

Full Length Research Paper

The language of instruction issue in Tanzania: Pertinent determining factors and perceptions of education stakeholders

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The purpose of this study was to explore how education stakeholders in Tanzania express their perceptions and concerns regarding the use of English or Kiswahili as language of instruction in Tanzanian schools. The qualitative study was conducted in Tanzania between November 2011 and March 2012. 27 education stakeholders (13 females and 14 males) in five districts across Tanzania were interviewed. It was found out in the study that while educational stakeholders differ in their perspectives regarding the use of English or Kiswahili as the language of instruction in Tanzanian schools, the cost of education reforms in terms of both human and financial resources greatly influences policy decision making on the language of instruction in Tanzanian schools. Further, stakeholders differ greatly in their opinions regarding the use of either English or Kiswahili as the language of instruction in Tanzanian schools. Nevertheless, proficiency in English language, regardless of whether it is used as a language of instruction or not is very important for Tanzanian students within the globalized world.

Key words: Education stakeholders, languages, English or Kiswahili.

INTRODUCTION

Language policy: The context

Tanzania official languages are Kiswahili and English. Practically, English is considered as an academic language while Kiswahili as a language of daily communication. At school level, Kiswahili is the language of instruction in public primary schools in Tanzania while English is taught just as a single subject until students reach secondary school. Note also that 99.1% of school

age children in Tanzania attend public schools while only 0.9% attend private schools (URT, 2005). Unlike in public schools, the language of instruction in private schools is English throughout.

When a student in a public school advances to secondary school the language of instruction swiftly changes from Kiswahili to English. All subjects, except Kiswahili language are taught in English in secondary schools (MoEVT, 2008). Little attempt is made to help students

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make this transition. Apparently, the learning process becomes challenging for most students in secondary schools as the majority of them largely lack a basic command of English language (Qorro, 2006). No wonder many scholars, including Solórzano (1998), have questioned the type of learning theory that informs the best way to teach students in a language they do not yet comprehend, read or speak.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Many countries of the world are increasingly becoming bilingual or multilingual as a result of the impact of globalization (Imam, 2005). Thus, national language policies and the selection of languages to be used as the media of instruction in schools are of considerable importance for the quality of teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2005). In Tanzania, the issues involved in the language of instruction cannot be ignored as Tanzania is basically a multilingual nation. Thus, there is a strong relationship between language of instruction and quality of education in the country's education system.

According to numerous studies (Canada-Ministry of Education, 2005; UNESCO, 2005; Qorro, 2006; Rajani 2006), learners can only actively participate in knowledge creation if they are allowed to use the language they understand very well, which, in most cases, is the language they usually speak in their day-to-day life. This is one of the reasons why researchers and activists in Tanzania support the idea that the medium of instruction should be in Kiswahili from primary to secondary schools, and eventually to tertiary level (Qorro, 2006). The reason for this is that Kiswahili, apart from being the official language in Tanzania, is the language of wider communication, parliament, trade and commerce throughout the country.

Significant number of the Tanzanian policymakers opposes this notion by defending the status quo (Qorro, 2006). These policymakers argue that the best way for students to learn English is to use it; otherwise they will lose it. In reality, according to educational advocacy groups and scholars, using Kiswahili as a language of instruction does not mean English is ignored (Rajani, 2006). In fact, learning and understanding better the language students are familiar with (that is, Kiswahili) is the key to master the second language proficiently (Canada-Ministry of Education, 2005), which in this case would be English.

In Canada, for example, English language learners are encouraged to use their first languages in classrooms, as well as in homework assignments. According to the Canada Ministry of Education policy document (2005), the use of first languages in classrooms enhances learners' development of English language proficiency,

supports their sense of identity and self-confidence, and promotes positive attitudes towards language learning among all students, including English speakers.

In fact, curriculum delivery through a foreign medium encourages rote learning that reduces the chance of life skills education (Example, HIV/AIDS prevention practices) leading to positive behavior change (Wedgwood, 2006). Generally, this kind of instruction does not prepare children to face the world of economic competition. Instead of receiving quality education, students in such classrooms do not get quality education and neither learn English nor Kiswahili languages (Qorro, 2006).

In her study with Brock-Utne, Qorro (2006) observed the use of English as a language of instruction in schools. The study revealed that most students and the majority of teachers in Tanzania are seriously handicapped when it comes to using English as the language of instruction: "Only a handful of students take part in active learning and the majority of students simply sit and copy notes that their teachers have written on the blackboard" (p. 4). Qorro observed further that if the teacher's handwriting is not legible students do not ask but simply copy words incorrectly since they are not able to distinguish correct from incorrect spelled words.

