

# Benefits of Multilingualism and Globalisation in Languages: Evidence of Phonological Awareness among Learners in Tanzania

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## Abstract:

Multilingualism, defined as the ability to use more than two languages, underscores the dynamic and intricate nature of language acquisition. Its cognitive advantages are increasingly recognised, including enhanced mental flexibility, improved problem-solving skills, and superior executive functioning. Beyond these cognitive benefits, multilingualism significantly influences social identity, fosters intercultural understanding, and informs language policy. As interactions among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds become more prevalent, it is crucial to comprehend the implications of multilingualism in our increasingly globalised world.

This study investigates multilingualism's impact within the globalisation framework, with a particular emphasis on phonological awareness as a crucial cognitive and linguistic outcome. Focusing on Tanzania—a nation characterised by its linguistic diversity, boasting over 150 ethnic languages—the study examines how multilingual learners navigate complex language systems amidst the dual pressures of globalising forces that favour dominant languages such as English and Swahili, as well as local initiatives aimed at preserving ethnic linguistic identities. In this setting, multilingualism is a facilitator of global communication and a protector of linguistic diversity.

The research encompasses 104 secondary school students, categorised into three groups: bilinguals (Swahili-English), trilinguals with a Bantu first language (Haya), and trilinguals with a Cushitic first language (Iraqw). Participant selection procedures involved proficiency tests in English and Swahili and additional tests for ethnic languages for trilingual groups using CEFR-based proficiency assessments, as well as questionnaires to gather information about their language backgrounds.

The data collection process involved conducting phonological awareness tasks in both Swahili and English; the study explored how language repertoire and the first language (L1) typology influence performance in areas such as syllable awareness, phoneme manipulation, and error identification.

The findings reveal that trilingual learners, particularly those with typologically diverse linguistic backgrounds, exhibit superior phonological awareness and enhanced cognitive flexibility compared to their bilingual counterparts. Notably, learners with Iraqw as their L1 outperformed those with Haya on several tasks, underscoring the



impact of L1 structural complexity and linguistic distance on the processing of L2 and L3. Furthermore, the results indicate that while Swahili's regular orthography and syllable structure facilitate higher performance across all groups, multilingual learners demonstrate greater adaptability when tackling the phonological irregularities of English.

In conclusion, the study asserts that multilingualism in globalised linguistic contexts enhances metalinguistic awareness and executive functioning and equips learners with essential tools for success in intercultural communication and cognitively demanding environments. These findings carry significant implications for language education policies and the sustainability of global linguistic diversity, advocating for inclusive multilingual frameworks that recognise the pedagogical, cultural, and cognitive value of linguistic variety.

**Keywords: multilingual mentoring, primary schools, early language learning, intercultural understanding**

