The Challenges of Teaching English in Africa: With Reference to Tanzania Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Anglophone Africa is faced with various challenges, some of which have been overlooked. Among these is lack of clarity on the status given to English when making important decisions on language planning and policy. This has lead to unrealistic objectives of ELT, inappropriate teaching and learning materials, and inadequate teaching methods. The article examines the different contexts in which English language is taught, in order to determine, at policy level, what objectives are realistic and what methods and materials are appropriate for which context. This would contribute towards addressing the challenges facing ELT in Anglophone Africa. Finally, the paper calls for a need for African language planners and policy makers to go back to the drawing board and take stock of ELT on the basis of the context that prevail on the ground.

Key concepts: *challenges of ELT, language policy and planning, English language teaching, English as a foreign language, English as a second language, and English as the language of instruction.*

1.0 Introduction

This article is an attempt to re-interpret and make sense of research findings on teaching English as a second/foreign language, conducted in Africa and beyond; and its challenges, particularly in Tanzania in the last 30 years. The teaching and learning of English in most of Anglophone Africa have generally been faced with several challenges. Among them, the most often recounted are: insufficient and inappropriate teaching and learning materials, lack of qualified and competent teachers, and overcrowded classrooms. These challenges, which have a long history, are not unique to Africa, as pointed out by Quirk and Smith (1959):

> In 1906, a Board of Education report drew attention to the confusion of aims in English teaching: apparently, the only well-established feature was the outcry of complaint – about the quality of the teaching, the unsuitable text-books, and the lack of any coherent sense of purpose. Quirk and Smith (1959:1-2).

The key argument in this article is that these challenges are a result of mismatch between the assumed and the actual status of English in these countries. It seems English is assumed to be a second language while the language context in most African countries indicates that English is a foreign language. This misreading of the context, for example in the case of Tanzania, has subsequently led to challenges such as

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inappropriate policy decisions, unrealistic objectives for ELT, inappropriate teaching/learning materials and inappropriate teaching/learning methods. The outcome of all these is inconsistency between learners' needs, on the one hand, and what the syllabus provides and the kind of English language that is taught, on the other hand. These are the issues that this article addresses.

Before going into further discussion, some of the terms used in this article need to be defined and contextualised. I am aware of the definitions of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) in contexts such as those given by Phillipson (1992) that the conventional definition of ESL countries is those in which "English is not a native language but where it is used widely as a medium of communication in domains such as education and government…" and that "In EFL countries English is not the medium of instruction…. But is learnt at school, as in the case of France, and Japan, for communicating with speakers of the language, or for reading texts in the language" (Phillipson, 1992:24). In this article, a foreign language is understood to mean a language that is not used in the home or in the day-to-day communication between members of a particular community, but is used in formal situations or in the presence of foreign nationals who do not understand the language of that particular community. A second language, on the other hand, is understood to mean a language that is not necessarily used in the home, but is used in the day-to-day communication in public life and between members of different ethnic groups.

Language planning here is understood to mean an explicit and systematic effort to resolve perceived language problems and achieve related goals through institutionally organised intervention in the use and usage of languages (Christian, 1988 cited in Einarsson, 2001). Language policy is understood to mean the choice of a society in the area of language of communication; that is, a set of positions, principles and decisions reflecting a community's relationships to its languages while maximising its communicative potential as proposed by Gugarski (1992) cited in Einarsson (2001).

Any language teaching is expected to have challenges; however, effective language planning and policy address and are expected to greatly reduce whatever challenges may occur at different levels of implementation. Effective language planning here means planning that takes into account the context in which the language in question is taught. It is precisely this aspect that has been overlooked in ELT in Anglophone countries such as Tanzania. Before taking this point further, let us first look at the different contexts of ELT.

2.0 Teaching English in different contexts

The teaching of English as a first language (L_1), as a second language (L_2), and as a foreign language (FL) reflects the different contexts in which English is taught. Learners of English as a first or native language, acquire English language naturally as young children. They do so usually because their parents use English as a normal means of communication with them and with each other, and because English is the language used by the community in which they are growing up. Since for most learners in African countries this situation rarely prevails, this article will not address the context of teaching English as L_1; instead, it will focus on teaching English as a second language (ESL) and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL).

2.1 English as a second language (ESL)

Learners of English as a second language usually live in a community where English is not the native language of the community, but is frequently used as a means of communication between speakers of different native languages. In such communities, English is also used by the mass media such as radio, newspapers and television. Thus, learners of ESL will have been exposed to English long before they start learning it at school. This also means that, as they learn English at school, they also pick it up from the media and from members of their community, a situation which acts as a support system for ELT. In the context of teaching English as a second language (ESL), the purpose is to prepare and enable learners to participate fully in the social, political and economic life of the nation (Stern, 1983:16).

