The Intensity of Language of Instruction Problem in Tanzanian Universities: Is it a Numeracy and Literacy Background Case?

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Abstract
This paper presents the seriousness of the problem of English as Language of Instruction (LoI) in Tanzanian university students and instructors. This problem hinders strongly the learning and teaching process. The paper derives the causes of the problem and suggesting a way forward. This is mainly a literature and observational experience based study, which partly involves an interview. What justifies the seriousness of the problem includes; inability of both students and instructors to make consistent discussions in English (use of code-switching) which is accompanied by grammatical errors and mistakes. Language errors are also realised in students’ dissertations and other academic writings. It has been found that poor literacy and numeracy background are among the strongest causes of that problem in the sense that English is not effectively and totally exposed to children in their early education stages since many pupils use Kiswahili as LoI in many public primary and pre-primary schools. Other causes of the English language problem are: linguistic environment is highly covered by Kiswahili as it caters almost all people’ language needs, incompetent English teachers and lacking a culture of using English. The proposed way forward includes: officialising English to be used as LoI from pre-primary and primary schools in both public and private schools, intensifying English teaching and learning in secondary schools, and building a culture of using English. Finally, the government is advised to take measures to handle this educational challenge because the LoI is the heart of knowledge sharing, therefore, if the LoI is not clear to students and instructors, knowledge cannot be shared.

Keywords: Language of Instruction (LoI), Numeracy and Literacy, Post-primary Education.

INTRODUCTION
The importance of English Language and its international acceptability have been pointed by various scholars; Crystal (2003) argues that politically, English is an official or working language of most international political gatherings throughout the world. Furthermore, UNESCO (2013) informs that 85% of international organizations use English as the language of official communications. Also, Neeley (2012) says economically, the Harvard Business Review call English “the global language of business”. Despite the fact that English is used as Language of Instruction (LoI) in Tanzanian post-primary education, many students have neither good command nor proper proficiency in the English language. Various scholars (Lupogo, 2014; Mvungi, 1982; Rubagumya, 1991; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko, 1998; Mwinshekhe, 2003; Brock-Utne, 2005;
Vuzu 2005) have shown several English language problems among the students and some teachers as it is used as LoI and strongly suggesting the use of Kiswahili to replace English. Msabila (2001) presents various grammatical common mistakes which are found in students’ dissertations and theses from Mzumbe University, Tanzania. Moreover, Malekela (2003) addresses English language problems faced by the University of Dar Es Salaam undergraduate students.

Although English is used as LoI in both secondary schools and higher learning institutions, this paper will focus on higher learning institutions, particularly universities.

Since the role of LoI is very important in knowledge sharing, it is must be understood well by instructors and students. Brock-Utne (2005) supports this as she points out that understanding well a LoI enables a learner to understand the content and failure of a learner to capture well the LoI does not only make a learner fail to understand the content but also leads him or her into confusion and frustration.

There has been a very strong debate on which language should be used as LoI in post-primary education between English and Kiswahili. The government has several times recommended Kiswahili to be used as LoI, but there has been no implementation. This paper does not rely on this debate, rather it intends to rescue the current education which is affected negatively by the language of instruction which is not well captured by both instructors and students.

If the language of instruction is not well understood by instructors and students, it is very obvious that knowledge will not well be shared. Therefore, the target of the paper is to show the intensity of English language problem and suggesting the solution. It does not make sense to keep on waiting for the many given recommendations of going for Kiswahili to be implemented, it is better to find a way of handling the problem in another possible way.

Therefore, this paper demonstrates how English is a problem among the students and some of their instructors and suggest a way forward. This study is different from several scholars’ perspective (eg. Lupogo, 2014; Mvungi, 1982; Rubagumya, 1991; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko, 1998; Brock-Utne, 2001; Qorro, 2003; Mwinshekhe, 2003; Brock-Utne 2005; Vuzu 2005) who believe the only way of handling this problem is to go for Kiswahili. For instance, Qorro (2002) stipulates the use of Kiswahili as LoI will eliminate the huge amount of incorrect English to which students are exposed. Apart from presenting English language problems, the current study finds a way of solving that problem.

The study results are from literature analysis, researcher’s observational experience and interview. The selected case study is University of Dar Es Salaam (UDSM) and Mzumbe university (MU). UDSM is the university where the author pursued his both undergraduate (BA) and postgraduate (MA) studies while Mzumbe university is where the researcher works as an assistant lecturer. Hence, it has been easy to observe the nature of English language problem among many students and some of the instructors/lecturers.

**English Problems Facing Students and Instructors in Universities**

Researcher’s observational experience and literature analysis have been used to find out various English problems facing students and instructors.

