On the suitability of Swahili for early schooling in remote rural Tanzania: do policy and practice align?

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Abstract: This article explores the use of Swahili for education in Tanzania, focusing on rural areas where Swahili is not the main language of the community. Current language policy mandates Swahili as the exclusive Medium of Instruction at primary level throughout the country. However, findings reported here show that in parts of rural Tanzania, children learn Swahili only after a substantial period of being at school, meaning that Swahili does not support early childhood education nor equality of outcomes. Children experience difficulties with progression in learning and teacher-dominated classes can be observed. The study also finds unequal performance in national examinations based on the language of the community, and a prevalence of grade repetition in some settings. It calls for a policy which appreciates the role of community languages and an approach which sees multilingualism as a resource to be harnessed both inside and outside the classroom.

Ikisiri: Makala hii inachunguza kuhusu ufaafu wa Kiswahili kama lugha ya elimu nchini Tanzania, ikiangazia zaidi vivijini hasa ambako Kiswahili si lugha kuu ya mawasiliano. Sera ya lugha ya elimu iliyopo sasa inaipa lugha ya Kiswahili mamlaka ya kipekee ya kuwa lugha kuu ya elimu ya msingi kwa nchi nzima. Matokeo ya utafiti huu yanaonesha kwamba katika maeneo mengi ya vijijini watoto hufahamu Kiswahili baada ya kipindi kirefu cha kuwepo shuleni, na kwamba, Kiswahili si lugha wezeshi kwa elimu ya watoto wanaoanza shule. Hivyo, watoto hupata ugumu katika maendeleo yao ya kielimu madarasani, na walimu hutawala maongezi. Pia, kuna utofauti wa ufaulu katika mitihani ya kitaifa baina ya maeneo, na ukariri wa madarasa hasa kwenye maeneo kadhaa. Tunapendekeza uwepo wa sera inayotambua na kuthamini lugha za jamii, na yenye mtazamo chanya kuhusu wingilugha, na kuwa lugha hizo ni rasilimali inayopaswa kutumiwa kimanufaa darasani na nje.

Note on the authors: see end of article.

1 Introduction

In multilingual societies across the world, the question of which language should serve as the Medium of Instruction has long sparked debate. In post-colonial states, such debates are even more common (La Piedra 2006; Mapunda 2011; Trudell 2016), and Tanzania is no exception. The discussion around the Medium of Instruction (MoI) in Tanzania has been present since at least the end of the 19th century. Cameron and Dodd (1970, 75) report that in 1907, when the first Director of Education was appointed in the then Deutsche Ostafrika, he was pressurised by 'the Arab ruling classes and the Asian trading community, which constituted 20 per cent of the population, to use only Arabic and English as the media of instruction' in the education system. Despite this pressure, the Director of Education refused to declare either English or Arabic as MoI and decided instead that Swahili should be the MoI in then Tanganyika.

This debate resurfaced again during British colonial rule (1919–61), when the colonial government announced its language in education policy. Swahili was to be used in the first five years of primary education and English was to be used in the subsequent three years of primary education and throughout secondary education (Burchert 1994: 4). Some years later, the Binns Mission Report of 1950 recommended that Swahili be eliminated from the education system as it was not in 'the best interests' of the learners, an idea that was rejected by the British colonial government (Cameron & Dodd 1970: 110). The debate continued after Tanganyika gained independence in 1961 and, in 1964, formed a union with Zanzibar to become the United Republic of Tanzania.

Today, Swahili is the *de jure* Medium of Instruction in public primary schools throughout Tanzania,[1] while English is the Medium of Instruction at secondary and tertiary levels. More recently, Swahili has also gained additional influence after being adopted as one of the working languages of the Southern African Development Cooperation and one of the official languages of the East African Community (alongside English). Swahili has also received recognition in South Africa and Botswana, both of which have committed to offering Swahili as part of their national curricula.[2]

In terms of its broader linguistic ecology, Tanzania is multilingual, with around 150 languages spoken (Mradi wa Lugha za Tanzania 2009: 3). Moreover, Tanzania has what has been described as a triglossic situation, with English, Swahili and the approximately 150 community languages used in different domains on a day-to-day basis. The long-standing debate on the MoI in Tanzania has tended to focus on the suitability—or relative power of—either English or Swahili. This has included both

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[1] This contrasts with the case of privately owned primary schools, most of which use English as the medium of instruction.

[2] See 'Swahili gaining popularity globally', www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2021/swahili-gaining-popularity-globally), 9 December 2021.

policy papers (e.g. a report by Criper and Dodd 1984 that was commissioned by the British Council) and a range of academic studies (e.g. Rubagumya 1989; Qorro 2004; 2013; Brock-Utne 2004; Swilla 2009; Mapunda 2015; amongst others).

Given the linguistic diversity of Tanzania, however, it is striking that the discussion has not given more consideration to the role of the community languages in education. There is a wide array of evidence which shows that children learn better in a language which they understand (Dutcher 2004; Alidou *et al.* 2006; Ball 2011). Yet, there is an implicit assumption in the Tanzanian language policy that since Swahili is widely used in the country and indeed throughout East Africa, it is known by the entire nation and therefore suitable for education. This assumption overlooks the importance of access to early years education in a language which is known to the learner. Those children who grow up speaking one of the other languages as their home language are faced with an additional challenge when they first enter schooling and are met with instruction in Swahili—the dual task of learning the MoI and learning the subject matter (Ngorosho 2011). Describing the situation in Tanzania, Ngorosho (2011: 21) further says 'Children learn better in the language they master'. Teachers often spend a significant portion of their time teaching the learners the MoI, often at the expense of other content or material. It has also been observed that not giving due consideration to learners' linguistic repertoires and the linguistic realities of multilingual settings, which are numerous in Tanzania (Wedin 2004; Mapunda 2010), creates a range of detrimental effects and outcomes for a large portion of children, including negatively impacting on experiences of education.

Community languages go quietly unrecognised in the language policy and are assumed not to be relevant for the purposes of formal education. We argue in this paper that this is an over-simplification of the issue and that these ongoing debates overlook the crucial position that community languages play in the country, including in the education system. This is particularly important at the pre-primary and primary levels, where learners are just starting out in their schooling, as well as being a point at which their Swahili skills may well still be developing.

The goal of this paper is to re-visit the question of the suitability of Swahili as the Medium of Instruction in Tanzanian, with a focus not on English as an alternative but through consideration of the role and influence of Tanzania's community languages. We seek to address two questions in relation to the use of Swahili as the MoI in primary education in Tanzania:

1 How practicable is the use of Swahili in early years education in remote rural settings in the country?
2 What are the perceptions of community members-cum-parents towards the Swahili-only policy in the education of their children?

