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## Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing the Acquisition of English Vocabulary in Multilingual Contexts: Insights from Selected Secondary School Teachers in Dodoma, Tanzania

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### Article info **Abstract**

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The study aimed to investigate the influence of sociolinguistic factors on the acquisition of English vocabulary in multilingual contexts. It employed a case study design in Dodoma City and Chamwino District Councils in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. Purposive sampling was used to select eight English language teachers, all of them having at least five years' teaching experience. Selected teachers participated in semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data, which underwent content analysis through Nvivo 12. The findings of the study indicate that sociolinguistic factors, such as the learners' first language, the level at which they started learning English, the education level of their parents, and opportunities to interact with English-speaking children, positively impact the acquisition of English vocabulary. Attention should be paid to the social and cultural backgrounds of learners when elucidating the process of acquiring vocabulary in a second/foreign language within multilingual environments. Based on these findings, teachers and policymakers should consider the sociolinguistic backgrounds of learners when designing language teaching programmes. They should provide support for learners who may start learning English at a later age to improve English in multilingual contexts.

**Keywords:** Dodoma, English Vocabulary, Multilingualism, Sociolinguistics, Tanzania

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## 1. Introduction

English language acquisition in multilingual contexts presents unique challenges and opportunities for learners (Ngaiza, 2023). Understanding the sociolinguistic factors that influence the acquisition of English vocabulary is crucial for designing effective language teaching programmes (Mtallo & Kimambo, 2022). However, in the ongoing discussion within second/foreign vocabulary acquisition literature, a key issue revolves around the factors responsible for the varying proficiency levels among L2 learners in terms of the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge. This investigation is closely linked to sociocultural theory (SCT), which asserts that the acquisition, or learning, of language is shaped by a blend of social and cognitive elements.

In the ongoing discourse, certain scholars (e.g., Campbell, 1986; Carrol, 2008; Clark, 2004; Hickmann, 1986; Mekala, 2013; Seuren, 1987) contend that variations in vocabulary acquisition are predominantly linked to cognitive factors. They assert that language learning is intricately connected to the mental, emotional, and physical development of learners, particularly in the context of acquiring and employing a second language. These researchers argue that individual differences among language learners can serve as predictive indicators of their success, or failure, in language acquisition.

Conversely, others (Dolivan, 2011; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lanza, 1997; Tarone, 2007; Zaretsky & Lange, 2015) attribute variations in vocabulary acquisition to sociolinguistic factors. They emphasize the importance of considering the relationship between the social context and the use and acquisition of a second/foreign language. According to the sociocultural theory, learners' exposure to and processing of a second language in social settings are significantly influenced by social mediation. Furthermore, they posit that sociolinguistic elements ought to hold a pivotal position in influencing the acquisition of a second/foreign language, as they offer valuable perspectives into the learners' local, social, and cultural milieu (Tarone, 2007). Consequently, sociolinguistic factors provide a framework through which we can enhance our comprehension of second language acquisition in varied contexts.

However, even though both perspectives play a crucial role in the field of second language learning, sociolinguistic research remains incomplete. There is still a need for a thorough examination of how sociolinguistic factors are incorporated into the process of acquiring second language vocabulary. To address this gap, this study specifically concentrates on examining the sociolinguistic elements that influence the acquisition of English vocabulary among students in chosen secondary schools in Dodoma, Tanzania.

As Tanzania's capital city, Dodoma represents a diverse linguistic landscape with learners from various sociolinguistic backgrounds (Dodoma Regional Education Office, 2021). This study aims to shed light on the impact

of these factors on learners' English vocabulary acquisition. By examining their first language, the level at which they started learning English, and the age they were exposed to English, the research seeks to identify key factors influencing vocabulary development (e.g., Mtallo & Kimambo, 2022).

Previous research has highlighted the importance of sociolinguistic variables such as learners' first language proficiency, parental education level, and opportunities for interaction with English-speaking peers (Canagarajah, 2006; Torres-Guzmán, 2002). However, limited research has specifically focused on the sociolinguistic factors characterising English vocabulary acquisition in multilingual contexts in Dodoma, Tanzania.

Understanding the relationship between sociolinguistic factors and vocabulary acquisition in this context has significant implications for language teaching (Wei, 2000). By identifying the specific challenges and opportunities which multilingual contexts present, educators can develop targeted interventions to enhance vocabulary acquisition among learners. Furthermore, policymakers can utilise these findings to inform the design of language teaching programmes that consider learners' sociolinguistic backgrounds and provide appropriate support (Tanzania Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2019).

Besides, the acquisition of English vocabulary in multilingual contexts poses challenges influenced by various sociolinguistic factors. In the selected secondary schools in Dodoma, Tanzania, where multiple languages are spoken, understanding the specific factors that impact the learners' acquisition of English vocabulary is crucial. However, insights and understanding of these sociolinguistic factors and their effects on vocabulary acquisition in Dodoma are lacking. By addressing this gap in knowledge, educators and policymakers can develop effective strategies to enhance English vocabulary acquisition and promote successful language learning outcomes in such multilingual educational environments.

This research adopted a case study approach, selecting secondary school teachers in Dodoma to gather qualitative data using semi-structured interviews. Through a careful analysis of the collected data, the study provides examples and insights into the sociolinguistic factors influencing learners' acquisition of English vocabulary in multilingual contexts.

Ultimately, the findings of this research contribute to the existing body of knowledge about sociolinguistic factors and language acquisition. The results inform educational practices and policies in Dodoma, Tanzania, and may provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers working in similar multilingual contexts worldwide.

## 2. Literature Review

In Tanzania, language dynamics revolve around Kiswahili, English, and Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs). Kiswahili holds the status of a national language, while English serves as the primary medium of instruction from secondary education onwards. At the primary level, Kiswahili is the instructional language, with English taught as a subject. ECLs thrive in specific localities, primarily in rural areas, used within homes and community settings (Mtallo & Kimambo, 2022).

Previous research in Tanzania primarily focused on investigating the influence of Kiswahili on English as a Common Language (CL). For instance, Mochiwa (1979) delved into the effects of Kiswahili on Kizigua, highlighting a trend towards adopting Kiswahili and significant lexical borrowing. However, examining the acquisition of English provides a more comprehensive view, given its distinctions from both ECLs and Kiswahili.

Rubanza (1979) focused on Kiswahili's encroachment on Kihaya, observing a preference for Kiswahili even in traditionally Kihaya-dominant spaces. Similarly, Mekacha (1993) investigated Kiswahili's influence on Ekinata, revealing domain dominance for both languages. Msanjila (1999) studied Kiswahili and ECL use in rural villages, delineating usage patterns based on social factors like age, literacy, and proximity to urban areas.

