LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN AFRICA: ITS CHALLENGES AND THE ASSISTANCE OF BICS AND CALP IN PUTTING IN PLACE APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICIES The case of Tanzania Language Policy

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Abstract

This paper explores the choice of language of instruction in African educational system, distinguishing between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. It discusses how various factors – ideological, socio-economic, pedagogical and financial influence language policy decisions. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the complexities involved in setting educational language policies in Africa. The focus of this Paper is on African countries on where Tanzanian language policy is taken as an example to represent the rest of the countries. The paper contends that there are several non-academic factors that guide the choice of medium of instruction in Africa. Also, the paper reveals several challenges faced by language policy makers in choosing a language of instruction. The challenges include; colonial influence, absence of ethically neutral lingua franca, and the influence of political powers. Furthermore, the paper discloses the role of BICS and CALP in choosing appropriate medium of instruction. like using native language in teaching, making sure that a learner is competent in CALP before he goes for BICS, bringing all teacher to become teachers of language in their respective subjects. This paper recommends that, one, language policy makers to consider the concepts BICS and CALPS in putting in place appropriate educational language policies in Africa. Also, language policy makers should be realistic when formulating language policies. Lastly, the role of teaching language should not be left to the language teachers only, all teachers should be prepared to be teachers of language in their areas of specialization.

Keywords: BICS and CALP, Language policy, educational language policy, Language of instruction

INRODUCTION

Prior to embarking on the major concerns of this paper it is good to refer to the famous quote from Wolff which states as follows *"Language is not everything in Education but without language everything is nothing in education" (*Alidou et al, (2006). It is the fact beyond reasonable doubt that, Africa is a multilingual society, that is, it is characterised by many languages spoken by its people in their particular communities. Yet, in most African countries a child does not learn and taught using a language of his recent surroundings. Francomacaro (1994) claims that —language policy in African countries can be construed as a far-reaching issue that is still a long way from a satisfactory solution‖ Education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual situations". Due to this linguistic plurality, the government appreciated the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion as well as preserving culture (Amuseghan, 2007) —Imposing English as the language of instruction has made people to become victims of language circumstances rather than the beneficiaries of intellectual ability (Ismail, 2007).

The concepts of BICS and CALP

The acronyms BICS and CALP refer to a distinction introduced by Cummins (1979) between *Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills* and *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency respectively.* Guo and Feng (2024) define BICS as the aspects of daily face-to-face communication, focusing on pronunciation and oral production fluency. It is the language necessary for day-to-day living including conversations with friends in informal interactions, for example at home, at the market, in the 'daladala' (public transport) and with friends and relatives. In short, BICS is the conversational fluency in language (Cummins, 2013). It is the information/content to be communicated and is usually reinforced by the surrounding environment and interpersonal cues such as facial expression, gestures and intonation in face- to- face interaction. In most cases, it is primarily oral/ spoken.

According to Cummins (2013) **CALP** —refers to students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school‖. It is the language necessary to understand and discuss content in the classroom that is the language used in writing academic works such as essays, research papers and reports. Words like calculate, measure, analyse, discuss, justify and elaborate are commonly used in discussing content in the classroom and cannot be used in informal context such as in the market and in hair cutting and dressing saloon and even if they are used, the information/content demanded may not be exactly the same as in academic arena. So, CALP in other words is the student's ability to understand and express in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to one's success in school. CALP is considered as those aspects of language proficiency related to literacy skills (Guo and Feng, 2024).

Language policy

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), "A language policy is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, group or system" At 'national level', language policy tries to identify the nation's needs across the range of communities and cultural group that it contains. It is a set of nationally agreed principles which enables decision makers to make choices about language issues in a rational, comprehensive and balanced way.

Educational Language Policy on the other hand, refers to the official rules governing language use in education systems. It means a proposed course of action on choosing a language of instruction in different levels of education for example primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities. It also provides direction for the treatment of language issues in educational context, in order to improve language and literacy competences.

A Language/medium of instruction is a device used by teachers in class to pass information and impart knowledge to learners. Dearden (2014) states that a medium of instruction is a language used by teachers in teaching academic subjects in countries where that particular language is not the language of the majority. In many African countries where there is more than one language used by its people language policy makers tend to officiate one language as the language of instruction in classroom sessions.

