

# **PHILOSOPHY & HUMAN SCIENCE**

## **The Influence of Language of Instruction on Students' Academic Outcomes: The Experience of Secondary Schools in Morogoro, Tanzania**

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### **Abstract**

Many have ascribed the poor performance that secondary school students in Tanzania have suffered in various school subjects in the national examinations to the students' weakness in English, the Language of Instruction (LoI). This brief paper seeks to determine the influence of LoI on students' academic success in secondary schools. An English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) and students' academic archival reports provided the data and a Statistical Package for Software System (SPSS) facilitated data analysis. Analysis brought to light the finding that proficiency in LoI affects performance only to a slight extent. Non-ELP factors exert a stronger influence on performance in subjects other than English while – not surprisingly – English proficiency does indeed exercise much influence on English achievement. The study concludes that academic performance is a function of several variables and that ELP plays a role in performance but not the major role. The study recommends that the government (1) emphasize the improvement of ELP, since the greater the improvement, the more a positive influence may be anticipated; and (2) consider using ELP as an additional eligibility criterion for admission into higher education.

## 1. Introduction

Tanzania, like several other countries, requires students to enter the university with a basic level of competence in four distinct English language skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening. To enter universities on other continents, students coming from non-English speaking countries must provide evidence of proficiency in the English language before being admitted (Dooey and Oliver, 2002). The two most popular tests for this purpose are the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The ELP of prospective and incoming university students is therefore a critical determinant in predicting their success in graduate studies. The only differences between Tanzanian universities and universities on other continents where proficiency testing is concerned are: first, those Tanzanian universities doing ELP testing do it for screening purposes while in the universities found overseas the testing is for admission. Next, the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) in Tanzania evaluates mainly grammar and vocabulary skills in a written format. At the Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), for instance, entrants are given screening tests; the results show substantial increases in the number of new entrants who fail. Consequently, most of them are being advised to register for the intensive grammar programme or for Communication Skills 1.

Tanzania basically does not use ELP as one of her admission criteria, but rather uses O-level and A-level NECTA results as a key criterion when admitting candidates for advanced studies or for a college programme. The assumption is that students' scores on these tests prior to the learning for which these tests are intended to qualify them are significant in predicting the final score or success of these same students in the final examinations administered on other levels, such as in A-level universities and colleges. Therefore, the scores of students in O-level or A-level NECTA results ought to be significant in foretelling what a student will score eventually in A-level final evaluations or in their final scores at the university.

The public and some scholars, however, blame English as the cause of underachievement because students are admitted into

various levels with poor grades in English. Indeed they cannot express themselves in English, the language that is supposed to be transmitting knowledge to them.

Good performance on the part of students is essential for the personal development of individuals and for the social and economic development of society-at-large. Here in Tanzania, poor students' academic performance in most secondary schools is a growing problem and is now at an alarming rate. Because this is the case, affluent parents have lost trust in the public schools and are now taking their children to the private schools; some send their children abroad. One of the factors frequently mentioned as to why they don't want to take their children to public schools is that the English taught there is not up to par. As a result, there is a fear that if their children were to go to the public schools, they would not be proficient in English, and thus would fail to keep up with the pace of the teaching and learning processes at more advanced institutions.

It is obvious that Tanzania like other multilingual societies in the world has not eluded the problem of language of education. In the country, the Language of Instruction (LoI) in primary schools is different from that of schools on the secondary and tertiary levels. English is the LoI of secondary schools and higher learning institutions while Kiswahili is used in the primary schools.

The LoI, for more than 50 years since independence has always been a matter of public debate. There is an opinion that we can get rid of English as the LoI because even after students take courses that focus on English, they nevertheless manifest weak proficiency.

Actually, students' success in school depends upon their proficiency in the LoI (Mvungi, 1982; Osbiston, 1980). The LoI plays a crucial role in learning: Malekela (2003), for example, argues that if the learner is handicapped in the LoI, then learning may not take place because the instructor and the learner will not be communicating with each other. Therefore, the overall performance of students seems to depend extensively on the LoI.

Poor performance in the country is not restricted only to secondary schools where English is the LoI, but also to primary schools where English is not the LoI. This really raises a crucial question as to whether English really is the genuine cause of poor

performance in secondary schools as critics tend to claim. One would expect primary school pupils to perform well because they are taught in Kiswahili, which is our *lingua franca*<sup>1</sup> and a first language for some.