These studies, while informative, largely concentrate on language influence rather than language acquisition. Recognising this gap, current research delves into how social factors shape the acquisition of English vocabulary, aiming to understand its interplay with societal elements.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research Design and Sampling

In this investigation, a qualitative methodology was employed, utilising a case study design to analyse secondary school students with varied sociolinguistic backgrounds. The selection of a case study design was influenced by Creswell's (2017) viewpoint, deeming it suitable for scrutinising individuals, groups, communities, or institutions. The research was conducted in particular secondary schools located in Dodoma, specifically within Dodoma City and Chamwino District, to include both rural and urban environments in the investigation of vocabulary acquisition. Dodoma was selected due to its central position in Tanzania and its notable population growth rate of 23 per cent over the previous decade (URT, 2016, p. 69). This increase was, in part, attributed to the government's move from Dar-es-Salaam to Dodoma and the establishment of numerous higher learning institutions, which were expected to attract secondary school students with diverse sociolinguistic characteristics.

### **3.2. Participants**

The study involved eight English language teachers, evenly divided between four privately-owned and four government-owned secondary schools. Only teachers actively involved in teaching English as an academic subject were selected for interview sessions. The choice of this sample size aligns with Mason's (2002, p.13) recommendation, advocating for a moderate sample size, ideally not surpassing 30 cases, in qualitative research. Additionally, Creswell (2014) suggests aiming for a smaller sample size, around 10, especially when there are no unique characteristics to be revealed in the broader population.

Teachers were deliberately chosen using snowball sampling, as described by Creswell (2014), to identify teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Snowball sampling involves participants assisting researchers in identifying other potential subjects. The selection criteria focused on teachers who had a teaching history in English for at least five years, with the expectation that those with substantial experience would provide valuable insights into English vocabulary acquisition. Referrals from initially selected participants were relied upon to identify additional teachers meeting the specified teaching experience criteria.

The decision to include both private and public secondary schools was made through systematic random sampling to minimise bias, ensuring that the chosen schools accurately represented the entire population. The inclusion of both private and public secondary schools was justified by the assumption that learners from these two categories might differ in social backgrounds, and studying acquisition based on only one category might not present a comprehensive representation of the population.

### **3.3. Data Collection Instruments**

For this research, qualitative data collection utilised semi-structured interviews. The objective of the interviews with teachers was to discern sociolinguistic factors affecting the acquisition of English vocabulary by learners. Employing an interview guide facilitated a systematic approach to questioning, providing the flexibility to pose follow-up inquiries to clarify any unclear points. The qualitative data were gathered by interviewing secondary school teachers with a minimum of five years of experience in teaching English to Form Three and Four students.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The interviews, once recorded, underwent transcription and analysis through NVivo 12 software. This tool was employed to identify, document, and analyse diverse themes and sub-themes emerging from the interviews. The study engaged eight primary informants who willingly took part in the semi-structured interviews, drawing on their experiences in teaching English to secondary school students. The analysis process began by transforming recorded interviews into interview transcripts, which were then exported to

NVivo 12 as sources for analysis. Coding was performed by creating nodes to organise materials related to specific themes. Data analysis and coding continued until no new themes emerged, indicating that saturation had been reached. Nodes were used to categorise participants' views based on the study's objectives. The findings were summarised into major themes, presenting the results of the qualitative data analysis through narratives.

The research aimed to recognise the sociolinguistic factors that impact the acquisition of English vocabulary by learners. As previously stated, interviews were employed to gather qualitative data from the participants. Table 1 outlines the characteristics of the interview participants.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Attributes*

Cases	Age Group	Sex	Experience (Years)	Teach English	Class
Case1	30-39	Female	3 to 6	Yes	III & IV
Case2	30-39	Female	7 to 10	Yes	III & IV
Case3	30-39	Male	3 to 6	Yes	III & IV
Case4	40-49	Male	15 to 18	Yes	III & IV
Case5	30-39	Female	7 to 10	Yes	III
Case6	30-39	Female	3 to 6	Yes	III & IV
Case7	20-29	Female	3 to 6	Yes	III
Case8	30-39	Male	11 to 14	Yes	III & IV

Several sociolinguistic variables characterise the learners' acquisition of English vocabulary. However, some of them seem to be more dominant than others, as the study participants frequently mentioned them in Table 2. Table 2 is a matrix coding query generated by Nvivo 12 Plus. It indicates coding frequencies from each participant (case). It shows the frequency with which the participants mentioned a particular sociolinguistic variable that influences the acquisition of English vocabulary. The frequencies indicate which sociolinguistic variable was more dominant among the qualitative study participants. Looking at Table 2, home language (20), English learning start level (21), parents' education level (18) and play with English-speaking children (10) are dominant. These are further explored in the following subsections.

**Table 2**

*Sociolinguistic Themes/Variables*

Sociolinguistic Themes	Case1	Case2	Case3	Case4	Case5	Case6	Case7	Case8	Total
Home Language	2	4	3	2	1	3	0	5	20
English Learning Start Level	5	1	4	2	2	2	0	5	21
Parents' Education Level	6	1	2	1	1	0	2	5	18
English Course	1	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	9
Language in Class	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The language Used at the Playground	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Play with English-Speaking Children	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	10
School Nursery	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	9
Other Factors	3	0	0	1	2	3	5	5	19

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Results

#### 4.1.1. *The Use of English at Home*

Six out of eight teachers acknowledged that the language spoken at home has an impact on learners' vocabulary acquisition. When English is spoken at home, students find it easier to develop vocabulary at school. One teacher stated, "Learners who use English at home are in a better position to acquire English than those who use ECLs/Kiswahili" (Case 1). Another noted that learners who communicate in English at home face fewer difficulties in acquiring vocabulary (Case 5). These responses indicate that the use of English at home significantly influences vocabulary acquisition. However, there was some disagreement on this issue, as one participant saw students struggling equally regardless of their home language (Case 3). This indicates a slight difference in perspectives regarding the relationship between home language and vocabulary acquisition.

