

Language Curriculum Design in Tanzania Primary Education: Emerging Issues

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Abstract

This paper presents contemporary issues worth-considering in the primary education language curriculum design decisions in Tanzania. The paper argues that although language syllabuses have been changed to respond to the skills/competence-based teaching and learning approach, in the effort to implement curriculum reforms conducted in 2005 and new Education and Training Policy (ETP)(URT,2014), yet there are some other language related skills that need to be accommodated in the primary education language curriculum. Using literature evidence, the paper argues that, ICT/Multi-literacies, media literacy, tourism language, trade and commerce language rhetoric, and job market language skills are not adequately represented in the language curriculum currently in use in Tanzania primary education. If at all we are moved by social efficiency and learner-centred ideologies in curriculum design and development, we need to consider skills that a school leaver will be able to do to overcome challenges of the contemporary world of work. For that reason, language curriculum developers need to consider these skills and make them part of the curriculum.

Key words: Language curriculum, primary education, language and literacy, contemporary issues

1. Introduction

Curriculum is an official document that is usually used to guide teachers and other education stakeholders on the content to be taught to our children; methodology and learning assessment strategies. According to Nation & Macalister (2010, p.1) ‘Curriculum design’ can be seen as a kind of writing activity and, as such, it can usefully be studied as a process which involves typical sub-processes of the writing process such as: *gathering ideas, ordering ideas, ideas to text, reviewing, and editing*. Nation & Macalister, further explain that this process considers three important factors: *environmental analysis; needs analysis; and, application of principles*. In fact, the needs of the language learner are discovered by use of variety of means such as, testing, questioning and interviewing; recalling previous performance; consulting employers, teachers and others involved; by collecting data from sources such as textbooks and manuals that the learners will have to read and analysing them; by investigating the situations where the learners will need to use the language (Nation & Macalister, *ibid.*).

Hutchinson & Waters (1987 as cited in Nation & Macalister, p.24) divide these needs into **target needs** (i.e., *what the learner needs to do in the target situation*) and **learning needs** (i.e., *what the learner needs to do in order to learn*). In this way, they show that the analysis of **target needs** can be sub-divided into three: *necessities, lacks and wants*. According to Schiro (2013, p. 1), curriculum design and process, depending on different purposes, can be influenced by two or all of the following ideologies, namely: *scholar academics*, i.e., transmitting traditional knowledge from one generation to another; *social efficiency*-building capacity of the school leaver to be able to overcome the emerging socio-economic challenges; *learner-centred*-appreciating talents, interests and needs of each learner in their natural environment and nurture them; and *social reconstruction* (i.e., *overcoming social inequalities*) ideologies. Tanzania primary education curriculum on language is implemented based on the changes made in the major curriculum reform that was conducted in 2005 that essentially introduced competence-based curriculum (CBC) mainly in response to education for all (EFA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) influences (see Nzima, 2016, 21). This heavily influenced the changes on subject syllabuses in 2010 including that of language, where teachers were required to abandon *traditional pedagogy* that based on transmitting *content* (teacher-centred) to *transmitting skills and competences* to learners by use of student-centred pedagogy. Thus, the curriculum currently in use seems to have been influenced mainly by three ideologies: i.e., *learner-centred*, *social efficiency* and *scholar academics* (cf. Schiro, 2013).

In that context, language curriculum needs to be designed in such a way that it enables a language learner acquire skills that are not only relevant but also on demand for survival and leisure in a given community. In Tanzania primary education, three languages: Kiswahili, English and French are taught as stipulated in the curriculum (MoEVT, 2013, p. 7). However, it is reported that many primary school children complete primary education without ability to read and write a simple text story written not only in English the foreign language but also in Kiswahili (Uwezo, 2011; 2012; 2015) which is mainly used as second language to majority Tanzanians (Masato, 2004; Brock-Utne, 2005). This paper attempts to assess the extent to which the language curriculum currently in use has accommodated the emerging language issues that are worth-considering for the survival of the primary school leaver not only in the modern world of science and technology but also in the later stages of schooling.

