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## Youth Perceptions of a Television Edutainment Program in Maintaining Standard Swahili in Tanzania

Beatrice Rabachi, Kaanaeli Kaale, Peter C. Mataba

St. Augustine University of Tanzania

[bettyrabach@gmail.com](mailto:bettyrabach@gmail.com), [kaanaeli@gmail.com](mailto:kaanaeli@gmail.com), [petercmataba@gmail.com](mailto:petercmataba@gmail.com)

**Abstract. Purpose:** This study assessed the perceptions of youth in Mwanza City, Tanzania, regarding Star Television's *Kamusi ya Mtaa* program and its role in maintaining standard Swahili. The research sought to examine the program's content, analyze youth perceptions of its relevance, and evaluate its influence on their linguistic attitudes and practices. **Methodology** A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 80 youth (aged 15-35) via structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with Swahili teachers and media producers, and a documentary review of program episodes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS, and qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. **Findings:** The study revealed that *Kamusi ya Mtaa* primarily focuses on explaining street slang, reinforcing correct grammar, and promoting Swahili cultural identity. Youth perceived the program as highly educational and entertaining, with 81.3% reporting learning new Swahili words, 68.8% gaining confidence in using standard Swahili, and 60% consciously reducing their use of slang. The program was seen to reshape the prestige of standard Swahili, making it appear modern and desirable. However, limited digital accessibility and inconsistent broadcast schedules were identified as significant constraints to its reach and impact. **Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy, and Practice:** The study empirically validates Social Cognitive Theory in a linguistic context, demonstrating how media serves as a modeling tool for language behavior. It contributes to policy by highlighting the underutilized potential of edutainment media as a complementary tool to formal language policy for national language promotion. For practice, it provides broadcasters and language institutions with evidence-based strategies for designing effective, youth-centric language content.

**Keywords.** Swahili, Language Maintenance, Edutainment, Media Influence, Youth Perceptions, Social Cognitive Theory, Tanzania

### 1. Introduction

Language is a vital tool for communication, cultural identity, and national cohesion. In Tanzania, Swahili holds an unparalleled position as the national and official language, integral to education, administration, and national unity (Mazrui et al., 1998). Despite its formal status, a significant linguistic shift is occurring among urban youth, who are increasingly adopting "Lugha ya Mtaa" (street language)—a hybrid form of Swahili blended with slang, English, Arabic, and local dialects (Hillewaert, 2021). This trend raises concerns among educators and

policymakers about the long-term erosion of standard Swahili's grammatical accuracy and its role as a unifying national language (Fiacre et al., 2022).

In this context, mass media emerges as a crucial platform for language promotion and preservation. Television, in particular, possesses a unique capacity to shape public discourse and cultural norms. Star Television's *Kamusi ya Mtaa* is an innovative response to this challenge. Launched in 2020, this Swahili-language program adopts an edutainment approach, translating street slang into standard Swahili through dramatized scenes, humor, and street interviews. Its explicit goal is to make standard Swahili relatable and accessible to a youth audience. However, while initiatives like *Kamusi ya Mtaa* are intuitively appealing, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence demonstrating their actual influence on youth perceptions and linguistic behavior. Previous research in Tanzania has predominantly focused on formal education and policy (Kapinga, 2018; Rubagumya, 2010), leaving a gap in understanding the role of informal, media-based learning. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by systematically investigating the Mwanza City youth's perceptions of *Kamusi ya Mtaa* and its contribution to maintaining standard Swahili.

The study was guided by three specific objectives:

1. To examine the content and thematic focus of Star Television's *Kamusi ya Mtaa* program.
2. To analyze youth perceptions of the *Kamusi ya Mtaa* program and its relevance in promoting standard Swahili.
3. To assess how the *Kamusi ya Mtaa* program influences youth attitudes and practices regarding the use of standard Swahili.

## **2. Empirical Literature**

The empirical literature on media and language reveals a growing recognition of entertainment-education (edutainment) as a powerful strategy for social and behavioral change.

Globally, studies affirm that structured media content combining education with entertainment significantly enhances learning outcomes. Singh et al. (2019), in a study of Indian adolescents, found that a thematic sequence of introducing a word, demonstrating its use, explaining its cultural origin, and reinforcing it with humor maximized retention. Similarly, Arno (2020) demonstrated that European students exposed to dramatized language segments achieved 45% higher recall compared to those in lecture-style instruction. These findings underscore the importance of narrative and emotional engagement in effective language learning through media.