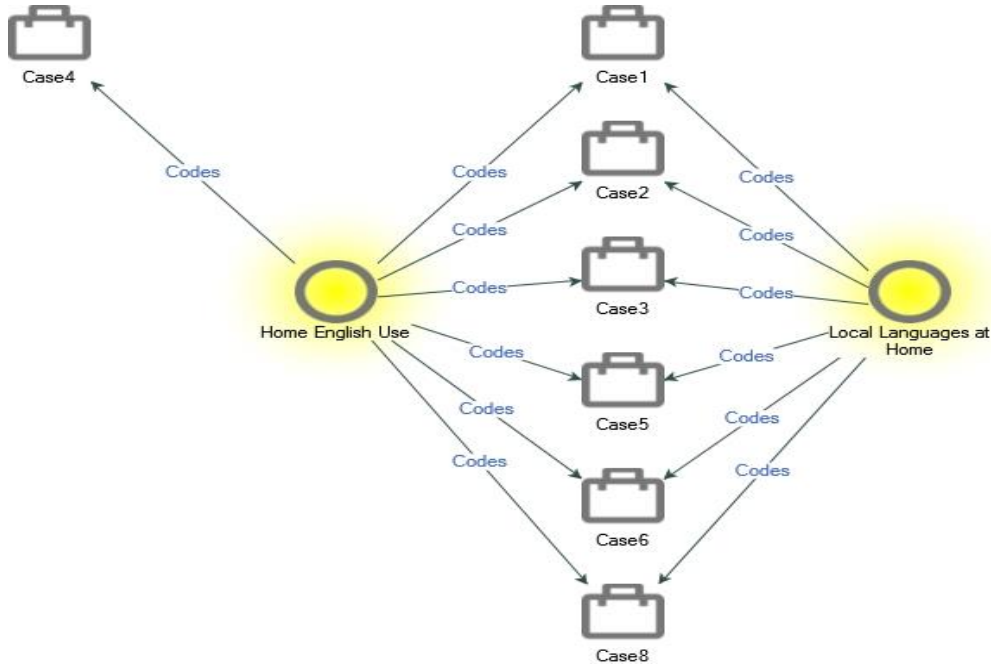
The study also found that when parents speak English at home, certain vocabulary items become embedded in their school-going children, facilitating the acquisition of new vocabulary. Educated parents were seen to have a greater ability to introduce vocabulary to their children compared to uneducated parents (Case 2). Additionally, English spoken at home creates an environment where students can continue practising the language outside of school. Some students only practise English within the school compound, while others practise it beyond the school environment (Case 6). These responses indicate that speaking English at home not only supports but also enhances students' ability to speak English and acquire new vocabulary. Therefore, if English is spoken at home, it becomes one of the sociolinguistic variables that significantly contribute to children's vocabulary acquisition.

The interview data suggest that learners from families that speak English at home encounter fewer difficulties in learning new English vocabulary compared to those whose family members only speak Kiswahili or ECLs. One of the participants stated that learners who communicate in English at home face fewer difficulties in acquiring vocabulary compared to those who use Kiswahili, or ECLs (Case 8). Another participant indicated that learners who use English at home are far better off than those who use Kiswahili or ECLs in acquiring English vocabulary (Case 6). These responses imply that the regular use of English at home simplifies the process of learning new vocabulary for children in those families. Students feel more comfortable learning English in secondary school because it is not completely unfamiliar to them. However, the same cannot be true for children from families where only Kiswahili is spoken, as they may find it more challenging to learn English vocabulary since they are encountering it for the first time.

Figure 1 depicts two sub-themes: English and ECLs used at home. Six out of eight participants discussed the influence of English and ECLs at home on vocabulary acquisition, while Case 4 and Case 7 did not mention ECLs' use and its impact on vocabulary acquisition.

**Figure 1**

*Comparison between the Use of English and ECLs at Home*



#### 4.1.1.1. ECLs at Home

Six out of eight participants stated that the challenges in vocabulary acquisition are caused by using only ECLs in the families. The study found that children from families whose members speak ECLs, or Kiswahili, only are likely to find English vocabulary acquisition challenging. A typical response was "...so, most of the Tanzanian learners face a very serious challenge in the transition from Kiswahili to English when they join the secondary school level" (Case 8). Case 2 responded, "because learners acquired it as the third language since they had their ECLs as the first language and Swahili as their second language." The responses indicate that the use of only ECLs in families poses challenges for school-going children to acquire English vocabulary. Implicitly, they also lack places to continue using their learned English to continue mastering the language.

Thematic analysis indicated that Tanzanians have their mother tongues. English is not even a second language; it is a third language for most students. Therefore, while at home, students communicate with others using their mother tongue, or Kiswahili. Therefore, English is new and a third language to learners. Thus, it is difficult to acquire English vocabulary. One participant,



for example, remarked, "... most of the students in Tanzania use English as a second or foreign language as they start using their mother tongue languages first followed by Kiswahili which is used as a medium of instruction at the primary school level" (Case 8).

**Figure 2**

*ECLs at Home Coding by Case (Item)*

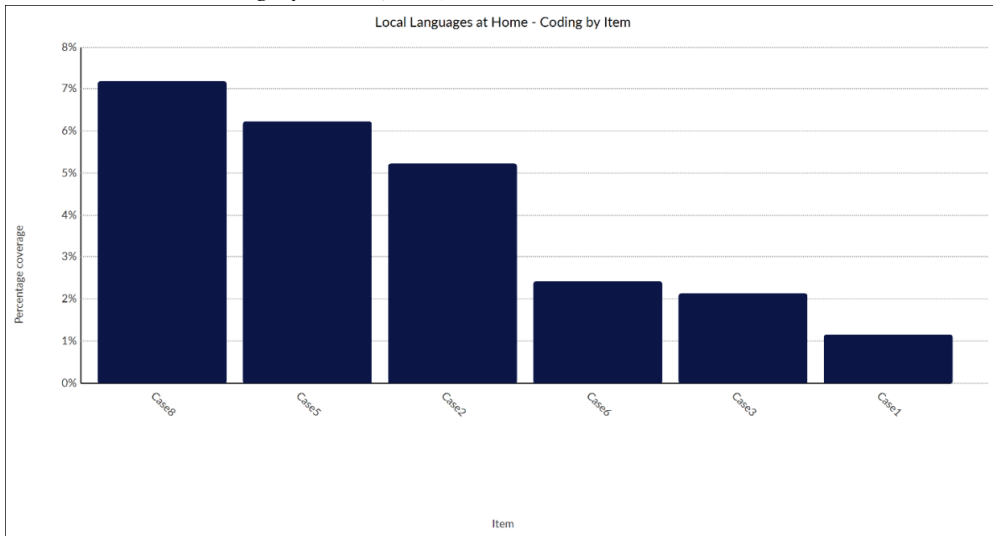
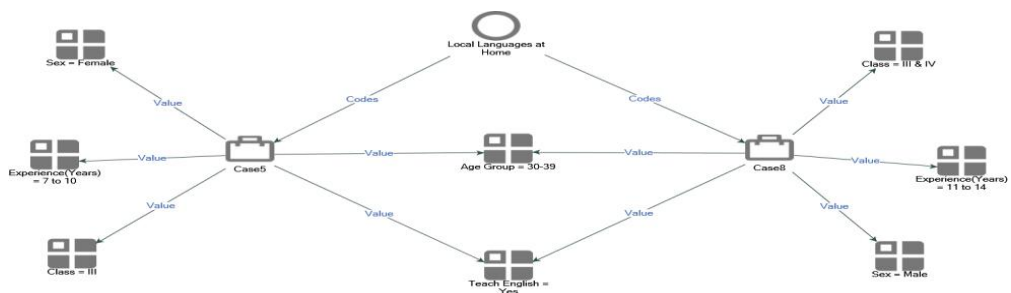


Figure 2 shows that six participants talked about the association between local languages and English vocabulary acquisition challenges. The cases are shown in Figure 1 in descending order. It means that Case 8, Case 5, and Case 2 talked more about ECLs at home than Case 1. Percentage coverage indicates the amount of data coded in the theme from the case. Figure 3 illustrates the project map for Case 8 and Case 5, which emphasized the challenges of using only local languages at home and their impact on vocabulary acquisition. Both participants belong to the Age Group (30-39) and have extensive English teaching experience, as shown in the figure.

