Stakeholders' Views on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Using English as a Language of Instruction (ELoI) for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Tanzania

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Abstract

Drawing on a multiple-case study design involving semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, this research investigated the perspectives of 32 stakeholders from two centres in the Dar es Salaam and Arusha regions on the benefits and drawbacks of using English as the language of instruction (ELoI) in Vocational Education and Training (VET). The results indicate that using ELoI enhances access to employment opportunities, provides abundant teaching and learning resources, improves English language communication skills, enriches vocabulary, boosts speaking confidence, and supports technical and professional functions. However, it also reinforces social stratification, hinders student achievement, limits creativity, and consumes instructional time. To support the effective implementation of ELoI, recommended measures include introducing an intensive communicative English programme for students with low proficiency and permitting code-switching between English and Kiswahili in VET classrooms.

Keywords: *Language of instruction (LoI), Kiswahili as a language of instruction (KLoI), vocational education and training authority (VETA)*

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Introduction

English has rapidly spread globally under globalisation, driven by internationalisation, free markets, and the Internet (Rao, 2019). This spread is viewed both positively and negatively. Positively, English is seen as an international language, a global language, a lingua franca, a world language, and a language of science and technology (Crystal, 2003; Gobbo, 2010; Hu, 2015; Jenkins, 2009; Kubota & Mckay, 2009; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009; Mckay, 2003). The coined terms have probably highlighted English's value and importance, contributing to its fame and global use. The need for a common language for social and international purposes strongly influences individual and group language choices and practices

(Prasangani, 2015; Spolsky, 2004, 2009). The higher requirement for English has dictated its usage not only as a lingua franca but also as a language of instruction (LoI) in most countries in the world.

For instance, in most countries in the South East Asia (Korea, China, Turkey, Malaysia, Japan) and Europe (Croatia, Italy, Sweden, Finland), where local languages were previously prioritised, there has been a shift towards English as a language of instruction (ELoI) in higher education (Arkın & Osam, 2015; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015). The impetus behind this move is the internationalisation of institutions for academic exchange programmes and effective communication at workplaces where English is the medium of communication (Arkın & Osam, 2015; Basibek et al., 2013; Hahl et al., 2014; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2017). The choice for and use of English in those countries has been attributed to a vast number of speakers across the world who use it for communication in academic, socioeconomic, technological and political matters (Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015; Rao, 2019)rather little attention has been directed to English-medium instruction (EMI.

In Africa, particularly East African countries (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda), ELoI policies have been adopted in secondary, tertiary, and some primary education (Migge & Léglise, 2007). Even francophone countries like Rwanda have adopted ELoI in higher education (Marie, 2013). The motivations for the adoption of ELoI have been the economic, social, and political connectivity, improved English proficiency, and the abundance of English resources (Kadeghe, 2003; Marwa, 2014). In Tanzania, for example, Kiswahili is the national language and is used as a language of instruction (KLoI) in government pre-primary and primary education, while private schools use ELoI. However, secondary and tertiary education use ELoI in both government and private institutions (Lupogo, 2014; Qorro, 2013). Tanzania does not have a stand-alone language policy; rather, language provisions are embedded in the Education and Training Policy of 2014, specifically in Sections 3.2.19 and 3.2.20 (MoEVT, 2014). Section 3.2.19 of the policy states that KLoI should be used at all levels of education and training (MoEVT, 2014, p. 38). However, Section 3.2.20 gives English an equal status to that of Kiswahili by stating that the government will continue improving ELoI at all levels of education and training in the country (MoEVT, 2014, p. 38). Other foreign languages are taught as subjects at all levels of education (MoEVT, 2014).

Despite the policy requirement that ELoI be used in tertiary education, vocational education and training (VET) inclusive, recent developments indicate an intention for a shift from ELoI to KLoI in community-based Folk Development Colleges (FDCs). For instance, on December 13, 2019, Dr. Pancras Bujulu, the then Director General of VETA, submitted 24 Kiswahili-translated curricula for various VET

fields to the then Deputy Permanent Secretary of Education, Dr. Ave Maria Semakafu, ready to be implemented as from the year 2022 in the FDCs for VET courses except those related to tourism and hospitality which remained using ELoI (VETA, 2019). However, all VETA's centres, the locus of this paper, are still using ELoI for all their courses.

