



## **THE PARENT'S CHOICE OF LEARNING THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION - A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN TANZANIA**

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### **Abstract:**

In Tanzania, the English medium schools are now mushrooming and many parents send their children at very early age. These schools enroll children of pre-school to school age to learn through English a foreign language regardless of their proficiency in the first language. Therefore, the study aims at examining these young learners' competence as they learn through English as a foreign language in their English medium schools (EMS). Specifically the study intended: to identify reasons for parents sending their children in English medium school at early age; to identify factors influencing pace of learning in English at early childhood; to assess the impact of learning in English at early childhood on the perceived academic competence of the child; and to identify challenges facing parents sending their children to English medium schools. The study used both quantitative and qualitative approach. Random and purposeful sampling were used in getting sample for the study, the sampled size was 155. Questionnaire for 150 parents/guardians and interview sessions with 5 early child education teachers were used for data collection. Results showed that majority of the parents sent their children to English Medium schools (EMS) for future mobility of their children(53.0%), competence for higher learning (50.7%), better child care (84.7%), avoid congestion experienced in public schools (86.7%) and for quality education (68.0%). Early child education teachers reported that parents' awareness on education matters, cognitive ability of a child, differences in age, Social economic status of parents and child speech development influenced the pace of learning in English at early childhood. Furthermore, the impacts reported by teacher include; differences in

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performance of children, poor mastering of the subject which resulted to other children being sent to non-English medium schools due to their low proficiency in English and some parents complaints on their children competence. The study recommends For good results in academic competence of a child especially this particular context, parents , parents should also be involved in child learning, and early child education teacher's tolerance is much needed in child learning because every child is different from the other. Children should taught by professional and competent teachers who have specialized in early education.

**Keywords:** early childhood, language, English medium schools (EMS), English language

## 1. Introduction

Language is defined as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication, (Maghway, 1996). The symbols in languages used to represent the sounds, and these symbols are arranged in a systematic way to form a unitary whole. If one sound in the system is to go missing the whole system would fail to function. So in languages sounds are organized systematically to form words. The words are assigned different meanings by different language communities. Language is also said to be arbitrary, it means that, the meanings assigned to the symbols happened by chance, no meeting was held in the community to agree on the various names of different items or objects. Also language is said to be vocal because all languages are essentially spoken, writing is secondary or is a recent development. Moreover, language is symbolic in the sense that, the relationship between the meanings assigned to the sounds and the object is not a direct one, except for onomatopoeic words (words which imitate the sound of an object).

In addition language is said to be for human communication because it is only human beings who are capable of communicating through language, other Species just imitate human sounds and cannot be as creative as human beings. Therefore, in human being language is the vehicle by which knowledge is jointly constructed, internalize and exchange verbal or symbolic utterances for communication (Mercer, 1994). Thus, the use of language in any society is unavoidable thing. The following questions can be asked regarding with the use and learning of language: do children master to speak English language at early age? What makes a choice of learning a language? Why people learn a certain language and not the other? Why parents prefer their children to know a certain language and not the other? Therefore, the study aims at examining

Learning through English Language in Early Child Education in English medium schools.

### **1.1 Languages Use in Formal Education in Tanzania: Historical Perspectives**

In Tanzania, the former Tanganyika, Germans used Kiswahili as a media of instruction, the same after independence 1962 Mwalimu Nyerere introduced Adult Education which was derived in Kiswahili Language (Puja 2003. Currently Tanzania Educational Policy of 1995 “Education Training Policy” emphasis the use of Kiswahili as medium of instruction in pre-primary and primary schools, English is taught as compulsory subject. In post primary Education, English language is the medium of instruction (MOEC 1995) the main feature of Tanzania Education system is the bilingual policy which requires children to learn both Kiswahili and English. English is essential, as it is the Language which links Tanzania and the rest of the world through technology, commerce and also administration. The learning of Kiswahili enables Tanzania’s students to keep in touch with their cultural values and heritage (United Republic of Tanzania 2001)