But this has not been the case. In recent years, the examination board has been frequently reporting on poor primary school results.

In the present article, therefore, language proficiency should generally be understood as the overall ability/versatility of an individual in the use of language. An English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) is to be understood as a test for proficiency that is organised systematically into listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. Academic outcome<sup>2</sup> is intended to mean the result of academic work undertaken by a student and is defined in terms of the scores that a student is able to garner after a certain period of learning. Language of Instruction (LoI) simply refers to the language utilised in the process of teaching and learning; in other words, it is the medium of instruction.

## 2. Problem Statement

Many students in Tanzania complete various levels with poor grades or scores in English and in other subjects like Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, and History, to mention but a few. As a result, many of these students resort to reseating. Having repeated one or several courses, only a very few successfully pass and have the opportunity to continue with A-level studies or with a college education. As Kagashe reports in a January, 2011, issue of *The Citizen*, for instance, from among 397,251 students who sat for the national examinations in 2010, a total of 174,193 (43.83%) of the students failed the examinations (i.e., they scored division zero); and 223,058 – in other words, 56.15% – passed the examinations.

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<sup>1</sup> Lingua franca is a language used among people whose main languages are different. Most Tanzanians have their own mother tongue (like Kisafwa, Kibena, Kisukuma, Kikinga, Kizigua, Kimakonde, and so forth) while Kiswahili is a common language; for some Kiswahili is their mother tongue.

<sup>2</sup> In this study academic achievement or academic performance and academic outcome are used synonymously to mean scores or grades achieved or realised by assessing or examining the ability displayed through speaking or writing what one has learnt in the classroom.

The average pass mark dropped from 52.83% in 2009 to 50.40% in 2010.

The trend did not seem to change in succeeding years: the students who sat for Form Four examinations in 2012 produced very poor results. Siyame (2013) reports that from among 397,136 students who sat for the examinations, 240,903 got division zero – 60% – and those who got division I – III were less than even 6%. The results were so devastating that the government decided to lower the standards – to lower the cut-off points –so that students could be admitted to Form Five and other levels even though by the standards of previous years they would not have been allowed to do so.<sup>3</sup> This is to say that without lowering the cut-off points or curving the scores it would have turned out that some schools and colleges would have had no candidate or very few candidates to enter A-level or college education.

Scholars have given this problem of poor performance and decrease of quality of education considerable attention (Omari 1995; Osaki 1999 and Wilson 2011). The performance of students in the CSSE has been of humiliating dimensions for the three consecutive years 2010, 2011 and 2012. The publication of these embarrassing results has fuelled fierce discussion and raging debates about the possible causes. In fact, these debates and discussions have often been ascribing the poor performance on the part of the students to weakness in English language proficiency since this is the language through which knowledge transmitted to learners.

Generally speaking, most language experts in Tanzania have so far been considering lack of proficiency in English as a factor for the underachievement of most students at higher levels of education because students fail to learn effectively when the sole medium of instruction is English. Often teachers feel compelled to use Kiswahili to clarify what they are trying to teach in English (Jones, Rubagumya and Mwansoko, 1998). Hence, in most classes code switching is unofficially the continuing paradigm for teaching academic subjects.

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<sup>3</sup> In such a problematic situation one may choose to curve the scores: this is usually done according to the parameters of a bell curve (Editor's Note).

Despite the ongoing debates about the LoI – debates that have continued unabated since independence – researchers know little about the influence of ELP on academic performance or on whether scores in English proficiency correlate with actual ability in English language usage. Very little has been investigated to ascertain whether scores the students achieve in language reflect their ability in the language. The few studies that indeed focused on this problem did not seem to shed any light on the matter (Jones, Rubagumya and Mwansoko, 1998; Mvungi, 1982; Roy-Campbell and Qorro, 1997). There were others, however, that arrived at the noteworthy conclusion that English was not to be blamed (see, for example, Kadege, 2000).

Actually, the problem of poor performance of public secondary school students is not limited to Tanzania. According to Ajayi, a Nigerian scholar, public schools in Nigeria have been persistently experiencing mass failure in public examinations. The researcher argues that the factors affecting the situation are multi-dimensional in nature in the sense that they range from either positive or negative influences on the part of parents, students, teachers, schools, government and the society-at-large (Ajayi, 2012).

