

Article

## Local Languages of Instruction as a Right in Education for Sustainable Development in Africa

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**Abstract:** Today's educational challenges in Africa have their roots in the colonial education system. The article explores the consequences of linguistic choices for quality education, self-determined development and children's rights in education. The analysis centers on a case study of a curriculum change in Zanzibar in which English has replaced Kiswahili as the language of instruction in the last years of primary school in Mathematics and Science subjects. The case study is grounded in an extensive review of theory and practices on the relationship between language of instruction, learning and rights in education. The field study researched the reasons behind the curriculum change, the extent to which schools were prepared for the change, and the consequences of the change for the learning environment. The article, therefore suggests that for the 21st century, Africa should place emphasis on rights policies that promotes not only access, but also inclusion and quality education.

**Keywords:** local language; rights in education; curriculum; language of instruction; Africa

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### 1. Introduction

Western based curriculums tend to have similar content and structure; however, the world is made of different cultures, with different languages and different needs. In non-Western contexts, it is important that cultural context be taken in consideration in the structures and in the curriculums of basic education. To put it another way, the curriculum should be made according to the needs of the country and most importantly, to the cultures and needs of the local community. These principles were ignored under colonization and this has hindered the process of development of African countries. As the historian from Burkina Faso, [1] notes that the breakup of the African educational system was

completed by colonial domination when the colonialists replaced the African educational system with an absolutely different system designed to serve the overall aim of the subjugation of the continent to European needs. Furthermore, he added that in African societies, education lost its functional role [1]. It is wrong to think that one can achieve basic education by coming into a community and imposing a generic way of teaching. While in many African countries, education was an integral part of the culture, issues of language identification and standardization, which have come to be a contentious debate today, were insignificant. Children learned community knowledge and history, which were preserved and transmitted orally. Children learned by asking questions instead of being taught in an alien foreign language. Education was constructed in a rights perspective in which local languages were favored over the colonial languages. Colonial-based education deepened disparities of opportunity through language polarization. While this has led to dehumanization, with elements of cultural and language identity rooted in a colonial past, it has also pushed African communities into economic crisis within a rapidly globalized economy [2].

Education is one way of ensuring greater equity as well as enabling citizens to act and transform their livelihood. The Indian economist [3] who suggested considering poverty (lack of basic health, education, shelter, nutrition, clean water, *etc.*) as capability deprivation in the sense that these poverty indicators deprive poor people not only of achieving prosperity but of being able to make choices and thus being capable of leading a life of dignity and good quality. The above indicators as articulated by Sen illustrate that there are influences on capability deprivation other than lowness of income or lowness of resources. It should be further noted that while income-based measures are of instrumental importance for development, capability deprivation is of intrinsic importance. Sen [3] points out that the instrumental relation between poverty and income may vary within nation states, communities, families and individuals. This ambiguous thinking is dignified in neoliberal frameworks, as its design is not congruent with achieving constitutive elements of well-being. Thus, it follows that the view of poverty as a deprivation of valuable freedoms evaluates multidimensional poverty according to capabilities [2]. Human societies across the African continent have developed rich sets of experiences relating to their historical antecedents and the environment in which they live. Education is absolutely essential to the development of capabilities for both individual and national development.

This article brings to the discussion of educational rights the notion of right in education, which implies that rights are not ensured unless the education offered is of high quality [4]. Furthermore [4] adds that a right in education approach includes all children from different backgrounds and different abilities regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, social-economic situation, disability, or other conditions. With its decentralization and localization, it promotes different educational cultures and social transformation, overcoming social injustices which modern schooling is perpetuating and even strengthens [5]. Each of the Western countries has adapted its structure and curriculum according to its needs; nonetheless, there are certain commonalities in the Western approach to education. One such commonality is the reliance on a formal curriculum, seen as the best way for students to acquire a basic education. Another is the physical separation in schools between teachers and classrooms. Yet another is a common approach to teacher formation. Finally, the basic curriculum prioritizes the learning of reading, writing and counting.

This article will explore the consequences of linguistic choices for quality education, self-determined development and children's rights in education. The analysis centers on a case study of a curriculum

change in Zanzibar (Tanzania) [6], which among other changes will replace the current language of instruction (LoI), Kiswahili [7], with English in the subjects of Mathematics and Science from Standard 5. The focus has been on how the implementation was planned and executed and most importantly, what have been the consequences of the change for quality learning and fulfillment of children's rights in education. Local language and local curriculum are two complex intervening variables that are at the core of the achievement of quality education and children's rights in education [8]. There has been a major focus over the past two decades in international and national development programs on making the right to education a universal human right. This has been understood to mean access to education. However, not enough attention has been given to the quality of this expanding educational effort. The study involved interviews with key actors, including policy makers, local academics and teachers; as well as observation at several schools. The schools selected in Zanzibar consisted of two schools in an urban area (Stone Town) and two in a rural area (one in the North and one in the South). The studies started in 2009 and involved Standard 1 teachers in 2010, Standard 2 teachers in 2011 and Standard 3 teachers in 2012. A total of 49 teachers were selected for in depth interviews. Interviews were set up with each of the school's headmasters and with a sample of four teachers from each school that teaches Kiswahili, English, Mathematics and Science subjects in the first year. In the second and in third year, the headmasters organized group interviews consisting of six teachers in each group. The headmasters of each school were also interviewed each year and the interviews became more fluid each time they were conducted. The answers from the first year and the third year were very different; I will come back to the difference in the findings section. Four government officials involved in the language policy formulation process were interviewed during the first visit to Zanzibar. Visits to Ministries were essential to get a holistic overview of the education sector in Zanzibar. Zanzibari academics were also interviewed. Four lecturers and researchers were interviewed at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA), chosen purposively according to their fields. Most of these interviews were informal and conversational, but they provided very valuable information. Four teacher trainers were interviewed at the Training of Trainers College in Zanzibar in order to explore their involvement with the new curriculum.