Education in English is spreading around the world, not only as a foreign language subject, but increasingly as a language of learning as both local and international schools implement English medium teaching across the curriculum. (Kirkpatrick, 2011). In Tanzania, the English medium schools are now mushrooming and many Parents do prefer to send their children in those schools at very early age. These schools enroll children of preschool to school age to learn through English which is a foreign language regardless of their proficiency in the first language. Therefore this study intends to examine the English language learning in early childhood Education; by looking at the reasons for parents sending their children in English medium school at early age, factors influencing pace of learning in English at early childhood, assess the impact of learning in English at early childhood on the perceived academic competence of the child and challenges facing parents by sending their children in English medium schools.

### **1.2 General Objective**

The study examines learning through English in English Medium Schools (EMS) in Tanzania.

### **1.3 Specific Objectives**

- i. To identify factors influencing parents to send their children to English Medium Schools

- ii. To identify factors influencing pace of learning English in English medium school in children in early years.
- iii. To assess the impact of learning through English at early childhood on the perceived academic competence of a child
- iv. To identify challenges facing parents sending their children into English medium schools

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Early child Education in Tanzania**

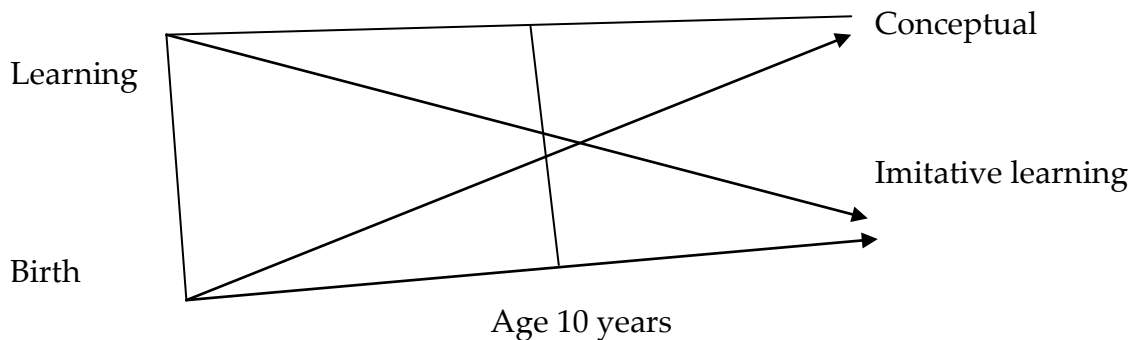
Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to eight years old. A time of remarkable brain growth, these years laid the foundation for subsequent learning and development. Early childhood education is frequently applied to the education of young children from birth through eight or the type of education which takes place before formal education either at home, neighbor, child care centers, pre- school or nursery school, Montessori and other preprimary schools (EFA, Global Monitoring Report 2007). Quality Early Childhood Education (ECCE) helps a child develop their potential and promotes their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. (UNESCO, 2012).

Early child education in Tanzania is regarded as a preparation for primary education focuses on development of literacy and numeracy skills,, social and emotional skills tend to neglected (Mbise, 1996). The provision of education including pre – primary education in Tanzania is not only done through the Government but also other education stakeholders including communities, Civil Society Organizations and Development Partners and individuals (MEVT, 2009). The medium of instruction used in the pre-schools is Kiswahili, the national language, English being taught as a compulsory subject (TEP, 1995). However, there are primary schools which use English as their medium of instruction. According to Rugemalira (2005) in the 1995 Education Amendment Act, pre and primary education provision was a government monopoly, and official policy required that all seven years of primary education be provided in Kiswahili, the national language. Only three government schools, viz. Olympio, Diamond and Arusha, and another nine private schools were allowed to use English as medium of instruction

