Teachers' Constructions of Students: A Need for Transforming English Language Teaching Practices in Tanzania

Dr. Upendo P. Biswalo

St John's University of Tanzania

Email: upendopsix@yahoo.uk/ubiswalo@sjut.ac.tz

Abstract: This paper presents and discusses how teachers of English in the three secondary schools in Dodoma city-Tanzania, constructed their students. It uses Foucauldian discourse analysis as a lens to understanding how students were constructed by their teachers in the teaching and learning processes. Data were collected through interviews from teachers of English, and classroom observations. The findings revealed that, teachers' perceptions about their students, and the knowledge teachers held about teaching English allowed them to construct their students in a more deficit terms. Students were constructed by their teachers as "lazy", "slow learners", "difficult to teach", "passive recipients of knowledge", "quiet learners" "unmotivated", and the like. The findings also revealed that teachers' constructions of students influenced teachers' pedagogical approaches and practices in the classroom. Moreover, teacher participants in this study appeared to relinquish their responsibility for students' failure by placing blame on students, students' families, and society, and on the government. This paper argues that, when teachers construct students in a more deficit terms, such constructions may impact on students' learning. This study suggests that, teachers need to be made aware of how their deficit constructions of students produce negative and alienating positions for students. . This study, therefore, suggests that when students are given more opportunity to share their ideas and views in the classroom, they are enabled to learn English meaningfully and being able to interact and communicate effectively with other speakers of English around the globe, because, today English is regarded as the language of the world.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, English as a medium of instruction, Constructions of students, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, Tanzania.

How to reference this article (APA):

Biswalo, U. P. (2020). Teachers' constructions of students: A Need for transforming English language teaching practices in Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education, 4*(3), 65-74.

1. Introduction

The English language teaching (ELT) in Tanzania can be traced back during the colonial period. During the British colonial period in Tanzania (1918-1961), English was the official language, and it was the medium of instruction (the MOI) after primary education. Qorro (2013) notes that, "the English language was made the main prerequisite for the acquisition of formal education at the post-primary education level and for employment in white collar jobs" (p. 31). Qorro's assertion is supported by Swilla (2009), who argues that during British colonial rule, a small number of African people were trained purposely to serve in the colonial administration. During this period, the English language was given high status, and

very few spoke English because few went to secondary school (Rubagumya, 1991). After independence in 1961, Tanzania inherited the British colonial system whereby English remained the MOI at secondary and tertiary education levels.

Tanzania is a multilingual society with more than 120 spoken indigenous languages (Qorro, 2013), plus Kiswahili, which is the country's national language. Thus, it may be argued that Tanzania is both a multilingual and multicultural society. In Tanzania, Kiswahili is the MOI for primary education, while English is taught as a subject. Studies conducted in Tanzania show that the shift of the MOI from Kiswahili to English in secondary education has brought a lot of confusion to students and acts as a barrier to learning

because the language is not familiar to them (Brock-Utne 2002, 2006; Mwinsheikke, 2003; Qorro, 2006). As English is not intensively taught at the primary education level, many students may finish their primary education with low proficiency in the English language. These students, according to Qorro (2013), "face serious difficulties using English knowledge in all subjects taught in English during the four years of secondary education" (p. 31). Qorro argues that English is spoken by a small population of Tanzanians, while the majority use Kiswahili. As the lingua franca of the country, Kiswahili is the national language and most students use it in their everyday life communications. English is mostly confined to the classroom for students. Thus, because English is not the home language for the majority of students, many find it hard to learn and use because the language does not link directly to their everyday life experiences.

In summary, this section has shown the dilemmas many students face in secondary school education because they are not familiar with the English language. This study, however, addresses how English language teachers' perspectives and pedagogical approaches have been shaped by their views on how well students can learn English, both as a subject and as the MOI. It presents an argument that teachers' perceptions about their students, and the knowledge teachers held about teaching English allowed them to construct their students in deficit terms. The following literature review section describes deficit theorising how students were constructed by their teachers in New Zealand and Tanzanian contexts.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Deficit theorising

Bishop's (2005) study about Māori students explains how teachers described their students in deficit terms. He argued that teachers considered Māori students' lack of educational achievement as emanating from students themselves and their families. They believed that students did not want to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers in Bishop's study commented that Maori students' culture was different from the schools' and that made it difficult for students to cope with the education system and made them disengage from the learning process. It could be argued that teachers in Bishop's study appeared to relinquish their responsibility for their students' learning. They appeared to blame the students and students' families or the government for students' failure in schools. They also blamed Māori students' parents for not supporting their children's education by assisting them at home.

