; knowing how to act sensibly, safely and appropriately online; understanding how, when, why and with whom to use technology.

Cox (1991) contends that 'literacy' may include 'Language use, language study, literature, drama and media education' and that it 'ranges from the teaching of a skill like handwriting, through the development of the imagination and of competence in reading, writing, speaking and listening, to the academic study of the greatest literature.' This implies that teaching and learning in one's language literacy opens an opportunity up for accessing everyday information and communicate the mind in a meaningful way. Through literacy competence learners can develop creativity, arts and designs, and literary works. However, in many African countries where teaching and learning is done in foreign languages, linking home-and-school and applying digital literacy pedagogy in primary education has been proven to be a daunting

task. As a result, children completing Standard VII from public primary schools have risked missing both knowledge-based on their socio-cultural set-up and the competences related to effective use of modern technology. The paper, therefore, assesses issues in language, literacy teaching and learning in Tanzania's primary schools.

Crucial components in the development of literacy

The paper argues that there are different ways that can be used to develop language and literacy among learners in early childhood and at primary education. These may include connecting the home-and-school environment; parental involvement in the child's literacy learning; preparing teachers on literacy pedagogy in nursery and primary education; lifelong learning strategy; language policy that supports the use of indigenous languages in the catchment areas; and developing orthographic systems of the widely used African languages in the respective community. Tabors, Snow and Dickinson (2001, p. 313) observe that home and the pre-school environments of the children in the home—school connection begin by trying to understand how homes and schools together may shape the skills that children bring to the literacy challenges of the early graders in school.

Along these lines, Morrow, Gambrell, Duke and Nero (2011) identified ten evidence-based best practices for literacy instruction thus:

i. Classrooms should reflect a culture that fosters literacy motivation. The teacher should foster literacy by creating a community of literacy learners;
ii. Students learn best when they read for authentic meaning-making purposes: for pleasure, to be informed, and to perform a task;
iii. Teachers should provide appropriate scaffolded instruction in the five core skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) to promote independent reading;
iv. The school day should include time for self-selected reading;
v. Providing students with high-quality literature across a wide range of genres that will build a love for reading and address the Common Core standards;
vi. As themes or topics are explored, multiple texts should be used to increase background knowledge, connect concepts, and increase vocabulary;
vii. The classroom should reflect and encourage community and collaboration;
viii. A balance of teacher-and student-led discussions of texts is important to build lifelong learners;

ix. Students need ample opportunities to use technologies that connect and expand concepts; and,

x. Differentiate instruction based on student assessments to accommodate the needs of individual students (Morrow *et al.*, 2011, pp. 21-22).

Using these practices would bring about not only better literacy learning outcomes but would also enable pupils to develop more interests in learning other subjects. TheUS National Reading Panel (2015) reports that effective literacy instruction strategies integrate the following key components: first, clear instruction in phonemic awareness; second, systematic phonics instruction; teaching approaches that support pupil's fluency; and, three, teaching that enhances pupils' comprehension. Similarly, a study by Roskos *et al.* (2003, pp. 53-55) identified the following literacy teaching strategies:

i. *Rich teacher talk*—teachers need to involve pupils in a rich discussion in large groups, small groups, and individualised talk that focus on the use of uncommon words, thus extending children's discussion; providing cognitively challenging content; and responding to pupils' talk;

ii. *Storybook reading*—teachers need to guide children to read out aloud in the class at least once or twice a day. During storybook reading children are exposed to entertaining activities such as stories, poems, and information books;

iii. *Alphabet activities*—during literacy teaching, teachers should engage children with learning resources which increase the understanding of the alphabet, such as ABC books, magnetic letters, alphabet blocks and puzzles alphabet chart;

iv. *Support for emergent reading*—encourage and support children reading by providing various resources and familiarise them with books;

v. *Support for emergent writing*—teachers are required to encourage children to use emergent forms of writing, such as scribble writing, random letter strings, and invented spelling. For emerging writing strategy to be successful school and writing centre should have good stoke of pens, pencils, paper, and book-making materials; teacher writes down text dictated by children and availability of play-related writing materials;

vi. *Shared book experience*—the teacher should read the books to children by enlarging the text and point as she/he reads. During the reading, teachers should develop pupils' awareness to distinguish between picture and print;

vii. *Integrated, content-focused activities*. Teachers are required to involve learners in investigating topics that are interesting and which are of their interests.