Most African countries are multilingual societies. There are three major factors behind this linguistic situation; **First** is the existence of many tribes, each tribe having its own local language used as a language of day – today communication between people belonging to the same speech community. **Second** is the presence of a lingua franca that is, a language for communication among people of different mother tongues. **Third** is the presence of the colonial languages. The colonial background tells us that colonial masters used their own languages to colonise the people of Africa and the African continent in general. Many colonial languages were well established and continued to be powerful even after the departure of the colonialists. Therefore, the newly independent African countries continued to use European languages as their national languages such as French in Senegal, Portuguese in Mozambique and English in Kenya and the like.

Batibo (1995) Tanzania can best be used to explain this linguistic situation. In the country there are more than 120 local/ethnic community languages used at home, in informal conversation and in traditional ceremonies. There are bigger ethnic community languages used by a larger population such as Sukuma language which is common in the lake zone consisting of five regions namely Mwanza, Shinyanga, Geita, Simiyu and Tabora. There also small local languages used by a very small population such as Ndamba language used by the Ndamba society located in Kilombero District in Morogoro region. In addition, there is Kiswahili as a National language and English as an official language.

The United Republic of Tanzania is the union of two countries namely; Tanganyika and Zanzibar which were merged in 1964 to form one. Tanganyika became independent in 1961 while Zanzibar achieved her independence in 1963. Immediately after independence, in 1961, Kiswahili was proclaimed as an official language of the country by the late first president of the country, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, as part of his Ujamaa Social policy (UNICEF, 2017). Nyerere wanted a common language which could be used to bring unity among the people for mobilization and national development.

Language policies of Tanzania seem to be confusing, contradictory, and ambiguous. In Tanzania, Kiswahili is seen as the national language, while both Kiswahili and English are official languages. The issue of language has, however, disappeared from

the constitution in Tanzania. In the constitution of South Africa, 11 languages are official and seen as equal. But when it comes to practice in the classroom in both countries, the majority of the learners struggle to learn academic content because of the foreign medium that is used as the language of instruction from secondary school onwards in Tanzania and already from the fourth grade in primary school in South Africa‖ (Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottlr, 2004).

In addition, the country Kiswahili which is the national language and the language of communication at the national level within its borders (Batibo, 1995). It is spoken by over 90% of the population. It is the language between the government and the people, that is, it is used in the parliament and also in court sessions. It is the lingua franca between people of different tribes and is increasingly the first language of the young generation especially in urban areas among the working class. It is also the medium of instruction in primary schools and the language through which school- children learn the first literacy skills.

There is also English which is used as an international communication in politics, trade and commerce. It is an official language which is limited to very formal situations or where foreigners are involved. It is also the language of instruction in secondary schools and for tertiary levels and caters for all issues beyond boundaries namely international communication. Furthermore, it is the language of diplomacy.

Despite its status of being a national language in the country, yet, Kiswahili is limited in some domains of use. This limitation in one way or another hinders socio-economic development in the country. In some institutions and specifically in tourists' hotels some people are ignored because they lack competence of English language. Sengiyumva (2012) argues that ―in many countries, national languages have been used as tools to foster both socio-economic and technological development. He insists that the Chinese have reached where they are using their own language, the Americans and the British have used English, so do other countries such as France and Portuguese for Portugal‖. This is not the case in Tanzania.

Many countries in the African continent use European languages as official languages and medium of instruction in the class. For example, in Tanzania despite Kiswahili being the national language, it has not been used as the medium of instruction in higher education setting even in both public and private offices; English has been used as official language (Sengiyumva, 2012).

The General Linguistic Situation in Africa

Ouedraogo (2000:19) asserts that the complexity of the language question in Africa has been compounded by factors such as the commercial importance of the colonial language, the perception that multilingualism is a problem. Language is therefore one of the major challenges of curriculum implementation for governments in post- colonial Africa.

Despite the fact that most Africa countries are multilingual societies yet they use monolingual policies in education where most of them tend to officiate languages of their masters (colonial languages) as the language of instruction. Using monolingual policies in a multilingual society may mean that languages policies in many African countries are not practical. The policies are not learner centered (they do not favour the learner) as they do not help a learner to acquire what is intended in education (Rubagumya, 2010). This practice of using colonial languages as the medium of

instruction to a great extent imperil the quality of education in the continent.

For example, in Tanzania English is used as the language of instruction in secondary schools and in tertiary level. The language is neither the mother tongue nor the lingua franca to the learners. Most leaners have little command of the language. They cannot express themselves well using the language (orally or written). Learners in secondary schools and even in universities speak English only when they are in the class with their teacher. When the teacher is not in the class or when they are outside the class; library, home, hostel and so on they just use Kiswahili to communicate among themselves. Lack of conversational fluency on the language leads to poor performance in their examinations. The reason behind this linguistic situation is the kind of education the countries have inherited from their colonial masters. Therefore, they simply officiate colonial language in educational system as a result of the inheritance.