### **2.1 Language Learning in Early Childhood**

Language learning is a conscious process of receiving information about the language, transforming it into knowledge through intellectual effort s and storing it through

memorization (Chomsky, 1952). Language 1 learning develops familiarity to the phonetic characteristics, the structure as well as the vocabulary of the language. The process is tied to the pre-set syllabus including memorization of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical structure of a particular language. Cognitively Andersson (1955: 492), distinguishes two kinds of language learning; conditional or imitative learning and conceptual or analytical learning. This can be more described below:



**Source:** A sketch on type of language learning adapted from Andersson (1960: 303)

The sketch shows that, language is learned through imitative its peak starts at birth and declines with time. Conceptual learning its peak starts at lowest at birth and increase from the age of 10 language learning become more powerful and effective. A study by Chomsky (1952) shows that, the lower the age the faster and complete language learning will be. It is seen that a one year child can put three to four words together to make a sentence without considering articles and conjunctions. After twelve months children can understand up to fifty words and make simple sentences and make directions by thirty a child can understand up to nine hundred words and speak more than five hundred seventy words. At the kindergarten level, a child knows more than four thousand words; it is a time when the child is able to follow multi-sets of directions and understand basics of grammar. Therefore a child who learn through English language (English medium schools) has to be introduced to the environment be it at home or school in particular to be able to imitate or being conditioned to speak in English at early age so that a child can master the subjects taught.

## 2.2 Factors Influencing Language Learning in Children

Generally, factors that influence language learning that is, foreign language or second language include learner factors and learner process (Alcon and Guzman, 200). Learner factors are like the age, motivation, anxiety, extroversion, aptitude, cognitive style and individual learning techniques. On the other side, learner's process can be explained

into two perspectives that is linguistic grammatization and cognitive capability on what learner has to do to develop their second language (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

The learner factors discussed above, according to Paradis (2011), the factors for child language learning can be grouped into two categories; child internal factor and child external factors. The child internal factors have been explained above while the child external factors are the factors determine quality and the input the child receives in the targeted language. These include; the length of exposure, time in school, in the community and the home environment of a particular language. Moreover, the differences of language learning differ from one child to another depending on the mentioned and explained factors above. Language learning, English in particular is very important for the children who Learning through English (English medium Schools) although, some children do begin school without having been exposed to English language (Clark, 2009) while the ability to speak English in these schools is an important asset that children can use within the school environment.

### **3. Methodology of the Study**

This study used both quantitative and qualitative approach. Qualitative approach through structured interview to the early children teachers enables the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of issues as well as explore and discover new and important themes around the factors influencing pace of learning English and the impact of Learning in English at early childhood on the perceived academic competencies. Themes were created based on the views of participants (pre - school teachers). The researcher also used observation methods on what is taking place in the pre- primary schools (English pre-primary schools) issues observed include the number of children taught in one class and the English speaking habit of the children. Random and purposeful sampling were used in getting sample for the study, the sampled size was 160. Questionnaire for 150 parents/guardians and interview sessions involved 5 English medium early child education teachers where all are professional teacher attended Montessori Training for data collection. Issues that were involved in the questionnaire include, factors that driven parents sending their children learning through English, factors influencing the pace of learning in English language and the challenges parents encounter by sending their children into schools which English is their medium of instruction. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 20 version for quantitative data. Content and discourse analysis were employed in analyzing for qualitative collected data.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

Variables	Categories	N	%
Age	26-35 years old	16	10.7
	36-45years old	72	48.0
	46-55 years old	62	41.3
Sex	Male	74	49.3
	Female	76	50.7
Education level	Primary level	61	40.7
	Diploma level	22	14.7
	University level	67	44.7
Employment status	Government employment	43	28.7
	Private employment	11	7.3
	Self-employment	96	64

Source: Field Data

The above findings reveal the type of population involved in the study, more respondents (48%) range from 36-45years. The employment status shows that majority of the respondents are self-employed (64%) followed by government employed (28.7%)