While English enjoys widespread adoption, it faces criticism stemming from assumptions and challenges in ELoI classroom implementation, particularly in contexts where it is a second or foreign language. Robert Phillipson's English linguistic imperialism perspective argues that English dominance is maintained through structural and cultural inequalities (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47). Based on the challenges encountered in classroom implementation of ELoI, studies highlight poor English proficiency as a major challenge, leading to hesitations, poor pronunciation, and limited vocabulary, which hinder effective teaching and learning (e.g. Adogpa, 2015; Sanmugam & Harun, 2013; Senepati, Patnaik, & Dash, 2012). Similarly, based on their studies in secondary schools in Tanzania, most scholars (e.g. Brock-Utne, 2010; Ismail, 2014; Qorro, 2013; Swilla, 2009; Vuzo, 2006) argue that ELoI is a barrier to effective teaching and learning. It is further postulated that the LoI should be familiar to users, as an unfamiliar LoI adds unnecessary learning tasks for the learner (Chaudron, 1998, cited in Senapati et al., 2012, p. 61). Even other studies in Tanzania (e.g. Nguliamali & Temu, 2012; Ntallima, 2014), which did not focus on the LoI, indicate that the performance of most VET graduates is not satisfactory; there is a mismatch between the skills acquired and those needed in the labour market. One of the possible causes of the mismatch is poor English proficiency (Nguliamali & Temu, 2012; Lupogo, 2014). The question remains about the views of the main stakeholders who implement ELoI in VET classrooms.

It is clear, therefore, that much has been unveiled about ELoI in secondary schools in Tanzania. Still, little is known about the same, particularly about its advantages and disadvantages in VET centres where, currently, the government has been focusing more resources on producing more competent artisans and technicians who can contribute to the national economic development. Thus, it was essential to study ELoI in VET centres by examining the views of the main implementers of such a policy in classrooms. Their perspectives on ELoI's advantages and disadvantages reflect their feelings, beliefs, and values, which may influence their readiness to implement the policy (Ricento, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). These views can provide insights into current practices and inform the development of a language policy for VET centres. Specifically, the study aimed:

i. To explore the participants' views on the advantages of using English as a language of instruction in VET centres.
ii. To explore the participants' views on the disadvantages of using English as a language of instruction in VET centres.

Methodology

This paper adopted a qualitative multiple-case study approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' personal experiences and perspectives from their natural settings regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using ELoI in VET classrooms. As highlighted in previous studies (see, for example, Pesambili, 2020a, 2020b; Pesambili, 2021; Pesambili, 2024), the qualitative research approach is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena, particularly where participants' voices, contextual factors, and in-depth insights are essential for interpreting meaning. A multiple-case study enhances the credibility (Shenton, 2004) and transferability (Merriam, 2009) of the study findings because of its ability to provide sufficient variation in understanding the phenomenon. Previous studies show that case study designs are effective in capturing the contextual realities of educational settings, examining the interplay between policy and practice, and illuminating lived experiences from multiple perspectives (Pesambili, 2013; Pesambili & Mkumbo, 2018, 2024).

The study was conducted in two government-owned Vocational Education and Training (VET) centres under the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA), located in Dar es Salaam and the Arusha region. These regions were purposively selected due to the presence of fully registered VETA centres equipped with teaching and learning resources for both theoretical and practical training. Dar es Salaam has the highest number of VET centres (189), followed by Arusha (67). However, only two centres in Dar es Salaam and one in Arusha are fully registered and owned by VETA (VETA, 2017). The selected centres offered a variety of courses across multiple fields of study, unlike the third VETA centre in Dar es Salaam, which offered only two courses already included in the selected centre. As such, participants from the chosen centres were well-positioned to provide comprehensive insights into the use of English as the language of instruction (ELoI).