Similarly, studies conducted in Tanzania have shown that, the dominance of teacher-talk is a very widespread practice in schooling in Tanzania due to the low level of English among students, and inadequate teaching facilities and resources (Brock-Utne, 2012; Qorro, 2013). The use of teacher-talk approach suggests that

teachers construct their students as 'passive receivers of knowledge'. Additionally, studies have revealed that African languages and cultures are still marginalised in the education system in Tanzania today (Brock-Utne, 2002, 2012; Qorro, 2013). This suggests that students' languages and cultures are seen as barriers to learning English. Although English is the MOI at secondary education level, however, Neke (2005) argues that the use of English as the MOI acts as a barrier rather than a bridge to learning, and this contributes to the low quality of education, which has negative implications for development. This study argues that, students' languages and cultures are important in learning, not only a second language, English, but also other secondary school subjects.

Thus, it could be argued that, to allow students learn English meaningfully, teachers need to stop thinking of emerging bi and multilingual learners in deficit terms. Deficit thinking makes students feel alienated and judged, and offers them absolutely no incentive to learn. Teachers need to take responsibility for students' learning rather than placing blame on them and their families, or on the government. They need to know their students' needs. In this way, they will get to know their students better and their cultures (Savage et al., 2011), thus facilitate in learning English in their classrooms. May (2005) and Brock-Utne (2012) have argued that maintaining students' languages and cultures in their education is important because it allows them to learn successfully. This study therefore suggests that, students' languages and cultures should to be included in the teaching and learning process.

3. Methodology

This paper uses Foucauldian discourse analysis as a methodological approach for exploring and analysing the complexities of ELT practices in Tanzania. In this study, Foucault's concept of power/knowledge relations has been used to understand how teachers used their knowledge to construct students mostly in deficit terms.

3.1 Foucault's concept of Power/ knowledge relations

Foucault conceptualises discipline as power, and also as knowledge, and thus proposes the concept of power/knowledge relations. Foucault (1979) argues that "power produces It produces reality" (p. 194). For Foucault, power is not merely prohibitive, it is productive; that is, power is not always repressive or harmful (Ball, 2013). Power "is a strategy, enabled in other kinds of relations" (Ball, 2013, p. 50). Ball argues that discourses and the expert knowledge in which they are spoken constitute the object as being of their concern. For instance, the practitioner, and the professional, are also brought into being by the knowledge that makes them expert.

Foucault argues that we should not take for granted the relations entwining power and knowledge, but rather consider that those relations need to be explored in every case. Power relations are always instantiated in certain

fields of knowledge. Experts, and their knowledges play a key role in determining how we should act and who we are. Those who decide what counts as knowledge also exercise power. In this study, the concept of knowledge/power relations is explored to understand how teachers exercise their power over students. In other words, how teachers used their expert knowledge of teaching English to construct students in deficit terms. Jardine (2005) argues that as educators "we can help our students learn, or we can unintentionally hinder them; we can help them grow up into fulfilled, competent adults, or act in ways that undermine them" (p. 2).

Accordingly, Coloma (2011) argues that power is mediated through actions, and, because teachers hold knowledge, they also have power to transmit such knowledge to students, telling them what to do. Therefore, in this study, the concept of power relations is explored to investigate the role and influence of power in shaping teachers' perspectives. This concept also investigates the ways in which teachers demonstrate power by adopting their own particular strategies and approaches to teaching English. Therefore, Foucauldian discourse analysis is used as a lens to understand how students have been constructed by their teachers in the teaching and learning processes.

3.2 Data collection methods

The data for this study was collected from six teachers of English with more than six years' experience in the teaching field in three secondary schools in the Dodoma city in Tanzania. These teachers were teaching English to students of year one to year four of secondary education (Forms One to Four respectively). For each school, the researcher selected only two teachers to participate. Data collection methods involved interviews with teachers and classroom observations. All the interviews were conducted in schools, at a time convenient for teachers during non-teaching hours and when they had no other responsibilities. Merriam (1998) recommends that the language used during interviews should be the language of the interviewee. It was considered that the use of English only might limit their freedom to express their ideas freely, thus, the participants were free to use either English or Kiswahili, or both. However, all teachers preferred to use English during the interviews.