**Figure 3**

*Project Map for Case 8 and Case 5*



#### **4.1.2. Level of First Exposure to English**

The interview dataset further revealed that the level at which a student started learning/being exposed to English has an association with English vocabulary acquisition. Three main levels were found: starting at kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school. Additionally, interview data indicate vocabulary acquisition is also linked with the nature of the school attended by the learner, whether Kiswahili medium schools or English medium schools.

##### **4.1.2.1. Start at Day-Care/Kindergarten Level**

Six of the eight interview participants highlighted the importance of starting English learning at an early age for vocabulary acquisition. Those who began in kindergarten had fewer difficulties in acquiring vocabulary compared to those who started later. One participant observed that early English learners have a better command of the language, while another noted that attending daycare centres contributes to easier vocabulary acquisition. However, not all participants agreed on the impact of kindergarten on vocabulary acquisition. One response indicated that there was no difference in acquiring English vocabulary between students who attended kindergarten and those who did not. Additionally, daycare was found to have a positive influence on vocabulary acquisition, particularly when English teaching was incorporated into the activities. Some daycare centres focus solely on childcare rather than language instruction. A participant said, “Attending a day-care centre may benefit learners, especially those who attended there focusing on learning English. You see most of the parents do not register their kids to those centres with that aim” (Case 3). This response suggests that, as one starts learning English earlier in childhood via kindergartens and daycare centres, there is a huge chance for the child to acquire vocabulary in his/her later stages of education.

Figure 4 demonstrates that the theme of starting kindergarten receives more coding frequencies from Form 3 and 4 English teachers. They believe that learning English at this level facilitates vocabulary acquisition. Figure 4 also indicates fewer coding frequencies for primary and secondary school themes, suggesting that acquiring English at these levels is not as straightforward as starting in kindergarten. Starting second language learning at a young age, such as in kindergarten or daycare, is linked to the learners' age and implies that it is easier to acquire a second language when exposed to it early.

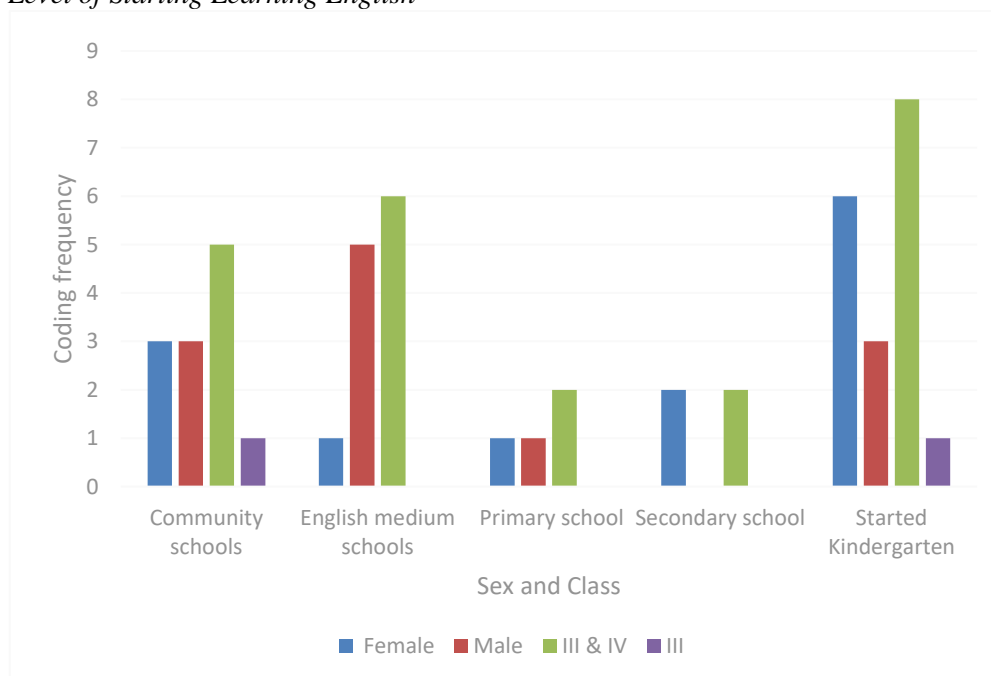
##### **4.1.2.2. Start at the Primary and Secondary School Level**

Both primary and secondary school sub-themes had fewer coding frequencies, as shown in Figure 4, indicating less discussion about the connection between starting English learning at the primary school level and vocabulary acquisition. The datasets suggest that students have limited English backgrounds from their primary school education. Participants highlighted that the students' diverse backgrounds from their families, kindergarten, and

primary school contribute to these challenges. Additionally, the use of Kiswahili as the primary medium of instruction in most primary schools further hinders English vocabulary acquisition in secondary school. Although the participants' responses indicate difficulties in acquiring second language vocabulary at the primary/secondary school level, Cummins (1981) proposed a different perspective. He suggested that learners at this level acquire CALP more easily compared to lower levels, where Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are acquired. However, Garcia (2004) mentioned that CALP can be achieved before BICS in specific situations, such as a scientist reading a text in an unfamiliar language. These differing views highlight that second language vocabulary acquisition can occur at any level, although it is easier when learners are exposed to the second language at lower levels (kindergarten/daycare) compared to primary or secondary school.

#### Figure 4

*Level of Starting Learning English*



#### 4.1.2.3. Kiswahili Medium Public Schools vs. English Medium Private Schools

Interview data indicate disparities in vocabulary acquisition between students who went to Kiswahili medium public schools and those who went to English medium private schools. Students who attended Kiswahili medium public schools face more challenges in vocabulary acquisition than those who attended English medium private schools. The following extract shows this point:

Learning background is one of the factors contributing to differences in the acquisition of vocabulary, i.e., some of the students are from English medium

private schools while the majority are from Kiswahili medium public/community schools. Those from the English medium private schools have a great chance of doing better than those in the Kiswahili medium public/community schools. (Case 1)

The second response was, “That is because the majority of the students came from Kiswahili medium public schools which do not use English as a medium of instruction at the primary school level.” The responses indicate that learners from schools where English is used as the medium of instruction do not encounter vocabulary acquisition challenges. It is because they are used to the language. Implicitly, the school environments provide more room for students to practise using the English language as most students and teachers will interact in English. Therefore, the responses tell us that the everyday use of English is advantageous to students as they join secondary school studies.

