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Between Tongues: The Battle for Linguistic Equity in Tanzanian Schools – An Autoethnographic Study

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Abstract— *This autoethnographic study delves into the personal experiences of both a student and a teacher navigating the dual-language educational framework of Swahili and English in Tanzania. The research investigates how these individual narratives enhance our understanding of the broader impacts of language policies. By integrating personal reflections with theoretical analysis and a comprehensive literature review, the study explores the profound effects of these policies on both students and teachers. The findings reveal significant advantages of using Swahili, the native language for the majority of learners, in fostering not only academic success but also emotional and psychological well-being. Conversely, the use of English as a medium of instruction is shown to exacerbate educational disparities and hinder the emotional health of students. Based on these insights, the study advocates for substantial revisions to the current language policies, suggesting a shift towards prioritizing Swahili to better meet the needs of the majority, thus promoting greater educational equity and inclusivity.*

Keywords **– *Autoethnography, Linguistic Imperialism, Tanzanian Education, Language Policy, Educational Inequality***

I. MY POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Today, I embark on a journey not just of distance, from the Eastern part of Africa in Tanzania to the academic halls where I now stand (USA), but also a journey of thought, reflection, and identity. As a second-year doctoral student in Language, Literacy, and Culture, my academic and personal voyage intertwines with the intricate web of language policy and planning in post-colonial countries. Speaking Swahili as my native tongue and English as my second language has not merely been an act of communication but a doorway to deeper insights into the socio-political, cultural, and educational landscapes that shape the world.

My interest in language policies and planning in post-colonial or global South contexts is not an abstract academic pursuit. It is rooted in my lived experiences as a student, a teacher, and now a researcher currently residing in the Global North. These roles, seemingly distinct, converge in my person, offering me a unique vantage point from which to examine and critique the mechanisms of language policies/language of instruction in schools. In the classroom, I find myself at the micro-level, directly engaging with and sometimes contesting the very policies I study and implement. I am both a policy implementer and planner, an agent navigating the complex terrain of language policies in education.

My positionality is further complicated by the memories of linguistic punishment for not speaking "good English" in educational settings, an experience shared by many in Tanzania. This practice, reminiscent of colonial disciplinary measures, not only underscores the lingering shadows of colonialism but also challenges me to reflect critically on my role in perpetuating or challenging these legacies.

As I stand at the intersection of multiple identities: teacher, student, and researcher, I am constantly reminded of the tensions, resilience, triumphs, privileges, and responsibilities that accompany my journey. The privilege of education and the medium of instruction, which is not accessible to all in my homeland, places me in a unique position to

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question, critique, and seek alternatives to the colonial legacies embedded in our educational practices. My journey of learning and teaching English, marred by instances of psychological and physical punishment, informs my critical stance on language policy and planning. It compels me to question: How different am I or my practices, as a teacher, from the colonizers who sought to erase our languages and, with them, a part of our identity?

In presenting this narrative, I intend to convey a personal experience while shedding light on the wider consequences of our language choices in education. These decisions can either contribute to or counteract epistemic injustice and have the potential to either liberate or oppress. In performing my duties, I am acutely aware of the fine line between mentoring and controlling. My objective is to cultivate environments that encourage educational equality and equitable access to knowledge.

II. INTRODUCTION

A simple online search on Tanzania's educational language shift in education reveals numerous claims about the transition from English to Swahili as the medium of instruction, a policy shift purportedly initiated under President Jakaya Kikwete. These headlines range from “Tanzania Replaces English with Kiswahili as its Official School Language" (Black Press USA, 2015) to “Tanzania banning Swahili in its secondary schools and setting English as a compulsory subject” (Face of Malawi, 2023), hinting at a radical educational transformation. Nevertheless, the complexities behind these headlines reflect a deeper narrative of struggle, adaptation, and ideological shifts within Tanzania's language policies in education. While Tanzania's implementation of mother tongue instruction in early education (UNESCO, 2009) has received global praise, the difficulties encountered during the transition period have drawn scrutiny from local scholars (Dady, 2020; Mpemba 2007; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014; Brock -Utne, 2007; Swila, 2009, Mapunda, 2022). This means Tanzania's language policy in education from secondary to higher education is problematic. Yet, the research methodologies used have often simplified these impacts into mere causes and effects, overlooking the rich tapestry of struggles, resilience, efforts, triumphs, and both productive and unproductive resistance that students and teachers in Tanzania endure. They navigate through a complex, unequal, and inequitable language policy in education, facing challenges that go beyond academic performance and delve into the heart of their daily educational experiences.

