



## ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) IN TANZANIA: EVIDENCES FROM LITERATURE

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### Abstract

For the past 30 years, English has occupied the position of being the most important foreign language in the world. English serves the purpose of being the language for international communication, science, commerce, advertising, diplomacy and transferring advanced technology. In addition, in the era of globalisation, the interdependence and interlinkedness of countries necessitates a need for having a global language and English qualifies for this better than other languages. As a result of this necessity for having a global language, a number of countries including Tanzania have put much efforts and emphasis on the teaching of English as a foreign language. The role of English is of significant important in promoting economic growth and developing skilled man powers, hence, improvement in English language teaching and learning has become the prior concern. Based on the literature review, this article highlights several key issues: historical, political, and social conditions of English in Tanzania, status of English language education in national education policies, factors affecting the implementation of communicative language teaching approach, validity of students' assessment and its wash back effect on teaching, and deficiencies of existing teacher development programmes in language teachers' capacity building. The article concludes with several implications and recommendations to improve the situation of English language teaching in the country and specifically the probable solutions to overcome the discussed problems.

**Keywords:** English in education policy, CLT approach, Teacher education, English language teaching in Tanzania

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## Introduction

Over the last 30 years, English has occupied the position of being the most important foreign language in the world. English serves the purpose of being the language for international communication, science, commerce, advertising, diplomacy and transferring advanced technology (Hossain, 2015; Khan, 2013; Swilla, 2009). In addition, in the era of globalisation, the interdependence and interlinkedness of countries necessitates a need for having a global language and English qualifies for this better than other languages (Hossain, 2015; Khan, 2013). As a result of this necessity for having a global language, a number of countries including Tanzania have put much efforts and emphasis on the teaching of English as a foreign language rather than their native languages to its citizens (Hossain, 2015; Tork, 2006). The role of English is of significant important in promoting economic growth and developing skilled man powers, who are globally compatible hence, improvement in English language teaching and learning has become the prior concern (Hamid, 2010).

Despite a number of measures have been taken in years to improve English language teaching (ELT) in Tanzania (Brock-Utne, 2002; HakiElimu, 2009; Mkonongwa, 2012; Sane & Sebonde, 2014), the outcomes are still unsatisfactory since language proficiency level among students is depressing (Brock-utne, 2007; Qorro, 2007; Swilla, 2009; Komba, 2012; Qorro, 2012; Bikongoro, 2014; Sane & Sebonde, 2014;). To elucidate, various problems such as the politically motivated decision in lowering the status and use of English in Tanzania since the independence (Legere, 2007; Schneider, 2007; Swila, 2009), inconsistent language in education policies (Bwenge, 2012; Qorro, 2013; Ochieng, 2015), implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (Mpayo, 2012; Lyimo, 2013; Sane & Sebonde, 2014; Makunja, 2016; Suzubeki, 2016; Ndulila 2017; John, 2020; Omari, 2020), examination format (Lyimo, 2013; Emmanuel, 2019), and language teachers' professional development (Sane & Sebonde, 2014; Makunja, 2016; Emmanuel, 2019) are the most significant setbacks that hamper ELT in Tanzania.

Against the background of these problems in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Tanzania, based on evidences from literature, this article critically analyses the historical, political, and social conditions of English in Tanzania in the first phase. Secondly, the article highlights the

existing status of English language education in national education policies in Tanzania. Thirdly, it seeks attention on the factors affecting the implementation of CLT approach. Furthermore, the article also assesses the validity of students' assessment in Tanzania and its washback effects on teaching. Finally, the article explicates the deficiencies of existing teacher development programmes in language teachers' capacity building. The article concludes with several implications and recommendations to improve the situation of ELT in the country and specifically the probable solutions to overcome the discussed problems.

### **English in Tanzania: A Socio-Historical and Political Perspective, Its Roles and Status**

Since language is a significant part for creating a unique cultural life of a region, it is important to make a reflection on the historical background of languages in Tanzania and explore how the current linguistic reality has emerged. In Tanzania, ELT was introduced in education system in 1919 during the British occupation of Tanzania, by then Tanganyika (Mhina, 1976). Mhina extends that before this time, the territory was under Germany rule which played a significant role in the use of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction and not German. In addition, the British rule introduced secondary school education so as to get auxiliary staff for carrying out clerical jobs in their administration.

