



## The language of instruction debate in Tanzania: What is the choice of citizens amongst the international languages?

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### Key Messages

Despite the languages they speak at home, respondents are equally divided on whether English language to continue to be used for impactful teaching and learning,

There is not clear association between preference of English as a medium of instruction and the influence of the United Kingdom and United States of America,

Although majority of respondents choose Tanzania's model for future development, they prefer English as the language of instruction to other languages, including Kiswahili.

### Introduction

The debate on whether to use Kiswahili to teach and learn effectively in post-primary education in Tanzania has resurfaced. It is evident that formal education is critical to eliminate poverty and realise sustainable development, but all generations of educators and learners must master the language of instruction for the students to learn successfully (Ishumi, 1994). In Tanzania, Kiswahili and English are both official languages, but Kiswahili is the national language (JamhuriyaMuunganowa Tanzania, 2014, 2022). Before 1967, only English was used to teach from primary to university level, but in 1967, English was discontinued in primary education, and the academic performance above that level declined (Ishumi, 1994). However, it was later re-introduced and is used in some primary schools, especially private schools (Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, 2014).

The debate on the medium of instruction has two sides. On the one hand, it is argued that Kiswahili is the most appropriate medium of instruction in all education levels because most educators and students are not fluent in English language (Edward, 2022; Ishumi, 1994; Mosenda, 2022; Rubanza, 1996). Furthermore, most Tanzanians use it in their everyday life compared to English language (Edward, 2022; JamhuriyaMuunganowa Tanzania, 2022; Mosenda, 2022; Rubanza, 1996). The 2012 census showed that 57% of the population aged five years and above could write and speak Kiswahili only, 13% both Kiswahili and English, while 0.8% could write and speak English only (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). Also, it is learned easily because it is in the Bantu languages group which has many Tanzanian tribal languages. Again, Kiswahili is

growing and gaining international status (Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, 2014, 2022). Next, Kiswahili language promotes nationalism (Ishumi, 1994; Rubanza, 1996). Finally, English language is discriminatory because it is used by few Tanzanians in everyday life (Rubanza, 1996). However, it is suggested that in order for learning to take place, all education stakeholders should create a conducive environment to teach and learn in English (Edward, 2022). On the other hand, Ishumi (1994) and Rubanza (1996) present the arguments of some scholars for using English as the language of instructions in post-primary levels as follows. First, the immense knowledge is in English. Second, Kiswahili does not have adequate vocabulary to accommodate such scientific knowledge. Finally, it helps Tanzanians to participate in the international affairs.

In early 1970s, the government decided to introduce Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in Form I and II as a first phase (Ishumi, 1994). Later, in the mid-1980s, it announced that Kiswahili would be the medium of instruction in all levels of education from 1985 (Ishumi, 1994), but it has never happened (Ishumi, 1994; Mjema, Joseph, & Temba, 2022). In 2014, the government set a goal to use Kiswahili at all levels, but stated that both Kiswahili and English are languages of instructions in all levels of education (JamhuriyaMuunganowa Tanzania, 2014). With this policy statement, the government gives freedom to citizens to choose the medium of instructions between those two languages. In other words, as Ishumi (1994, p. 148) suggested, it is bilingual. For example, recently, the Minister for Education, Science and Technology, and Vocational Training reported that parents continued to send their children to English medium schools (Mjema et al., 2022). The

reason is that English is positively associated with good academic achievement, prestige, and good political, and socio-economic opportunities (Rubanza, 1996). It is also claimed that the United Kingdom influences the use of English language in teaching and learning in Tanzania (Rubanza, 1996).

After seven years of the implementation of the 2014 education and training policy, this policy brief explores the choice of citizens of the medium of instruction amongst the international languages. The international languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Kiswahili, and Portuguese. The findings will inform the debate on language of instruction in Tanzania, implementation and review of the policy.

