

## **PhD Abstract**

*A Study of Early Literacy Classroom Interaction in Rural Tanzania: Cases of Ruvuma and Coast Regions*

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The study investigates the effectiveness of the use of Swahili in classroom interaction in rural Tanzania with specific reference to Ruvuma and Coast regions in Tanzania. The national policy is to use Swahili only as the medium of instruction in primary schools even though it is not the main language of communication in many communities in Tanzania.

The study is guided by socio-cultural learning theory as propounded by Vygotsky. It holds that an ideal classroom situation is one in which learners and teachers are active participants in the classroom processes. Teachers should provide support to learners when in difficulty. The data was collected through semi-structured interview, observation and pupil language assessment. Since the focus of the study is literacy acquisition, the study focused mainly on grade one pupils at age seven. The analysis was guided by classroom interaction analysis and adult-child proximation models.

The general result is that in Songea Rural District, where the language of the surrounding community is not Swahili, classroom interaction is minimal. By contrast, in Bagamoyo District, where the language of the community is Swahili, classroom interaction is good. Pupils are voluble enough to interact well among themselves and with teachers, and they compete to respond to questions and provide information. In the schools in Songea, pupils learn less, lesson foci are diverted to cope with communication difficulties and there is less progress in terms of mastering literacy skills mastery and curriculum coverage. Pupils in the school in Bagamoyo had a higher level of expressive ability.

The findings suggest that the medium of instruction policy disadvantages pupils in the early primary years, who live in remote rural areas where Swahili is not the main

language of communication. It is recommended that classroom interaction in the early years of primary education be in a familiar language. At the very least, teachers should be permitted to switch into the local language, when otherwise they would not be understood. Further, teachers should be specifically trained for teaching in contexts where Swahili is not the first language of pupils.