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## Language of Instruction: A Challenge for Secondary Schools and Tertiary Institutions in Implementing VET in Tanzania

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### Abstract

*The paper clarifies how English as a Language of Instruction (LoI) acts as a setback in learning processes in Tanzania secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the paper shows the impact of the present LoI, English. The first impact is failure of effective implementation of Vocational Education Training (VET). This is because the language (English) used by students to acquire knowledge is different from the language (Kiswahili) used in providing particular knowledge related services in the society. The second impact is failure of effective acquisition of relevant knowledge since the students are not proficient in LoI. Finally, the paper strongly suggests the use of Kiswahili as a LoI in Tanzania secondary schools and tertiary institutions.*

**Keywords:** Secondary Schools, Tertiary Institutions, Implementing VET, Language of Instruction

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### Introduction

Despite that, there is a controversial understanding and perceiving the concept of vocational education and training (VET), this paper will show its standpoint. Kalimasi (2013) points out that to a large extent VET is widely known as a skilled occupation for standard seven leavers enrolled in different vocational training centres. Psacharopolous as in Kalimasi (2013) adds that VET is also recognized as a form of skills that can be integrated with other forms of education, namely primary, secondary and higher education. Moreover, Mwinuka, Redecker & Wihstutz (2000, p.9) presents that VET is among the systems of education such as pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher education which is provided and implemented by various formal and informal institutions including small workshops like garages and tailoring marts, mission trade schools, national vocational training centres, folk development colleges, technical secondary schools and colleges as well as private vocational schools and centres. According to VETA (2013), VET is perceived as education for failures. This is because the minimum entrance qualification is standard seven.

As previously stated that VET applies to all levels of education in Tanzania, then it should be understood that language (especially the language of instruction) used in making VET possible because it is the one which teachers/instructors use to deliver a certain vocational training to the students. Language is a medium of any kind of information given in VET. Learning cannot take place without language of instruction which is familiar to the students and teachers. The students and teachers have to be proficient

in the language of instruction for effective learning to take place. The next section shows the challenges related to language of instruction.

### **Language of Instruction Challenge in Tanzanian System of Education**

Language of instruction is a key element in education since it is a medium through which knowledge is imparted and shared among the learners and teachers. If the language of instruction is not well familiar to the learners and/or teachers, teaching and learning cannot be effective. Therefore, language of instruction problems results in educational problems. According to Tanzania Education and Training policy of 1995, primary education and Teacher Training Colleges (primary school teacher colleges) in Tanzania use Kiswahili as the language of instruction while Secondary as well as Tertiary education learning is through English and Kiswahili remains only as a subject (URT, 1995).

There is no language problem in primary education and other informal VET centers, which use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction. This is because the majority of Tanzanians are proficient in Kiswahili language; it is unlike in English language, a medium of instruction in secondary schools and tertiary institutions in which many Tanzanians lack good command of it. For instance, Rubagumya (1990) shows that about 90% of the population (Tanzanians) is bilingual in Kiswahili and a vernacular language. And according to Abdulaziz-Mkilifi (1972), only about 15% have any knowledge of English. Uncountable studies, like Mlama and Matteru (1977), Mvungi (1982) Rubagumya (1991), Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko (1998), Zaline, Roy-Campbell & Qorro (1997), Brock-Utne (2001), Qorro (1999, 2003), Mwinshekhe (2001, 2003) just to mention a few have explicitly shown the problems of using English as medium of instruction in Tanzania secondary schools and higher learning institutions. These scholars recommend the use of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction at all levels of education.

Moreover, The Makwata commission recommended the use of Kiswahili as language of instruction at all levels of education (United Republic of Tanzania, 1984). Again the Ministry of Education and Culture (1998) recommended the same after realizing that English was problematic to both teachers and students, but the government has not adopted this recommendation, and it has not therefore been implemented. Also, various researchers (Mlama and Matteru 1978; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko 1998; Brock-Utne 2001; Vuzo 2005) have confirmed that most students and the majority of teachers are seriously handicapped when using English as LoI; hence, suggesting it to be replaced by Kiswahili. Therefore, it does not make a good sense to see the language which is not well understood by students and/or teachers is used as a language instruction.