**Table 2: Factors Influencing Parents to Send Their Children to EMS**

Statements of factors	Yes		No		Total
	N	%	N	%	%
Competence for higher Education	79	52.7	71	47.3	100
For prestige	80	53.0	70	46.7	100
Foundation of education	50	33.3	100	66.7	100
Go with globalization	47	31.3	103	68.7	100
Quality of education	102	68.0	48	32.0	100
Better child care	127	84.7	23	15.3	100
Congestion in public schools	130	86.7	20	13.3	100
Acquire English competencies	76	50.7	74	49.3	100
Children future mobility	80	53.0	70	46.7	100

Source: Field Data

The above results show that, parents value the English medium kind of schooling as schools providing quality education (68%), than the public schools are 'congestion (86.7%)'. Mwinuka (2001) support the findings by revealing that in Tanzania private early childhood programmes are considered to be of higher quality than government funded ones. In addition to that, the findings above reveal the picture that the English

medium schools are better place for child care (84.7%). Cross tabulation data between 'better child care' and 'sex' shows that Male 71(%) sees the importance of English medium schools than the counterpart Female 56(%) as a place where children are taken care in the absence of their parents. Furthermore, parents view English Medium Schools as a means in which by studying there, children gain and acquire English competence (50.7%) which will help them for future mobility (53.0%). All in all learning though English language and speaking it according to Sa (2007) is likely to help individuals raise their standard of living standard as well as raise the economic growth of the country.

**Table 3: Factors Influencing Pace of Learning English**

Statements of factors	Yes		No		Total
	N	%	N	%	%
Environment- high social economic status	108	72	42	28	100
Teaching & learning school environment	70	46.7	80	53.3	100
Environment surrounding children	103	68.7	47	31.3	100
Child peer group	122	81.3	28	18.7	100
English teaching methods	92	61.3	58	38.7	100
Number of children in one class	142	94.7	8	5.3	100

Source: Field Data

The findings above reveal that child environment which include; parents social economic status (72%), number of children in one class (94.7%), as well as Child peer group (81.3%) and the general environment surrounding the child highly influence the pace of learning English language in children. From the study by Rugemalira (2005) reported that the background of English language at home as an environment, influence the pace of learning English language in children. He gave an example At Kibangu School, during the past ten years by the time the study was conducted, only one pupil was identified as having an English language background at home. Also, the early childhood teacher (B1) emphasized good environment for a child to learn including learning English language as a medium of instruction. As it was reported:

*“...in principle any early childhood school be it of English medium or the so called public schools, one class must consists children from 10- 15 children, in this number one teacher is eligible to handle and teach, if the number increases from 15-20 the teacher must have a person to assist (a fellow professional early child teacher”*



Moreover, parents level of education, parents' awareness on educational matters, cognitive ability of a child, difference in age, and child speech development influence pace of language learning in children: one early childhood teacher (A1) reported:

*"From the experience I have in teaching children.... Cognitive ability is the major factor which influence the pace of learning English language in children, there are children who join the school and don't know even one vocabulary of English and another child start schooling with a starting words in English, ... but you may find the one who came with no knowledge of English goes faster in learning English as well as learning through English".*

In emphasis of the differences on English language learning in children, another early childhood teacher (B1) added:

*"Parents education of the child contributes much on the pace of learning language, English language in particular, You may teach a child to learn through English language or make a child use English language to communicate, if one doesn't practice at home, the child pace of learning English language which is the vehicle in learning through English will be affected and hence affecting an individual performance."*

Moreover, Unicef (2009), agrees with the above explanation where by each child is seen having special characteristics and needs , grows and learn at his own pace , this leads some children to be provided with extra help in learning which is called early childhood intervention for assistance. This implies that, children mastering of language learning differs from one child to another, depending on the internal and external factors of a child. Therefore, learning through English language needs more parental or care givers involvement in child education or child learning as well as the much support from early childhood teacher. Children should be involved in more conversation or interaction in English language while joining the school, this will fasten English language learning process the child will perform better.

