



Early Multilingualism and Bi/Multilingual Education in Tanzanian Primary Schools: Teachers' Perceptions

Josephiter Mutagwaba & Ulrike Jessner

To cite this article: Josephiter Mutagwaba & Ulrike Jessner (2024) Early Multilingualism and Bi/Multilingual Education in Tanzanian Primary Schools: Teachers' Perceptions, *Language Matters*, 55:1-2, 139-164, DOI: [10.1080/10228195.2024.2348664](https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2024.2348664)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2024.2348664>



© 2024 The Author(s). Co-published by Unisa Press and Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 29 Jul 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 325



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Early Multilingualism and Bi/Multilingual Education in Tanzanian Primary Schools: Teachers' Perceptions

Josephiter Mutagwaba

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8270-4564>

University of Innsbruck, Austria

Ulrike Jessner

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3015-3281>

University of Innsbruck, Austria

University of Pannonia, Hungary

ulrike.jessner@uibk.ac.at

Abstract

The article investigates early multilingualism in Tanzanian primary schools, focusing on teachers' perceptions of bilingual/multilingual education. It highlights Tanzania's rich linguistic diversity, with over 156 languages, and the bilingual education policy using Swahili and English. The study examines language teaching methods, the development of multilingualism with English, and the effectiveness of these methods in fostering language proficiency in young pupils. The research was conducted in three primary schools in the Kagera region and involved structured interviews with 24 language teachers. The findings contribute to understanding multilingual education in Tanzania, presenting implications for teaching strategies and policy development to enhance multilingual proficiency in the educational system.

Keywords: bilingual education; early multilingualism; language proficiency; Tanzanian education; teaching strategies

UNISA   Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Language Matters

www.tandfonline.com/r/mss

Volume 55 | Number 1–2 | 2024 | pp. 139–164

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2024.2348664>
ISSN 1753-5395 (Online), ISSN 1022-8195 (Print)

© The Author(s) 2024



Co-published by Unisa Press and Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

1. Introduction

Multilingualism is widespread in many world regions, reflecting our planet's cultural and linguistic diversity. Multilingualism denotes the ability to speak more than two languages (Herdina and Jessner 2002; Jessner 2008) at varying proficiency levels (Kulkarni 2013). Several factors can prompt multilingualism in individuals and societies, including immigration, children from third cultures, education, temporary residence in foreign countries or regions, or living in naturally multilingual areas (Kulkarni 2013). Early multilingualism pertains to children's capability to acquire multiple languages during their early childhood. Even newborns exposed to multiple languages before birth can learn several languages, differentiate between different languages in speech, and display language-specific babbling by 10–12 months (Baker and Wright 2017).

Tanzania is known for its diverse linguistic landscape, with more than 156 languages spoken (Muzale and Rugemalira 2008). This can be attributed to various groups' complex history of trade, migration, and colonisation (Kimambo and Maddox 2019; Petzell 2012). Swahili is Tanzania's official national language and the most widely spoken language. English is the second official language commonly used in government, education, and business. Tanzanian children grow up in a multilingual environment and are exposed to their ethnic languages and Swahili from a young age. In that regard, many Tanzanian children acquire at least the first two languages naturally in their homes and from the community around them. Tanzania's language education policy is bilingual (Tibategeza 2010), with Swahili and English being used as languages of instruction at various levels of education (United Republic of Tanzania 1995). In primary schools, the Swahili language is the medium of instruction, while English is used in post-primary education. This study investigates how bi/multilingualism is promoted in Tanzanian primary schools regarding language teaching methods.

This article focuses on teachers' perspectives regarding bi/multilingual education and language teaching approaches. The article begins by concisely summarising the language guidelines in Tanzania's education policy, multilingualism and multilingual awareness in the Tanzanian speech community, and the pedagogical techniques implemented in schools to promote multilingualism. We then outline our research approach by detailing the participants, instruments, and data collection methods. Following this, we present our findings, which explore the development of early multilingualism with English in Tanzania and the efficiency of the techniques utilised to foster multilingual proficiency in young pupils. These results are followed by a short discussion and the study's implications.

2. Literature Review

Scholars have for years shown keen interest in analysing Tanzania's linguistic diversity, language policy, and language proficiency. The educational policies surrounding

language have been exhaustively scrutinised, with numerous researchers advocating for a well-rounded approach to language acquisition to improve the quality of education for learners in Tanzania (John 2017; Mapunda and Gibson 2022; Mohr 2018; Tibategeza 2010). The focus of this inquiry delves into how primary schools navigate this diversity when implementing bilingual education policies.

2.1 Language Policy in Tanzania

Multilingualism is prevalent in countries such as Tanzania and other African and Asian nations (Batibo 2020; Garcia 2017). However, most studies on multilingualism have focused on formal contexts, particularly in Europe and the United States, where parents and policymakers intentionally choose to raise children bi/multilingually (Baker and Wright 2017). Tanzania boasts an estimated 156 spoken languages (Muzale and Rugemalira 2008), and even before the arrival of Europeans, the country had a diverse linguistic landscape. Abdulaziz (2017) notes that over 100 Bantu languages, Cushitic, Nilotic, and Khoi San were spoken in Tanzania. The diversity of languages in Tanzania is a testament to the country's rich cultural heritage. However, the pre-colonial language situation was later impacted by introducing European languages under German and British rules, prioritising European languages over indigenous ones. Abdulaziz notes that introducing English as the official language in Tanzania led to the devaluation of ethnic languages and a loss of cultural identity. In the colonial era, language education policies were designed to promote English among the locals. Colonial administrators and merchants did not typically advocate for using ethnic languages. Instead, they often employed indigenous languages solely to further the interests of the colonial powers. For instance, Arab merchants utilised Swahili to promote Islam and facilitate business communication. Meanwhile, Germans used Swahili for administrative purposes, and the British allowed limited use of ethnic languages as they worked through local governments under chiefdoms (Mtavangu 2017).

After independence, Tanzania's education policy failed to address the issue of language hierarchy. The policy was affected by the mono-philosophical ideology that aimed at creating a uniform national identity, which resulted in the suppression of ethnic languages (Mtavangu 2017) and the prioritisation of English and Swahili. Despite criticism from scholars for its failure to achieve biliteracy (Brock-Utne 2007; Tibategeza 2010; Tibategeza and Du Plessis 2012) and challenges such as emotional distress faced by learners who are not well-prepared in English (Adamson 2022), the problem of language in the education system remains a challenge. Nonetheless, linguistic heterogeneity persists in Tanzania. Ethnic languages remain the primary language of the majority, serving as the foundation for local knowledge in areas such as agriculture and animal husbandry. Additionally, ethnic languages are the most effective tools for imparting and interpreting ethical information through proverbs and sayings (Mtavangu 2017).

2.2 Multilingualism and Multilingual Awareness in Tanzania

Critical language awareness refers to how languages are regarded and appreciated within a society. Individuals are encouraged to recognise the importance of all languages without one language dominating the discourse. This approach extends beyond mere cognitive recognition and seeks to promote social and political awareness, motivating individuals to take action (Alim 2010).