It is the intent of this present paper, therefore, to examine to what extent the English language is the culprit to be blamed for the mass failures that have been occurring time and time again. Does English deserve the suspicion that the public and some scholars are giving it as if it were the only cause for the failures?

### **3. Theoretical Considerations**

We have been indicating repeatedly that the poor performance of secondary school students in various subjects in the national examinations has often been ascribed to their weaknesses in the English language. The insinuation is that the LoI has a marked influence on the students' academic success. The increasing failure of students in courses that concentrate on the English language together with their failures in other school subjects and the ensuing downfall of education in general has inspired scholarly discussions on the possible factors of such a dismal situation, a situation that seems to have prevailed since the 1980s.

It is a matter of course that various studies reveal that most Tanzanian students have low levels of ELP. Scholars like Mvungi (1982) and Osbiston (1980) argue that proficiency in the LoI is an important factor in general academic performance; hence lack of proficiency in English results in poor performance in other academic subjects.

Table 1 below shows that in 2010 a total of 334,531 students from the Tanzania Mainland sat for national examinations among whom 1.58% scored Division I, 2.92% Division II, 7.10% Division III, 37.70% Division IV and 50.70% failed. In 2011, a total of 324,421 sat for CSEE among whom 1.11% of students scored Division I, 2.47% Division II, 6.47% Division III and 42.64% Division IV while 47.30% failed. The failure tallies, 50.70% in 2010 and 47.30% in 2011, are high. Indeed the data presented in the table clearly show that the general performance in the CSEE was poor in both years. The majority of the candidates scored Division IV which corresponds to a marginal pass; the rest scored Division 0, that is to say, they "Failed". When the percentages of the marginal pass tally (Division IV) and the failure tally (Division 0) are combined, the resulting percentages, 88.40% in 2010 and 89.30% in 2011 represent students who performed either on the borderline or below it. Currently the CSEE results are becoming even worse year after year. For example, the results of 2012 were the worst ever recorded by the national examinations board. When scholars and the general public review the total configuration of scores for recent years, they seem to rush to the conclusion that the problem rests with poor ELP on the part of the students.

### **3.1 Previous Studies on Prediction of Academic Outcomes**

Prediction of academic outcome refers to the act of foretelling what a student will score at the end of the course of study because particular tests given to students are significant in forecasting the final scores of such students in the final examinations. Dooley and Oliver (2002) did their study on "the predictive validity of the [International English Language Testing Service] (IELTS) test as an indicator of future academic success". The purpose of their study was to investigate how accurate IELTS is, as a predictor of

performance and success in the school of business, science and engineering. To do this, a small-scale quantitative study was carried out amongst first year undergraduate students from diverse non-English speaking backgrounds who were admitted to their academic programmes on the basis of their IELTS scores. The findings showed little evidence that the IELTS could support the hypothesis that language proficiency is a predictor for academic success. It is possible that these results are the consequence of involving students in the study who in fact came from a broad range of various backgrounds, age groups, faculties and departments. This confirmed previous research findings which suggested that language is only one among many important contributing factors.

In 2006, Woodrow investigated the predictive validity of the IELTS test on students' success at the university. IELTS subtest scores were correlated against students' first semester Grade Point Average (GPA), which Woodrow considered to be a reliable criterion for the level of academic achievement for that particular semester.

Year			Divisions		
			I	II	III
2011	Girls	No.	1,073	2,405	6,347
		%	0.78	1.74	4.59
	Boys	No.	2,538	5,595	14,652
		%	1.36	3.00	7.87
	Total	No.	3,611	8,000	20,999
		%	1.11	2.47	6.47
2010	Girls	No.	1,457	2,862	7,547
		%	0.96	1.89	4.97
	Boys	No.	3,814	6,896	16,198
		%	2.09	3.77	8.87
	Total	No.	5,271	9,758	23,745
		%	1.58	2.92	7.10

IV	O	I-III	I-IV	All Levels
2011	2011	2011	2011	2011
<b>G</b> 54,941	73,482	9,825	64,766	<b>138,248</b>
% 39.74	53.15	7.11	46.85	
<b>B</b> 83,402	79,986	22,785	106,187	<b>186,173</b>
% 44.80	42.97	12.24	57.03	