The study purposively involved 32 research participants to generate information through semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs). The interview data were triangulated by those collected through FGDs. Key participants included 12 instructors (T) and 16 students (S) with at least a year of experience using English as a Language of Instruction (ELoI) in practical-oriented VET subjects. This is because the study was interested in getting insights into the subject matter under the study through experienced participants in using ELoI in both theoretical and practical sessions for a comprehensive picture of ELoI in VET centres. Two registrars (R) were also interviewed about student demographics and general opinions on ELoI. At the same time, two vice academic principals (P) were consulted for information on policy documents related to ELoI that could contribute to the understanding of the processes involved in the successful implementation of ELoI in VET classrooms and assist in identifying the required

participants in their centres. These participants provided detailed insights into the advantages and disadvantages of using ELoI in VET through 45-minute interviews and 1-hour FGDs.

The data were analysed thematically in six phases as advised by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2014, 2023): First, each recorded interview and FGDs were transcribed, labelled, and read severally across the data set. Second, related meaningful segments of data were created as initial codes. Third, the initial codes were then sorted and collated for main themes based on the research questions. Fourth, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they were internally coherent and distinct from each other and addressed the research objectives. Fifth, the themes were defined, and names were given derived directly from the data itself. Lastly, the research findings were reported with detailed themes supported by relevant quotations.

The study adhered to all research protocols, including obtaining research clearance, securing participants' informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality in the handling and documentation of field data. These measures were taken to uphold ethical standards and protect the rights and privacy of all participants involved in the study.

Results and Discussion

Each participant's views (interviews and FGDs) from both VET centres were analysed across the data set (cross-analysis), and the researcher categorised them into themes (italicised and bolded) and their corresponding supporting quotes (italicised) under each research objective (bolded) as follows:

Participants' views on the advantages of using ELoI in VET centres

The themes of this research objective were that ELoI creates access to abundant teaching and learning resources; improves English language skills, vocabulary and speaking confidence; it is useful in executing technical and professional functions in VET centres; creates access to employment opportunities and ELoI is a medium for social and cultural exchange as presented and discussed below.

ELoI eases access to abundant teaching and learning resources in VET classrooms

English as a language of instruction (ELoI) provides students and instructors in Vocational Education and Training (VET) classrooms with access to a wide range of learning materials, including textbooks, research articles, and online resources, all in English language. "*English-based books are easily accessible globally, unlike Kiswahili, which lacks the vocabulary to accommodate modern technology*" (Interview with T1 Centre B). In addition to this quote, another instructor in FGD noted:

> …most English vocabulary is yet familiar, while Swahili words invented for new technology are unfamiliar. For instance, "Baobonya" is difficult to understand in Kiswahili, but 'keyboard' is easily understood (FGD with T3 centre A).

This advantage was also highlighted by the registrars of both VET centres, who noted that most resources—such as books, journals, tools, and machines—are in English and readily accessible online. This widespread English language usage in science and technology, vocational education in particular, has, as argued in Spolsky's (2004) framework, added value to such a language. This value attracts VET instructors to consider ELoI beneficial despite their students' struggle with English. This finding also concurs with those revealed by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017) and Basibek et al. (2013) that, despite their low English proficiency and that of their students, instructors from Iranian and Turkish universities, respectively, considered ELoI beneficial in resource location. However, the students involved in the current study were silent on this advantage probably because, at the VET level, it is the instructors who ensure the availability of resources for class use and direct their students on how to access them.

ELoI improves English language skills, vocabulary, and speaking confidence

During interviews with instructors and registrars, and FGD with students, it was revealed that in the course of implementing ELoI, instructors and students encounter new English vocabulary and search their meanings in a dictionary or on the Internet, most of which help them improve speaking and writing skills as well as speaking-confidence, particularly through classroom presentations. It was quoted:

> The use of ELoI and the teaching of English as a subject here [at VET centre] has really improved some students' spoken English, particularly those who joined VET with standard seven as their entry qualifications. They could not even construct an error-free sentence in English, but now they can express themselves, though not so much, and they write their exams well (Interview with R2 centre B).