In this regard, Snow *et al.* (1998) show that children who come from homes, where parents model the uses of literacy and engage children in activities that promote basic understandings about literacy and its uses, are better prepared for school. Moreover, it is not the frequency of the book reading or even the quality of the talk that accompanies book reading alone that is related to children's language and literacy abilities but also the broader pattern of parent-child activities and interactions that support children's language and literacy development (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). This would, indeed, define the socio-cultural practices and the practical demands of the media and digital literacy competencies in a given community.

Language and literacy interventions: studies in Africa

Studies conducted in Africa have shown that language and literacy are always embedded in some socio-cultural set of activities. These activities, and not the literacy itself, provide the material for the analysis of literacy practices (Achen & Openjuru, 2012; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Kell, 2008; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). What is often treated as a problem associated with the abilities or language resources on the part of underclass or minority children and adults is primarily lack of familiarity with particular ways of undertaking literacy (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). Pahl and Rowsell (*ibid.*) assert that if teachers and testers make deficit assumptions about what children have and what they bring to school or what adults bring to their learning activities, then they fail to identify what language and literacy resources children or adults would have and how they might be engaged with for building upon them.

Although classrooms in Africa commonly maintain clear boundaries between the languages and learning of school and the out-of-school languages and literacy practices of bilingual or multilingual youths as described by Martin- Jones (2007,p. 167), researchers such as Garcia (2009) have called for 'translanguaging' and situated literacies in the classroom, arguing that all the language and literacy pedagogical approaches should be contextualised and should start with the language and literacy resources that children bring to school. This, however, can apply to typical and

highly embedded multi-lingual communities such as South Africa where choosing one dominant local language in early grades would be difficult (Makalela, 2013).

Moreover, a study by Trudell (2012) on "early grade literacy in African schools and Lessons learned" shows that Literacy in the early primary grades is receiving a great deal of attention among national and international education organisations in Africa. A study done by Uwezo (2011) in Eastern Africa using the early grade reading assessment (EGRA) tool established that they are raising serious questions about the effectiveness of literacy provision in the formal education system. Children's scores in reading are proving to be lower than expected; the Uwezo Kenya report (2011) notes that only 28 percent of children in Standard III can read a Standard II level story (cf. Mugo *et al.*, 2011, p. 2). Also, an EGRA study of Malian pupils found that at the end of Grade II, between 10 percent and 33 percent of the pupils were not able to indicate the beginning and the end of a written sentence or the right direction of reading (Varly, 2011, p. 14). In this regard, a study by Trudell (*ibid.*) yielded some important lessons pertinent to Africa, which can help to inform policy-makers on best practices in primary education learning in Tanzania, in particular. Consider the following six lessons as extracted from the study:

Lesson one: policy implementation

Both formal research and informal observations indicate that, in some countries of Africa, national policy regarding language of instruction is not being followed. In Kenya, for example, the national policy calls for the mother tongue or 'language of the catchment area' to be used as the medium of instruction through Grade 3.However, it is reported that the language used between 70 percent and 80 percent of the classroom time in Grades 1–3 is English – not [Ki]Swahili and not the mother tongue of the students. This is true even in rural environments, where fluency in English was extremely low among the students (Piper, 2010). The results of this resistance to national policy are disturbing; the average reading comprehension scores for Grade 3 children in these classrooms were between 4.4 per cent and 14.9 per cent.