<b>T</b> 138,343	153,468	32,610	170,953	<b>324,421</b>
% 42.64	47.30	10.05	52.69	
<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>G</b> 51,459	88,503	11,866	63,325	<b>151,828</b>
% 33.89	58.29	7.82	41.71	
<b>B</b> 74,699	81,096	26,908	101,607	<b>182,703</b>
% 40.89	44.39	14.73	55.61	
<b>T</b> 126,158	169,599	38,774	164,932	<b>334,531</b>
% 37.71	50.70	11.59	49.30	

Table 1: Mainland Tanzania School Candidates, CSEE 2010-2011: Performance by Divisions (See: NECTA Stats, 2012)

The results of this 2006 study indicated that the level of English Language Proficiency, as measured by the IELTS, moderately predicted academic achievement in the first semester of study for the students sampled. In this study, the overall IELTS represented 16% of the variance in academic achievement as measured by the first semester GPA. The results are consistent with those of other studies that indicate that variables other than language proficiency are relevant.

Woodrow examined other variables including professional experience. However, there seemed to exist no significant correlational relationship between these variables and the first semester GPA. The analysis indicated that at a lower level of English, the relationship is stronger than at a higher level. Thus, for students scoring 6.5 or lower, proficiency may influence their achievement, whereas with students scoring 7 and above, English proficiency does not influence academic performance. Woodrow concluded by stating the obvious: academic achievement is a complex issue. Her study found that proficiency in the English language, particularly at the low end of the proficiency scale, may be related to performance; and that academic achievement for international students is depends partly on language proficiency.

A lot of studies in other parts of the world show that LoI has a role to play in educational success (Bellingham 1993; Elder 1993; Allwright and Banerjee 1997 and Cotton and Conrow, 1998). From these studies conducted in the developed world, it can be concluded that a relationship exists between the language proficiency scores of students instructed in English and their eventual academic

performance. With particular reference to Tanzania, several studies on academic achievement have concentrated on finding factors affecting poor performance in science subjects (Chonjo and Welford, 2001), in medical education (Leshabari and Masesa, 2000) and in teachers' education (Dasu, 2001). Osaki (1997) studied the relationship between CSEE results and one's final degree classification. More significantly, Ndabi (1987) observed that Form Four results in individual subjects correlated significantly with the results in the corresponding Form Six subjects. Ndabi concluded that the CSEE results predicted students' academic performance in subjects that concerned the sciences.

In contrast, Ndabi (1989), investigating the relationship between Qualifying Tests (QT) and CSEE results (for the period from 1980 to 1982), found that QT could be used to predict the performance of CSEE candidates. This seemed to indicate that helpful data about the predictive power of proficiency in LoI on academic outcomes could have been available in previous years but researchers simply had not applied themselves to this issue.

Dooey and Oliver observed that there is no significant relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement; Criper and Dodd (1984), on the other hand, realised that there is a substantial gap between the students' proficiency in English and the kind of facility necessary for English to be a useful tool for studies in Tanzania. Woodrow noticed that at lower levels of English proficiency, the lack of this language skill plays a detrimental influence on achievement.

Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) observed that ELP has a significant impact on academic achievement. A synopsis of all the studies pertaining to our topic manifests a conflict in the findings and hence calls for further research. All the studies, especially those conducted in Tanzania that concern prediction of performance, conclude that when the causative factors are addressed, better academic achievement will be attained. It must be noted, however, that none of these studies seemed to have the capacity to predict what learning approach could be unequivocally advantageous for academic achievement; nor did any of these studies show convincing evidence of the influence of LoI on academic outcome.

In fact, with particular reference to Tanzania, the question about whether ELP can predict academic performance becomes a complicated one since for most students English is a third language. For only a few, is it a second language. What creates even further complications is that in the villages students are exposed to the English language by and large only in the classroom, while outside the classroom, Kiswahili predominates.

Therefore, our present study targets the issue of the influence of English language proficiency on secondary school students' ability to perform academically – that is to say, the study focuses on the power of ELP to predict academic achievement.

## **4. Study Methodology**

### **4.1 Study Area, Sampling and Study Design**

The study was conducted in Morogoro, Tanzania. The Morogoro Urban District served as the study site since the area has a big number of poorly performing schools and is among the regions showing a trend of poor performance in CSEE (URT, 2010). This district has an annual growth rate of 2.6% and is situated on the lower slopes of Uluguru Mountains; it covers an area of 260 km<sup>2</sup> (URT, 2010).

