

Full Length Research Paper

The Intensity of Language of Instruction Problem in Tanzanian Universities: Is it a Numeracy and Literacy Background Case?

Issaya Lupogo

Email: islupogo@mzumbe.ac.tz

Department of Education Foundations and Teaching Management - Mzumbe University, Tanzania.

Accepted 20th August, 2016

Abstract

This paper presents the seriousness of the problem of English as Language of Instruction (LoI) in Tanzanian university students and instructors. This problem hinders strongly the learning and teaching process. The paper derives the causes of the problem and suggesting a way forward. This is mainly a literature and observational experience based study, which partly involves an interview. What justifies the seriousness of the problem includes; inability of both students and instructors to make consistent discussions in English (use of code-switching) which is accompanied by grammatical errors and mistakes. Language errors are also realised in students' dissertations and other academic writings. It has been found that poor literacy and numeracy background are among the strongest causes of that problem in the sense that English is not effectively and totally exposed to children in their early education stages since many pupils use Kiswahili as LoI in many public primary and pre-primary schools. Other causes of the English language problem are: linguistic environment is highly covered by Kiswahili as it caters almost all people' language needs, incompetent English teachers and lacking a culture of using English. The proposed way forward includes: officialising English to be used as LoI from pre-primary and primary schools in both public and private schools, intensifying English teaching and learning in secondary schools, and building a culture of using English. Finally, the government is advised to take measures to handle this educational challenge because the LoI is the heart of knowledge sharing, therefore, if the LoI is not clear to students and instructors, knowledge cannot be shared.

Keywords: Language of Instruction (LoI), Numeracy and Literacy, Post-primary Education.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of English Language and its international acceptability have been pointed by various scholars; Crystal (2003) argues that politically, English is an official or working language of most international political gatherings throughout the world. Furthermore, UNESCO (2013) informs that 85% of international organizations use English as the language of official communications. Also, Neeley (2012) says economically, the Harvard

Business Review call English "the global language of business". Despite the fact that English is used as Language of Instruction (LoI) in Tanzanian post-primary education, many students have neither good command nor proper proficiency in the English language. Various scholars (Lupogo, 2014; Mvungi, 1982; Rubagumya, 1991; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko, 1998; Mwinshekhe, 2003; Brock-Utne 2005;

Vuzo 2005) have shown several English language problems among the students and some teachers as it is used as Lol and strongly suggesting the use of Kiswahili to replace English. Msabila (2001) presents various grammatical common mistakes which are found in students' dissertations and theses from Mzumbe University, Tanzania. Moreover, Malekela (2003) addresses English language problems faced by the University of Dar Es Salaam undergraduate students.

Although English is used as Lol in both secondary schools and higher learning institutions, this paper will focus on higher learning institutions, particularly universities.

Since the role of Lol is very important in knowledge sharing, it must be understood well by instructors and students. Brock-Utne (2005) supports this as she points out that understanding well a Lol enables a learner to understand the content and failure of a learner to capture well the Lol does not only make a learner fail to understand the content but also leads him or her into confusion and frustration.

There has been a very strong debate on which language should be used as Lol in post-primary education between English and Kiswahili. The government has several times recommended Kiswahili to be used as Lol, but there has been no implementation. This paper does not rely on this debate, rather it intends to rescue the current education which is affected negatively by the language of instruction which is not well captured by both instructors and students.

If the language of instruction is not well understood by instructors and students, it is very obvious that knowledge will not well be shared. Therefore, the target of the paper is to show the intensity of English language problem and suggesting the solution. It does not make sense to keep on waiting for the many given recommendations of going for Kiswahili to be implemented, it is better to find a way of handling the problem in another possible way.

Therefore, this paper demonstrates how English is a problem among the students and some of their instructors and suggest a way forward. This study is different from several scholars' perspective (eg. Lupogo, 2014; Mvungi, 1982; Rubagumya, 1991; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko, 1998; Brock-Utne, 2001; Qorro, 2003; Mwinshekhe, 2003; Brock-Utne 2005; Vuzo 2005) who believe the only way of handling this problem is to go for Kiswahili. For instance, Qorro (2002) stipulates the use of Kiswahili as Lol will eliminate the huge amount of incorrect English to which students are exposed. Apart from presenting English language problems, the current study finds a way of solving that problem.