## Methodology

Afrobarometer Round Eight quantitative data were used to fulfil the purpose of this policy brief because one of the variables was about the language of instruction preference. Afrobarometer directs a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Eight rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2021. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed 2,398 adult citizens of Tanzania in March - April 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

## Key findings

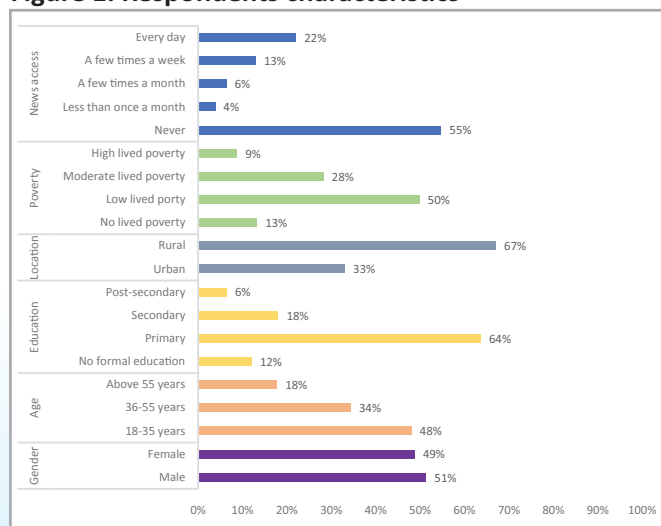
The analysis comprises demographics, primary language spoken at home, economic and political influence of China, Kenya, Russia, the UK and US, and their preference of the medium of instruction.

### Demographic features

Respondents had different perspectives and experiences because of their different demographic features such as gender, age, and education (see Figure 1). The analysis showed that there were as many men as women, and close to half of them were youth. In this case, youth means a person aged between 15 and 35 years old (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007), while one in four was above 55 years old. The majority of respondents had primary education, and a quarter of them had post-primary education. Also, one in ten did not go to school. Two-thirds of respondents lived in the rural area, and most of them experienced lived poverty, but only one in ten faced high lived poverty. Lived poverty is measured using the Afrobarometer Lived

poverty is measured using the Afrobarometer Lived Poverty Index (LPI) on a scale of 0 to 4 (Mattes, 1998). The index comprises food, clean water, medical treatment, cooking fuel, and cash income (Mattes, 1998). Two in five respondents accessed news via traditional and modern media like radio and the Internet, respectively. Of these respondents, one in five did it every day, while one in ten did a few times a week.

Figure 1. Respondents characteristics

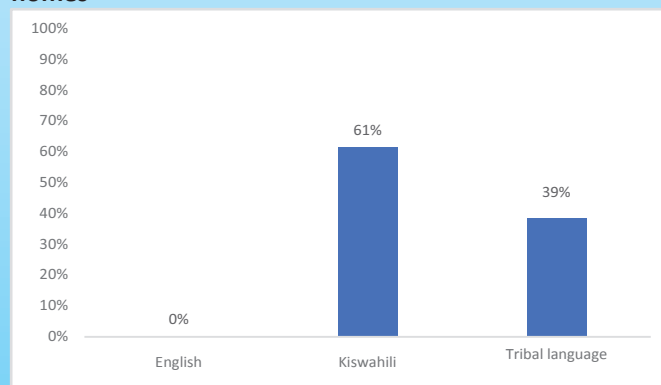


Source: Fieldwork data, 2021

### Primary language spoken at home

Respondents used different primary languages to communicate when they were at their homes (see Figure 2). The results indicated that close to two-thirds spoke Kiswahili at home, and slightly above one-third used their tribal languages like Chagga, Haya, Nyamwezi, and Sukuma. There was no respondent who used English as a primary language to speak at their homes.

Figure 2. Respondents' primary language spoken at their homes

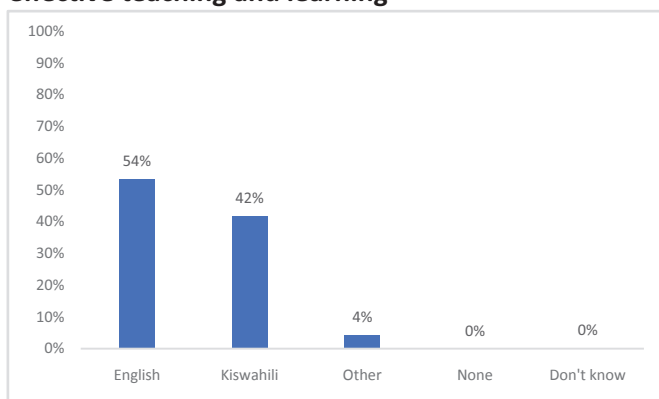


Source: Fieldwork data, 2021

### Preference of the medium of instruction

For the future of the next generation in Tanzania, a simple majority of respondents thought English language was the most important international language for young people to learn. In contrast, two in five respondents preferred Kiswahili to other international languages (see Figure 3). Others were Arabic (1%), Chinese (2%), French (1%), German (0%), and Portuguese (0%).