2. Background Literature

Although curriculum has been reformed several times since independence, yet the teaching and learning of language and Literacy in Tanzania has remained a matter of major concerns as reports have shown that many children at primary education are not learning much as they are expected, and the majority of them leave primary education without ability to read and write even in Kiswahili, the basic literacy skills that would be expected of them upon leaving primary education (Bhalalusesa, 2008; UWEZO, 2011; 2012; 2015; and Hakielimu, 2015). Unfortunately, while the basic literacy skills are not achieved, nowadays, the term “Literacy” in language learning is no longer a simple mastery of decoding skills, but a construct with broader meanings and wide ranging technological, cultural and social implications (Mills, 2010). New understandings of literacy, termed “multiliteracies” now incorporate any sign-making practices that use various technologies and account for cultural and societal influences (Burke, 2016, p.1). Indeed, the term ‘functional literacy’ seems to be an attempt to link literacy to purpose, and thus to some kind of levels of relevance and usefulness. Lawton & 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 not only takes place in 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 at a number of other sites and settings (Prinsloo, 2014,p.66). Prinsloo, 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 nature of the language and literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially the new learners and their position in relations of power (Cook-Gumperz, 2006).

According to 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 as 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 (p.17).

In addition, Buckingham (2008, p.277) asserts that ‘the 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.’

Becta (2010) summarises digital literacy as: ‘the combination of skills, knowledge and understanding that young people need to learn in order to participate fully and safely in an unceasingly digital world.’ They describe ‘digital literacy’ as a combination of: functional technology skills; critical thinking; collaborative skills; and, social awareness. The term ‘digital literacy’ relates to: the functional skills of knowing about and using digital technology effectively; the ability 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.

It is also reported by Cox (1991) 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 opportunity to access everyday information and communicate the mind in the meaningful way. It is also through language and literacy competences that learners develop creativity, arts and designs; and, literary works. However, in most African countries where teaching and learning is done in foreign languages,

linking home and school and applying digital literacy pedagogy in primary education have been challenging. As a result, children graduating from public primary schools have been at risk of missing both education socio-cultural connection and the competences related to effective use of modern technology.

3. Studies and language emerging issues

This section presents issues that language curriculum for Tanzania primary education ought to consider as they are part and parcel of the world today. Every primary school leaver needs not only to be competent in the language skills but also largely in each of the following:

3.1 ICT/Multi-literacies

As note earlier, new understanding of literacy, termed “multiliteracies” now incorporate any sign-making practices that use various technologies and also account for cultural and societal influences (Burke, 2016, p.1). Again, while in many communities pupils may wish to use multiliteracies outside of the classroom, 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. This for Tanzania corroborates a study by Anney, Mmasa & Ndunguru (2016, p.152), who found that there are serious problems of literacy teaching in public primary schools where many teachers do not have adequate skills of teaching it; and, about 64% of Standard II pupils cannot read, write and do simple arithmetic, while for Standard III about 54% could not do that. This suggests that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and multi-literacy skills are not only part of primary school language curriculum but also teachers lack adequate training in these areas. ICT skills need to be part of language curriculum to promote application of the modern technology linked with the languages that are taught. The curriculum in use, instead of linking ICT with language in primary education, it has combined ICT/TEHAMA with science subject (MoEVT, 2013, p.7). It should be noted that the latter cannot be understood fully if a learner has no adequate command in the language used.

3.2 Media industry/literacy

Media literacy is defined by *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language, 2006*, as “an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques; and the ability to understand and use the mass media in an

active, critical way” (p. 156). Curriculum should show the need for the link between language learning in primary schools and the role of the media such as access to information from newspapers, magazines, posters, billboards, banners, national and local radio and TV station; and from computer softcopies and internet sources. In this regard, Ontario Ministry of education (2008, p.7) reports that today pupils have grown up in the information age where Television, movies, the Internet, magazines, newspapers, books, radio, computer games, billboards, signs, and videos are all very much part of their world. Because pupils or rather students obtain a significant amount of their knowledge of the world from the media around them, they must learn how to interpret the messages that inform, entertain, or seek to persuade them. Their curriculum should thus, indicate how these elements will be learned to enable them cope with veritable communication explosions.