Similar linguistic situation exists in Nigeria, where the majority of Nigerians are not familiar with the language recommended by policy makers in the country. Anukaenyi (2019) claims that the policy objectives of education in Nigeria are couched in English language been the nation's lingua Franca and as such Language of Education at all levels. It should be realised that a great number of Nigerians do not speak the language in which all the education policy in Nigeria is written (Anukaenyi 2019).

Anukaenyi (2019) insists that ―approximately ninety million Nigerians (53% of the population) do not and also cannot speak English. They cannot understand the National Policy of Education. Therefore, there are convincing reasons to believe that issues related to language diversity and language policy in education have been one of the major factors responsible for poor education content and poor student academic performance in the Nigerian education system‖.

Language of instruction in Africa is a problem to both students and teachers. Some teachers have found themselves becoming victims of medium of instruction when they are supposed to teach in European languages which they are not competent with. Similarly, learners are required to learn and comprehend materials written in languages out of their linguistic environment. This hinders learners to conduct group discussions in English. In short, their discussions are conducted in their own common languages and written in English. Many researchers in the field of linguistics such as (Rubagumya, 2003; Ndayipfukamiye, 2001; and Arthur 2001) claim that African language policies are difficult to implement . The policies require teachers to use English as the medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher learning institutions but the real practice in the classroom is different. Teachers code-switch between the English and Kiswahili and even their local languages. Rubagumya (2010) terms this situation as a mismatch between language policy and classroom practice in many African countries.

Generally, what seems to be a learning problem or a matter of bad grade, drop out and repetition is really a language problem (Harries, 1999). Whatever the official policies may be the teachers in the classrooms will use whatever language they are competent with and their students feel most comfortable. For examples, the coping strategies teachers and learners use like translations, code-mixing and code-switching. At the end of the day the learners have to write their examinations in English or any other European

language. The language policy issues in African countries lead many African pupils to fall even further behind not because they are ignorant rather due to language issues.

Objectives

Specifically, this paper intends to:

1. To examine the factors guiding the choice of language of instruction in African countries.

2. To examine the role of BICS and CALP in setting educational language policy in Africa.

3. To examine the challenges faced African language policy makers in choosing the language of instruction.

Methodology

Documentary review

The argument of this academic work was supported by documentary review. Document review is a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents. It is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). Documents may be hard copy or electronic. Different works in the field of linguistics were consulted and evaluated to obtain the required information. the documents were also well analysed. The documents include; Tanzania: *The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa* by UNICEF, 2017 and *Teaching and Learning English in Africa: Do Learners matter*? (By Rubagumya, 2010), just to mention a few.

Results

Factors guiding the choice of language of instruction in African countries

First is **ideological issues**, this is to do with the role of language in expressing African World view/spirit. Mirhosseini, (2018) views of ideology as the most fundamental beliefs in any social practice, which may provide a less-formidable conception of the term and lessen the divergence among English Language Teaching. There is a need to consider which language is suitable in expressing the community spirit also there must be a consideration on which language will be suitable for national integration. Though ideological factors work better in a monolingual country than in a multilingual country yet there are some language policy makers in African who believe that when the country has many languages, it is not easy to mobilize people because there is no common language. Though this fact is debatable because in Africa there are countries like Somalia with one language yet mobilizing people is difficult. In general, the idea of one nation for one language is not suitable in multilingual Africa because when certain languages are marginalized, automatically people using those languages will also be marginalized and hence difficult to integrate them for national development.

Second is socio- economic issues, this puts together language and socio- economic development of the country. Warschauer, (2000) argues that due to globalization, learning the English language has become necessary for countries to strengthen their economic development, international business, academics, and popular entertainment African countries would love to use language in organizing and mobilizing people for national development. Most African countries preferred to use colonial languages like English believing that the language can help Africans integrate into the social and global economy. Also, they believe that English could help Africans to get the requisites knowledge, skills, and capital needed for effective competition in the world market. They want to use language to became part of the global economy by producing competitive goods and services (Rubagumya, 2003). So, most African countries believe that the only way to be part of the global economy is to use colonial languages because most of them are global languages used in every corner of the world.