The study results are from literature analysis, researcher's observational experience and interview. The selected case study is University of Dar Es Salaam (UDSM) and Mzumbe university (MU). UDSM is the university where the author pursued his both

undergraduate (BA) and postgraduate (MA) studies while Mzumbe university is where the researcher works as an assistant lecturer. Hence, it has been easy to observe the nature of English language problem among many students and some of the instructors/lecturers.

English Problems Facing Students and Instructors in Universities

Researcher's observational experience and literature analysis have been used to find out various English problems facing students and instructors.

Observational Experience

Though my life experience at Mzumbe University as an instructor (Assistant Lecturer) from 2011 up to 2015, I have been noting various English problems in meetings, seminars, workshops etc. These problems include grammatical errors, code-switching/mixing (English and Kiswahili) when one fails to make a point in English etc. Moreover, I have been confirming that the discussion becomes more interactive when the meeting/workshop facilitator allows code-switching/mixing among the members as it is started by him or herself.

Table 1 shows the common English grammatical errors committed by instructors/lecturers during various academic occasions like in proposal presentations, seminars, workshops, and meetings. Again, reflecting back to 2007 – 2013 when I was undertaking my undergraduate (BA) and postgraduate (MA) studies at UDSM, there was one interesting case in relation to the English language as the medium of instruction. Lecturers, when lecturing used to make some joyful stories out of the lesson content for their students so as to make them enjoy the lecture.

Those stories were popularly known by Kiswahili name as "**chai**", denotatively means *tea* but connotatively means "*joyful story which is not part of the lecture*". Interestingly, when "**chai**" was in Kiswahili, students laughed and enjoyed a lot the lesson and the course lecturer was much appreciated and loved, but it was opposite when "**chai**" of the same kind was in English as students kept on listening very carefully, but no joy was easily noticed except from few students who captured the meaning of that "**chai**". Relying on this anecdote, it is clearly observed that students were either not able to understand the story/**chai** presented in the English language or a lecturer/instructor was not able to present it perfectly in English.

Also code-switching (the use of English and Kiswahili) for some instructors has been an obvious case as it has been observed from both universities, UDSM and MU. Moreover, while I was a student between the same period (2007 - 2013) I had realized that students were using English in official classes only under the presence of the course instructor, for instance,

Table 1. Common English Grammatical Errors with their correction

Type of the error	Instructor' error	It's correction
Double use of subject	...Aziza (not a really used name) she presented....	...Aziza presented....or ...she presented.....(if the typical name has previously been mentioned)
Double marking of past tense in a sentence	I did not understood that	I did not understand that
Improper use of active voice	a)...issues which you are conducted..	a)...issues which you conducted/conduct....
	b) I was finished my presentation...	b) I finished my presentation.....
Misuse of DO and DOES	I doesn't understand that	I don't understand that
Improper reporting	He must know how do we teach	He must know how we (do) teach
Improper use of conjunctions	Despite of his strength, he has failed to	Despite his strength, he has failed...

Source: Author (2015)

in seminar presentations and/or lectures when a lecturer allows a little discussion or questions. When students were working on their group assignment outside the class, they mostly undertook the discussion in Kiswahili and finally writing down the information discussed in English. There was a careful choosing of the student from the group to write down what had been discussed orally. The one who was supposed to write the work seemed to be more proficient in English than others because there was another task of translating what was discussed in Kiswahili into English. This proves that the students in universities cannot command English well. They feel happy and comfortable when they communicate in Kiswahili.