On the other hand, classroom observations enriched the depth of each participant's case through capturing classroom behaviours connected to teacher reactions while teaching English. During observation, the researcher positioned herself at the corner so that she could see the teacher clearly and observe what was going on in the classroom. Although the focus was on the methods and approaches teachers were using in the classroom, occasionally there was observance of teacher/students' interaction and students' behaviours on how they responded to the teacher's methods and approaches.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Teachers' pedagogical practices

According to the findings, teachers' approaches and methods focused on their students' achieving grammatical skills in the language. Teachers wanted students to pass examinations, and to empower students with the language that would enable them to learn other secondary subjects because English is the MOI. This tension appeared to force teachers to ensure that their students understood grammar because they might need it in learning other subjects that were assessed through reading and writing in English, and also for communication purposes around the school premises. This is problematic as it appears students are learning English mostly for academic achievement. Moreover, teachers felt forced to teach for examinations because they were evaluated by the performance of their students. The findings of this study illustrate the teachers' tensions in conforming to school and government expectations of good results for their students. In other words, these teachers were facing a dilemma in meeting both school and government needs to produce good results at the end of the year. Anderson and Grinberg (1998) argue that "teacher and administrator preparation is a disciplinary practice to the extent that it produces legitimate knowledge, proper ways of behaving, and ways of thinking that form the boundaries of what counts as good practice" (p. 342). In this way, it is possible to argue that the teacher's education seems to influence teacher's pedagogical practices in the classroom.

Similarly, teachers' pedagogical approaches/ practices resulted to the constructions of students in a more deficit terms/ the discourses of low ability students. For instance, students were constructed by their teachers as 'slow learners', these students may come to accept that label that they are "slow learners" and thus, maintain the discourse at school. The problem is not for them to be constructed as slow learners; rather, it is for them to accept that identity as "slow learners". In this way, Foucault's theory that power is productive (Ball, 2013) comes into effect.

Teacher participants in this study believed that students' failure in learning English was not their fault, and thus, placed blame on the students themselves, their families/ society, and the government. Such discourses suggest that teachers did not take total responsibility for raising the achievement levels of the students. The discourses of low ability students are then explained below:

4.2 Blaming the students

Teachers in this study constructed their students as low ability students. However, each teacher constructed them differently. For instance, one female teacher constructed her students as "prefer[ing] spoon feeding", having a "bad attitude towards learning", and as learners who "don't want to participate". She justified her use of

the lecture method, saying her students preferred spoon-feeding:

> *According to the nature of students in our school, lecture method is unavoidable, nature of students, they do prefer spoon feeding ... they do not consume their time reading various books ... we have the library there, although it lacks some of the books, but they don't use their time reading books there ... the attitude of the learners because most of them come from we call them St. Kayumbas' primary schools ...they normally don't want to participate ... they are here because they are here; they don't want to put more effort. (Interview, 1/13)*

This could be interpreted as suggesting that the teacher regarded her students as lazy, unmotivated, and not taking responsibility for their own learning, describing them as not knowing the reason they were at school. Additionally, the teacher appears to construct them as passive recipients of knowledge. She also appeared to blame students' poor primary schooling at "St Kayumbas' schools" (St. Kayumba is the nickname for government-administered primary schools in Tanzania. These schools are regarded as schools for children coming from low socio-economic backgrounds and are characterised by lack of resources). In this way, this teacher saw students' failure to learn English as being due to students' attitudes towards learning, and their family backgrounds. She appeared to blame the students for not taking responsibility for their own learning. She mentioned that, although the school has a library, students do not take time to read books available there. She stressed that students do not make enough effort to learn. The teacher identified a lack of motivation among the students by saying that students do not want to compete with other students from other schools, using the ironic statement "they are here because they are here". In effect, the teacher was saying that students' failure was not her fault, rather, she appeared to see students themselves as the problem. Likewise, another female teacher also reported to use a "telling approach" because her students "don't want to talk". She said that students had low proficiency in English and therefore it was hard to teach them. In effect, this teacher saw students' failure as the students' fault; and not her own.

On the other hand, another male teacher constructed his students as "low proficiency English learners", "slow learners", and "passive recipients of knowledge" who need teachers to provide them with knowledge. His beliefs about his students influenced his pedagogical practices in the classroom. For instance, when the teacher was elaborating the important messages found in the book, he asked his students to be attentive and to listen to him (Classroom observation notes, 2/13). When asked during the interview, he elaborated:

> *I wanted them to remain with only one task [which is] listening to me, and later I will prepare some notes. This is because many of our students are slow learners; so if you give them two tasks at the same time, they tend to*

> *forget one task and remember the other. (Interview, 2/13)*

The phrase "later I will prepare some notes" suggests that the teacher constructed his students as passive recipients of knowledge.