The main contribution of this article is to argue that quality learning must be related to educational rights and that quality learning in African countries will not be achieved without curricula that are based on the use of a local LoI.

## **2. The Background for the Changes in Zanzibar**

Many African countries are struggling with the question of whether or to choose a local or foreign language in schools from elementary to university. There is a wealth of evidence, which indicates that using a language any group of learners speaks and understands well improves the quality of their learning [8]. Despite this evidence, Zanzibar is in the process of introducing a foreign language, English, for certain subjects in the final two years of primary school.

In 2006, Zanzibar, which has a school system autonomous from that of the Tanzanian mainland, initiated a review of its educational strategy, which resulted in a reform of its curriculum. In addition to the change of LoI, from Kiswahili to English in Mathematics and Science subjects from Standard 5, it introduced a new subject, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) from Standard 5

(in English), as well as language classes in Arabic from Standard 1. The official background for the changes was an evaluation of the 1996 to 2006 Zanzibar Education Master Plan (ZEMAP) Midterm Review [9], the Education for All (EFA) Assessment [10], and the Zanzibar Education Sector Review [11], at the Ministry of Education (MoE), Culture and Sports [12,13], in 2003, which in turn initiated several studies. The evaluation concluded that because the performance of students in mathematics and science was poor in secondary school, that students would be better prepared if these subjects were taught in English in the last two years of primary school. In interviews with Ministry officials, it was implied that pressures from international development organizations and promises of monetary support were factors in the decision to make the change of LoI to English. In 2002, the enrolment in schools was very low, 65.5% for basic education and only about 14% for secondary education ([9], p.18). In 2006, the net enrolment rate was 77% for basic education ([9], p.12). The aim of the policy is to increase enrollment to 90% in primary education by 2012. The provision of subject teachers in all primary schools with a diploma in Mathematics, Science and English is a key area in the implementation of the education sector reforms, since “English, Mathematics and Science remain understaffed and with teachers lacking the right qualifications” ([9], p.13), which is a reason why the levels of student performance in Science, Mathematics and language education in primary schools is low. The decision to make English the LoI from Standard 5 in Mathematics and Science will demand a major upgrading of competence in English for the relevant teachers. “The number of teachers in primary schools is sufficient, but, of the 7981 teachers in primary schools, 861 or 10.7% are untrained and only 446 or 5.5% are diploma teachers. Teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, is a therefore a question of major importance ([9], p.14). These concluded that while the educational system had achieved a number of successes, it still had unresolved problems associated with poor quality of teachers, unmanageable class size and inadequate teaching aids and facilities [9], which necessitated reforms. A new educational policy, entitled “Zanzibar Basic Education Improvement Project” (ZBEIP) [14], a World Bank Group project was approved in 2007.

The new policy instituted a system of 2-6-4-2-3+, comprising 2 years in pre-primary, 6 years in primary, 4 years in ordinary secondary, 2 years in advanced secondary, 3+ years of university and other higher learning institutions. The compulsory education includes the pre-primary education, which, together with primary and secondary grades adds up to a total of twelve years of compulsory education. The new education policy embraced the key objectives of access, equity and quality. The stated intention was:

- To enhance quality education in secondary school in order to reduce drop-outs.
- To reinforce local Islam-based culture, and to facilitate global integration through the increased use of English.
- To increase gender parity, since it has been achieved in primary education but not in secondary or in post-secondary, where the level of male enrolment has been much higher than that of females ([15], p.9).

The implementation of this policy, which began in 2010, has removed the OSC. Pupils who started Standard one in 2010 are expected to follow the new system of 2-6-4-2-3+.

In addition to the merging of the two educational tracks into one, other major changes in curriculum were written into policy. These include: (a) A reduction of the primary school education from 7 to 6 years; (b) A change of LoI from Kiswahili to English from Standard 5 in the subjects of Mathematics

and Science; (c) Introduction of ICT, starting from Standard 5, taught in English; (d) Social studies to be split into three subjects: geography, civics and history from Standard 5; and (e) Continuing to teach Arabic from pre-primary to Standard 3. According to one of the policy makers in the Ministry of Educational and Vocational Training (MoEVT), Zanzibar has overproduced teachers in Islamic education and Arabic. Therefore, the focus from now on will be on other subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science. This finding was later confirmed through discussions with other policy makers. However, I was told that Arabic in Zanzibar is easier to learn than English since it is a language introduced in pre-primary school and in the Koranic School. Kiswahili language has also been influenced by Arabic; thus it was argued that Arabic is part of their culture and identity, which English is not. Other measures associated with the implementation of the policy are the preparation of syllabus, writing of textbooks and teacher training.

In 2010, Zanzibar began implementation of the new policy for Standard 1; however, the implementation for higher Standards will be phased in incrementally until 2015, when the policy is expected to be fully operational for all primary Standards.

