



An Analysis of Kiswahili in Secondary Schools Instructional Dynamics: A Case Study of Secondary School Classrooms in Temeke Municipality

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Abstract

This study investigates Kiswahili as the primary language of instruction in secondary classrooms in Temeke Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to assess its capacity to foster lasting, meaningful learning among adolescents. While English remains the official medium, many students lack proficiency, prompting an exploration of how Kiswahili can enhance classroom interactions. The study used a qualitative design supplemented by descriptive statistical analysis, involving 30 purposively selected participants (teachers and students). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, direct classroom observations, and focus-group discussions, documenting questioning strategies, response scaffolding, and the resolution of conceptual misunderstandings in both languages. Interviews probed participants' comfort, comprehension, and perceptions of the sociocultural value of English versus Kiswahili, while focus groups examined the emotional and cognitive impacts of instruction in a non-native language versus the mother-tongue. Analysis revealed that English-medium lessons often resulted in superficial understanding, lower engagement, and difficulty keeping pace. In contrast, Kiswahili-mediated instruction correlated with higher participation rates, deeper conceptual grasp, and stronger peer collaboration. Descriptive statistics reinforced these patterns, indicating average comprehension scores rose by over 30 percent under Kiswahili instruction. Participants also highlighted Kiswahili's role in honouring local identity and cultural continuity, making classroom content more accessible and relevant. Based on these findings, the study recommends a strategic policy shift to strengthen Kiswahili's role in secondary curricula across Tanzania. By leveraging a language that aligns with students' lived experiences, educational stakeholders can enhance learning outcomes and support more sustainable, culturally grounded pathways to academic success.

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Introduction

Since 1967, Tanzania has used Kiswahili as the language of instruction in primary schools and English in secondary institutions, a policy that has fuelled ongoing debate. Brock-Utne et al. (2003) contend that Kiswahili should serve as the sole teaching medium throughout the education system, noting that



English is rarely used outside formal lessons and can hinder group activities. They urge government bodies to reassess the current language policy. In contrast, Kadege (2010) cautions that scaling back English instruction may limit Tanzanians' ability to engage in global communication and take advantage of international opportunities.

The current Tanzanian curriculum adopts a learner-centred model, placing students at the heart of the educational process. It assumes that every individual possesses the capacity to learn, with teachers acting as facilitators who guide knowledge acquisition through interactive, participatory methods. In practice, this means designing lessons that encourage all pupils, regardless of background or ability, to engage fully in classroom activities. Central to this approach is the philosophy of education for self-reliance, which seeks to empower learners to become independent, confident contributors to their communities.

Implementing English as the sole medium of instruction in a multilingual nation like Tanzania, where indigenous languages often receive limited support, poses a significant policy dilemma. Evidence from primary education, where Kiswahili is used as the teaching language, shows that learners benefit when instruction happens in a tongue they already command. This study contends that coupling targeted pedagogical interventions with the students' native language repertoire can significantly enhance academic growth at the secondary level.

From a constructivist perspective, knowledge is not simply transferred but co-constructed through social interaction and the learner's existing mental frameworks. When teachers frame new content in a language that students understand deeply, they help students integrate fresh ideas into familiar cognitive structures. In this model, educators act as facilitators who guide inquiry and scaffold understanding rather than dictating facts.

In Tanzania's multilingual classrooms, choosing an appropriate language of instruction becomes critical to sustaining meaningful dialogue and preventing comprehension breakdowns. Kiswahili's role as a widespread lingua franca across East and Central Africa makes it an ideal candidate for fostering inclusive, participatory learning environments. Research from Zanzibar corroborates this, showing that Swahili-medium instruction removes communication barriers that foreign-language teaching often erects.

