

Language Policy for Education and Development in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines language policy in Tanzanian schools and its effect on education, equality and economic development. I begin with an overview of language policy from colonization to the present, mapping out the relative positions of English and Swahili in education over the years. I go on to explore the failings of educational language policy as it now stands, focusing on the jarring transition from Swahili-medium primary school to English-medium secondary school. I highlight the most common arguments on both sides of the debate between English and Swahili in secondary schools. I then delve into the field of language economics, illustrating the procedure for finding the private return on language skills. I develop a model of an economy with excess demand for one particular language, applying it to the case of English in urban Tanzania. Although there is currently no data available to test this model I propose a basic outline for future research in the area. I go on to consider the macro effects of improved English education on the economy as a whole. Finally, I return to the question of how to fix the sequence of language education in Tanzanian schools in order to improve content learning and equity, guided by suggestions by Batibo (1990). I then evaluate the policy alternatives based on their expected effect on the quality of education and the distribution of income in Tanzania, and suggest some small measures the government could take if it chose to maintain the status quo.*

1. OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

Tanzania, like many African countries, boasts a wealth of indigenous languages. At last count, over 127 languages were spoken in this country of 37 million on the east coast of Africa (Gordon 2005). Tanzania differs from some of its neighbors in that a lingua franca, Swahili, is spoken as a second language by a vast majority of the population and is a straightforward choice for a national language. Swahili is a Bantu language in structure and vocabulary, making it closely related to many of the country's local languages, but it also

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draws a great deal of its vocabulary from Arabic due to the influences of coastal trade. Swahili is the mother tongue of the Swahili people living along the coast and in Zanzibar, as well as of the younger generations of city dwellers. An estimated 30 million rural Tanzanians are second-language speakers, using their local language at home but Swahili for cross-tribal communication (Gordon 2005). In 2004 the National Kiswahili Council estimated that 99 percent of all Tanzanians spoke Swahili as at least a second language (Brock-Utne 2005).¹

A common educational dilemma in multilingual African countries is what to choose as the language of instruction. In the absence of an ethnically neutral lingua franca, any choice will be seen to favor certain ethno-linguistic groups at the expense of all others. According to Alidou (2004), this was not a problem prior to colonization, when each community used its own language to educate its children. Education across ethno-linguistic groups was not necessary until the arrival of colonialism and Western education, when formal schools were introduced and children who spoke different languages were often placed in the same classroom. The problem of multilingualism in the classroom had a simple solution for most colonizers: simply teach in the colonial language. In Tanzania², however, the choice of a colonial language was less obvious. Swahili, widely spoken by the arrival of the colonizers, could be used as easily as the colonial language to bridge linguistic gaps in the classroom. Today, Tanzania and Ethiopia are the only countries on the continent to use

¹ "Kiswahili" is the Swahili word for the language. The "Ki-" prefix indicates that the word belongs to the noun class that includes languages. (Other examples are "Kiingereza" for English and "Kichaga" for the Chaga language. In contrast, "Mswahili" indicates a Swahili person and "Uswahili" the region where Swahili is spoken.

² The United Republic of Tanzania forms the union of Tanganyika, as the mainland was known during British colonial rule and following independence, and Zanzibar, a large island off the coast. The two territories united in 1964. In order to avoid confusion I will refer to the people inhabiting the region that is now mainland Tanzania as "Tanzanians," regardless of the time period in question. Note that prior to colonization they would have identified themselves by tribe or village, and that during the colonial period they were officially thought of as "German East Africans" or "Tanganyikans."

national languages rather than colonial ones throughout the primary school system (Alidou 2004).

Nonetheless, Tanzania has not escaped the medium-of-instruction problems plaguing so many other African countries. Although Swahili is used in primary education, English is the medium of instruction at the secondary and post-secondary levels. There is an ongoing debate over whether this is the optimal amount of English in Tanzanian schools, with compelling arguments for both English and Swahili as primary media of instruction; this controversy will be addressed in the following sections.

Swahili had its first taste of official status during the German colonial rule beginning in the late seventeenth century, when it was designated for nationwide use in education and colonial administration. After some controversy over whether German or Swahili should be used as the medium of instruction in schools, Swahili was eventually chosen, although the colonial government's motivation for this decision has been called into question. Rather than desiring Tanzanians to learn in a language they spoke because it would advance their education, did the administration perhaps hope to prevent Tanzanians from learning German and thereby acquiring a sense of equality with their colonizers? (Roy-Campbell 2001: 41). The most straightforward explanation for their decision is that since the goal of the government schools was to prepare Tanzanians for employment in the colonial bureaucracy, using the convenient lingua franca already spoken by nearly all potential employees both in schools and in colonial administration was most practical. This promotion of Swahili as a language of education and administration during German colonial rule was instrumental in the language's spread as a lingua franca in Tanzania (Roy-Campbell 2001: 42).

