



The Importance of Learning French in An Anglophone Country: The Case of Tanzania

Victor Mpoyo Kalume

St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania

Corresponding Author

Victor Mpoyo Kalume, Email: victorkalume80@gmail.com

Author's Contributions

The author was solely responsible for all aspects of this research

Article History

Received: November 22, 2025; Accepted: January 28, 2026; Published: March 14, 2026.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the significance of learning the French language in Tanzania, an Anglophone nation with increasing participation in regional and international affair. Through qualitative document analysis, the study explores the cultural, economic, educational, and diplomatic roles of French in Tanzanian context. It further investigates how French learning complements Tanzania's effort to promote Kiswahili as a Pan-African language. Findings show that multilingual proficiency specifically in Kiswahili, English, and French strengthens regional integration, increases academic and employment opportunities, and enhances Tanzania's engagement in global institution such as the African Union (AU), United Nation (UN), and Organization Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). The study concludes that French is not a competitor to Kiswahili; rather, it is strategic asset that supports Tanzania's national and continental ambition.

Keywords: French language; Tanzania; multilingualism; Kiswahili; regional integration; francophone Africa

INTRODUCTION

Language is a foundational tool for communication, identity, and development. Tanzania, a nation with strong linguistic heritage centered on Kiswahili, uses English as an official language in government, education, and international relation. However, French has become increasingly important as Tanzania strengthens ties with Francophone countries and international organization. More than 20 African countries use French as an official or administrative language (OIF, 2022), making French significant for trade, diplomacy and cooperation. This paper examines the importance of French in Tanzania and highlights how multilingualism contributes to national development and African integration.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts qualitative research design based on documentary analysis. Data was collected from:

- Scholarly journal articles
- Policy paper from UNESCO, African Union, and OIF
- Academic books on language policy in Africa
- Government education reports
- Previous research on multilingualism regional integration, and linguistic development

Documents were analysed thematically to identify patterns regarding the benefits challenges, and implication of learning French in Tanzania. The approach allows for deeper interpretation of multilingual dynamics and educational policy trends

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multilingual

Africa scholars recognize multilingualism as an important resource for development.

Brock-Utne (2018) argue that language policy directly

affect educational quality and regional cooperation. Similarly, web and Kembo-sure (2020) highlight that Africa nations with strong multilingual policies are better positioned for regional trade and diplomacy.

French As a Global and African Language

French is spoken by over 300 million people worldwide and remains a major working language of the UN, AU, and UNESCO (UNESCO, 2021). In Africa, French dominates Central, West and part of East Africa, making it strategically important for countries like Tanzania that border Francophone nations.

Foreign-language Education in Tanzania

Dearden (2014) observes that global competition increasingly demands foreign-language proficiency. Tanzania’s education system includes French in secondary school and universities, preparing students for international careers in diplomacy, tourism and business.

Kiswahili and Africa Integration

Kiswahili has experienced rapid expansion across Africa and was adopted as an official working language of the Africa Union in 2022.

Mugyabusa (2021) notes that Tanzania plays a leading role in spreading Kiswahili in East and Central Africa. Multilingual citizens fluent in Kiswahili, English, and French strengthen Tanzania’s Influence in continental integration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Regional and Diplomatic Benefits

Tanzania borders three Francophone countries: Rwanda, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Proficiency in French enhances communication and cooperation within the East Africa Community (EAC) and Africa Union. Many AU meetings and documents use French, making bilingual or trilingual Tanzania highly competitive.

Economic and Trade Advantages

French facilitates trade relations with Francophone markets in Africa. Sectors such as tourism, mining, agriculture and transportation benefit from cross-border communication. Tanzania’s tourism industry also hosts large number of visitor from France, Belgium, Rwanda, and DRC.

Education, Scholarships and Employability

French proficiency expands educational opportunities through scholarships from French, Belgium, Canada, and OIF. Tanzanian graduates with French Language skills gain access to international career in diplomacy, humanitarian Organizations, Aviation and international

NGOs.

French and Expansion of Kiswahili

French does not threaten Kiswahili. Instead, multilingual Tanzanians can serve as “cultural bridges” between Francophone and Anglophone regions. Kiswahili’s rise as Africa’s unifying language benefits greatly when speakers can also engage Francophone communities.

Linguistic Competitiveness in Global Institution

French is a working language of:

- United Nation (UN)
- UNESCO
- African Union (AU)
- International Olympic Committee
- European Union missions to Africa

Tanzanians with French gain immediate advantages in these spaces.

Table 1. Roles of major language in Tanzania

Language	Primary Function	Primary Function
	Regional/Global importance	Regional/Global importance
Kiswahili	National identity, unity, social life	East and Central Africa
English	Official communication, higher education	Global communication
French	Diplomacy, trade, regional integration	Francophone Africa

Interpretation

Kiswahili serves as Tanzania’s cultural foundation; English provides global connectivity, while French adds strategic regional integration. Together, they enhance Tanzania’s competitiveness in international affairs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

French language education in Tanzania offers significant strategic value. It strengthens diplomatic relations, enhances participation in African integration and expands economic opportunities with Francophone regions. At the same time Kiswahili continues to rise as a Pan-African language, and multilingual Tanzanians fluent in Kiswahili, English, and French – are positioned to lead continental cooperation. Invest in French does not diminish Kiswahili; instead, it support Tanzania’s

role as a linguistic and diplomatic bridge in Africa. The study concludes that expanding French education is a wise and forward-looking policy for Tanzania.

REFERENCES

- African Union. (2022). Africa Union adopts Kiswahili as an official working language. AU Secretariat.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2018). Language of instruction in Africa: The most important and least appreciate issue. *International Review of Education*, 64(6), 745-769.
- Dearden, J.(2014). English as a medium of instruction. A growing global phenomenon British Council.
- Mugyabuso, A. (2021). Kiswahili and regional integration in East Africa. *Journal of Africa Language*, 42(2), 55-70.
- Organization Internationale de la Francophonie. (2022). La Langue française dans le monde 2022. OIF Publications.
- UNESCO. (2021). Language of Africa and sustainable development. UNESCO.
- Webb, V. and Kembo-Sure. (2020). Language in Africa: Multilingualism and policy. Oxford Universties Press.