The British colonial epoch had a greater deal in the history of ELT in Tanzania. Since during British rule, English emerged as both a medium of instruction and a subject in the education system of Tanzania. English subject was allocated with more periods about twelve hours per week in the curriculum, contrary to Kiswahili subject which was allocated with two hours per week (Mhina, 1976; Swila, 2009; Qorro, 2013). In addition, an individual with an "A" grade pass in English subject was awarded an overseas Cambridge School Certificate. Similarly, an individual was considered to get employment or join secondary school on the basis of good performance in English subject (Mhina, 1976; Swila, 2009; Qorro, 2013). Consequently, English was viewed as high class language for further education and higher administrative posts while Kiswahili was regarded for low level administrative purposes (Bwenge, 2012).

In post-colonial Tanzania, language policy did not change that much as English remained a medium of instruction in post primary education. However, English is not a prerequisite for awarding certificates or employment (Qorro, 2013). The attitude towards English started to change after the Arusha Declaration in which glorification of Kiswahili was realised in various domains where as speaking English in public was regarded to have colonial legacy (Bwenge, 2012). As a result, in the late 1970's onwards scholars reported the decline of English language proficiency in different levels of education in Tanzania (Mlama & Materu, 1978; Crippler & Dodd, 1984; Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997).

English language in Tanzania has a significant role in educational system; English is a medium of instruction in secondary school levels, tertiary Education level and is taught as a compulsory subject from primary school levels to ordinary level of secondary education (MOEC, 1995). The mastery of English language is very important for gaining access to tertiary education. Outside the education system, English plays other roles although in a limited domain. English is a language of opportunities, high rank jobs in Tanzania and beyond, a language of the high court, diplomatic ties, advancement in science and technology as well as international trade and business (Swilla, 2009).

Nevertheless, the status of English is that of a foreign language since it is rarely used as a medium of communication in government offices and parastatals or in the day-to-day activities, be it in government business, at the family level or as a language for socialisation among peers (Tibategeza, 2009; Qorro, 2013; Sane & Sebonde, 2014). It is also noted that English is rarely used outside the classroom. In particular, learners in public schools do not normally use English language rather they use Kiswahili language when participating fully in the social, political and economic life of Tanzania (Vuzo, 2008; Qorro, 2013; Sane & Sebonde, 2014; Mtallo, 2015).

### **Language in Education Policy in Tanzania**

Language planning and policy in Africa generally and Tanzania in particular has been a controversial issue for over five decades (Qorro, 2013). At the planning and policy-making level, it is stipulated that English is used as the language of instruction from secondary school level onwards, with the assumption that when students get exposed to it and use it as the

language of instruction, they would learn it in the process (Qorro, 2013). Qorro explicates that policy has been changed several times over the five decades; and every time the change is made towards introducing English language teaching a bit earlier than before, with the assumption that the earlier children are exposed to English the faster they will learn it.

In 1995 the Ministry of Education published the Education and Training policy in Tanzania that is currently being implemented. In accordance with this policy, English continues to be the medium of instruction from secondary schools up to the tertiary level and eventually in higher education institutions (Vuzo, 2008).

The Education and Training policy clearly specifies the position of Kiswahili and English in education. It stipulates that “the medium of instruction in pre-primary schools shall be Kiswahili, and English shall be a compulsory subject” (Ministry of Education and Culture [MOEC], 1995, p. 35). At primary level, the policy addresses that “the medium of instruction in primary schools shall be Kiswahili, and English shall be a compulsory subject” (MOEC, 1995, p. 39). It further extends that “the medium of instruction for secondary education shall continue to be English except for the teaching of other approved languages and Kiswahili shall be a compulsory subject up to ordinary level” (MOEC, 1995, p. 45).

Accompany these specifications for language roles in education is a great expectation, thus stated: “It is expected that at the end of seven years of primary education, pupils will have acquired and developed adequate mastery of this language, both spoken and written, to cope with the demands at secondary, post secondary and the world of work” (MOEC, 1995, p. 39).

Mwinsheikhe (2008) argued that this expectation is hardly realized is a known fact. In fact the pedagogical problem inherent in the transition from Kiswahili MOI to English MOI was anticipated even in the five- Year Development Plan (1969-74) which states that educational problems will emerge because students, on entering secondary school, are supposed to have a shift to study in a new language (English), at the same time taking on a more difficult set of subject.