The use of Kiswahili as the medium of instruction in primary public schools poses challenges for learners in acquiring English vocabulary, especially when English becomes the main medium of instruction at the secondary level. This language barrier hinders their understanding of subjects taught in English. In contrast, English-medium private schools restrict the use of Kiswahili and enforce English as the primary language, which aids students in vocabulary acquisition. These schools create an environment where English usage is compulsory, promoting students' knowledge and skills in the language. However, this approach also presents challenges as students may struggle to acquire the specific vocabulary needed for effective communication. The word cloud presented in Figure 5 reinforces the connection between this theme and the participants' responses.

The word cloud in Figure 5 reflects the words commonly used by participants to explain why English medium private schools face no challenges in vocabulary acquisition.

### **Figure 5**

#### A Word Cloud on the Theme English Medium Schools

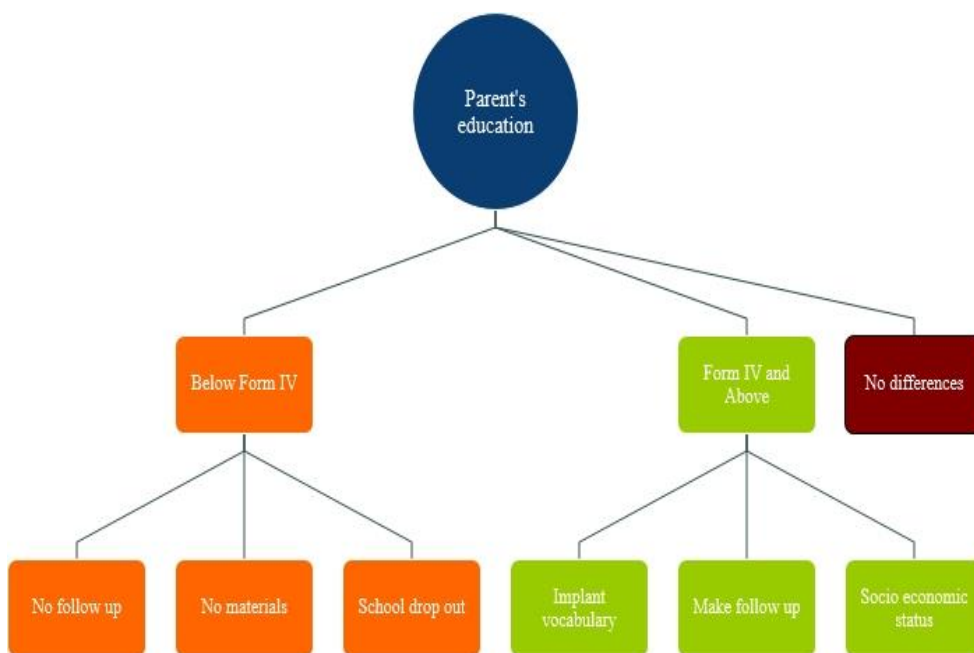


#### 4.1.3. Parents' Education Level

Interview data also indicated that parents' education level is another sociolinguistic factor associated with English vocabulary acquisition in secondary schools. The sub-themes under the parents' education level are 'below Form 4, Form 4 or above, and no differences', as shown in Figure 6. They are further explored in the next sections.

**Figure 6**

*Parents' Education Level*



##### 4.1.3.1. Below Form 4

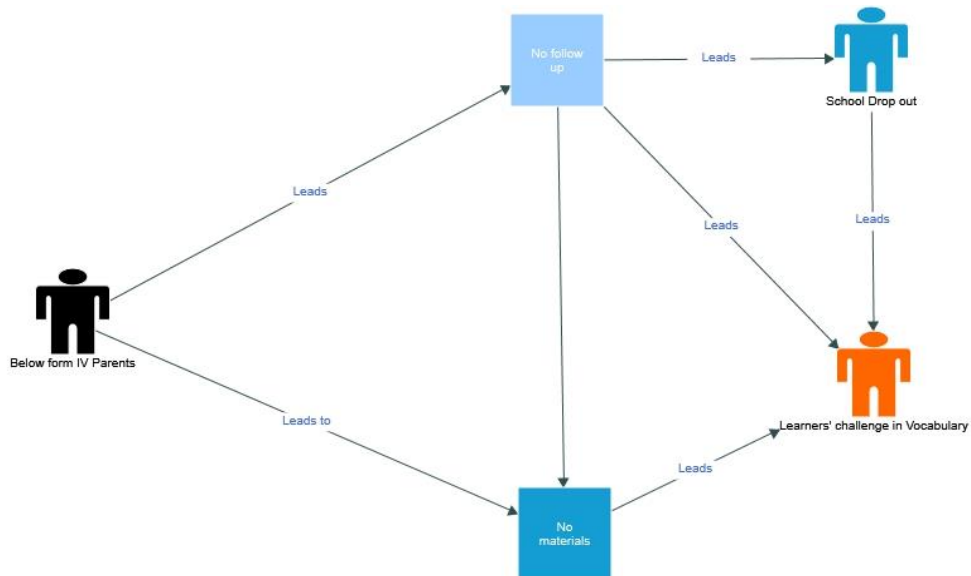
Five out of eight interviewed English teachers talked about the link between parents whose education level is below Form 4 and acquiring vocabulary in secondary schools. The participants associated parents below the Form 4 level of education with their children's school dropout, no follow-up, and no materials for their children. Thematic analysis of the qualitative dataset found that many students who drop out are from families whose parents' education level is below Form 4. Dropping out of school causes difficulties in English vocabulary acquisition. A typical response was, "The dropout and truancy rates are elevated among students whose parents have an educational attainment below Form 4 compared to those whose parents have achieved education levels beyond Form 4" (Case 1). The response indicates a lack of commitment by parents with an education level below Form 4 to ensure that their children attend school regularly and complete their studies. It also

implicitly affects learners' ability to acquire English vocabulary, which can also affect their understanding of other subjects taught in English.

Figure 7 was generated from Nvivo 12 to illustrate how parents' education level (Below Form 4) influences their school-going children's English vocabulary acquisition.

### Figure 7

A Concept Map of Parents' Education Level, below Form 4



Besides school dropouts, a lack of parental follow-up is associated with the Form 4 education level. Parents with at least a Form 4 education level tend to have better follow-up on their children's education, leading to a relatively higher acquisition rate. Conversely, parents with education levels below Form 4 face difficulties in providing English books for their children and supporting vocabulary acquisition.