We explore the role of community languages in education and the relationship between these languages and Swahili. The goal is to reconsider the language in education policy in Tanzanian primary schools. In doing so, we suggest that the question can perhaps be re-phrased not to ask whether English or Swahili should be the MoI, but rather whether the overemphasis and reliance on English and Swahili at the exclusion of other languages represents a barrier to education given the highly multilingual nature of the country.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 provides background to the topic, highlighting some of the key issues. Section 2 examines the language in education policy in Tanzania, with a focus on language practices and learning. Section 3 presents the context of the present study and describes the research methods employed. Section 4 presents findings of the study. Section 5 constitutes a discussion of the findings, while Section 6 presents a conclusion and highlights some recommendations.

2 Language policy and education in Tanzania

Before we go on to talk more about the study itself, some background on the Tanzanian school system is in order. Children attend nursery school for two years (aged 5 and 6) and thereafter join primary school for seven years. These seven years of schooling are known as Standard (or Grade) 1–7. The typical age for learners to enter school is 7 years old. Pupils may start primary school after two years of pre-primary school or may enter directly depending on their local context. The term 'Beginner classes' is sometimes used to refer to nursey up to Grade Four, and we use it in this sense in the paper. Primary school during these years involves a national examination in Standard Four and again in Standard Seven. This fourth-year exam is a formative assessment known as the Standard Four National Assessment (SNFA). The Standard Seven exam is also known as the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and ultimately serves as an entry examination for secondary school.

In primary school, all students study Maths, English, Swahili, Science and Social Studies. While we focus on the early years of education in the current paper, it is also worth noting that the PSLE is conducted in English, thereby in many instances serving as a further barrier to progress in education. This means the transition between primary school (where Swahili is the MoI) and secondary school (where English is the MoI) is mediated via an exam administered in English. At this point in schooling, many pupils are not proficient in English, and so their attainment in the PSLE reflects not their overall achievement on the broad range of topics but their ability to undertake the exam in English.

We seek to contextualise the study by first exploring current language in education policy in Tanzania. We refer to two key policy documents which determine the MoI in the country: the 1995 Education and Training Policy and the 2014 Education and

Training Policy. The 1995 policy provided the basis of the 2014 Policy and an exploration of this is necessary to understand the present-day situation.

The 1995 Education and Training Policy, as the name suggests, provides for all education and training in the country and also set out the language in education policy adopted in primary schools in the country:

> At the primary school level, full development of language skills is vital for a fuller understanding of and mastery of knowledge and skills implied in the primary school curriculum. Children at this level of education will continue to be taught in a language which is commonly used in Tanzania. Therefore: **The medium of instruction in primary schools shall be Kiswahili, and English shall be a compulsory subject.**
>
> (United Republic of Tanzania 1995: 39)[3]

The subsequent 2014 Education and Training Policy *Sera ya Elimu na Mafunzo* in Swahili, is the current policy, although note at the time of writing this policy is also being revised. The 2014 Policy is heavily based on—and provided an update to—the 1995 Education and Training Policy. It also addresses the Medium of Instruction. We present the original text in Swahili, along with our own English translation:

> **Suala**
> Lugha ya kufundishia na kujifunzia
> **Maelezo**
> Kwa sasa, lugha za kufundishia na kujifunzia katika elimu na mafunzo ni Kiswahili na Kiingereza. Lugha ya kufundishia elimu ya awali na msingi ni Kiswahili. Aidha, lugha ya Kiingereza inatumika kufundishia katika baadhi ya shule.
>
> (Sera ya Elimu na Mafunzo 2014: 37)

> *The Issue*
> *The Medium of Instruction*
> *Explanation*
> *For the time being, the medium of instruction shall be Swahili and English. The medium of instruction in pre- and primary schools shall be Swahili. Also, the English language is used in some schools.*
>
> (Sera ya Elimu na Mafunzo 2014: 37, our translation)

These are important statements about the policy regarding the Medium of Instruction in Tanzania. Crucially, these policy documents stipulate that Swahili and English are to be the languages used in primary schooling. There is mention of pre-primary and primary levels—where Swahili is to be the MoI. There is also recognition that English is to be used 'in some schools', although exactly which schools this might be is not specified, making this quite vague. Although as noted above, many private schools opt to have English as a Medium of Instruction even at the primary

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[3] We present here an excerpt from the official English translation of the policy. Bold is as in the original.

and pre-primary level. Given the later shift to English as MoI at secondary school, some parents choose English-medium primary schools to mitigate against (or avoid entirely) the switch from Swahili to English at the transition between primary and secondary levels.

Strikingly, neither the 1995 nor the 2014 Education and Training Policy contains a single mention of the presence of community languages. There is no mention of the other languages spoken in Tanzania, nor of their relative position or potential in education. As a result, community languages are assigned no official recognition nor official status in education. It is against the backdrop of this 'silence' on community languages that the current study takes place.

3 Context of the study and methods

3.1 The schools

The study reported here was carried out in three schools in three different administrative regions of Tanzania, namely Ruvuma, Tabora and Coast Regions. For ethical reasons, the schools are represented here using pseudonyms: School X (Ruvuma Region, Songea District), School Y (Coast Region, Bagamoyo District) and School Z (Tabora Region, Nzega Town Council).[4]

School X is located about 50 kilometres northwest of Songea Town, and about 25 kilometres away from the nearest semi-urban centre, where a number of social services, including a hospital, a vocational training centre, a secondary school, a bookshop and a bank, can be found. The school was established in 1974 and in many ways represents a typically rural location. The village is accessible by a gravel road which is reachable reliably for about six months of the year and is only partly accessible for the rest of the year during the rainy season. There is no on-grid electricity in the village, no newspapers are available to buy and there are no bookshops where the inhabitants or pupils could buy reading materials. In this area, the main community language is Ngoni. Swahili is also used but in a more limited number of domains, such as in church, in government offices where workers may be based who are from outside the region and do not speak Ngoni and in the market. Swahili is the MoI in the schools in this region, as across the whole of Tanzania.

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[4] The research being reported here followed all ethical procedures which are operational in Tanzania. We received ethical clearance from the University of Dar es Salaam, which was then taken to relevant regional and district authorities. We were cleared at these levels and were allowed to proceed to village and school levels. We also obtained informed consent from the administration in the respective schools and all participants. All participants were informed of the goals of the research and their freedom to participate or withdraw, and issues of confidentiality and anonymity were discussed.

School Y was nationalised along with other schools in 1967 following the Arusha Declaration. The school is in Bagamoyo District, on the Tanzanian coast. The area is about 70 kilometres north of Dar es Salaam and is accessible via a tarmacked road throughout the year. Here the main language of the community is Swahili, and historically, this and the broader coastal region are home to the Swahili community—*Waswahili*. This means that Swahili is not only the MoI in the public primary schools in this area, but also the dominant community language.

Finally, School Z is located 38 kilometres east of the town of Nzega in the central northern Tabora Region of Tanzania. The school was established in 1984. Like School X, School Z is located in an area which is only reliably accessible for six months of the year due to the gravel access road. In the surrounding area, there is no on-grid electricity, and there are no bookshops nor newsstands where community members could buy reading materials. The main language of the community is Sukuma, and the majority of the children only learn Swahili at school.