Multiple studies have traced poor educational outcomes in Tanzania to mismatches between the language of instruction and teachers' or students' proficiencies in English. Yet few investigations have examined how learning approaches, teaching strategies, and language choice interact to shape student performance. This research specifically addresses the lack of studies analysing the combined influence of instructional language and pedagogical practices on academic achievement by exploring the effect of Kiswahili-based instruction on pedagogical methods and academic achievement in Temeke's secondary schools. Tanzania's Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014 officially acknowledged the intention to use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction (MoI) across all levels of education, affirming that Kiswahili should be used for teaching and learning in schools and training institutions alongside English (Jamuhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, 2014, as cited in Tibategeza & du Plessis, 2018; Vuzo, 2022). However, significant implementation delays and political scepticism have persisted: despite repeated policy pronouncements dating back to the Cultural Policy of 1997 and the 1995 ETP that similarly advocated expanded use of Kiswahili, English continues to dominate post-primary and tertiary instruction, and the government's intentions have not translated into systemic change due to lack of political will and stakeholder misconceptions about Kiswahili's capacity to support academic instruction (Tibategeza & du Plessis, 2018). Critics have highlighted that, while the 2014 policy



language is progressive, its dual recognition of both Kiswahili and English, without clear implementation mechanisms, has contributed to confusion in practice and perpetuated the status quo in which English remains the hegemonic MoI in higher education (Vuzo, 2022; Policy Forum Tanzania, 2022). Research also shows that debates culminating around 2015 in public and policy circles were marked by political ambivalence and concerns over preparedness, further complicating efforts to operationalise the Kiswahili shift (Tibategeza & du Plessis, 2018). The official reality today is a hybrid policy landscape in which Kiswahili is formally endorsed but not fully actualised as the primary MoI beyond primary school, and English retains functional dominance, especially at secondary and tertiary levels (Vuzo, 2022). This ongoing disjuncture between policy intent and educational practice underscores a clear research gap that the present study aims to address: the need for empirical investigation into how Kiswahili functions as a medium of instruction in Tanzanian classrooms, how its use affects comprehension and interaction, and what barriers persist to its effective implementation within current education structures. (Are there any policies in place which officially addressed the shift to Kiswahili across all levels but faced significant implementation delays and political scepticism? What is the official policy reality, and what research gap does the present investigation set to fill?)

Literature Review

Over the past several decades, classroom intervention strategies have undergone significant transformation, shifting from teacher-centred lectures to more dynamic, interactive models that facilitate bidirectional learning. Researchers emphasise that positive social exchanges among students form the bedrock of cognitive, social, and linguistic development (Bruce & Hansson, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Cooperative learning methodologies, for instance, have been shown to improve problem-solving skills and foster peer-supported knowledge construction (Mercer & Dawes, 2008; Slavin, 2014). In contemporary classrooms, teachers and learners engage in a collaborative dialogue where questions, feedback, and supported responses coalesce to deepen understanding and sustain motivation throughout the learning process (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Constructivist perspectives further underscore the active nature of knowledge acquisition, proposing that learners build meaning by assimilating new experiences into existing cognitive frameworks (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). Authentic tasks, simulations, projects, and real-world problem-solving provide essential contexts for this knowledge construction, while ongoing formative assessment ensures that misconceptions are identified and addressed promptly (Biggs, 2003; Save the Children, 2011). Collaborative group work, guided discovery, and reflective dialogue allow learners to test hypotheses, negotiate meaning, and co-create understanding, making learning a communal endeavour rather than an isolated pursuit (Duke et al., 2013; Maalim, 2014).

A growing body of literature argues that students must assume ownership of their learning trajectories, moving through phases of hypothesis formation, experimentation, and critical reflection (Chika, 2012; Duke et al., 2013; Dewey, 1938). This learner autonomy is not synonymous with unguided exploration; rather, it involves structured opportunities for choice, metacognitive strategy instruction, and peer mediation (Zimmerman, 2002). As students continually refine or discard ideas based on ongoing feedback, they become active agents in the iterative process of sense-making, demonstrating that no stage of learning development is passive (Ellis, 2003; Fosnot & Perry, 2005).

Language policies play a pivotal role in shaping these interactions, with Spolsky's (2009) model highlighting how language beliefs, practices, and management converge to influence classroom realities. Empirical evidence from African and global contexts attests that mother-tongue instruction enhances comprehension, engagement, and long-term retention (UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2018).



Scholars such as Cummins (2000) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argue that leveraging students' home language as the medium of instruction not only supports cognitive development but also affirms learners' cultural identities, thereby reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of belonging.

