

# **A study on a newly rising concern on “the absence of mother tongue education” in the discussion of quality education in Tanzania**

## **—A case study of 10 primary schools—**

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There has been increased interest in quality education in Tanzania, and there is a new trend from the perspective of ‘mother tongue education’, which enforces the use of each ethnic language from early education in Tanzania. To examine the validity of this newly risen concern, this paper reports on field research conducted in 10 primary schools in Njombe, Ruvuma and Dar es Salaam regions between 2015- 2017.

After the high enrolment has been achieved, Tanzania needed to focus on improving the quality of education. To address the poor learning performance called ‘learning crisis,’ the government introduced learner-centered instruction. The teachers were then required to apply instructional methods where the students actively participated in their learning. In this context, the question of the language of instruction in schools is given more attention than before.

In Tanzania, the language of instruction has been a major issue mainly at the secondary education level, especially to introduce a new policy to enforce the use of Kiswahili, which enables the students to better understand the subjects at all levels and achieve higher performance. However, recently, there is a new trend. Some researchers concern the negative effect of making Kiswahili the language of instruction from the first years of education on the assumption that Kiswahili is not the students’ ‘mother tongue’, and ethnic languages are therefore better understood.

Through interviews with teachers and observations in classrooms, this study reveals that the assumption which support this new language question in primary schools seems not really the case. Moreover, it is difficult to assess whether poor performance is caused by language or not in the current setting, which faces challenges such as the lack of teaching material, lack of teachers, and inadequate educational environment. At the same time, if the ethnic languages are to be used as the medium of instruction, new challenges would arise, such as that new text books must be written, qualified teachers are needed for every ethnic language, etc. The issues concerning the language of instruction may therefore create more challenges and undermine the every efforts towards quality education.