The context of ESL and the purpose of teaching English as a second language described above do not seem to match the actual status of English language in Tanzania. For example, English is not the language that is 'frequently used as a means of communication between speakers of different native languages'. English in Tanzania is not frequently used by the mass media such as radio, newspapers and television. Thus, unlike learners in ESL situation, most Tanzanian English language learners are not exposed to English language before they go to school. Finally, learners of English language in Tanzania, in particular those in public schools, do not normally use English language when they want to participate fully in the social, political and economic life of Tanzania. Thus, if policy makers assume that English in Tanzania is a second language, and therefore design materials and syllabus for ESL context, and set objectives of ELT on the basis of ESL context, then they create a mismatch between students' actual needs for English, and the kind of English that is taught in schools. This mismatch seems to occur at various levels such as: planning and policy, materials design and development, and classroom teaching. It is at these levels where the challenges of ELT in Tanzania are discussed in this article. Below, the context of teaching English as a foreign language is examined.

2.2 English as a foreign language (EFL)

Learners of English as a foreign language are usually taught English as a subject at school or college and live in a community where English is not normally used. They do not normally learn English from their parents and do not use it as a means of communication with their parents or in the community in which they live. Foreign language teaching is thus defined as teaching in a context where there is no vital speech community to support learning. This means that learners' exposure is restricted to the classroom only. Foreign language teaching usually requires more formal instruction and other measures of compensating for the lack of environmental support (Stern, 1983:16). The purposes for teaching/learning a foreign language are to enable learners to travel abroad, communicate with (native) speakers, read literature in foreign language, or read scientific and technical works in the relevant foreign language (Stern, 1983).

The foreign language context described by Stern here seems to fit the actual situation of English language in Tanzania, in terms of its place and status, (except for its use as the language of instruction at post primary school level). In the case of Tanzania, this would mean acknowledging that students have no other support system for learning

English; and therefore, providing unlimited amount of reading and audio-visual materials in English language classrooms. The purposes of teaching/learning a foreign language, as described by Stern, when applied to the Tanzanian context for ELT seem to be modest and attainable. If ELT in Tanzania could aim at enabling students to 'communicate with (native) speakers in English, read literature in English, or scientific and technical works in English'; that would be no small achievement.

2.3 Why the context is important to ELT

The different English language teaching contexts also mean that exactly the same methods and the same teaching/learning materials cannot be used to teach English as a first language (L_1), English as a second language (ESL), or English as a foreign language (EFL). This is because the native speaking pupils will already have achieved a high level of competence in English when they first go to school, whereas the ESL pupils will have 'picked up' some English before their first English lesson, but in most cases they will have attained only a low level of competence. On the other hand, the learners of EFL will probably know hardly any English at all before they receive their first English lesson. This last context is true for most learners of English in Anglophone countries like Tanzania, particularly for the majority, who live in rural areas. The implications of ELT in these different contexts are that teaching/learning materials and method have to be designed and developed for each context; and curriculum developers and materials designers have to be clear in their minds on the kind of context for which they are working. Short of that, inappropriate choices in terms of policy decisions, teaching materials and unrealistic objectives are likely to create serious challenges towards ELT.

The challenges of ELT that are under discussion arise out of inappropriate planning and policy decisions, which have in turn resulted in unrealistic objectives for ELT, and inappropriate teaching/learning materials and inappropriate ELT focus. In addition, the said planning and policy decisions do not seem to be supported by second/foreign language learning theories. Some of these theories are discussed in the next section.

3.0 Theories of second/foreign language learning

3.1 Interdependence Theory

Cummins (1979, 2000) posited two theories for second language learning: the first is the Linguistic Interdependence Theory and the second is the Threshold Theory in addition to which Krashen (1985, 2007), proposed the Comprehensible Input Theory. The Linguistic Interdependence Theory holds that "academic language proficiency transfers across languages such that students who have developed literacy in their L_1 will tend to make stronger progress in acquiring literacy in L_2" (Cummins, 2000:173). The central tenet of this hypothesis is that a child's first language skills must become well developed to ensure that their academic and linguistic performance in the second language is maximised. The theory suggests that growth and development in a second language is dependent on a well-developed first language. The corollary of this is that poor growth and development in a first language hampers the growth of a second language. The linguistic interdependence can also take place in the form of skills transfer as pointed out by Krashen, who supports Cummins theory that literacy developed in the primary language transfers to the second language.

3.2 Comprehensible Input Theory

The second theory: Comprehensible Input Theory propounded by Krashen (2000) states that knowledge gained in the first language helps make English language more comprehensible. He says that "when schools provide children quality education in their primary language, they give them two things: knowledge and literacy". Krashen proposes his theory on the ground that children who arrive in the USA with a good education background in their first language are successful in learning English compared to their counterparts who have been using English across the curriculum.