When the British government took over administration of German East Africa following World War I, Swahili was preserved as the language of instruction in the first five years of primary school, but the medium in last three years of primary and all of secondary school was switched to English (Rubagumya 1990). Colonial administration was also now carried out in English. Roy-Campbell (2001) argues that the British administration had a concrete plan to train a small minority of elite Tanzanians to assist in colonial administration, while for the rest of the population the aim was to maintain very low levels of education. This could be seen in the “Ten Year Development and Welfare Plan for Tanganyika,” put out by the colonial government, which stated that ideally 100 percent of the population would attend primary school and only 4 percent would attend secondary school (Roy-Campbell 2001). This proposed imbalance more or less holds today, with secondary school enrollment still drastically lower than primary school enrollment and among the lowest in Africa at 5 to 6 percent in 2000 (World Bank Group).

In 1954 the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the political party that fought for independence from British rule, used Swahili as a tool for uniting the different ethnic groups it sought to represent (Rubagumya 1990). Tanganyika gained independence in 1961, with Julius Nyerere, a former secondary-school teacher and founder of TANU, as its first leader. His vision was of a country united under *ujamaa*, or “familyhood,” a political philosophy of socialism and self-reliance. Nyerere adopted an aggressive nation-building campaign that included promoting Swahili as the language of public life and transforming the educational curriculum of government schools to focus on the Tanzanian national experience (Miguel 2001). In a book entitled “Education for Self-Reliance,” Nyerere criticized the Western view of education prevailing in Tanzania following independence:

We have not until now questioned the basic system of education which we took over at the time of Independence. We have never done that because we

have never thought about education except in terms of obtaining teachers, engineers, administrators, etc. Individually and collectively we have in practice thought of education as a training for the skills required to earn high salaries in the modern sector of our economy. (Nyerere 1968: 267, cited in Smith 1990)

Under education for self-reliance, Tanzania would transform the educational system into a force for the common good, oriented toward rural life and removed from the control of colonialism (Smith 1990). The establishment of Swahili as a national language was instrumental in the move towards self-reliance in general. But despite Nyerere's desire to re-imagine education through the new lens of self-reliance, English remained the language of instruction in secondary schools.

During the 1970s it seemed that policymakers were on the brink of implementing a switch from English to Swahili in secondary schools. A 1978 study commissioned by the National Kiswahili Council (Mlama and Matteredu) heightened concerns about existing policies and expectations of change (Lwaitama and Rugemalira 1990). In February of 1982 the Presidential Commission on Education, appointed by Nyerere, recommended that a change from English to Swahili in secondary classrooms be effected starting in 1985 (Lwaitama and Rugemalira 1990).

Not long after these recommendations were made, policymakers were already beginning to change their minds. The Ministry of Education released an official, if vague, statement in 1984: "Both languages, English and Kiswahili, will be used as media of instruction. English will be improved at all levels of education" (Wizara ya Elimu 1984: 19, cited in Lwaitama and Rugelamira 1990: 37). Later that year, Julius Nyerere announced in a speech that English was needed in secondary schools in order to encourage Tanzanians to learn and value the language (Lwaitama and Rugelamira 1990).

It is unclear what motivated this political change of heart. Some speculated that the government was wary of switching to Swahili because it might increase the demand for secondary education, which the government would not have been able to accommodate (Lwaitama and Rugelamira 1990). Given the political unrest this imbalance would cause, it is plausible that policymakers in the 1980s were motivated by such fears. However, the hesitation to adopt Swahili as a language of instruction at higher levels may also have been based on the prohibitively high cost of developing educational materials in the language. This has been a major factor in the maintenance of colonial languages in the educational systems of many other African countries, most of which are very poor (Yahya-Othman 1990).

Today, the structure of official language use in Tanzanian education is much as it was following independence: Swahili is the language of instruction in primary schools, English in secondary schools. According to the national website:

The main feature of Tanzania's education system is the bilingual policy, which requires children to learn both Kiswahili and English. English is essential, as it is the language which links Tanzania and the rest of the world through technology, commerce and also administration. The learning of the Kiswahili enables Tanzania's students to keep in touch with their cultural values and heritage. English is taught as compulsory subject in the primary education whereas at post primary education is the medium of instruction. With regard the Kiswahili, it is the medium of instruction at primary education while at tertiary education is taught as compulsory subject at secondary education and as option at tertiary education. (United Republic of Tanzania)

In the 2001 Education Sector Development Programme released by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, "Use of English as media of instruction" is listed under the strengths of secondary education (United Republic of Tanzania 2001: 63). This seems to indicate that any reservations the government may have had about the educational effects of using English in secondary schools have been assuaged. However, as we will see, the

function of English as a medium of instruction has also led to serious failings on the part of the educational system.