In Zanzibar, Kiswahili is understood by the entire population and spoken as mother tongue by the vast majority [16]. The language of wider communication (LWC) at all levels is Kiswahili. English is a foreign language that was introduced in Tanzania (then Tanganyika) during the British colonial rule. In spite of a long exposure to English, today only 5% of the population speaks English [17]. In primary education, for Standards 1 to 7 Tanzania made a decision in 1967 (after Independence) to institute Kiswahili as the LoI. Thus, the current curriculum change reverses an earlier policy to use Kiswahili throughout primary school. At the end of the 1970s President Nyerere, appointed a Presidential Commission on Education to review the entire education system. The Commission recommended changing the LoI in schools to Kiswahili from January 1985 and in universities from 1991. However, in August 1983 the Minister of Education (MoE) declared that the Ministry was not yet ready for the change. The implementation of Kiswahili was delayed, but in 1997, the government categorically reaffirmed its intention to make the change to Kiswahili [18]. By 2009, the policy had still not been implemented and in fact was reversed by the Education and Training Policy of 2009 (not yet adopted), which suggests that even government primary schools may choose English as the LoI [18]. Today English is still the LoI from secondary schools until tertiary education.

### *2.1. Kiswahili the African Lingua Franca*

Efforts to promote Kiswahili began in the 1930s. The first President of Tanzania Julius K. Nyerere (1962–1985) initiated efforts to make Kiswahili a pan-Tanzanian language. He faced several dilemmas associated with reunifying African languages. One problem is that cultural subgroups champion their own local languages (mother-tongues) at the expense of a national or regional language [19]. However, what can be learned from his strategy is that African languages have the same potential to serve as a pan-national language as any other language, and unification can be made to happen if there is political will to create and enforce the necessary policies and strategies. The promotion of Kiswahili had begun in Tanzania long before Nyerere's efforts. It was given the status of the official language for the inter-territorial East African Language Committee in Tanganyika, Kenya, and Uganda. The African

linguists working at CASAS have suggested writing Kiswahili as KiSwahili, in the same way as they write isiXhosa [20].

In 1967 [21], the Tanzanian constitution was amended and Kiswahili became formalized as the LoI for primary school grades within the education system [22]. Kiswahili has since been used in Tanzania as both official and national language. A competence in English is also important, since English links Tanzania and the rest of the world as the global language of technology, commerce and administration [23]. Even so, in most official and legal discussions, Kiswahili is the language of choice. A Zanzibari scholar gives us an example that conveys the tension between English and Kiswahili within the legal system:

I remember an incident in 2007 at the General Meeting of the Zanzibar Law Society where members argued for some time whether the meeting should be conducted in English or Kiswahili. Later the President of the Society ruled that it should be in English since it was the official language of the High Court. Half an hour after the decision was made, nobody was talking in English, and no one protested. ([24], p. 6).

Kiswahili is often used as the intra-family language after marriage in Tanzania. About 80 million people in 14 countries in East and Central Africa speak Kiswahili [20]. Kiswahili is one of the five official languages of the African Union alongside English, French, Portuguese and Arabic [20]. Kiswahili has been occasionally used as working language in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meetings as far back as 1986. It was however, never made an official working language of the UN or UNESCO. Othman [24] argues that:

Kiswahili is no longer the language of Tanzania or East Africa; it is the language of the entire African continent, having been adopted by the African Union as one of its official languages. When former Mozambican President, Joaquim Chissano (and not the President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa), addressed the African Heads of State Summit for the first time using Kiswahili, the audience warmly applauded ([24], p.7).

Language plays a major role in Tanzania's robust media. Most newspapers in Tanzania are in Kiswahili. The public broadcasting television service *Televisheni ya Taifa* (TVT) or Tanzania Broadcasting Cooperation (TBC) sends most of the programs in Kiswahili. The radio networks of Radio Tanzania Dar-es-Salaam (RTD) are also State-run and use Kiswahili. It is important to note that from 2007 the Tanzanian State has owned both TVT and RTD. They are both very popular and are both under the umbrella of Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation. However, privately owned media are more important, since they control more than 11 daily newspapers, over 6 television stations and more than 6 FM radio stations. All of these are published or conducted in Kiswahili. One of them, Radio Free Africa (RFA) reaches the Great Lakes Region – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and even Burundi. This shows the importance of Kiswahili as a cross border language [25].

The language dilemma continues to be a subject of intense debate among language and education scholars. ([24], p.6) formulates the central question this way:

Why is a country like Tanzania, which was in the forefront of Africa's liberation struggle, which proclaimed the Arusha Declaration that ushered in its own development path and which in its policy

documents and proclamations wanted the people to be the masters of their own destiny, unable to resolve this language problem? ([24], p.6).

Ouane and Glanz [26] wrote that Tanzania, in comparison to Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and Zambia was the only of these countries that went beyond experimentation and implemented a policy that promoted the effective use of a national language in formal and non-formal education and administration. Its success can be traced back to Nyerere's concept of "Education for self-reliance" which perceives education as the means for laying the foundations in the present for future development [27].

## 2.2. Language Imperialism in Africa

In the 18th and 19th centuries, colonial linguists and missionaries recorded African languages and classified them into differing dialects [28,29]. In sub-Saharan Africa, African languages were either related to, or were derivatives of Bantu. The shared communicative base was much broader than that assumed by missionaries and language scientists who have written about African languages from the 1830s to the present, for example, missionaries Isaac Hughes (1789–1870), who transcribed seTswana, and Andrew Spaarman (1747–1820) who transcribed isiXhosa in South Africa. These transcriptions led to the linguistic separation of these closely related languages. ([29], p. 151) calls this process the "de-Africanization through displacement of African languages". Furthermore, he argues that "African languages are not so different as to impede communication, as it is canonically assumed" ([29], p. 166) and a harmonization, rather than a segmentation of languages ought to be made. However, he notes that:

The notion of harmonization is often misinterpreted to mean that some African languages will be killed and that people will lose their languages and identities... this process of harmonization does not take anything away from the speakers, but rather adds... a core written Standard for literacy, which learners from different languages acquire at school while retaining their home or spoken varieties ([29], p. 168).