3.3 Threshold Theory

The Threshold Theory proposes that there are two thresholds that a bilingual child (a child proficient in two languages) has to pass in order to avoid the negative consequences of having two underdeveloped languages (Cummins, 1979 cited in Baker & Hornberger, 2001:18). The two such thresholds are a certain level of proficiency in both the first (literacy) language and the second (or foreign) language. When this theory is applied to the language teaching situation in Anglophone countries, for example in the case of Tanzania, it means that the learners need to reach a certain level of proficiency in Kiswahili before they embark on learning English. This also means that the current practice of mixing the two languages will not enable students to gain proficiency either in Kiswahili or in English; additionally, it is also illustrative of the negative consequences of having two underdeveloped languages. Students need to have a firm knowledge of Kiswahili grammar and usage that sets a kind of benchmark for learning English. All these three second/foreign language learning theories: The Interdependence Theory, The Comprehensible Input Theory and the Threshold Theory take into account the context in which the teaching/learning English language takes place. However, language planning and policy in Anglophone countries in Africa, such as Tanzania, seem to have overlooked the importance of context, as a result of which a number of challenges now face ELT.

4.0 Challenges of teaching/learning English language in Tanzania

4.1 ELT at the level of planning and policy

In the case of Tanzania, the assumption made by language planners and language-in-education policy makers is that English is a second language. On the basis of this assumption, decisions on curriculum and syllabus design, preparation or selection of teaching materials, objectives of teaching English, as well as methods for teaching English, are all conceptualised in the context of English as a second language, while in reality English in Tanzania is a foreign language. As such, all decisions related to language policy and planning are inconsistent with this reality. This inconsistency has over the years resulted in major challenges of teaching English as a foreign language in Tanzania. It has not only created lack of symmetry in the different levels of language planning, language policy, and classroom teaching, but it has also resulted in further inconsistency between the expected and the actual outcomes of ELT.

In a study conducted in Tanzania secondary schools (Qorro, 1999), English language teachers were interviewed as to what problems they encountered when teaching English language. Some of the responses were:

(a) insufficient and/or inappropriate teaching and learning materials,
(b) lack of qualified teachers,
(c) students' extremely low English language proficiency,
(d) lack of interest and confidence because of poor command of English language,
(e) no clear objectives for teaching English, and
(f) poor and inappropriate teaching methods.

Similar interviews were held with English language teacher-trainees at the University of Dar es Salaam on the same question. These were students taking the English Language Teaching Methods Course (CT 210), during the academic year 2000/2001. Their responses were as follows:

(a) the status of Kiswahili and the presence of vernaculars interfere with the learning of English,
(b) students lack exposure to an English language speaking community,
(c) the status of English language in Tanzania is unclear to syllabus designers,
(d) advocating switching to Kiswahili medium demoralises teachers of English,
(e) introducing two languages (Kiswahili and English) simultaneously at primary school level confuses pupils,
(f) lack of opportunities and/or incentives to use and therefore to learn English since English is not the language used for everyday life,
(g) the books available for teaching English are too difficult for students, and
(h) teachers concentrate mainly on teaching rules and principles of English language which are sometimes difficult to use in normal communication.

Some of these responses confirm the existence of the challenges of ELT that are being addressed in this article; for example (e), lack of clear objectives of ELT; (i), unclear status of English language in Tanzania; and (k), introducing two languages simultaneously at primary school level). These are indicative of challenges facing ELT, resulting from decisions made at the planning and policy levels. These are serious challenges that need to be addressed because inappropriate choices and decisions at the language planning and policy levels are likely to result in poor achievement in the subsequent levels. Similarly, appropriate choices and decisions at this level would determine success of ELT at the subsequent levels. In a document by the Ministry of Education and Culture (1985), the following is stated:

In 1983, English as a subject was started in Std.3. Pupils spent the first two years learning Kiswahili, which to many is a second language besides their vernacular. The teaching of English is aimed at giving the pupils a basis for a second language besides Kiswahili for local and international communication. The emphasis is on a realistic setting in a Tanzania situation (MOEC, 1985:20).

Here one could see the objectives for teaching English as those of a second language in addition to Kiswahili. Another document by the MOEC (1995) says:

Language teaching will be an essential aspect of Education. The focus will be on Kiswahili and English. Mastery of Kiswahili consolidates Tanzanian culture while English will enable Tanzanians to access knowledge, understanding, science and technology, and communication with other countries... (MOEC, 1995:52).