2. ENGLISH OR SWAHILI?

Although Julius Nyerere has been praised as a great leader for Tanzania, his nation-building credited with forestalling political tensions and allowing for a peaceful transition from colony to republic (Miguel 2004), he is now paradoxically criticized both for his failure to bring Swahili into secondary classrooms as proposed in 1982 and for his failure to establish English as the medium of instruction at earlier stages of education. In the summer of 2006 I spent nine weeks in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest city and former capital. Before I went I had read about the use of Swahili in Tanzania, particularly the role of language policy in post-independence nation building (Abdulaziz 1971). I expected most Tanzanians to agree with the view I had encountered in the literature that the maintenance of Swahili as the language of instruction in primary schools and the expansion of its use in public life had benefited the country. However, the four people who volunteered opinions to me said that they felt the use of Swahili in primary schools was a grave mistake, compromising Tanzania's position in the international academic, scientific and business worlds. One friend of mine, a student at the University of Dar es Salaam who worked as a seamstress for two years after completing primary school in order to afford secondary-school fees, said she felt she was at a sharp disadvantage in the job market compared to similarly educated people from neighboring countries such as Kenya and Uganda who had learned English earlier.

On the other hand, the academy of linguists and educators seems to believe the government has failed by maintaining English as the medium of secondary instruction.

Despite the fact that no sub-Saharan African country has so far used an African language as the medium of instruction at the secondary level, there has been great hope that Tanzania might be the first (Yahya-Othman 1990). Academics argue that the government should at the very least develop a bilingual policy for secondary schools, if not switch entirely to Swahili, for both political and instrumental reasons (cf Roy-Campbell 1997).

It has been well documented that students in secondary schools are not prepared for the use of English as a medium of instruction. Teachers and students alike struggle to express themselves clearly in a language they have not mastered. Swahili often becomes the *de facto* language of instruction as students and teachers switch to the more familiar language for clarification and discussion (Roy-Campbell et al 1997). A 1978 study by Mlama and Matteredu found that the standards of English education are falling and that students perform much better under the medium of Swahili. An essay exam given through this study yielded thoughtful and concise responses when the students were asked to use Swahili, but disjointed and nearly unintelligible responses to the same questions by the same students when asked to use English (Roy-Campbell 1997). The Criper and Dodd Report made a similarly bleak observation in 1984:

Throughout their secondary school career little or no other subject information is getting across to about 50% of the pupils in our sample. Only about 10% of Form IV's³ are at a level at which one might expect English medium education to begin. (Criper and Dodd 1984: 14, cited in Rugemalira et al 1990: 28)

In addition, this study estimated that up to 75 percent of teaching, at least at the early stages of secondary education, was being done in Swahili rather than English (Rugemalira et al 1990). Often students and teachers employ code switching, the practice of alternating

³ The lower secondary cycle runs from Form I to Form IV, at which point students take an O-level examination. If they pass, they continue on to Forms V and VI in upper secondary school. Most schools do not offer all six grades of instruction (Lassibille et al 1998).

between two languages to ease communication, rather than relying entirely on Swahili. Cleghorn and Rollnick (2002) argue that code switching in the classroom may be a fruitful path towards more effective bilingual education. They suggest that small interjections in the local language such as “isn’t that so?” or “you know?” serve to recapture the attention of learners, even if the phrases themselves carry no content. In addition, the local language can be used to clarify details of the lesson that were not understood when explained in English. However, the authors mention that the positive effects of code switching in African classrooms are often limited by the belief held by teachers and students that code switching is unacceptable and by the presence in some classrooms of inspectors intent on upholding English-only policies.

Many students and teachers in secondary schools have found ways of getting around the English language barrier in the classroom, but assignments and tests are still written in English, handicapping students with low proficiency. In particular, national exit exams from secondary school are conducted in English, not Swahili. This poses serious problems for many students—both students who have failed to pick up English despite the best efforts of their teachers and students who have been allowed to conduct much of their education in Swahili by more permissive instructors, neglecting their English instruction. An inadequate command of English, regardless of the level of understanding of the subject matter, could cause a student to fail her national exams and prevent her from graduating and moving on to university. Not surprisingly, students do perform very poorly on the national exams and rates of failure are high: Nearly 50 percent of Form IV leavers failed their national exams in English in 1986 (Yahya-Othman 1990).