Thus, it is crucial for every country to have a clear policy on language of instruction in its education system in order to achieve both goals, that is, quality of education as a result of the use of local languages in schools and acquiring proficiency in the global languages through education. While there are strong educational arguments in favor of mother tongue (or first language) instruction, a careful balance needs to be made between enabling people to use local languages in learning and providing access to global languages of communication through education (UNESCO, 2005).

Global perspectives

Placing the discussion on the broader context, it is significant to conceptualize English within a global perspective as a socio-political, economic and educational language. English is now the first language of about 400 million people in Britain, the United States and the Commonwealth, and it has become the dominant global language of communication, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy and the internet (Guo and Beckett, 2007). Undeniably, today English is increasingly becoming the dominant global language whereby both the West and the East have become equally busy promoting it (Imam, 2005).

Throughout the language policy discussion, therefore, it is important to ask ourselves whether language policy is such an important global issue. Gándara and Gómez (2009) found out that nation-states have frequently used

language as an instrumental and symbolic tool for the process of building a solitary national culture. Language therefore is a key element of ethnic and national identity. Gándara and Gómez (2009) further contends that ethno-cultural identity and language are inextricably connected, and language choice and language use always have socio-political and socio-economic consequences.

Focusing on the English language policy within historical context, it would seem that, socio-political and economic roles of English language have been evolving over time across nations. Spring (2007), for example, found out that, in the 21st century English language plays a different role in the global economy than it did during the 19th century when it was used as an instrument of cultural imperialism. Today, English serves as a vehicle for participation in the global economy. In fact, English is now chosen as a language to learn rather than the language that is imposed by outside forces (Spring, 2007; Rubagumya et al., 2011; Kiliku, 2011).

In Africa, due to the character of most colonially defined states and intuitive policies of imperialist powers, the languages of Europe, specifically Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English and French became the languages of power (Alexander, 1999). During the period of decolonization, all the fledgling nations of Asia faced the language identity question. Language became one of the keys to nation-building and identity, and an instrument of coherence and control (Imam, 2005). Ironically, in Africa, English changed its form from being the language of the oppressor to becoming the language of national unity and liberation (Alexander, 1999).

Politically, countries like Singapore, Malaysia, India and Sri Lanka, vigorously surge forward in the promotion of English language parallel with additional indigenous languages (Imam, 2005). In Africa, however, the argument was based on the assertion that the choice of any indigenous language “would unleash a separatist dynamic which would destabilize the mostly very plurilingual African states” (Alexander, 1999, p. 5). Thus, it is evident that the supremacy of English language across the world has political and cultural sanctions from the powerful and dominant ruling classes regardless of the critical observation of the scholars and the ordinary people.

The above information showed the circumstances in which English language has emerged to become a dominant language across the world. However, still more questions remained unanswered as to how and why English became such a powerful and dominant global language. In fact, the global role of English language and English-speaking cultures is not derived from an inherent superiority, or from the natural outcome of market forces on a level playing field, or from a spontaneous movement towards global unity; rather, it is derived from the past and present hegemony of the USA and UK in economics, politics and in the cultural sphere (Imam, 2005). The

necessity for global English is a function of institutions, trans-national companies, and governments able to ensure their own culture is given universal respect (Imam, 2005).

Beyond political and economic context, English language is equally deeply embedded in the contemporary urban youth culture across the world. In Johannesburg, South Africa, for example, youth culture known as Y-Culture initiated by the YFM radio station launched a fashion label called “*Loxion Kulcha*” which are ironic deformations of the English words “*Location Culture*” (Nuttall, 2008). Y-Culture, according to Nuttall (2008), remixes African American style to its own purposes.

Nuttall informs readers further that multilingualism is built into the text of Y-Magazine - another youth culture symbol in Johannesburg; however, its main articles are written in English.

Neoliberalism and globalization framework within Tanzanian context

Under globalization, within the context of neoliberalism, labor is considered as a commodity. States collectively seek and negotiate the reduction of barriers to movement of capital across borders and the opening of markets for both commodities and capital to global exchange (Harvey, 2007). For a country to be able to benefit from globalization through the free movement of labor and capital, education should assume its role of preparing people to fit into the globalized and neoliberal world. Here again, English plays a crucial role in the Tanzanian education system, as it is explained below.