Participants' quotes revealed that VET classrooms serve as the primary space for students to strengthen their English language skills and speaking confidence. This foundation is crucial for students advancing to higher education, where English proficiency is essential. These findings align with previous studies (e.g. Arkın & Osam, 2015; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015;rather little attention has been directed to English-medium instruction (EMI Pulcini & Campagna, 2015), which highlight how regular use of English as the language of instruction (ELoI) enhances both instructors' and students' speaking and writing skills by expanding their vocabulary. The study further found that ELoI enabled students

to speak confidently in classroom presentations, engage in discussions, complete written assessments, and communicate with foreign visitors. While acquiring English skills alone does not ensure speaking confidence—consistent practice is key—most core courses' instructors did not actively encourage students to use English in presentations to improve their proficiency. Therefore, the English skills and confidence observed in this study were subjective to individuals rather than a broader social phenomenon shaped by shared beliefs and community norms, as suggested by Spolsky (2009, p. 2).

ELoI is useful in executing technical and professional functions in VET centres

English is widely used in technical manuals, safety guidelines, and industry-specific communication. Regular use of ELoI in VET enables both instructors and students to become proficient in English, which then allows them to understand instructions, follow procedures, and effectively engage in workplace environments where English is the only medium of communication. During an interview, one of the academic principals was quoted saying:

> Before adopting ELoI, when most of our instructors had been trained in KLoI and used it in VET classrooms, you would find a machine, for example, the Computer Numeral Control (CNC) machine, idle just because there was nobody in those fields who could read and understand the manual books written in English indicating how to operate or troubleshoot the machine until an expert from outside was hired or brought by donors from abroad to help us. But now, all are done by our experienced instructors in English language use (Interview with P1 centre A).

Similarly, in FGDs with instructors, it was unveiled that the experience gained from using ELoI supports them in their professional consultancy service delivery and promotion of VET goods within and outside the country where English is the language of communication. *"...but now we can maintain, troubleshoot, operate machines, and negotiate bids and contracts with various local and foreign organisations using English as the primary medium of communication"* (FGD with T4 centre B).

This finding concurs with those revealed by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017) that Iranian university teachers found ELoI advantageous as it instils them academic English, which facilitates their access to and use of ICT facilities for teaching and learning. Also, the forces behind these instructors' perceptions relate to Spolsky's (2004) assumptions in his framework of language policy, as argued elsewhere in this paper. The advantage of English language proficiency simplifies the use of multimedia technologies in modern education systems and its support in performing professional

functions, which influences the adoption of ELoI not only in VET centres and Tanzania's education system but also in the global systems of education.

Using ELoI creates access to employment opportunities

In FGDs with instructors and during interviews with most students in both VET centres, employment opportunity was mentioned, believing that being taught in English improves students' English proficiency and gaining experience in using the English language, which, according to them, enables graduates to excel in interviews and getting employment. One of the students said,

> You may be a good artisan, particularly in practical works. Still, if your English is poor, you cannot be employed by international organisations, most of which pay well" (Interview with S1 centre B).

During FGDs, instructors contended that the English proficiency gained through regular use of ELoI was an added advantage for instructors when it comes to promotion to managerial positions. Similarly, the previous studies (e.g. Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2017) showed several economic advantages of using ELoI in education and, more interestingly, employment opportunities for graduates being common to all studies. This is probably because of unemployment problems that most countries in the world, including Tanzania, are facing. English proficiency, therefore, becomes one of the requirements for job seekers and for promotions to higher ranks, which require someone proficient in both written and spoken English. This has been a general requirement that most local and foreign institutions and organisations in Tanzania prioritise when advertising job opportunities. As asserted by Spolsky (2004) in his framework, peoples' beliefs and values attached to the English language and their importance to the local and foreign labour markets have influenced not only the study participants but also the general community's perceptions about ELoI policy.