Further evidence of students as "passive recipients of knowledge" is found in another teacher's practice of explaining all messages found in the novel and asking students to memorise and retrieve the messages (Classroom observation notes, 2/13). This also implies that only the teacher's interpretation of the novel was valued. The students' voices appeared to be silenced because of the culture that regards teachers as knowledgeable, and therefore, students have to obey and follow what the teacher says in the classroom.

4.2.1 Quiet learners

In this section I have engaged in the ways in which students were continually been constructed as deficient learners. Another female teacher also constructed her students as "beginning language learners", "quiet learners" and "difficult to teach" because of their limited English proficiency. This teacher constructed her students as "quiet' learners", because they seemed very reluctant to participate by answering teachers' questions. The students' level of English appeared to influence teacher's pedagogical approaches. She believed that in order to allow them to learn the language, teachers needed to instruct them slowly. In her instruction she appeared to be slow in her teaching pace, and did a lot of repetition to elaborate main points in order to enable her students to understand the material. (Classroom observation notes, 2/13). She explained that:

> *For these young students, Form One up to Form Four, it is very difficult to teach them. If I were teaching Form Five, I could just write questions and leave them. But for these students, I am supposed to read each question; for instance: Mention five symptoms of a person with HIV/AIDS, a student can fail to know [understand] what a symptom is [Interview, 2/13]*

This teacher was observed writing five questions on the blackboard. She then went through all the questions to identify difficult words before students copied the exercise to do at home (Classroom observation, 2/13). This indicated that she thought the students' limited proficiency in English made teaching and learning difficult for both the teacher and the students, and therefore, she provided help to these beginning language learners. Therefore, these teachers positioned their students as "new language learners", and thus, they thought that by providing them with clear elaborations of points, and by slowing down when teaching them, and also by providing them with a caring environment, they could enable them to learn.

4.3 Blaming the students' families and society

The female teacher noted that, due to the low income of parents, most of her students do not get support from home in the form of learning materials, such as textbooks:

> *We have few books, and the parents cannot afford buying books for their own children. (Interview, 1/13)*

The statement suggests that the teacher saw the low social economic backgrounds these students came from as contributing to students' failure in school. For instance, she identified her students' educational backgrounds — coming from St. Kayumbas' schools created more problems. She appeared to place blame on parents for students' failure, and not necessarily to see it as her responsibility.

On the other hand, one male teacher believed that the society students came from did not enable them to apply the knowledge they gained at school in their everyday life. He appeared to blame the ways parents/guardians brought up their children, arguing that they destroyed students' lives:

> *The message of AIDS pandemic has reached the students; but the problem is that this message cannot be put into practice to students due to family problems, society problems, and up-bringing ways of students ... Sometimes parents do not up-bring properly their children; they do not sit with their children and talk about AIDS. They [students] are reading the book but they lack guidance in the family level and the society level. They read here but when they go home in the society, they meet with new style of life, they follow it and they forget the message of AIDS pandemic at school. (Interview, 2/13)*

This teacher's statement suggests three levels of blame: parents, society, and students. He appeared to blame parents for not providing guidance to students on HIV/AIDS. He suggested that teachers do their best at school to equip students with knowledge, but society is not helping the students to put the knowledge into practice. He therefore appeared to blame society at large for not being fair to students' health. He complained that parents did not sit with their children and educate them about HIV/AIDS, which might lead to students' health being jeopardised. In effect, the teacher saw lack of positive role models/few positive examples to follow in the society contributing to students' engagement in a lifestyle which endangers them.

Relatedly, other teacher participants in this study appeared to blame the parents/guardians for students' failure to learn English. One female teacher appeared to blame the parents/guardians for not helping their children because she expected students to complete homework at home with the help of their family members. Another female teacher, on the other hand, seemed to believe that students did not get support from their families. She mentioned that most parents could not afford to buy books for their children. These findings are similar to aspects of Bishop's (2005) study on Māori students. Teachers in Bishop's study appeared to blame students' parents for not taking part in the education of their children. This suggests that teachers seem to be putting aside their responsibility; teachers saw students' failure as not their fault, and considered that students and their families were to blame.

4.4 Blaming the system/government

Under this category, most teachers in this study appeared to blame the government for its policy of using Kiswahili at primary education that causes students' failure to learn English at secondary education. Teachers also considered large classes and lack of resources; shortage of teachers, irrelevant curriculum, lack of funds, and lack of in-service training to teachers as some of the reasons for student failure.