Purposive sampling was the technique used for selecting the site and the population that would take part in the study. The participants were from Morogoro Secondary School. The researchers selected students whose academic achievement test scores in English and General Studies (final examination results) were available in their progress report forms. That is to say, those whose test scores were not available in the students' progress reports were not involved. General Studies was used as a representative subject for the other non-selected subjects because it is the subject which – as the title of the course indicates – involves all the students irrespective of whether they belong to the science or arts streams.

The target population in this study consisted of the Form Five advanced level male and female students. These students were deemed appropriate to provide data for the study since A-level students, unlike those of Form One, have greater exposure to English as the medium for learning. One secondary school that

enrols students from various parts of Tanzania, from both government and private O-level schools, was involved because its students came from diverse sectors of the country.

The study involved both a correlational research design and a cross-sectional design. Even though correlational research designs do not automatically produce cause-effect relationships, the researcher considered it appropriate to use the data offered by a correlational research design to bring forth a rough estimate of the predictive power of language proficiency on academic performance. In any event, the research also intended to assess the strength of the relationship between these two variables. The objectives of this study, therefore, determined the feasibility of this choice.

A cross-sectional design was used in order to bring forth data that might be representative of a much larger population than just the sample under study: this design typically includes either the entire population or a selected subset; from the selected individuals, data are collected to answer the research questions of interest. Cross-sectional design focuses on looking at how variables are related to each other at a specific point in time.

The study employed an ELPT and a documentary review in the data collection process. In order to ensure the reliability and the validity of the instruments, the ELPT was piloted in the private school that is nearest to the field school. The problems discovered during the pilot study helped in the re-arrangement of questions and phraseology to suit the Tanzanian context. The students' progress reports were reviewed to collect the secondary data for academic achievement scores of English and General Studies and the test for language proficiency was administered to all the sampled students. ELPT was used because ELP is considered a good indicator and predictor of academic achievement of students who are instructed in English (Bellingham 1993; Cotton and Conrow 1998; Feast 2002; Fakeye and Ogunsiji 2009).

The ELPT was a modified version of the TOEFL test. Modifying the TOEFL seemed necessary because the local proficiency test system is not standardized and is mostly grammar-based – i.e., it excludes other skills like speaking and listening.

In Tanzania, English for most speakers is a second or even a third language; hence either TOEFL or IELTS is an appropriate

test to use in assessing the proficiency level of the students. The ELPT used was a hybrid of a variety of TOEFL tests found online<sup>4</sup>. Another justification for modifying the test in this fashion was that some of the tests involved sections that were difficult to complete using a pen and paper because they were originally intended to be completed and assessed through Internet-Based Language Testing (IBLT) software.

The subjects' academic performance evaluations were correlated with the proficiency test scores to determine whether a significant relationship existed and the extent of the relationship. A linear regression analysis was conducted with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the impact of ELP on students' overall academic achievement. With the help of a coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ), regression analysis helped to ascertain to what extent a change in academic achievement is explained by language proficiency. In other words,  $r^2$  is used to determine what percentage of the variance of one variable can be appropriately explained, predicted or accounted for by the variance of another variable.

## 4.2 The Study

The data for the study were collected for three weeks during February and March, 2011. The study involved 89 students, all of whom were from the arts combinations. A-level students were selected since they are prospective university students: after a short time, they would be joining various universities within the nation or overseas where they would be given ELPTs to ascertain if they can cope with university studies.

Most of the A-level students in Tanzania have been learning through the medium of English for a suitably long time; hence they are assumed to have an adequate degree of proficiency and competency in the English language. Each student's scores on the final examinations (of English and General Studies), therefore, were correlated and analysed by means of linear regression analysis with proficiency measures.

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<sup>4</sup> Free Practice Test for Learners of English found at <http://www.examenglish.com/TOEFL/index.php>

The study proceeded according to the hypothesis that to a large extent the ELP of Tanzanian secondary school students does not influence or predict – nor does it have any significant effect – on academic achievement. In statistics, a result is statistically significant if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance (Bryars, 1983). The amount of evidence required to accept that an event is unlikely to have arisen by chance is known as the critical probability value (p-value). The significance level is usually taken to be 0.05(5%), though sometimes more rigorous research analyses may require 0.01(1%) or 0.001(0.1%) (Bryars, 1983). When the p-value is less than the level of significance determined beforehand, whether it is at the 0.05 level or significance or at the 0.01 level ( $p < 0.05$  or  $p < 0.01$ ), the result is said to be significant (Sanders and Smidt, 2000).