In this document by MOEC one might say that the objectives of teaching English resemble those of teaching a foreign language; i.e. to access knowledge written in the language and to communicate with people in other countries. The document states: "Mastery of Kiswahili consolidates Tanzanian culture....". This is an understatement; on the basis of L_1 and L_2 Interdependence Theory, the mastery of Kiswahili sets a firm foundation for learning English. The same document continues: "In Tanzania English language and Kiswahili are used for official and commercial business, with English dominating in the international commerce and business" (MOEC, 1995:55).

There seems to be lack of clarity in the language planning and policy makers' minds whether English is or needs to be taught as a second or a foreign language. If we examine further the issue of unclear objectives of ELT, in the case of Tanzania, they are stated in the 2005 English language syllabus for primary schools as follows:

(a) To enable the pupils to express themselves appropriately in given situations.
(b) To develop the pupils' basic skills in listening, (lip reading for the deaf), speaking, reading and writing through the English language (writing into Braille for the blind).
(c) To enable pupils to acquire and apply correct English grammar.
(d) To provide the pupils with a sound base for higher education and further personal advancement through English language use and usage. (MOEC, 2005:v).

In the context of EFL that prevails in Tanzania (especially in the rural areas), these objectives are too ambitious and not attainable. The skills of listening and speaking cannot be developed in a situation where the language is rarely spoken. The same applies for correct English grammar and personal advancement through English language use and usage. Ignoring the context has implications for ELT as pointed out by Kirkland (1976:114) who observed the ELT situation in Tanzania and remarked: "Much time is now wasted in teaching the wrong kind of English to the wrong people and doing it badly so that a great deal of remedial work is needed before the language can be useful (Kirkland, 1976:114).

This observation by Kirkland made over thirty years ago still reflects the current situation of ELT in Tanzania; hence, the need to address the issues of ELT cannot be over emphasised. In particular, the objectives of teaching English, the kind of English to be taught and the approaches as well as materials for teaching English have to be clear in the minds of language planners and policy makers.

As pointed out in Section 2.0, learners of English language in Tanzania do not normally use English when they want to participate fully in the social, political and economic life of their country. In this situation, the purposes for teaching/learning English should be to enable learners learn enough language to travel abroad, communicate with (native) speakers, read literature in foreign language, or read scientific and technical works in the relevant foreign language (Stern, 1983). These objectives of teaching English as a foreign language are modest enough and much more realistic and attainable in the Tanzanian context.

4.2 Challenges arising from inappropriate teaching/learning materials for ELT

Teachers' responses, for example (a), insufficient and/or inappropriate teaching and learning materials; and (m), the books available for teaching English are too difficult for students, confirm the existence of challenges related to teaching/learning materials for ELT. It would seem most of the textbooks and supplementary readers for ELT were designed and developed for learners of English as a second language (ESL). Thus, this challenge can be attributed to the initial misconception of the status of English in Tanzania, as Kirkland (1976) observed when referring to ELT situation in Tanzania and East Africa generally:

> *The language of the textbooks, usually prepared for mother-tongue pupils, is far too difficult for second language pupils, if, indeed, it can be understood by English children... special editions prepared for the tropics or even for East Africa change the content, examples and illustrations but do not sufficiently simplify the language if they attempt to control it at all. Much of the teaching time, therefore, is spent explaining in Swahili the incomprehensible English text which are at present the only acceptable source of information for most subjects (Kirkland, 1976:110).*

Kirkland says it all; textbooks designed for teaching English as first language would be too difficult and therefore inappropriate for ESL or EFL contexts such as that of Tanzania. Thus the discrepancy between the actual and the assumed status of English language and the subsequent processes and decisions that ensue starting from the levels of planning and policy making has resulted in inappropriate materials design or selection; and as such, it is a challenge that needs to be addressed so that appropriate teaching/learning materials are designed and developed and learners' communicative potential is maximised.

4.3 Challenges resulting from using English as a language of instruction

Teachers' responses (b), lack of qualified teachers; (c), students' extremely low English language proficiency; and (d), lack of interest and confidence because of poor command of English language, show that the use of English as language of instruction (LOI) is a challenge to ELT. I will further illustrate this point. In one of the *Language in Education* conferences held in Dar es Salaam in 2002, a participant who was also the headmaster of one of the secondary schools in Dar es Salaam reported that his school had 50 teachers out of who only 3 (6%) teachers were proficient in, and used correct English to teach their subjects. This means that the remaining 47 (94%) teachers in that school taught in broken or incorrect English. Thus, in a situation where only 6% of teachers use good English and the rest 94% use bad English, most learners are very likely to pick up the bad English. This is even more so in a context like the one that prevails in Tanzania, where most learners have no other access to reasonably good English language, except from a few English language teachers. Even if the 3 teachers in the headmaster's example were English language teachers who were highly qualified and had the best materials to teach English, the 47 teachers of other subjects would very likely undo the former's effort to teach English. The decision to make English LOI is based on the misconception that English is a second language in Tanzania; and that using it as LOI would help students get exposure to, and learn English. However, classroom research (Mlama & Matteru, 1978; Criper & Dodd, 1984; Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1987; Rubagumya *et al.*, 1998; Vuzo, 2005; Mwinsheikhe, 2008) shows that the use of English as LOI does not only, not help students learn English, but it also works against ELT.