ELoI is a medium for social and cultural exchange

During the FGD with instructors at VET centre A, it was established that the experience in using ELoI had helped some instructors to interact with foreigners effectively and learn from them. Here is an assertion given by an instructor:

> In 2021, we attended a seminar on electrical issues at a Swedish government vocational institution. I managed to communicate in the English language, which, of course, was one of the criteria for the attendees, and I interacted with experts from different countries. We created friends and learned a lot from their electrical workshops, particularly on how they professionally work, behave, and produce cost-effective goods and services…. (FGD with T5 centre A).

Instructors in centre B and students in both centres did not mention this finding. This is perhaps because they did not consider it an advantage or they had never experienced such an exchange before. The finding corroborates those revealed by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017), who showed that cultural concepts, events, and values shared through ELoI lessen the tendency toward stereotypes and promote the development of global citizens who are tolerant of all cultures. Beyond forming friendships, students and teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds can exchange cultural values and practices—such as artefactual designs and workplace norms—through shared teaching and learning resources. Cultural transmission embedded in the English language occurs through interpersonal interactions, books, academic journals, tools, and multimedia technologies. Societies that produce and disseminate educational materials in English are more likely to influence others culturally, and the reverse also holds.

Participants' views on the disadvantages of using ELoI in VET centres

The themes of this research objective are that ELoI is a barrier to achievement in theoretical examinations; it limits students' creativity; content delivery in ELoI is superficial; ELoI is a burden and time-consuming in teaching and learning in VET classrooms; ELoI creates classes among students in VET centres; and that ELoI endangers the national language and culture as presented and discussed below.

ELoI is a barrier to achievement in theoretical examinations

During interviews with students, it was established that theoretical examinations often required them to explain, elaborate, and discuss in English, something which, according to them, was challenging for many who were incompetent in English. A third-year student who completed secondary school before joining VET was quoted:

> Theoretical exams demand high expression in English, but, in reality, most of us struggle with fluency in English, resulting in failures in theoretical exams but excelling in practical exams (Interview with S4 centre A).

Also, an instructor at VET Centre A who was teaching Agromechanics was quoted in an interview saying:

> …even when marking their answer sheet and you find it not clear, you would go through the whole page in search of at least a point, but all in vain! As an instructor of the core course, how would you help such a student with their English? You give them the marks they deserve… (Interview with T4 centre A).

Participants noted that VET examination regulations require students to pass both theoretical and practical components; failure in one results in failing both. This

finding supports Lupogo's (2014) argument that VET students, especially those admitted with Standard Seven qualifications, often struggle academically due to limited English proficiency. However, this study revealed that even students with secondary education qualifications perceived ELoI as a key factor contributing to their failure in theoretical examinations. Similarly, existing literature (Arkın & Osam, 2015; Basibek et al., 2013; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2017) has linked ELoI to poor test performance and academic underachievement. Notably, unlike previous studies, the current research found that the negative impact of ELoI was particularly evident in theoretical instruction and assessments. Consequently, the use of ELoI may hinder the recognition of capable VET graduates whose strengths lie in practical skills essential for the growing industrial sector.

ELoI limits students' creativity

Focus group discussions with instructors and students revealed that the use of English as the language of instruction (ELoI) limits students' creativity in VET classrooms. Many students become passive recipients of knowledge, unable to question or engage critically. According to participants, this passivity stems from students' limited English proficiency, which prevents meaningful interaction. As a result, students often remain silent or respond only to yes/no questions, hindering their ability to demonstrate practical skills during workshop training and engage in creative, problem-solving tasks that require language use. One instructor explained:

> …it demoralises when you notice some students dozing or struggling to grasp what you say in English! But when I noticed this, I switched to Kiswahili, and now you see the class becoming active; they [students] ask questions and contribute their ideas by answering oral questions posed in the class (FGD with T6 centre B).

This quote illustrates how language barriers can directly affect student engagement and classroom dynamics. It supports Clegg and Afitska's (2011) observation that students tend to be passive in classrooms where a second or foreign language is used as the language of instruction. Similarly, Mathias and Masaazi (2012) argue that such passivity hampers students' creativity. As Zhou et al. (2021) contend, English language proficiency can either enable or constrain students' ability to think creatively in classroom settings. Without adequate proficiency, students are less able to access a wide range of English-language resources, engage in meaningful academic discussions, or collaborate with global innovators—skills essential for developing and sharing creative, competitive, and problem-solving ideas in technical fields.