In both School X and School Z, the main language of the communities (Ngoni and Sukuma respectively) is different from the mandated Medium of Instruction. It is only in School Y where the main community language is the same as the MoI—Swahili.

The choice of Nzega and Songea Districts was motivated by their rural location. In the context of the current study, we use the term 'remote' to refer to distance from both urban and semi-urban locations and from highways. One of the features of these remote rural locations, therefore, is that contact between the inhabitants of these villages and those outside their community is more limited. In terms of local infrastructure, both areas lack consistently navigable roads, and there is no access at all to the railway network. There is limited access to media such as newspapers, due in part to the restricted infrastructure which is required for regular deliveries. Television and internet use are also limited since neither of these locations are centrally electrified, although communities may use generators and to a lesser extent solar power, and internet is available via mobile phones. We consider all of these as important factors that contribute to 'remoteness'. While there is not a one-to-one match between areas where Swahili is dominant and those areas which are not classified here as remote, these notions do intersect.

The traditional homeland of the Swahili-speakers is the coastal area in which a number of key cities and towns are found, including Dar es Salaam, as well as the centres of Bagamoyo and Tanga. These areas have historically been better served due to their proximity to the coast (crucial for economic and transport purposes). Likewise, areas which are urban are more likely to be multi-ethnic and therefore multilingual, which in many cases means that Swahili becomes the language of wider communication between speakers who have different first languages. These factors, as will be shown, affect how the Swahili Medium of Instruction policy interacts with the broader patterns of language usage in the country.

Bagamoyo was chosen for the study since although this district is also described as rural for administrative purposes, it has other attributes which differ from those of the other two locations. Firstly, Bagamoyo is relatively close to Dar es Salaam, the business and commercial capital of the country. Bagamoyo is also part of the so-called Swahili Coast—the traditional Swahili homeland. This means that most people in the district not only speak Swahili but identify as *Waswahili* and, for the most part, are monolingual Swahili-speakers. This contrasts to the other two locations, where people speak another community language as their first language and Swahili is employed as a language of wider communication. As such, School Y represents an important point of contrast with the other two schools.

3.2 Methods used

In terms of methods used to gather data, we employed a combination of i) a photo elicitation task, ii) classroom observations, iii) focus groups and iv) interviews with teachers and parents. We also extracted the results for the three schools involved in our study from the National Standard Four assessment results, which are publicly available.

We used a photo elicitation task in both School X (Songea District) and School Y (Bagamoyo District) for comparison purposes. We hypothesised that the level of mastery of Swahili where School Z is located was lower, and so comparability would not be appropriate. In the photo elicitation task, Grade One and Grade Two pupils were shown a colour photo of a male farmer wearing trousers, a t-shirt and a hat. The man is holding items which are commonly known in the area, namely a catapult and a machete, and next to him are a hoe and a hammer. The participants were also shown pictures of chickens and a dog gnawing on a bone. Finally, there was also a picture of a man holding a pair of sheers. The pupils were then asked to name and describe the items in the photos in Swahili.

The aim of using these pictures was to see which items in the pictures the learners were able to describe. This was taken as a general indicator of their Swahili exposure and knowledge and thereby the extent to which they are likely to be able to use Swahili in their early years of schooling. We are aware that this approach is not without fault and certainly does not consist of a detailed assessment of knowledge. However, it did provide us with a stimulus for some general observations and discussion which helped us to better understand into their linguistic repertoires. In terms of data collection, the number of participants in the photo elicitation task was quite small—just two pupils in each school. However, the findings we obtained (discussed below) are in line with those identified in studies carried out with a bigger sample size (see e.g. Wedin 2008; Mapunda 2010). Moreover, we use the photo elicitation task not as the focus of a quantitative study but rather to gain some qualitative

insights into patterns of Swahili knowledge and use. We believe that, combined with the other data examined here, this task does provide informative insights and context for the broader discussion.

Classroom observations were carried out in order to see how students and teachers participate in pedagogical processes. Among the issues in which we were interested were how students responded to questions and how teachers handled the use of community languages. We also considered the use of teacher feedback, the strategies used by teachers to ask questions and elicit responses and engagement from the students, as well as the general activity of the class. We conducted classroom observations of three lessons in each of the locations. Each lesson lasts 40 minutes, so this represents 2 hours of classroom observations in each of the schools. As with the photo elicitation task, this is a relatively short amount of time for the classroom observations. However, we believe that they provided us with some insights into the classroom dynamics and the modes of delivery, language usage and student participations, even during this 2-hour timeframe. And again, combined with the other methods used here, they are informative.

We also conducted a series of interviews with teachers and parents to better understand their perceptions of the use of community languages, particularly in the beginner classes. In Schools X and Z, we interviewed two teachers and two parents. In School Y, we interviewed one teacher and two parents. We held focus group discussions with the pupils at School Z. The focus group comprised six pupils, aged 10–16 years,[5] who were in Grades Three and Four. In Schools X and Y, we did not conduct focus groups since the pupils were only in Grades One and Two (aged 7 and 8), and so we deemed them too young to be involved in focus groups. All of the learners involved in the focus group were first-language speakers of Sukuma and had learnt Swahili at school. Table 1 provides an overview of the data collection.

The focus group discussion and interviews were all conducted in Swahili, the main language of wider communication in Tanzania and the common language for speakers who have different first languages (although see Costley & Reilly 2021 for some of the challenges associated with researching multilingually). All of the parents and teachers who were interviewed had good mastery of Swahili. The use of Swahili in the discussion with the pupils may have had an impact on their answers and confidence in interacting with the researchers. However, in the absence of another shared language, this was deemed preferable. The reader will see the range of responses provided in Swahili (alongside our English translations) in the excerpts discussed below.

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[5] The age range is often the result of repeating a year after failing examinations, starting school late or having to interrupt schooling. The expected ages for Grade 3 and Grade 4 students are 9 and 10 years old since children are expected to start Grade 1 when they are 7 years old.

Table 1. Summary of the methods used in data collection.

School pseudonym	Region	Main community language	Data collection methods
School X	Ruvuma District—Songea	Ngoni	Photo elicitation—2 pupils
			Interviews—2 teachers, 2 parents
			Classroom observations—3 lessons of 40 minutes each (2 hours total)
			Standard Four national assessment data
School Y	Coast District—Bagamoyo	Swahili	Photo elicitation—2 pupils
			Interview—1 teacher, 2 parents
			Classroom observations—3 lessons of 40 minutes each (2 hours total)
			Standard Four national assessment data
School Z	Tabora District—Nzega	Sukuma	Interview—2 teachers, 2 parents
			Focus group—6 pupils
			Classroom observations—3 lessons of 40 minutes each (2 hours total)
			Standard Four national assessment data

In terms of data analysis, for the photo elicitation, our primary interest was to gain better understanding of the confidence and command of Swahili by Grade One and Two pupils. Similarly, in the classroom observations, we wanted to get an overall idea of language use patterns in the classroom by both teachers and pupils. As for the interviews, we wanted to see which themes emerged with regard to perceptions relating to the use of community languages in the rural settings under examination. The focus group discussion gave us further insights into the views and perceptions of the learners in relation to expected and real language use in the classroom and their attitudes, which impact these.