This idea could complete the idea of the Ghanaian anthropologist & sociologist, [28] when he writes that Africa needs a harmonization of languages. In Cape Town, South Africa, The Center for Advanced Study of African Society in Cape Town (CASAS) is working on the harmonization of languages since as explained above in the 18th and 19th centuries; African languages were broken up into dialects. Much of the work of classifying and dividing was done by missionaries [30] and was supported by the colonial authorities. These divisions weakened the language. ([29], p. 151) calls it the "de-Africanization through displacement of African languages." He quotes that:

The period concerning about 1830 down to the present day became a period of intensive monograph study of the Bantu languages, a period in which almost all the research and recording work was done by the missionaries ([29], p. 151).

If local languages were harmonized, this would help to protect traditions through stories, myths, and songs. Languages with a colonial legacy, such as English, French, Portuguese and Spanish (to a smaller extent) continue to be used as official languages in many developing countries today. Africans were forced to use European languages, and this constituted a form for colonization of the mind [30]. English is a particularly powerful globalizing language that is influencing debates on choice

of LoI in many developing countries. ([31], p. 421) notes that “language has a pecking order and English has the sharpest beak”. It carries with it a cultural context foreign to the local contexts for education [31]. The use of English embedded in education is a form for dependency (discussed in the next section) through the institution of European languages, metaphors and curricula. Ki-Zerbo [1] describes in his book “Educate or Perish” how the colonialists replaced the African educational system with a system designed to serve European needs. Colonialized Africa lacked rhyme or reason. Coherent groups of people were divided and disparate groups, who really did not speak the same language, were merged. Odora [32] has argued that in contrast to the Global North which relies on scientific traditions for universal truth, indigenous children were taught from traditional epistemology narratively passed from their ancestors. Learning in these ways formed the basis for transformations of economic, cultural and social systems, and of indigenous sustainable development [33]. Sophisticated fiscal and governance arrangements were in place to develop capacities necessary to exercise rights throughout life and enable the performance of a multiplicity of community functions. Contrary to popular understanding among scholars in the Global North, Africa was neither an educationally nor a technologically unsophisticated continent prior to the Berlin Conference. The general view of African education neglects local context and local people’s rights to their own indigenous histories. Africa’s “good” pre-colonial education and governance systems were adequate and appropriate as socializing agents and supportive of creativity and innovation. However, the long-term consequence of the colonial educational system is an absence of a feeling of responsibility to protect access to local languages, which are irreplaceable intellectual and cultural resources to societies, so that today much African education is of abysmal quality [2].

In recent years, the use of English as a LoI in postcolonial countries has been a subject of debate and research. Many scholars argue that English intervention in learning promotes and prolongs neo-colonialism and that its expansion should be halted [34–38]. Before the colonization of Africa, each social group used its own language to educate its children. The issue of a foreign tongue as language of instruction in Africa emerged in the late 1800s with the introduction of western education of modern era refers to schooling or formal education with specialized curriculum, syllabus and professional teachers/instructors/trainers. During the colonial era (1885–1962), formal education (schooling) was initiated by colonial governments and Christian missionaries ([39], p. 1). Furthermore, “Children began to receive basic education in colonial languages” ([39], p. 1). In the line with [39], ([40], p. 2) stated that “By the time the British took over Tanganyika, after the end of the First World War, to administer it on behalf of the League of Nations, the Kiswahili language was in widespread use”. There were a few pockets where its use was restricted, but it was understood by the majority of the population, and more so in the islands of Zanzibar. In the struggle for independence in both Tanganyika (now Tanzania Mainland) and Zanzibar, Kiswahili played an important role. It was used to mobilize the populace, to raise their political consciousness and to prepare them for self-rule. It was also expected to mobilize them for national development. In fact, the widespread use of Kiswahili was one of the factors that brought about national cohesion and unity.

Today, English is used as an official or semi-official language in over 60 countries in the world [41], and has a prominent place in a further 20. Globally, it is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic conferences, Science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music and advertising ([41], p. 36,37).

Kachru [42] describes the spread of English as three concentric circles to explain how the language has been acquired and how it is used. The first inner circle represents its use as a mother tongue or/and a first language. The second circle comprises countries colonized by Britain where English is learned by non-native speakers as a second language in a multilingual setting, as is the case in Tanzania. The outermost circle consists of countries that dedicate several years in primary and secondary education to the teaching of English as a foreign language, such as Norway and France. Some scholars, namely [43], regard English as a valuable asset for global business and cross-cultural communication. Many language policy makers have adopted this view both in wealthy nations like the United States and Great Britain, where large amounts of “foreign aid” money is spent on promoting English, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where English is now often the sole official LoI at all levels of education [36]. These perspectives ignore the issues of quality learning and cultural identity. If the language is a part of a child, rejecting her language as a teaching medium is likely to affect her self-esteem and identity. The learning process can be done effectively only if a child feels that its identity is acknowledged. These identity and language issues have been taken up in the theory of additive and subtractive learning. In the case of additive learning, learners of a second language maintain their first language while simultaneously adding a second, socially relevant language to his/her repertory of skills. Appel and Muysken [44] argue that the first language is not in danger of being replaced if it is seen as a prestigious language and if it is supported in many ways *i.e.*, in the mass media. In contrast, “when second-language learning is part of a process of language shift away from the first or ‘home’ language, subtractive bilingualism results” ([44], p. 102). Psychological issues will intervene and disturb the mind of the child, eventually arresting the learning process. The best way for anyone to learn is to not feel rejected or to feel their identity threatened. Phillipson [45] argues that this increasing global influence of English constitutes “linguistic imperialism” and counter poses the preservation of native languages as “linguistic human rights” in line with [46].