Content delivery in ELoI is superficial

The results showed that content delivery by most instructors in oral English was superficial and lacked vivid examples and elaborations that could make the subject well understood by the learners. A student was quoted as saying:

> Most of our instructors for core subjects just read notes for us. They have no extra English words to explain their notes and give more examples unless they switch to Kiswahili…. (Interview with S3 Centre B).

This implies that instructors may have either copied notes from books without simplifying them in simple English or, rather, simplified them but failed to provide detailed explanations during teaching. These occurrences were likely intentional, driven by students' low English proficiency, which forced instructors to compromise content. Alternatively, they may have happened unintentionally due to some instructors' lack of competence in oral English, as established and argued elsewhere in this paper. Some VET instructors struggled with spoken English due to a lack of fluency and appropriate vocabulary in their classroom teaching. In such situations, instructors cannot elaborate on the subject content in detail nor give extra practical stories and examples in the English language so that students can connect what they learn in class and their future careers as skilled experts. Hahl et al. (2014) revealed similar findings in which the subject content was not effectively elaborated due to teachers' poor English proficiency.

ELoI is a burden and time-consuming in teaching and learning in VET classrooms

During interviews with students in VET centre A, it was found that students' effort and time were spent learning both the English language and vocational skills simultaneously and that this was a burden to most students. The following is a quotation from one of the students during an interview:

> I ended up in Standard Seven and stayed home for about four years, but later on, I decided to join VET so that I could acquire carpentry skills to employ myself. When I came here [VET], unfortunately, I found all subjects are taught in the English language, contrary to primary schools where I was taught in Kiswahili [KLoI]; to me, it has really been a challenge learning both carpentry and English; I sometimes feel like giving up some subjects…. (Interview with S2 centre A).

Instructors contended that most of them were voluntarily translating some English keywords or phrases into Kiswahili orally and sometimes repeated the same English utterances several times so that students could understand the lessons. It was also time-consuming in preparations, and they were obliged to familiarise themselves well with the content, meaning of English words encountered, and

their pronunciations and spellings so that they could maintain their respect before students in classroom teaching. This finding is in line with a contention given by Chaudron (1998) that a student faces multiple tasks at a time when using a second or a foreign language as a LoI. It can, however, be argued that such learning English skills together with the intended vocational skills in VET classrooms could be beneficial to students if their instructors were trained and competent enough to teach both skills simultaneously.

Still, some VET instructors' preparations were beyond normal preparations, as confirmed by one of the instructors during the FGD:

> When preparing to teach in English, you need to do it thoroughly well in content-wise and spoken English to avoid disrespect from students…. Yes, some of them [students] studied in English medium schools; they are better in English than some of us (FGD with T2 centre A).

Similar findings were reported in earlier studies conducted at Croatian and Italian universities, where English was used as a foreign language (Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). In those contexts, instructors spent considerable time elaborating on subject content to facilitate student understanding. Likewise, in the current study, instructors devoted substantial time to translating content from English to Kiswahili, which also aimed at enhancing comprehension.

ELoI creates classes among students in VET centres

Participants perceived ELoI as a source of segregation, noting that students with weak English backgrounds—particularly those who had not attained at least a D grade in English at the secondary level—were excluded from certain courses considered to be language-intensive, regardless of their interests. This practice was seen as limiting students' access to preferred training pathways. When asked about strategies in place to support both instructors and students in using ELoI, the Academic Principal of VET Centre B indirectly acknowledged this stratification in his response. He stated:

> …standard seven leavers and those who failed the English subject in their end-of-secondary school examination are not admitted to courses such as Electrical Installation, Information and Communication Technology, Hotel Management, Tourism, and Hospitality courses which demand high use of English language in both classrooms, teaching and learning and in executing duties at workplaces (Interview with P2 centre B).