4.4.1 Students' first languages and cultures and the use of Kiswahili as barriers

Most teachers in this study saw students' low level of English proficiency emanating from outside the classroom. Students' first languages and Kiswahili background were mentioned by all teachers as being a major problem for students in learning English. Teachers believed that students' mispronunciation was caused by their mother tongues and the extensive use of Kiswahili in their daily interactions. This also produces one of the tensions for teachers of English:

> *We have students with different backgrounds. What we normally do in the class is just to equip them with the English language as the medium of instruction. (Interview, 1/13)*

Although the teacher was aware of the existence of different cultures in her classroom, she found it a big challenge to accommodate these when teaching. She was aware that her students potentially came from more than 120 cultural groups as Qorro's (2013) study suggests. However, for her, students' first languages and cultures were barriers, not resources, in learning a second language, and a way of understanding different cultures. She commented:

> *In most primary schools, they use Kiswahili as the medium of instruction. So, when [students] join secondary school, they come with Kiswahili as the medium of expressing themselves. So, there, we have to impose the new language which is English, in our culture, so as to help them to cope, to understand, in order to use English in their everyday life. (Interview, 1/2013)*

The statement suggests that the teacher regarded Kiswahili as a barrier for students learning English, forcing teachers such as herself "to impose" English on students, since English is the MOI and students also will

need it in order to learn other secondary school subjects. Looking closely at teacher's statement above, the phrase "to impose" sounds negative as it suggests students are forced to learn English. Also, "to cope, to understand, in order to use English in their everyday life" sounds unrealistic because English is not an everyday language for the majority of Tanzanians. Although the teacher acknowledged that her class comprised of students from diverse backgrounds, knowledge about dealing with such students seemed to be missing. In other words, this teacher appeared not to draw on her students' cultural diversity as a resource. It could be argued that students from culturally diverse backgrounds may have distinctive ways of learning English, and that knowledge of their first languages and cultures is important in learning a second language.

Another male teacher, on the other hand, believed that students' low proficiency in English was due to their educational background of using Kiswahili:

> *Nowadays we receive students from primary schools they don't know even what is "was", what is "them". So, it is a big problem. They don't know how to read and write [English] ... Students have been used to communicate by Kiswahili in primary school. When students come to secondary school, [they are] forced to communicate in English. (Interview, 2/13)*

The statements above suggest that the teacher appeared to blame the education system for using Kiswahili in primary education, feeling that it was causing problems for students at secondary education. To reduce the confusion in shifting from Kiswahili to English, the teacher suggested changes to the curriculum:

> *Maybe the curriculum could be changed; even at primary school, the medium of instruction and communication could be English because of this confusion. (Interview, 2/13)*

In Tanzania, English is the MOI in secondary education. As explained above in the introduction section, students have their mother tongues (vernaculars) plus Kiswahili, the national language of the country; therefore, secondary education is often difficult for them because English is not the language of day-to-day communication. One male teacher elaborated:

> *Sometimes, it is very difficult to interact in the classroom using the [English] language because it is not their first language. (Interview, 2/13)*

The statement suggests that students in this teacher's class may find it difficult to interact effectively in English because of their low proficiency in the language.

Although English is taught at the primary level, it appears that students do not learn enough to be able to use the language in secondary education for communication and learning purposes. Moreover, one male teacher believed that students' first languages were barriers to learning and interacting in the English language:

> *The problem is that they have got their mother languages, but we use to enforce them to speak English. The classroom should have the environment of English, and those who are vernacular language speakers or Kiswahili speakers we normally give them punishment. (Interview, 2/13)*

When English is used as an academic language, and the MOI, students' first languages and cultures were seen as obstacles to their learning English, and were prohibited on the school premises. The phrase "the classroom should have the environment of English" from teacher's comment above appears to attempt to explain and justify why students were obliged to follow the school's rule of speaking English only, with those who failed to do so being punished. In other words, students were forced to assimilate to a school culture. To reinforce the school's rule of speaking English, there were signs above classroom and staff-room doors which read "Speak English Only" (Observation notes, 2/13). The use of these signs supports the notion that students' first languages and cultures were excluded and marginalised in the school, because the teachers considered that they may be impediments to learning. However, studies suggest that students' first languages and cultures are actually important in learning a second language (Lisanza, 2014; Newton et al., 2010).