The p-value also depends on whether one deals with one-tailed test or two-tailed test. When one already knows in what direction a correlation should be proceeding – for example, one knows that if one variable increases, the other should be increasing – one uses the one-tailed test. In contrast, if one is not sure whether one variable will increase according to the increase of the other variable or whether the first variable will decrease as the other variable increases, then one would utilise a two-tailed test to determine the significance of any correlation arising from the data (Field, 2005).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Effects of LoI on Academic Achievement

The study aimed at exploring the extent of the impact of Proficiency in LoI on academic achievement. In testing the hypothesis that proficiency in LoI has a very little impact on academic achievement – i.e., that the degree of correlation would be statistically insignificant – English academic achievement scores and scores on proficiency in the LoI were compared in a regression analysis to explore the extent to which the achievement in English is explained by language proficiency. Table 2 reflects that  $r^2$  which helps to ascertain how fit is the ELP in explaining achievement in English is 0.086, and Table 3 shows that the p-value for 0.086 is 0.005. Since  $r^2 = 0.086$  (which is equivalent to 8.6%) this shows that ELP has the power to explain

academic achievement in English language studies, or to put it in another way, affects academic achievement in English by 8.6 %. This can be interpreted to mean that ELP has an effect on English language performance of the secondary school students researched by 8.6%. The corollary to this is that the remainder, 91.4%, is due to other factors.

**Table 2: Regression Summary-English Achievement and ELP**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.293	0.086	0.075	7.784

Predictors: A (Constant) = English Proficiency; B = English Achievement

The relationship of these variables is statistically significant when  $p < 0.01$ . The level of significance was set at 0.01 and the p-value as shown in Table 3 is 0.005. Here, the p-value is less than the significance level set ( $0.005 < 0.01$ ). Hence, it was established that the relationship is significant. It was therefore ascertained that there is a significant positive relationship between ELP and academic achievement in English among the advanced level secondary school students that constituted the research sample.

**Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for English and ELP**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance Level
Regression	494.553	1	494.553	8.163	0.005
Residual	5270.952	87	60.586		
Total	5765.506	88			

Predictors: A (Constant) = English Proficiency (%); B (Dependent Variable) = English Achievement (%).

## 5.2 The Effects of Proficiency in the LOI based on each Stream Studied

The relationship between proficiency in the LOI and academic achievement was narrowed down to the streams that make up the research group so as to determine in which stream the ELP has more influence. The regression analysis presented in Table 4 shows that  $r^2 = 0.296$  which is equivalent to 29.6% ~ 30%. Thus, ELP has

the power to influence academic achievement in English for the HKL stream by 30%. This can be interpreted to mean that among the cluster of variables that might affect performance in the HKL stream, ELP accounted for 30% of the influence on English achievement. The influence of other factors on students' performance amounted to 70%. This influence is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level of significance.

Conversely, from the summary in Table 5, it is reflected that  $r^2 = 0.006$ , equivalent to 0.6% implies that in the HGL stream proficiency in English, the LoI has the power to influencing performance by less than 1 %. This influence, of course, was not significant because  $p > 0.01$ .

**Table 4: Summary of Regression Analysis for HKL Stream**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.544	0.296	0.279	7.463

Predictors: A = Language Proficiency for HKL, B = Dependent Variable: Achievement in English

It can be said, therefore, that the regression analysis conducted relating proficiency in the LoI and achievement in English for each stream reflects that the influence of the proficiency level seems more determinative for a student in the HKL than for the student in HGL. This is another way of saying that the analysis shows that in the HKL stream English proficiency has more influence on academic achievement than in the HGL stream since ELP's influence on HKL stream was found to be 30% and that of HGL was 1%. This influence is much higher in HKL possibly because the HKL are dealing with both languages, Kiswahili and English. Hence learning transfer seems to be occurring: the learning of one language seems to help in the understanding of the other language, especially where language features are definitively transferable.