### 3. Evidence that Learning in an African Language Enhances Knowledge Acquisition

African linguists and educationalists such as [47–52], all argue for the advantages of the use of an African language as the LoI. Children taught in any of the language varieties similar to their mother tongue will have better learning comprehension than those taught in an adopted foreign language such as English, and, furthermore mother tongue education leads to more effective teaching of Sciences and Mathematics [53–55].

Rea-Dickins and Yu [56], who have very recently conducted a large-scale study in Zanzibar on the dynamics of language in student performance as assessed at the end of basic education, concluded that “the reality on the ground frequently runs counter to this ambition for international language proficiency, as the majority of children cannot cope with being taught and tested in a foreign language” (p.16). They argue that “policy makers often look for quick and ‘simple’ solutions...language is a major gatekeeper for the majority” (p.15–16).

An effective language policy takes care that the languages taught in education reflect everyday communication patterns which is as quoted above the reality on the ground in Zanzibar. According to [57], it would be demotivating for learners to learn how to read and write in languages that are neither promoted nor used as language in schools.

Scholars such as [58–61] all conclude from their research that learning in one's mother tongue allows for better learning of all subjects including the learning of a second language. The language that a child masters best is the language used at home and in the local surroundings. However, a choice of language for a local school is complicated by the fact that in many African contexts there are several languages used in the community. There is not always an obvious choice of local language and this has led to many local debates on whether one of the local languages should be used or whether a pan-African language such as Kiswahili should be used as a LoI. The cost of using multiple mother tongues in differing regions is high and there are also debates on whether this separation is feasible. I acknowledge the importance of this debate and the difficulties involved in the choice of a local or pan-African language, but derive from the literature that due to the fluency of Zanzibari and Tanzanians in general in Kiswahili, and because it is a locally constructed language that is related to the vast majority of East African languages, that it is an obvious choice for primary schooling in Zanzibar.

An important issue in choice of a local LoI such as Kiswahili is its reinforcement of local identity. Identity is strongly connected to parent's beliefs, to the language spoken at home and to local culture. The overwhelming message from research in Africa is that using a language that learners use in their everyday lives will improve learning and help to maintain the connection to the local cultural context. The use of a local language in education will contribute to literacy and strengthen cultural identity [52]. According to [52] the use of a local language as a teaching medium will also affect a child's self-esteem. The learning process can be done effectively only if a child feels that her or his identity is acknowledged. The best learning environment will be created when a child feels that their language has value. If the local language is rejected this is equivalent to the rejection of local identity. Research shows that this sense of rejection is affecting children's sense of identity in several African countries [36,37]. Beyond pedagogic and psychological reasons, language is inextricably linked to identity, ideology and power. As ([35], p. 141) wrote "What does it mean for the development of self-respect and identity that the language one normally communicates in does not seem to be deemed fit for a language of instruction in school?". Identity is strongly connected to parent's attitudes, to the language spoken at home and to cultural understanding. If this is ignored, children can become drop-outs or "outsiders" in the society, and on top of that, the society will blame them as being responsible for their own difficulties. Research shows that when people feel that they are outsiders, social problems often develop.

Many schools around the world use English as the LoI in the expectation that it will bring better academic success for their students. As ([60], p. 1) states, "Yet it is now well established that when a child begins learning in his or her first language (also known as a home language or mother tongue) a child is more likely to succeed academically and is better able to learn an additional languages". Webley [60], as well as several scholars in the study directed by [26] leave no doubt that the use of mother tongues facilitate the learning processes in schools.

Scholars such as [37] confirm that there is a belief in Tanzania that learning in English will improve the learning of the language; however, she points out that the LoI has another important function, in that concepts are communicated to children in the language they understand best. [61] study in Nigeria and [62] study in Kenya confirm this point, showing that when Science instruction was conducted primarily in English as opposed to a native tongue, students were unable to apply concepts they had

learned in class to practical situations at home. Furthermore ([58], p. 3) reinforces the point on the power of local language to communicate concepts when he writes, “Learning a second language does not imply the development of a totally new perspective, but rather the expansion of perspectives that children already possess”. It is important to make the point that learning in a language and learning a language have two different functions, and to combine these functions will slow and possibly stop the process of learning [37]. This difference has to be understood and acknowledged in the curriculum.

The LOITASA [63] project, based at the University of Oslo, addressed the question of LoI and learning in Tanzania and South Africa. The aim of the LOITASA project in the first phase has been to build up research competence in the South and to study the effects of having as a LoI a language which is unfamiliar to the students and not well mastered by the teachers which has been done by several books in the LOITASA series that can be found in the website (see reference list below). On the second phase, the LOITASA team has been looking at the problem of a lack of materials, by comparing the resource gap between private primary schools and government primary schools where the results show that children succeed better in private schools because of the allocated resources and not the LoI. The project compared learning in classrooms that employ a familiar language versus those in which learning takes place in English. The results clearly demonstrated that not only does the use of Kiswahili improve teaching and learning, but also that it has significant subsidiary benefits for the society. Its conclusions were that students performed better when they are taught in a familiar language and suggested that Kiswahili should be used in post primary education as well as in higher education.

In addition to the results from LOITASA and many other studies cited above that English as a LoI hinders educational development at the primary level, there is also evidence that it reinforces social inequity [64]. A result of the transition to English LoI could be a diminution of “cultural capital” in poor and socially excluded groups [65]. According to [65] the ability to function well in school and in society will be dependent on certain surrounding factors such as parental education, the number of books in the home, the amount that a child is read to, and the amount that a child is talked to. In line with [58] who writes that “Children do not arrive at school with equal amounts of knowledge of the world... Differences in experiences in homes and in their daily lives can lead to some children having lesser or greater amounts of knowledge in some knowledge-domains than other children” ([58], p. 6).

