Promoting Multilingualism in Tanzanian Education Policy: Challenges and Options

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Abstract
This paper presents a discussion that explains how the Tanzanian language in education policy could promote multilingualism in education, its challenges and options available. Using literature evidence, as part of its methodology, the paper argues that many Africans including Tanzanians are naturally multilingual. In Tanzania, for example, due to intermarriages a child may find him/herself acquiring two or three languages simultaneously. The discussion also shows that language in education policy in Tanzania does not implement a language policy that promotes multilingual education, instead, it has continued to implement language policy that perpetuates Eurocentric view of bilingualism for which, of the two languages claimed to be used in education, one is by necessity of European nation (English), the language that is foreign and unfamiliar to both teachers and students. The study also reveals that although, Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs) are the means of interaction in rural communities and mother tongues of the majority children in rural, yet these ECLs have no room in the language policy in force. The paper has also shown that, a child learns better when he/she learns in the mother tongue or the language he/she knows better. This, in principle, supports child's acquisition of literacy foundation in the learning of any additional language. The paper has also noted that there are challenges of promoting multilingual education model in Tanzania. Some of these challenges are due to the continued domination of economic power by the ex-colonial masters; others are due to lack of political will. A few others are attitudinal. On the language attitude, both academics and politicians are divided. Since benefits of multilingual education are massive, in this paper, a multilingual model for Tanzania is proposed. Thus, the government should seek to understand the logic behind multilingual education to better address problems associated with literacy learning in early childhood education.
Keywords: Multilingualism, Ethnic Community Languages, Language Policy**,** Education Policy

1. Introduction

Tanzania is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, home to approximately 150 languages (Tibategeza, 2010), including Kiswahili, the language that is used as the first official and national language; language of wider inter-ethnic communication, and the medium of instruction in Tanzania primary education. English, on the other hand, is the second official language in the government official business transactions; taught at school as compulsory academic subject from standard III to form IV, and used a medium of instruction from secondary education to higher learning institutions (MoEC, 1995; MoEVT, 2014). However, this policy model does not allow the use of Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs) in education. Thus, this policy status quo brings in one pertinent question: *Does the language policy in force promote multilingual education in Tanzania?* Indeed, it is clearly that what is happening on language and education policy in Tanzania is not even additive bilingual education because the ECLs which are mother tongues of the majority Tanzanians especially in rural are strictly not used (removed) at school, instead children in rural areas are forced to learn in the second

language Kiswahili in their early years of primary education (cf. Masato, 2004). This practice, in turn, affects literacy acquisition and foundation as theories and practice show that children learn the literacy better when they get it first in their mother tongues (Cummins, 1981). The model seems to largely represent a subtractive bilingual model because the objective of the subtractive model is to move learners out of the *mother tongue* into the official/foreign language as a medium of instruction as early as possible; and sometimes this involves going straight to the *official/foreign language medium of instruction* in the first year of school (Ouane & Glanz, 2011, p. 11).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) defines the term *bilingual education* as relating only when the language of instruction, which requires that, at least, two languages should be used as means of instruction in subjects other than the languages themselves. This term was, however, not intended to be applied to the educational goal of the African context, but for western countries. As Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir (2004) noted that if these two languages referred to in *bilingual education* were African languages like *Kiswahili* and *Kiha,* it could not be referred to as *bilingual education model*. The term is applicable only when one of the languages is *a European language* (*an ex-colonial language*). Brock-Utne (2009, p. 19) further explains that even if an African child were to be trained in school, in two African languages, s/he would not be called a *bilingual*. It is due to this ill-thought European motive on African education that Brock-Utne argues that it is in this situation that greatly contributes to the *stupidification* of the African Children by learning through the language they do not understand (cf. Brock-Utne, 2007).