In additional to the qualitative data, |the national Standard Four Assessments allowed for a quantitative approach and enabled us to look at any trends in outcomes in these examinations across the three schools. We were also interested in other features of the examination procedures; for example, we wanted to look at rates of year repetition and non-attendance in examinations. These are discussed in further detail in Section 4 below.

4 Findings and results

In this section, we present the findings and results that emerged from the data collection. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in Section 5. The presentation of

the results and their discussion are structured with regard to the two questions which the study seeks to answer.

4.1 Practicability of the use of Swahili in beginner classes in remote rural Tanzania

Recall the first question:

> 1 How practicable is the use of Swahili in early years of education in remote rural settings in the country?

Accordingly, we present findings on pupils' performance in National Standard Four Assessments (NSFA) for the three schools. We also present findings from the photo elicitation task, which provides insights into the pupils' language use practices. We also explore the data from the interviews with parents of pupils who are studying in the schools, along with the teachers.

4.1.1 Findings from the Standard Four national assessments (2015–2019)

First, we present findings on pupils' performance in Standard Four Assessments for the three schools over a five-year period from 2015 to 2019. These results were obtained from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania's website (www.necta.org). The National Examinations Council of Tanzania uses a letter-based grading system for assessment results. The results and the corresponding letter grades are as follows:

1 A (75–100) (excellent)
2 B (65–74) (very good)
3 C (45–64) (good)
4 D (30–44) (weak pass)
5 Referred (0–29)

Under the Tanzanian system, students who receive a grade between 0 and 29 are 'referred' and repeat Grade Four until they pass. Table 2 presents the performance of Grade Four pupils in the three schools 2015–2019.

The data in Table 2 can be represented graphically through Figure 1 below.

Table 2 and Figure 1 show that there is variation between the schools in terms of the number of students who perform in the A grade range. School X (Songea District)

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[6] The number of students obtaining an A grade in 2019 (25) is particularly high compared to the previous years—2018 (3), 2017 (0), 2016 (0), 2015 (0). When taken alone, the 2019 figure seems to suggest that the students in this school are in fact doing quite well. However, when the year-on-year data are examined, we can see that this is not the case. It would be interesting to return to this school as data are made available for subsequent years to see whether this upward trend continues or whether this was an anomaly of sorts.

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Table 2. Performance of Schools X, Y and Z in national Standard Four assessment (as percentages).

	School X (Songea)					School Y (Bagamoyo)					School Z (Tabora)				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
A	0	0	0	3	25	0	0	0	13	10	0	3	4	0	1
B	18	22	2	29	35	28	35	39	65	70	0	22	59	5	18
C	37	33	29	44	20	65	65	55	19	20	16	26	20	25	59
D	25	30	39	24	13	7	0	6	3	0	32	4	6	50	16
Referred	16	14	24	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	32	21	0	16	2
Absent	4	1	3	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	20	23	10	4	3
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
n	*79*	*83*	*124*	*132*	*127*	*86*	*68*	*71*	*72*	*70*	*79*	*103*	*49*	*76*	*98*

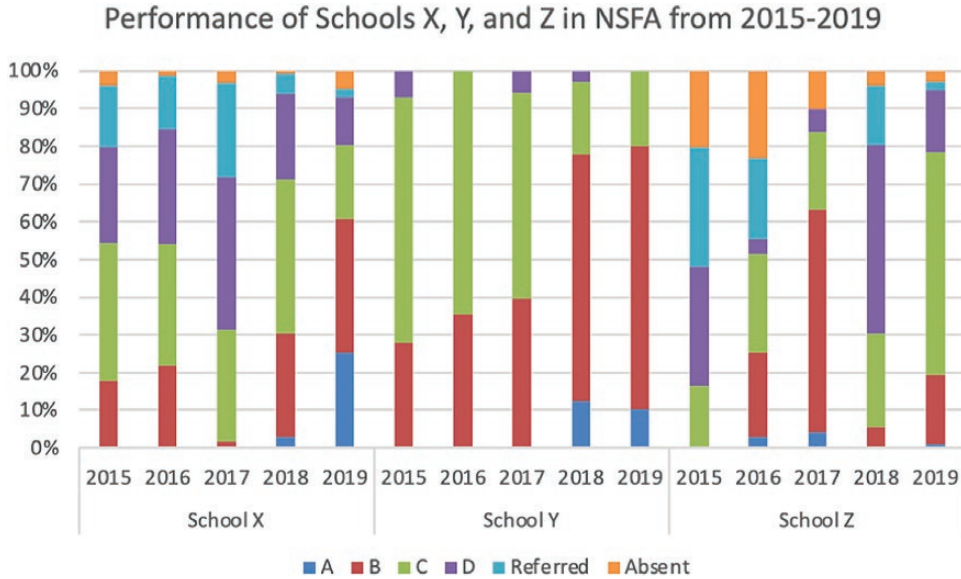(Source: Our calculations based on the data made available by NECTA.)

Figure 1. Performance of Schools X, Y and Z in NSFA (2015–2019).

had the most A grades obtained in 2019 (25 per cent)[6] and 2018 (only 3 per cent). This contrasts with the situation in School Z where in all five years, only 8 per cent got an A grade. This further contrasts with the situation in School Y (Bagamoyo), where in all five years 23 per cent got an A. Not only do the results in School Y show a good overall percentage of students obtaining an A grade, but they also show a high level of consistency of this outcome as it pertains to all five years for which we have access to the data.

While it is true that performance in examinations is a function of multiple factors, looking at the averages of the aggregate scores over the five-year period, a pattern can be identified. In Schools X and Z, where Swahili is not the language of the community, the percentage obtaining B and C grades is lower than in School Y, where the Medium of Instruction is also the language of the community. We also see that in Schools X and Z, there are cases of absenteeism from examinations and pupils being referred (and consequently repeating a year), which is not observed in School Y. We consider this to be a reflection of the impact of the use of Swahili as the medium of instruction. It appears that the students in School Y are generally better supported as a result of a higher degree of competency in Swahili and are therefore more likely to pass the exam and, in fact, to attend the exam in the first place (presumably also reflective of a more positive experience of schooling up to that point).

4.1.2 Findings from photo elicitation task

The photo elicitation task was used with Grade One and Two children (aged 7–8) in order to gain an idea of their knowledge of Swahili and as a way of structuring

discussion on this topic. Findings indicated that children in Grades One and Two were less likely to be able to sustain their description of the items in Swahili alone, or in which might be recognised as a more formal of 'standard' Swahili. In School X (Songea Rural District), where the main language of the community is Ngoni, the children showed evidence of their multilingual repertoires, translanguaged in some instances, and provided some descriptions of the items drawing on their linguistics resources in Ngoni. For instance, when asked about the name of the colour of chickens, both pupils PX1 (female, 7 years, Grade One) named the colours using the Ngoni terms—i.e., *yidung'u* 'red' and *ya msopi* 'white'. In Extract 1 below, boldface is used for works which are of Ngoni origin; italics are used for our English translation. The task was administered in Swahili.