In communities with multiple languages, there exists a risk of linguistic supremacy, which can impact language policies and planning. Tanzania is a country renowned for its linguistic diversity, with many languages spoken by its people. Tanzanians are known for their fluency in multiple languages, and research has highlighted the numerous benefits of being multilingual for young learners, such as developing their metalinguistic awareness (Becker and Knoll 2021; Hofer and Jessner 2019), creativity, and cognitive abilities (Baker 2011; Fürst and Grin 2018; Okal 2014). Furthermore, being multilingual has been linked to a decreased risk of Alzheimer's disease in older adults (Klein, Christie, and Parkvall 2016). Despite this, Tanzania's language policy prioritises official languages such as Swahili and English while overlooking the use of ethnic languages in education and official settings. The question of the language of instruction has been primarily focused on switching from English to Swahili in post-primary education (Brock-Utne 2007; Marwa 2014; Neke 2005; Qorro 2013), with little regard for the incorporation of ethnic languages into the education system. Despite being predominantly bilingual, ethnic languages are not considered much in Tanzania's linguistic landscape (Lusekelo 2019; Lusekelo and Alphonse 2018). This raises questions about multilingual awareness in the Tanzanian speech community.

However, the post-mono-philosophy (Mtavangu 2017) period has ushered in a more liberal and multi-philosophy approach to education policy, with some researchers advocating for a multilingual approach. This includes using Swahili as the language of instruction (Qorro 2013; Swilla 2009) and teaching bi/multilingually using all languages spoken by pupils, including their ethnic languages (John 2017). Some institutions have contributed to documenting and preserving ethnic languages. Universities have launched initiatives to promote multilingualism, such as the "Language of Tanzania Project" at the University of Dar es Salaam (2001–2014), which has contributed significantly to documenting and maintaining the languages of Tanzania, including completing a language atlas of Tanzania and publishing dictionaries of Tanzanian languages other than Swahili (Mtavangu 2017).

2.3 Approaches and Methods of Language Acquisition in Early Multilingualism

In Tanzanian homes, children acquire multiple languages naturally, drawing from their home and community environments. While some households use a mixed-language approach that involves code-switching between ethnic languages and Swahili, traditional strategies like the "one person-one language" (Baker and Wright 2017; Becker and Knoll 2021) approach are not necessarily applicable in this multilingual

context. Multilingualism in Tanzanian children can be acquired simultaneously or sequentially, with the latter typically occurring when children start school and begin using a second language daily. However, Tanzanian schools lack a formalised bilingual education approach such as dual bilingual education, heritage bilingual education, and immersion bilingual education (Baker and Wright 2017) and categorising languages as majority or minority is not always applicable given their varying prevalence across contexts. While Swahili is the primary language used for instruction in primary education, and English is used in post-primary education, there is concern about the acquisition and proficiency of bi/multilingual literacy in many Tanzanian schools (Brock-Utne 2007; Tibategeza 2010; Tibategeza and Du Plessis 2012). Most Tanzanian children lack writing and reading skills in their ethnic languages since they do not learn in these languages. Many learners complete grade seven with little to no English proficiency; some finish grade 12 (form four) with poor speaking skills. This article highlights the importance of exploring multilingual acquisition, supporting multilingualism in education, and maintaining proficiency in natural multilingual environments like Tanzania.

3. The Study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate how early multilingualism has been facilitated in the Tanzanian context, particularly in primary schools, the strategies used, and the extent to which the goal of multilingual proficiency has been achieved.

3.1 Research Questions

- To what extent is critical multilingual awareness present in the Tanzanian speech community?
- What teaching and learning strategies are used in Tanzanian primary schools to promote bi/multilingualism?
- To what extent has Tanzanian education policy implemented bi/multilingualism in primary schools?

3.2 Selection of Schools

Three schools from the Kagera region were purposively selected based on their language of instruction. These included School One, a public Swahili-medium primary school (referred to as School One [Swh. Pub.]) located in Bukoba District; School Two, a private English-medium primary school (referred to as School Two [Eng. Priv.]) located in Muleba District; and School Three, a private Swahili-medium primary school (referred to as School Three [Swh. Priv.]) located in Muleba District.

Table 1: Description of schools

School One (Swh. Pub.)	School Two (Eng. Priv.)	School Three (Swh. Priv.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day school • Kindergarten–primary seven • Age: 4–13 • Dominant language: Haya, spoken in the village and the children’s homes • Languages used in the school compound: English and Swahili • Language of instruction: Swahili • English as a subject: 4 hrs • Swahili as a subject: 3.5 hrs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private day and boarding school • Kindergarten–primary seven • Age: 4–13 • First language for majority of pupils: Haya • Languages used in the school compound: English and Swahili • Language of instruction: English • English as a subject: 4 hrs • Swahili as a subject: 3.5 hrs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boarding school • Primary six and seven • Age: 11–13 • First language for majority of pupils: Haya • Languages used in the school compound: English and Swahili • Language of instruction: Swahili • English as a subject: 7 hrs • Swahili as a subject: 3.5 hrs

3.3 Description of Pupils’ Language Background

Most pupils in School One (Swh. Pub.) acquired Haya as their first language. In contrast, in schools Two (Eng. Priv.) and Three (Swh. Priv.), some pupils acquired Swahili as their first language, and others acquired both languages (Haya and Swahili) simultaneously. All pupils in the schools selected had been exposed to English at an early age, but there were differences in the intensity with which they had received training in the language. Pupils in Swahili primary schools had been exposed to English in grade three (age: 8–9), where they learned it as a subject only, while pupils in English medium primary school(s) had been exposed to English already in kindergarten (age: 3.5–4.5) where they had learned the language as a subject and used it as a language of instruction and communication.

3.4. Participants

The study involved 24 language teachers from three primary schools; their ages ranged between 25 and 45. Of the 24 teachers, 14 were male, and 10 were female. The study involved English and Swahili teachers from grades three to seven of School One (Swh. Pub.) and School Two (Eng. Priv.), and only grades six and seven teachers from School Three (Swh. Priv.). There were 12 English teachers (School One: N = 5; School Two: N = 5; School Three: N = 2) and 12 Swahili teachers (School One: N = 5; School Two: N = 5; School Three: N = 2) who responded to the interview and evaluated their pupils’ language proficiency.

3.5 Data Collection Tools

Structured Interview

During the study, participants were interviewed regarding their opinions of multilingualism, language attitudes, and preferences among teachers and pupils. The interviews also explored promotion strategies for bi/multilingualism and the effectiveness of Tanzania's bilingual education system.

Terminal and Annual Examinations and Speaking Tests in Haya

The language teachers evaluated their students' language proficiency by utilising the results of both end-of-term and annual exams in English and Swahili, which the teachers themselves set. Proficiency in Haya was evaluated by native-speaking teachers through conversations, and the pupils were assigned grades.

3.6 Analysis

Qualitative methods were used to analyse the data through content analysis. Responses from the participants were examined thoroughly to identify patterns and themes that would provide valuable insights and contribute to the research goals. This process entailed meticulously organising and classifying the data according to thematic categories. The presentation of the results includes various visual aids such as charts, tables, and graphics to display the percentage of respondents who shared similar ideas. Moreover, extracts from respondents' explanations are also incorporated into the presentation to provide more context and insight into the findings.

4. Results

The study comprehensively analysed early multilingualism in Tanzanian primary schools, highlighting several key findings. It reveals a clear preference for English over Swahili and ethnic languages among pupils and teachers, attributing high prestige to English in the educational context. The study uncovers mixed attitudes towards implementing Tanzania's bilingual education policy, with notable strategies for fostering bi/multilingualism within schools. Proficiency levels in Swahili, English, and ethnic languages vary, with pupils in private schools often outperforming their public school counterparts in English proficiency. These findings are essential for understanding language use and instruction complexities in Tanzania's primary education system.