It is from this perspective that I want to share my experiences as a student and teacher in Tanzania's primary and secondary schools. By providing an inside view, I hope readers will see, feel, and hear the extent to which this policy has been detrimental to students and teachers. As researchers exploring this area, we should not forget our past; any solutions or suggestions our studies might offer should be grounded in our history and reflect on what it means for students and teachers today.

Tracing the Evolution: Tanzania's Language Policy Through the Years

Tanzania's engagement with Swahili spans from its pre-colonial roots to its elevated status in the post-colonial period. It reflects the nation's concerted efforts to cultivate unity and establish a distinct identity through linguistic means. Originating as a lingua franca for trade on the East African coast and extending into the hinterlands through commercial interactions (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995), Swahili was subsequently adopted by German and British colonial administrations as an expedient tool for governance and communication (Illiffe 1969; Clerke, 1960; Gottneid, 1976; Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995). According to Othman (2008), Swahili had gained popularity among the locals earlier before the British colonial rule on behalf of the League of Nations. This explains why it became significant during the struggle for independence in Tanganyika, now Tanzania's mainland and Zanzibar. As noted by Dady (2020) before colonization, African countries did not face difficulties selecting a Language of Instruction (LoI) as each community educated its children in its native language. It was rather because of colonialism and the imposition of Western educational systems in Africa that there was a need for a universal language for education that transcended linguistic differences among African communities (Alidou, 2004). The following section provides an overview of the linguistic situation in education in Tanzania, tracing its evolution from the colonial era to the present day. This historical context is crucial for understanding the continuities in language policy from the period of colonial rule to contemporary settings. Despite formal shifts towards independence and self-governance, the linguistic strategies and educational practices employed today bear striking similarities to those used by colonial administrators. These parallels underscore the urgent need for a decolonization of the educational system in Tanzania,

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challenging us to rethink and reshape the way language is used as a tool of instruction and cultural transmission. This analysis will illustrate how the persistent legacy of colonial language policies continues to influence educational practices, highlighting the importance of revisiting and revising these policies to better reflect and serve the post-colonial Tanzanian context.

The Context of Language Policy During the Colonial Era

Germany, being the first Western country to colonize Tanganyika, encouraged the use of the Swahili language as an official language while limiting access to German (Roy-Campbell 2001; Swila, 2009; Moyd, 1996). With the shift to a British colony in 1919 after World War I, many changes happened in the colony's administration. The existing education system that promoted the use of Swahili throughout was shifted to only the first four years of school, and from the fifth year to tertiary education, English began to be used as a medium of instruction (Rubagumya, 1990 & Swila, 2009). One should remember that the British government employed indirect rule and a "divide and rule" policy which was a "conscious effort of an imperialist power to create and/or turn to its advantage the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, tribal, or religious differences within the population of a subjugated colony" (Morrock, 1973, pg 129). So, education was one of the ways that they could create the differences among the people of Tanganyika. Therefore, the main purpose of the British education system was to educate people who could provide service to the colonial administration.

The Context of Language Policy During the Post-Colonial Era

Post-independence Tanzania maintained the colonial curriculum and languages of instruction, using Swahili as LoI in the first four years of primary education and English from the fifth to secondary and post-secondary levels. However, with changes in the country's ideologies under Nyerere's socialism and Education for Self-Reliance policy, Swahili was cemented as the primary language of instruction in primary education, aiming to dismantle the colonial legacy and promote national unity (Swila,2009). It is more interesting to note that Tanzania gained independence in 1961. Still, it was not until January 4th, 1967, that Swahili was made the official language, while English remained an official and prevalent language for official matters. Swahili was used when the citizens were involved for political reasons since English was only spoken by the elite people (Massamba,1987).