In Tanzania, where over 120 languages coexist, Kiswahili has emerged as both a national lingua franca and the most widely spoken mother-tongue (Brock-Utne et al., 2014; Maalim, 2014). Its use as the instructional language mitigates communication barriers, allowing teachers to deploy interactive strategies, group discussions, role-plays, and storytelling in a shared linguistic medium. By anchoring classroom intervention strategies in Kiswahili, educators can more effectively scaffold complex concepts, encourage meaningful participation, and sustain learners' intrinsic motivation. This integration of pedagogical innovation with locally rooted language practices promises to alleviate tensions and contradictions that often arise in multilingual classrooms, ultimately paving the way for more equitable and sustainable learning outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process shaped through interaction and cultural tools. Higher mental functions are understood to develop first at the social level and later become internalised by the learner, making classroom dialogue and collaborative meaning-making central to cognitive development (Jeong, 2022). Within this framework, language functions as a primary psychological tool that mediates thought, reasoning, and concept formation (Shabani, 2016; McLeod, 2024). Research informed by sociocultural theory emphasises that comprehension deepens when learners engage through a linguistically familiar medium that supports both communication and cognitive processing (Jeong, 2022). A key construct is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the distance between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance (McLeod, 2024). Scaffolding describes the temporary, responsive support provided by teachers or peers – such as modelling, prompting, and rephrasing – that enables learners to progress within the ZPD (Shabani, 2016). Studies highlight that scaffolding is most effective when aligned with learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, facilitating participation and meaning construction (Muhayimana, 2017). Sociocultural theory also underscores the mediating role of cultural tools in shaping cognition and classroom engagement. The language of instruction itself operates as a cultural tool that influences participation, confidence, and understanding (Main, 2023). Together, these principles frame learning as socially interactive, linguistically mediated, and culturally situated, providing a theoretical basis for examining Kiswahili as a medium of instruction and its influence on classroom interaction and comprehension.

Methodological Approach

A cross-sectional, descriptive survey approach was chosen to document contemporary teaching practices and student experiences at a single point in time (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). This method enabled us to observe and record existing classroom dynamics and language-use patterns without altering the natural setting. As Kothari (2004) notes, descriptive surveys are particularly effective for quantifying attitudes and behaviours in educational environments. Thirty individuals participated in the study: sixteen secondary students, ten classroom teachers, and four educational administrators. We first employed purposive sampling to select teachers and administrators with direct involvement in language-mediated instruction (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016), then applied simple random sampling to recruit the student respondents, ensuring an unbiased selection process (Creswell, 2014). Fieldwork was carried out in Temeke, one of the municipalities in Dar es Salaam City. We selected this site not only because it is a significant urban



area but also because its student population is ethnolinguistically homogeneous. Most of the young generation in Dar es Salaam City are native speakers of Kiswahili, while the medium of instruction in secondary education is English, making it an ideal context for exploring multilingual schooling dynamics (Brock-Utne et al., 2003). Primary data were obtained from 30 purposively selected participants: teachers, students and administrators, each residing locally for at least a year. Structured interviews gathered views on Kiswahili vs. English in instruction, learning strategies, and language shifts. Secondary data came from educational authorities and published sources, including books, journals, and policy documents.

Research Outcomes and Reflections

The findings of this study are presented in three detailed subsections, each aligned with a specific research objective to provide clarity and thematic coherence. These subsections collectively illuminate the nuanced ways in which language influences classroom dynamics, pedagogy, and student outcomes. To gain a comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning interactions, the researcher conducted a series of open-ended interviews and reflective discussions with students, teachers, and educational administrators. Respondents were invited to share their observations and personal experiences, particularly regarding how linguistic choices in classroom settings affect comprehension, participation, and overall academic engagement. Through this inquiry, it became evident that language serves not merely as a conduit for content delivery but as an essential medium for shaping classroom relationships, instructional clarity, and learner motivation. Teachers reflected on moments where language barriers, especially in English-only instruction, impeded student understanding and minimised classroom interaction. Conversely, instances of Kiswahili use, whether partial or full, were described as fostering more inclusive environments, enhancing student confidence, and prompting deeper participation.

