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Theoretical and practical challenges in a Tanzanian English medium primary school

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Abstract

This paper reports on the experiences from an English medium school (EMS) in Tanzania. It places Tanzanian EMSs in the larger context of bilingual education practices and examines the similarities and differences with immersion programmes in other parts of the world. The triglossic community background of these schools is noted, showing that even though the simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages is a theoretical possibility, the conditions for its realization in Tanzanian elementary schools pose special challenges.

Among the most pertinent challenges and choices facing EMSs the paper discusses (i) teacher quality (ii) the ideal time for introducing another language, (iii) the impact of English medium education on cognitive and personality development, and (iv) the place of code switching in the classroom. It is argued that the best course of action in these schools would be a gradual transition from Kiswahili medium instruction in the lower grades to English in the higher grades. But since this avenue is blocked by conflicting demands from stakeholders, educators have to make a choice of pursuing some goals while putting others on hold.

1. Introduction

This paper reports on the author's ten years' experience of establishing and managing *Kibangu English Medium School* in Tanzania. Although the general administrative, financial, and legal aspects of setting up and running the school have provided ample challenges, these aspects will not be the focus of the discussion. Rather, attention will be directed at those aspects of the school's educational mission that deal with language teaching and the role of the medium of instruction in the whole endeavour.

2. Background to English Medium Primary Schools

English medium primary schools (EMS) are a very recent development in Tanzania. Until the 1995 Education Amendment Act, primary education provision was a government monopoly, and official policy required that all seven years of primary education be provided in Kiswahili, the national language. Only two government schools, viz. Olympio and Arusha, and another nine private schools[1] were allowed to use English as medium of instruction. In the case of the schools that presented candidates for the government examination, the pupils still had to do the final Primary School Leaving Examination in Kiswahili. At the same time, English medium instruction in all post-primary (i.e. secondary and tertiary) levels has remained unchanged since the colonial era.

The original idea of establishing a school came out of a very simple observation that there were not enough schools in Tanzania and that the nation as a whole was not investing a sufficient amount of resources in the education of the nation's children (Rugemalira 2001). For instance at the primary school within the University of Dar es Salaam campus, the smallest classes had eighty children each under one teacher, in rooms designed to hold forty-five pupils. More than half of these had to sit on the floor. There were virtually no textbooks and the learning environment was generally impoverished. But this school was among the best in the country, with relatively decent physical structures.

Although during the past five years an effort has been made, through the Primary Education Development Programme (Tanzania Government 2001), to rehabilitate the primary schools and raise enrolment – with a target of universal primary education by 2005 – it will take a huge amount of determined leadership to sustain a reasonable level of expenditure on the education sector. The statistics for 2002 show a primary school pupil population of 5,981,338 and 112,109 teachers; this gives us a "decent" teacher- pupil ratio of 1:53. Net pupil enrolment is 80.7%. (Tanzania Govt. Website 2004). But the picture on the ground presents more formidable challenges: thousands of new classrooms, teacher's houses and latrines are needed. Millions of desks and books need to be produced and distributed. Thousands of well trained teachers need to be supplied every year.

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[1] The private primary schools that were tolerated before the policy changes of the 1990s included the International School of Tanganyika (Dar es Salaam: IST Ltd), International School Moshi (Moshi: ISM Ltd), St. Constantine's School (Arusha: Hellenic Society of Tanganyika), Nyakahoja (Mwanza: Catholic Church), Isamilo (Mwanza: Anglican Church), Tanga Popatlal (Tanga: Tanga Education Society), Rigida (Tanga: Amboni Group Ltd), Canon Andrea Mwaka (Dodoma: Anglican Church), Morogoro International School (Morogoro: International School of Morogoro Ltd). The list does not include schools set up to serve expatriate communities from particular countries, e.g. French School (Dar es Salaam), Danish School (Iringa). (Source: Ministry of Education and Culture.)

It is against this background that private primary schools burst onto the scene. Their share of the total enrolment is still statistically negligible; in 2002 there were 20,970 pupils in the private schools, i.e. 0.003% of the total pupil population (three pupils out of every 1000 were in private schools.). Kibangu School proposed to provide an alternative to government schools for the children of parents with modest means – not really low income. It sought to provide quality education on the basis of the Tanzanian national curriculum, *using Kiswahili as the language of instruction*. But there were two obstacles from the very beginning.