In the 1970s, following the study commissioned by the National Kiswahili Council, some efforts to switch from English to Swahili in secondary school heightened. Then, in February 1982, Nyerere appointed a Presidential Commission on Education, which recommended the changes to take place starting in 1985 (Lwaitama and Rugemalira, 1990). According to Gazzola et al. (2023), it is one thing to set an agenda and formulate a policy and another thing to implement it when it comes to public policy. In 1984, dissenting opinions began to emerge, challenging earlier recommendations. That same year, Lwaitama and Rugemalira (1990: 37) note that the Ministry of Education issued an ambiguous statement declaring, "Both languages, English and Kiswahili, will be used as media of instruction. English will be improved at all levels of education" (as cited in Sa, 2007 pg. 5). Further emphasizing the Ministry's stance, Nyerere highlighted the importance of English in secondary education, advocating for Tanzanians to learn and appreciate the language (Lwaitama and Rugemalira 1990, as mentioned by Sa, 2007, pg 5). The rationale for this shift has been the subject of speculation, with some research (Yahya-Othman and Batibo, 1996) suggesting the high costs associated with transitioning to Swahili as a prohibitive factor for the government at the time. This leads to the ongoing question: Why hasn't the government-initiated efforts to allocate funds for this purpose, which could have significantly benefited the country beyond the current state?

Nevertheless, Othman (2008) is critical of the government's indecisiveness about the status of the two languages, which explicitly favors English over Swahili. As Gazzola et al. (2023) point out, "Policymaking is about making choices to do something or nothing to address a public problem/issue. If abstaining from doing something is a deliberate decision, then also 'doing nothing' is a public policy" (pg. 44). The same policy practice that has been going on to date leads to claims that I have just shared at the beginning of this paper.

The Language Policy in the Present Era

According to UNICEF (2017) and World Bank (1990), as Ujamaa's influence waned in the late 20th century, Tanzania found itself navigating the tides of capitalism, unable to sidestep the global economic pressures and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) promoted by international financial bodies like the IMF

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and World Bank during the 1980s. Mazrui (1997) and Tandon (2008) noted that English, seen as a vestige of imperialism, reclaimed its dominance, impacting the socio-political and economic fabric of Tanzania more strongly than before. Today, the educational curriculum in both Swahili and English, crafted during the colonial era under Western influence, has sparked ongoing debates within the broader context of the country's ideological evolution. To put it succinctly, Tanzania's educational language policy has remained largely unchanged since the British colonial period. The introduction of the 2014 Education Policy did little to alter the language of instruction, instead adding layers of ambiguity to policy statements. This ambiguity underscores a deep-seated "indecision" that is entwined with the nation's historical, social, and political fabric, as discussed by (Brock-Utne, 2017; Yogi, 2010; Brock-Utne & Hopson, 2005; Mapunda, 2022).

Amidst these conflicting scenarios, the individuals at the grassroots teachers and students bear the repercussions of the inconsistencies in language policy. Swahili, being the native language for a vast majority of students from diverse backgrounds; be it rural or urban settings, affluent or less privileged families, remains central to their early development. However, a significant portion of these students are enrolled in private schools where English is the primary medium of instruction from an early age, a practice criticized for its detrimental impact on meaningful learning (UNESCO, 2017; Brock-Utne, 2007). Conversely, students in public schools encounter a jarring shift to English in secondary education, a transition fraught with challenges and marked by a sudden departure from their mother tongue (Nomlomo & Vuzo (2014) and Yogi (2017). As studies explain, this abrupt language transition experienced by students entering secondary education has profound implications for them and their teachers (Bikongoro, 2015; Tibategeza & Plessis, 2018; Rubanza, 2002). On the other hand, students who have been learning English from the start, despite initial hurdles, tend to navigate the educational system more easily as they progress Nomlomo & Vuzo (2014) and Rubanza (2002).

For years, studies on the impact of Tanzania's language policy in education, especially from secondary to tertiary levels, have primarily used qualitative methods to explore the effects of using English as a medium of instruction. For example, a study by Nanai (2023) consolidates findings from multiple studies to offer a comprehensive view of the policy's impact on education. This research identified a discrepancy between the goals of the policy, the design of the curriculum, and actual classroom experiences, which adversely impact learning. Another study by Birgit Brock-Utne (2002) investigated Tanzania's educational language policy using a qualitative approach. Her study, which included analyzing documents, conducting interviews, and classroom observations, revealed a disconnect between policy intentions and actual classroom experiences. She found that English, as the language of instruction, often obstructs student learning, contrasting with Kiswahili's potential to enhance understanding. However, external influences and systemic reluctance have impeded Kiswahili's adoption in higher education, despite its evident advantages for student engagement and comprehension.