The public education system in Tanzania can hardly compete within the global markets. This is due to inadequate resources, poor infrastructure and manpower. Thus, under the command of neoliberalism, the task of providing competitive education is left to the private individuals. The private education system in which English is the language of instruction is, however, guaranteed to the small percentage of the population (elites). Under these circumstances, individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings such as not investing significantly in one's own human capital through education (Harvey, 2007). This is the case in many African countries.

In pursuance of neoliberalism, the major policy challenge nations are facing regarding the issue of English as a language of instruction is therefore related to government power and elitist privileges on the one hand and people's activism and information sharing on the other hand. Technically, private schools in Tanzania are mainly for the few elite members of the population and high level government officials due to high cost of enrolment and other numerous inhibitive fees. English in these schools

Table 1. Demographic information.

	Policymakers	Teachers	Parents	Activists	Total
Female	1	9	2	1	13
Male	4	3	3	4	14
Total	5	12	5	5	27

becomes the medium of instruction by default. The status quo is protected by policy at all levels and ironically, some poor people who do not have access to these elite schools still support the use of English as the language of instructions in schools. They accept the status quo, not because their children enjoy high quality education in these “elite” schools, but because they understand the need and the importance of English language for their children. In fact, unknowingly they mix up two different concepts: learning in English versus learning English.

These poor parents believe that “the languages of wider communication” (Clayton, 1998) are the sure way to expose their children to the globalized labor markets. Consequently, these parents feel that denying their children knowledge of English is like shutting doors for their future career and employment opportunities. As a result of political pressure, government officials and education administrators found themselves in a tricky position that prompts them to ignore the objective and scientific evidence of the ideal policy on the language of instruction.. Thus, in spite of numerous calls at the national and international levels to provide students with education in their own native languages, the governments of non-English speaking countries continue to use “the language of wider communication” (Clayton, 1998).

In general, the increasing dominance of English language contributes to neocolonialism by empowering the already powerful class and leaving the disadvantaged further behind. For example, currently, most English textbooks and readings in China, from kindergarten to university, either originated from the Anglo countries or represent Anglocentric culture in the name of authenticity (Guo, 2005). As a result, according to Guo (2005), many Chinese students know more about the Anglo culture than Chinese culture, and indeed, some young Chinese students seem to internalize the belief in the superiority of Anglo culture and the inferiority of their own culture.

In sum, English language hegemony across the world is well grounded and supported by social, political, economic and cultural forces. Undeniably, English language cannot be ignored during this era of globalization and technological advancement. This assertion however, should not justify the dominance of English language at the expense of local and indigenous languages across the world. The challenge is to ensure that English

language prevails, while at the same time, indigenous languages are equally promoted.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed at finding out how education stakeholders in Tanzania express their perceptions and concerns on the use of English or Kiswahili as languages of instruction in Tanzanian schools. Specifically, the study aimed at finding out the perspectives of key education stakeholders regarding language of instruction in Tanzania. People from all walks of life who have special ties with education policy and implementation in Tanzania were interviewed. And in order to streamline these groups of people into clear and distinct categories, the researcher classified them into four main groups of education stakeholders, namely, policymakers, teachers, parents and activists. Each participant was placed into one of these four categories of education stakeholders.

The qualitative study was conducted in Tanzania between November 2010 and March 2011. Twenty seven education stakeholders in five districts across the country were interviewed throughout this time. These districts were selected using a random number table. The participants in the selected districts were contacted through both ordinary and electronic mails to notify them of the selection of their districts and request their participation.

From December 2010 to February 2011, 27 education stakeholders in five districts across the country were interviewed. The initial plan was to interview at least 20 participants, five from each group of educational stakeholders (policy makers, teachers, parents, advocacy group/ activists) from at least ten districts. However, the saturation level was reached when the researcher conducted the interview on the fourth district. Upon reaching the fifth district the information received from the participants became more repetitive and generally lacked new evidences and information. This posed as a good indicator that the maximum saturation was attained.

The demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Verbal and written consent forms were provided to the participants. The researcher read and explained the consent form to each individual before it was obtained.