First, before the 1995 Education Amendment Act, any private primary school tolerated by government *had to teach in a language other than Kiswahili* (Tanzania Government 1992). Coming from the earlier socialist era of state control of every sector, any intimation of encroaching on government turf was regarded as a disrespectful, even subversive, challenge. As one official at the Ministry of Education put it to me, "*serikali haijashindwa*"; that is, government hasn't failed in its resolve to provide education to the nation's children; so how dare you suggest that you want to do the same? Fortunately, after 1995, this obstacle was removed by the new Education and Training Policy: "The establishment, ownership and management of primary schools shall be liberalized" (Tanzania Government 1995a: 36). The legal amendment in the same year sealed the change.

The second and far more formidable obstacle was presented by the market. An informal survey showed that the parents close to the proposed school wanted an *English medium school*. This rather unexpected development did occasion some soul searching. For I had taken it as self-evident that an important ingredient of a quality school is that the language of instruction be intelligible to the learners and their teachers. What the parents were demanding was that in addition to mastery of the curriculum content, the child must also master the English language, AND that the best way to do so was through English medium instruction.[2]

3. Client profile

The parents served by Kibangu School and most EMS in general are in the middle and upper income brackets. Even those that are struggling to make ends meet on a

[2] The East African Association of University Kiswahili Teachers (Chama cha Kiswahili cha Afrika ya Mashariki – CHAKAMA) has resolved to make a practical contribution to the protracted debate on the medium of instruction in secondary school in Tanzania by drawing up plans for establishing a Kiswahili medium secondary school [Mulokozi & Senkoro 2004]. Given our experiences at Kibangu School the promoters of this initiative need to prepare themselves very well to i) create a body of parents and children willing to be part of the initiative; ii) secure a reliable fund to run the school so that free scholarships can be used to obtain students; and iii) persuade the education authorities to set examinations in Kiswahili and certify the products of the school. By 2002 there were only two private primary schools registered as Kiswahili medium schools, viz. Chimala (Mbarali: Church of Christ Mission, 1999), and Huruma (Mbinga: Roman Catholic Sisters, 1996).

normal salary are certainly better off than the vast majority of the rural and urban poor. Given the rural-urban economic imbalance, such schools are predominantly urban; the few rural schools provide boarding facilities and so can recruit from a wider geographical area. In the majority of families parents would have completed four years of secondary school – some of them being very well educated with second university degrees or higher. Families in which both parents did not go beyond primary school are rare. The composition of the parents' committee at Kibangu is indicative: it includes a university professor, a telecommunications engineer, a tax accountant, an engineer who heads a large polytechnic, a nurse, an administrative officer in the local municipal administration, and a water resources technician.[3]

The significance of this profile of our clients becomes clearer when one takes into account the following facts: more than 70% of the country's population is rural; the economy is dependent on peasant agriculture; GDP per capita is around US$250; not every school age child goes to even primary school – only 80% do; of the half million children who complete seven years of primary school, only 20% go on to secondary school; and an even smaller proportion get to university.[4]

The home and first language of the children admitted to EMS is Kiswahili. In the majority of cases the parents have a language other than Kiswahili as their first language, but the effective language of the home is Kiswahili, and these *urban children* acquire it as their first language. They may attain a passive understanding of the parents' mother tongue but they will not actively speak it. Where the parents have different mother tongues, there is even less likelihood that the urban child will acquire any of these languages.

English is a foreign language in Tanzania, but it comes with tremendous power and prestige – being the language of the former colonial power and of the sole super power. It is taught as a compulsory subject for twelve years, from pre-school to the fourth year of secondary school (Tanzania Government 1995a). English is the medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary education, and coexists precariously with the national language (Kiswahili) across various domains of public functions (government and business). There are very few families where English is the language of the home. At Kibangu School, during the past ten years, only one pupil was identified as having an English language background at home: his father was an American teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam.

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3 English serves a real gate keeping function and continues to empower the already rich and culturally advantaged (Maamouri, Mohamed 2001).

4 The education system in Tanzania provides for one to two years of nursery (kindergarten, preparatory) school for children aged five to seven years; seven years of primary school (P 1-7), four years of ordinary level secondary school (S 1-4), two years of advanced level secondary school (S 5-6), and a minimum of three years for a university degree.