Nevertheless, Mwinsheikhe (2008) noted that cultural policy of 1997 clarifies the government’s standpoint regarding the position of the

languages in formal education in Tanzania and points to the drawbacks of the 1995 education and training policy. This cultural policy lays great emphasis on the use of Kiswahili as a means of furthering scientific and technological development which it deems necessary for national development. Mwinsheikhe added that the policy also stipulates that a specific plan of action will be put in place to facilitate the use of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction at all levels of education and training. Furthermore, English is given due importance as foreign language. Currently, no steps have been taken towards using Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in secondary schools. Nothing happened notwithstanding the fact that the consultancy report of 1998 proposed that Kiswahili as LOI in secondary schools should commence in 2001 (Mwinsheikhe, 2008).

### **English Access and Equality**

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (2003), access policy means who will learn what language and when. If access to English brings positive benefits to individuals, then English should be made equally accessible to all citizens (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). However, English language teaching was not carefully planned since the quality of teaching and teachers is not equal and is poor across the country (Dominician, 2008; HakiElimu, 2009; Mosha, 2012; Ngaruiya, 2013; Mosha, 2014; Sane & Sebonde, 2014). Besides, majority of the schools across the country are inadequately resourced, and lack of English teachers robs all aspirations (Vuzo, 2010; Makunja, 2016).

Furthermore, there has been social inequity within the population since access to English is not equal in rural and urban areas (Rubagumya, 1991; Rugemalira, 2005; Bwenge, 2012; Bikongoro, 2014). To make it worse, English medium schools get exclusive access to English with the bare minimum use of Kiswahili. Consequently, the emergence of English medium schools in the cities has contributed to the inequality to a large extent (Rubagumya, 1991; Rugemalira, 2005; Bakawhemama, 2010; Bwenge, 2012). The urban students often go to English medium schools and receive their education in English thus; the level of their proficiency is higher compared to the Swahili medium students who study in public and private schools (Rubagumya, 1991; Rugemalira, 2005; Bakawhemama, 2010; Bwenge, 2012; Bikongoro, 2014).

### **Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach in Tanzania**

As a strategy to improve the English language proficiency in Tanzania, the Government issued a communicative competence based English syllabus for ordinary level1 (O-level) in 2005 to replace the old syllabus which was claimed to be structure based and hence could not produce communicative competent learners. The new syllabus requires teachers to use the communicative approach in teaching the English language (Tanzania Institute of Education [TIE], 2005).

Despite its beginning with lots of promises and expectations, CLT has not been implemented as it was intended in the curriculum (Mpayo, 2012; Lyimo, 2013; Sane & Sebonde, 2014; Makunja, 2016; Suzubeki, 2016; Ndulila 2017; John, 2020; Omari, 2020). A number of issues have contributed to the current problem associated with CLT implementation. Among them, factors associated with teachers and teaching practices are reported in the existing literature frequently (Mpayo, 2012; Lyimo, 2013; Sane & Sebonde, 2014; Makunja, 2016; Suzubeki, 2016; Ndulila 2017; John, 2020; Omari, 2020).

As Fullan (2007) contends that multiple factors contribute to teachers' implementation of the curriculum. Among these factors are unacknowledged teachers' needs, lack in curriculum clarity and complexity associated with curriculum, and quality and practicality of textbook and other materials. Curriculum development and implementation is a top-down process in the context of Tanzania, as a result, teachers do not get the opportunity to express their views (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Meena, 2009; Nzima; 2016; Mgaiwa, 2018).

It is understandable that teachers are skilful in teaching through Grammar translation method since they have the experience of utilising the method in the classroom. With the CLT innovation, teachers' needs were overlooked, and to an extent, it was imposed on them (Omari, 2020). Teachers' needs are identified as qualification and training (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Meena, 2009; Namamba & Rao, 2017; Mgaiwa, 2018).

Just to mention a few, teachers' inadequate knowledge on CLT approach, teaching methods and strategies, managing large size class, lack of supportive environment for practicing speaking English, lack of effective

teaching materials, and professional development are the setbacks towards implementation of CLT approach in the context of Tanzania (Mpayo, 2012; Lyimo, 2013; Sane & Sebonde, 2014; Makunja, 2016; Suzubeki, 2016; Ndulila 2017; John, 2020; Omari, 2020). In addition, the reality of the classroom has certainly been ignored by the policymakers since there is an existing gap of communication between policymakers and implementers (Meena, 2009; Nzima, 2016). Thus, naturally, CLT implementation would become ineffective in such contexts. Therefore, given the few empirical studies available currently, it is important to scrutinise further the teachers' understanding of the curriculum that might ascertain new insights.