This quote suggests that, unlike instructors and students, VET administrators viewed the screening of students for specific courses based on English proficiency not as segregation but as a strategy to enhance teaching and learning. However,

a study by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2017) on university teachers' perspectives in Iran found that implementing ELoI created social classes between those with access to English and those without. In contrast, the current study—conducted in VET centres where ELoI was already in use—found that it led to systemic stratification within institutions. Such internal stratification can disadvantage marginalised students, fostering feelings of inferiority, limiting social interaction, and contributing to academic failure or dropout, especially when students are placed in courses unrelated to their interests. Notably, even students selected for language-intensive courses based on English proficiency still perceived ELoI as a barrier to learning core subjects. This indicates that selection based solely on English competence is insufficient for effective teaching and learning. Therefore, inclusive measures are needed to support all VET students in acquiring vocational skills through the language of instruction.

ELoI endangers the national language and culture

In interviews, students expressed concern that the use of ELoI in VET centres undermines Kiswahili—the national language—which they viewed as a carrier of Tanzanian culture. They advocated for the use of Kiswahili as the language of instruction (KLoI), believing it would accelerate the development of scientific and technological terminology while promoting cultural values both locally and beyond. Similarly, some instructors supported KLoI over ELoI. As one instructor noted, "*...by using KLoI, students will feel more comfortable and become active in VET classrooms because it is the same language that they use at home*" (FGD with T5, Centre A). This finding corroborates most studies (e.g. Basibek et al., 2013; Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2015; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2017) which revealed that despite a marked preference showed by participants for ELoI, they worried about their local languages and cultural identity if ELoI continues to be used.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the views of VET stakeholders on the advantages and disadvantages of using English as the language of instruction (ELoI) in VET classrooms. The findings indicate that ELoI offers several advantages: it facilitates access to employment and to a wide range of teaching and learning resources; improves English language skills, vocabulary, and speaking confidence—crucial for higher education and professional functions; and fosters social and cultural interaction. However, several challenges were also identified. ELoI was perceived as a barrier to success in theoretical examinations, a burden that consumes instructional time, a constraint on student creativity, and a cause of superficial content delivery. It was also found to reinforce class divisions among students and

to marginalise Kiswahili, thereby threatening Tanzania's linguistic and cultural heritage. Despite these challenges, most participants supported the continued use of ELoI in VET classrooms.

Nevertheless, the disadvantages—many of which directly affect teaching and learning—must be addressed for more inclusive and effective implementation. To this end, the study proposes two key recommendations:

1. *Introduce an intensive communicative English language programme*

   A tailored pre-entry English programme should be introduced for students with low English proficiency. This programme should focus on developing conversational and vocational communication skills. Instructors should create supportive learning environments by:

   - Selecting and integrating vocationally relevant vocabulary and materials
   - Using audio-visual aids to enhance listening and writing
   - Asking interactive questions to build speaking confidence and autonomy
   - Employing role-play activities to simulate real-life scenarios and develop creativity, fluency, and appropriate language registers

2. *Officially allow code-switching between English and Kiswahili*

The policy should permit strategic code-switching during classroom instruction. Participants reported that mixing English with Kiswahili was already an informal but effective approach to clarifying subject content. As supported by Floris (2014), Storch and Wigglesworth (2003), and Kenner et al. (2008), the mother tongue can support learning in a second or foreign language by facilitating cognitive transfer. Code-switching should also be allowed in written assessments where students lack the English vocabulary to express their ideas fully. However, the use of Kiswahili should not surpass English to maintain the intended benefits of ELoI. As Floris (2014, p. 57) suggests, an ideal bilingual model may involve 70–80% English and 20–30% instruction in the native language. However, caution is warranted, as implementing such a policy may face both practical and ideological challenges. In many educational contexts, the use of two languages in instruction is not widely accepted, and a single-language policy is often preferred for curriculum alignment and assessment standards. Without clear guidelines, code-switching may also be perceived as undermining language policy or instructional quality. Moreover, successful implementation would require deliberate planning, stakeholder sensitisation, and professional development to equip instructors with the skills to manage bilingual classrooms effectively.

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