#### 4.1.3.2. Form 4 or Above

Among the eight English teachers interviewed, four noted a correlation between learners' ease of vocabulary acquisition in secondary schools and their parents' education level, specifically those with Form 4 or higher education. The teachers noted that parents could follow up and impart English vocabulary and socio-economic status. The study found that educated parents normally make follow-ups on their school-going children. The follow-up allows them to understand what is happening in school in terms of the children's academic performance. The following two responses represent such views. "Parents whose educational level is at least Form 4 have greater chances to make follow-up on their children's progress and give them necessities, such as reference

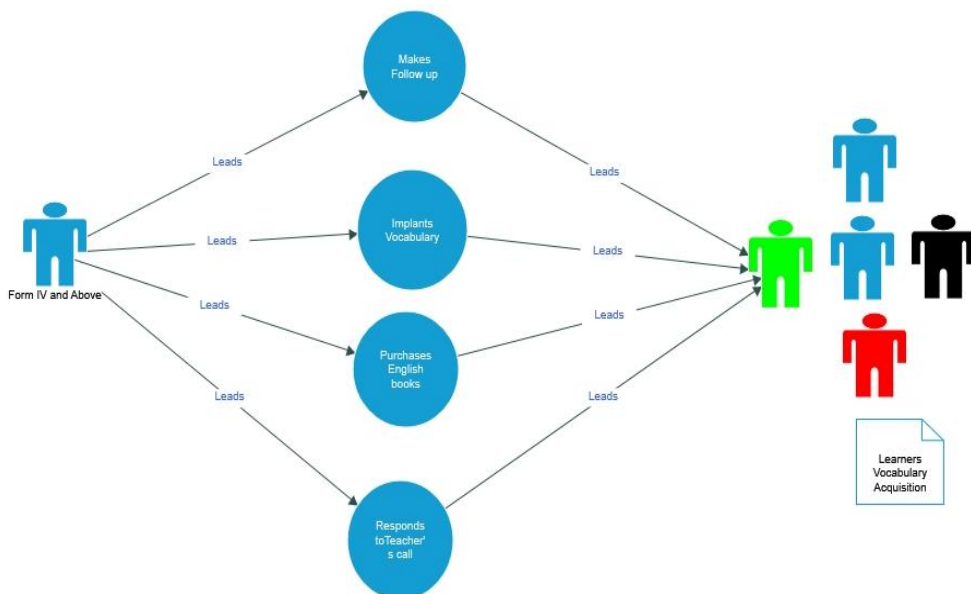
books, exercise books etc. than those whose level of education is below Form 4” (Case1). The second response related to the number of parents who always come to school or who are ready to go to school when you call them for their children’s learning progress is higher for those whose level of education is above Form 4 than those whose level is below Form 4.

Implicitly, the two responses indicate that parents’ good education helps them see the value of education for their children. They take time to do close follow-ups and monitor what students are learning in schools. Such follow-ups also compel students to work hard after realising that parents would follow up on what they are doing in school. Moreover, the responses indicate that educated parents also buy English reading materials for their children. The reading materials help learners to acquire new English vocabulary.

Figure 8 is created with Nvivo 12 to capture how parents’ education level (Form 4 or above) influences their school-going children’s English vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, the responses show that educated parents cooperate with teachers in monitoring students learning progress. The parents respond to teachers’ calls at the school when they are needed. In contrast, parents with below Form 4 education level do not have the trouble to meet with teachers to discuss learners’ academic progress.

**Figure 8**

*A Concept Map of Parents’ Education Level, Form 4 or Above*



Besides being good at making follow-ups, educated parents have the chance to impart English vocabulary to learners. The acquisition of vocabulary

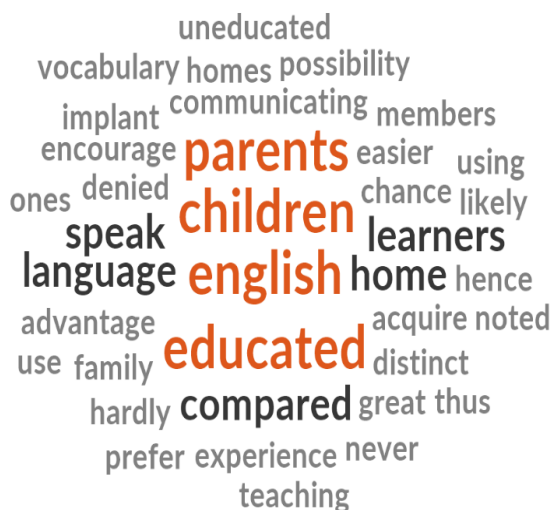
from parents happens when parents talk with their children in English, at home. One participant, for example, observed

Based on my teaching background, I have noticed that learners whose parents are educated and prefer to use English at home when communicating with their children are likely to acquire the English language more easily than those learners whose parents or family members are not educated; hence, they are denied the possibility of using the English language in their homes. (Case 8)  
This response indicates that educated parents play a role in helping learners acquire English vocabulary by talking with them in English, an opportunity that students whose parents did not reach Form Four lack.

Figure 9 presents the word cloud of node implanting, implying the higher the frequency, the larger the font size. Larger font size words indicate that parents' use of English at home can help learners acquire English vocabulary.

### **Figure 8**

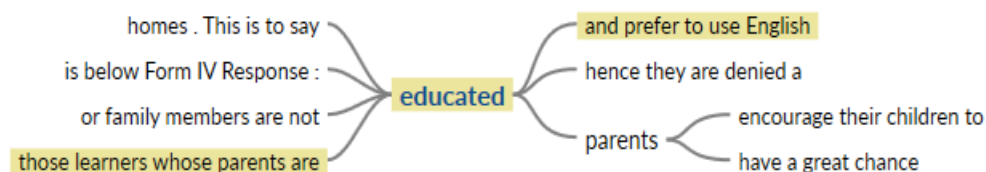
*Word Cloud of Node Implanting*



The word “educated” was extracted from the word cloud in Figure 10. The word tree indicates how the term educated was used by participants concerning other words. It shows that educated parents prefer to use English.

### **Figure 9**

*A Word Tree of the Word Educated*





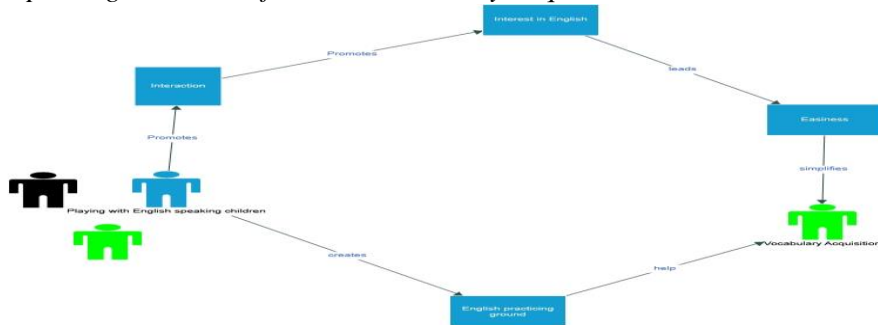
#### ***4.1.4. Playing with English-Speaking Children***

Seven out of the eight interviewed teachers acknowledged a positive relationship between playing with English-speaking children and the ease of acquiring English vocabulary. The data suggest that playing with English speakers can foster an interest in the language, which, in turn, facilitates vocabulary acquisition. The context and environment provided during playing allow for practising English speaking skills, as reflected in this extract: “Students who had the opportunity to interact with English-speaking peers in their early years will have an advantage in acquiring English vocabulary compared to those who had never been exposed to such an environment” (Case 4). Another participant explained, “... the one who has a chance to play with English-speaking children develops interests in the language, leading to easiness in acquisition” (Case 1). However, not every interviewed English teacher held this opinion. For example, one teacher remarked, “There is no difference between students who had the opportunity to engage with English-speaking children and those who lacked such opportunities” (Case 5). These responses indicate that there are disagreements among the study participants on whether playing with English-speaking children leads to ease in vocabulary acquisition.