Extract 1

Int:	……, eeh hawa ni nini? *(……, eeh what are these?)*
PX1:	Kuku *(Chickens)*
Int:	Huyu ana rangi gani? *(What's the colour of this one?)*
PX2:	Ya jogoo *(Of a cock)*
Int:	Rangi yake inaitwa nini? …… Wewe rangi hii ya kuku unaijua? … inaitwa nini? *(What is the name of its colour? … You there, do you know the colour of this chicken? … what's it called?)*
PX1:	**Yidung'u** *(Red) [Ngoni]*
PX2:	**Yidung'u** *(Red) [Ngoni]*
Int:	Eeh, Na hii? *(eeh, and this?)*
PX1:	**Ya msopi** *(White) [Ngoni]*
Int:	Wewe hizi rangi unazijua? *(You, do you know these colours?)*
PX2	Ndiyo *(Yes)*
Int:	Hii rangi gani? *(What colour is this?)*
PX2	**Yidung'u** *(Red)* [Ngoni]
Int:	Ehee, na hii? *(OK, and this?)*
PX2	**Ya msopi** *(White)* [Ngoni]
Int:	Huyu nae ameshika nini? *(And what is this one holding?)*
PX2	Mkasi *(Sheers)*
Int:	Mmh mkasi anafanyia nini? *(OK, what does he do with sheers?)*
PX2	Anakatia **matutu** *(For pruning sprouts)* ['sprouts' in Ngoni]
Int:	Anakatia **matutu** ……, eeh wewe unaona huyu ameshika nini? *(For pruning sprouts... OK, what do you see this person holding?)* ['sprouts' in Ngoni]……
PX2:	Mkasi *(Sheers)*

[7] This example is interesting since pupil PX1 uses a combination of the Swahili word (and verb) *nyoa*, which, although it can be translated as 'cut' in English, is the verb specifically used for cutting hair. The second word they use, *matutu* 'sprouts', is a word from Ngoni. What we see here, therefore, is the child drawing on their multilingual repertoire and combining their knowledge of Ngoni and Swahili. Moreover, the use of the Swahili verb *nyoa* 'cut hair' to refer to the sprouts suggests some continuing overgeneralisations in Swahili due to the semantic mismatch between the verb and the noun.

Int: Anafanyia nini? *(What is he doing with them?)*
PX1:   Ananyoa **matutu**[7] *(He is trimming sprouts)* ['sprouts' in Ngoni]

It is also worth noting that in some instances, the descriptions or answers the participants provided differed from what would be expected in so-called Standard Swahili. For example, Pupil PX2 (male, 8 years old, Grade One) answered a question relating to the colour of a chicken by saying that the chicken was *rangi ya jogoo* 'the colour of a cock'.

Also in School X, pupil PX3 drew on the breadth of his linguistic resources and used a number of Ngoni words in a discussion that was taking place in Swahili. For example, when he was asked what the man in the picture was doing, he said that he was weeding *malombi* (the Ngoni word for 'corn'). Likewise, in the picture there is a person who is carrying a mat. When asked what the man was doing, PX3 said *amegega* (Ngoni for 'he is carrying') rather than using the Swahili word *amebeba*. Some participants also produced several other Ngoni words, including *lijege* (Ngoni for 'bone'), which contrast with the Swahili term *fupa* and *liganga* (Ngoni for 'stone'), instead of for example *jiwe*.

An interesting question here arises as to whether the respondents were aware or not that these words are not Swahili. It seems quite likely that the learners here do not perceive strict boundaries between named languages or codes but rather are drawing on the linguistic resources they have available to them. Although, as will be seen later, this is a distinction that is seen as important from the perspective of standard language or monolingual language ideologies which dominate the education system, at least from a formal perspective. Ngoni and Swahili are closely related Bantu languages and both *lijege* (Ngoni for 'bone') and *liganga* (Ngoni for 'stone') could be well-formed Swahili words in terms of phonology and morphology. There is nothing in these words that would indicate that they are Ngoni rather than Swahili. It is interesting to consider, therefore, the ways in which the children are using the linguistic repertoires to which they have access. In the absence of any reason to do otherwise, they are using the lexical items they know to describe and refer to the images and events they see in the photos, which in this case reflect their (at least) bilingual language repertoires. However, it is also worth noting that the responses given by the participants were also typically short, usually one-word answers. This relates also to our observations about the nature of the pupil–teacher interactions in the classroom (a point to which we will return below).

The findings in School X contrast with those in School Y, where Swahili is the dominant language of the wider community. In School Y, the pupils describe all of the items in Swahili. Their descriptions were more elaborate and extensive, and they often did not need to be prompted to expand or provide further information. They were also capable of identifying most of the items in the pictures and to explain how

the items are used. As noted above, however, this was more of a qualitative study than a quantitative study given the small sample size we worked with for the photo elicitation tasks. However, the findings here mirror those of other studies and feed into our findings from the different methods used in the current study.

4.1.3 Findings from the focus group

A focus group discussion was held with pupils from School Z, where the language of the community is Sukuma. The group involved pupils in Grades Three and Four. Pupils start Grade One when they are 7 years old, and so when they are in Grade Three, they are 9 years old. The pupils in the focus group were aged 9 years and above. The pupils had been exposed to Swahili in school for about five years (this includes two years of pre-primary school). The focus group was made up of six pupils, three girls and three boys. The focus group discussions did not involve teachers or parents, because we wanted to try and create conditions in which the pupils could talk freely. The focus group was conducted in Swahili.

The questions prompted the pupils to talk about their language use in general and their ability to use Swahili in their studies. One of the main areas of discussion was which language they usually speak in the classroom. Two of the pupils said that they speak Swahili, and that this is because Swahili is our *lugha ya taifa* ('national language'). Pupil PZ3 (female, 16 years, Grade Four) said that they always speak Swahili at home. Pupils PZ4 (male, 14 years, Grade Three) and PZ6 (female, 10 years, Grade Three) reported speaking Sukuma at home, and PZ5 speaks both Sukuma and Swahili at home.