### **The Quest of Students' Assessment and its Effects**

The success of language policy and implementation of the curriculum depends mostly on the quality of assessment and testing (Das et al., 2014). One of the critical issues of the examination format is exclusion of the two vital language skills, speaking and listening, from the centralised exams (Rubagumya, 2010; Kitundu, 2012; Lyimo, 2013; Mtallo, 2015; Emmanuel, 2019; Malima, Mtani & Ngowi, 2019).

This conservative attitude to exams setting causes reduction of the curriculum which is a clear indication that the assessment is not congruent with the national curriculum. According to Malima, Mtani & Ngowi (2019), the tests are not consistent with the goal of teaching English language that seeks to develop students' communicative competence thus, the assessment methods lack validity, due to the existing gap between what it "intended to be taught and what is measured".

The impact of assessment has severe wash back effects on English language teaching in Tanzania (Rubagumya, 2010; Lyimo, 2013; Mtallo, 2015; Malima, Mtani & Ngowi, 2019). The wash back effect of the English examinations is noted in the test preparation of the students and teachers in achieving higher grade (Mtallo, 2015). This particular phenomenon leads the students to memorise the course contents and poses the potential danger of acquiring superficial competence in language (Rubagumya, 2010; Kitundu, 2012; Lyimo, 2013; Mtallo, 2015; Malima, Mtani & Ngowi, 2019).

Moreover, since the two important skills, listening and speaking, are not assessed in the tests, teachers and students are unwilling to practice them in the classroom (Lyimo, 2013; Emmanuel, 2019). It is evident that the wash

back effect of assessment impacts several aspects of teaching and learning of English in Tanzania. However, there is still a paucity of empirical studies given those handful of studies mentioned above. Thus, further empirical studies are needed to find out the impact of wash back of testing on the different classroom practices carried out by the teachers and the learners.

### **English Language Teacher Education and Professional Development**

Quality of education is dependent upon many factors, (i.e., inputs and processes), including the quality of teachers. However the quality of teachers in the education profession forms an important component for effective education system delivery (Mosha, 2006; Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Mgaiwa, 2018). It is arguably that development of a quality education system relies upon the quality of its teachers hence the quality of teachers should be of paramount importance and acceptable standard (Mosha, 2006; Hardman et al., 2011; Goodwin et al., 2014).

Based on this view, teacher preparation and professional development is at the hub of any effective and efficient education system. Besides, teachers are vital components of any education system because they form an important pillar for students' learning by converting national philosophy, educational policy and curriculum goals into instructional objectives and eventually create the environment for students' learning (Richmond & Floden, 2017).

Admittedly, teacher education (TE) is an indispensable part for enriching teachers' dexterity (Karim et al., 2018) regardless of the subjects they teach. In addition, TE contributes in building teacher cognition and teacher identity that embeds the decisive factors which determine teachers' actions in the classroom. The aim of any teacher education programme is to attain teachers' change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). As such, it becomes conspicuous that TE has direct influences on teachers' classroom practices (Rahman et al., 2018).

English language teachers like other subject teachers in Tanzania undergo in the same teacher training. Teacher education in Tanzania is currently managed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST). The ministry manages about 34 public teacher's colleges and provides guidance to about 14 registered privately-owned colleges that prepare

teachers at the certificate and diploma levels (Luwavi, 2012; Kitta & Fussy, 2013; UNESCO, 2014; TIE, 2019).

Teacher Education and Professional development is achieved in two phases: pre-service and in-service teacher education. Pre-service teacher education programmes are run by both government and non-government training institutions. In-service teacher education programmes are mainly run by public institutions and are either upgrading or non-upgrading programmes (UNESCO, 2014; Mgaiwa, 2018).

Most upgrading programmes are run by the same training institutions that offer pre-service programmes. These types of in-service programmes are mainly academic and less professional, and attract many teachers due to the fact that they are recognized for promotion. Non-upgrading programmes are not recognized for promotion, and therefore attract teachers only when they are associated with allowances. However, the current upgrading programmes do not provide opportunities for the teacher's cumulative career advancement along the same specialization (UNESCO, 2014; Mgaiwa, 2018).