Lesson two: medium of instruction

Research has shown that when children learn in the language theyspeak, their learning is greatly enhanced. Longitudinal study of a mother tongue-basedbilingual education programme in the Kom language community of Cameroonindicates that, when Grade 1 Kom children in the region are tested in languagearts and mathematics, the scores of children in

the Kom-medium classrooms aremuch higher than those of children taught in English-medium classrooms (cf. Walter & Trammell, 2010). Even in testing of oral English, Kom-medium children score higherthan those taught in English.

Lesson three: teachers and reading

Research across Africa indicates that teachers' pre-service training does notgenerally prepare them to teach reading and writing for meaning. A study ofteacher preparation in the countries of Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania andKenya (Akyeampong et al., *2011) indicates that very little teacher training is focusedspecifically on learning how to teach reading and writing. Reading is meant to becovered in the language classes, but actual reading and writing skills are not beingtaught. The study found that this situation is so common; that new teachersbelieve that teaching children to read with understanding is not even relevant forearly primary grades. And since teacher trainers are often secondary teachersthemselves, they may not know how to teach reading to the trainees. As a result, many children in lower primary grades progress to higher primary gradeswithout the ability to read fluently and with meaning.*

Lesson four: early grade learning

The poor learning that results from the mismatch between the language ofinstruction and the language the child speaks is the most prominent in the earlygrades; this is seen particularly strongly in data from longitudinal studies. The childhas had little chance to learn the language of instruction by then, and this significantlack of fluency in the language of instruction is very visible. Studies also show that, where learning in the early grades is poor, the student does not catch up in later grades; rather, the child falls furtherand further behind as he or she passes from grade to grade (Stanovich, 1986).

Lesson five: expectations of school

The realities of primary school in many African contexts have led to expectationsamong some African teachers that do not match the expectations of global education thinkers where early grade learning is concerned. One of these expectations concerns the point in the child's education at which a child should be able to read and write. Agencies that reflect Northern understandings of reading and learning expect that children should be able to read with a fair degree of fluency by the end of Grade 2 (for example, the USAID standard outcome indicator for reading, USAID 2012,p.9). However, interviews of African teachers reveal the assumption that the child should not be expected to be able to read until Grade 4 or 5 (Akyempong, 2011).

Lesson six: reading skills

As noted above, early grade literacy assessments being carried out in Africa areproviding evidence that reading skills are not being learned as expected in the early primary grades. It is also not clear whether teachers' understanding of the component skills of reading and writing are even adequate to the task. Reading skills experts agree that successful reading includes both decoding and comprehension components. Focusing on only pronunciation or sound-symbol correspondence without a commensurate emphasis on meaningful reading does not produce good readers. However, it is not uncommon to find 'reading' defined in the classroom in terms of oral production only, with comprehension not considered tubenecessary. A mismatch between the language of instruction and the language spoken by the learners is often to blame. When 'reading' takes place in a language that the learner does not understand, comprehension is definitely not a part of the process. A comparative study of reading fluency and comprehension among children in Kenya, the UK and the Netherlands, found that minority language speaking Kenyan children score as highly as their Dutch counterparts do on reading tests – when they learn and are examined in their own languages.

These six lessons drawn from different African countries can inform language policy-makers in the education sector for them to improve the situation by allowing learners, especially in early childhood education, to learn or acquire literacy competence in their first or mother-tongue. This is because, theory and practice prove that strong literacy foundation in one's first or mother-tongue promotes not only the learning of other subjects better but also learning of the subsequent languages. In the field of language teaching and learning, L1 and L2 are interdependent in any case and the acquisition of an L2 depends on a good foundation built in the L1 through *Common Underlying Proficiency* (CUP). Cummins (1981) provides the interdependent principle, which states:

> To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to Ly (p.29).

Since Tanzania is a multilingual country, choosing the agreed upon dominant ECL in a given community and using it in early childhood education, at least, up to Standard II in rural areas could be relevant. Thus, through CUP, the literacy foundation in Kiswahili among primary school learners could be established (cf. FinScope, 2017, p. 23).