More and similar studies like these have reduced these impacts to simple cause-and-effect scenarios, failing to capture the full spectrum of challenges, resilience, efforts, victories, and both constructive and counterproductive resistances that Tanzanian students and teachers face. They are navigating a network of complex, unjust, and unfair educational language policies, dealing with obstacles that transcend academic achievements and touch the essence of their everyday educational journeys.

This paper takes a novel approach to examining Tanzania's educational language policy by weaving together the personal and academic through autoethnography, a methodology not widely applied in this context. Furthermore, by adopting autoethnography, this paper aims to dive deeper into the personal experiences within Tanzania's education system, leveraging the researcher's own experiences as both a student and a teacher. This method allows for a nuanced exploration of how language policies affect learning and teaching on a daily basis, beyond what traditional research methods might reveal. It's an exploration of the complexities, struggles, and triumphs within the education system, offering a unique perspective that highlights the need for policy reforms grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected. Through this lens, the paper seeks to contribute to a more profound understanding of educational language policy in Tanzania, suggesting pathways for meaningful change.

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III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a reflective autoethnographic approach, strategically integrating personal narrative with a comprehensive theoretical framework and extensive literature review to explore the languages of instruction in Tanzania. Autoethnography, as defined by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), is a method that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context. This methodology is particularly suited to addressing the complex interplay of personal experiences with broader cultural realities, making it an ideal approach for studies that seek to deeply understand personal educational experiences within specific cultural settings.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through the following autoethnographic methods:

1. Personal Narrative: This involves the crafting of detailed, evocative narratives that not only recount personal experiences but also invite readers to engage emotionally and intellectually with the text (Ellis, 2004). These narratives delve deeply into my experiences, specifically focusing on the mediums of instruction employed during my years as a student and later as an educator in various educational institutions in Tanzania and Uganda. Through storytelling, this method provides insight into the profound impact that language and teaching methods have on educational experiences and outcomes.
2. Reflective Analysis: Critical reflection is employed to dissect these narratives, enabling a deeper understanding of how personal experiences align with or contest existing educational theories and practices. This reflective process is crucial in autoethnography, as it facilitates the transformation of personal experience into broader cultural insights (Chang, 2008).
3. Document Analysis: A rigorous review of academic literature forms the backbone of the theoretical analysis in this study. The literature review helps to situate the personal experiences within existing research and theory, offering a scholarly backdrop against which personal stories are analyzed.

Setting

The setting of the study is inherently retrospective, focusing on past educational experiences in Tanzania and Uganda. These experiences span from various schools where I have been both a student and a teacher, encompassing a diverse range of educational environments. This retrospective analysis is vital in autoethnography, as it allows for a reflective examination of how past experiences continue to influence present and future educational and professional practices.

Significance of the Study

The use of autoethnography in this study offers significant insights into the personal and professional educational landscapes of East Africa, particularly in Tanzania and Uganda. By weaving together personal experiences with scholarly analysis, this method provides a powerful tool for understanding and potentially transforming educational practices within these cultural contexts.

So, what is Autoethnography?

Autoethnography transcends mere personal narrative; it's an in-depth exploration of self and how we interpret our place in the world. It involves understanding how we define and identify ourselves, and how others perceive us through our stories. This approach enables a mutual understanding, allowing others to see themselves in our narratives and vice versa. It delves into the tensions within our studies, questioning the necessity of these stories and aiming to provide more than just a description of our feelings about experiences. As Carolyn Ellis (2013) articulately points out, “For most of us, autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and what we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a hopeful story, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living” (p. 10).

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IV. FINDINGS (MY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY)

Swahili Days: Echoes of Learning in Primary School

As an extroverted individual, participating in class discussions and answering questions came naturally to me during my primary school years. The walls were adorned with educational posters in Swahili. Our classroom was alive with laughter and dialogue. Bright paintings and colorful posters covered the walls, each piece bursting with stories of our community and creativity, all in Swahili. We sat at simple wooden desks lined up in rows, sharing space and ideas. In front of us, a big black chalkboard filled with our teacher's bold Swahili words guided our every day of class. Swahili words filled the room, sometimes spoken softly, sometimes sung out loud, and often debated warmly as we learned new things together.