The current educational language policy can be criticized for economic reasons as well. Competence in English can be regarded as a form of human capital⁴ useful to them in seeking employment, where the return on investment in English is a wage premium (or, perhaps, access to higher-paying job categories that require knowledge of English.) Immigrants from Kenya, Uganda and Zambia who were exposed to English at a younger age are often more qualified to take high-paying jobs in Tanzania because of their English skills, thereby displacing Tanzanians who would be qualified if only they spoke better English. There seems to be a clear pattern of higher-prestige jobs tending to employ English speakers, although we cannot be sure of the direction of causation. According to a sociolinguistic study by Polomé (1980), shopkeepers, clerks, professionals, managers/administrators and teachers in Tanzania all tend to be trilingual in the vernacular, Swahili and English. Unskilled laborers and farmers, on the other hand, tend to speak their own vernacular and some Swahili, but no English (Polomé 1980: 111).

Many wealthier Tanzanian parents send their children to private schools, as well as to government and private schools in these neighboring countries, in order to have their children exposed to English-medium education in primary school (Mazrui 1997). Unfortunately, this has the effect of placing valuable human capital (if indeed it exists in the form of English) in the hands of those who are already privileged, perpetuating inequality.

There are strong arguments in favor of both expanding the role of Swahili in secondary schools and expanding the role of English in primary schools. These arguments can be organized according to economic, social and educational motivations. If Swahili is instituted as the language of instruction in secondary schools, it is almost inevitable that transfer of information and therefore the quality of secondary education will improve. This

⁴ In economics, “human capital” refers to the set of skills a person has acquired through education and training, which allow her to be more productive and receive greater compensation in the labor market.

makes sense intuitively: If children are not learning well in a language they do not understand, try teaching in a language they do understand. From an economic standpoint, improved education will lead to a more productive population and, ultimately, economic growth. Educational outcomes in general will probably improve as students are less likely to be discouraged in their pursuit of education or to fail the national exams, which in this scenario would be conducted in Swahili. Finally, there may be socio-cultural benefits to prioritizing an African language over a Western one. The adoption of Swahili as the medium of instruction at both primary and secondary levels of education would have enormous symbolic power, representing a final casting-off of colonial chains and acceptance of African culture. Although this may not affect the life of the average Tanzanian as obviously as a change in the daily wage, it may have value nonetheless.

On the other hand, if English is introduced to students earlier and emphasized more in primary school, students may be better prepared to learn entirely in English when they reach secondary school. A stronger foundation in English would allow students both a heightened understanding of subject matter that is presented in English and the tools necessary for completing the national exams. They would also arguably enjoy broadened labor-market opportunities and higher wages given their skills in English. Finally, the labor-market benefits of English skills would ideally accrue in equal amounts to anyone at a given level of education, and would not depend on whether they had attended government or private schools. There would be great social benefits to having the human capital of English distributed more equitably across socioeconomic classes.

3. THE MARKET VALUE OF LANGUAGE

Studies of labor market conditions in Western countries have indicated that there can be a wage premium on knowledge of language. To understand this, we can follow the simple language market model described by Carliner (1981). Imagine an economy where two languages are spoken, A and B; there are A_n native speakers of A and B_n native speakers of B. Each worker would prefer to work in his own native language, but will invest in the other language if he stands to gain through a wage premium. Suppose that because A is more useful in tourism and business, the demand for speakers of A exceeds the supply, A_n , when the wage for jobs requiring A is equal to the wage for jobs requiring B (native speakers of B have no incentive to invest in learning A). In order to reach equilibrium, the wage for A jobs must rise until enough B-speakers learn language A to bring supply up to demand. Therefore, there is a wage premium on language A relative to language B.

Through observation and conjecture alone, the situation in urban Tanzania seems to roughly mirror this simple language model. There is a relatively high demand for English and there are very few fluent speakers, whereas the supply of fluent Swahili speakers is sufficient to meet the demand (I use “fluent” here rather than “native” because Swahili is the second language for most Tanzanians, but is usually spoken with native-speaker proficiency). Because of the low supply of and high demand for English speakers, there is most likely a significant wage premium on English. It is even possible that language markets in Tanzania are not currently at equilibrium; the supply of competent English speakers may not actually equal demand even at relatively high wages.

In a survey of the relationship between language and wages, Barry Chiswick and Paul Miller (1995) look at the earnings of immigrants as related to their language skills in several countries. They find that the wage premium on fluency in the destination language is as high

as 16.9 percent (in the United States) and is also considerable in countries such as Australia, Canada and Israel.