Another challenge arising from using English as LOI is that after students have been exposed to incorrect English for over six years of secondary education, it becomes difficult for them to completely overcome the use of incorrect English even when they specialise as English language teachers. As a result of this negative exposure, it is not uncommon, for example, to find English language teachers who are not proficient in English. The training in English language teaching at tertiary level is not sufficient to enable them to unlearn the incorrect English they picked at secondary school level. This situation has actually made the preparation of English language teachers/specialists particularly difficult in Africa; and it is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Another challenge arising from using English as LOI is that the majority of students do not understand the content of what is taught. This lack of understanding constrains their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which in turn undermines their capacity to learn English language. When students cannot make sense of what is taught in English in content areas such as mathematics, geography, history, biology, chemistry, etc. they then fail to use language (whether English or any other language), to express what it is that they have learnt. The corollary of this is that when students understand the subject matter of their content areas such as those mentioned above, their cognitive capacity is developed. As their cognitive capacity develops and improves, so is their capacity to learn language, be it English, French, Kiswahili or any other. One way to overcome this challenge is to eliminate the use of English as LOI and focus more attention on ELT in terms of improving methods and providing schools with appropriate teaching and learning materials.

5.0 ELT situation in other African countries and beyond
5.1 The situation in African countries
The position that policy makers and most people in high offices in Tanzania seem to hold is that English is a second language in Tanzania. Some scholars ([Yahya-Othman, 2005] personal communication) for example, believe that English is a second language in most other Anglophone Africa such as Kenya, South Africa and Uganda. One might agree in the case of South Africa; however, Kenya and Uganda are not very different from Tanzania. In the case of Kenya, a Kenyan scholar (Bunyi, 2001) who conducted a study in Kiambu, a rural district adjacent to Nairobi reports as follows:

> *When Gicagi people find themselves constrained to speak another language, as when they visit Nairobi, they choose to speak Kiswahili. A woman, whose son, Nderi, was in Standard I, made the following observation*: "ndathii Nairobi ngore mukabira ndikiaragia Githweri I giki gitu kia Mashambani" *(translated as: If I go to Nairobi and meet a non-Gikuyu speaker, I speak in our village Kiswahili).*

Speaking in '*Githweri…kia Mashambani*' (village Kiswahili) to a non-Gikuyu speaker implies that Kiswahili is a second language. Had English been a second language, this woman from Gicagi would have used English to communicate with people who are non-Gikuyu speakers. Bunyi (2001) reports that many Gicagi people have radios and they listen to Gikuyu broadcast more often that to Kiswahili or English ones. She reports that "very few people in Gicagi have television; consequently, Gicagi children have almost no access to English in their homes and community" (Bunyi, 2001). On the situation in schools Bunyi has the following to say:

> *...even in Gicagi school itself, Gicagi children have very limited access to English. Gikuyu is the first language of everyone in the school, and it dominates the out-of-class communication of both the teachers and the students. Although there is a rule that prohibits Standard 4-8 children speaking Gikuyu in the school compound, according to the headmaster, it is very difficult to enforce the rule. The teachers themselves break the rule and start speaking Gikuyu to the students.... Consequently, the no-Gikuyu-in-the-school-compound rule remains dormant most of the time, only to be resurrected when poor examination results come (Bunyi, 2001:83).*

The situation does not seem to fit our earlier definition of English as a second language as it is used in Kenya. If language policy and planning, as well as English language syllabus and English language teaching materials are designed with the assumption that English is a second language in Anglophone countries in Africa such as Kenya or Tanzania, it is likely that those materials will not be appropriate and effective for teaching/learning of English. Consequently, the objectives of ELT will not be attained and thus causing serious challenges towards ELT. In the case of Kenya, Gicagi is a district adjacent to Nairobi, where people might visit Nairobi on a more frequent basis and get exposed to English. However, the point is if this is the English language situation in Gicagi, what would it be like in more remote districts of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Zambia or other Anglophone countries?