Multilingualism is an intellectual skill, acquired and sustained at an expense through formal education (Matras, 2008, p. 70). In this sense, it is an asset to the individual and so potentially to the society that is served by this particular individual. Brock-Utne (2009, p. 23) views Multilingualism as a situation whereby people in their local communities are able to acquire, learn and use many languages (at least three, either simultaneously or sequentially), consciously or unconsciously. Brock-Utne argues that people in many African societies are already multilingual. She uses an example from a Tanzanian who lived in Kigoma region, Kasulu district whose father was Vinza speaking kiVinza; his mother was Ha speaking kiHa. Brock-Utne reports that this person grew up with these languages and so became proficient in both as they were his *home-languages*. Interestingly, when this person went out to play with his age-mates Kiswahili was a widely spoken language for communication and interaction. However, although Kiswahili was rarely spoken by his parents at home, it was available in place making this person develop proficiency in three languages simultaneously. This situation is very common in many communities of a Tanzanian society due to people's mobility and inter-marriages. It is because of this linguistic situation in Tanzania, and of course, in many other African societies that the terms such as *mother tongues*, *first language,* and *second language*, sometimes do not fit the African context Kimizi (2009 as cited in Brock-Utne, 2009, p. 24). Indeed, for very many reasons, Kiswahili in Tanzania is a second language as is often learned after gaining some experience in one or two other African languages; sometimes Kiswahili is learned simultaneously with other African languages. Considering this situation, it would be correct to say that English for Tanzanian students is not a *second language,* but a foreign language as they have very little expose to it outside classroom.

Thomas (2007, p. 82) defines Language policy as the explicit and implicit statements implemented in an attempt to change the language behaviour of individuals within a

society. To him, Language policy may support or discourage the use of languages or varieties of languages within a society. Connecting this with 'Language planning', Tollefson (1991, p. 16), refers *'Language planning'* to as all conscious efforts that affect the structure or function of language varieties. Language planning usually involves three stages, namely: *status, corpus* and *acquisition* planning (Wright, 2004, p. 43). According to Skutnabb-Kangas (as cited in Annamalai, 2003, p. 119), *language policy* of the government may broadly be classified into three kinds, in terms of the goals of the policy-*implicitly* or *explicitly.* These are: first, policy elimination of multilingualism. This is achieved primarily by prohibiting and penalising the use of minority languages even in private domains. Second is tolerance of multilingualism. This is being indifferent to minority languages and their exclusion in the policy formulation about use in public domains. Third is maintenance of multilingualism. This is to allow non-governmental efforts and funds for the use of minority languages in public domains like education and disallowing discrimination by language. Indeed, in Tanzania, *language policy* seems to be in line with an *implicit policy of tolerance of multilingualism* because individuals can use ECLs in private domains, yet the government does not bother about it though it is not stated in the policy. The Tanzania policy promotes Kiswahili and English in the public domains at the same time it does not take any measure to ban the use of ECLs in private domains such as home usage, etc. Thus, the *language policy* is generally viewed as a powerful planning on language use by the governments.

In Tanzania, regarding the language policy in force, minority languages are all ECLs except Kiswahili which is said to be spoken as mother tongue by approximately 10% of the Tanzania population (Rubagumya, 1990) and, used as *second language* (L2) by 99% of the Tanzanian population (Masato, 2004; and Brock-Utne, 2005), basically for inter-*ethnic* communication. ECLs are used by majority of Tanzanians as their first languages (L1s) or mother tongues; however, they are strictly not used in school, media or in any other official domains, and do not have any official or formal status in Tanzania (Strom, 200, p. 229). Even the new Education and training policy (ETP) of 2014 continues to disregard the use of ECLs in education, the practice that adversely affects effort geared towards promoting *multilingualism* in Tanzania. The ETP of 2014 in its policy statement No. 3.2.20 has reiterated the government position by stating that:

> Serikali itaendelea na utaratibu wa kuimarisha matumizi ya lugha ya Kiingereza katika kufundishia na kujifunzia, katika ngazi zote za elimu na mafunzo. MoEVT (2014, p. 38)
>
> *Translation*
>
> The government shall continue with its plan to improve the use of English language as medium of teaching and learning, at all levels of education and vocational training [*Translation is mine*]. MoEVT (2014, p.38)