Pre-service teacher training is currently offered through three clusters: Grade A (certificate) teachers, Diploma teachers, and Degree graduate teachers. Certificate teachers are prepared for three years to teach pre-primary and primary school students, whilst Diploma holders are prepared for two years to be secondary school teachers, although most also teach in primary schools. Degree graduates are prepared for three years to teach in secondary schools, but mostly high schools and teacher training colleges (Bhalalusesa et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2014; Mgaiwa, 2018).

In-service education is currently a multi-player activity in which different institutions participate under the coordination of the Teacher Education Department. The MoEST and sister institutions such as the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), Agency for Development of Educational Managers (ADEM), and the School Inspectorate Section, provide most of the non-upgrading in-service programmes, in collaboration with NGOs, donor funded projects like Quality Education Improvement Programme in Tanzania (EQUIP-T), funded by DFID; Literacy and Numeracy Support Programme (LANES), funded by Global Partnership in Education (GPE); and School Based In-Service Training (SBIT), funded by UNICEF

universities and teachers' colleges, but mainly using the project approach. In most cases, such programmes are inequitably accessible, ad-hoc, non-continuous and uncoordinated, and therefore, limited in their potential to contribute towards the professional advancement of teachers (UNESCO, 2014; Namamba & Rao, 2017; Dachi, 2018; Mgaiwa, 2018; Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019).

Teacher education and professional development is surrounded with a number of challenges such as lack of specific policies for teacher education, lack of continuing professional development, lack of an autonomous teacher regulatory body, and poor quality of candidates joining teacher education, limited knowledge on teacher professional development among teacher professional development stakeholders, predominance of traditional approach to teacher professional development, limited budget and ineffective organization of teacher professional development activities (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Meena, 2009; UNESCO, 2014; Namamba & Rao, 2017; Mgaiwa, 2018; Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019 ). Consequently, these challenges hamper directly or indirectly the language teacher professional development and hence the implementation of CLT approach becomes ineffective.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Considering the fact that Tanzania is among the English learning populations of the world, it is imperative to study problems associated with English language education in the country. This article discussed the key issues linked with ELT in Tanzania by reviewing relevant concurrent literature. Based on the thematic discussion above, several implications emerged concerning English language education in the country and future research. English in Tanzania is significant in many ways. In order to supply the global demand of skilled workforce, English language proficiency is imperative. However, for the achievement of enhanced English language proficiency, an exclusionary approach such as undermining Kiswahili and other ethnic languages from language planning is undesirable.

Therefore, this research calls for adopting a global approach in providing appropriate linguistic attention to mother tongue and English, where Kiswahili and other indigenous languages would hold the root of the

culture in terms of language practices in education and society while English will provide the nation more opportunity in the global stage. A national consensus should be made recognising multilingualism in Tanzania which is historically, socially, and culturally evident in the land of Tanzania, although it is politically unacknowledged.

Apparently, Tanzania has remained unsuccessful in attaining self-reliance in English language teaching. Although the problem is reported widely in popular opinion and empirical studies, policymakers are often reluctant in admitting the problem. MoEST should acknowledge the complication created by their inconsistent policy formulation. To adopt a sustainable language policy, policymakers must revisit some of the policies objectively, sidelining the prescriptions of the donors, NGOs, or any other interest groups, and plan accordingly. Eventually, inclusive language policy and planning based on equity should be the objective.

Undoubtedly, the CLT is one of the most dominant language teaching approaches in the world today. However, integrating CLT into the curriculum requires pragmatic and judicious planning since in the context of Tanzania, the implementation of CLT approach is competing with the traditional language teaching and learning culture. Therefore, policymakers should re-evaluate the relevance of the CLT approach in the curriculum in the context of Tanzania. In addition, textbook and classroom resources should comply with the objectives of the CLT curriculum.

The current English language assessment in Tanzania discussed depicts that the challenges are numerous. Above of all, the wash back effect needs to be addressed seriously. Assessment practices are hard to change; however, if initiatives to change the current practices are not taken, they will remain unchanged which will ultimately preclude the adoption of time-appropriate learning styles by the students. Assessment methods must be compatible with the contemporary expectations of the real world. Hence, the policymakers must think of alternative forms of assessment, at least alternatives in assessment.

Tanzania needs to strengthen its teacher training capacity through local expertise and institutions, instead of relying heavily on donor-funded teacher development programmes. Several teacher education-related problems discussed earlier in the article needs to be addressed properly in

order to make teacher education and professional development more effective and efficient.

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