Third is **pedagogical issues**, this is to do with what will be the most suitable language to be used as the medium of instruction in the course of teaching and learning and thus suitable for cognitive development. By considering this factor most African countries prefer a language rich in pedagogical materials. In Tanzania for example, English was selected because it was believed to have enough technical terms and that most learning and teaching materials are written using the language. Kiswahili was ignored because it has shortage of technical terms and it lacks teaching and learning materials. Saleh (2023) conducted a study which intended to investigate the pedagogical challenges that English language teachers face in Jordan. The findings revealed that the weakness in the pedagogical content knowledge may cause many challenges.

Lastly, is **financial/economic issues**, this refers to financial issues for preparation and production of teaching and learning materials. African counties have copied formal education from their colonial masters. During the colonial era and even now to some extent, the colonial masters have been supplying the teaching and learning materials to their former colonies in form of aids. So, African countries have for a long time been enjoying educational aids from their masters and thus reducing the cost of running educational matters in the continent. Changing the medium of instruction from European languages to our ethnic community languages has some financial implications especially in preparing and producing teaching and learning materials. This has been a problem language policy maker face when trying to set policies that favour indigenous languages. To avoid that many African countries would prefer using the European languages in education system. In Tanzania for example, for quite some time now, debates have been waging all over whether Kiswahili should be allowed to be used in all spheres as medium of instruction. Those who are against have put forward their arguments and mainly they have focused on high cost of translation (Sengiyumva, 2012).

The role of BICS and CALP in setting educational language policy in Africa.

First, the policy makers should emphasize on the use of native languages in their curriculum as insisted by Cummins (2013) in the concepts of BICS and CALPS. This is because the first language is important in learning the second language. Also, this will show the acceptance of the children's first language and so facilitating comprehension. The fact is when a child acquires language, he/she also acquires a package of knowledge associated with that language. Therefore, the mother tongue will be the most suitable language because the child has already acquired knowledge when he/she has acquired the language. BICS insists that ignoring the mother tongue means ignoring the knowledge a child has acquired at home. Knowledge of first language one to know the format and skills of writing and reading the second language, that is CALP development (Guo, and Feng, 2024).

Also, since BICS and CALP are in continuum, competent teachers and books are needed to move them (BICS and CALP). Policy makers should also consider that learners are competent in CALP

before choosing it as a medium of instruction. If learners are not proficient in the language of instruction, they will not be able to read and comprehend the content in books and other instructional materials in that language. Likewise, teachers have to be proficient in language of instruction; otherwise, they will not be able to impart knowledge effectively (Rubagumya, 2000). It should also be taken into consideration that language of instruction is a packaging tool which is used to package information and knowledge. If the tool is weak, it cannot work effectively and therefore, it will have little impact to meet the objective of learning. Therefore, for a leaner, fluency in language is of paramount importance before they use it as the language of instruction.

In addition to that, language policy makers should take into consideration that for a learner to acquire conversational fluency in language he has to move from BICS to CALP. Therefore, the number of hours for language to be taught in the classroom should be increased. This will provide enough time for learners to acquire and master the language. Today, in Tanzania, for instance, English language is taught for 2- 4 hours in a week in primary and secondary schools, this is not enough for a learner to acquire and master the language and use it as a means of communication with friends in normal conversation or in the class as the medium of instruction. This is because a learner can understand fast if he has good command of the language of instruction. The distinction between BICS and CALP draw attention to the reasons behind the low academic achievement of migrant children in comparison with their native peers (Khatib, 2016).

Based on the concepts of BICS and CALP, Policy makers should also make sure that the teaching and learning materials are relevant to the learners in terms of level of difficult and should be in the language well known to students. The distinction between BICS and CALP has solved some of the enigmas concerning the education of children who are native speakers of the language and those who are not (Khatib, 2016). The language used in these teaching and learning materials should be suitable to the learner's level of education for them to learn and use it at CALP level. Rubagumya (2010) observed that, "in many African countries, the teaching and learning materials are usually at the level of difficulty not suitable to most learners" and are also in the language not familiar to the leaners. This indicates that most of the teaching and learning materials in Africa are irrelevant to the learners and teachers and this may be due to the fact that most of them are imported from Europe to be imparted to the Africans.

Last but not least, Curriculum changes should not be done without language teachers. This is due to the fact that language teachers are aware of the concepts of BICS and CALP and may have the necessary inputs in choosing appropriate language of instruction. Khatib (2016) insists that the BICS/CALP dichotomy has attracted the attention of many educators, syllabus designers, and various educational systems involved in the education of minority migrant children. In Africa, the curriculum changes are very much influenced by political leaders and teachers being merely implementers of what has been decided. In Rwanda, for instance, the change from French to English in 2008 "was done hurriedly without any adequate preparations, so much so that teachers have to struggle to learn English themselves while at the same time they are expected to teach it" (Rubagumya, 2010). So, the Rwandese learners and teachers, in this context, were forced to learn and teach in the language at CALP level while they had no competence

even at BICS.