Literature analysis

Several scholars have demonstrated how students in universities are faced by English language challenge. Msabila (2004) in his article titled "Language goofs rife in dissertations and theses" presents various grammatical common mistakes which are found in students' dissertations and theses of Mzumbe University. Some of these mistakes described by Msabila are summarised in Table 2. Also a report from the University of Dar Es Salaam (UDSM), UDSM Academic Audit (1999) confirms the English incompetence among the students. However, by considering the global science and technology needs, the report recommends English to continue being used as the medium of instruction.

Moreover, Malekele's (2014) study about "English as a medium of instruction in post-primary education in Tanzania" shows that English as Lol in Tanzanian post-primary education faces a great challenge of students not being proficient at all in the language. Extract 1 is an

essay from one undergraduate student from UDSM which has many grammatical errors and mistakes.

The student's essay directly confirms how university students are not familiar with English language. This goes in line with my teaching experience to Mzumbe University undergraduate students as the same happen

to several students in their individual assignments.

Causes of English Language Problem and Way Forward.

Study results under this sub-section have been analysed from the interview, which was conducted to ten interviewees (five lecturers and five third year students) from Mzumbe university, department of Education. There were two interview guide questions;

- i). Many students and some of the instructors/lecturers are not good in English language (a language of instruction), what do you think are the causes for that problem?
- ii). How can this problem be solved?

What are the Causes of English Language Problem?

The main repeated causes for English language problem were as follows;

The first one is the poor English background. Students do not have a good background of English. Some of these students are the ones who later become university instructors. Therefore, being a lecturer does not guarantee the problem to be solved. One lecturer was quoted saying;

"we do not have a strong English background, as you can reflect back to primary education which uses Kiswahili as Language of instruction. At that early age is when a pupil can acquire or learn a language effortlessly and easily. Although English is taught as the subject, sometimes you can find even the English teacher is not competent. Then, what do you expect?..." Also one student said;

"The main cause is incompetent English language teachers in primary schools and the use of Kiswahili as medium of instruction in primary schools"

Table 2. Common mistakes in students' dissertations and theses

Type of mistake	Example of the mistake	Correction of the mistake
Mistakes connected to the use the following words; bias, result, abide, relate, affect, importance, difference, lecturer, despite, cook	There was no biasness in data collection	There was no bias in data collection
	These problems result into/to.....	These problems result in.....
	We should abide by the law	We should abide to/with the law
Mistakes in making some phrases	This issue is related with ...	This issue is related to.....
	Shortage of fund	Shortage of funds
	Fund rising	Fund raising
	Significant of the study	Significance of the study
	Delimitations of the study	Delimitation of the study

Source: Msabila (2004)

Extract 1: An essay from undergraduate student

School inspectors are the persons who move to the Schools to Check for the implimentation of the Curriculum as well as the effectiveness of the syllabus in so doing they Collect all problems and send to the Curriculum developers. The inspectors are not only Check for the implementation of the Curriculum but also to see the effectiveness of the teacher to teach. In this case the inspector needs the good relationship (Cooperation) between teachers and to See how the effective syllabus is. Also the school inspectors tend to See whether the teachers are compentant in teaching or not. And also they give feedback about the availability of materials like books, Chemicals, apparatus, teaching aids (may be local one) So as to facilitate the teaching.

The School inspectors, the call the teacher after teaching and tell him/her that where is important point to imphasis as Sometimes the teaching aids is not proper Students to understand well the subject. So you must improve for that. In doing So the education or the quality of education increases and thus mantan the our education. The examination Is the questions written in the paper according to the respective questions that is from the respective subjects that place the Students in order to measure understanding ability. The questions Set according to what the Students learnt.