Among my favorite subjects were vocational skills, where we ventured into the valley with our teacher, transforming the mud into various objects like cups, plates, and miniature houses. This hands-on learning facilitated entirely in Kiswahili, ignited our collective curiosity and fostered a profound connection to each lesson. Despite the complexity of new concepts, the language never served as a barrier; instead, it was a bridge that made even the most challenging topics accessible. I recall learning about osmosis in such a vibrant setting, where we brought potatoes and salt from home to observe this phenomenon firsthand. Classes were full of energy and cooperation. Our teacher welcomed questions, sparked debates, and made sure learning was a journey we took together. All these things were happening in the language we understood better. Studying in Swahili did more than just teach us school subjects. It tied us closer to each other and to our culture, helping friendships grow and making school a joyous place. For seven years, going to school was a joyous experience.

These memories lay the groundwork for everything I learned later. They show how deeply our language and culture are woven into our education. I share this with you to highlight how important language is in shaping not just our schooling, but who we are.

The next section will explore my transition period as I concluded my primary education and entered secondary school, where everything turned into a nightmare. This phase marked a drastic shift from the familiar and nurturing environment of primary school to a challenging and often daunting new world of secondary education.

English at a Cost: The Perils of Language Transition in Tanzanian Schools

The education system in Tanzania comprises seven years of primary schooling where all subjects are taught in Swahili, and English is introduced only as a separate subject. The expectation is that five years of studying English should sufficiently prepare students to switch entirely to English instruction upon entering secondary school. However, does this transition truly serve the needs of Tanzanian students? My personal experiences shed light on this critical question.

The shift to English in secondary school was jarring. This new academic language, with its complex structures and foreign vocabulary, created a profound chasm between my thoughts and their expression. Anticipating this shift, I had envisioned a seamless transition to learning in English, a notion that quickly unraveled into a challenging reality. The transition required grappling with new academic concepts while simultaneously mastering a new language, a dual challenge that proved more daunting than any home chore. This shift dramatically undermined my extroverted nature, as the fear of miscommunication or potential ridicule silenced me, making me long for the inclusivity of my Kiswahili-speaking classroom. This experience highlighted the enduring legacy of colonial education systems in Africa, where English, as a colonial remnant, still dominates as the primary language of instruction.

I remember the classroom feeling colder, and less inviting, as English words seemed to hover just out of reach. The warm Swahili posters were replaced by stark, authoritative signs proclaiming, "Speak English" and "No English, No Service," even adorning some teachers' office doors. This linguistic enforcement further alienated me, making the once inviting space of learning feel forbidding and impersonal. The stark shift from the familiar embrace of Kiswahili to the stark uncertainties of English required a strenuous period of adaptation. My classroom participation, once vibrant and active, dwindled as I grappled to translate my thoughts into a language that felt entirely foreign. The confidence I had through my primary school years evaporated, leaving me to navigate a landscape of isolation within the very walls that were meant to foster my growth.

Unlike me, my peers from English-speaking backgrounds seemed to traverse this transition with disconcerting ease. In primary school, my challenges were centered around understanding the content; it was

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within my control to engage in extra evening classes to grasp difficult concepts. However, these difficulties were rooted in the language of instruction in secondary school. Extra classes became sessions of translation rather than comprehension, where I spent hours converting the English content into Swahili before we could even begin to address the underlying concepts.

This epistemic injustice extended beyond the classroom walls. It affected students like me, hailing from public schools, creating disparities in our academic performance not because the subjects were inherently difficult, but because the language made them inaccessible. The simple act of raising my hand to ask a question became a source of dread; I envied my classmates who could effortlessly grasp and discuss complex materials in English, engaging in meaningful conversations with our teachers.

Though some instructors attempted to bridge this gap by intermittently using Swahili, especially when the confusion was palpable across the classroom, their efforts were undercut by the reality that our examinations were in English. The constant reminder that these tests would judge not just our knowledge but our command of a foreign language was disheartening. It placed my peers and I, who did not have the privilege of a consistent English education, at a distinct disadvantage. The stakes were incredibly high, as these results would determine our futures, purportedly measuring our intelligence and understanding of the content.