Another teacher showed his concern about students' first languages and Kiswahili. He elaborated that:

> *The students have got their own mother tongues; and here in town [Dodoma urban], Kiswahili is the dominant language; and from primary school, they have been taught all subjects in Kiswahili. When they come to secondary school, they are supposed to read and to be taught or to learn through English language. So, it is very difficult for them to be fluent [in English] and to understand easily [the language]. (Interview, 2/13)*

This suggests that the teaching of English is mainly focused on academic achievement, because students need to communicate in academic language in order to learn and pass examinations. This could be one of the reasons that students' languages are not welcomed in schools despite studies that indicate how important students' first languages are to learning a second language (Brock-Utne, 2012; Magogwe, 2009; Lisanza, 2014; Newton et al., 2010).

Another teacher commented that students' background experiences affected both their ability to learn English, and their ability to interact globally. She mentioned that students spoke English at school, but when they went home, they spoke their languages and Kiswahili:

> *The main problem is the background of learners themselves because they come from different cultures. We find that it is very difficult to make them speak the same because they normally speak in different ways ... At home also is a problem, because people at*

home normally don't speak English. (Interview, 2/13)

In effect, from the statement above, the teacher was proposing that students' first languages are an obstacle to their learning English. As explained in the introduction section, in Tanzanian classrooms, students come from different cultural backgrounds. Kiswahili is the national language of the country, and the MOI at the primary education level; the majority of Tanzanian students use Kiswahili as their main language of communication in their everyday lives. The teachers attribute the students' failure to not adjusting to the school system. Since English is not the home language, many students found it difficult to learn and use English in schools.

This way, teachers appeared to blame the education system. However, looking at their positioning, it clearly shows that these teachers are also relinquishing their responsibility for students' low academic achievement. These findings aligns with Bishop's (2005) study which found that, Māori students fail to learn because they are disconnected from their cultures and find the culture of the school difficult to fit in (Bishop, 2005). They saw the students' low proficiency in English "as being outside of their own agency, of their own abilities to engage with these problems" (Bishop, 2005, p. 78). When the cultures at home and school are different, teachers "have a ready-made excuse" (Bishop, 2005, p. 71) for students' failure in school.

4.4.2 Large classes, lack of resources, and shortage of teachers

Large classes, lack of resources, and shortage of teachers were seen as reasons for student failure. For instance, one female teacher commented that the government should consider the provision of enough and appropriate resources in schools:

> *We don't have enough facilities; teaching and learning materials, even books are not enough ... the government should add the provision of books and other teaching and learning materials in schools. Sometimes you may have ten books for fifty students... (Interview, 2/13)*

This indicates that the shortage of teaching materials, such as textbooks, appeared to make her teaching more difficult. She also mentioned that large class size was a constraint on her teaching. She reported having a large number of students in the class (up to 50 students). She appeared to blame the government for not providing enough resources in schools, feeling that the government contributed to students' failure to learn English. Clearly, the teacher was aware of the impact of the lack of resources to help her students learn about other cultures.

Another female teacher, on the other hand, proposed that the government should consider providing both adequate resources to schools, and training for teachers:

> *The Government should put more emphasis to these community schools, equipping them with those resources, not only for students, but also for teachers so as to enable them to improve their teaching, learning new techniques ... the main thing is the Government; we cannot do without the Government. (Interview, 1/13)*

It is clear that she believed the government controlled the teaching of English in Tanzania, and that the government had a crucial role in implementing her suggested changes. This suggests a dependency on the Government. In other words, she appeared to believe that students' lack of success was beyond her control; it was the Government's fault.

Teaching materials and other learning resources were the major problems teacher participants in this study faced. For instance, It was observed that one female teacher using only one textbook to teach a class of nearly 50 students. Students had no access to the book, and so they had to listen attentively to understand and answer the questions at the end of the lesson (Classroom observation notes, 2/13). When asked during the interview, the teacher commented that:

> *We have only one textbook, therefore their duty is only to listen ... If we had many books, students could sit in pairs and read ... I was supposed to pass around, to observe what they are doing. But because we had only one book, it was difficult for me to move around. (Interview, 2/13)*

Looking closely at the above statement, it appears that the teacher was blaming the Government for not providing enough materials, such as textbooks, to schools. It could be argued that the lack of textbooks made this teacher employ the strategy she thought would work in her class, that is, to read the text herself.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher was seen providing students with a written exercise to do at home. She believed that students might get help from family members when they did written homework. However, when asked the following day during the interview whether students completed the assignment, she explained that, due to the lack of textbooks, students were unable to do homework well because they had no books to refer to for their assignments:

> *It was very difficult because they didn't have anywhere to make any reference. They were supposed to have books while they write those written questions and make a reference, but because of the shortage of books, the exercise [was] very difficult [for students to attempt]. (Interview, 2/13)*

However, looking deeply at teacher's comments above, she appeared to blame the government for students' failure. It also seems that the teacher believed it was not her fault if the students did not learn English.