The fact that some pupils reported using Swahili exclusively at home in the discussion raises issues which are central to our study here. The school is located in a predominantly Sukuma-speaking area. It was observed by the researcher during the focus group discussion that the pupils spoke Swahili with what might be described as an influence from Sukuma. For example, one of them said, '*tunacháp-ág-wà*[8] *tuki-ongé-ág-à Kisúkúmà*' ('we are caned if we speak Sukuma'). That the pupil felt it was important—or perhaps expected—to report that they speak Swahili at home reflects broader assumptions and patterns relating to language use in education and widespread ideas that Swahili is what they *should* be using. If it is indeed the case that the pupils (and their parents) speak Swahili at home despite identifying as Sukuma, this

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[8] Luhende (2018: 56) describes [-ag-] as a typical habitual morpheme in Sukuma. This is also what we found in pupils' Swahili, as a feature of language transfer. It can also be seen that the Swahili used by these students exhibits tone (indicated by the accents on the vowels). While Swahili does not have tone, Sukuma does. Again, suggesting evidence of influence of the students' first language and from a translanguaging perspective, perhaps a blurring of boundaries between named codes.

would suggest that parents are making an active decision to support the use of Swahili in the home, perhaps in the interests of perceived educational benefit or to facilitate future employment opportunities. Indeed, one of the parents does report speaking Swahili at home (discussed below), although this does not seem to be a widespread practice amongst those who were interviewed. However, if it is not the case that the students speak Swahili at home and yet they feel the need to report that they do, this suggests wider pressures again to be perceived to be using Swahili at home, especially perhaps to the (Swahili-speaking) researcher and in the contexts in which the interview is taking place (i.e. at school).

The question of why pupils might feel the need to report using Swahili at home also links to the comment reported by two of the students that Swahili is the national language. The suggestion here is that Swahili is something to be proud of, that if you are patriotic and loyal to Tanzania, you would choose to use Swahili, even at home. Some of the students also reported being punished by their teachers if they speak Sukuma in the classroom, while others reported being forced to communicate in Swahili. Extract 2, from the focus group discussion, shows this in more detail:

Extract 2

Int: Mwingine? We unaongea lugha gani darasani?
       Another one? Which language do you speak in the classroom?

PZ3:   Kiswahili
       Swahili

Int: Kwa nini?
       Why?

PZ3:   Ni lugha ya taifa.
       It's the national language.

Int: Sababu nyingine? Semeni … kama walimu wanawakataza kuongea Kisukuma.
       Any other reason? Just speak out … if teachers stop you from speaking Sukuma.

PZ4:   Tukiongea Kisukuma tunachapwa.
       If we speak Sukuma we are caned.

Int: Mnachapwa kwa sababu mmeongea Kisukuma? Lakini si ndiyo lugha yenu, utambulisho wa asili yenu? Mlitangaziwa kwamba msiongee Kisukuma?
       You get caned because you speak Sukuma? But is it not your language, your ethnic identity? Were you informed that you should not speak Sukuma?

PZ4:   Hapana, wakati mwingine tunaongea tu Kisukuma, wengine wanaongea tu Kiswahili, na hawachapwi.
       No, on some occasions we just speak Sukuma, others just speak Swahili, and they do not get caned.

While one pupil reports speaking just Swahili at home and school, two report speaking both Sukuma and Swahili, while three say they speak only Sukuma by default at home. From Extract 3, pupil PZ6 (female, 10 years, Grade Three) admits that she

does not understand Swahili, and that is the reason why she prefers to use Sukuma, her community language.

Extract 3

PZ3:   Tunaongea Kiswahili.
         We speak Swahili.

Int: Na nyinyi?
         And you?

PZ4:   Wengine Kisukuma.
         Others speak Sukuma.

Int: Eti ee?
         Is that correct?

PZ4:   Ndiyo.
         Yes.

Int: Sasa … nyumbani huwa mnaongea lugha gani?
         So … which language do you speak at home?

PZ5:   Kisukuma na Kiswahili.
         Sukuma and Swahili.

Int: Na wewe, nyumbani mnaongea lugha gani?
         And you, which language do you speak at home?

PZ6:   Kisukuma.
         Sukuma.

Int: Kwa nini usiongee Kiswahili?
         Why don't you speak Swahili?

PZ6:   Sielewi.
         I don't understand.

As can be seen in Extract 4 below, a parent from School X, Parent PX1 (male, 41 years old, who did not complete primary school education), who grew up in the same village, has chosen to speak only Swahili with his children at home.

Extract 4

Int: Watoto wanaoanza darasa la kwanza hapa kijijini, wana ufahamu wa kutosha wa kutumia lugha ya Kiswahili darasani …?
         Are the children who start Grade One in this village sufficiently capable of using the Swahili language in the classroom …?

PX1:   Nafikiri hawana uwezo huo.
         I think they do not have that ability.

Int: Kwa nini unafikiri hivyo?
         Why do you think so?

PX1:   Kwa kuwa watoto wamejengeka kuongea lugha ya kienyeji kutoka kwa wazazi nyumbani. Labda akifikia hatua za juu baada ya kufundishwa shuleni.
         Because the children have grown up speaking the ethnic language from their parents at home. Maybe, after reaching higher levels after being taught at school.

He does not want his children to speak Ngoni, but he acknowledges the fact that in Rural Songea District the main language of the community is Ngoni. His own children only speak Swahili with him, but when they go out to play with their fellow children, and when they are with their mother and other community members, they speak Ngoni rather than Swahili.

In School Y, Teacher TY1 (female, 32 years old) had taught in Singida Region before being transferred to this school in Bagamoyo. According to her, she is happy that all the pupils in beginner classes in School Y have good mastery of Swahili, and she finds her classes active and enjoyable. She says, 'I think because many parents in the Coast Region speak so much Swahili, all the children have good mastery of Swahili'. She notes, however, that when she was in Singida Region, children used to speak Nyaturu, and their mastery of Swahili was quite poor. And because of this, her classes were difficult to conduct and at times the level of participation was quite low.

Extract 5

Int   Je, unadhani kwamba hawa watoto wanafahamu lugha ya Kiswahili kuweza kujifun-zia; hawa watoto wa Darasa la Kwanza?

Do you think those children have enough mastery of Swahili for learning; those Grade One children?

TY1   Ninafikiri hivyo kwa sababu hapa katika mkoa wa Pwani wazazi wengi wanaongea sana Kiswahili, nadhani wote wanafahamu vizuri Kiswahili.

I think that because here in the Coast Region many parents speak Swahili a lot, I think all have a good understanding of Swahili.

Int   Unadhani ni kwa nini kuna tofauti kati ya Mkoa wa Pwani na Singida ulikokuwepo kabla ya kuja hapa?

Why do you think there is a difference between the Coast Region and Singida where you had been before?

TY1   Kwa maoni yangu kuna tofauti, kwa sababu nilipokuwepo Mkoa wa singida nilikuwa nikipata shida sana katika ufundishaji. Wakati mwingine ilinipasa kutumia maneno ya lugha ya asili ili watoto waweze kunielewa. Lakini jambo hilo halipo hapa Mkoa wa Pwani.

In my opinion there is a difference, because when I was in Singida Region I used to have a lot of trouble teaching. There were times when I had to resort to words from the community language in order for the children to understand. But I don't see this happening here in the Coast Region.

Int   Kwa hiyo unadhani kwamba matumizi ya lugha ya Kiswahili ni tatizo kwa madarasa ya mwanzoni mkoani Singida?