Challenges faced by African countries in putting in place educational language policies
One of these challenges is the great influence from their former colonial languages. Most colonial masters would love to see their languages are still used by the countries they colonized. To get rid of this multilingual problem in the classroom situation, the solution is simply to teach in colonial languages (Alidou, 2004). But in a multilingual country where there is one lingua franca which is widely used by the majority of the population, that lingua franca stands a better chance of being selected as a language of instruction, at least at the elementary level Rubagumya 2000).

Moreover, there is a challenge of the absence of an ethnically neutral lingua franca, any choice will be seen to favour certain ethno-linguistic groups at the expense of all others. After the independence this problem became too big where many countries would need one language for one nation. In Africa, Tanzania and Ethiopia are the only countries on the continent which use national languages rather than colonial ones throughout the primary school system (Alidou, 2004). There is also a question of value due to the existence of big variation of language in Africa. Nigeria for example has too many languages. Some countries like Tanzania have ethnic languages, national language and language for wider community. So, the complexity is not only on the number of languages but also power of the languages, that is which has value and which has no value.

Another challenge facing Africa in choosing language of instruction is the political climate of the country. In Malawi for example the approach to the language issues has been greatly influenced by prevailing political climate in the country. After independence in 1964, Malawi was characterized by the desire to promote national unity through one leader (Banda), one party (the Malawi Congress Party), one language (Chichewa) and one nation (Malawi). In 1994 it was the era of multiparty democracy and good governance in the country. Here four new languages were introduced on the radio (Chiyao, Chilomwe, Chisena and Chitonga). The same political era has also proposed the mother tongue instruction in grade 1-4 at the primary school level in Malawi (Kamwendo, 2000).

CONCLUSION

In multilingual Africa, there are so many challenges when it comes to the setting of educational language policy. Most African countries tend to go for English as they believe that it is a global language and it facilitates learning since there are many books and other printed materials written in English. In this paper it has been revealed that the concepts of BICS and CALP by Jim Cummins (1979) if well considered can help educational language policy makers to set appropriate policies in their countries since the concepts suggest a bilingual sort of education.

This paper has attempted to explain the factors determining the choice of language of instruction in Africa namely social-economic factors, ideological factors, pedagogical factors and economic factors. The paper also elaborated he role of BICS and CALPS in putting in place the appropriate language policy in Africa. Lastly this paper has explained challenges faced by African countries in putting in place educational language policies in the continent. The challenges include; colonial influence, absence of ethically neutral lingua franca, and the influence of political powers in choosing the medium of instruction.

RECOMMENDATION

Language policy makers in the African Continent should not put African languages in danger in favour of colonial languages. They should promote and honour ethnic community languages because by so doing they honour our own traditions and customs; they honour themselves and in the final analysis they honour each other in the continent. Africans need to honour the past generation through education by passing on our rites and rituals to the next generation by using own languages. They should therefore empower African languages by using them as medium of instruction in all levels of education. The reason given by some policy makers those colonial languages, specifically English is a language of globalisation is not enough to bless the death of our languages and invite a new form of colonialism through language. Rubagumya (2003) believes that globalisation is a just a way abolishing the term imperialism. Africa contributes very little to the world's economy because its economy is marginalised.

Also, language policy makers should be realistic when formulating language policies. They should focus in assisting learners to acquire what is intended in education. So far, in many African countries language policies are not clear of what is intended in education; to acquire what they call global language or knowledge. Therefore, they should involve a reasonable.

Moreover, the role of teaching language should not be left to the language teachers only. All teachers should be prepared to be teachers of language in their areas of specialization. Teachers of social sciences subjects, for example, can teach language when using and explaining vocabularies such as discuss, evaluate, analyse and many others. Natural science teachers can also use terminologies like diffusion, reproduction, photosynthesis, calcium carbonate and other terms of the same field.

Lastly, language policy makers should consider the concepts BICS and CALPS in putting in place appropriate educational language policies in Africa. They should use local languages which are clear and understood by the leaner so that the transfer of knowledge could be as smooth as possible. As suggested by many scholars, in order to achieve the intended knowledge in education, leaners need to acquire conversational fluency in the language before they use it as the medium of instruction as demanded in BICS and CALP. In multilingual Africa, many learners are fluent in their local languages.

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