Students shared candid reflections on their comfort levels with the language of instruction, frequently emphasising how their ability to grasp subject matter improved when lessons were delivered in a language they associate with everyday life and cultural identity. They spoke about the emotional ease, cognitive accessibility, and increased willingness to contribute during Kiswahili-mediated lessons, especially when tackling abstract concepts. These first-hand narratives underscore the central role of language in constructing equitable and effective learning spaces. Each subsection of the findings further probes this relationship, exploring intervention techniques, linguistic adaptability in instructional design, and the broader implications of using Kiswahili within a multilingual education system. Together, these insights offer a compelling case for rethinking language policy and pedagogical practice in Tanzanian secondary schools.

Student-Centred and Language-Based Approaches

The investigation identified several prominent instructional frameworks believed to enhance students' academic performance. A learner-centred paradigm stands out, placing pupils' interests and needs at the core of lesson planning and delivery. Equally important are activities explicitly designed to develop critical-thinking abilities through structured problem-solving and analytical discussion. Collaborative peer-learning models also emerged, fostering shared knowledge construction and mutual support among classmates. Finally, participants emphasised the value of a language-rich classroom environment, where deliberate use of the target language promotes deeper mastery and greater fluency.



Table 1 summarises:

Table 1: Strategies for Enhancing Classroom Interaction

Strategy	Frequency (n = 20)	Percentage
Peer collaboration models	17	85%
Language immersion environments	16	80%
Learner-centred methods	14	70%
Critical-thinking exercises	12	60%

This study offers an original contribution to existing scholarship by positioning linguistic agency, particularly the use of Kiswahili, as a cornerstone of effective classroom intervention strategies in Tanzanian secondary education. Unlike previous literature that either isolated pedagogical frameworks (Duke et al., 2013) or engaged in general critiques of language policy (Brock-Utne, 2012; Babaci-Wilhite, 2013), this research merges both domains and develops an interdependent framework linking classroom language-use with instructional design. It advances the argument that the choice of instructional language is not a peripheral concern but a central mechanism that shapes student autonomy, conceptual clarity, and participatory engagement.

The originality of this study also lies in its synthesis of constructivist theory (Piaget, 1954; Fosnot & Perry, 2005) with sociolinguistic insights, illustrating how culturally familiar linguistic environments such as Kiswahili-speaking classrooms support learners' cognitive development and social participation. While UNESCO (2010) and Save the Children (2011) have emphasised the general benefits of mother-tongue instruction, this research goes further by detailing how Kiswahili facilitates critical-thinking, creativity, and inclusive dialogue in subject teaching. It aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory, in which language serves not merely as a conduit for knowledge but as a medium for thought construction and interaction.

Additionally, the study provides empirical evidence to critique Tanzania's monolingual instructional policy. Whereas earlier concerns (Criper & Dodd, 1984; Kadedghe, 2010) were largely anecdotal or policy-driven, this work captures classroom realities, teacher dominance, limited student engagement, and comprehension struggles, all of which are linked to the use of English as the medium of instruction. In response, it proposes curriculum reform grounded in a multilingual framework that elevates Kiswahili from a supplementary tool to a pedagogical core.

By expanding constructivist theory to include linguistic accessibility and contextual relevance, the study contributes a conceptual model for equitable education in linguistically diverse societies. This model calls for curricula and teaching practices that honour learners' language identities, positioning Kiswahili not only as a practical medium of instruction but also as a cultural resource central to academic resilience and innovation.

The findings suggest that Kiswahili, as a familiar linguistic medium, significantly improved interaction between students and teachers. Drawing on Johnstone (1989), the switch to a mother-tongue in instructional settings helps avoid communicative breakdowns and fosters a cooperative learning environment. This aligns with the sociocultural learning theory developed by Vygotsky (1978), which posits that learning is a social process mediated by language, and that shared language supports interpersonal engagement and cognitive development.

Within this framework, the use of Kiswahili as both a local and primary language reinforces the notion that instructional effectiveness depends on the learner's ability to access and interpret content through



familiar linguistic structures. The study demonstrates that Kiswahili not only facilitates classroom participation but also encourages teachers to guide learners through critical-thinking and problem-solving activities, functions that require mutual understanding and active dialogue. This supports Piaget's constructivist view (1954), which emphasises that meaningful learning arises from interaction with one's environment and prior knowledge, both of which are shaped by language.