So, do you think that the use of Swahili can be a problem in beginner classes in Singida Region?

TY1   Nadhani kwamba ilikuwa ni tatizo nilipokuwa kule. Sifahamu kwa sasa hali ikoje.

I think that it was a problem when I was there. I don't know what the situation is like now.

Int   Sawa, kwa hiyo watoto walikuwa wanaongea lugha gani zaidi wakiwa nyumbani?
        OK, so which language did the children use most while at home?

TY1   Kule Singida?
        In Singida?

Int   Ndiyo
        Yes

TY1   Zaidi Kinyaturu
        They used Nyaturu most.

Likewise, Parent PY1 (male, 43 years old, born in Kilimanjaro Region) from School Y has travelled to various regions in Tanzania. His children, who are in Grade Two and Four, speak Swahili at home because that is the language they have grown up with in the area of School Y. He admits that in Rural Kilimanjaro the use of Swahili in beginner classes is a problem because children are not used to it and tend to have had relatively low exposure to Swahili before starting school.

Extract 6

Int   Watoto wadogo huwa wanaongea lugha gani kule Moshi?
        What language do the little children use in Moshi?

PY1   Kama kule kwetu, huwa wanaongea tu lugha ya nyumbani. Ina maana, wengi kule wanaongea lugha ya asili, hata shuleni, au wakiwa wanacheza nyumbani. Lakini hapa hata watoto jirani wanapocheza huwa wanaongea Kiswahili. Kila mahali ni Kiswahili.
        Like at our home there there, he would just speak the home language. It means, there people most would speak the community language, even at school, or while playing at home. But here even when the neighbouring children play, they speak Swahili. Everywhere, it's Swahili.

Int   Kwa hiyo hali ikoje mkoani Kilimanjaro?
        So what is the situation like in Kilimanjaro Region?

PY1   Kwa sasa, kule Moshi, Mkoa wa Kilimanjaro, … wakiwa na bibi zao, babu, shangazi, na wajomba, wanaongea tu lugha ya asili …
        At the moment, in Moshi Kilimanjaro Region … when they are with their grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, they only speak the community language …

Int   Sasa, kwa wale watoto kule, hali inakuwaje wanapoanza tu Darasa la Kwanza? Huwa wanakumbana na ugumu wowotw katika matumizi ya Kiswahili, ambayo ndiyo maelekezo ya Sera kwamba kitumike wanapoanza shule?
        Now, those children there, what is the situation like when they just start Grade One? Do they face any difficulties using Swahili, which the policy directs to be used when they join school?

PY1   Wale watoto kule?
        The children there?

Int   Ndiyo
        Yes?

PY1   Wale watoto kule Moshi huwa wanapata ugumu wanapoanza shule, lakini pale tu mwanzoni.
Those children in Moshi face difficulties when they start schooling, but mostly just at the start.

4.2 Community members' and teachers' perceptions of the Swahili-only policy in the education

The second question driving the current study relates to community perceptions. It asks:

2 What are the perceptions of community members-cum-parents towards the Swahili only policy in the education of their children?

In all three schools, both parents and teachers were asked about how they perceive the suitability of the Swahili-only language in education policy for the children as opposed to if community languages were used in beginner classes. Six parents were interviewed, two from each location. Recall that two teachers were interviewed in both Schools X and Z and 1 teacher was interviewed in School Y. The parents were asked about language use in their families, and whether they thought their children were capable of using Swahili in their studies. Parent PTC1 (female, farmer, 40 years old) has completed primary education. She speaks Sukuma as her first language, but also speaks Swahili. She reported that the language most used at home is Sukuma. Her child, who is in Grade Two, knows Sukuma well but struggles with Swahili. She tries to teach him Swahili from time to time. However, she insists that Sukuma should not be used in the schools:

Extract 7

Int: Je mtoto wako aliye Darasa la Pili anafahamu Kiswahili vizuri?
Does your child who is in Grade Two know Swahili well?

PC1:   Hapana, anafahamu Kisukuma vizuri.
No, he knows Sukuma well.

Int: Je unadhani kwamba lugha ya Kisukuma inafaa iruhusiwe kutumika kwenye madarasa ya mwanzo?
Do you think the Sukuma language is suitable to be allowed for use in beginner classes?

PC1:   Haifai.
It is not suitable.

Int: Kwa nini unadhani hivyo?
Why?

PC1:   Kwa sababu hata mwalimu anapofundisha hafahamu mambo ya Kisukuma, ndiyo sababu anapaswa kutumia lugha ya taifa [Kiswahili].
Because even when the teacher teaches, he does not know Sukuma issues, it is why he should use the national language [Swahili].

A related view in terms of views on the use of community languages as MoI in remote rural areas is held by Parent PX1, who thinks that children should be taught in Swahili and not in the community languages. He proposes that, in cases where the communication is severely impacted, maybe teachers could consider using both languages:

> Kama ingewezekana, na ili watoto waweze kuelewa masomo yao haraka, labda wafundishwe kwa lugha zote mbili: zaidi kwa Kiswahili, lakini aweze kuchanganya kidogo na lugha ya asili.
> *… if it were possible, and in order for them (pupils) to be able to quickly understand the subjects, maybe they should be taught in both languages: mostly in Swahili language, but could be mixed slightly with the ethnic language.*

PX1 also claims that if teachers stick to the Swahili-only policy, '*Matokeo ni kwamba mwaalimu anaweza kuwa anafundisha upepo*' (The result is that the teacher may be teaching the air), meaning that what the teacher is saying may not be understood by the children.

   Teacher TX1 (male, 42 years old, born in Songea), who speaks Ngoni as his first language, admits that most children in their early years at school in the village have not mastered enough Swahili to be able to use it in their studies. He has also worked in Arumeru District in Arusha Region and thinks that the MoI situation in Arumeru is even worse than it is in Songea District. Although he starts by saying that Swahili should be used in the classroom, he also reports being open to—and perhaps himself using—a slightly more flexible approach in which the key aspect is being responsive to the learners' needs.

Extract 8

Int: Je una maoni gani juu ya lugha yenyewe ya kufundishia hasa kwa madarasa haya ya mwanzo?
       What opinion do you have about the MoI itself, especially for these beginner classes?

TX1   Naona hiki Kiswahili kingeendeshwa kama inavyotakiwa lakini siyo kwa mkazo wa juu zaidi kwa sababu pale mtoto anakuwa bado ana matatizo ya kujua kile Kiswahili. Kwa hiyo bado inabidi kwenda nae taratibu.
       I think that this Swahili should be used as required, but not so strictly; because at that stage the child still has problems regarding knowledge of Swahili. So there is still a need to move slowly with him or her.

Int: Mh, kwa hiyo katika kwenda nae taratibu unafikiri mwalimu afanyeje labda ili kumuelewesha mtoto?
       OK, so in going slowly, what do you think the teacher should perhaps do in order to make the child understand?