Language teaching and literacy development

African countries such as Tanzania need to determine the best way to teach language and literacy especially for primary education where a strong foundation is essential. Whether a curriculum may be home-grown or commercially prepared those who develop and use language and literacy curriculum are expected to support their claims in the curriculum content with research-based evidence. Strickland and Riley-Ayers propose the key components of a literacy curriculum grounded in evidence baseto include:

- Oral language development, which includes vocabulary and listening;
- An understanding of the alphabetic code, which includes phonological/phonemic awareness and knowledge of the alphabet; and,
- Knowledge and understanding about print and its use in one's first language(Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006).

In this way, the pedagogical link between L1 and L2 and/or home-school (parental involvement) should be sought for better teaching and learning of literacy to materialise. Some of the teaching approaches/techniques that ought to be used include:

- Phonics—letter/alphabet-sound pattern (*Sound linkage*)
- Direct method (*teaching in target language*)
- Total physical response (*Object linkage*); and
- Communicative language teaching in the pattern of *oral-aural, reading, writing,*as have been found effective in the teaching of language and literacy in early childhood education (cf. Caroll *et al.*, 2011).

Generally, learning to read depends upon two basic foundation skills: knowing the **sounds of letters**; and **phoneme awareness**—the ability to work with the sounds in words. Having these skills gives a child 'self-teaching' strategy—a way to work out *unknown words* on their own, without always having to rely on a teacher or parent (Caroll *et al.*, 2011, p. 59). The sounding out process can be an important memory tool—each time a word is sounded out successfully, the link between the sounds and letters is strengthened and the child gets closer to knowing that word 'by sight' (*ibid.*, 2011, p. 59). Indeed, *Sound linkage* is the reading intervention programme aimed at struggling readers aged 6 - 10 years. This programme, in turn, builds on ideas of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) that include structured phonics work. A meta-

analysis of reading research carried out in the US on topics to make some general conclusions on what works well recommended the use of the following in early grades classroom techniques:

- *Phonics* programmes that focus on a few key phonological skills (normally segmenting and blending sounds) rather than a wide mixture of skills (such as finding rhyming words, matching sounds across words, or swapping sounds in different words);
- Programmes that include small group work rather than whole class or individual programmes;
- Programmes that work with younger readers (those considered to be 'at-risk') rather than those implemented after children had failed; and,
- Relatively short-term interventions with a focus on ***phonics***, with a total intervention time of between 5 and 18 hours (Caroll *et al.*, 2011, p. 62).

It was, thus, established that the reading with phonology intervention has four key activities: *letter learning; phoneme awareness* (segmenting and blending); book reading; and, **sight word**[3] learning (*ibid.*, p. 62).

The intervention established that, in addition to their expected difficulties with *phoneme awareness* and *letter knowledge*, a group of 'treatment non-responders' also showed weaknesses in *oral language* (e.g., *vocabulary, and grammar*) (Caroll *et al.*, 2011, pp. 85-6). Studies on student achievement reveal that researchers have identified quite a number of factors associated with learning outcomes. According to Bryrnes and Wasik (2009, p. 278), these factors include family variables (e.g., parent income, parenting style, parent involvement); student characteristics (e.g., motivation, intelligence, gender, ethnicity); and school variables (e.g., curriculum, instructional practices). Researchers also found that pupils demonstrate higher levels of achievement if:

- Their parents are highly educated;
- The pupils are highly motivated to learn course material; and
- Teachers cover the material found on achievement tests(*ibid.*, p. 278).

[3]**Sight word**: Printed words that can be read automatically without the need to 'decode'.

Despite several differences in approaches, an integrative accounts of these factors had indicated a common denominator-- the claim that pupils are likely to attain high levels of achievement in a particular domain (e.g., reading) when two necessary conditions are met:

i. They are regularly exposed to genuine opportunities to enhance their skills in that domain (*the exposure condition);* and
ii. They have the propensity to take advantage of these opportunities (the *propensity condition*).