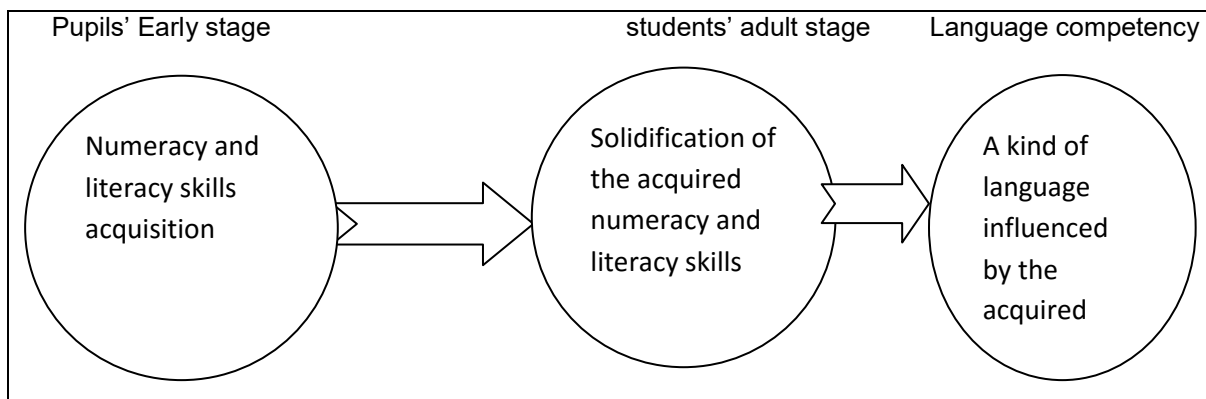
The examination also may teachers to make Summative evatuation, formativeas well as placement. The examination Should be well defined in Such away that it must measure from What the Students learnt example Kwamisi- the Curriculum used is not National Curriculum. The evaluated the Curriculum according to what they did in that society but during examination, they Sent exams from National that was Curriculum in Tanzania. The students all failed because they learnt about What they did in that Society (Kwamisi). So this was the failer of What intended to measure.

Problems facing the examinations, too much Cheating in Such away that the education (examination) is not effective Measure What is intended to Measure. Also likage of examination make the equality of education to drop out. In this Case examination should be carefully guided So as to reduce the likage of examination. In addition to that the examinations should be garded up to all parts in Tanzania (Countries) do.

Source: Malekela (2003)

From this explanation, it is well noted that the numeracy and literacy skills are imparted to pupils in Kiswahhili and not in English. Hence it is difficult for a kid to develop English language as effective as the kids gone through English medium pre-primary schools. Despite the fact that pupils in primary schools expect to learn English from English teachers, some of these teachers as it has been said by the interviewees are not competent enough in English, hence, they fail to equip well the pupils with English language.

There is a very direct relationship between literacy and numeracy skills acquisition in childhood and language skills development in adulthood. National Early Literacy Panel (2008) points out that the teaching of literacy takes as its starting point a child's language proficiency, hence there is a need to ensure a solid language foundation. Moreover, Pelletier (2011) supports it by stating that the time of early childhood prior to grade one is a qualitatively unique developmental period for language and literacy learning. This monograph addresses the question of how

Figure 1. Relationship between Numeracy/Literacy Skills and Language Competency

Source: Author (2015)

parents and educators can support young children in becoming literate learners. The Figure 1 illustrates smartly.

Figure 1 shows that the final person's language competency depends on the way he/she acquired the language literacy in the childhood. The childhood acquired skills consolidate and become the strong habit which cannot easily be changed. Therefore, following the fact that Tanzanians children acquire literacy and numeracy skills in Kiswahili language, it becomes very difficult to learn English in their adulthood (in post-primary education). Hence, the intensity of the English language problem is unescapable.

Another cause is a lack of interest in learning and using English. English is only used where there is a high need of using it. For instance, in most cases, instructors do not use English in their offices or in their non-academic matters. Also, it is very rare to realize the use of English when a student consults his or her lecturer, the conversation is either done in Kiswahili or code-switching (Kiswahili and English). There is no habit of personal English learning like reading English story books, listening to English speeches and talkings. This all is confirmed by the lecturer and student who are quoted below consecutively;

"Tanzanians have neither an interest in learning English nor speaking it. Some of us feel like punishment if we are asked to communicate in English because we are used to our Kiswahili and we can do almost everything by using our Kiswahili, so what is English for?"