Again, in its statement No. 3.2.19, the ETP states languages that can be used in education as follows:

> Serikali itahakikisha kuwa lugha ya Kiswahili, Kiingereza na nyingine za kigeni zinafundishwa kwa ufasaha naufanisi katika ngazi zote za elimu na mafunzo nchini ili kuleta ufahamu na umahiri kutokana na umuhimu wa lugha hizo katika masuala ya kitaifa, kikanda na kimataifa. (MoEVT, 2014, p. 37)

Translation

> The government shall ensure that Kiswahili, English and other foreign languages shall be taught proficiently and efficiently at all levels of education and training institutions in the country to bring about comprehension and

> competencies to users due to the role these languages play on issues pertaining to national, regional and international levels. [*Translation is mine*] (MoEVT, 2014, p. 37)

It is from this government position on language policy that this paper was written to use literature evidence to show how the Tanzanian language in education policy would promote *multilingual* education. The paper also aimed at presenting and discussing challenges in promoting *multilingualism* and the options available by suggesting the way *multilingual model* in Tanzania can proceed.

2. Language Policy and Practices in Tanzania

The discussion draws from information available in both government and academic documents. Observations made from everyday language use and evidence gathered from literature were used to argue for change of colonial legacy and mindset.

i. Language use in private domains

In Tanzania, although ECLs are not stated in the policy for use and in which domains, in rural areas they are languages for wide communication. In homogeneous speech communities, for example: Sukuma, Maasai, Nyakyusa, Luguru, Haya, and Ha, these languages are widely spoken. Farmers and pastorailsts in rural communities use their ECLs in their respective catchment areas for communication. Kiswahili is a language spoken mainly in urban areas for inter-ethnic communication. It is believed that soon after independence in 1960s, these ECLs or rather negatively tribal languages were implicitly banned or avoided and turned focus on Kiswahili the language that was considered a symbol of national unity. This marked the beginning of the elimination of the efforts towards multilingual education.

ii. Language use in public domains

Emphasis in this sub-section is illuminate on how the policy practices are in: education, the constitution, the national assembly, public administration and judiciary. Generally, in all these domains of use, only Kiswahili and English languages are allowed. It should be understood that these are areas where ECLs could re-gain status, capital and ultimately revitalise. Thus, continuing to exclude ECLs in these key domains clearly implies that not only that Tanzania language policy is not in a better position to promote multilingual education, but also it is not in line with UNESCO (1953) which, for example, emphasises that:

> On educational grounds, we recommend that the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue, because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the break between home and the school as small as possible.
>
> UNESCO (1953, pp. 47–8)

The language policy that maintains multilingualism is that which considers ECLs, at least, in education in its statements (MoEVT, 2014). Unfortunately, the one in force does not state the place of ECLs nor recognize their existence; despite the fact that, in rural areas ECLs are the major means of communication; culturally valued and respected. In fact, old people in many Tanzanian cultures including my own would like to see their grandsons and daughters when they go back home in rural from town to greet and speak to their grandparents in their ECLs to show respect to them because the use of own language culturally stands as a symbol for respect. Otherwise, they would not be accepted.

Furthermore, the URT Constitution of 1977 is silent on the role of these ECLs and there are no mechanisms put in place for their protection, promotion and development. This has continually perpetuated "linguicism", a practice that has exposed ECLs into extinct.

The state; thus, should protect the existence of diversity of languages for the people of Tanzania and promote the development and use of Kiswahili, ECLs, and foreign languages. This would enhance democratic citizenship that respect linguistic human rights and appreciate diversity which is natural and Godly (Skutnabb-kangas, 2000, pp. 214-15).One of the main pillars of language rights is the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that:

> Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration (of human rights) without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, *language*, religion, political or other opinion, national, or social origin, property, birth or other status.
>
> (Gusi, 1998, p. 10)

Tanzania as a signatory to UN articles is both politically and morally obliged to not only observe the articles, but also to enforce them for enhanced democratic citizenship and quality education delivery in early childhood.