Carliner's (1981) study of wage premiums in Canada yielded similar results. The study made use of 1971 census data placing respondents into eight language groups: monolingual English, monolingual French, monolingual other, bilingual English (where English is the native language but French is also spoken), bilingual French, bilingual other (where there is some other native language, but English and French are also spoken), nonnative English (where there is some other native language, but English is also spoken), and nonnative French. Separate calculations were done for five areas in Canada, encompassing both English- and French-speaking regions. The subjects were men between the ages of 18 and 64 who worked more than 34 hours a week and more than 26 weeks a year. Carliner conducted a regression analysis with hourly wage as the independent variable and years of school completed, years of work experience, dummy variables for the 8 language categories, and dummy variables for men living in big cities, rural non-farm areas, and rural farm areas.

Carliner's study presents a good template for an analysis of the market for English in Tanzania. Robust data on language characteristics are not currently available, due to the omission of language-related categories in the census. However, if sufficient data can be gathered a similar regression could indicate the premium on English in Tanzanian labor markets. A survey would need to include questions about the language spoken at home, yearly income and hours worked per year, years of schooling, years of work experience, and geographic location. A proxy for socio-economic status, such as level of education achieved by parents, might also be a useful variable to include. Separate analyses could be conducted

for major cities such as Dar es Salaam and Arusha, suburbs around these cities, and remote rural areas to estimate an independent wage premium for each geographic region.

Looking back at our model of language markets, we can reason that as the supply of fluent English speakers increases (brought on, in our case, by a change in educational language policy), the wage premium on English is driven down. The supply of English speakers will increase as long as the premium is greater than the cost of acquiring English; if the cost is zero, the wage for English jobs will be driven down to that of Swahili jobs. In reality, the cost is not zero; for most Tanzanians English is acquired through education, which involves both an opportunity cost in the form of the wages foregone while attending school and an accounting cost in the form of school fees, currently charged for government secondary schools. Therefore, there is a cost associated with acquiring English. By our model, the lower that cost, the smaller the gap between the wage for English jobs and Swahili jobs. If the provision of English is made more efficient, with more English provided to each student per year of education “paid for,” it follows that the cost of acquiring a given level of English will decrease. Therefore, more effective teaching of English could potentially lead to a narrowing of the gap between wages for English-speakers and non-English-speakers.

4. ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGLISH

Is English really important enough to the average Tanzanian to justify significant spending to improve English education in government schools? In an article on language and economic development, Bruthiaux (2000: 287) argues that “What is striking both in research findings and in anecdotal evidence is how relatively few individuals in most developing societies (including former British colonies such as India) ever come into contact

with English or have any immediate need for it in their day-to-day life.” It is likely true that the demand for English in rural Tanzania is much lower than in urban centers such as Dar es Salaam and Arusha, where tourism and business thrive. To the average child living in a rural village, the labor market opportunities of the city may seem impossibly distant. Nonetheless, many urban dwellers of working age do come from rural areas: Every young adult I knew well in Dar es Salaam had grown up in a small, rural village and only moved to the city after either graduating or leaving school. Young adults in particular often migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities. It seems unjust to deny rural children the skills they would need if they chose to set out for the city simply because the vast majority of them will not do so. Why promote social and geographic immobility? On the other hand, perhaps it is unwise to devote resources to developing a skill so remote from so vast a majority of the population.

There are no large-scale studies of language attitudes in Tanzania, but Josef Schmied (1985) presents a small-scale study in which he surveyed 70 Tanzanians on their attitudes to English. He finds that many of the respondents do not feel that “English is useful for getting a better job.” His explanation for this is that job offers are often based on certificates of school completion, which indirectly imply some level of English knowledge. At the same time, most school graduates expect to be employed in state industries and government organizations, which operate in Swahili, rather than the private sector. On the other hand, most respondents supported the claim that “Only a sufficient knowledge of English can keep science and learning in Tanzania in touch with world-wide developments.” The idea that science, in particular, is less viable through Swahili is widespread, and it is often a reason cited for switching to English-medium education. However, with sufficient resources (which are not trivial to muster) I believe this would prove to be untrue. Swahili has no inherent

incapability to express the ideas of science; although some words may be missing, they can be borrowed as many other words in the language have been, or coined as many other languages have done. As an example of lexical borrowing, words ending in “-ology” or “-ics” in English receive the suffix “-ia” in Swahili. “Phonology” becomes *fonolojia*, “etymology” becomes *etimolojia* and “physics” becomes *fizikia* (Mwansoko 1990: 137). At the same time, it is likely true that in order to participate in the international exchange of ideas, Tanzanian scientists, like all other scientists, need to know English.