Language is used in the learning process inside and outside of the house. Children of elite parents are more likely to have access to English literature and films, and to have travelled, and thus to have been exposed to the use of English in differing contexts. Therefore, the use of English as LoI gives advantages to elite families and reinforces disadvantages for others. In effect, the skewed cultural capital will be reinforced and institutionalized in the education system [58,65]. As discussed above, cultural context is crucial for learning; however today, the classroom education does not take advantage of the immense learning opportunities available at home, in communities and in workplaces [66].

Furthermore, ([67], p. 95) argues, “How much pupils learn in school depends greatly on what concepts they are exposed to, how much time they spend studying these concepts, and how effective their teachers are in communicating them”. A review undertaken by a joint research team from UNESCO and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) concluded that the interconnectedness between language, communication and effective teaching and learning is generally misunderstood outside expert circles [26]. Using a foreign language as a LoI makes the language a barrier rather than an aid for both teachers and students.

Cooke and Williams [68] cite numerous studies [69,70] conducted in several African countries to show that “the vast majority of primary school pupils cannot read adequately in English, the sole official language of instruction” ([70], p. 307). Cooke and Williams [68] go on to state, “If children in developing countries have little exposure to the LoI outside the school, and if teaching the LoI is ineffective inside the school, then low-quality education is inevitable” ([68], p. 313). As the majority of these students leave school with no literacy and a low competence with a language they use very little outside the classroom, to propose that receiving their education in English disadvantages them is a severe understatement.

English language education is put further into question when examining the inequities it perpetuates between its immediate benefactors (the relatively wealthy) and those for whom it has no practical use (the severely impoverished). In addition to possessing the means to access larger markets and coveted white-collar jobs, the relatively wealthy urban groups also have better educational opportunities leading to greater levels of English proficiency than the more disadvantaged urban and rural poor are able to acquire [71]. English then becomes an upper-class language, which the poor hold in great esteem but cannot effectively access because of the low quality of their education and their disadvantaged economic status.

#### **4. The Rights-based Approach to Language of Instruction**

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 [72] states that everyone has the right to education. It says little about the nature, kind and quality of education. Rights and capabilities are often discussed as multi-dimensional models, which can be seen as comprehensive models [71]. The UN called for a mainstreaming of human rights to encourage the government’s responsibility to insure the rights-based approach. A right-based approach works to shift the paradigm away from aid and towards moral duty imposed on the world through the international consensus of human rights. The rights-based framework includes the principle that every human being is entitled to decent education and gives priority to the intrinsic importance of education, implying that governments need to mobilize the resources to offer quality education ([73], p. 8). Tomasevski [74] advocates that education should prepare learners for participation: “it should teach the young that all human beings—themselves included—have rights” ([74], p. 33). Education has the potential to empower if teaching and learning give nourishment and self-respect that in turn bring confidence to teachers and learners. The opposite could develop within the new curriculum in Zanzibar. I agree with ([75], p. 77) when she writes that “It will be necessary that the government goes beyond its duties in terms of the rights-based policies, to undertake action to ensure that every child can fully and equally enjoy her right to education” which implies that teachers are well-trained and well-paid, and teaching material is provided and a good curriculum and pedagogy is developed.

As reviewed in the previous section, the choice of the LoI is crucial for learning. Language plays a critical role in cognitive learning and in the development of logic, reason, critical thinking and new knowledge [50,76,77]. I have examined whether the change to English as a LoI in the new primary curriculum of Zanzibar will truly fulfill the intentions of the human rights perspective, and advance the quality of teaching and learning. UNESCO’s convention of 2005 on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions emphasizes the importance of linguistic diversity. Local language

should be seen as an intimate part of culture and thus should be designated as a human right in the education sector [46]. Applying the arguments on quality learning and capability approach, education in a local language should be regarded as a human right.

Reforms and policies connecting local cultures to education have been neglected in Africa. According to ([78], p. 60), “effective education reform requires agendas and initiatives with strong local roots”. In other words, indigenous knowledge should be included in the curriculum [32,79], and indigenous language is critical to the preservation and development of indigenous knowledge.

Africa will not achieve human right in education until and unless it acknowledges that local language, identity and culture are to be respected and fulfilled in local curriculum.

## 5. The Implications of the Curriculum Change

I found that one of the purposes of the curriculum change was, in the minds of educational policy makers, to enhance quality education in secondary school and to decrease dropouts (only 50, 3% of eligible children were enrolled in secondary school in 2006 while 100% were enrolled in primary school). However, according to interviews with local academics, the assessment of past problems and future solutions was based on an incomplete analysis, giving most attention to the wishes of parents, who confuse learning English with learning in English. In addition, the analysis behind the change gave too little attention to the views of teachers and to the quality of their interaction with students in the classroom. An important finding from interviews with teachers was that they were deficient in English skills. Even English teachers (*i.e.*, teachers of the English language) had difficulties communicating in English. Many teachers related that they felt that teaching and learning in English was an overwhelming challenge. All of the Mathematics and Science teachers interviewed disagreed with the curricular change requiring Mathematics and Science to be taught in English. They believe that the principles of Mathematics can be better explained with reference to local context and they showed me concrete examples such as the dimensioning of school gardens. One of the teachers interviewed explained it thus “The best way to teach math is to use local context in local language. For example to use leaves, lemon, sun flowers to learn algebra ex. Lemons begin with a L and if you have 5 lemons it becomes 5 L, then we can say  $5 L - 3 L = 2 L$ .” (16th of November 2010).

