Imagined Futures and New Technology: Youths' Language Attitudes in Songea, Tanzania

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Abstract

Building on investment theory, this study analyses the language attitudes of secondary school students in Songea, Tanzania, with a focus on identity and access to digital technology. The study involved 467 secondary school students aged 14–21 years. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Less than half of the students had access to digital technology. Most of them lacked the required linguistic resources. English, a challenge to most students, and, to some extent, even Swahili, are seen as tools for future possibilities and success. Students invest in learning English and want to go abroad. Lack of resources notwithstanding, students' decisions to invest in learning a particular language is mostly influenced by imagined possibilities. Structural inequalities and socioeconomic differences impact both language skills and the use of digital tools. Consequently, digital resources using mainly English and difficult Swahili terminology become an exclusion mechanism for many Tanzanian secondary school students.

Keywords: imagined futures; investment theory; youth identity; language attitudes; digital technology; Songea; Tanzania