In a counterexample to Bruthiaux’s claim that English skills are often irrelevant in developing countries, Frances Vavrus (2002) recounts how she began a teaching position in the rural Kilimanjaro region convinced that English as a medium of secondary instruction was harmful to education and came out of it with a profound understanding of the economic hardships of the region and the hope that young people place in their knowledge of English. She presents excerpts from interviews and focus groups in which Tanzanians express their views that English will help them interact with the rest of the world, succeed in higher education and garner respect from their peers. Respondents also noted that Tanzania as a country relies on English for economic success, particularly in sectors such as tourism.

As one secondary student said,

Because our economy is small and our strength as a nation is small, we can’t rely on Swahili to be a national language. [...] Tanzania is a country that has an abundance of traditional things that haven’t yet been destroyed when compared to all the other countries in the world. However, because of the language problem, the tourists who come here aren’t shown these [traditional] things or the proper welcome, but how can you communicate with them? You can’t. They don’t know Swahili and you don’t know English or German or French. (Vavrus 2003: 391)

This student brings up the question of whether greater language skills in the population can be beneficial to Tanzania as a whole as well as to private citizens. She specifically talks about

Tanzania's capability to offer a warm welcome to visitors, which she believes is constrained by poor knowledge of English.

Tourism accounted for 28 percent of Tanzania's total exports in 2005 (Overseas Development Institute). It is clearly an important industry for Tanzania's economy, as well as being a booming industry internationally over the last half century. An industry workforce with strong English skills would contribute to higher productivity and increased demand for tourism. Some economists believe that tourism has the potential to reduce poverty and increase welfare in many African countries. For Tanzania, they write:

Tourism has a substantial positive impact on GDP, total welfare, exports and tax revenue. Urban areas will benefit more from tourism expansion than rural areas unless government invests in improving infrastructure—under this [government investment] scenario the distributional impact of tourism expansion disproportionately benefits the rural areas. (ODI 2006: 3)

In addition, an English-speaking population might be more likely to attract and retain foreign direct investment to Tanzania. Although language is certainly not the main investment criterion, a workforce proficient in English would likely make the country more attractive to foreign investors and businesses. Foreign direct investment has been a crucial factor in the rapid development of many economies, particularly in East Asia. Attracting more foreign direct investment to Tanzania would provide net benefits to the country in the long run.

The private benefits from returns to language as human capital are likely to also benefit the country as a whole. A workforce with higher levels of human capital is more productive, because each individual with the desired English skills can get work done that someone without those skills could not. Knowledge of English is unlikely to increase productivity in most sectors, such as agriculture and industry, which account for 43 percent

and 17 percent of gross domestic product. However, it is likely to increase productivity in any industry that relies on international communication (particularly, as mentioned before, tourism and business). The service sector, which includes these domains, accounts for 40 percent of GDP.

Productivity leads to economic growth, a major goal for a developing country. Increased knowledge of English may not have a significant impact on productivity and growth in the economy as a whole, but it may allow certain currently expanding industries to flourish. Once again, language is not the most important form of human capital, and its effect may be minimal compared to the effect of increased secondary school enrollment, for example. Nonetheless, English education could be expected to contribute at least somewhat to an increase in growth and the standard of living.

Finally, in order to assess whether English is a valuable asset to Tanzania, it is important to know who will be benefiting from potential improvements in English education. Currently, secondary schooling is a privilege only a very small portion of the school-age population can afford. Although the government strives for universal primary enrollment, secondary enrollment is not a priority. In 2000, gross primary enrollment was 66 percent of the age group (by 2004 it had risen to approximately 100 percent), while gross secondary enrollment was only 6 percent of the age group for males and 5 percent for females.⁵ This is extremely low for sub-Saharan Africa in general, and in fact Tanzania has

⁵ The gross enrollment rate is calculated by finding the number of children enrolled at the given level of education divided by the total population in that age group. Gross enrollment can therefore exceed 100 percent. Net enrollment is calculated by finding the number of children *of the appropriate age group* enrolled at the given level of education and dividing by the total number of children of that age group. Data for net secondary enrollment were not available from the World Bank.

lower rates of secondary enrollment than all of its geographic neighbors (World Bank Group).⁶

Although a stronger foundation in English in primary school would not be sufficient to raise secondary school enrollment, it might help to reduce student discouragement when faced with the demands of English instruction in secondary school. In addition, students who are not exposed to English in their daily lives are currently at a sharp disadvantage compared to those who are, and these students will tend to come from less educated families (Mazrui 1997). In this way, insufficient English preparation might disadvantage the already disadvantaged in that they do not have outside contact with English to help them succeed in English-medium classes and exams. Therefore, the distributional effects of improving English education would likely be to improve social equity, giving rural and urban, rich and poor children alike similar chances of succeeding in secondary school. (It is unlikely that enrollment would surge up among poorer children, because the single most important factor in staying out of secondary school is the fees that must be paid and the crucial wages that could be earned from working rather than studying. However, equality of opportunity would be improved.) Note that just as improved English education at lower levels might increase a student's chances of attending and succeeding in secondary school, so would a switch to Swahili-medium instruction at that level. Either policy alternative has distributional benefits when compared to the status quo.