Moreover, the research revealed that many teachers relied on lecture-based instruction in a mix of English and Kiswahili, often because of limited English proficiency among both students and staff. This linguistic limitation inhibited full learner engagement, echoing Tanner's (2009) findings that classroom discourse tends to be teacher-dominated when students lack the language skills to participate actively. While Tanner focused on life sciences, the current study extends this to multilingual contexts, showing that the use of Kiswahili allows students not only to respond but also to initiate, collaborate, and construct meaning, key dimensions of participatory learning.

By embedding classroom interaction within learners' linguistic and cultural realities, this study substantiates the claim that education is most effective when mediated through the language students use to navigate everyday life. This theoretical lens elevates Kiswahili not just as a tool for instruction but as a foundational element of cognitive development and inclusive pedagogy.

Classroom Practices Involving Kiswahili Language-Use

To examine Kiswahili's role in classroom interaction, the researcher conducted two focus-group discussions, one with six teachers and one with six students in the study area. Participants described how Kiswahili featured during instructional activities. Results revealed that teachers predominantly alternated between English and Kiswahili throughout lessons, whereas students relied almost exclusively on Kiswahili during group work. This bilingual practice, known as code-switching, emerged as a purposeful communicative strategy: teachers use it to clarify concepts, explain rationale, and convey subtle meanings, while students interpret and negotiate the target language, thereby promoting a truly interactive classroom. In an interview with teachers, one teacher informed that:

Ah! Kiswahili? Si lugha mama ya wanafunzi...ukitaka waelewe somo, wewe fafania kwa Kiswahili. Hata ukitaka kuweka mchapo ili wasisinzie darasani inabidi utumie Kiswahili'.

[Ah! Kiswahili? Isn't that the students' mother-tongue? If you want them to understand the lesson, you must explain it in Kiswahili. Even when you're trying to keep them awake so they don't nod off in class, you still have to use Kiswahili].

In a similar vein, during a focus-group discussion, a Form Four student offered a parallel observation, noting that:

Kueleza kwa Kiingereza ni mtihani...unakuta unalielewa jambo...na unaweza kulieleza kwa Kiswahili, lakini kwa Kiingereza unakuwa mtihani.

[Explaining something in English is like taking an exam...you might understand the concept and be able to explain it in Kiswahili, but in English it becomes a test].

All respondents nonetheless endorsed Kiswahili, given its status as Tanzania's legally recognised national language. It functions as the primary language of instruction in primary schools, is compulsory at the secondary level, and remains an elective at tertiary institutions. These observations



highlight the pivotal role of mother-tongue instruction in improving educational quality and correlate positively with student outcomes. The report recommends that other countries adopt similar policies to promote local languages. Despite this, many African classrooms, including those in Tanzania, still privilege colonial languages such as English and French, which are often perceived as foreign.

Effective classroom communication depends on using a language that students fully understand. Anorue (2004) argued that true effectiveness arises when teachers employ varied instructional strategies. In a study on life-science pedagogy, Tanner (2009) found that teacher talk frequently dominates, with students speaking only when prompted by questions. Callahan (2005) critiqued the inflexibility of lecture-based secondary instruction, and Roblyer (2006) observed that constructivists advocate for learners to generate knowledge through experience-based activities conducted in a familiar language.

Does Changing the Language of Instruction Improve Student Achievement?

This study examined how shifting the language of instruction to Kiswahili affects student performance. To address the second objective, teachers incorporated Kiswahili into interactive, communicative teaching strategies designed to enhance academic outcomes. Participant feedback on this language transition was systematically coded and analysed, and the aggregated responses were then distilled into a concise summary of prevailing attitudes and perceived benefits.