3.3 Language for employment

In Today’s world where knowledge economy drives the market and job opportunities, language job related skills must be embedded in the language curriculum because language is the sole medium used to express one’s mind, skills and the hidden talents. In Tanzania, for instance, there is an increasing trend especially in the private sectors where language proficiency is taken as a factor for securing a job opportunity. Although primary education curriculum stresses on teachers to strive to impart communicative language competences among learners as shown in the extract below, yet many primary school leaver do not demonstrate these abilities even in Kiswahili (UWEZO, 2015). The primary education curriculum states that:

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, 2013, uk.7).

Translation

On languages, this area involves language subjects such as Kiswahili, English and French. The importance of language here is to prepare learners to acquire skills and develop abilities in listening, reading, speaking and writing proficiently in the language and strengthening 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, 2013, p.7). [*Translation is mine*]

In the UK, a study conducted by Dustmann & Fabbri (2003) on the determinants of language proficiency and the effect of language on earnings and employment probabilities of non-white immigrants, showed that:

language acquisition, employment probabilities, as well as earnings differ widely across non-white immigrants, according to their ethnic origin. Language proficiency has a positive effect on employment probabilities, and lack of English fluency leads to earning losses.

This is also true in Tanzania where despite that we have Kiswahili that is, at least, spoken as second language by the majority Tanzanians, interviews to recruit potential employees in public and private sectors are still conducted in English, *the foreign language*. Employers and, of course, even parents have come to believe that knowledge is correct and effective when is expressed in the English language. Therefore, if this is the case, the primary education curriculum should not just indicate the language related job market demands, but also teachers should be trained adequately to respond to that need.

3.4 Trade and commerce

Both local and international trade and commerce currently require a person to master, at least, one language that is spoken across national borders. The spread of English in 19th century through colonialism, religion, trade and commerce in Africa and other continents has increased its demand and some others have termed this language international language. Since, this claim is not easily refuted; primary school curriculum should seriously address this aspect and enable a school leaver at this level use both Kiswahili and English languages competently and confidently as these languages are official languages in the business. Fidrmuc & Fidrmuc (2009, p.1) observe that languages facilitate communication and ease transactions. They further argue that:

Two individuals who speak the same language can communicate and trade with each other directly whereas those without a sufficient knowledge of a common language must often rely on an intermediary or hire an interpreter. The additional complexity inherent in such a mediated relationship, the potential for costly errors and their increased cost may be large enough to prevent otherwise mutually beneficial transactions from occurring. Consequently, ability to speak foreign languages should have a positive economic payoff embodied in better employment opportunities and higher wages.

The present paper, thus, argues for inclusion of trade and commerce language in the primary education language curriculum to help school leavers develop abilities in the use of foreign languages taught for business purpose with foreigners within the country and abroad.

3.5 Language of tourism & leisure

National parks and other natural attractions are key source of national economy and employment. However, language curriculum in primary education seems not to make this part of the language curriculum. As a result, primary school leavers are not able to take charge of the available opportunities in their own country. Although there are tourism and hotel management colleges that offer related trainings, yet these orientations need to be taught right in primary education with well designed language curriculum. MacCannel (as cited in Dann, 1996, p. 14) further states that the language of tourism enhances the impression of authenticity through abundant explicit expressions:

this is a typical native house; this is the very place the leader fell; this is the actual pen used to sign the law; this is the original manuscript; this is the authentic Tlingit fish club; this is a real piece of the true Crown of Thorn.

In fact, growing global connections, networks and the marketisation of public discourse and the impact of the media, the Internet in particular, has resulted into the firmer grounding of tourism as discourse and part of human leisure. This tendency is well explained by Dann (1996, p. 2), who asserts:

....tourism, in the act of promotion, as well as in the accounts of its practitioners and clients, has a discourse of its own. Seen in this light, the language of tourism is thus a great deal more than a metaphor. Via static and moving pictures, written texts and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings and, in doing so, convert them from potential into actual clients.

Language curriculum in Tanzania should, thus, state and make the language of tourism part of it to enable primary school leavers, at least, employable or seek their own employments with these skills.

4. Conclusion

The paper has argued that although curriculum was changed in response to competence-based learning outcomes as influenced by learner-centred, social efficiency and partly scholar academics, yet some other language related skills such as ICT/Multi-literacies, job market language skills, language of tourism and language of the media industries and that of trade and commerce are missing in the primary school language curriculum. Thus, lack of these skills suggests reforms of the same.

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