⁶ For the year 2000: In Kenya gross secondary enrollment was approximately 39 percent for males and 37 for females, in Uganda 18 percent and 14 percent, in Zambia 20 percent and 17 percent, in Mozambique 8 percent and 5 percent, in Malawi 36 percent and 27 percent, in Dem. Rep. Congo 24 percent and 12 percent, and in Rwanda 11 percent for both. Data were not available for Burundi in 2000, but in 2004 the figures were 14 and 10; the average for sub-Saharan Africa in 2004 was 33 for males and 26 for females (World Bank Group).

5. IMMERSION AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Given the resources, it would almost certainly be in Tanzania's interest to improve English education in government schools. Language immersion programs used in other parts of the world set good examples and seem to have been successful. Genesee (1995) describes second-language immersion programs in Canada, identifying several types of immersion. These include early immersion, both partial and total, where the second language is used for either some or all of the instruction starting anywhere between grade one and grade four; delayed immersion, where the second language is the medium of instruction in fourth or fifth grade; and late immersion, where intensive use of the second language is left until the end of elementary school or the beginning of secondary school. During times where the second language is not the medium of instruction, it is taught in a core second-language curriculum. Genesee found that students in early, delayed and late immersion programs displayed no negative effects on the development of their first language (here, English), while immersion students showed higher proficiency in all aspects of the second language (French) than their core-curriculum peers. In addition, immersion students displayed the same level of proficiency in subjects such as math and science as students in non-immersion programs.

The current system in Tanzania could be thought of as "late immersion," where English, the second language, is a subject in primary school and then the sole medium of instruction in secondary school. But the system is failing. According to Genesee, most late immersion programs in Canada are preceded by either core second-language instruction throughout elementary school or by special preparatory courses one or two years prior to immersion. It is clear that whatever core second-language instruction students are receiving in primary schools in Tanzania is not sufficient. Before embarking on the costly task of

redesigning the primary school curriculum, it might be beneficial to look into immersion bridge programs allowing primary-school leavers to prepare for English-medium instruction in secondary school.

Finally, small experimental programs could offer valuable information about the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching English. In order to draw sound conclusions about the effectiveness of such a program, enrollment would have to be randomly assigned. The English proficiency of students in the bridge program would be compared to that of the control group. Ideally, with random assignment, no other variables would complicate the results and any difference in proficiency levels could be attributed directly to the immersion variable.

6. THE PATH FORWARD

In an article on the failures of English language teaching in Tanzanian primary schools, Batibo (1990) suggests four paths to improvement that policymakers might take. These depend on three variables: whether English is expected to remain the medium of instruction in secondary schools over the next 15 years, whether English education needs to be intensified, and whether English should be taught to all students or only those who plan to continue in their education and make use of English later in life.

If English remains the medium of instruction, the clear goal is to give students a stronger foundation in English at the primary level, preparing them for the demands of English in secondary school. Batibo suggests two paths; in the first, students begin learning English in their third year and continue with it for five years. In the second, students begin English in their fifth year and continue for three years. Batibo labels the first model the “extensive” approach, where English education is initiated early and spread over several

years. Its advantages include greater exposure to English and cognitive advantage due to the early start; its disadvantages include the cost of teachers and materials, the shortage of qualified teachers, and the fact that some children in remote rural areas are still developing their writing and reading skills in Swahili by the third year of primary. He also suggests that teachers specialize in English in the later primary years rather than following the standard primary school model in which all teachers teach all subjects.

The second model is the “intensive” approach, where English education is concentrated into fewer years of total exposure. According to Batibo, some advantages are that it will be cheaper in terms of teachers and materials and that students will have already mastered reading and writing skills in Swahili. Disadvantages include the time pressure on other subjects when so much time is devoted to intensive English, the danger that three years is not enough exposure time, and the fact that pupils will begin to learn the language at an older age, which may be less cognitively desirable. In this approach all intensive English teachers should be specialists in English education. In both models, Batibo also recommends a one-month intensive refresher course during the transition from primary to secondary education. It is unclear what the cost to the students of such a refresher course would be, but if the government could provide it at a low cost, the rough transition to secondary school would be somewhat smoothed.