**Observational Experience**

Though my life experience at Mzumbe University as an instructor (Assistant Lecturer) from 2011 up to 2015, I have been noting various English problems in meetings, seminars, workshops etc. These problems include grammatical errors, code-switching/mixing (English and Kiswahili) when one fails to make a point in English etc. Moreover, I have been confirming that the discussion becomes more interactive when the meeting/workshop facilitator allows code-switching/mixing among the members as it is started by him or herself.

Table 1 shows the common English grammatical errors committed by instructors/lecturers during various academic occasions like in proposal presentations, seminars, workshops, and meetings. Again, reflecting back to 2007 – 2013 when I was undertaking my undergraduate (BA) and postgraduate (MA) studies at UDSM, there was one interesting case in relation to the English language as the medium of instruction. Lecturers, when lecturing used to make some joyful stories out of the lesson content for their students so as to make them enjoy the lecture.

Those stories were popularly known by Kiswahili name as “chai”, denotatively means tea but connotatively means “joyful story which is not part of the lecture”. Interestingly, when “chai” was in Kiswahili, students laughed and enjoyed a lot the lesson and the course lecturer was much appreciated and loved, but it was opposite when “chai” of the same kind was in English as students kept on listening very carefully, but no joy was easily noticed except from few students who captured the meaning of that “chai”. Relying on this anecdote, it is clearly observed that students were either not able to understand the story/chai presented in the English language or a lecturer/instructor was not able to present it perfectly in English.

Also code-switching (the use of English and Kiswahili) for some instructors has been an obvious case as it has been observed from both universities, UDSM and MU. Moreover, while I was a student between the same period (2007 - 2013) I had realized that students were using English in official classes only under the presence of the course instructor, for instance,
in seminar presentations and/or lectures when a lecturer allows a little discussion or questions. When students were working on their group assignment outside the class, they mostly undertook the discussion in Kiswahili and finally writing down the information discussed in English. There was a careful choosing of the student from the group to write down what had been discussed orally. The one who was supposed to write the work seemed to be more proficient in English than others because there was another task of translating what was discussed in Kiswahili into English. This proves that students in universities cannot command English well. They feel happy and comfortable when they communicate in Kiswahili.

**Literature analysis**

Several scholars have demonstrated how students in universities are faced by English language challenge. Msabila (2004) in his article titled “Language goofs rife in dissertations and theses” presents various grammatical common mistakes which are found in students' dissertations and theses of Mzumbe University. Some of these mistakes described by Msabila are summarised in Table 2. Also a report from the University of Dar Es Salaam (UDSM), UDSM Academic Audit (1999) confirms the English incompetence among the students. However, by considering the global science and technology needs, the report recommends English to continue being used as the medium of instruction.

Moreover, Malekele’s (2014) study about “English as a medium of instruction in post-primary education in Tanzania” shows that English as LoI in Tanzanian post-primary education faces a great challenge of students not being proficient at all in the language. Extract 1 is an essay from one undergraduate student from UDSM which has many grammatical errors and mistakes.

The student’s essay directly confirms how university students are not familiar with English language. This goes in line with my teaching experience to Mzumbe University undergraduate students as the same happen to several students in their individual assignments.

**Causes of English Language Problem and Way Forward.**

Study results under this sub-section have been analysed from the interview, which was conducted to ten interviewees (five lecturers and five third-year students) from Mzumbe University, department of Education. There were two interview guide questions;

i). Many students and some of the instructors/lecturers are not good in English language (a language of instruction), what do you think are the causes for that problem? 

ii). How can this problem be solved?

**What are the Causes of English Language Problem?**

The main repeated causes for English language problem were as follows;

The first one is the poor English background. Students do not have a good background of English. Some of these students are the ones who later become university instructors. Therefore, being a lecturer does not guarantee the problem to be solved. One lecturer was quoted saying;

“we do not have a strong English background, as you can reflect back to primary education which uses Kiswahili as Language of instruction. At that early age is when a pupil can acquire or learn a language effortlessly and easily. Although English is taught as the subject, sometimes you can find even the English teacher is not competent. Then, what do you expect?...” Also one student said;

“The main cause is incompetent English language teachers in primary schools and the use of Kiswahili as medium of instruction in primary schools”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of the error</th>
<th>Instructor error</th>
<th>It’s correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Double marking of past tense in a sentence</td>
<td>I did not understand that a) ...issues which you are conducted...</td>
<td>a) ...issues which you conducted/...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper use of active voice</td>
<td>I don't understand that</td>
<td>I don’t understand that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of DO and DOES</td>
<td>He must know how we (do) teach</td>
<td>He must know how we (do) teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper reporting</td>
<td>Despite of his strength, he has failed to</td>
<td>Despite of his strength, he has failed to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author (2015)
Table 2. Common mistakes in students’ dissertations and theses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of mistake</th>
<th>Example of the mistake</th>
<th>Correction of the mistake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mistakes connected to the use of the following words: bias, result, abide, relate, affect, importance, difference, lecturer, despite, cook</td>
<td>There was no biasness in data collection</td>
<td>There was no bias in data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These problems result into/to…....</td>
<td>These problems result in…..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We should abide by the law</td>
<td>We should abide to/with the law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This issue is related with ……</td>
<td>This issue is related to…..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistakes in making some phrases</td>
<td>Shortage of fund</td>
<td>Shortage of funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fund rising</td>
<td>Fund raising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant of the study</td>
<td>Significance of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delimitations of the study</td>
<td>Delimitation of the study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Extract 1: An assay from undergraduate student