4.4.3 Lack of in-service training for teachers

Teachers in this study appeared to place blame on the government for not providing them with trainings so that they gained new skills, which in turn, would contribute to students' success in learning. In effect, they saw students' failure as the government's fault, and not theirs:

> Teachers are supposed to be provided with different seminars or some short courses while they are at work because the world changes, also the teachers have to change, so that they can change the students. So, at least short courses or seminars to help them to upgrade their profession. (Interview, 2/13)

The phrase, "because the world changes, also the teachers have to change, so that they can change the students" suggests that both teachers and students need skills as the world changes, for example, for global communication, to allow them to interact and communicate effectively with other speakers of English globally, in other words, become global citizens.

The above descriptions have shown how deficit discourses on low ability students were constructed by teachers, suggesting that they abdicated their responsibility. It appeared that teachers' definition of low ability students was vague; their language (e.g., "passive recipients of knowledge" "slow learners" "quiet learners", "difficult to teach") reveals deficit-based constructions of students. This is revealing, according to Bishop, who states that "teachers' actions and behaviours, how they relate to and interact with students, are governed by the discourse in which they position themselves and how they understand and position the other people in the relationship" (p. 73).

Interestingly, all teachers considered students' first languages and cultures as barriers to learning English. This contradicts the studies that regard students' languages as resources to learn a second language (Lisanza, 2014; Newton et al., 2010). This study has shown how students' first languages and cultures are marginalised in learning. Studies suggest that culturally responsive teaching and learning is needed if the goal is to empower students (Sleeter, 2010). Teachers in this study perceived students' first languages and cultures as barriers to learning English. This implies that students' languages and cultures are not used as a resource for their own learning (Sleeter, 2012). There is a need for this belief to be changed if the goal is to empower students with the language. For this to happen, teachers need to willingly learn about their students and their cultures (Sleeter, 2010). In this way, teachers may start viewing students' languages and cultures as resources, and not barriers. When teachers know their students and their cultures well, they may not construct them in deficit terms.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the complexities of ELT in Tanzania. It has shown how the discourses of low ability students were created by teachers. Teachers of English in this study appeared to construct their students in deficit terms, which they then used to justify their approaches and practices in the classroom. The findings of this study have shown that due to power operations in the classroom, some teachers constructed their students in deficit discourses. For instance, teachers in this study saw students' failure to learn English as being due to students' attitudes towards learning, and their family backgrounds. According to the findings, teachers placed blame on students and their families and the government when students failed to learn English. They believed that students do not take the responsibility for their own learning and that their lack of motivation and negative attitudes contributed to their failure. Some teachers believed that students' failure to learn was caused by their families not taking responsibility for their children's learning. Teachers also appeared to believe that students' first languages and cultures were barriers for them to learn English. The data suggest that teachers' professional knowledge of teaching English partly influenced the way they constructed their students. It could be argued that, teachers appeared to relinquish their responsibility for students' failure by placing blame on students, students' families, and society, and on the government. This study argues that in order to prepare students for effective global communications and interactions, there is a need for teachers to change their deficit thinking about their students, and to assume responsibility over their learning. The study also argued that there is a need to think about including students' languages and cultures in learning English. Therefore, teachers need to become agents for change in ELT in Tanzania.

5.2 Recommendations

The study suggests that teachers need to be made aware of how their deficit constructions of students, their families and their students' first languages and cultures as barriers to learning English in turn produce negative and alienating positions for students. Teachers need to understand the importance of students' first languages in learning English. The teaching of English should enable students to communicate and interact effectively within and outside the country, and not only be focussed on passing examinations. This study therefore calls for teachers to construct students' languages and cultures in supportive terms so that these students not only perform well in their studies, but also in global interactions and communications because today English is regarded as the global language (Baker, 2011).

Likewise, discourses that construct students as passive recipients of knowledge need to be challenged too. Students learn more effectively when they are given more opportunity to share their ideas and views in the classroom. Encouraging this will ensure that students are prepared not only for examinations, but also for interaction and communication with people of other cultures around the globe. This is because sharing their

views in the classroom builds up skills of respect and value for other people's ideas. Lastly, there is a need to address the constraints in ELT such as shortage of resources, and large class sizes. Large class sizes were reported by all teachers so that it is making it difficult for them to reach all students. The government needs to ensure that relevant and sufficient teaching materials and resources such as textbooks are distributed to schools to reduce the challenges faced by teachers.