Contemporary accounts suggest that there are two component aspects of the propensity (inclination) to take advantage of learning opportunities: A motivational component and an ability component (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Motivation is a theoretical construct that is used to explain the initiation, direction, and intensity of an individual's behaviour in a particular situation (Stipek, 1993; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Bryrnes and Wasik (2009, p. 278) observe that notion of "motivation" is useful for answering key five questions:

i. Why do pupils pick books up and read?
ii. Why do pupils choose to read a book in a particular way (e.g., *scan it*) instead of reading it in another way (e.g., *read it more deeply)?*
iii. Why do pupils prefer to read certain authors and genres over others?
iv. Why do pupils differ in the amount of independent reading they do per day (e.g., 10 min vs. 1 hr)?
v. Why do certain pupils expend a great deal of effort and persist when they read a difficult passage, while others expend very little effort and give up easily?

In an attempt to answer these questions, motivation theorists have identified a large number of constructs. However, instead of examining these constructs one by one, they examine them in three groups, mainly in terms of goal-related constructs; knowledge-related constructs; and, metacognitive constructs (Bryrnes & Wasik, 2009, p. 280). After all, literacy development starts early in life and is highly correlated with school achievement. All of the domains of a child's development—physical, social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy—are interrelated and interdependent (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006).Along these lines, Strickland and Riley-Ayers, (*ibid.*) termed the following as the *Literacy key predictors* of reading and school success: *Oral language, Alphabetic Code,* and *print knowledge*. In this regard,

- The more limited a child's experiences with language and literacy, the more likely he or she will have difficulty learning to read;
- Highly capable teachers are required to implement today's more challenging early literacy curriculum.
- Teacher knowledge, respect and support for the diversity of children's families, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds are important in early literacy development.

Nevertheless, all these strategies largely seem to promote a literacy traditional notion—ability to read and write. They do not show how digital and media literacy could be integrated in literacy learning. In view of these traditions, the present paper has been written to inform policy-makers and curriculum developers oncoming up with an innovative curriculum that address effectively the current demand of 'multi-literacy' competences required for the primary school leavers in Tanzania.

Tanzania Primary Education Case

Although primary education curriculum (MoEVT, 2013a) on language learning targets communicative competence as one of the expected learning outcomes of the learner at primary education, a review of a 'Curriculum for certificate in teacher education' in its six trainee's expected competences (MoEVT, 2013b, p. 7) suggests that teachers for primary education are currently not prepared to specialise in language subjects at Grade "A" Certificate course. Interestingly, primary education curriculum demands teachers at this level to strive towards achieving specialised language competences among learners, as it states:

> Kuhusu lugha, eneo hili linahusisha masomo ya Kiswahili, English na French. Umuhimu wa lugha ni kuwaandaa walengwa wawe na ujuzi wa kusikiliza, kusoma, kuzungumza na kuandika kwa ufasaha pamoja na kuelewa na kujieleza kwa kutumia lugha inayojumuisha alama na maneno. Pia kuwezesha walengwa kuwasiliana katika shughuli za kila siku katika muktadha na mazingira mbalimbali (MoEVT, 2013a, p. 7).

This, in the English version, translates:

> On languages, this area involves language subjects such as Kiswahili, English and French. The language role here is to prepare learners to acquire skills and develop the aptitude to listen, read, speak and write proficiently in the language with the ability to understand and be able to express themselves using language in words and gestures. It also targets to

> enable learners to communicate using the language in their daily routines in relation to context and various environments (MoEVT, 2013a, p. 7).