Interview data suggest that playing with English-speaking children promotes interaction and facilitates the acquisition of English vocabulary. One participant highlighted that learners who have English-speaking friends find it easier to acquire vocabulary through their interactions outside of school. These findings align with Cann's (1992) research, which emphasised the significant difference in language acquisition between pupils who frequently speak English with their peers and those who rarely, or never, use English in their social surroundings. The social environment plays a crucial role in second language acquisition, and the amount of English spoken at home and in social settings is an important factor. However, some participants held opposing views, suggesting that playing with English-speaking children does not influence vocabulary acquisition. This is evident in Figure 11.

#### **Figure 11**

*Project Map Representing the Ideas of the Majority on Whether Playing with English-Speaking Children Influences Vocabulary Acquisition*



#### **4.1.5. Attending an English Course**

There are mixed views about associating attending an English course and the acquisition of vocabulary in secondary school. Two out of eight interviewed English teachers broadly support that learners who attend a course before joining secondary school do better in acquiring vocabulary than learners who never attend the course. For example, Case 3 commented that “those who have had an opportunity to attend such a course display competence and confidence in the language, especially in speaking, compared to those who had not.” However, other English teachers noticed just a minor difference in acquiring vocabulary between those who attended and those who did not attend an English course. Case 7, for instance, had the following to offer in this regard: “There exists a slight difference; however, it is not significant since acquisition at this level is greatly impacted by an individual’s openness to learning than what they learnt in the past.” Similarly, another participant stated that “there might be some differences at the beginning, especially when they join the school, but as time goes by the differences diminish slowly. Finally, they stand in the same position as they experience the same social setting” (Case 1).

These responses indicate that attending an English course before entering secondary school does not guarantee successful English vocabulary acquisition. While some participants rejected any relationship between attending the course and vocabulary acquisition, others expressed that there was no difference between those who attended the course and those who did not.

#### **4.1.6. Attending Nursery School**

Half of the participants, specifically four out of eight, express the view that commencing nursery school within the initial three years of life facilitates a more seamless acquisition of English vocabulary compared to those who begin attending after three years. It also makes the learner develop a good command of the language. One participant pointed out that “... one who started learning English at an early age is likely to have a good command of the

language as compared to those who started learning it at a later age. This is vividly seen in my classes” (Case 1). Another participant also remarked that “those who start at an early stage acquire vocabulary easily” (Case 2). However, two other teachers did not concur; they argued that attending nursery school in the first three years does not necessarily put the learner in a good position to acquire vocabulary. Minor differences might exist at the beginning between the two groups. For instance, Case 3 explained that “perhaps, some differences may be seen here, especially during the first few months of joining school.” Another interviewee disagreed, clarifying that, “there is no remarkable distinction” (Case 4). The responses show disagreement among the English teachers in the study area, as some say there is no difference at all. Those who attend nursery school early in their lives and those who attend three years later have no considerable vocabulary acquisition differences.

#### ***4.1.7. Opportunity to Practise Using the English Language***

Two out of eight English teachers talked more about learners missing an opportunity to practise using the English language. The data show that learners have nowhere to practise using the language. Students find no one speaks the language outside the school context, except learners coming from educated families who can speak English. This situation puts learners in a difficult situation in acquiring English vocabulary. In this regard, one of the participants claimed that some students practise speaking English only in the school compound while others practise it even outside the school compound. Thus, it becomes more challenging to acquire the English vocabulary for those who only practice it in the school compound than for those who practice it even beyond the school compound. The response indicates that it is difficult to acquire English vocabulary as most learners lack the opportunity to interact with others in English. The only time they practise speaking English is when they are at school. Based on this scenario, one can reasonably argue that the school environment alone is not enough for practising the language. Learners mostly interact with people using languages other than English.

## **4.2. Discussion**

This study focuses on examining how sociolinguistic elements impact the process of acquiring English vocabulary within multilingual environments. Regarding the home language, findings show that the language used in the household affects the way learners develop their vocabulary. This finding aligns with previous research by Li (2007), Dixon et al. (2012), and Omego (2014). Li (2007) examined the influence of the home environment on second language acquisition among Chinese immigrant families in Canada, where English was their second language. Consistent with the current study, Li (2007) discovered that the use of a second language at home is a crucial factor that significantly influences the acquisition rate. The amount of language children

hear and use at home and later at school was found to be strongly correlated with language development. More exposure to English at home was associated with a higher acquisition rate. Similarly, the current study's findings support Omega's (2014) research on the influence of the environment on children's acquisition of English as a second language in Nigeria. Omega found that children exposed to a home environment where English was frequently spoken had greater language acquisition compared to those with limited, or no, opportunity to use English at home.

The findings further revealed that children in households where family members exclusively communicate in ECLs or Kiswahili may encounter difficulties in acquiring English vocabulary. These findings align with Takac's (2008) research, which suggests that learners who are not frequently exposed to the second language (L2) in their home environment face difficulties in acquiring L2 vocabulary knowledge. This is particularly true when there is no equivalence between the local languages (learners' L1s) and L2. The lack of structural, phonological, or other similarities between English and the learners' home languages (Kiswahili/ECLs) in the Tanzanian multilingual context hinders the development of English vocabulary competency. Learners whose parents and family members use English at home have an advantage in developing a broader and deeper English vocabulary compared to those who lack this opportunity.

Considering the level of first exposure to English, the findings also showed that there is a connection between the point at which a student begins learning or being exposed to English and the acquisition of English vocabulary. For instance, the participants emphasized the significance of initiating English learning during early childhood as crucial for acquiring vocabulary. This aligns with Muftah's (2017) study among Yemeni kindergarten pupils, which found a positive impact of early second language instruction. It is suggested that language acquisition is higher and more intuitive during early childhood. However, these findings contradict previous research indicating that older learners (8 to 12 years old) have an advantage in acquiring a school language faster and more efficiently than younger learners (4 to 7 years old) (Brown, 2000; Cummins, 1981; Shunk, 2009). For example, Shunk (2009) argued that acquiring a second language smoothly is challenging for early-age learners (5 or 6 years old) because their first language acquisition process is still ongoing. Cummins (1992) also noted that children at the kindergarten level (2 to 5 years old) acquire Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), while those exposed to a second language after age 5 acquire cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Despite these arguments, it can be maintained that starting second language learning at an early age, such as in kindergarten or daycare centres, leads to easier and more efficient acquisition compared to later

exposure. Such early learners have a better chance of acquiring both BICS and CALP, albeit separately.