For the sake of clarity, each of these key stakeholder groups will be discussed in turn. The first group, as indicated above, comprised *education policymakers*. For the purpose of this study, this group was divided into two main sub-categories: the central government policymakers (where development of national education policy is centralized) and the district level policy makers (where education policy is interpreted, appropriated and implemented). The second category is of *activists*. These include scholars from institutions of higher education and activists from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Historically, activists have been instrumental to the policy process in Tanzania. The study therefore examined the

extent and kind of education policy advocacy in which this group engages. NGOs in Tanzania are increasingly engaging in advocacy work in order to influence change in the way education policies are created and implemented and to ensure the government is accountable to the promises of the education targets it sets (TENMET, 2008).

The third group of stakeholders is *teachers*. These include all primary and secondary school teachers in Tanzania. Teachers are the key stakeholders in interpreting, appropriating and implementing educational policy especially in respect to school administration and classroom activities. The final groups included in the study are the *parents* of the school children. All four groups represent key players of education policy process in the country. Thus, their perceptions and experience offer important contributions to this study. Below are the samples of the interview questions:

1. Should Kiswahili or English be the language of instruction at all levels of education in Tanzania?
2. English as a global language should be used in schools at all levels as a language of instruction because Tanzania as member of the global family cannot ignore English. What are your opinions?
3. The best way for students to learn English is to use it as a language of instruction in schools. What are your opinions?
4. Kiswahili as the national language should be used in schools at all levels as a language of instruction. What are your opinions?
5. Children can only actively participate in knowledge creation if they are allowed to use Kiswahili, the language they understand very well. What are your opinions?

Interviews were conducted around the five basic questions above. The detailed follow up and probe questions took higher prominence. The interviews were conducted both in Kiswahili and English languages. The materials were organized according to the opinions of each group of education stakeholders. The information from each group was coded based on how the participants in each group saw themselves and how they defined what was important to them.

FINDINGS

As indicated earlier, language of instruction is an important aspect of quality of education in terms of the process or what is taking place inside the classroom. The conceptual framework indicated that children can only actively participate in knowledge creation if they are allowed to use the language they understand very well. The language of instruction policy in Tanzania indicates that students should use Kiswahili in primary school and English at the higher levels of education as their language of instruction. The study revealed that, policy-makers would prefer to have English as a language of instruction in Tanzanian schools at all levels. Nevertheless, they would rather prefer to maintain the status quo at the moment due to the high cost that might be incurred as a result of reforming the language of instruction in schools. Based on their opinions, the main challenge of the education sector in Tanzania is the financial constraint and not the language of instruction.

During the interview, one education stakeholder asserted that the country strives to maintain the status quo, not

because it is the best educational policy, but due to the high cost that would be involved if they decided to drastically change the whole education system. He contended that “we would like our primary schools to use English as language of instruction, but how are we going to cover the cost of overhauling the whole system? A shortage of teachers and lack of competent ones is a serious hurdle, according to the policymakers. They argued that even if they decide to employ all the college graduates to teach in primary schools, using English as a medium of instruction, the government does not have enough money to pay them all. He further said “we can’t hire university graduates to teach primary schools because we can’t afford to pay them! Private schools pay them almost four times as much as our pay rates. So we don’t have any choice but to continue teaching in Kiswahili in primary schools and in English in secondary schools.”

The human and financial resources cost implications also did not exclude the complex task of translating the science subjects from English to Kiswahili language or the reverse. One policymaker blamed the University of Dar es Salaam experts for failing to work on the translation. As a result, policymakers decided to maintain the status quo of teaching in English in secondary schools and in Kiswahili in primary.

Based on the arguments above, policymakers in Tanzania prefer to maintain the status quo (Kiswahili in primary school and English in higher levels) not primarily due to scientific or empirical evidence but due to the huge cost of implementation that relates to financial and human resources. Even after this researcher informed them of the importance of teaching by using the mother tongue as evidenced by the scientific findings, they still insisted on the use of English as the language of instruction by contending that “if there are competent and committed teachers and resources then using English as the language of instruction should not pose a challenge”. He argued, “Do you think our children fail exams because of the language issues? I don’t think so! Why then private schools, which use English as their language of instruction, perform better than public schools?”

In sum, policymakers based their language of instruction opinions on the financial and human resources costs. They are contented with the status quo and would prefer to work on the education reforms within the existing framework, both in terms of policy and practice. They believe that to change it radically is too risky. When they were given only two options in response to question one above – English or Kiswahili - (setting aside financial and human resources cost factors), policymakers would prefer to have all schools in the country using English as language of instruction at all levels.