In other words, the primary education curriculum directs language teachers to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in actual classroom situations to achieve communicative language competences and effective literacy command among learners. Although Tanzania uses its national language, Kiswahili, as language of instruction in primary education (URT, 1995; 2014), children in public primary schools reportedlyfinish the primary school cycle with little or no literacy competence in Kiswahili, the second language for majority Tanzanians (Masato, 2004). According to a study by Anney, Mmasa and Ndunguru (2016, p. 152), there are serious problems of literacy teaching in public primary schools where many teachers do not have adequate skills of teaching it. About 64 percent of Standard I pupils could not read, write or do simple numeracy whereas for Standard III about 54 percent could not do that. In addition, other contributory factors to such illiteracy include pupils' late enrolment in Standard I, shortages of teaching and learning resources, and parents' low or non-existent level of formal education, inadequate literacy teachers and teachers with effective literacy teaching skills.

Uwezo, a non-profit organisation using a citizen movement based-approach to assessing literacy and numeracy levels, in its three consecutive reports (Uwezo, 2011; 2012; 2014) indicates that in Tanzania, primary school pupils are not learning literacy as much as expected since they leave Standard VII without having acquired the ability to read or write basic story even in Kiswahili. In its report, Uwezo (2014 as cited in Hakielimu, 2015, p. 11) based on the country survey found that less than half the children in Standard III could read a simple Kiswahili text. The problems in English were even more glaring than those in Kiswahili as only 1 in 5 children was able to read a simple text in English. The reports further show that literacy competencies in lower grades seem to be increasingly dropping, thus an urgent need for intervention.

According UNESCO (2007 cited in Bhalalusesa, 2008), Tanzania was one of the countries at serious risk on literacy in Africa. The report further indicates that the statistical trend of illiteracy from independence in 1961 (then known as Tanganyika before its union with Zanzibar to forge Tanzania in 1964) to 2007 was: 1961 (85%), 1975 (37%), 1977 (27%), 1981 (20%), 1983 (15%), 1986 (10%), 1992 (15%), 2000 (32%), and by 2008 the literacy rate was estimated to be 69.4 percent. UNESCO also noted with concern that the literacy rate, which reached almost 90 percent in 1986, had

dropped to 85 percent in 1992 and dropping was expected to continue at the rate of two percent annually (URT, 2000 EFA Assessment).

Indeed, literacy competence in Kiswahili among Tanzania's primary school leavers remains generally unsatisfactory as the current report by FinScope (2017, p. 23) reveals that 72 percent of all Tanzanians can read and write in Kiswahili; three percent can only read, whereas 25 percent can neither read nor write in Kiswahili. This reality suggests that, although new multi-literacy competences in the contemporary world are emerging, Tanzania still faces challenges in improving the teaching and learning of the traditional literacy skills—reading and writing at the primary education level, leaving the development of digital and media literacy competencies a far-fetched dream (MoEVT, 2013a).

Moreover, reporting on literacy learning in Africa, Ouane and Glanz (2011) contend that the current language policies implemented in many African countries' education sector undermine the use of national or ethnic community languages for the development of education and societal literacy. Indeed, the policies under implementation fail to allow citizens to be active participants in initiating and sustaining development. As a result, they largely fail to fulfil their civic duties and responsibilities within the community. In this context, the language policies, which are promoted in Africa, Tanzania included, negatively affect the promotion of democracy, effective information access and utilisation, literacy learning in early childhood education and the decentralisation of governmental institutions (Ouane & Glanz, *ibid.*, p. 243).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that there are key issues in language, literacy teaching and learning in Tanzania's primary education that have yet to be addressed in earnest in both policy and curriculum content. The evidence from the relevant literature reviewed has shown that primary education in Tanzania is still struggling to achieve traditional literacy competences among school leavers, hence leaving digital and media literacy competencies a far-fetchedreality. Thus, based on practical and theoretical evidence, the paper has argued that Tanzania needs to strive towards a literacy teaching and learning system that includes media and digital literacy competencies in Tanzania's primary education curriculum as new multi-literacy competencies are rapidly emerging. It also recommends for the formulation of a

language policy that would flexibly allow the use of ECLs in the catchment area, at least, up to Standard II in rural areas as Tanzania is a multilingual society.

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