4.1 Language Preferences and Attitudes

The findings reveal a distinct preference for English among pupils and teachers, underlining its prestige over Swahili and ethnic languages in Tanzanian primary schools. This preference is rooted in the belief that English offers greater academic and professional advancement opportunities. Teachers' attitudes strongly endorse English as essential for pupils' success despite the country's bilingual education policy aiming

to balance English and Swahili. The study highlights a societal and educational inclination towards English, suggesting its dominant role in shaping language education practices.

Giving their opinions on which languages should be included in the curriculum, teachers expressed satisfaction with the current language policy. They suggested that only Swahili and English should be taught in the education curriculum.

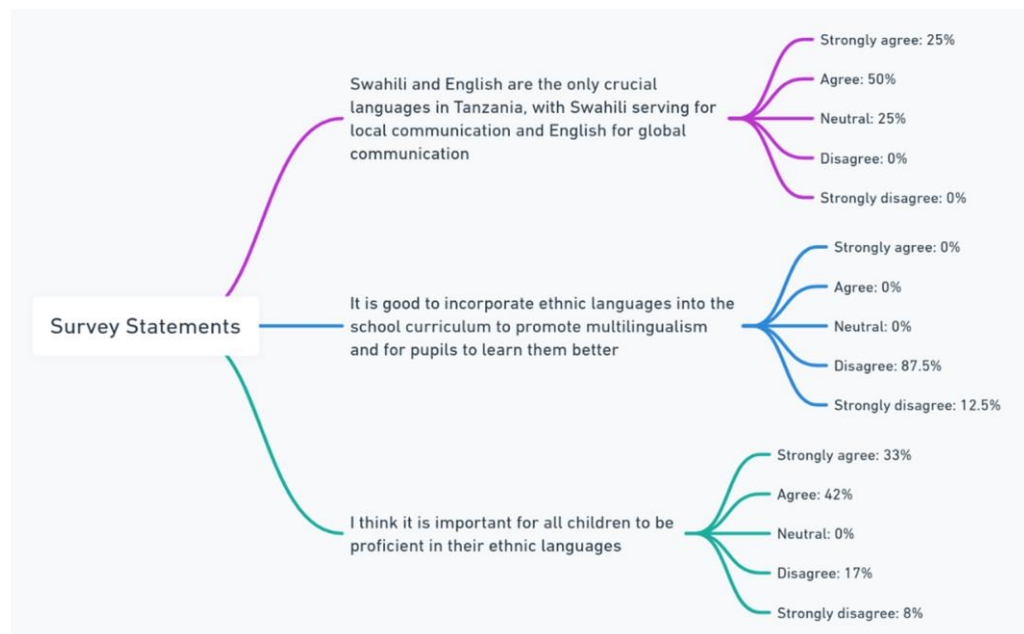


Figure 1: Teachers' opinions regarding the language used in the education policy

The results revealed that none of the participants agreed that introducing ethnic languages into the school curriculum is beneficial. However, most (75%) acknowledged the significance of children being fluent in their ethnic languages, suggesting their importance in maintaining cultural identity. Additionally, the majority (75%) agreed that Swahili and English are the only essential languages, with a small number (25%) remaining neutral.

Regarding language prestige, the participants' responses indicated that English was considered the most prestigious language.

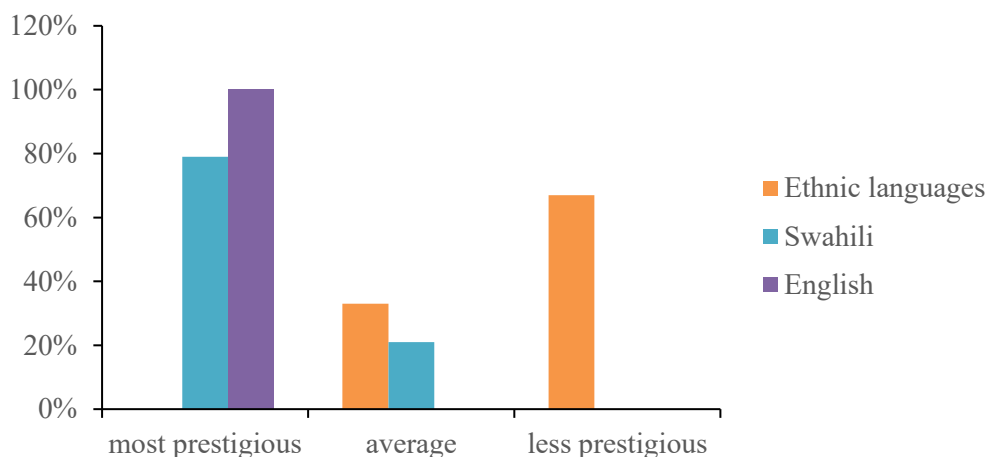


Figure 2: Teachers' perception of language prestige

The study revealed that all the participants (100%) considered English the most prestigious language, followed by Swahili, which 79% of the respondents found highly prestigious. In comparison, 21% regarded it as moderately prestigious. On the other hand, ethnic languages received the slightest regard, as 67% of the respondents deemed them to be of lower prestige, while 33% believed they were moderately esteemed.

Based on the language preference argument presented, it was found that English is the most favoured language in the education system. The participants unanimously expressed that pupils prefer learning English over other languages.

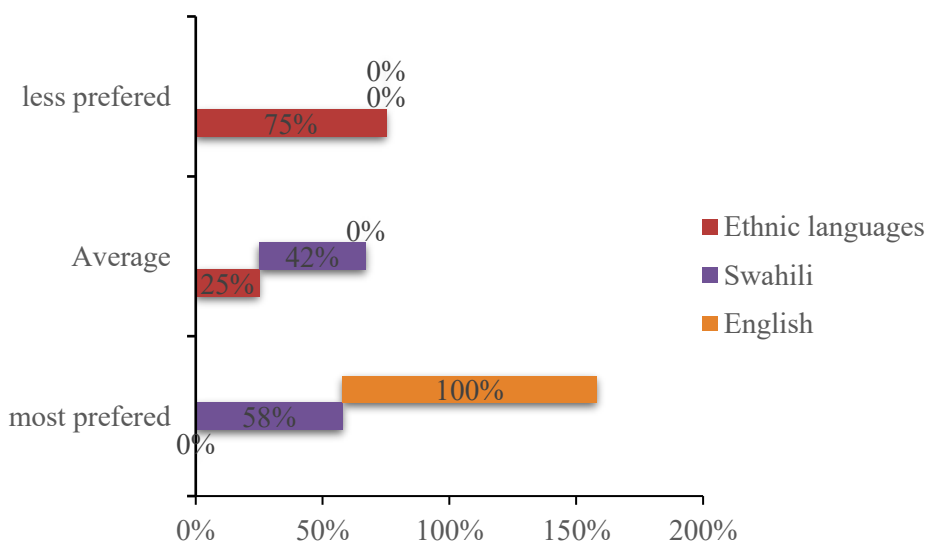


Figure 3: Teachers' opinions about the most preferred language

The participants indicated that English is the most favoured language, with 100% stating it as the top preference. Swahili is the second most favoured language, with 58% stating it as the top preference and 42% considering it an average preference. However, the participants believed that ethnic languages are not as favoured by pupils; 25% noted that ethnic languages are preferred on average, while 75% said they are less favoured.