Likewise teachers, the other group of education stakeholders, believe that the language of instruction should

primarily be determined by the economic situation and specifically the national education budget. Apparently, they too believe that, given enough resources, English should be the language of instruction from primary schools. They argued that by using English as a language of instruction in primary school, students benefit more than using Kiswahili. A teacher from one primary school summed it all by arguing that “if there were enough resources and good preparation, I would prefer English language as a medium of instruction in primary schools too.”

Teachers believe that the swift shift from Kiswahili to English as language of instruction when a student moves from primary to secondary school contributes to students’ failures. They believe that it is important to have one uniform language, which should be English, throughout the education sector. The reason is that they wrongly believe that proficiency in English language is a symbol of higher quality of education. They always see private schools, which are typical English medium schools, are doing better than public schools (Kiswahili medium). One teacher affirmed that “all these teachers you see around here send their children to private (English medium) schools. And when these children enter secondary schools they definitely do better than the ones who graduated from the public primary schools.”

The third group of education stakeholders, who identified themselves as parents, shares the same views as teachers and policymakers on the language of instruction policy in Tanzanian schools. They contended that the status quo, that is, Kiswahili as a language of instruction in primary schools and English in secondary schools is not the best option for the education achievement in Tanzania. Kiswahili should, however, be maintained as a result of insufficient financial and human resources. Parents, on the other hand, differ from the other two groups by contending that given enough resources, Kiswahili should be used at all levels as a language of instruction as it is more likely to facilitate and improve real learning in schools. One parent said that “in my opinion, I think the current system is not working and therefore needs to be changed. However, realistically speaking, we should maintain the status quo in primary schools because Kiswahili is already in place. Likewise we should maintain English in secondary schools although I know this is not the best choice at all”.

It is apparent that parents prefer to see Kiswahili used as a language of instruction at all levels, but at the same time this group of stakeholders is very skeptical to push forward their opinion. They are aware of the many problems the education sector in Tanzania is currently facing; hence changing the status quo might add even more complex problems. To affirm this, parents observed that, “it will cost us a lot in terms of translation and editing costs. It will indeed create confusion. Let us maintain the

status quo and deal with other problems we are currently facing. This one can wait until later.” Another parent spoke both in terms of cost issues and the students’ ability to understand the course contents. She contended that “let us use Kiswahili as a language of instruction in primary schools because it is the language that everybody understands well. English can be taught as a single subject until students become comfortable enough to use it. Once it is well understood then it can be used as a language of instruction in higher levels, as is the case right now.”

The last group of stakeholders who seemed to be vocal and passionate about education performance in Tanzania is the activists. Most of the individuals, who made up this group as indicated earlier, are from Non-Governmental Organizations, researchers and scholars. Their opinions in most cases resonate with the ones observed in the empirical studies regarding language of instruction policy in schools. In accordance with the literature review and the opinions of activists, people learn to think and write and gain confidence better in the language they know best. They argued, “according to the global evidence, the most effective way to improve learning in schools is to teach kids in the language they know best. Now if you have a Tanzanian kid who speaks English more fluently than Kiswahili then for that kid it is better to have the medium of instruction in English and Kiswahili as a second language. According to research, the most effective learning takes place in your language (Qorro, 2006). Even if you are learning a foreign language you can learn and grasp the logic of it, the idea of it and the meaning of it more whenever it is taught in your language.”

It is important however to note that, by using Kiswahili as a language of instruction, activists are supporting the proficiency of both languages, English and Kiswahili. The point here is to ensure that Tanzanian graduates are fluent in both Kiswahili and English. According to activists, it is not English versus Kiswahili. “You need both fully. So it is not “A” versus “B”; it is A and B; spoken fully and fluently.” Activists believe further that poor proficiency in English language among Tanzanians is not only rooted in the language of instruction dilemma but also in the process of teaching and education system as a whole: “If you go to Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, people speak their languages and they do it well, and they speak English far better than Tanzanians. So how do they do it? They make sure that the medium of instruction is in the language of their country – in Tanzania for practical purposes it should be in Kiswahili. So the right way to educate our children is to do a decent job in teaching using Kiswahili language and ensuring that English is taught properly as a second language.” Like other groups of stakeholders, activists also consider the issue of resource availability and the cost of

implementation as important factors to think through before attempting to make any substantial policy change. Their argument is that with the available resources it is possible, although very demanding, to pursue a strategic policy choice that ensures children learn well and understand both languages. They argued, "due to the fact that there are not so many people in Tanzania who could use English fluently, it is wise to use Kiswahili as a language of instruction.. So, it is a strategic choice for the country. If you want to teach in English make sure the kids understand English. It can be done. Like my kids speak a different language at home, but they go to an English medium school and they learn very well. So the issue here is how to do it seriously. Otherwise you will create new problems".