Brock-Utne (2005) in a study of African Girls Education Initiative supported through UNICEF, recounts her experience of sitting at the back of classrooms in six African countries including Uganda, Swaziland, Namibia, Niger, Mali and Guinea as tragic, where children and teachers had great difficulty expressing themselves in English (or French) because they had had very little exposure to these foreign languages. From South Africa, Alexander (2000) reports that "...in many other African countries, the problem is compounded by the fact that those who are expected to use (English) as the medium of teaching.... do not have the necessary proficiency in order to serve as role models for the learners" (Alexander, 2000:20). This state of matters has far reaching effects not only on English language teaching, but also, on the quality of education generally in these countries. Studies in West Africa have shown that English can benefit from well-developed African languages. As Wolff points out:

> *In order to achieve high competence and performance in official language, say English or French, which is the ultimate educational goal which parents and pupils set for themselves, the more solid the basic mother tongue education, the higher the performance in the foreign language! (Wolff, 2000:54)*

Research on language teaching/learning has moved from viewing previously learnt languages as problems in learning a second or a foreign language, to accepting them and using them as a resource towards that end. The use of other indigenous languages as a resource in the classroom by allowing students to bring in their rich language background into the learning of English is encouraged in modern language teaching theories and practices. This is allowing for multi-diversity of languages and cultures and hence tolerance for one another. These are facts that African countries that teach English need to learn from outside Africa, especially the non-English speaking countries – that we learn English language better when our proficiency of our mother tongue or first language is high.

5.2 ELT in Europe and Asia

In most countries in Europe, English is taught as a foreign language and with better resources starting from Std. 4 or Std. 5. Although all the four language skills are emphasised, the focus is on reading and writing. By the time students join tertiary education, they can read various teaching/learning materials in English while learners' first languages such as Norwegian, Dutch, Swedish, French, etc. are used to study all subjects across the curriculum. In most of these countries, learners start learning English with a strong foundation in their primary languages, which they use as a resource in learning English. Canagarajah (1999) points out that the fact that we are forever rooted in the primary community of socialisation, is what enables us to negotiate or appropriate other languages (and cultures) more effectively. He continues:

> *Research in language acquisition and cognitive development confirms that a thorough grounding in one's first language and culture enhances the ability to acquire other languages, literacies and knowledge. ...If we are to appropriate the language (English) for our purposes, the oppressive history and hegemonic values associated with English have to be kept very much in mind, and engaged judiciously (Canagarajah, 1999:2).*

Canagarajah's position is in line with Cummins' (1979, 1981, 2000) Language Learning Interdependence Theory mentioned earlier, that our ability to learn other languages is enhanced by thorough grounding in our first language.

Looking at the situation in Europe and Asia and comparing it to that in Africa, it would seem African countries are trying to teach English in order to replace African languages, known as subtractive bilingualism, which is contrary to Cummins' Interdependence Language Learning Theory. European and Asian countries, on the other hand, teach English as an additional foreign language without the need to replace their languages (additive bilingualism), as they work in line with the said language learning theory. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed urgently. What can be done about these challenges will be discussed in the next section.

6.0 Way forward: Addressing the challenges of ELT in Tanzania

6.1 Considering context and re-examining objectives of ELT

The first and most important point in a situation where there is a misconception of context is to go back to the drawing board and agree on the situation on the ground. Thus, if we want to teach English for communication with the international community and for reading literature in English, then our focus for teaching it must be different from those who want to teach it for day-to-day communication. This realisation will enable us set realistic goals for ELT and overcome the confusion that seems to prevail in the policy documents. All these are issues to be decided upon at the language planning and policy level.

Kaplan and Baldauf Jr. (1997) advise that the following six decision considerations need to be taken by the education sector in relation to language policy and planning. First, it is necessary to determine which language(s) are to be taught; when the instruction will commence and for what duration; and what sort of proficiency is expected to meet the needs of the society.

Secondly, it important to define teacher supply, taking into consideration who will teach the language(s); for example, where they will come from, the nature of pre-service training that will produce proficient teachers, the nature of in-service training that will maintain proficiency levels attained, the distribution of teachers through the system as well as equity in the reward structure.

Thirdly, it is essential to determine which segment of the student population will be exposed to language(s) education and how that segment will be identified, provided with readiness training, and induced to undertake the available instruction, and to devise strategies to gain parental and community support for any plan that is set up.

Fourthly, one has to determine what methodologies and what materials will be used to support those methodologies, and how and by whom those materials will be prepared, and how they will be distributed through the system.

Additionally, it is crucial to define assessment processes that can be used for initial placement, for in-course testing, and for output (summative) testing, and at the same time it will need to develop an assessment system that can measure both teacher and system performance, so that language instruction fits with societal needs.

Finally, it is central to determine how to support all these activities fiscally and physically, by identifying the source of the resources, and how the language education system can be maintained across the contexts served by the system overtime (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr. 1997:9).

In the case of Tanzania, it would seem that most of these issues have not been addressed. However, these cannot be ignored, because it is the planning and policy that guide and determine success at all the other levels in the education system in general, and language teaching in particular. Therefore, in discussing the way forward to addressing the challenges of ELT in Tanzania, the six decision areas will guide the discussion in the next section.