Earlier we saw the impact of LoI in the education system, as for now let us see its impact in VET. It is asserted that the impact LoI in VET is extrapolated under: first, failure to capture basic vocational skills, that is to say, students learning through rote learning thus the graduate lacks the necessary skills and/or competencies despite the good performance in their paper and pencil final examinations. Rote learning is a result of poor proficiency in English language. Brock-Utne, Desai, Pitman & Qorro (2010) point out that teaching and learning is more effective when mother tongue is used as medium of instruction. In Tanzania, Kiswahili is increasingly becoming a first language because of intermarriage which is a growing practice in rural and urban areas alike nowadays in Tanzania. Therefore, one can argue that it is a grave mistake to ignore using Kiswahili as Language of Instruction (LoI) in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This can be evidenced by following example of a classroom interaction between a teacher and a student.

#### ***Commerce Teacher (T) with Students (S): Form II Class***

T: Goods must be remain in the store... to be ready for a

changing of weather...it is a danger to sell all goods in the store...The dangerous of selling all the goods in the store... when goods are scarcity... and sales are increase... (*T mixes language to elaborate what he was teaching*) **Nina maana kuwa bidhaa zikipungua (I mean if goods decreases)...** we need time for a preparation.  
Time to ask for a new goods... (*in the course of the lesson he posed a question*)  
T: How can we do before to sell all goods in the store?  
S: You must be care with that changes...and making time for a preparation...

*Source: Vuzo (2005)*

This situation shows that a teacher and student do not have a good command of the English language. Both teachers and students do not only commit grammatical English errors, but also they fail to maintain using English throughout and opting for code-switching (from English to Kiswahili). Therefore, under this situation, one cannot acquire vocational skills because of a language barrier; hence, proper VET implementation faces difficulties.

Second, there is mismatch between language in the class and the language in the actual use of learned skills in society. Tanzanians learn via English, but when they complete their studies and work in different Tanzania companies or offices, the dominant language is Kiswahili because the clients to whom they provide services are Swahili speakers in most cases.

Data from literature can be supported by data collected from 17 students from the Mzumbe University, School of Public Administration and Management (SOPAM) who were at field studies at different organizations, namely Ministry of finance, NSSF, TANROADS, Dar es salaam Port whereby all of them reported to have used Kiswahili in several situations like in meetings, when a boss gives some directives/orders, workers in office, when a worker/employee addresses a certain issue to the boss, when a worker addresses something to the costumer, information on notice board etc. The students also reported that English remained in sole documents and it was mostly orally used when a foreigner (Non Kiswahili speaker) paid a visit to the organization. Furthermore, the students said that code-mixing (the use of both English and Kiswahili) was sometimes used because some of the field vocabularies were either difficult to be translated into Kiswahili or were totally not found in Kiswahili. The following were some responses given by the students to the question which required them to give out their general suggestion in regard to the language of instruction at the organization they were undertaking their field studies.

*“Kiswahili has to be used more than English because 110 out of 114 employees are Tanzanians and they are more comfortable with Kiswahili than English, Only 4 employees are Zambians. Also Kiswahili is better for most of the employees because of their level of education; most of the lower level employees have only primary education.*

*“My suggestion is that Kiswahili should be used in communications. This is because some other employees are not fluent in English language; hence, it is difficult in understanding the directives given”*

*“I suggest that Kiswahili language to continue to be used because it makes workers to understand each other and it does not affect the performance of this organization”*

*“To my suggestion Kiswahili language should be mostly used, this is because many of customers that are served by the municipality are from outside and they are much familiar with Swahili language for example, Mtaa executive officer, ward executive officers and other normal citizens. English language should be used where necessary, for example, when a foreigner pays a visit to the office and other internal official work”*

Therefore, this shows that vocational skills is delivered to students by language A (English) but application of the acquired skills is done in language Z (Kiswahili). As various suggestions given above, suggest that Kiswahili should officially be used in organizations because despite the fact that the language of communication in various organizations has theoretically been English; it is never being used, instead, Kiswahili has taken the place. If Kiswahili is being used in delivering services it is important now the vocational training (acquisition of particular education) should as well be done in Kiswahili.

### **Conclusion**

It is high time for the government to adopt Kiswahili as Language of Instruction (LoI) in secondary schools and tertiary institutions so as to implement VET effectively in the country because more than 90% of Tanzanians are familiar with Kiswahili. Moreover, all local services from various offices, trading centres e.t.c. are done in Kiswahili throughout the country. This does not mean English should totally be terminated, but it will be used as a subject which will be taught by English professional teachers who will enable a student to understand proper English different from the current situation in which students are expected to learn English through using it as a language of instruction. Language is not learned by making it a LoI rather it is to be taught by particular language teachers. The result of maintaining this wrong ideology (teaching in English is learning English) has resulted in poor English to many students because some teachers who are not competent in the English language have been imparting poor English grammar to their students and sometimes distorting a proper grammar which students have learned from the English teacher.

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