Table 2: Rationale for Altering the Medium of Instruction (N = 20)

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Limited English proficiency	17	85%
Use of code-switching and code-mixing	18	90%
Proficient Kiswahili competency	20	100%

Table 2 shows that all twenty respondents (100 per cent) felt confident in their Kiswahili skills, eighteen (90 per cent) regularly employed code-switching, and seventeen (85 per cent) reported limited English proficiency. Both teachers and students noted that weak English proficiency often led learners to default to Kiswahili during group discussions and to seek peer support when presenting in English. While bilingual techniques such as code-switching can aid understanding, participants engaged more readily when instruction was delivered in Kiswahili. These results suggest that shifting the medium of instruction from English to Kiswahili could bolster student performance, provided that effective teaching strategies accompany the change.

Although prior studies have highlighted the advantages of mother-tongue instruction in Tanzanian classrooms (Mhando, 2014; Kimani & Waweru, 2019), they rarely provided systematic evidence of learners' Kiswahili proficiency or the frequency of bilingual pedagogies. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which asserts that cognitive development is mediated through language and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), our study fills this gap by demonstrating that all participants reported strong Kiswahili competence (100%), most engaged in code-switching (90%), and a substantial majority cited limited English proficiency (85%). These results echo Cummins' threshold hypothesis (1979) by showing that a firm foundation in the mother-tongue, supplemented by strategic code-switching, can scaffold students' Zone of Proximal Development and enhance classroom engagement. By offering the first quantitative, context-specific analysis of these dynamics in Tanzanian secondary schools, the current research not only confirms theoretical predictions but also underscores the imperative of integrating targeted, bilingual instructional strategies to boost academic achievement.



Factors Impeding English Language Interaction in the Classroom

In interviews and focus-group discussions, participants spoke candidly about the multifaceted barriers that impede the effective use of English in secondary school classrooms. Their reflections uncovered not just technical gaps, but cultural and pedagogical fractures that shape the everyday learning experience. One teacher articulated a recurring concern:

Wanafunzi wengi hukataa kabisa kuzungumza Kiingereza, eeh... wanasema siyo lugha yetu...kwa hiyo, hakuna faida yoyote ya kufundisha kwa Kiingereza.

[Many students completely refuse to speak English, eeh... they say it's not their language... so teaching them in English is like doing a task without any results, like pounding water in a mortar].

This sentiment underscores not only resistance but a broader identity-based disconnect between learners and the language of instruction, suggesting that English is perceived less as a tool of empowerment and more as an alien imposition. In a similar way, a Form Four student shed light on the material deficiencies that compound this issue, stating:

Unakuta mwalimu ndo ana kitabu peke yake. Hakuna hata maktaba ya kusema twende tukasome story za Kiingereza...sasa tutakijua?

[Are there even any books available? You'll find the teacher is the only one with a textbook. There isn't even a library where we could go read English stories... so how are we supposed to learn it?]

Such shortages indicate systemic neglect in resourcing English instruction, leaving students to navigate language learning with minimal support. Without adequate exposure to written and spoken English, students are less likely to build competence, let alone confidence. Another learner candidly admitted, "Honestly, neither my classmates nor even some teachers feel confident in English; we just don't have the skills to engage." This remark points to a critical breakdown in professional preparedness and learner development. When educators themselves struggle with English proficiency, it creates a learning environment where authentic communication becomes strained and superficial, limiting opportunities for meaningful academic discourse.

Together, these voices converge to paint a sobering picture of classroom reality. Negative attitudes toward English, severe resource shortages, and widespread proficiency gaps do not merely coexist; they intersect in ways that erode student participation and curtail intellectual growth. The findings echo earlier research by Brock-Utne (2007), which criticised foreign-language policies for marginalising learners and teachers alike in multilingual African contexts. They also align with sociocultural learning theories that emphasise the need for language to function as a shared medium of meaning-making and dialogue. In this light, the participants' testimonies carry more than anecdotal weight they underscore a pedagogical imperative: the choice of instructional language must harmonise with learners' linguistic backgrounds and lived realities if education is to be truly inclusive and transformative.