6.2 Decision area one: Policy and Planning

It would be necessary to make an informed decision about when to begin ELT and for how long. In the case of Tanzania, ELT currently commences at Std. I in primary school, and continues until the end of ordinary level secondary education (Form 4). By the end of this period it is expected that learners would be able to:
  • use appropriate English to communicate in a variety of settings,
  • use English to achieve academically in all content areas, and
  • communicate in English using signs and read using Braille (for deaf and the blind respectively) (MOEC, 2005:v).

Unfortunately, for most students in Tanzania, these expectations have not been met; and it is argued that this is because of the inconsistency between the assumed and the actual status of English, which has resulted in setting unrealistic objectives for ELT. As a way forward it is proposed that ELT should start from Std. V up to Form IV. This is because

currently, the ELT starts off badly at a level which most learners rarely need to use it. By delaying the teaching of English until Primary 5, the Ministry of Education will be able to:

(a) select the best English language teachers from among those who are currently teaching from Std. I to Std 7, and concentrate efforts on the last three years of primary school (Std 5, 6 and 7);

(b) give opportunity to those who are not well qualified to attend intensive in-service English language course for one or two years; and

(c) give primary school learners, especially those in remote rural areas, a chance to learn Kiswahili before they are introduced to English, which is in line with the Language Learning Interdependence Theory.

In the Tanzanian context where resources are scarce, it does not help to scatter efforts so thinly across the whole of the primary school level; instead concerted effort, focused on a smaller population, is likely to overcome the challenge of ELT.

6.3 Decision area two: Teacher supply and the nature of training for ELT

In the current ELT situation in Tanzania, primary school English language teachers are drawn from the population of secondary school graduates. As far as ELT is concerned, however, this is not good enough. It is being proposed, as a way forward, that prospective English language teachers for primary school should be those who have passed English in the general (ordinary) secondary school leaving examination. This proposal would greatly reduce the population from which English language teachers could be drawn; however, the earlier proposal (6.2) requires fewer teachers and therefore it should be possible to select only those who have passed their English language examination at ordinary secondary school level.

The nature of pre-service training should be designed with teaching English as a foreign language in mind, to produce proficient teachers of ELT. Similarly, in-service training programmes should be put in place to maintain proficiency over time. In terms of distribution of teachers through the system, it is important to have qualified teachers in rural as well as in urban areas.

6.4 Decision area three: Student population

As said earlier, in Tanzania, ELT starts from the first year of primary school to the last year of ordinary secondary school, while a recently proposed policy suggests starting ELT from nursery school. It is therefore being proposed in this article that this decision should be reviewed so that ELT student population is drawn starting from the fifth year of primary school to the fourth year of secondary school. This will give learners firm grounding in their first literacy language, which will in turn facilitate the learning of English. Since most learners in an EFL situation like the one in Tanzania will hardly know any English before they receive their first English language lesson, it is important to start with the right kind of English and at the level that quality teaching of English can be sustained. It is argued therefore, that for the sake of efficiency and for effective ELT to take place, the segment of learner population should be reduced to the last three years of primary education. The government, through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training should device strategies to gain parental and community support for this particular set up.

6.5 *Decision area four: ELT methodology and teaching/learning materials*

As a way forward, it is proposed that the methodologies used in the current system need to be changed to take cognisance of the actual context that English is a foreign language in Tanzania. There will also be a need to change teaching approaches. The current focus of ELT in Tanzania seems to be on all the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing (See objectives of ELT in Section 4.1). However, the actual context as relates to the status of English does not match this focus. Of necessity, this focus needs to be changed so that reading skills are emphasised above all language skills followed by writing skills. This does not mean to abandon listening and speaking skills; it means prioritising the skills and giving emphasis on the ones that students need most of the time in their academic life. To avail learners with reading materials, the government can commission teachers and university lecturers to write simple and interesting classroom readers that will support the basic teaching materials (also developed locally) for ELT.

In addition, ELT programmes such as 'mmersion' and/or 'submersion' that are used in the USA, Canada and Australia will not work in the case of Tanzania because the contexts differ greatly. For example, in the USA immigrant children are immersed in an *English-only* environment because English is the main language of the North American society; and children get the opportunity to 'swim' or 'sink'. However, in the African context where English is the minority language, it is not possible to immerse learners in English language (except for the lucky few who can afford fees in the expensive private boarding schools). Teaching and learning materials to be used to support these methodologies need to be tailor-made for the Tanzanian pupils. University professors and some of the teachers in secondary schools could be commissioned by the government to prepare ELT materials. The task of distributing and disseminating materials to the schools could be outsourced to private companies.