The imposition of English extended beyond the academic to affect social dynamics and peer relationships. Speaking Kiswahili became a punishable offense, fostering a climate of anxiety and surveillance. This punitive approach to language use contradicted the cultural identity of a nation where Swahili is the heartbeat of Tanzania. I resorted to silence even outside the classroom. To avoid being labeled as a "Swahili speaker" and facing harsh punishment, I withdrew from socializing. My reluctance to engage in conversation stemmed from a fear of having my name reported and punished the next day. This environment fostered a deep resentment towards those who fluently spoke English, whom I perceived as boastful or complicit in maintaining this oppressive system. An incident that vividly captures the oppressive nature of this policy occurred when I was unable to explain my presence outside the classroom due to limited English proficiency, leading to unwarranted punishment. The fear of physical punishment, though severe, paled in comparison to the dread of the state exams. Knowing that these exams could seal my academic fate forced me into rote learning, a strategy that prioritized memorization over understanding due to the language barrier.

This linguistic struggle did not end in Tanzania; it followed me to Uganda. There, while physical punishment was absent, the psychological torment of speaking "broken English" persisted. The assumption that fluency in English equated to intelligence was prevalent, and my attempts to communicate in English were often met with ridicule. In Uganda, there was a word for “broken English” Mbogo. This experience culminated in a classroom incident where my grammatical errors were mockingly written on the board, amplifying my fear of speaking and reinforcing the cycle of silence and humiliation.

These experiences underscore that the language of instruction, a vestige of colonial rule, serves more as a barrier than a tool of empowerment, perpetuating a cycle of silence and exclusion that affects many learners across Africa. The need for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to language policy in education is evident, as the current reliance on English continues to disenfranchise countless students who are educated in Swahili.

From Survival to Privilege: Navigating The English Divide in High School and College

At one point, I started to believe that English proficiency and intellectual abilities were interconnected. My four-year experience in Uganda, although traumatizing, laid the groundwork for my high school education in Tanzania, where English is the medium of instruction. Returning with newfound confidence, I felt that language would no longer be a barrier. I vividly remember actively participating in class discussions, especially in arts subjects that involved extensive reading and writing. I felt privileged; even though it was a private school, and many students came from English-speaking backgrounds, their confidence didn't seem to match mine. I believed I knew more than they did, a notion I learned the hard way. In Uganda, mastering English was a survival necessity. When my Tanzanian peers learned of my time in Uganda, they'd often remark, "Oh, that's why you can speak English," since it's uncommon for Tanzanians to use English throughout the day when everyone speaks Swahili.

In college, life became easier. I excelled in my courses because language was no longer an obstacle. With frequent presentations, my classmates often chose

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me to speak on behalf of the group. I felt privileged, but I deeply understood it wasn't their fault, they simply hadn't had the same exposure to English as I had. Inside, I knew I wasn't fundamentally different from them; my advantage was merely circumstantial. However, in class, I found myself unduly fixated on my professors' grammatical errors during lectures, often at the expense of learning the actual course content. This focus was a direct transference of my past traumas associated with learning English, a language once foreign and fraught with difficulties. My experiences in Uganda, where mastering English was essential for academic survival, had ingrained in me a hyper-awareness of language accuracy, which now manifested as a critical lens through which I viewed my educators. This unintentional shift in focus from content to form was an echo of my earlier struggles, highlighting the deep-seated impact of my language journey on my academic interactions.

This preoccupation with grammatical accuracy often distracted me from the richer educational experiences that college had to offer. It was a paradoxical situation where my linguistic capabilities, once a barrier, had become a prism through which I viewed all academic exchanges. This perspective is both a testament to my growth and a reminder of the enduring scars left by my earlier educational encounters. As I navigated through my college years, this realization helped me to gradually shift my focus back to the substantive knowledge being imparted, striving to fully engage with the material beyond the surface structure of the language used.

Teaching in Translation: Balancing Language and Teaching in Tanzania

As a teacher, my experiences were layered and challenging, spanning pedagogical, linguistic, and emotional realms. When I was in college as a student teacher, teaching English seemed straightforward; the theories I was learning appeared practical and poised to facilitate a smooth learning environment. However, the stark reality hit during my first field practice. I was taken aback by the scarcity of resources in schools a situation I was familiar with as a former student, but its impact on teaching had never truly dawned on me. The large class sizes rendered the pedagogical theories, which mostly originated from contexts quite different from ours in the West, impractical in our setting. Adapting these theories to our local context was not something I had been prepared for in college; it was a skill I had to develop when I began teaching.