Another teacher argued that “we forget that our children can think and process a lot more things through their mother tongue than in English, most of them are stuck and cannot go to higher education I am sure it is the reason because they are very intelligent.” (15 November 2010). A clear finding from these interviews is that the teachers are not well prepared to teach in English. Most of the teachers interviewed could not speak English, including English teachers. During interviews, Kiswahili was used most of the time as teachers could not express themselves in English. Many teachers said that to learn and to teach English was a huge challenge.

Teacher involvement has been underestimated in Africa and this is part of the reason behind a neglect of the problem of teacher competence in English [37]. I have pointed out that this is a major problem in Zanzibar. A number of studies [34,80] have analyzed the causes of poor quality learning and they all highlighted the lack of qualified teachers (especially in rural areas), inadequate planning of head teachers and teachers, large classes, as well as lack of material and absenteeism of teachers and

head teachers [81]. An important finding from the interviews with teachers is that the teacher preparation for the transition to English as a LoI is poor. One teacher argued that:

When I was a child I was taught in English at the primary level. It was not a problem. Why? Because we had a good preparation of teachers, there is not enough preparation of teachers. Teacher training college to me is not a right place to “cook” the teachers. There are many reasons including shortage of teaching and learning materials, shortage of qualified and motivated teachers that is why we need teachers who can provide the product required. That is the problem that we are having (15 November, 2010).

The second year teachers drew attention to the challenges of having only a teacher guide book and were impatiently awaiting the books that they had not received at the start of the third year. They explained that the delay created difficulties in teaching according to the new curriculum. One of the English teachers emphasized the needs of books for both teachers and learners and explained that creativity was not enough:

We had a workshop last year on test questions, how to formulate questions, to simplify comprehension, how to teach topics, which material to use. Teach and taste fruits, learners bring them from home for example “Guava is bitter, Juice is sweet, Mango is sweet but can be bitter” but this is not enough, we need books (14 February 2012).

A switch of LoI to English in 2014 will require thorough preparation. A group interview of English teachers revealed other challenges relating to more detailed English subject content that the teachers will find more difficult to teach as they are not competent in the language:

We have too many topics and sub-topics like identifying objects and prepositions, teaching how to solve a problem, including describing oneself, issues, expressing emotions such as happiness, sourness, like/dislike, making polite requests and responses, making simple inquiries, comparing and differentiating, telling time, making apologies, translating short paragraphs and passages. These are our challenges and we need books for both the teachers and the learners (14 February 2012).

If the books become available in 2013 that may help the transition but there are no guarantees that the 2010 and 2011 cohorts will have access to quality learning in 2014–2015. The teachers stated that they will not succeed in using the new curriculum in a way that creates a comprehensible learning environment for children. This absence of a capability to teach and learn violates the rights of both children and teachers. The change will be no more than a formalism, which cannot be complied with in practice. The overwhelming conclusion from the teachers is that the implementation will result in a degradation of learning. They are in favor of teaching in Kiswahili, the most effective way for them to teach and for the children to learn in all subjects.

According to a senior Zanzibari academic, familiar with the policy analysis behind the curriculum change, it was not based on solid research. In his view, the changes are the result of a political rather than a research-based decision. He argued that policy makers are incompetent when it comes to teaching and language issues; they will just go along with the general opinion of the people. According to him, a government must base its policies on scientific research, but this was not done in LoI changes in Zanzibar.

The analysis provides a basis for examining how the curriculum in Zanzibar is perceived and used in school, and the ways that local people and governments interpret and deal with the issues related to learning processes within the curriculum development.

Education policies in Zanzibar are being implemented and their consequences for quality teaching and learning have been underestimated. There is a dilemma of maintaining local contexts for learning as African countries attempt to educate their citizens to be competitive in an increasingly globalizing economy. At the center of this debate between local and global influences on curriculum is the issue of LoI. There are widespread and indisputable findings that the use of a local LoI promotes deeper understanding of both local and global issues; in short, both a local curriculum and a local language are essential for quality learning and should be regarded as an implicit right in education. I critically examine the arguments for considering a local LoI as a right in education and the reasons behind lack of acknowledgement of this right in Africa. The arguments draws on my research in Zanzibar, focusing on the four primary schools where I have interviewed teachers and observed students in order to have a feel for how teaching and learning will take place within the new curriculum [82].

The reality is that today in many countries in Africa, the choice of language-in-education policy disregards both the Science and the rights of language choice by implementing a non-local, non-indigenous language (English) as the LoI in schools where English (or French) is being promoted as a LoI in the name of global integration. Reforms in Africa are being undertaken based on an unrealistic agenda that is incorporating Western curriculum and using Western languages. The reasons for this have to do with misplaced associations of development with modernization, where emulation of Western development and Western educational systems are regarded as the way forward for Africa. Scientifically speaking, this does not form a basis for capability-based educational development, nor does it bring social justice and quality in education [2]. It is time to recognize the wealth of African knowledge and to promote its languages in education. This would make a significant contribution to African development on its own terms and for the benefit of the majority of Africans.

There is no doubt that Zanzibar is in need of education reforms to improve quality learning. There is a substantial body of research as mentioned above, which shows that students learn more quickly and effectively when taught in a familiar language than when first taught in a foreign language. Zanzibar needs educational reforms but, unfortunately, she has mistakenly mixed up increased use of English LoI with improved educational performance. How can we recapture local knowledge in another form of schooling which will recognize the integration of local and global knowledge in the education system? Indeed it is asserted that there is a need to learn from local communities to enrich the development process, as local languages are an integral part of the culture and resources of a community. According to [83], the use of local languages and a culturally sensitive approach play an important role in the maintenance and regeneration of indigenous innovation. We observe that language abstraction as an instrument of domination or cultural dehumanization was effected either by the process of assimilation or acculturation [84]. Assimilation (movement towards the dominant culture) in Africa had to do with colonial power turning natives into model citizens. This was achieved by French for example by teaching French language at schools and churches, along with French history and culture.