"..you know, Sir, sometimes if you entertain speaking English, you are perceived as you are boasting yourself to your friends. You will find that even if you know English well, but you have no body to speak with. Even when we go to see our lecturers for various

problems they accept the use of Kiswahili, also when we attempt our final examinations, mostly Kiswahili is used to communicate with invigilators like asking for permission to get out etc."

These two quotations show that students and their instructors do not have a culture of speaking English, even for those who know English perfectly cannot speak frequently to others because it is sometimes regarded as boasting yourself to others. Hence, by ignoring English speaking practice, leads into not only being unable to improve English, but also even the little English one has may be eroded.

The last cause is poor and old English language teaching methodologies and lack of learning and teaching resources in schools and universities. The lecturer confirms below;

"There is no enough teaching and learning resources in school and colleges. Also the language teaching methodologies are not effective, teachers still use the old approaches in teaching grammar"

This informs that there is also a problem in teaching English language as a subject. English teachers in primary schools are the ones expected to impart English language skills to the pupils, if teachers are neither competent in English nor able to use modern recommended language teaching approaches, it is likely obvious to produce standard seven pupils who cannot command good English.

These causes can technically be associated with the Tanzanian linguistic environment which is of more Kiswahili than English. Unlike the neighbouring country, Kenya whose linguistic environment consists of more English than Kiswahili or their vernacular languages. Kiswahili is mostly used in Tanzania compared to English and vernacular languages. This is also confirmed by

Table 3: Language Use in Different Domains in Tanzania

		DOMAIN	VERNACULAR	KISWAHILI	ENGLISH
1	Informal	Home	VV	(VV)	
		With neighbours	(VV)	VV	
		Work place	(V)	VV	
2	Cultural	Place of worship	(V)	VV	
		Literature		VV	V
		Cinema		V	VV
3	Commercial	Big business		VV	VV
		Small business	(V)	VV	
		Tourism		V	VV
4	Educational	Medium: primary school	(V)	VV	
		Medium: secondary school		V	VV
		Medium: tertiary level			VV
		Medium: adult education		VV	
		Books, Journal etc.		VV	VV
5	Political	Parliament		VV	
		Public rallies		VV	
6	Administration	Village	(V)	VV	
		District/regional		VV	
		National		VV	(V)
7	Judiciary	Primary Court	(v)	VV	
		District Court	(v)	VV	(V)
		-R.M.C ^a	(v)	(VV)	VV
		-High/Appeal Court	(v)	(VV)	VV
8	Mass media	Radio		VV	V
		Daily papers		VV	VV
		Diplomacy		(V) ^b	VV
		Trade		(V) ^b	VV
9	International	Cultural exchange		(V) ^b	VV
		Information exchange		(V) ^b	VV
		Science and technology		(V) ^b	VV

KEY

R.C.M^a = Resident Magistrate Court. ^b Used sometimes in dealing with neighbouring countries.

VV = Normal working language

V= Sometimes used

()= Depends on setting, interlocutors, etc.

Source: Lupogo (2013)

Rubagumya as cited from Lupogo (2013) who describes the triglossic situation whereby every language has been indicated in its domain in which it is used as summarised in the table above.

Table 3 shows openly that Kiswahili is used in many domains compared to other languages. As it has been pointed out by the interviewees that because of having nowhere to practice, even the English which is learnt in class vanishes.

What is the way forward?

The way forward pertaining to the English language problem was captured through interview, particularly in

the second interview guide question which wanted the interviewees to suggest ways of overcoming this problem. There were three main suggestions which were repeated by seven (7) out of ten (10) interviewees; officialising English to be used as LoI from pre-primary and primary schools in both public and private schools, improving English teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools, and building a culture of using English.

One of the interviewees was quoted saying;

First of all, English must be used as a language of instruction from class one to the college. Also adequate resources for teaching and learning need to be supplied in school e.g. books, audiovisual

aids, etc....and modern and effective language teaching methodologies should be adopted and practised by English teachers.