School inspectors are the persons who move to the Schools to Check for the implementation of the Curriculum as well as the effectiveness of the syllabus in so doing they Collect all problems and send to the Curriculum developers. The inspectors are not only Check for the implementation of the Curriculum but also to see the effectiveness of the teacher to teach. In this case the inspector needs the good relationship (Cooperation) between teachers and to See how the effective syllabus is. Also the school inspectors tend to See whether the teachers are competent in teaching or not. And also they give feedback about the availability of materials like books, Chemicals, apparatus, teaching aids (may be local one) So as to facilitate the teaching.

The School inspectors, the call the teacher after teaching and tell him/her that where is important point to emphasis as Sometimes the teaching aids is not proper Students to understand well the subject. So you must improve for that. In doing So the education or the quality of education increases and thus mantan the our education. The examination Is the questions written in the paper according to the respective questions that is from the respective subjects that place the Students in order to measure understanding ability. The questions Set according to what the Students learnt.

The examination also may teachers to make Summative evatuation, formatives well as placement. The examination Should be well defined in Such away that it must measure from What the Students learnt example Kwamisi- the Curriculum used is not National Curriculum. The evaluated the Curriculum according to what they did in that society but during examination, they Sent exams from National that was Curriculum in Tanzania. The students all failed because they learnt about What they did in that Society (Kwamisi). So this was the failer of What intended to measure.

Problems facing the examinations, too much Cheating in Such away that the education (examination) is not effective Measure What is intended to Measure. Also likage of examination make the equality of education to drop out. In this Case examination should be carefully guided So as to reduce the likage of examination. In addition to that the examinations should be garded up to all parts in Tanzania (Countries) do.


From this explanation, it is well noted that the numeracy and literacy skills are imparted to pupils in Kiswahhili and not in English. Hence it is difficult for a kid to develop English language as effective as the kids gone through English medium pre-primary schools. Despite the fact that pupils in primary schools expect to learn English from English teachers, some of these teachers as it has been said by the interviewees are not competent enough in English, hence, they fail to equip well the pupils with English language.

There is a very direct relationship between literacy and numeracy skills acquisition in childhood and language skills development in adulthood. National Early Literacy Panel (2008) points out that the teaching of literacy takes as its starting point a child’s language proficiency, hence there is a need to ensure a solid language foundation. Moreover, Pelletier (2011) supports it by stating that the time of early childhood prior to grade one is a qualitatively unique developmental period for language and literacy learning. This monograph addresses the question of how
parents and educators can support young children in
becoming literate learners. The Figure 1 illustrates
smartly.

Figure 1 shows that the final person’s language
competency depends on the way he/she acquired the
language literacy in the childhood. The childhood
acquired skills consolidate and become the strong habit
which cannot easily be changed. Therefore, following the
data fact that Tanzanians children acquire literacy and numeracy
skills in Kiswahili language, it becomes very difficult to
learn English in their adulthood (in post-primary
education). Hence, the intensity of the English language
problem is unescapable.

Another cause is a lack of interest in learning and using
English. English is only used where there is a high need
of using it. For instance, in most cases, instructors do not
use English in their offices or in their non-academic
matters. Also, it is very rare to realize the use of English
when a student consults his or her lecturer, the
conversation is either done in Kiswahili or code-switching
(Kiswahili and English). There is no habit of personal
English learning like reading English story books,
listening to English speeches and talkings. This all is
confirmed by the lecturer and student who are quoted
below consecutively;

“Tanzanians have neither an interest in learning
English nor speaking it. Some of us feel like
punishment if we are asked to communicate in
English because we are used to our Kiswahili and we
can do almost everything by using our Kiswahili, so
what is English for ?”

“...you know, Sir, sometimes if you entertain speaking
English, you are perceived as you are boasting
yourself to your friends. You will find that even if
you know English well, but you have no body to speak
with. Even when we go to see our lecturers for various
problems they accept the use of Kiswahili, also when
we attempt our final examinations, mostly Kiswahili is
used to communicate with invigilators like asking for
permission to get out etc.”