The participants were also asked to share their thoughts on promoting multilingualism in schools by teaching all languages. Interestingly, all 24 participants believed that Tanzania could still achieve multilingualism without teaching ethnic languages in schools. Instead, they emphasised the significance of prioritising English and employing effective teaching methods to ensure that pupils attain proficiency in the language by the time they complete primary school. Below are a few examples of the responses shared by the participants.

Children in this area are proficient in Haya and Swahili. Therefore, proficiency in two languages is possible even if native languages are not permitted in schools. What I can say is that we need to emphasise English. (A respondent from School One)

We emphasise using English because pupils can learn Swahili and Haya in their homes. This approach helps our pupils be proficient in all three languages by the time they finish primary seven. (A respondent from School Two)

Pupils come when they are already good at Swahili and Haya. Therefore, our approach focuses on English more than other languages. This approach yields good results. Our pupils can speak Haya, Swahili, and English well. (A respondent from School Three)

4.2 Multilingual Awareness and Strategies

Teachers in Tanzanian primary schools demonstrate a significant level of multilingual awareness, recognising the importance of fostering bi/multilingualism in their pupils. Strategies employed include integrating English and Swahili in instruction and communication. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies, with challenges in balancing the instructional time and resources allocated to each language.

4.2.1 Language Use

The choice of language used according to the individual school environment depends on the Tanzanian education policy, which allows only Swahili and English and a few optional languages, such as French, to be taught as foreign languages. The three schools differ in how they use the languages regarding the language of instruction and the language of communication (Table 2).

Table 2: Languages taught in the individual school environment and their roles

School	Number of languages	Language of instruction	Language of communication
School 1 (Swh. Pub.)	2 (Swahili and English)	Swahili	Swahili
School 2 (Eng. Priv.)	2 (Swahili and English)	English	English and Swahili
School 3 (Swh. Priv.)	2 (Swahili and English)	Swahili	English and Swahili

The results also showed that the three schools differ in the number of hours employed for teaching particular language(s) per week (Table 3). School Three (Swh. Priv.) has more hours of teaching English as a subject than School One (Swh. Pub.) and School Two (Eng. Priv.).

Table 3: Hours of teaching English and Swahili as subjects

School 1 (Swh. Pub.)	Swahili – 3.5 hours	English – 4 hours
School 2 (Eng. Priv.)	Swahili – 3.5 hours	English – 4 hours
School 3 (Swh. Priv.)	Swahili – 3.5 hours	English – 7 hours

According to the study, pupils in schools Two and Three (Eng. Priv. and Swh. Priv.) use English and Swahili to communicate with different people. Pupils in these schools predominantly use English to communicate with their teachers, English and Swahili with their peers, and Swahili to communicate with non-academic staff. In contrast, pupils in School One (Swh. Pub.) primarily use Swahili to communicate with teachers, non-academic staff, and peers (Table 4).

Table 4: Medium of communication with people in school compounds

	School 1 (Swh. Pub.)	School 2 (Eng. Priv.)	School 3 (Swh. Priv.)
People			
Teachers	Swahili	English	English
Fellow pupils	Swahili	English and Swahili	English
Matron	Not applicable	Swahili	Swahili
Other non-academic staff	Swahili	Swahili	Swahili

The study also investigated what language pupils use when engaging in different activities. The participants noted that English and Swahili are used by pupils when doing different activities in schools Two (Eng. Priv.) and Three (Swh. Priv.). At the same time, in School One (Swh. Pub.) Swahili is used as the language of communication in all activities in the school compounds, as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Language used in different activities and media

Activities	School 1 (Swh. Pub)		School 2 (Eng. Priv)		School 3 (Swh. Priv.)	
	Language	Duration	Language	Duration	Language	Duration
Teaching (LoI)	Swahili	8 hours	English	10 hours	Swahili	8 hours
Playing outside	Swahili	1 hour	English and Swahili	1.5 hours	English	2 hours
Singing	-	-	English and Swahili	1 hour	English and Haya	1 hour
Watching TV	-	-	Swahili	1 hour	English	30 min
Dormitories	-	-	English and Swahili	-	English	-

4.2.2 Strategies

Regarding teaching strategies, the participants' responses on promoting multilingualism showed differences among schools implementing bilingual education in Tanzania.

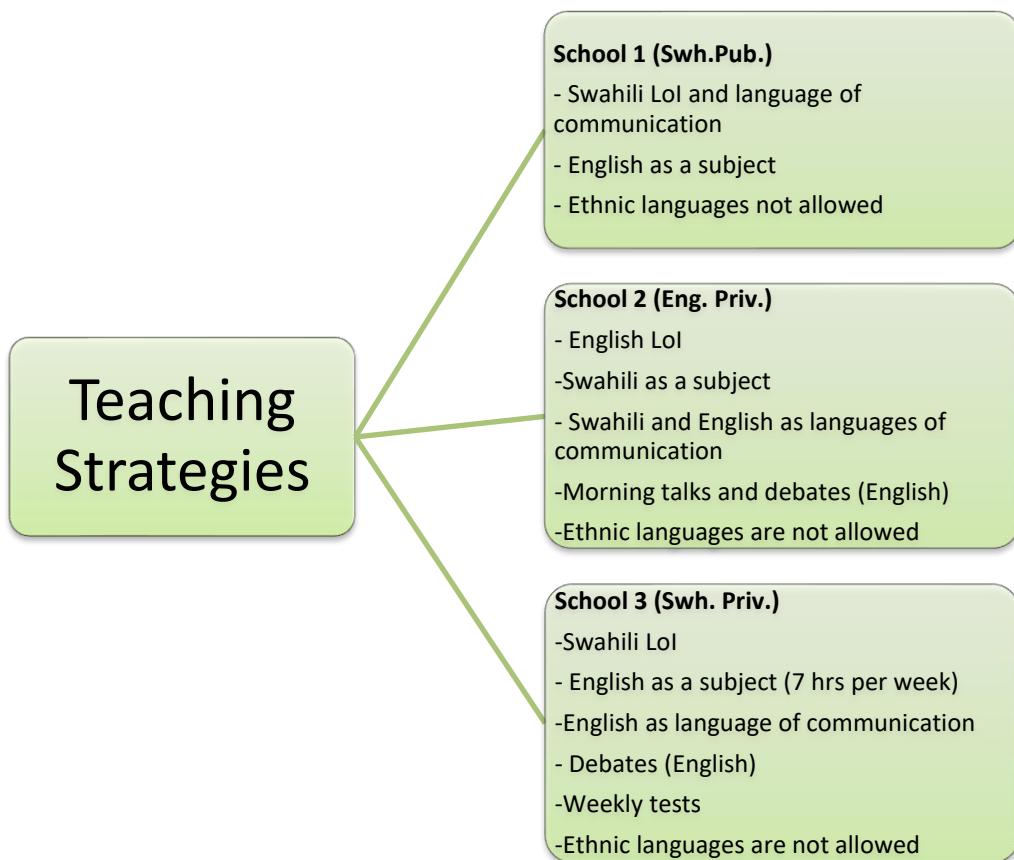


Figure 4: Strategies employed by schools teaching languages

The results revealed that, in the view of the participating teachers in School One (Swh. Pub.), more effort is being made to improve Swahili language skills, while English is given little attention. In schools Two (Eng. Priv.) and Three (Swh. Priv.), on the other hand, more emphasis is being laid on English by creating more activities that engage pupils in using the language (Figure 4).