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Generally, the findings of this study imply that, against numerous research findings and credible empirical evidence (Qorro, 2006; Rajani, 2006), policymakers and teachers in Tanzania still believe that the use of English as a language of instruction in Tanzanian schools is important for quality of education achievement. They are strongly convinced that the best way for students to learn English is to use it as the language of instruction. Both of these groups believe that changing the current status will not improve quality but rather will create new problems. They attribute higher quality of education to English language proficiency, because they see that private schools that use English as the language of instruction generally perform better than public schools which use Kiswahili as their language of instruction.

Indeed, the reasons have little or nothing to do with the language of instruction but it is a result of other factors attributed to private schools such as competent administration; teachers' higher salaries, accountability and commitment; availability of teaching and learning materials and facilities, and so on (Rajani, 2006). Evidence across the world (Canada-Ministry of Education, 2005; UNESCO, 2005; Qorro, 2006) proves that children can only actively participate in knowledge creation if they are allowed to use the language they understand well. Thus, Kiswahili, as a Tanzanian wider language of communication, should be used in schools at all levels as the language of instruction.

Parents as a powerful group of education stakeholders in Tanzania understand that it would be better if Kiswahili were the language of instruction throughout education levels. What they need is for the children to acquire quality of education including English language proficiency. Their main concerns are the availability of enough human and financial resources to reform the education sector. They understand the status quo is not the best

option at the moment, but due to other factors related to human resource and financial cost, they would prefer to continue with the status quo rather than cause a new set of problems. Likewise the activists, as parents, understand the importance of Kiswahili as a language of instruction. However, their main concern is how this could be implemented to realize the achievement of both students' higher performance in general and higher English proficiency in particular.

The findings of this study, therefore, inform that, insufficient resources – both human and financial, global hegemony of English language and ill-informed policy, all play important roles, which influence the perspectives of education stakeholders in Tanzania on the language of instruction policy. As pointed out earlier, UNESCO (2005) reminds us that educational policy makers have difficult decisions to make with regard to languages, schooling and the curriculum in which the technical and the political overlap. The best way to strategically navigate through the language dichotomy is therefore to learn from the examples of other successful countries. Indeed, in the majority of the countries across the world for which English is not their native language and who are doing well in terms of education and economy (for example, Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Indonesia and Korea), all levels of education in their schools are offered in their native language and English is taught as a second language (Rajani, 2006).

The challenge that remains is for scholars and stakeholders to apply the findings of this study and other empirical studies to provoke debate that will not only inform people and their government, but also influence their perspectives to implement the right policy. This idea seems to be very theoretical; however, it can be translated into practice. How this can be done? One way is to have the scholars and stakeholders invite and encourage several private and government secondary schools to serve as 'pilots' of teaching using Kiswahili as medium of instruction (including development of materials, teacher training, etc.), and carefully monitor performance. Second, invite all sides on this issue to have a thoughtful, open debate based on solid evidence and research, and use the findings to inform policy. This great idea initially came up in Sumra's (2004) evaluation report on policy challenges on secondary education performance in Tanzania. This initiative will not solve the dilemma but it will move this debate in the right direction. As Rajani (2006) says, we will be able to teach in a medium with which the vast majority of students are comfortable, as well as build proficiency in English – which is increasingly valuable in a globalizing world.

While interpreting the results of this study, its major limitations should be considered. First, students as a major and key group of education stakeholders were not involved in the study. Their ideas and opinion could be

compared to the perspectives of other stakeholders and thus be used as an impetus for provoking a deep and thoughtful debate that should aim at finding the solution for the language of instruction dilemma in Tanzania. This limitation should be considered as a potential ground for further studies regarding this topic.

The other shortcoming is the limited number of people that took part in this study. More people especially those who represent the marginalized groups such as poor people, people with disabilities, women in rural areas and people who have limited access to formal education should also be involved in the study. In fact, these stakeholders could be a crucial strategic group of education stakeholders in Tanzania whose ideas could make a difference in education policy and implementation. Their inclusion would also make it easier for this study to generalize its findings to the Tanzanian population. This limitation should as well be considered as potential grounds for further studies on language policy in education.

Conflict of interest

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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