Moreover, quality education in its total logic should be availed in the language that learners understand better and its literacy should essentially be taught in childhood education. In line with this, Ouane & Glanz (2011) boldly assert that:

> Quality-oriented education for Africa must involve the development of both functional and academic multilingual literacy. Here, the sound pedagogical principle of proceeding from the known and familiar to the unknown or unfamiliar must apply; in other words, all learning must take place in the local/familiar language (mother tongue/first language), and literacy must also begin in this language. Knowledge and literacy skills can then, in due course, be transferred into other languages such as the foreign/official language (p.76).

3. Research on Language Rights and Education in Tanzania

For more than three decades now, 1980s to present, there have been debates that mainly centred on which language should be used as language of instruction (LOI) in Tanzania education system (cf. Mvungi 1982; Criper & Dodd, 1984; Simmonds *et al*., 1991; Roy-Campbell &Qorro, 1997; Kadeghe, 2000, 2003; Brock-Utne, 2004, 2005, 2007; Galabawa & Lwaitama, 2005; Galabawa & Senkoro, 2006; Qorro, 2005, 2008, 2010; Vuzo, 2010). Although these studies have shed light on how an optimal LOI should be chosen by policy-makers, yet the problem of LOI in Tanzania has remained. Again, these studies seem not to touch directly on issues of language rights violation, language co-existence and multilingualism in education. Only Kiswahili and English are favoured in these studies neglecting the role that other languages like ECLs could play in the social development initiatives.

4. Challenges in Promoting Multilingualism in Tanzania

Many objections to promotion of multilingual education are grounded in the attitude. Many Africans, including Tanzanians down grade their own language when it comes to using it in education. They think that educating in foreign languages like English is superior and soothing connected with employment and money. Obanya (1999) lists eight distinct areas of concern that, in the eyes of decision makers pose major challenges to the promotion of multilingual education model in Africa, including:

(i) the multiplicity of languages;
(ii) the multi-ethnic nature of urban areas;
(iii) the low level of technical development of African languages;
(iv) the official status of indigenous languages;
(v) the hostility of Africans to the study of their own languages;

(vi) the limited personnel and material resources for teaching indigenous languages;
(vii) the assumed high costs of educating in African languages; and,
(viii) even long-term ill-effects on the learner.Obanya (1999 as cited in Ouane & Glanz(2011, p. 78)

Considering the list above, one can say that all the reasons popularly given are mere fallacies, ill-conceived and, above all, do not stand the test of what has been demonstrated by research, practical experience, and day-to-day evidence in education in Africa. Ouane & Glanz (2011, p. 78) explain that most of these ill-conceived reasons can be met by consistent language policy that is research-based and the leaders' political will in favour of multilingualism. In fact, the real obstacles to the promotion of African languages in education in favour of multilingualism lie elsewhere, not in the spheres/reasons listed, but often in the "fear of the unknown" (Obanya, 1999). In addition, other reasons have been that politicians and academics are divided on the language issue. Research evidence on language in education in Tanzania represents divided views. Some evidence supports the view that we need two languages only-*English* and *Kiswahili* (Kadeghe, 2000; 2003); other evidences represent the view that we need Kiswahili (Qorro, 2005; 2008; 2010); and others strongly represent the view that we need use of mother tongues in education (Brock-Utne, 2000; 2004; 2005; 2007; and Vuzo, 2010).

1. Impacts Associated with Disregard of ECLS in Education

Uwezo, a non-profit organisation using a citizen movement based-approach to assessing literacy and numeracy levels in East Africa, in its three consecutive reports (Uwezo, 2011; 2012; 2015) indicates that in Tanzania, primary school pupils are not learning literacy much as expected as they leave standard seven without ability to read or write basic story even in Kiswahili. The reports further show that literacy competencies in lower grades seem to be increasingly dropping; thus, calling for intervention. To be precise, in its recent report (Uwezo, 2015 as cited in Hakielimu, 2015, p. 11), on country survey, less than half the children in standard 3 were able to read a simple Kiswahili text. The problems in English were more glaring as only 1 in 5 children was able to read a simple text in English. Much of the reasons for this failure, in theoretical lens, have been associated with lack of literacy foundations in the child's mother tongues which are not taught, at least, in early grades (Cummins, 1981; 2000).