**Table 5: Summary of Regression Analysis for HGL Stream**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.075	.006	-.018	7.545

Predictors: A (Constant) = ELP Scores (%). B (Dependent Variable) = Achievement in English (%)

### 5.3 Effects of Proficiency in the LoI on other Subjects Apart from English

It was of significant interest for the researcher to ascertain the regression relationship of ELP and other subjects apart from English. To this end, General Studies was used in the analysis. Table 6, shows that  $r = 0.096$ , this implies that there is a weaker relationship between these two variables. Further,  $r^2 = 0.009$  which is equivalent to 0.9%, meaning that proficiency in LoI has the power to influence academic achievement in General Studies by 0.9%. In other words, ELP has a very little influence on General Studies; its influence is less than 1%. For this reason, other variables apart from language proficiency, when considered as one cluster of influential factors, have greater influence on academic performance, more than 99% according to our analysis. The influence of ELP was seen to be insignificant:  $p > 0.01$ .

**Table 6: Regression Analysis: ELP and General Studies**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.096	.009	-.002	9.211

Predictors: A (Constant) = Language Proficiency Scores (%); B (Dependent) = General Studies (%)

As far as the hypothesis is concerned, the data presented above seem to support the assumption that only to a little extent does ELP act as a determinative factor for academic performance in English and in other school subjects. That is to say that only to a very small extent does ELP affect performance in English, and even less in other subjects.

Although the influence of English proficiency on academic achievement is small, it is to be recalled that our data did show that there is a meaningful and statistically significant influence of ELP on academic achievement if the academic subject in question is English. The influence of ELP on achievement in other subjects when General Studies is accepted as the dependent variable is negligible and statistically insignificant.

We reiterate, therefore, there seems to be a meaningful significant positive relationship exists between ELP and academic achievement in English among the studied A- level students.

Extending the relationship to other subjects apart from English, represented by General Studies, it was observed that the p-value (0.372) is not less than the significant level set, 0.01 (i.e.,  $0.372 > 0.01$ ). This implies that if there is an influence our research could not determine it since any figure above the significance level could be due to error variance. In this respect, the hypothesis upon which the study concentrated was partly upheld: the ELP has a meaningful significant influence on English, while to a large extent, the ELP does not influence academic achievement in other subjects apart from English itself.

## 6. Discussion

English, the LoI, in Tanzania has fallen victim to accusations from some scholars and the general public as the cause of mass failure of students and the downfall of education standards in the country (Wilson, 2011). Our findings establish that language proficiency influences performance of students when the academic subject at issue is English itself but this influence seems to disappear when one studies the correlation between ELP and academic achievement in other subject areas. It is clear from the study that the influence is not great enough to deserve to be blamed in the public forum as it has been. The accusations thrown at English make it seem as if the lack of English proficiency is the only cause of underachievement among students in Tanzania. The study has revealed that it is the non-ELP factors that influence performance greatly. Thus, it should be understood that poor performance is an interplay of several factors – those who publicly blame lack of proficiency in English seem incorrect in their judgment.

The study does seem to show that the more one improves proficiency in the LoI, the more improved will be academic performance. This implies that the impact of LoI may vary according to how the students differ from each other in their language ability. Students with high proficiency in English are likely to benefit most where English is used as the LoI.

The effects of LoI on learning outcomes may vary from one subject to another. Basically, the influence that the degree of proficiency a person has reached in the language of instruction

exercises on that person's performance in any given subject will vary according to how instrumental the language is for grasping the content of the subject. For example, a social science subject like history demands much language involvement while a pure science like mathematics demands less language ability for formulating and grasping a content which consists largely of numbers and symbols. Therefore, the effect of proficiency on learning outcomes will vary in accordance to the indispensability of the language for grasping/understanding the content of the subject. In the pure sciences the non-LoI factors would seem to exert a greater effect on the outcome, while in the social sciences the ELP would seem to have much influence.

It seems, then, that there is a need to interpret academic scores, especially that of English, with great caution. The general public is acquainted with the notion that a score or grade represents the degree of measurable achievement; and when a student gets an 'A', say in the English language, the actual ability of such a student in English should be excellent, implying that s/he is excellent in writing, listening, reading and speaking. In reality, this may not be the case. The scores allotted to students in English do not necessarily correlate with their ability in using the language. Our study seems to show, for example, that an 'A' score granted to a student may be the consequence of a constellation of considerations on the part of the teacher and therefore may be a function of many variables. In this scenario, English plays a role but not the dominant role.