Based on the participants' feedback, there appears to be a lack of awareness regarding the considerable influence of multilingual pedagogies. None of the responses acknowledged the potential benefits of incorporating multilingual pedagogies into their teaching methods. Instead, the teachers prioritise specific languages that require more attention to aid learners in developing proficiency in multiple languages. Excerpts from the feedback provided by the participants follow.

The approach we use here is to emphasise speaking Swahili because we know that when pupils go home, they speak Haya. After all, ethnic languages are not allowed to be used in school compounds. For English, they will learn it when they go to secondary school. Here, we teach only the basics. (Respondent School One)

Our school emphasises using English because it is the language pupils need most. In secondary schools, for example, they learn everything in English. If pupils do not know English, they will have difficulty and even fail exams. We want our pupils to be proficient in English before they go to secondary school. After all, pupils can learn Swahili and Haya from their homes, but English is only learned in schools. (Respondent School Two)

We aim to improve English and Swahili proficiency here. Of course, we create more activities for pupils to learn English because they come here with little knowledge of English. Assigning a particular role to a particular language yields good results. Our pupils have spoken good English in just two years, although the language of instruction here is Swahili. However, we use this approach from our creativity as a school because the education language policy does not illustrate how the bilingual policy should be implemented. (Respondent School Three)

4.2.3 Teachers' Opinions on Tanzanian bilingual education

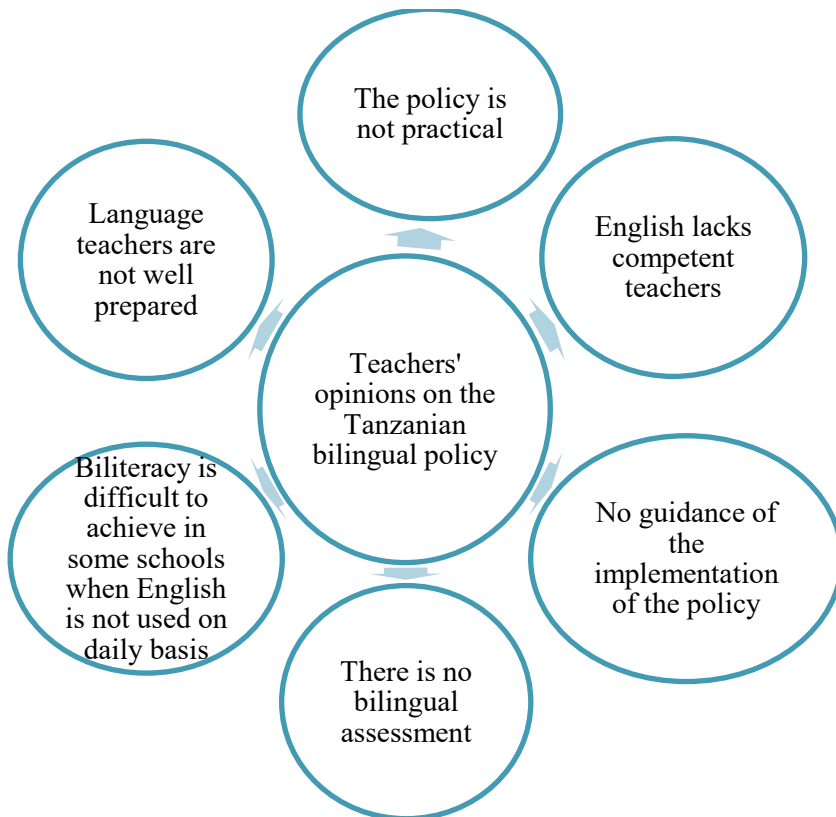


Figure 5: Participants' opinions on the bilingual policy

The participants gave their thoughts on the bilingual education policy in Tanzania and expressed concerns about its practicability, such as its failure to encourage bilingualism. More focus is placed on teaching Swahili than English in public primary schools, where

most pupils are enrolled. This presents a challenge because the primary goal of education is to enable pupils to become proficient in both languages. The lack of language teachers is another concern that was pointed out. The participants noted that language teachers face difficulties in English owing to inadequate preparation and language skills. This results in a lack of opportunities for pupils to practice speaking English, compromising their education. Additionally, achieving biliteracy is not easy in some (public) schools, as many pupils cannot achieve proficiency in both languages. Furthermore, the lack of definitive instructions or designated approaches for implementing bilingualism further exacerbates the issue. Finally, the participants highlighted the lack of a bilingual assessment tool in candidate classes (grades four and seven) as a challenge, as this tool would help determine the level of proficiency a pupil needs to progress to upper classes and secondary schools.

4.3 Language Proficiency

The results indicate varying proficiency levels in Swahili, English, and ethnic languages among students, with notable differences between public and private schools. Pupils in private schools generally exhibit higher proficiency in English, attributed to more resources and a stronger emphasis on English instruction. This contrast highlights the impact of the bilingual education policy, which aims to promote bilingualism but faces challenges in equitable implementation across different school types.

Giving their opinion on their pupils' bi/multilingual proficiency as regards the number of languages spoken by pupils, the participants firmly believed that pupils are proficient in at least two languages by the time they complete their primary education (as depicted in Figure 6).

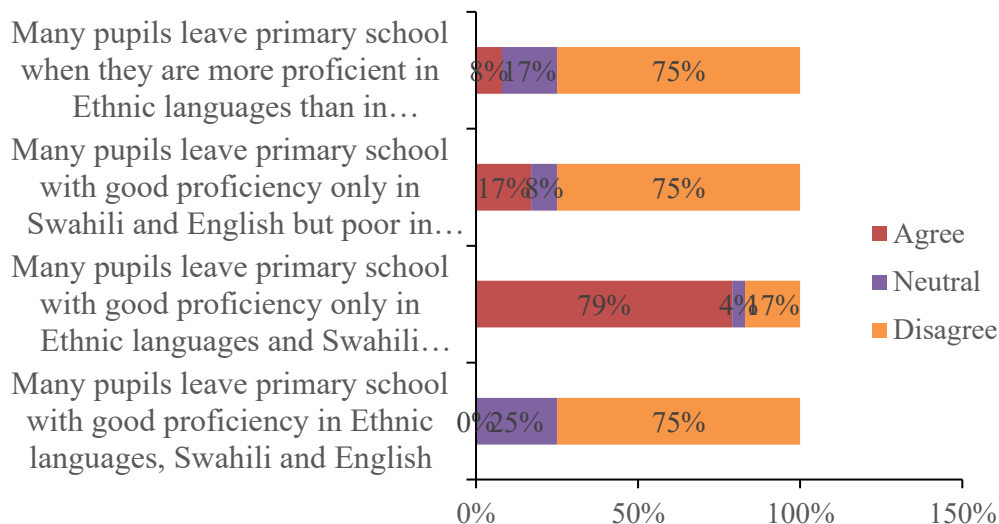


Figure 6: Bilingual proficiency achievement

According to the results, the participating teachers believed that pupils fully grasp various languages after seventh grade. The study found that 79% of the participants concur that pupils exhibit more excellent proficiency in Swahili and other native tongues than English. This observation aligns with the approach to education in Tanzania, where English receives less emphasis in public elementary schools.