4. Parents' objectives

What are the parents' objectives and expectations for enrolling their children in EMS? On the whole parents want to provide quality education for their children. They are aware of the inadequacies in the free government schools and so they are prepared to pay (rather dearly) for a good service in the EMS. They watch their children's progress closely and are eager to compare their performance with that of children in government schools and in other private schools. They demand that ALL children in a class pass the Primary Four and Primary Seven examinations; they want ALL Primary Seven pupils to secure places in government secondary schools – even if they have no intention of taking up those places, preferring private secondary schools instead.[5] They watch the relative ranking for each school and will consider transferring their children to top ranking schools. For instance, one top ranked school was so attractive to a parent that he had his son (from Kibangu) repeat Primary Seven at that school instead of sending him to secondary school.

Nevertheless many parents do attach special significance to their children's mastery of the English language. Parents want their children to demonstrate their ability to speak English within the first few months of entering an EMS. And again parents do transfer children if they perceive the school as not doing enough to get children to SPEAK English. The significance of the English factor has been reported in research by Rubagumya (2003) and Muhdhar (2002) who found that 79.8% and 81% of parents respectively would not send their children to a private school if English was NOT the medium of instruction. Indeed the popular Kiswahili short form for EMS is "shule za Kiingereza", i.e. schools of English. Buwembo (2004:16) has summarized the kind of thinking that drives the demand for English:

> "... under the East African Community, free movement of labour will soon see Tanzanians competing with Kenyans and Ugandans on an equal basis – for jobs in Tanzania! ... When work permits are no more, there will be a scramble for Tanzania ... *It is scary to imagine a Tanzanian school-leaver who can hardly express himself in English, being subjected to the same interview by a Dar es Salaam-based multinational, as a fellow from Kampala or Nairobi who thinks in English*" [emphasis added].

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[5] During the years 2001-2004, twenty-two of Kibangu pupils were selected to join government secondary schools. Only three did actually take the places offered; the rest went to private schools.

5. The immersion school parallel

There are basic similarities between Tanzanian EMS and second language immersion schools in other parts of the world (Baker 2001). Immersion schools have the objective of raising bilingual children in an environment where one of the desired languages has a weak base in the community. The school is designed to create such a base, i.e. to establish a speech community in the school so that the child can acquire the language under some kind of naturalistic conditions. The immersion environment contrasts with the standard practice of teaching and learning a second or foreign language by means of a limited number of periods per week where the language is taught as a subject. By making the target language the medium of all or a substantial proportion of the activities in the school, the learner is given more exposure (input) and more practice opportunities, of a varied nature. It is *expected* that the learners will come out of an immersion programme with greater mastery of the target language and will exhibit other non-linguistic outcomes such as "higher willingness to communicate, lower communication anxiety, & higher perceived communicative competence" (Baker & Macintyre 2003).

There are significant variations in *immersion models* worldwide. The Canadian model where English speaking parents want their children to acquire French as an additional language has been described as *additive*. The two languages are equally valued in the community and learners of French seek to widen their opportunities by functioning in both languages. In the Welsh, Irish and Catalan contexts the struggle is to preserve an embattled language vis as vis more powerful and prestigious languages (English and Spanish). The school seeks to maintain the community of speakers and help it grow. This has been described as the *maintenance* model. The third model, described as *subtractive*, is driven by the objective of assimilating the learner to the dominant language and culture as quickly as possible. The learner's first language is largely regarded as an obstacle to be put out of the way. The situation in many African schools can be regarded as subtractive to various degrees: the language of the school may be the chosen language because of a combination of factors – lingua franca, national unity, modernity, foreign relations, power and prestige. There is no doubt that the inability to make use of the first languages of learners in schools in Tanzania, and many other countries, is a subtractive experience.

Variations in *immersion programmes* are more difficult to exhaustively describe, but they can be summarized along the following dimensions:

i) Total or partial immersion – whether the school conducts all instruction or

part of the instruction in the target language. This may be determined in terms of time (hours per day or days per week) or in terms of subjects (e.g. humanities vs sciences).

ii) Early or late immersion – whether the school/system introduces target language instruction in the beginning years of school (e.g. P 1) or later (e.g. P5, S1); and how long the learners remain in the programme (early/late/no exit).

iii) Gradual immersion or submersion – whether the school allows the learners to use the first language as a resource while slowly increasing the use of the target language or the first language is prohibited in the immersion domains. For instance, children may be taught basic literacy in the first language before being introduced to reading and writing the target language. In some programmes judicious use of the first language may be allowed or tolerated while in others it is strictly prohibited.