Acculturation, a derivative of African contact with European colonializes, is manifested in assimilation or marginalization (alienation from both the local and the dominant cultures).

Both processes of polarizing give rise to social challenges based on a presumption of the superiority of Western culture and “civilization” [2]. In this sense, in addition to advocating for retaining human rights, Nyerere had a strong vision of education and social action [27]. One of the key objectives of Nyerere’s development strategy for Tanzania was to ensure that basic social services were available equitably to all members of society. He questioned the concept of schooling and understood that colonialism had based the schooling systems in their colonies on “western” educational curricula and concepts. His idea was to rethink the idea of basic schooling in an African context. He believed that various forms for local knowledge were important and that the classical, European style education that had been instituted by the British did not account for this [27]. Nyerere’s idea was that the Tanzanian economy would also benefit from this merging of livelihood-based knowledge with classical education. His vision of integrating local economy and local education were seen as a way of resolving many of the problems of colonization and one-way development. Designing education in a way that accounts for local culture, language and life patterns would also bring back autonomy and pride in the country. After his educational reforms were put into place he wrote:

Our national songs and dances are once again being learned by our children; our national language has been given the importance in our curriculum which it needs and deserves...changes have been introduced to make our educational system more relevant to our needs ([27], p. 49).

I agree with [27] that the detrimental and insidious effects of market mechanism on curriculum and language constitute a basis for replacing local language the pedagogy of choice. Nyerere’s goals emphasizing local language and culture in education were translated into the 1974 Universal Primary Education Movement: to make primary education universally available, compulsory and to provide free of cost to users to ensure it reached the poorest segments of the population [23]. This is why the unique experience of African development and the imperative of vested language interest in curriculum are still shaped and further compounded the obstacles (or roadblocks) for linguistic rights for social-development and integration [2].

## 6. Conclusions

A quality education should be regarded as a human right. Fundamental freedom and quality education will not be achieved through the medium of a foreign LoI. The curriculum change in Zanzibar constitutes a violation of children’s rights in education. Based on the declaration of human rights, children have the right to be educated in a way that contributes to their capacity for individual development. Every Zanzibari child should have the right to express himself/herself in a language s/he masters best; only then can democracy be achieved. The most significant contribution of this article is in demonstrating the links between language choice, quality learning and rights in education. Using a local (‘indigenous’) language satisfies the rights criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability [74]. These should be common to education in all its forms and at all levels. In general terms, quality education corresponds to basic education as set out in the World Declaration on Education for All, but must also ensure human rights through localizing education in local language and context.

It should take account of the educational, cultural and social background of the students concerned. It demands flexible curricula and varied delivery systems to respond to opportunities of communities and the needs of students in different social and cultural settings [85,86].

In many African countries, the goal of right to education is becoming increasingly remote, let alone that of right in education [2]. Development aid has to be integrated with human rights principles to meet the demands of right in education. With this understanding and with the awareness of the education challenges of nations and millions of people throughout Africa, implying that the lack of the right in education remains a distant goal, a rights-capability based approach to education becomes imperative in order to overcome obstacles.

Local languages need to be valued and to be preserved, and children need to be prepared for the world in a language that promotes understanding. The adherence to human rights requires changing not only laws but also cultural practices and economic systems [75]. Development needs a new face in which local technologies, including those used in education are given priority. An important educational technology is the production of books. Textbooks and teaching materials can be produced inexpensively if the knowledge and the production are local. Many literacy classes in Africa use African languages in literacy work, something that is commendable, but as [20] states, people once literate may forget how to read simply because they do not have access to reading materials. Production of books and other support materials is thus of particular importance and yet it is currently a growing problem.

Despite the scientifically-based evidence, English as a LoI continues to be required at all educational levels in many developing nations and remains the focus of many language 'aid' programs implemented by countries such as the United States and United Kingdom [84]. Therefore, language educators working in developmental contexts ought to question language policies and seek to inform other educators, policy makers, and community members of more viable educational alternatives to the current, blind-faith reliance on English. Equally important, the political motives of government officials in these countries must be questioned.

My findings encourage us also to ask why wealthy donor nations such as the United States spend large amounts of "foreign aid" money on the promotion of English in developing countries instead of using it for funding basic literacy acquisition in local dialects and generating quality educational materials in native languages [2]. A possible way further could be to encourage a wide-scale educational campaign to inform developing communities of how language choice in education can affect personal and economic development. For, in order to make any change possible, one would need to question both the causes and the effects of such harmful language and educational policies at every level, from government officials and policy makers down to the poorest participants in education.

The success of implementing a new curriculum reform will depend on the extent to which policy makers and planners take school realities into account [87]. As shown in the case of Zanzibar the policy seems to have been driven by political imperatives, which had little to do with classroom realities. Teachers and principals should be given more control in curriculum development. Ensuring that aid as well as international partnerships results in quality education requires the designing of more innovative frameworks that fit the uniqueness and realities of localities. These are some of the roadblocks and challenges that squarely face donor efforts in the way to facilitate the provision of rights, efficiency and efficacy in education [2]. Policy makers are in a position to work

towards a high quality education for all as part of a more comprehensive right-based approach, that we owe to children in order to achieve social justice in the society and in the world.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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