The diversity in English proficiency levels among my students was particularly daunting. Since most came from public schools, I needed to adjust my lesson plans to accommodate the majority, while also ensuring that more advanced students weren't neglected. This balancing act was a constant struggle. In English classes, immersion was feasible because language acquisition was the goal, but in subjects like history, using English as the language of instruction significantly slowed down the pace. Lessons that could have been delivered in 90 minutes stretched to 180, as I had to translate materials and ensure comprehension.

The pressure to cover the required curriculum while meeting my student's needs and preparing them for national examinations was overwhelming. I loathed reducing learning to mere memorization, yet often it felt like the only viable option. Objective tests, which allowed for educated guessing, became a crutch for many students, whereas essay questions led to chaos. Half of my students struggled to respond adequately, and some resorted to a mix of Swahili and English in their answers. Assessing these mixed-language responses posed an ethical dilemma: was I evaluating their understanding of the content, their English proficiency, or both?

Moreover, code-switching in class became a necessary strategy to foster understanding, though I had to be cautious of school authorities. The surveillance-like environment transformed my teaching from a passionate vocation into a series of covert operations, stripping away the joy and openness that should characterize the educational experience. Being tasked with disciplining students for speaking Swahili, their mother tongue and our national language, conflicted with my principles. The ideological clash between the school's policies, the broader educational norms, and my personal beliefs was a constant battle. I recall a conversation with the academic master about the rationale behind punishing students for speaking Swahili, to which he responded that such practices were believed to be helpful based on how previous generations, including myself, supposedly benefited.

Navigating these multifaceted challenges simultaneously was daunting. Each day in the classroom was not just about delivering lessons but about making a meaningful impact on my students' lives. How could I achieve this if we couldn't communicate effectively? If everything I taught seemed like mere noise to them? These experiences as a teacher have deeply influenced my perspective on education and continue to shape my approach to teaching and learning.

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Revisiting Roots, Revising Realities: Engaging with Autoethnography for Educational Reform"

Now, as a researcher residing in the U.S., I occupy a 'third space', a unique position that allows me to reflect upon and analyze these experiences critically. Drawing inspiration from "Negotiating Language Policies in Schools: Educators as Policymakers" by Ofelia Garcia and Kate Menken, I recognized the pivotal role educators play in shaping and negotiating language policies. This understanding deepened my engagement with autoethnography, allowing me to explore the profound impacts of English as a medium of instruction. My journey, filled with ethnographic curiosities, continually reflects on the methodologies, questions, and interactions that define my fieldwork. Influenced by researchers like Chang (2013), who intertwined her professional interests with personal experiences in mentoring, I recognized the unique position I occupy as both a former student and a teacher within the educational contexts I study.

This reflective process is an active engagement with my past, aiming to enhance my understanding of how language policies impact education. It is a process of self-inquiry that is not just preparatory work (Bochner and Ellis 2006) but a fundamental component of the research itself. It challenges the conventional view of the researcher as an external observer and recognizes the researcher's identity as deeply embedded within the social fabric of the study context (Wall, 2008). My doctoral studies, enriched by a continual interaction with scholarly works and the evolving educational research landscape, advocate for a critical examination of these policies and their implications for social justice. By positioning myself within the narrative, I bridge the gap between observer and participant, offering unique insights into the complexities of language education in Tanzania and the broader African context.

This autoethnographic journey is both an academic endeavor and a personal quest to articulate the intricate links between language, identity, and education. It underscores the necessity for policies that reflect the linguistic realities and needs of the communities they serve, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape. Through this third space, I contribute to the dialogue on educational reform, emphasizing the importance of local contexts and the voices of those directly impacted by policy decisions.

My experiences in Tanzania, Uganda and the U.S. serve as a lens through which I view and analyze the broader implications of language policies, fostering a deeper appreciation for the nuanced challenges and opportunities within the field of education. Drawing from a series of 'aha' moments and the insights gained from my re-engagement with the culture of my upbringing, this journey challenges the conventional view of researchers as mere observers. Recognizing our deep embeddedness within our study contexts, this autoethnographic approach allows me to acknowledge and critically examine my biases and insights, extending my gaze to explore the interconnectedness within our fields of study.