While a few EMS parents may be regarded as subscribing to a subtractive model of bilingualism, in general most parents want their children to master English, *in addition to* Kiswahili. They may appear to give no priority to Kiswahili because they assume that this language is "everywhere around the children" and can be picked up "free of charge". They see that English is rarely encountered in normal daily life and therefore argue that conscious planning and investment is required in order to master it. They also believe that extra investment in English is needed because this is the language of economic and social advancement.

Tanzanian EMS practice total early immersion. The vast majority of children are admitted at age five into preparatory grade (kindergarten), or at age six into first grade. At this age they have already mastered Kiswahili, but they have no English at all. As the school sets about the process of introducing a new language to the children, the development of vocabulary and grammatical complexity in Kiswahili continues, at least away from school, at a much faster pace.

Besides learning to listen to and speak a new language, school also introduces new linguistic skills, viz. reading and writing in English. Ideally a child will learn to read a word that is already in his/her oral vocabulary. This is how picture reading facilitates literacy development: the reader associates the picture with the oral vocabulary item and then with the visual graphic symbols. But since the dominant vocabulary is in Kiswahili, picture reading can elicit a Kiswahili vocabulary item. In order to support rapid literacy development it is important that the children build up a large oral English vocabulary at a very early stage. Part of this vocabulary will be directly related to the Kiswahili vocabulary; but there will be new concepts learnt for the first time in English only.

The place of Kiswahili has been a subject of creative tension in the school.

The government syllabus requires that seven hours per week be set aside for Kiswahili lessons in first grade while one hour is to be devoted to English. This is the specification for the government's Kiswahili medium schools. At Kibangu it was decided that reading and writing Kiswahili should not be introduced during the first three years (K to P 2); rather this would be introduced after children had mastered basic literacy skills in English. Nevertheless we found it imperative to set aside some time for Kiswahili story time; the teacher would read or tell Kiswahili stories to children and children would be encouraged to tell their own stories.

During our seventh year of operation (2001) the school inspectors faulted this arrangement and insisted that we schedule Kiswahili lessons and abide by the official syllabus for all grade levels. Our response was to schedule one Kiswahili hour per week in first and second grades. When Kiswahili was first introduced in first and second grades, the first grade teacher would swap classes with the second grade teacher for the Kiswahili lesson. In 2003 and 2004 however, the first grade teacher remained in charge of all subjects in her class. (For second grade the Kiswahili teacher is still different from the English teacher). In order for children not to confuse the two languages, the teacher sets clear signals to indicate the language to be used in any reading or spelling task. She takes advantage of a virtually similar alphabet: Kiswahili uses fewer consonant letters (q and x missing); consonant letter names are different from those in English, but are regularly pronounced with vowel [e]. The five vowel letters correspond to the vowel sounds available in Kiswahili. Consonant and vowel letter combinations form syllables in a regular manner, and these combine to form words with predictable pronunciation.

Our brief experience has not confirmed our fears of confusing the learners with two spelling systems (Kiswahili and English).[6] One of the teachers who taught Kiswahili in second grade (2002) and in first grade (2003, 2004) believes that the teaching of Kiswahili in first grade has helped many children learn to read (generally) much earlier than in previous years; and so she is asking for more time on the schedule. The question is, should we allow more time for the teaching of reading and writing in Kiswahili in the lower grades? Generally speaking, in a win-win situation, more time for Kiswahili could be found without reducing the time

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6 Kenner et al. (2004:142), in their study of bilingual children exposed to different writing systems, conclude that:

> "The children in the ... study were able to cope well with learning different writing systems at the same time. Rather than being 'confused' by simultaneous input, the children were experiencing cognitive benefits. They were able to look for and comprehend the principles on which each system was based, clarifying differences between systems as their learning progressed over time."

Recently I was informed of practice in a Hong Kong preschool whereby children as young as three years are exposed to both the rudiments of Chinese characters and the English roman alphabet.

allocated to English and the other activities in the programme. In reality however, additional time can be obtained by taking it away from some other activity, and this may or may not be possible depending on the importance attached to the first language and whether it is perceived as an obstacle to the learning of the target language.

It is arguable that the conditions in which the EMS operate favour the adoption of a strategy that teaches literacy skills to the children in Kiswahili, a familiar language, before introducing reading and writing in English. In the Canadian early French immersion programme, for instance, literacy in French is introduced in the third grade, after children have mastered basic literacy skills in English (cf. Baker 2001:353, 362). Siegel (1997), reporting on a study done in Papua New Guinea, notes "that initial instruction in Tok Pisin is actually more of a help than a hindrance to learning English and other subjects". The opposite argument is that by starting out on the difficult/unfamiliar end viz. English, the children's initial development will be slow but they will eventually and more easily transfer their English literacy skills to Kiswahili in the higher grades. It is noted that allowing more Kiswahili time at these early levels will be a long term liability particularly since they will more readily transfer the regular spelling-pronunciation from Kiswahili to English. And in the broader context of language learning theory, the position for early total immersion is steeped in the argument that the earlier the foreign language is introduced the better.