Based on the results of the end-term and annual exams in English and Swahili and the native-speaking teachers' evaluation through brief conversations in Haya, pupils attending Swahili public schools possess strong skills in Haya and Swahili but weak English proficiency. Conversely, pupils attending English and Swahili private schools demonstrate proficiency in all three languages upon completing primary school.

Table 6: Pupils' proficiency in Haya, Swahili, and English

	Haya				Swahili				English			
	L	S	W	R	L	S	W	R	L	S	W	R
School 1												
Grd. 3	A	A	D	D	C	C	C	C	F	F	E	E
Grd. 4	A	A	D	D	B	C	B	C	E	E	E	E
Grd. 5	B	A	D	D	B	B	B	B	E	E	D	D
Grd. 6	A	A	E	D	A	B	B	B	D	E	D	D
Grd. 7	A	A	D	D	A	B	B	B	D	E	D	D

School 2												
Grd. 3	B	D	-	E	B	B	C	C	C	C	C	D
Grd. 4	C	D	-	E	A	B	C	C	C	C	C	C
Grd. 5	C	D	-	E	A	B	C	B	B	C	B	B
Grd. 6	C	C	-	E	A	A	C	B	B	B	B	B
Grd. 7	C	C	-	E	A	A	B	B	B	A	B	A
School 3												
Grd. 6	B	C	D	E	A	B	B	B	B	C	C	B
Grd. 7	B	C	D	E	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B

Note. L: Listen; S: Speak; R: Read; W: Write

5. Discussion

The study's findings are significant as they shed light on how Tanzania's education system grapples with the intricate landscape of bilingual education in a multilingual society. The results suggest a strong inclination towards English among teachers, a preference that mirrors English's perceived prestige and global utility (Mohr 2018; Mohr and Ochieng 2017; Telli 2014). This aligns with Tanzania's bilingual education policy, which designates Swahili as the primary education instruction medium and English in post-primary education, raising questions about the policy's effectiveness and inclusivity (Tibategeza 2010).

The participants' responses reveal a belief in the power of multilingualism, even in the absence of formal ethnic language inclusion in the curriculum. This belief suggests that natural language acquisition in community and home settings plays a pivotal role in developing multilingual competencies. However, this approach may inadvertently overlook the advantages of structured language education in fostering balanced multilingualism and preserving cultural heritage.

The study's findings emphasise the pressing need to review and potentially adjust Tanzania's bilingual education policy. It also underscores the importance of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of language preferences, proficiencies, and educational practices to foster an environment that values and encourages the use of diverse languages.

5.1 Multilingualism as an Asset

The study's findings align with a wealth of literature that demonstrates the numerous benefits of multilingual education in a Tanzanian context (John 2017; Mapunda and Gibson 2022; Mohr and Ochieng 2017; Tibategeza 2010). Multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities such as problem-solving and creativity and fosters cultural awareness and sensitivity (Herdina and Jessner 2002; Hofer and Jessner 2019; Jessner 2008). This, in turn, equips individuals with the skills to navigate diverse social environments more effectively, underscoring the value and importance of multilingualism (Baker and Wright 2017).

Recognising the significance of critical multilingual awareness in Tanzania is of utmost importance. A linguistic hierarchy persists within education policies (Mtavangu 2017) and teachers' attitudes towards language, highlighting the need for greater attention. Nevertheless, the study highlights the potential benefits of embracing multilingualism in Tanzanian schools, including bridging communication gaps and enriching students' educational experiences. By highlighting the preference for English while recognising the value of Swahili and ethnic languages, the study points to the need for educational policies that embrace linguistic diversity (John 2017; Mapunda and Gibson 2022) rather than prioritising one language over others.

This perspective is crucial for Tanzania, a country with a rich tapestry of languages, where fostering multilingual competencies strengthens unity and social cohesion (Coetzee-Van Rooy 2022). The knowledge about the importance of multilingualism in education and literacy will lead to multilingualism policies that prepare pupils for a globalised world while grounding them in their cultural heritage.

5.2 Implementing Bilingual Education: Strategies and Challenges

The implementation of the bilingual education policy in Tanzania, as highlighted in the study, faces several significant challenges that undermine its effectiveness. One of the primary issues is the restriction of the use of ethnic languages within the educational system (John 2017; Mapunda and Gibson 2022). This hinders pupils from acquiring literacy in their ethnic languages and erodes cultural heritage and identity among pupils.

While not an exact match for the programme proposed by Baker and Wright (2017), Tanzania's approach to bilingual education can be likened to an immersion programme. In rural primary schools, learners must utilise Swahili as their secondary language, while English is introduced as a language of instruction in secondary school. Conversely, in urban regions where Swahili is the primary language, pupils must adopt the programme when transitioning to secondary schools, where English is the medium of instruction for all subjects except Swahili.

The bilingual education system emphasises Swahili during primary education and English during post-primary education (United Republic of Tanzania 1995). The use of ethnic languages is prohibited, although code-switching and code-mixing can be tolerated outside the classrooms among lower-class pupils. Upper-class pupils are subject to disciplinary action for speaking ethnic languages on school premises (Mapunda and Gibson 2022; Roemer 2023).

A strong emphasis on English, often seen as more prestigious and global (Mohr and Ochieng 2017), is another challenge to implementing bi/multilingual education in Tanzania. This study revealed that private school teachers have a preference for focusing on English education over other languages. In English medium schools, English is the primary instructional language, with Swahili taught as a subject. Swahili is mainly used for specific activities. In private Swahili medium schools, both languages

are used almost equally, with English used for extracurricular activities. However, the focus is on English education rather than bilingualism. This aligns with previous research indicating a preference for English over Swahili in Tanzanian education (Adamson 2022; Telli 2014).

This focus on English, especially in the context of post-primary education and in private primary schools, can inadvertently marginalise Swahili and ethnic languages (Brock-Utne 2017; Mohanty and Kutnabb-Kangas 2022) despite Swahili's official status and widespread use in the country. The prioritisation of English creates linguistic hierarchies within the education system, where proficiency in English is seen as more desirable than fluency in Swahili or ethnic languages. According to Neke (2005), using English as the language of instruction in private schools exacerbates educational inequalities and has socio-economic implications.

A more equitable and comprehensive approach to bi/multilingual education is crucial for Tanzania (John 2017; Mohr and Ochieng 2017; Tibategeza 2010). To achieve this, it is essential to review the current education policy to be responsive to linguistic diversity and realities in Tanzanian society, promoting more inclusive and effective education (Marwa 2014; Swilla 2009). This will enable pupils to be fluent in various languages and contribute to a diverse and multilingual community that values and safeguards all languages.