These two quotations show that students and their
instructors do not have a culture of speaking English,
even for those who know English perfectly cannot speak
frequently to others because it is sometimes regarded as
boasting yourself to others. Hence, by ignoring English
speaking practice, leads into not only being unable to
improve English, but also even the little English one has
may be eroded.

The last cause is poor and old English language
teaching methodologies and lack of learning and teaching
resources in schools and universities. The lecturer confirms
below;

“There is no enough teaching and learning resources
in school and colleges. Also the language teaching
methodologies are not effective, teachers still use the
old approaches in teaching grammar”

This informs that there is also a problem in teaching
English language as a subject. English teachers in
primary schools are the ones expected to impart English
language skills to the pupils, if teachers are neither
competent in English nor able to use modern
recommended language teaching approaches, it is likely
obvious to produce standard seven pupils who cannot
command good English.

These causes can technically be associated with the
Tanzanian linguistic environment which is of more
Kiswahili than English. Unlike the neighbouring country,
Kenya whose linguistic environment consists of more
English than Kiswahili or their vernacular languages.
Kiswahili is mostly used in Tanzania compared to English
and vernacular languages. This is also confirmed by

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Figure 1. Relationship between Numeracy/Literacy Skills and Language Competency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupils’ Early stage</th>
<th>students’ adult stage</th>
<th>Language competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy and literacy skills acquisition</td>
<td>Solidification of the acquired numeracy and literacy skills</td>
<td>A kind of language influenced by the acquired</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author (2015)
Table 3: Language Use in Different Domains in Tanzania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>VERNACULAR</th>
<th>KISWAHI</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>(VV)</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work place</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of worship</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big business</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium: primary school</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium: secondary school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public rallies</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/regional</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Court</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Court</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
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<tr>
<td>-R.M.C</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>(VV)</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<tr>
<td>-High/Appeal Court</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>(VV)</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<td>Mass media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily papers</td>
<td>VV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diplomacy</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural exchange</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information exchange</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and technology</td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>VV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY

R.C.M<sup>a</sup> = Resident Magistrate Court.  <sup>b</sup> Used sometimes in dealing with neighbouring countries.

VV = Normal working language
V= Sometimes used
( )= Depends on setting, interlocutors, etc.

Source: Lupogo (2013)

Rubagumya as cited from Lupogo (2013) who describes the triglolossic situation whereby every language has been indicated in its domain in which it is used as summarised in the table above.

Table 3 shows openly that Kiswahili is used in many domains compared to other languages. As it has been pointed out by the interviewees that because of having nowhere to practice, even the English which is learnt in class vanishes.

**What is the way forward?**

The way forward pertaining to the English language problem was captured through interview, particularly in the second interview guide question which wanted the interviewees to suggest ways of overcoming this problem. There were three main suggestions which were repeated by seven (7) out of ten (10) interviewees; officialising English to be used as LoI from pre-primary and primary schools in both public and private schools, improving English teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools, and building a culture of using English.

One of the interviewees was quoted saying;

*First of all, English must be used as a language of instruction from class one to the college. Also adequate resources for teaching and learning need to be supplied in school e.g. books, audiovisual*
The concept of using English as LoI from pre-primary is valid because it is quite understood that kids in early age acquire and learn the language smoothly, quickly and effortlessly. This has been tested by several private primary schools which use English as LoI whereby the pupils are more competent in English compared to public primary schools which use Kiswahili as LoI. This is confirmed by Lupogo (2013) who studied about the acquisition of prepositions by two groups of university students, those who passed through English Medium schools and those who passed through Kiswahili government primary schools. It was realized that students with English Medium background had more preposition acquisition skills than those with the Kiswahili medium background. It is obvious that if a pupil/child acquires literacy and numeracy skills in Language “A”, Kiswahili, cannot be expected to communicate materials in post-primary education level in Language “B”, English.

CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that the language of instruction is like the heart of knowledge sharing, it is unfair to remain quite despite the language is not understood clearly by both students and teachers/instructors. The realisation of the problem of English as LoI in post-primary has been reported by many scholars like Mvungi, 1982; Rubagumya, 1991; Rubagumya, Jones and Mansoko, 1998; Zaline, Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997; Brock-Utne, 2001; Qorro, 2003; Mwinshekhe, 2003; Brock-Utne 2005; Vuzo 2005 just to mention some of them, but the problem has not yet been given a permanent solution. Following the fact that the LoI plays a very sensitive role in knowledge sharing/imparting, to continue having a LoI which is not well commanded by both a teacher/instructor and a student, is to place our education in the danger zone as there shall be a production of graduates who have not acquired the required knowledge sufficiently because of LoI constraint. Therefore, the government is strongly advised to adopt the suggested ways forward for action.

REFERENCES


https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_Early_Language.pdf

Aids, etc…modern and effective language teaching methodologies should be adopted and practised by English teachers.