The long term consequences of designating only English as the academic language are more worrying. Since English is the medium of instruction throughout the education system for these children, will their literacy skills and academic proficiency in Kiswahili ever develop? Reporting on a study of a bilingual school situation in Mexico, Francis (2000:185) notes that, overall, school language (i.e. Spanish) outpaces home language (i.e. Nauhatl) with respect to the basic literacy skills, viz. reading, writing, oral narrative, and retelling. "Performance in Nahuatl appears to begin to 'lose ground' to Spanish in the academic language domain. This 'debilitation' occurs despite the opposite tendency in conversational fluency and actual use of Nahuatl among peers". This stunted development of the first language, Francis maintains, has a negative impact on the learning/teaching process in general:

> "... in the absence of any instruction in the students' primary language, modified second language teaching ... presents educators and learners with a dilemma ... In first language teaching, instructional discourse can be more abstract and less contextualized, thus propelling students' information processing capabilities one or more notches higher [i.e. at a more accelerated rate] along the cognitively demanding axis. When all content instruction is

provided without any recourse to the first language, the result is often a delayed or abated learning of decontextualized academic proficiencies."

In a similar vein, Williams (1996), reporting on a study of reading ability among elementary school children in Malawi and Zambia, notes that the "dominance [of English] in the education system may work against the individual primary school child's cognitive development in general, and their reading proficiency in particular."

At Kibangu school the overall allocation of time between English and Kiswahili lessons remains heavily tilted towards English through seventh grade. In the lower grades in particular there are many hours devoted to reading and handwriting skills – all in English. In addition the reading materials in the school library (for home reading) are mostly in English. This is partly because there are more children's books in English, many of them imported from Canada and the USA and sold at nominal prices. But this state of affairs largely reflects our *status as an EMS*. As in the debate about time allocation for Kiswahili, here too the question is, should we put more Kiswahili books in the library. The argument for making more Kiswahili books available is that we have a broader educational objective of developing literacy skills and building a reading habit in the children. The more books they read the better. The opposite view is that provision of Kiswahili books will leave the children little chance/incentive of borrowing English books.

There is very clear evidence that Kiswahili books are favourite; they circulate a lot and age much faster. Two considerations arise in this connection. First, in spite of the limited amount of time allocated to Kiswahili in the timetable, it does appear that the children are better able to read and understand Kiswahili books thanks to their superior command of the language, compared to English. This observation in itself would seem to reinforce the popular perception that Kiswahili is available for free pick up. Second, a significant number of the English books available contain content that is from a rather unfamiliar physical and cultural background (largely North American). The most accessible English books are those that are set in an African background, e.g. the graded Evans Publishers reader series (mainly West African) and the Progressive Peak English Reader series from Kenya.

Closely related to library books is the issue of textbooks for content subjects. It will be noted that prior to the 1995 Education Amendment Act, the primary school monolingual policy precluded the availability of teaching materials in English for various subjects. Even the two special government (EM) schools had no official English translations of the materials, including the syllabuses. The primary school leaving examination had to be written in Kiswahili even for the

children in these schools.

Towards the late 1990s, the syllabuses and examinations became available in English. Fortunately too, there had also occurred a liberalization of the textbook policy. Schools were no longer required to buy and use books produced by the Tanzania Institute of Education. So EMS could import books, especially from Kenya and Uganda. But the most problematic subject to handle in this respect has been Social Studies because there has to be a lot of local content – geography, history, civics. Books from other countries, particularly for third to fifth grades, were grossly inappropriate and irrelevant. The available Tanzanian books were in Kiswahili, but the authors and publishers have not been in a hurry to cater for such a negligible market. The question for us was whether we should make the social studies books written in Kiswahili available to the pupils in the classroom? In line with our declared intention of teaching all content subjects in English we decided to prepare our own notes to help the teacher, even though the pupils could still access the books in the library or at home. Still we found no alternative to the primary school atlas, and made this available for use in the classroom.