5.3 Implication for Policy and Practice

This study suggests that learning and teaching languages to multilingual learners and within a multilingual speech community are dynamic and complex (Herdina and Jessner 2002; Jessner 2006; 2008). Bi/multilingual learners tend to utilise all available linguistic resources at their disposal, and they do not perceive linguistic boundaries or codes but instead rely on every available resource (Mapunda and Gibson 2022). This study underscores the significance of the dynamic model of multilingualism (DMM) (Herdina and Jessner 2002) in multilingualism studies, particularly in settings like Tanzania. The findings reveal that pupils who could read and write in the Haya language acquired these competencies by transferring knowledge from Swahili. In light of this, language maintenance efforts can have a positive impact. Regular assessments of language proficiencies are imperative for these languages in these contexts. It is noteworthy that in Tanzania, some children may face challenges in speaking ethnic languages, but they are still able to comprehend them, indicating passive bilingualism. Likewise, most primary school pupils in Tanzania may not be able to speak English but attain proficiency in the language during their secondary education. These classroom approaches, however, can only become realistic if multilingual awareness among teachers can be developed to such an extent that multilingual pedagogies (Baker and Wright 2017) can be imagined in the Tanzanian school context.

The private Swahili medium school presents a significant finding, showcasing a balanced linguistic environment where pupils demonstrate proficiency in both Swahili

and English despite instruction primarily in Swahili. This challenges the ongoing debate in Tanzania over the language of instruction in secondary schools. While experts like Qorro (2013) and Swilla (2009) have raised concerns, advocating for a switch from English to Swahili as the primary language of instruction, the government has been hesitant, believing that using English as a language of instruction is essential for motivating pupils to learn the language. However, this study suggests otherwise, highlighting that the effectiveness of language learning is not dependent on the language of instruction (Qorro 2013) but on the teaching strategies and exposure to the language. Teachers at the Swahili medium school exhibit confidence in their pupils' proficiency. Interestingly, despite differences in English learning intensity and duration between schools Two (Eng-Priv.) and Three (Swah-Priv.), pupils demonstrate comparable levels of English proficiency in grades six and seven.

The current education policy does not foster bilingualism. The predominance of English as the primary language of instruction in English medium schools, with Swahili relegated to a secondary role, highlights the hegemony of English in Tanzanian education (Latisha and Helot 2022). Similarly, the extensive use of Swahili as the primary language of instruction and communication in public schools fails to promote bilingual education (John 2017; Mapunda and Gibson 2022; Tibategeza 2010). This dominance may inadvertently marginalise pupils whose first language is not Swahili or English, hindering their academic progress and perpetuating linguistic inequalities (Mohanty and Kutnabb-Kangas 2022).

Moreover, the disparities observed between English and Swahili medium schools suggest a discrepancy in promoting bilingualism and equal access to education (Rugemalira 2005; Swilla 2009). This asymmetry in language provision underscores the need for more inclusive language policies that value and support multilingualism (Brock-Utne 2017). Educational policies should promote bilingual education models that recognise the importance of pupils' mother tongues and English acquisition (John 2017; Mapunda and Gibson 2022; Tibategeza 2010). Research has shown that having a solid command of one's first language(s) can aid in the successful acquisition of additional languages, as noted by Butzkam (2003) and Natalia (2023). With inclusive policy, pupils will have equal access to education regardless of their linguistic background.

The study highlights the urgent need to revise language policies in education to support multilingualism using pedagogical strategies that embrace the linguistic diversity of Tanzanian pupils and leverage pupils' linguistic repertoires as valuable resources for learning. One approach could involve integrating students' mother tongues into the curriculum as languages of instruction alongside Swahili and English (John 2017). This will foster a sense of pride and cultural identity among pupils and enhance their academic achievement by scaffolding their learning in familiar linguistic contexts.

Standardised language proficiency assessments that define specific language proficiency levels for each grade are essential to enhance the multilingual curriculum in Tanzania. These assessments can reference frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Proficiency levels require curriculum-aligned test items and consistent scoring by certified assessors.

Teacher training programmes should prioritise embracing multilingual teaching approaches and equipping educators with the necessary skills to effectively teach in diverse linguistic environments to promote a more inclusive and equitable educational experience. Countries like Italy (Hofer and Jessner 2019; Lynn and Zanin 2022) and Switzerland (Brohy 2005; Elżbieta 2016) can be models for successful programmes prioritising multilingual education through teacher training and hiring multilingual teachers.

Overall, fostering inclusive language policies and teaching practices that recognise the value of all languages in the educational context is crucial for promoting equitable access to education and enhancing the academic success of all pupils. By embracing linguistic diversity, educational institutions can create more inclusive learning environments that empower pupils to thrive academically and culturally.

6. Conclusion

The study of early multilingualism in Tanzanian primary schools unveils significant insights into language preferences, teaching strategies, and pupils' proficiency levels. It highlights a pronounced preference for English, perceived as a language of prestige and opportunity, over Swahili and ethnic languages. This preference influences school instructional practices, potentially impacting the policy's effectiveness in promoting true bilingualism.

The findings on multilingual awareness among teachers and their strategies to foster bi/multilingualism reveal a complex interplay between policy aspirations and classroom realities. While teachers are cognizant of the benefits of multilingual education, resource limitations and societal attitudes towards English and Swahili pose challenges to implementing balanced language instruction.

Proficiency levels across languages further underscore the disparities between public and private schools, with pupils in private institutions often achieving higher proficiency in English. This discrepancy reflects differences in resource allocation and suggests that the bilingual education policy may not fully achieve its goals of equal language development across the educational spectrum.

All in all, the study calls for reevaluating language education policies in Tanzania. To truly foster multilingualism and leverage its cognitive and cultural benefits, there needs to be a more equitable distribution of resources, a shift in societal attitudes towards

ethnic languages, and a balanced approach to teaching languages in schools. Only then can Tanzania fully harness the potential of its linguistic diversity to enrich education and empower learners in a multilingual world.

Acknowledgement

The funding for this research work that forms part of my PhD programme was provided by the Doktoratstipendium aus der Nachwuchsförderung 2021; 2. Tranche, based at Innsbruck University, for which we are greatly indebted. We also thank the participants for the valuable information they provided us.

References

- Abdulaziz, Mohamed H. 2017. "Tanzania's National Language Policy and the Rise of Swahili Political Culture." In *Language Use and Social Change*, edited by W. H. Whiteley, 160–178. London: Routledge.
- Adamson, Laela. 2022. "Fear and Shame: Students' Experiences in English-Medium Secondary Classrooms in Tanzania." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2093357>
- Alim, Samy H. 2010. "Critical Language Awareness." *Sociolinguistics and Language Education* 18: 205–31. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847692849-010>
- Baker, Colin. 2011. *Foundation of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 5th edition. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, Colin, and Wayne E. Wright. 2017. *Foundation of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 6th edition. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Batibo, Herman. 2020. "Multilingualism in Southern Africa: Searching for National Identity in Diversity." *Marang: Journal of Language and Literature* 32: 120–32.
- Becker, Anna, and Alex Knoll. 2021. "Establishing Multiple Languages in Early Childhood. Heritage Languages and Language Hierarchies in German-English Daycare Centres in Switzerland." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 25 (7): 2561–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1932719>
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2007. "Language of Instruction and Student Performance: New Insights from Research in Tanzania and South Africa." *International Review of Education* 53 (5): 509–30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-007-9065-9>
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2017. "Multilingualism in Africa: Marginalisation and Empowerment." In *Multilingualisms and Development. Selected Proceedings of the 11th Language & Development Conference, New Delhi, India 2015*, edited by Hywel Coleman. 61–77. London: British Council