The concept of using English as Lol from pre-primary is valid because it is quite understood that kids in early age acquire and learn the language smoothly, quickly and effortlessly. This has been tested by several private primary schools which use English as Lol whereby the pupils are more competent in English compared to public primary schools which use Kiswahili as Lol. This is confirmed by Lupogo (2013) who studied about the acquisition of prepositions by two groups of university students, those who passed through English Medium schools and those who passed through Kiswahili government primary schools. It was realized that students with English Medium background had more preposition acquisition skills than those with the Kiswahili medium background. It is obvious that if a pupil/child acquires literacy and numeracy skills in Language "A", Kiswahili, cannot be expected to communicate materials in post-primary education level in Language "B", English.

CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that the language of instruction is like the heart of knowledge sharing, it is unfair to remain quite despite the language is not understood clearly by both students and teachers/instructors. The realisation of the problem of English as Lol in post-primary has been reported by many scholars like Mvungi, 1982; Rubagumya, 1991; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko, 1998; Zaline, Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997; Brock-Utne, 2001; Qorro, 2003; Mwinshhekhe, 2003; Brock-Utne 2005; Vuzo 2005 just to mention some of them, but the problem has not yet been given a permanent solution. Following the fact that the Lol plays a very sensitive role in knowledge sharing/imparting, to continue having a Lol which is not well commanded by both a teacher/instructor and a student, is to place our education in the danger zone as there shall be a production of graduates who have not acquired the required knowledge sufficiently because of Lol constraint. Therefore, the government is strongly advised to adopt the suggested ways forward for action.

REFERENCES

- Brock-Utne, B. (2005). Learning through a Familiar Language versus through a Foreign Language- A look into some secondary school classrooms in Tanzania: A paper presented at LOITASA Conference held at UWC, Cape Town, April 2005
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Janette Pelletier (2011). Supporting early language and literacy. Retrieved from
- https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_Early_Language.pdf
- Lupogo, I. (2014). Language of instruction: A challenge for secondary Schools and tertiary institutions in implementing VET in Tanzania. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research (JEPER)*. Vol.1, NO.3, Pp 26- 30
- Lupogo, I. (2013). Acquisition of Prepositions by Tanzanian EFL Learners. Unpublished MA Dissertation: University of Dar es Salaam.
- Mvungi, M. (1982). The Relationship Between Performance in the Instructional Medium and Some Secondary School Subjects in Tanzania. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, UDSM, Tanzania.
- Malekela, G. A. (2003). English as a medium of instruction in post-primary education in Tanzania: Is it a fair policy to the learner? In: Brock-Utne, Birgit, Desai, Zubeida and Qorro, Martha, *Language of instruction in Tanzania and South-Africa* (LOITASA) Dar-es-Salaam: E&D Limited.
- Msabila, D.T. (2004). Language goofing rife in dissertation and theses. *Convocation Newsletter Issue No.7 Pg. 18*
- Mwinshhekhe, H. (2003). Using Kiswahili as a Medium of Instruction in Science Teaching in Tanzania Secondary schools. In Birgit Brock-Utne, Z. Desai & M. Qorro (Eds.), *Language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (Loitasa)* (pp. 129-148). Dar es Salaam: E & D Limited
- Neeley, T. (2012, May). Global business speaks English. *Harvard Business Review*
- Rubagumya, Casmir (1991). *Language Promotion for Educational Purposes: The example Tanzania*. International Review of Education, vol. 37, no. 1. pp 67-87.
- Rubagumya, C., Kathryn J., and Mwansoko, H. (1998). Language for Learning and Teaching in Tanzania. A Research Paper funded by ODA, British Council, DSM
- UDSM (University of Dar es Salaam), (1999). *Report on the 1998 UDSM Academic Audit*. March 1999
- UNESCO (2013). The triumph of English: A world empire by other means. Retrieved from www.unesco.org
- Vuzo, M. (2005). Using English as a medium of instruction in Tanzania secondary schools: problems and prospects. In Brock-Utne, Desai and Qorro (eds.): *LOITASA Research in Progress*. Dar es Salaam: KAD Associates