Batibo next considers the path ahead should Swahili become the medium of instruction in secondary schools in the near future. In the “maximalist” approach, basic English skills are provided to all primary school leavers, giving everyone a fair chance to continue with their education. However, the costs of providing English to all might be unjustifiable given the small percentage of students who will actually use English later in life. In the “minimalist” approach, intensive English education begins in secondary school—that

is, English is taught only to those who plan to use English in their professional life. The main advantage of this approach is its efficiency, providing English only to those who want it. However, it deprives those who cannot afford secondary school fees of the chance of improving their English language skills, leaving them worse off if they choose to enter a labor market which values English. The minimalist approach is practical and efficient, but it allows English to become a skill of the elite alone (Batibo 1990).

The most compelling argument against heavy investment improved English education is that for the vast majority of Tanzanians, English is not and never will be a practical skill. Instead, it is a hindrance to communication in the classroom. Another intriguing argument against English in Tanzanian schools is that the alternative, Swahili, has the advantage of being an indigenous African language (with Arabic influences), and should therefore be preferred over any Western language. However, that an African language in education is necessary for emancipation seems to be a notion imposed from above by African and Western academics alike. It is unclear whether most Tanzanians are convinced by this argument. When asked to evaluate the statement, “To favour English means to neglect an important aspect of the self-identity of Tanzanians,” both the low- and high-socioeconomic groups in Schmed’s (1985) study dismissed this possibility. They also rejected the claim that English is unsuitable for an African environment because it is European language, as well as the claim that “A decline in the use of English would strengthen national unity.”

The most prevalent argument against a switch to Swahili is that to remove English from schools is to remove Tanzania from participation in the international academic, scientific and financial communities. In addition, a switch to Swahili in government schools does not imply that all students will give up English in favor of Swahili. Parents who value

English and who can afford the fees will continue to send their children to private or foreign schools, and the effect of a switch to Swahili will probably be a greater number of parents removing their children from government schools. The effect of this is that children born into privilege have the benefit of knowing English, while poorer children have no way of learning English even if they wanted to.

The motivation for maintaining the status quo is a lack of government funds for undertaking a serious English enrichment or Swahili development program. Maintaining the status quo is both inexpensive in financial terms and politically straightforward. However, there are serious problems with the current language policy in education, and the correct policy response could vastly improve the quality of education in the country. The long-term costs of the current structure, manifested in high secondary dropout and failure rates, outweigh the financial and political ease of this policy stance.

The only redeeming quality of the status quo is the presence of code switching, which could greatly enrich the quality of education if encouraged rather than condemned. In the case where the status quo is maintained but code switching is allowed, there would be a need for strong incentives to uphold some standard of English rather than allowing all classroom communication to switch to Swahili. Currently, the English-medium national exams offer this incentive, but it has already been established that given the quality of English instruction, students perform much better in Swahili than English. These exams should be given in Swahili instead of English, allowing students to express the full extent of their knowledge in a language they are comfortable with. In order to encourage active English learning, another incentive structure would need to be put in place. One possibility is a remittance of school fees based on performance in English classes. In order to keep such a reward structure from benefiting those who least need it—the children of the elite who

have greater exposure to English—it could also be means-tested. Students would receive school fee remittances based on both their performance in English and their family's need.

8. CONCLUSION

There are two important conclusions to be drawn from this discussion. First, speaking English is likely to help some individuals raise their standard of living, and having many English speakers in Tanzania may lead to economic growth. Second, if the quality of education is higher when conducted in Swahili, children should be learning in Swahili rather than English. Ultimately, the quality of education is the biggest priority of this policy analysis; better education brings all the human capital benefits of knowing English, and more. Although English-language education would probably be good for the country, there are other priorities besides having an economy filled with English speakers. Most important among these in the realm of education is increasing secondary enrollment; current levels are unacceptably low, well below the African average. Language policy is crucial to consider at the moment because it has such a detrimental effect on education, and education is so instrumental in development. Beyond correcting the failures of language policy in education, the government's priorities should lie elsewhere. The sociolinguistic environment in Tanzania is stable and peaceful compared to that of many neighboring countries. It is not necessary for the government to undertake a campaign to alter language policy in any way other than to correct its considerable failings in the realm of education. After correcting for language policy's critical flaws, Tanzania's government spending should focus on quality of education, public health and infrastructure rather than the provision of English language skills.

Nonetheless, if English can be provided to the average Tanzanian without compromising educational quality, it will be a worthwhile investment. Smaller pilot programs would help determine how to achieve improvements in English education, and at what cost. Although English is a former colonial language, it is also inescapably the language of international participation in the current age. Swahili is incredibly powerful as a lingua franca in Tanzania and is not likely to yield this particular status to English. Rather than reverting to its colonial past by producing English-speaking Tanzanians, Tanzania will be a nation of Swahili speakers with additional skills in English. This is one small step of many great changes to come that will encourage growth, reduce poverty and increase equity in Tanzania.

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