Regarding the impact of the instructional language in schools on vocabulary acquisition, the results suggest differences in vocabulary development between students who attended Kiswahili medium public schools and those in English medium private schools. Students from Kiswahili medium public schools encounter greater difficulties in acquiring vocabulary compared to their counterparts in English medium private schools. Takac's (2008) study supports these findings by emphasizing the importance of adequate linguistic input for L2 vocabulary learning. Schools, parents, and stakeholders must maximise comprehensive vocabulary exposure through strategies like debates, discussions, language games, storytelling, and reading. In the Tanzanian context, learners from English medium private schools benefit from a strong focus on language programs that encourage English usage in both classroom and naturalistic settings. As a result, they can easily develop a strong command of English vocabulary, unlike learners from Kiswahili medium public schools who primarily encounter English only within the classroom (Mapunda & Kyara, 2023).

Moreover, the educational background of parents emerged as another significant sociolinguistic factor impacting the acquisition of English vocabulary in this diverse linguistic setting. The results demonstrated that learners with parents who attained an education level beyond form 4 exhibited a smoother acquisition of English vocabulary compared to their peers. These findings align with previous research by Dubow et al. (2009) and Kalil et al. (2012), which emphasise the positive relationship between parental education level, parental involvement, and children's academic achievement. Children with less educated parents struggle to acquire a second language, such as English vocabulary, as they lack encouragement and educational role models.

Besides, the findings support Cann's (1992) research, which highlights the connection between linguistic ability, vocabulary extension, and the socioeconomic status of the family. Learners from higher socio-economic class families receive parental support that contributes to their proficiency in the second language. Parental involvement plays a crucial role in language acquisition, as it influences the child's motivation to continue language study and the effort they put into learning. Cann also found significant differences in language development and usage based on social class, with lower social class backgrounds associated with weaker language skills. The use of language within the family environment greatly impacts language proficiency, and families from diverse social backgrounds have varying attitudes towards child rearing, which affects language use. The study concludes that children who speak English in their homes have an advantage due to the encouragement they receive from their parents and family members.

Additionally, in the context of a multilingual environment, the study explored whether interacting with English-speaking children contributes to the acquisition of vocabulary in a second language. The results indicate that engaging with English speakers can cultivate an interest in the language, subsequently aiding in the acquisition of vocabulary. Nevertheless, although certain participants expressed contrary opinions, contending that interacting with English-speaking children has no impact on vocabulary acquisition, Adelman's (2014) study, supports the dominant view, highlighting the importance of interactions with native speakers for L2 learners to develop language proficiency. Such findings address the disagreements among participants and support that playing with English-speaking children influences the acquisition of English as a second language in multilingual contexts.

The results regarding the impact of attending an English course on English vocabulary acquisition present divergent opinions. Some participants dismissed any correlation between attending the course and vocabulary acquisition, while others expressed opposing viewpoints. Gaffas (2016) and Mikulec (2012) offer insights into addressing this disagreement. Gaffas found that learners who attended language preparatory programmes, including English courses, had an advantage in acquiring vocabulary knowledge. These programmes not only fostered language interest but also built learners' confidence in using the language. Thus, Gaffas' study supports the viewpoint of participants who believe that attending an English course influences the acquisition of English vocabulary. However, through the sociocognitive lens, Mikulec (2012) underscores that successful acquisition will take place if learners cognitively attend to language and socially gauge the feedback of their interlocutors. The interview data show that the secondary school social setting does not allow learners to use their sociocognitive process to reinforce their learned vocabulary. Eventually, these learners find themselves no better than those who did not take an English course.

There is a lack of consensus among English teachers in the study area regarding the impact of attending a nursery school on vocabulary acquisition. Some argue that there is no discernible difference in vocabulary acquisition between those who attend nursery school early in their lives and those who enrol three years later. Ndiujye et al. (2020) conducted a study on early childhood education in Tanzania, exploring the impact of attending nursery school on second language acquisition. Their findings align with the opinions of some participants, indicating that nursery school attendance sets a foundation for children's development and enhances their chances of success in acquiring a second language. However, it is important to consider that language acquisition is a complex process influenced by various factors. Some participants noted that initial differences may be observed when learners first

join the school, but these differences tend to diminish over time as learners adapt to their new social settings. Therefore, while the above-mentioned study supports the importance of nursery school, the views of other participants should be taken into account.

The results regarding the Opportunity to Practice Using the English Language suggest that learners who do not have the chance to engage with the English language encounter challenges in acquiring it when compared to their peers. The findings align with Batstone's (2002) claim that individuals exhibit distinct orientations to second language (L2) input, with a greater inclination towards naturalistic contexts over classroom settings. This implies that the naturalistic context positively influences the acquisition of a specific language in comparison to the classroom environment. In this case, learners who get an opportunity to use English in their natural environment develop vocabulary competency easier than those who find the language only in the classroom setting. A person who frequently practises using the language will most likely become more competent in it, confirming the saying, "Practice makes perfect." Therefore, one of the best strategies in second language acquisition is to create opportunities where L2 learners will be required to use the second language in different domains/contexts as previously realised by Mtallo and Kimambo (2022).

### **5. Conclusion and Implications**

The article examined teachers' ideas about sociolinguistic influences on English vocabulary acquisition in the Tanzanian multilingual context. A qualitative approach was used, involving semi-structured interviews with eight secondary school English teachers. The findings highlight the importance of sociolinguistic factors such as home language, exposure to English, school type, parents' education, and interaction with English speakers. The conclusion not only solidifies the idea that acquiring English vocabulary is influenced by a synergy of social and cognitive factors but also underscores the validity of the sociocultural theory's assertion that learning is an intricate interplay between these two dimensions. This insight underscores the significance of social interactions in vocabulary acquisition, highlighting that language learning develops not only through individual cognitive processes but also through social engagement and context.

Moreover, this conclusion aligns with the broader educational implications of the sociocultural theory, emphasising that language acquisition is a dynamic process that occurs through collaborative efforts, where learners engage in meaningful interactions within their sociocultural environment. This perspective underscores the importance of fostering rich linguistic environments, encouraging communication, and providing opportunities for students to engage with others in their journey to acquire vocabulary.

Ultimately, it reinforces the idea that language learning is a holistic endeavour that encompasses both individual cognition and social dynamics.

The study recommends expanding the research to include more regions and using additional data collection methods like participant observation to capture language use in different contexts. Participant observation is thought to help researchers to be part of the community while participating and observing what happens at the playground, home setting, and in a classroom environment. Thus, it would be possible to capture more information on language use.



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