Besides the allocation of teaching and learning time in the two languages, there is a wider issue of language use in the various activities of the school. Being a total immersion school, all activities are supposed to be transacted in the English language. In the higher grades (P 3-7) teaching can be done fairly smoothly with a teacher who is fluent in English and is committed to the cause. A good teacher will look for various and simple ways to get a pupil to understand instead of quickly resorting to a language that is familiar to the pupil. At the lower levels (K-P 2) it is a lot more difficult to try to communicate with children in a language that is totally foreign – especially during the first twelve months. Managing a class of thirty children aged six years, listening to their individual concerns, and giving them directions while pretending not to use the language they understand very well can make even the best teacher go off balance occasionally. Our teachers aim at developing a sufficient amount of vocabulary and clear class management rules that help the class to *move as quickly as possible* to full use of the chosen medium of instruction. And once the children get accustomed to the *classroom culture* they do really learn to communicate in English. Where the patterns of communication are less constrained – outside the classroom – there is noticeably more use of Kiswahili.

The case for discouraging code-switching in immersion programmes rests on three considerations. First, there is what can be called the *principle of separation*: that for the learners to master each language perfectly, it is important that it should be clear that they are dealing with two different codes, each with its own rules; and that the various functions to which code-switching is put in multilingual communities are luxuries which only graduate/mature speakers may be allowed to

enjoy (or sins sloppy speakers can get away with). Second, *the allocation of the time resource* requires that the learners spend as much time as possible using the target language while they are in the secluded school environment; any second or minute spent on the first language is time wasted considering that the seclusion has been purposefully set up to promote the target language. It is this consideration that partly explains the increasing popularity of boarding schools for young primary school children. Third, classroom code-switching that amounts to *translation* of what has been said in the target language undermines any motivation for learning the target language as the learners will learn to tune out and wait for the translation in the first language.

A major problem in this respect is the rather unrealistic expectation from many parents that children be forced to speak only English as soon as they set foot in the school. Some parents have very strong opinions on enforcement of the English only policy and any mitigation by the school is seen as a sign of incompetence. Muhdhar (2002:34) reports on parent views in Zanzibar:

> "It seems that English is not spoken around the school compound; our children cannot speak it because the teachers themselves speak Kiswahili most of the time ...
>
> Usually English is spoken in our presence; in our absence no English is spoken."

Kanigi (2002) studied the patterns of language use in four EMS in Dar es Salaam and concluded that *both* Kiswahili and English were used as languages of classroom instruction and of general communication outside the classroom. She noted that although teachers and pupils engaged in code switching on a significant scale, "most of the teachers and pupils use English exclusively inside the classroom" p. 108. She found that the use of Kiswahili was more widespread for activities outside the classroom (play ground, canteen), and quite predominant in communication involving non-teaching staff, which "implies that the rich owners of the E[nglish] M[edium] P[rimary] schools do not employ non-teaching staff [with a good command of English]" (Kanigi 2002:129).

At one time discussions in the Parent's Committee at Kibangu School suggested that all communication with parents should be in English. But we argued that while it is imperative to create a conducive school environment for children to learn and use English, we felt that it was not socially acceptable to communicate with parents in a language that many among them would find unintelligible. In this way we managed to keep Kiswahili in the deliberations of the Parents' Committee, the Annual Parents' Meeting, the Open Day functions and all written communication (letters & reports) to parents.

Part of our uneasiness with the English only policy in the school's activities concerns broader educational objectives: as educators we want to instill in the children a love and appreciation for the national language and the rich linguistic diversity of the country. The prohibition of Kiswahili and punishment for its use create a negative attitude towards the language, in effect telling the children that the language and its users are contemptible. Our worry is that we may be reproducing in these children the prejudices of some of the parents quoted in Rubagumya (2003:16-17):

> "... the views expressed ... seem to suggest that English is the only language in which quality education can be delivered. In fact, one of the respondents declares categorically, "no English, no education"! For those who hold these views, English is not only a medium through which education can be accessed; it is almost synonymous with education. Here we find a particular language being deified because of its association with a 'superior culture'. This, in my view, is linguistic imperialism at work, because of the apparent alienation of these respondents. They are convinced that Kiswahili is inherently inferior to English and for them the value of English should be obvious. This is what Fairclough (1989) calls ideological common sense."