According UNESCO (2007 cited in Bhalalusesa, 2008), Tanzania was noted one of the countries at serious risk on literacy in Africa. The report further indicates that the statistical trend of *illiteracy* since independence 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%.It was also noted with concern that the literacy rate, which reached almost 90% in 1986, had dropped to 85% in 1992 and dropping was expected to continue at the rate of 2% annually (URT, 2000 EFA Assessment).

EdQual, a consortium of six higher education institutions in the UK and Africa that was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to carry out a five year (2005-2010) research programme on education quality mainly in low income countries, among others, the consortium recommended the following on language teaching for Ghana and Tanzania:

i. Language of instruction and mother-tongue education (LOI & MTE)

Learners learn better, and teachers teach better, in a language they speak well. In this way, Policy-makers were advised to prioritise and extend the development of high–quality education in the mother tongue (MTE) as the

basis for education in Africa. Policy-makers should support advocacy and awareness-raising programmes aimed at increasing recognition of the educational value of MTE.

ii. Teacher Education and Professional Development

The effectiveness of teacher training and professional development both for teaching in African languages and for teaching in a European L2 needs to increase. The quality of initial teacher education for MTE and the quality of specialised teacher-education for subject teachers working in European languages should be improved. In-service programmes for teachers teaching both through an African and a European language that raise awareness of how language is used in the classroom and the needs of second language learners should be designed and implemented.

2. Options Promoting Multilingualism in Tanzania

The observation of African children of pre-school and primary school age in multilingual settings testifies to multilingualism as a natural behavioural patternsplayful code-switching are common and highly effective communication strategies that children in Africa grow up with in their peer groups (Khamis, 1994 as cited in Ouane & Glanz, 2011, p. 66). Anyone who has responsibility for planning and deciding on the linguistic aspects of educational policies would be well advised to view *multilingualism* as an important resource to be made use of as widely as possible. This is because it draws on children's prior experience, their already-established abilities, and so relates directly to their linguistic, social, and cultural behavioural patterns in their out-of-school environments (Wolff, 2000). Psycholinguistic and second language acquisition research over almost 100 years shows; however, that apart from pathological cases where children suffer from physical or mental deficits independently, bi- or *multilingualism* has never done harm to the mental and cognitive development of any child (Ouane & Glanz, 2011, p.66).

A study by Pflepsen (2011, p. 2) presents six major benefits of mother tongue based (MTB) education. These are that MTB education: improves access to education; improves reading and learning outcomes; facilitates learning a second or foreign language; improves internal educational efficiency; improves children's self-concept and identity; and, supports local culture and parental involvement. This is to say allowing a child to learn in the mother tongue would easily link school and the home environment for practical purposes.

African and international researches in education, language acquisition, psycholinguistics and applied linguistics, for example, (ADEA, 1996; Bamgbose, 2000; 2004; Heugh, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2002, 2004; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010), have come to the same conclusions as regards to effective language education:

- ¿ The first language needs to be reinforced and developed for 12 years in order for successful second language learning and academic success to take place, i.e., from birth to 12 years (first language as medium of instruction for at least six years of formal schooling).
- ¿ The international Second Language Acquisition literature indicates that under optimal conditions (these do not apply in most education systems in Africa) it takes six to eight years to learn a second language in school sufficiently well enough to use it as a medium of instruction.
- ¿ Language education models which remove the first language as a primary medium of instruction before year/grade five will facilitate little success for the majority of learners.
- ¿ Language education models which

> retain the first language as a primary medium of instruction for six years can succeed under very well-resourced conditions in African settings. Eight years of mother-tongue education maybe enough under less well-resourced conditions which are the reality in many African schools.Cited in Ouane & Glanz (2011, p.28)