- Brohy, Claudine. 2005. "Trilingual Education in Switzerland: Trilingualism and Minority Languages in Europe." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 171: 133–48. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2005.2005.171.133>
- Butzkamm, Wolfgang. 2003. "We Only Learn Language Once. The Role of the Mother Tongue in FL Classrooms: Death of a Dogma." *Language Learning Journal* 28 (1): 29–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571730385200181>
- Coetzee-Van Rooy, Susan. 2022. "Social Cohesion and Childhood Multilingualism in South Africa." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Childhood Multilingualism*, edited by Anat Stavans and Ulrike Jessner, 555–77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108669771.030>
- Elżbieta, Kuzelewska. 2016. "Language Policy in Switzerland." *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric* 45 (1): 125–40. <https://doi.org/10.1515/slgr-2016-0020>
- Fürst, Guillaume, and François Grin. 2018. "Multilingualism and Creativity: A Multivariate Approach." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39 (4): 341–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1389948>
- García, Ofelia. 2017. "Critical Multilingual Language Awareness and Teacher Education." *Language Awareness and Multilingualism* 263: 280. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02240-6_30
- Herdina, Philip, and Ulrike Jessner. 2002. *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism: Perspectives of Change in Psycholinguistics*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853595547>
- Hofer, Barbara, and Ulrike Jessner. 2019. "Multilingualism at the Primary Level in South Tyrol: How does Multilingual Education Affect Young Learners' Metalinguistic Awareness and Proficiency in L1, L2 and L3?" *The Language Learning Journal* 47 (1): 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2016.119586>
- Jessner, Ulrike. 2006. *Linguistic Awareness in Multilinguals: English as a Third Language*. Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748626540>
- Jessner, Ulrike. 2008. "A DST Model of Multilingualism and the Role of Metalinguistic Awareness." *The Modern Language Journal* 92 (2): 270–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00718.x>
- John, Philpo. 2017. "Promoting Multilingualism in Tanzanian Education Policy: Challenges and Options." *African Journal of Educational and Social Science Research* 5 (2): 43–55.
- Kimambo, Isaria N., and Gregory H. Maddox. 2019. *A New History of Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.

- Klein, Raymond M., John Christie, and Mikael Parkvall. 2016. "Does Multilingualism Affect the Incidence of Alzheimer's Disease? A Worldwide Analysis by Country." *SSM-Population Health* 2: 463–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.06.002>
- Kulkarni, Pradnya. 2012. "Role of Multilingualism in Cognitive Development." *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 72: 475–80.
- Latisha, Mary, and Christine Helot. 2022. "Multilingual Education in Formal Schooling: Conceptual Shifts in Theory, Policy and Practice." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Childhood Multilingualism*, edited by Anat Stavans and Ulrike Jessner, 82–112. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108669771.006>
- Lusekelo, Amani. 2019. "The Linguistic Situation in Orkesumet, an Urban Area in Simanjoro District of Tanzania." *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 20 (1): 30–60. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v20i1.2>
- Lusekelo, Amani, and Chrispina Alphonse. 2018. "The Linguistic Landscape of Urban Tanzania: An Account of the Language of Billboards and Shop Signs in District Headquarters." *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa* 9 (1): 1–28.
- Lynn, Mastellotto, and Zanin Renata. 2022. "Multilingual Teacher Training in South Tyrol: Strategies for Effective Linguistic Input with Young Learners." *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 16 (4–5): 324–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2022.2075368>
- Mapunda, Gastor, and Hannah Gibson. 2022. "On the Suitability of Swahili for Early Schooling in Remote Rural Tanzania: Do Policy and Practice Align?" *Journal of the British Academy* 10 (s4): 141–68. <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s4.141>
- Marwa, Nyankomo W. 2014. "Tanzania's Language of Instruction Policy Dilemma: Is There a Solution?" *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5 (23): 1262. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n23p1262>
- Mohanty, Ajit K., and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. 2022. "Growing up in Multilingual Societies: Violations of Linguistic Human Rights in Education." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Childhood Multilingualism*, edited by Anat Stavans and Ulrike Jessner, 578–601. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108669771.031>
- Mohr, Sussane. 2018. "The Changing Dynamics of Language Use and Language Attitudes in Tanzania." *Language Matters* 49 (3): 105–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2018.1463281>
- Mohr, Susanne, and Dunlop Ochieng. 2017. "Language Usage in Everyday Life and in Education: Current Attitudes towards English in Tanzania: English is Still Preferred as Medium of Instruction in Tanzania Despite Frequent Usage of Kiswahili in Everyday Life." *English Today* 33 (4): 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078417000268>

- Mtavangu, Nobert. 2017. "The Tanzanian Multilingual State." In *Language Policy, Ideology and Educational Practices in a Globalised World: Selected Papers from the PLIDAM 2014 Conference on "Policy and Ideology in Language Teaching and Learning: Actors and Discourses,"* edited by Delombera Negga, Monika Szirmai, Daniel Chan, 71–84. Paris: Archives Contemporaines.
- Muzale, Henry R. T., and Josephat M. Rugemalira. 2008. "Researching and Documenting the Languages of Tanzania." *Language Documentation and Conservation* 2 (1): 68–108.
- Natalia, Mesa. 2023. "Your Native Tongue Holds a Special Place in Your Brain, Even if You Speak 10 Languages: Neuroimaging Reveals How Polyglots' Brains Respond to both Familiar and Unfamiliar Languages." *Science*, 3 February 2023.
<https://www.science.org/content/article/your-native-tongue-holds-special-place-your-brain-even-if-you-speak-10-languages>
- Neke, Stephen M. 2005. "The Medium of Instruction in Tanzania: Reflections on Language, Education and Society." *Changing English* 12 (1): 73–83.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684052000340470>
- Okal, Benard Odoyo. 2014. "Benefits of Multilingualism in Education." *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 2 (3): 223–29. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2014.020304>
- Petzell, Malin. 2012. "The Linguistic Situation in Tanzania." *Moderna Språk* 106 (1): 136–44.
<https://doi.org/10.58221/mosp.v106i1.8233>
- Qorro, Martha A. S. 2013. "Language of Instruction in Tanzania: Why are Research Findings Not Heeded?" *International Review of Education* 59 (1): 29–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-013-9329-5>
- Rugemalira, Josephat M. 2006. "Theoretical and Practical Challenges in a Tanzanian English Medium Primary School." *Papers in Education and Development* 26: 89–115.
- Roemer, Ann E. 2023. "Second language Acquiescence of Multilingual Students in Tanzania." *Language and Education* 38 (2): 269–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2023.2186792>
- Swilla, Imani N. 2009. "Languages of Instruction in Tanzania: Contradictions Between Ideology, Policy and Implementation." *African Study Monographs* 30 (1): 1–14.
- Telli, Godfrey. 2014. "The Language of Instruction Issue in Tanzania: Pertinent Determining Factors and Perceptions of Education Stakeholders." *Journal of Languages and Culture* 5 (1): 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.5897/JLC12.039>
- Tibategeza, Eustard Rutalemwa. 2010. "Implementation of Bilingual Education in Tanzania: The Realities in the Schools." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 19 (4): 23.
- Tibategeza, Eustard, and Theodorus du Plessis. 2012. "Language-in-Education Policy Development in Tanzania: An Overview." *Language Matters* 43 (2): 184–201.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2011.573801>

The United Republic of Tanzania. 1995. *Education and Training Policy*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Ministry of Education and Culture.