Hence for many Tanzanian students, the scores they attain in either the English language or in other school subjects do not necessarily reflect their ability in the language that was used, nor do they necessarily reflect that there is occurring a transferring of proficiency in the LoI to a proficiency in understanding the content of a specified field. As far as the majority of students are concerned, if they attain an *A* or *B+* grade, it doesn't mean that their proficiency in English is *A* or *B+*. We have no discernible reason to believe that the influence of English on performance is noteworthy; hence, we remain saddled with the problem: what issues should be catching our attention in the schools of Tanzania

so that, having taken steps to resolve these issues, we systematically improve the academic performance of our students?

Lecturers in the universities sometimes complain that students' performance at the university in a number of disciplines does not reflect the grades or scores that were to be noted on their secondary school transcripts when they registered as new students. The assumption underlying such complaints is that ACSSE scores/grades that students presented the day of their university registration were going to be reliable predictors of the students' future performance at the university. Furthermore, managers in companies where university graduates are called for interviews say most of the candidates' abilities in language and in the discipline for which they are making application do not reflect the grades that appear on their transcripts.

Employers observe the actual work of their new employees: they notice that, in spite of the fact that their new employees have graduated just recently from the university, they are underperforming. The ones who are intending to benefit from the proficiency, skills and competencies of the new employees – the so-called consumers – take note of the apparent lack of ability of the new employees. Employers and consumers alike fail to see the connection between the graduates' actual performance and the scores recorded in their certificates or transcripts (Wilson, 2011). The academic records are showing that these recent graduates enjoyed excellent and/or very good scores in their years of university education, but in actuality they do not have the language skill to express the content of the courses in which they supposedly excelled.

Wilson's research correlates with that of other researchers from other parts of the world. Studies conducted by Ajibade (1993) and by Dooey and Oliver (2002) support the hypothesis that ELP has only a weak positive influence on students' academic performance. Our present study shows that proficiency in English has only a weak positive influence on academic performance when the students from whom the data are collected are advanced level students in Tanzania. Despite this weak connection between English proficiency and academic performance here in Tanzania, a more refined analysis of the variables involved indeed manifests

that there seems to exist a significant correlation between proficiency in English and academic performance in those subjects that require versatility in English in order to master the subject matter, while such a correlation does not significantly exist between English proficiency and subjects that do not require language skill in order to be mastered. English as an academic subject requires English proficiency: hence in this case the correlation exists. Mathematics does not require such proficiency in language: hence in the case of mathematics such a correlation does not exist.

Generally speaking, our study has shown that the LoI has only a weak positive influence on what students achieve. It also has to be kept in mind that the grades recorded on certificates or transcripts are a function of several factors: proficiency in the English language seems to be only a minor factor. One reason English seems to exert little influence on achievement may be poor testing styles: if the teacher, for example, formulates questions in a multiple-choice framework or in a framework that requires answers that can be memorized without being properly comprehended, a student may do well without really knowing English. Thus one would get an 'A' grade or 'B+' in English while his/her actual ability is not of an 'A' or a 'B+' level, but rather is much lower. In this situation, of course, the scores will not reflect the abilities in the LoI. It also must be considered that English may not be well taught, because many instructors themselves do not know English. Consequently, they cannot teach it well. What can we conclude from all this? It seems that there is a need to emphasize teaching English as a real means of communication.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study attempted to investigate to what extent proficiency in the LoI influences academic performance and whether such influence is significant. The hypothesis was that to a large extent the ELP among Tanzanian secondary school students do not exert an influence and hence show no significant effects on academic outcomes. The findings of the study by and large supported the hypothesis: only to a small extent does proficiency in LoI influence academic achievement.

One implication of this finding carries the implication that other variables apart from ELP, at least when they are clustered together, have a greater impact on academic performance. Despite the ELP's inability to influence performance, the fact that there is at least a small tendency to influence academic outcomes cannot be ignored. We make this assertion on the basis that ELP was in fact a significant factor in academic performance when the subject at issue was English itself.

Yet ELP failed to exercise any influence over other subjects such as General Studies. We conclude that language plays a role in educational success but not a dominant role. **Our study gives rise to the recommendation that Tanzania explicitly require ELP to be a criterion for students' admission into secondary schools and universities.** Why are we saying this? ... because O-level or A-level academic results alone are not sufficient criteria for determining academic capability. Indeed whether a student can succeed or not in his or her academic pursuits seems to be an issue that requires research into an entire cluster of variables that may be affecting our Tanzanian students' academic performance and consequently their future range of possibilities in the work world and in the various echelons of society to which they aspire.

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