**Figure 3. Most important international languages for effective teaching and learning**



Source: Fieldwork data, 2021

spoke mainly tribal languages. As Table 1 shows, as respondents moved higher on the academic ladder, they increasingly preferred English language to Kiswahili. However, a simple majority of respondents who did not go to school wanted English language to be used for teaching and learning as well. Also, a simple majority of urban dwellers preferred English, while one-third went for Kiswahili. Half of ruralites chose English, while two in five wanted Kiswahili. On age, a simple majority of youth, half of respondents aged 36-55, and over 55 years preferred English to other languages, while about two-fifths in all age categories wanted Kiswahili (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Cross tabulation of preference of the language of instruction by education level**

Language	Education							
	No formal education		Primary		Secondary		Post-secondary	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
None	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
English	161	56	780	51	243	57	100	65
Kiswahili	109	38	689	45	167	39	37	24
Other	14	5	52	3	19	4	18	12
Don't know	3	1	4	0	1	0	0	0

Source: Fieldwork data, 2021

**Table 2. Crosstabulation of preference of the medium of instruction by age**

Language	Age of respondents					
	18-35		36-55		Over 55	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
None	0	0	1	0	0	0
English	635	55	424	52	225	53
Kiswahili	460	40	361	44	180	43
Other	53	5	36	4	14	3
Don't know	4	0	0	0	5	1

Source: Fieldwork data, 2021

There was a slight difference regarding gender; for instance, a simple majority of respondents (54%) chose English, while about two in five in each gender wanted Kiswahili. Likewise, a simple majority of respondents who considered the United States (57%), United Kingdom (54%), and South Africa (55%) the best models of future Tanzania's development preferred English. Close to two-thirds of respondents who saw Tanzanian model was adequate for development preferred English to other languages including Kiswahili. Further, about half of respondents who considered China and Ethiopia as the best models also chose English. In contrast, about two in five respondents who considered the US and South Africa the best models wanted Kiswahili. Also, one-third who wanted the UK's and another one-third who chose Tanzania development model for future development preferred Kiswahili. Half of respondents who did not know about countries best models to follow for development preferred English language to be the medium of instruction to other international languages.

On average, a simple majority of respondents (55%) who thought that the economic and political influence of the UK, US and other nations was positive preferred English to Kiswahili. In contrast, except for other countries, a simple majority who thought that the economic and political influence of China on Tanzania was negative chose Kiswahili as the most important language of instruction.

## Conclusions & Policy Recommendations

The debate on the impactful medium of instruction has re-surfaced. This policy brief explores the position of citizens on this important aspect of teaching and learning. The Afrobarometer Round 8 quantitative data were used to meet the objective of this policy brief. The results showed that many respondents spoke Kiswahili and few tribal languages when they were at their home. None of them spoke English in their residences. However, about half of respondents preferred English language to Kiswahili as the language of instruction in Tanzania for impactful teaching and learning. There was not a clear association between a language of instruction preference and respondents' demographics, and thoughts whether the economic and political influence of developed nations was positive. Likewise, there was not a clear association of choice of language of instruction with nations development models. However, two-thirds of respondents who chose the model of development of Tanzania for future development preferred English to be used in teaching and learning.

The results suggest that English and Kiswahili languages can be used in post-primary education for teaching and learning, and educators and learners will choose freely one of the two media.

The findings inform the persistent debate about the medium of instruction in Tanzania and the implementation and review of 2014 education and training policy. Because respondents are equally divided on the language to use for effective teaching and learning, all stakeholders should ensure people master both languages – Kiswahili and English. However, these findings are not generalisable across time. It is

recommended that all four language skills – speaking, writing, listening, and reading should be taught effectively and creatively. Likewise, the speaking skill should also be examined effectively in continuous assessments and national exams.

Information on whether currently there are post-primary education learning institutions using Kiswahili to teach is very important.

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