TX1   Ee, mwalimu ni kujitahidi tu kumsogeza mtoto akijue kile Kiswahili na kumpa mwongozo mwongozo fulani, mifano mifano fulani ambayo inaweza ikamsaidia aka-kifahamu Kiswahili.
       Yes, the teacher should committedly work hard to bring the child close so as to know Swahili, and giving her certain guidance, certain examples, which can help the child understand Swahili.

Likewise, even though Teacher TY1 admitted that children in Singida Region, where she had taught before, face difficulties with Swahili as the MoI, she does not accept

that a community language should be used in the education system. This position is also held by parent PY1 (male, 43 years old, first language Chagga), who admits that in Moshi Rural District children have poor mastery of Swahili. Despite this, he does not support the use of community languages in beginner classes, and thinks that teachers are to work harder to help the pupils master Swahili.

5 Discussion

Regarding the practicability of the use of Swahili in beginner classes in remote rural Tanzania, it was found that the overall performance in Grade Four national examinations in School X and School Z was not as good as that in School Y, where the MoI is also the language of the community. We saw, for example, that in School Y, in the whole period of five years, no single pupil repeated a year, while in School Z, grade repetition was the highest, followed by School X. Other variables, such as absenteeism in examinations which were also non-existent in School Y, the highest in School Z followed by School X are also likely to have had an impact on grade outcomes, students' engagement and overall experience of formal education.

Another aspect worth comparing is the quality of the pass grades in the NSFA. Of the three schools, it is School Y in Bagamoyo District which is first, with an aggregate average of 47.4 per cent, followed by School X (21.2 per cent), and last School Z with an average score of 20.8 per cent of B grade in the five years. In contrast, Schools X and Z had more D grades (a weak pass) than the D grade found in School Y. More specifically, over the period of five years (2015–19) an average of 24 per cent of students got a D grade in School X; whereas in School Z, 26.7 per cent got a D grade. However, in School Y, where Swahili is also the language of the community, only 4.4 per cent received a D grade. While other factors may compound the challenges that the learners encounter in their schooling, the impact of the MoI cannot be underestimated.

The classroom observations revealed the lessons in School X and School Z to be also somewhat dull, with only a handful of pupils participating in answering questions. Only a few of the more able pupils were nominated by teachers to answer questions in the classroom, thereby reducing the possibility for the other pupils to participate in classroom activities and interactions. Rather than reflecting a shortcoming on the part of the teachers or the learners, we argue here that this reflects the impact of the language in education policy which, by excluding the other community languages from the classroom, disadvantages a large proportion of the learners and acts to marginalise those with lower levels of competency, exposure or simply confidence in Swahili. Some parents and teachers, while recognising the issues that learners face in the classrooms, still think that Swahili should be the only language used in the beginner classes, including in remote rural Tanzania, as reflected in the excerpts above.

While parents and teachers recognised that translanguaging between Swahili and community languages does exist, they suggested that this should only really be permitted in cases of failures in communication. That is, these other languages should be used as a 'last resort' rather than being regular parts of the daily interactions in the school setting and the classroom in particular. Dixon and Lewis (2008, 46) also reported similar views from teachers and parents in this regard:

> It is also not surprising that if teachers have narrow views of literacy, these are shared by parents. Many parents have also been educated in a system in which school literacy is valued and have little sense of the value of their own non-school literacy practices.

According to Gee (2001: 537), cited in Dixon and Lewis (2008: 42–43), 'schools fail to take the literacy practices of a range of communities into account' because their discourses are not the 'socially accepted ways of thinking, speaking and acting'. Indeed, in some of the explanations provided above it appears that neither teachers nor parents fully appreciate the resources that children take with them to schools and, more so, to the classrooms. Parents and teachers may well see the potential benefit of allowing a wider range of languages to be used and encouraged in formal educational contexts. At the same time, however, they often also acknowledge that this is in many ways impractical and that there are other factors which impact on language use and the language in education policy in the country. While parents may agree that the use of other community members might help their children in the short term in relation to transition into formal education, they also recognise that exams take place in Swahili and that the children will ultimately benefit from developing a high level of competency in Swahili for educational purposes, as well as for future employment purposes and for wider communication. This is the tension which we see replicated across much of the continent (see also Bagwasi & Costley, this volume) and indeed much of the multilingual world.

Parents consider future employment and wider benefits when it comes to making a decision on investment in language learning and only 'put efforts towards an investment that is likely to yield returns', as noted by Mapunda and Rosendal (2021). For these teachers and parents, community languages are not seen as offering substantial future prospects, and certainly not when compared to Swahili. While parents did share positive views and attitudes towards the other community languages, these were linked primarily to identity, sense of belonging and the role of these languages in the community and particularly within the home.

6 Concluding remarks and recommendations

The current study addressed two questions with regard to the position of Swahili in the language in education policy in Tanzania. Although Swahili is the official language, there are approximately 150 languages spoken in Tanzania. The first question

related to the practicability of using Swahili in remote rural Tanzania. The second question related to the perceptions of community members towards the Swahili-only language in education policy.

The key observation in this regard is that, while it is true that Swahili is known in many parts of the country, there are settings where the language is used to a lesser extent and where pupils, upon entering school, do not have a strong command of Swahili. Our data suggest that Swahili does not support the learning of all pupils in their early years of education in Tanzania, particularly those in remote rural schools where Swahili is not the language of the wider community.

Differences in attainment were reflected in the results from the Grade Four assessments as well as levels of grade repetition. However, here we have focused on the broader views, attitudes and experiences of learners, teachers and community members in relation to this language in education policy. As such, the insights from the photo elicitation task showed us that the students moved fluidly between Swahili and Ngoni during the task. In the focus group discussions (which were conducted with somewhat older pupils, who by this age had acquired more Swahili), pupils reported using Swahili and Sukuma—in some cases in different contexts. Some pupils noted that they would get caned—or threatened—if they used Sukuma in the classroom, as teachers were training to enforce a Swahili-only language classroom environment. However, in the interviews, both teachers and parents reported that the children really struggled with Swahili, particularly in the early years. They acknowledged that the Swahili-only classroom brings with it obstacles in terms of learning and requires children to learn both the language and the subject matter. Despite this, teachers and parents still considered it important that Swahili was used as the main language of instruction, acknowledging that this would be the language of examinations and that the learners would need these language skills later in life, too. Broader notions relating to Swahili being the 'language of the nation' were reflected amongst teachers, parents and pupils.

Finally, in terms of recommendations, we suggest that language in education policies should show an appreciation of the value of community languages in education in Tanzania and the potential for community languages to enhance learners' experiences of education. We suggest that rather than focusing on the respective merits of an English-dominant or a Swahili-dominant language in education policy, we should consider the benefits of a policy which actively encourages and supports the use of a wider range of languages in education. This would in fact be a more accurate reflection of the translanguaging practices that do take place in the classroom, albeit informally. And we believe this would also further provide a more supportive and effective educational experience for all. Failure to do this will likely continue to marginalise and disadvantage those students who speak languages other than Swahili.

Acknowledgements

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