**Table 4:** Challenges Facing Parents to Send Their Children to English Medium Schools

Statements of Factors	Yes		No		Total
	N	%	N	%	%
Cost	27	18	123	82	100
Parents artificial expectations	42	28	108	72	100
Adoption of western culture	76	50.7	74	49.3	100
Forgetting Kiswahili as a national language	96	64.0	52	34.7	100

Source: Field Data

The most challenge parents are frightened by sending their children in the English medium school is that, by learning through English language children will forget speaking their National language (Kiswahili) (64.0%). Parents went further by showing that by sending their children in English Medium Schools will adapt western culture. The findings align with the facts that learning of the Kiswahili enables Tanzanian children to keep in touch with their cultural values and heritage (URT 2006), whereas from one of the speech Julius Nyerere announced that, English Language is needed in secondary schools in order to encourage Tanzanians to learn and value the language (Lwaitama and Rugemalira, 1990). The implication is that, both languages Kiswahili and English are very important for ones' life, whereas English language enables learner to go with the rapid changes of the world taking place, economically politically as well as socially leaving Kiswahili in its own position as a national language and a symbol of identity. However, the issue of sending children in English medium schools is not a problem of cost (18%). This can be justified from the cross tabulation between cost and employment status in which there is no significant results are revealed, that means the issue of cost of sending children learning through English in English medium school is not a problem.

#### **4.1 The impact of Learning through English language at early childhood on the perceived academic competencies**

Early childhood teacher reported, differences in performance of children, poor mastering of the subject which result other children being sent to non-English medium schools or parents shifting their children into other English medium schools due their low English proficiency and speaking competencies and parents complain on the child learning. One teacher reported:

*"... you may find a child with two years is sent to learn through English in these school, without even mastering the first language which is Kiswahili... the child will take time like six to twelve months since started the school to understand how to use English language in communication as well as learning through English language and hence low performance."*

The above findings is supported by Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996, p. 96 who argue that, Children who develop proficiency in using their native language to communicate, to gain information, to solve problems, and to think can easily learn to use a second language in similar ways. Therefore, for a child to master English learning language as

a medium of instruction in English medium schools, a child must have developed competence in the first language.

In solving the mentioned differences, the early childhood teacher (C1) reported that:

*"... If I find the big differences to children in learning English or mastering English speaking or any other problem related to child academic competencies, I usually call a parent and discuss (Parents and Teacher Conference) what to be done to improve child performance"*

In addition to that, early childhood teacher (D1) added:

*"... for the child found to lag behind in learning English as a medium of instruction, I as a teacher I keep more interaction with the child... and I must be creative in increasing child English vocabulary."*

Children who are in a second-language learning situation have to be sufficiently motivated to start learning a new language. (Tabors, 1997, p. 81). Therefore, for children to master second language learning and minimize the impact mentioned above more conversation interaction is to be considered in both at home and school environment.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this era of globalization, language is the most powerful tool in the development of any human being. Nowadays English seen to be globalization language followed by Germany France Italy and now Chinese becomes more popular. Every language has its own significance, culture and values in a society regardless of differences. Most parents do invest to their child through education sector in future. Hence, parents believe much on English language as a guide on their children's future investment education and other fields. English language itself and Learning through English as a second language for a child has positive implication in society in the sense that, the child is connected with and contributes to their world. Therefore, the first language (Kiswahili) seems to be maintained for the purpose of preserving and respecting national language and its culture for a child identity.

## 6. Recommendations of the study

The government should provide human, financial and material support to public schools to motivate parents and guardians to send their children learning in public schools. Parents should not have negative perception on public government schools, as Tanzanians citizen, parents should give support to these schools, together, good environment for a child to learn can be created. Longitudinal study should be done on the performance of those children completing standard seven in English medium school from those in learning through Kiswahili language.

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