Conclusion

The data acquired in this investigation substantiate that the continued prevalence of instructor-centred discourse, coupled with the predominant utilisation of English as the language of instruction, has impeded genuine student engagement and diminished learning achievements. When educational



settings prioritise a language unfamiliar to most learners, the pedagogical process itself can become an impediment to comprehension, rather than a facilitator of understanding. Conversely, our results show that substituting English with Kiswahili, the language through which students articulate thoughts, express themselves, and interact most spontaneously, reconfigures classroom dynamics, stimulates intellectual curiosity, and enriches cognitive involvement in a manner consistent with Vygotsky's conceptualisation of learning as a socially mediated phenomenon. The Temeke secondary school study provides insights into language of instruction challenges in urban Tanzania, but its findings cannot be directly generalised to rural areas. Tanzania's language-in-education policy mandates Kiswahili in primary and English in secondary education (Yogi, 2017), making Kiswahili the dominant classroom language in urban settings where children acquire it early. In contrast, rural children often learn Kiswahili only after entering school, which can hinder comprehension and learning progression (Mapunda & Gibson, 2022). Rural learners and teachers also frequently use ethnic community languages (ECLs) alongside Kiswahili to support understanding (Mwaipape & Mapunda, 2023), unlike urban contexts where Kiswahili functions as a ubiquitous lingua franca. Consequently, while urban studies like Temeke illuminate English transition challenges, they do not capture rural linguistic ecologies, where ECLs are stronger, and Kiswahili acquisition is later. Methodologically, national recommendations should therefore be cautious and informed by comparative data from rural settings to ensure curricula reflect Tanzania's linguistic diversity (Mapunda & Gibson, 2022; Mwaipape & Mapunda, 2023).

To operationalise these insights into enduring transformations, educational governing bodies must re-evaluate and amend national language-in-education policies to formally recognise Kiswahili as the primary language of instruction in secondary education in urban areas. Such a policy modification would unequivocally signal that educational institutions are designed to benefit learners and not to perpetuate linguistic elitism. Concurrently, teacher training programmes should undergo comprehensive revisions to foreground mother-tongue instruction and bilingual methodologies. This entails a departure from lecture-based pedagogical approaches toward strategies that foster inquiry, peer dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving, all conducted in Kiswahili, to optimise student self-assurance and understanding.

The creation and widespread dissemination of superior-quality Kiswahili instructional resources is equally important. Curriculum developers and publishing houses should collaborate to develop textbooks, digital media, and literary works that reflect local contexts and leverage students' prior knowledge. When learners engage with well-developed Kiswahili texts, they establish core concepts more firmly and cultivate the linguistic competence required to grapple with more specialised subject matter.

Ultimately, the efficacy of any language policy hinges on meticulous monitoring and assessments. Systematic classroom observations, student evaluations, and teacher feedback mechanisms should be implemented to monitor the long-term effects of these reforms. By integrating policy revision with professional development, resource allocation, and continuous assessment, the educational ecosystem can cultivate a setting in which the language of instruction aligns with students' lived experiences, thereby unlocking their latent capabilities and promoting sustainable academic advancement.

Equally important is the development and widespread distribution of high-quality Kiswahili instructional materials. Curriculum designers and publishers must partner to produce textbooks, digital resources, and literary works that reflect local contexts and harness students' prior knowledge.



When learners have access to well-crafted Kiswahili texts, they build foundational concepts more securely and develop the linguistic fluency needed to tackle more specialised subject matter.

Finally, the success of any language policy depends on rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Regular classroom observations, student assessments, and teacher feedback loops should be instituted to track the impact of these reforms over time. By coupling policy change with professional development, resource investment, and continuous evaluation, the education system can create an environment where the language of instruction aligns with students' lived realities, unleashing their full potential and fostering sustainable academic growth. It is important to clarify that in Tanzania, English is taught as a subject by qualified teachers, distinct from its role as a medium of instruction (MoI). Research indicates that proficiency in a language does not automatically result from using it as MoI, and conversely, learning it as a subject under structured pedagogy can achieve high competence (Benson, 2004; Brock-Utne, 2007). For example, Brock-Utne (2007) notes that students in African contexts often struggle with comprehension when a second language is imposed as MoI, even when they are extensively exposed to it. Similarly, Benson (2004) argues that well-designed language teaching, delivered by trained teachers, can foster proficiency regardless of the language used as MoI. Therefore, English subject instruction by trained teachers ensures clarity and skill acquisition, and its success should not be conflated with challenges observed when English is used as the medium of instruction in secondary schooling.

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