6.6 *Decision area five: Assessment and evaluation process*

Currently, it is not clear how ELT is assessed and evaluated in Tanzania because the policy seems to have assigned the task of ELT to all teachers who teach at post primary school level. It is being proposed in this article that, in order to have in place a defined assessment process that can be used for initial placement, for in-course testing, and for output (summative) testing, the task of ELT needs to be left in the hands of competent and well-trained English language teachers. What is needed is to develop an assessment system that can measure both teacher and system performance.

The other aspect to consider in assessment and evaluation of ELT is to design and prepare an in-built evaluation mechanism that will be used to assess the efficiency of the new programmes and materials. This mechanism will assist in evaluating the achievement of ELT objectives over time. After evaluation, the programmes and materials could then be reviewed to include new suggestions for improvement. This would be an on-going process until such time that the programmes meet the expectations and objectives that would have been set at the planning and policy level.

7.0 Supporting ELT by eliminating exposure to incorrect English

One of the challenges of teaching English in Africa, and particularly Tanzania, is students being exposed to incorrect English through its use as the language of instruction and the English-only rule where the use of other languages is prohibited in the school compound. This in effect means that students are forced to speak or listen to incorrect English both inside and outside the classroom. This makes the teaching of English very difficult if not impossible. Commenting on an article, *A better path to English*, sent to the Korea Times, in which emphasis was put on "forcing students to speak English all the time to get more weight in English class", Krashen (2009) makes the following observation: "Research done over the last three decades has shown that we acquire language by understanding what we hear and read. The ability to produce language is the result of language acquisition, not the cause" (Krashen, 2009).

About forcing students to speak English all the time he further observes:

> *Forcing students to speak English will not improve their ability to speak English. The best way to improve speaking is therefore to increase the amount of comprehensible listening and reading that students do, and the easiest and most cost-effective way to make this happen is to develop libraries of interesting and comprehensible English books and recordings to supplement English class. Setting up libraries would be far more efficient than bringing in expensive foreign teachers and setting up English camps (Krashen, 2009).*

Research findings in Canada and USA (Cummins, 1979, 2000; Krashen, 1985, 2009) show that knowledge acquired through the first language can serve as a resource in the learning of a second or a foreign language. To illustrate this point Cummins (2001) has the following to say:

> *The initially high level of L development makes possible the development of similar levels of competence in L. However, for children whose L skills are less well developed in certain respects, intensive exposure to L in the initial grades is likely to impede the continued development of L. This will, in turn, exert a limiting effect on the development of L. In short, the hypothesis proposes that there is an interaction between the language of instruction and the type of competence the child has developed in his L prior to school. (Cummins, in Baker & Hornberger, 2001: 75)*

The idea of using learners' first language and subject matter knowledge as a resource for learning English had earlier originated from Cummins' (1979) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is believed to enhance students' capacity to learn, understand and process new knowledge, including the learning of English language. This was also supported by Krashen (1985, 2009). Thus, learning the subject matter knowledge in the language that students comprehend is a necessary step in effective teaching and learning of English. Conversely, when students have not comprehended the subject matter knowledge, their ability to explain that subject matter in English is further constrained. It is therefore proposed that at secondary school level the teaching of English as a subject should continue up to the end of ordinary level and that English should not be used as the language of instruction in order to avoid exposing students to the use of incorrect English.

8.0 Conclusion and recommendation

This article has attempted to re-interpret and make sense of policy decisions and research findings on ELT in Anglophone Africa with special focus on Tanzania. In

Anglophone Africa, ELT is mostly based on the assumption that English is a second language, while in effect English is a foreign language for most learners in Africa. This inconsistency between the assumed and the actual status of English has resulted in challenges in ELT. Most, if not all of the challenges resulting from this misconception of the status of English language in Tanzania can be overcome by taking into account the context of ELT. To that effect the following actions are recommended for improving ELT in Tanzania.

(a) Allow pupils to first develop literacy skills in their first literacy language at least for the first four years of primary school before introducing English.
(b) Improve English language teachers' knowledge of English and methods in ELT through in-service training.
(c) Provide relevant and appropriate learning materials such as books, audio and video cassettes, especially in areas where English is rarely spoken.
(d) Include all the other languages that pupils speak as a resource to ELT to enable pupils feel that they are accepted and their languages are valued. ELT should not be seen as a way of obliterating other languages.
(e) Teacher's guide to ELT should be prepared in Kiswahili so that they understand the instructions given.
(f) The differences between Kiswahili and English structure and word formation must be clearly explained and made obvious so that pupils understand them and learn from the start to avoid mixing them.
(g) Eliminate the use of English as LOI so as to avoid exposing students to incorrect English.

With these initial suggestions, and many more that may be proposed in the process of improving ELT in Tanzania, it is believed that the intended goals of ELT can be met without the accompanying negative outcomes.

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