At school we recognize that our pupils are generally able to express themselves fairly well as they progress through the higher grades. I would estimate that on average our Primary Seven pupil can express himself/herself in English as well as a Secondary Four student, on a subject that they are both equally knowledgeable. And since the teaching of English essentially ends at Secondary Four many Tanzanian students in higher secondary school and tertiary level institutions would not be in a position to improve their English proficiency beyond their Secondary Four attainment. This is a rather provocative claim to make: but research to determine its validity is doable. Twenty years ago Criper and Dodd [1984: 43], after administering a test across the various levels of the education system, maintained that *less than twenty percent of university students were at a level where they would find it easy to read even the simpler books required for their academic studies*.

On the other hand concerned parents note that their children have not overcome the shyness associated with speaking English away from school. Happy parents report how they 'caught' their children speaking very good English and how the children stopped and shied away upon discovering that the parent was around listening. On educational trips where hosts use English, teachers are elated when the pupils show off their mastery of the language. All these situations fit the

pattern: for these children, English is the language of the school and school related activities. To speak English in the home or neighbourhood can be inappropriate, disrespectful, or just funny (cf. Myburgh et al. 2004). As the pupils often put it, "when you speak English away from school people look at you"! Similar observations have been reported with Canadian French immersion learners: French remains the language of school, but the language of real life is English (Baker 2001:233, 358).

With regard to the demand that we introduce a third language, i.e. French, in the school curriculum, our policy has been clear. We have argued that at primary level these children need to devote all attention to the mastery of two languages, Kiswahili and English. We maintain that another foreign language would be an unnecessary distraction and a drain on the child's intellectual resources. The best level to introduce French is Secondary One, after the children have developed a strong foundation for one foreign language, viz. English.

6. Teacher quality

Teacher quality and commitment appears to be the single most important ingredient that can make a huge difference in the success of the EMS enterprise. An English immersion environment requires teachers whose command of the language enables them to be models for the children "who reproduce the accent of their teacher with deadly accuracy" (Cameron 2003:111). It requires teachers who are totally committed to the endeavour so that even when they would feel an urge to use Kiswahili they would restrain themselves.

A brief note on the national teacher supply will indicate the magnitude of the recruitment challenge. There are four types of teachers available in the system, based on the level of education and training. The largest group, Grade B/C, mainly consists of Primary Seven graduates with up to two years of teacher training. In 1992 this group formed 70% of all teachers in the primary schools of Tanzania. The 1999 figure was 54%. The second largest group, Grade A, consists of teachers who have completed Secondary Four and done one or two years[7] of teacher training. In 1992 this group formed 30% of all teachers; some improvement is noted in the 1999 figure of 46%. In the education system, teachers in these two groups are designated to teach at primary school level (Tanzania Government 1995a, 2000).

The third group, Diploma holders, has teachers who have completed Secondary Six and done one or two years of teacher training. It is a much smaller

[7] The variation in the number of years is due to changes in the curriculum of teacher training colleges: two years up to the mid sixties, then one year up to the early eighties, then back to two years up to 2002, and now back to one year!

group than the previous two (total of 9964 in 1999) and is supposed to be deployed in the first two years of secondary school. The fourth group, university degree holders, has teachers who have done three to four years of university study, typically after Secondary Six, or after obtaining the Diploma in Education. The teacher with a degree is a rare commodity; there were only 2660 in 1999. These are mainly deployed to teach in Secondary Three to Six, and in the teacher training colleges; they also fill the upper administrative positions in the education system.

Kibangu School's initial recruitment policy targeted diploma and degree holders, with a strong preference for the latter. But since there is such a short supply of degree holders, we suffered a high rate of turnover; typically the university graduates would use the school as a waiting post while searching for a more attractive position outside the teaching sector. Even those that stay in teaching feel more at home in a secondary school, harbouring a feeling of being underutilized in the primary school context.

The recruitment process includes an oral interview, a writing assignment in English, and assessment of actual teaching in the classroom. In this way we seek to get the best teachers able to use English effectively on a daily basis. Nevertheless our teachers have less than perfect command of the English language. They studied the language as a subject up to Secondary Four; like most Tanzanians, they do not use it beyond the special school environment. In addition none of our teachers has had any special exposure to language teaching methodology, let alone teaching in immersion contexts. Still in the special circumstances of an immersion programme they are able to improve their own proficiency, and to collectively contribute towards a skilled pupil population.