V. DISCUSSION

The misalignment between language policy intentions and classroom realities in Tanzania's education system starkly mirrors my personal experiences as both a student and a teacher. Telli (2014) and Mtallo (2015) articulate this tension, highlighting the abrupt switch from Kiswahili to English at the secondary level, which disregards students' linguistic readiness and echoes my own struggles with linguistic disorientation and academic challenges. This abrupt policy shift, rather than aiding educational progression, complicates learning outcomes, suggesting that the use of English might be more detrimental a curse rather than a blessing.

The diverse viewpoints on the use of English versus Kiswahili, as explored by Telli (2014), highlight the critical need for more inclusive policy-making processes that genuinely reflect the linguistic and educational realities of Tanzanian students. Currently, the exclusion of teachers and students from these processes often results in policies that fail to meet the needs of those most affected. Reflecting on my own journey, the initial foundation provided by Kiswahili in early education was crucial. However, the jarring transition to English in secondary education was not only challenging but also detrimental, reflecting the broader national issues with language policy where the implemented practices often do not align with the policy dictates (Brock-Utne, 2017). My narrative underscores the systemic struggle with the language of instruction, highlighting how personal experiences can serve as a microcosm of national educational challenges.

Furthermore, the experiences detailed resonate with broader themes of linguistic imperialism, where, as in Tanzania, despite the presence of a local lingua franca, the colonial language continues to dominate critical sectors like education, thus perpetuating educational

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inequalities (Phillipson, 1992). This dominance of English aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, where mastery of the colonial language becomes a significant asset that individuals must possess to gain access to social and economic privileges (Bourdieu, 1986). The inappropriate use of English as the medium of instruction, rather than as a foreign language that students learn alongside their primary education, suggests a significant disconnect between language policymakers and established linguistic and language learning theories (Cummins, 2000). From a theoretical perspective, the imposition of English in Tanzanian education serves as a quintessential example of linguistic imperialism, embodying Bourdieu's idea of symbolic power, where the dominance of a colonial language not only facilitates global integration but also reinforces social hierarchies and educational disparities. This linguistic dominance exacerbates educational inequities, disproportionately disadvantaging those not proficient in English and perpetuating cycles of educational inequality

The ongoing political debate often simplifies the issue to a choice between Swahili as a national language and English as an international language, neglecting the profound impacts these decisions have on identity and cultural beliefs. My experiences reveal that while English does not replace my identity, it introduces significant educational inequalities (Tollefson, 1991). Those who can afford private education are more likely to succeed, whereas those from lower-income backgrounds face overwhelming barriers, leading to high dropout rates and severe emotional and psychological impacts (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Today, the rise of low-cost private schools in Tanzania, often lacking the standards of more established institutions but using English as the language of instruction, underscores the commodification of English in educational settings. This situation forces parents to choose these schools, not because of the quality of education, but because they believe English instruction is synonymous with better prospects for their children, illustrating how English is marketed as a commodity, disadvantaging those who cannot afford it (Rubagumya 2003; Tollefson, 2002).

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Why not study ourselves before seeking to understand others? By revealing our own biases and perspectives, we pave the way for a more authentic, reflective, and inclusive approach to researching language policies and instruction. This autoethnographic exploration is not merely a methodological choice; it is a declaration of the value of personal experience in enriching academic inquiry, ensuring that the voices within and beyond the academic sphere are heard, understood, and valued (Howlett & Nguyen (2020). Through this autoethnographic lens, I aim to convince readers of the need for a paradigm shift in studying language policy issues, especially regarding the medium of instruction in schools. It's a call to recognize the profound insights that personal narratives and reflections can contribute to understanding and addressing the complexities of language education in post-colonial contexts.

The complexities of Tanzania's language policy reveal profound implications for educational equity and effectiveness. This study highlights how policy inconsistencies and the abrupt transition from Kiswahili to English have disproportionately affected students and teachers. As a student and teacher, my journey exposes the policy's detrimental effects on students' psychological well-being, confidence, and academic performance.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

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APPENDICES

Not applicable. This manuscript does not include appendices as all relevant data are contained within the main text.

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