Multilingualism is, thus, worth-encouraging and facilitating; and a change of paradigm from linguistic imperialism to the ecology of languages paradigm (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) where multilingualism is embedded is imperative. This is because it is important for Tanzanian children to have the right to learn many languages and gain reasonable competencies in several languages not just in the claimed Kiswahili and English only. A supply and demand theory would postulate that the current status of English may well be challenged in future (Graddol, 1997; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Note-worthy, there is a growing demand of other languages like Chinese, French, German and Arabic. Thus, struggling for monolingual or even *bilingual education models* only would be profoundly unrealistic! We should strive to attain *additive multilingualism* to enable our young children beginning school get a firm grounding in their mother tongues or familiar languages (Vuzo, 2006, p.316).

Therefore, following the above line of argument, a possible *Multilingual Model for Tanzania* is proposed, that: first, in *pre-primary* and *Standard I-II* (Lower primary) – ECLs/Kiswahili literacy should be taught in the respective community along with ECL/Kiswahili as MOI depending on the location: *rural/urban* respectively. Second, in standard III-VI upper primary, Kiswahili be taught and used as MOI, and English to be taught as a subject. Third, at secondary education particularly at Form I, another foreign language be introduced as compulsory subject, (*let's say French)*, whereas at Form III another foreign language (*e.g., Chinese*) be introduced as compulsory subject; fourth, at advanced secondary education, two more optional foreign languages (e.g., *Germany, Arabic, Portuguese or Spanish,* etc.) to be introduced. In this model, Kiswahili should be strengthened as MOI from primary education to ordinary secondary education except in rural areas primary 1 & 2 where a certain ECL is dominant and so preferably be agreed as MOI. Last, but not the least from advanced secondary education to tertiary levels, English to be retained as MOI; and its communication skills' subject to be improved. This model would enable *a form six student* graduate with; at least, five languages (*ECL/Kiswahili, English, French, Chinese and Arabic/Germany/Portuguese/Spanish*) mastered; thus, *multilingual education* and *language rights protected* in Tanzania. The table 6.1 below presents the proposed model.

Primary education		**Ordinary secondary education**		**Advanced secondary education**	**Tertiary Education**
Pre-primary/Lower Stds: I-II	**Upper III-VI**	**Form I-II**	**Form III-IV**	**Form V-VI**	**Colleges and Universities**
ECL/Kiswahili literacy taught as subjects & ECLs/Kiswahili as MOI	Kiswahili & English 1st FL taught as compulsor y subject	2nd FL introduced	3rd FL introduced	4th FL introduced (preferably two optional FLs)	Communication skills in English taught as compulsory course
		Kiswahili & English taught as compulsory subjects	Kiswahili & English taught as compulsory subjects	Kiswahili & English taught as Specialised subjects	Kiswahili & English taught as specialised academic subjects
	Kiswahili used as MOI	Kiswahili used as MOI	Kiswahili used as MOI	English used as MOI	English used as MOI

Source: Adapted by author with modifications from Vuzo (2007)

ECL = Ethnic Community Language; MOI= Medium of instruction; FL = Foreign Language

1. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the language policy in education and how it may inhibit or promote multilingual education in Tanzania. Using literature evidence, the paper has argued that Tanzanian language policy in education does not promote multilingual education. It rather implements a Eurocentric view of bilingual education which is unrealistic to Tanzanian context. The paper also postulates that the current problems associated with literacy learning in Tanzania primary schools may be attributable to the disregard of use and teaching of ECLs literacy in pre-primary and primary 1 & 2 especially in Tanzania rural areas. It has also been observed that Africans are already multilingual as many Africans can acquire or learn two or more languages simultaneously through interaction with mates. All that we need is an ideal educational model that can accommodate the present demand of multilingual education. It has also been established that there are challenges in developing multilingual education in Tanzania. In this regard, the paper has shown that both academics and politicians are sharply divided on the matter. However, since benefits of learning in mother tongue are massive, a model for adopting multilingual education for Tanzania is proposed.

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