Dissatisfaction with teacher English proficiency levels in Tanzania has prompted some schools to recruit teachers from other countries, notably Kenya and Uganda. The presence of such 'expatriates' becomes a significant public relations component in some schools. At Kibangu School we have not attempted to use foreigners this way. First, a policy of recruiting native or foreign near-native speakers of English to teach in the school would raise costs tremendously and defeat our basic tenet that the resources, both human and material, to provide a decent education to our children exist within our local communities. In order to control costs, there would be a temptation to recruit any 'good' speaker of English irrespective of whether they have teaching credentials or not. Second, a focus on English native speakers runs the risk of creating a special class of employees with preferential treatment. This could become a source of management problems as other employees resent their lower status. Third, teachers hired merely to provide a native-like speech model will despise their position and may not be good models in the broader pursuit of learning (Thornburry 2001). Fourth, it is by no means ideal

that the teachers should not understand the language of the pupils. Downes (2001:169) reports on Katoh English immersion school in Japan, with 450 pupils and 18 foreign full time staff:

> "Since most of the immersion teachers are not bilingual, *communication within the school and with parents has been difficult*. To compensate, the teachers work in teams where one of the teachers is a bilingual, and weekly newsletters in Japanese are sent home to keep parents informed" [emphasis added].

It is noted that the miscommunication issue may have been one of the factors causing parental worries about whether their children's Japanese identity would be negatively affected.

Kibangu School's recruitment history provides some sobering experience. A search for the perfect teacher can be quite frustrating. And there are close parallels at the larger national level: An attempt to force the bulk of the Grade B/C teachers to upgrade their academic standing resulted in massive failures in the national Secondary Four examinations. The government had to retract its threat to fire them. Who would teach in the schools if these were to be fired? Another tempting comparison is with the Hong Kong Language Proficiency Assessment Test (Glenwright 2002). If more than half of the relevant teaching force does not have the mandatory certification, and there are not enough new teachers entering the profession with the required credentials, then more time is needed to phase out the 'incompetent', or the criteria need to be changed in order to accept more members into the club of the 'competent'.

7. Product quality and EMS prospects

It is easy to be too severe in assessing the English proficiency of the teachers and their pupils, and to pay little attention to the wider educational objectives of the school's mission. In comparative terms, Kibangu School, together with the other EMS outperform the government Kiswahili medium schools in the examinations and in the assessment made by the school inspectors. This superior performance cannot be due to the use of English as the medium of instruction; rather it is achieved *in spite of* the use of English. The factors that bring the difference are the mundane ones whose absence prompted us to establish the school in the first place, viz. a better supply of teaching and learning materials, appropriate physical infrastructure (classrooms with small classes and adequate furniture), and an adequate number of well-qualified teachers. In addition, the children come from

urban, educated, above-average-income families.[8] This last factor is not negligible and must be given due weight in any argument for the replication of English Medium Instruction to the whole primary school system or its retention at secondary and tertiary levels (Roy-Campbell & Qorro 1997). This rather obvious observation needs reiterating because the apparent superior performance of the EMS is easily cited by people who believe that quality education is intimately tied to the English language.

Like the proficiency in English and general academic attainment, our pupils' performance in Kiswahili is generally better than that of the Kiswahili medium schools. But as already noted, it is not possible to make any specific conclusions in this respect since there are many other variables not related to the immersion model. One research issue that presents itself from the foregoing discussion is the extent to which the outcomes of the programme would be enhanced by the use of Kiswahili in the first two or three years, making use of the pupils' well-established first language to master the basic literacy skills. None of the EMS in Tanzania have the liberty to experiment along these lines for it would require a lot of persuading on the part of the parents that a late start of instruction in English will, at the very least, produce similar levels of performance as an early start.

In spite of what the EMS can help the pupils achieve in the realm of proficiency in English, it is doubtful whether these social conditions provide the opportunities for the children to realize their full potential. On the whole, Kiswahili remains the dominant language for both the EMS and KMS children. Kiswahili remains ahead in the children's basic interpersonal communicative skills. At the same time the school is promoting cognitive academic language proficiency in English only, with no hope (or desire?) that at a later stage (e.g. at secondary school level) this will change. In other words, the CALP is being built on the weaker BICS column or shoulder. It is conceivable that, other factors held constant, this situation holds back the full realization of intellectual development and creativity for most people who have to use a language other than the first for academic purposes.

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8 It may not be too far fetched to draw a parallel with the situation in South America: "These two types of schools participate in distinct 'imagined communities' ... and envision different sorts of futures for their graduates. Students, parents, and school staff of [EMS] generally participate in the same 'imagined community', sharing the hope that students will master academic content, become fluent in a high status international language such as English ..., move in international circles and become members of the national elite" (King 2004:335).

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