For future research, data could be gathered by interviewing Government officials in the Ministry of Education, in order to investigate the discourses they use to construct ELT and to enter into dialogues with them about how the goals for ELT should reflect changes in the globalised world, thus ensuring it is relevant to students' futures. Second, this study is based on a sample of six teachers with experience of at least three years in the teaching field, in three government administered secondary schools in urban Dodoma. Therefore it would be good to extend the study in other urban government schools in other regions to see how they teach and construct ELT. Third, future research on exploring student experiences and subjectivities in English language classrooms would extend this study. This is important because students' voices are important for both changes in policy and practice.

References

Anderson, G. L., & Grinberg, J. (1998). Educational administration as a disciplinary practice: Appropriating Foucault's view of power, discourse, and method. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 34(3)*, 329-353.

Baker, W. (2011). Intercultural awareness: Modeling an understanding of cultures in intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 11*(3), 197-214.

Ball, S. J. (2013). *Foucault, power, and education*. New York: Routledge.

Bishop, R. (2005). Pathologizing the lived experiences of the indigenous Maori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. In C. Shields, R. Bishop, & A.E. Mazawi (Eds.), *Pathologizing practices: The impact of deficit thinking on education* (pp. 56-84). New York: Peter Lang.

Brock-Utne, B. (2002, January). *The most recent developments concerning the debate on the language of instruction in Tanzania*. A paper presented at the Oxford International Conference on Education and Development, Institute for Educational Research. University of Oslo, Norway.

Brock-Utne, B. (2006). Learning through a familiar language versus learning through a foreign language: A look into some secondary school classrooms in Tanzania. In B. Brock-Utne, Z. Desai, & M. Qorro (Eds.), *Focus on fresh data on the language of instruction debate in Tanzania and South Africa* (pp. 1940). South Africa: African Minds.

Brock-Utne, B. (2012). Language and inequality: Global challenges to education. Compare: *A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 42(5)*, 773-793.

Coloma, R. (2011). Who's afraid of Foucault? History, theory and becoming subjects. *History of Education Quarterly, 51*(2), 184-210.

Foucault, M. (1979). *The history of sexuality*, *vol. 1: An introduction*. London: Allen Lane.

Jardine, G. M. (2005). *Foucault and education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Lisanza, E. M. (2014). Dialogic instruction and learning: The case of one Kiswahili classroom in Kenya. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 27*(2), 121-135.

Magogwe, J. M. (2009). The influence of cultural bias on motivation to learn English: The case of Khoe primary school students in eastern Botswana. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 22(1),* 1-13.

May, S. (2005). Bilingual/immersion education in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Setting the context. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 8*(5), 365-376.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mwinsheikke, H. M. (2003, December). *Overcoming the language barrier: An indepth study of the Tanzania secondary school science teachers' initiatives in coping with the English-Kiswahili dilemma in the teaching-learning process.* A paper presented at NETREED Conference, The University of Oslo, Norway. Retrieved from http://www.netreed.uio.no/articles/Papers_final/Halima.pdf

Newton, J.., Yates, E., Shern, S., & Nowitzki, W. (2010). *Intercultural communicative language teaching: Implications for effective teaching and learning - A literature review and an evidence-based framework for effective teaching*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

Qorro, M. A. S. (2006). Testing students' ability to learn through English during the transition from primary to secondary schooling. In B. Brock-Utne, Z. Desai, & M. Qorro (Eds.), *Focus on fresh data on the language of instruction debate in Tanzania and South Africa* (pp. 69-111). South Africa: African Minds.

Qorro, M. A. S. (2013). Language of instruction in Tanzania: Why are research findings not heeded? *International Review of Education, 59*, 29-45.

Rubagumya, C. M. (1991). Language promotion for educational purposes: The example of Tanzania. *International Review of Education, 37*(1), 67-85.

Savage, C., Hindle, R., Meyer, L. H., Hynds, A., Penetito, W., & Sleeter, C. E. (2011). Culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom: Indigenous student experiences across the curriculum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(3), 183-198.

Sleeter, C. (2010). Afterword - culturally responsive teaching: A reflection. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education, 5*(1), 116-119.

Sleeter, C. E. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education, 47*(3), 562-584.

Swilla, I. N. (2009). Languages of instruction in Tanzania: Contradictions between ideology, policy and implementation. *African Study Monographs, 30*(1), 114