Regionally, in Africa, research highlights the media's role in negotiating between indigenous languages and global influences. Nyakeriga and Mwangi (2021), in their study of Kenyan youth radio, found that programs integrating slang with standard Swahili corrections were perceived as authentic and effective. Conversely, programs that solely glamorized slang or were overly formal failed to engage the youth. Muchena et al. (2022) observed similar patterns in Rwanda and Uganda, where edutainment dramas using cultural proverbs and humor encouraged the adoption of standard linguistic forms. A recurring challenge identified in these regional studies is the issue of sustainability and accessibility, with irregular broadcasting and limited digital presence hindering long-term impact. In the Tanzanian context, scholarly work has extensively documented the challenges facing standard Swahili. Mreta (2009) and Mtengeti (2020) have detailed the rise of youth slang as a marker of urban identity and modernity. However, empirical research specifically evaluating media interventions is limited. Kapinga (2018) noted that television programs highlighting Swahili's cultural value positively influenced

youth attitudes, while Kwayu (2018) observed that youth often imitate language used by admired television characters. These studies, however, largely focused on content analysis or indirect influence within dramas, leaving a gap in understanding dedicated educational programs like *Kamusi ya Mtaa*.

This review, therefore, identifies a clear research gap: a lack of systematic, audience-focused studies in Tanzania that examine how youth perceive and are influenced by a dedicated language-edutainment television program. This study fills this gap by providing a convergent analysis of both the con-

tent of *Kamusi ya Mtaa* and the perceptions and reported behaviors of its youth audience.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two complementary communication theories: Agenda-Setting Theory and Social Cognitive Theory.

**Agenda-Setting Theory (AST)**, pioneered by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that while media may not tell people *what to think*, they are strikingly successful in telling people *what to think about*. By consistently highlighting certain issues, the media influences the salience of these topics in the public's mind. In the context of this study, *Kamusi ya Mtaa* performs an agenda-setting function by repeatedly bringing issues of linguistic correctness, the meaning of slang, and the value of standard Swahili to the forefront of its viewers' consciousness. By framing standard Swahili as a topic worthy of weekly discussion and associating it with positive attributes like intelligence and cultural pride, the program elevates its importance in the minds of youth, potentially shaping their linguistic priorities.

**Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**, as developed by Bandura (2001), provides a robust framework for explaining behavioral learning through media. SCT extends beyond simple imitation, emphasizing cognitive processes like attention, retention, production, and motivation. Central to SCT is the concept of observational learning, where individuals learn behaviors by watching others (models). The theory also highlights the role of self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their capability to perform a behavior—and reciprocal determinism, the dynamic interaction between personal factors, behavior, and the environment.

*Kamusi ya Mtaa* serves as a potent source of social modeling. The program's presenters act as relatable models who demonstrate the correct use of Swahili. Viewers pay *attention* to these models due to their charismatic and humorous presentation. They *retain* the linguistic lessons because they are embedded in memorable, entertaining narratives. They are more likely to *reproduce* the behavior (using standard Swahili) if they have high *self-efficacy*, which the program builds by showing that proper language is achievable and socially rewarding. Finally, the program operates within the framework of *reciprocal determinism*: exposure to the program (environment) influences youth attitudes (personal factors), which in turn affects their language use (behavior), and this changed behavior can then influence their social environment (e.g., peer groups).

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens: AST explains how *Kamusi ya Mtaa* makes standard Swahili salient, while SCT explains the psychological mechanism through which this salience translates into perceived and actual changes in linguistic behavior.

### 4. Research Method

This study adopted a **convergent parallel mixed-methods design** (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach involved the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and

qualitative data, which were analyzed separately and then merged to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

**Study Area and Population:** The study was conducted in Mwanza City, specifically in the Nyamagana District. Mwanza was selected due to its large youth population, high urbanization, and strong media penetration, making it an ideal site for studying youth linguistic behavior. The target population was youth aged 15-35 years, in line with Tanzania's National Youth Development Policy. The accessible population from three selected wards (Nyegezi, Pamba, and Butimba) was estimated at 19,383.

**Sample and Sampling:** The quantitative sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, yielding a minimum of 99 respondents. After accounting for field challenges, data from 80 respondents were analyzed. A simple random sampling technique was used to select these youth respondents to ensure representativeness. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants, including 23 youth for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 2 Swahili teachers, and 2 media producers from Star TV for in-depth interviews (IDIs). Thematic saturation guided the qualitative sample size.

**Data Collection Instruments and Procedures:**

- **Quantitative Data:** A structured questionnaire was administered to 80 youth. It collected data on demographics, media consumption habits, perceptions of *Kamusi ya Mtaa* (using Likert scales), and self-reported changes in language use.
- **Qualitative Data:** Two FGDs were conducted with youth to explore their perceptions in depth. Semi-structured IDIs were held with Swahili teachers and media producers to gain expert and production perspectives. All FGDs and IDIs were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated where necessary.
- **Documentary Review:** Selected episodes of *Kamusi ya Mtaa* were reviewed to analyze content themes, presentation style, and linguistic accuracy.

**Data Analysis:** Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to summarize the data. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Codes were generated from the transcripts and grouped into themes aligned with the research objectives. In the integration phase, quantitative trends and qualitative themes were compared and contrasted to derive nuanced interpretations.

**Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations:** To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and methods. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through a clear audit trail and reflexive practices. For quantitative reliability, the questionnaire was piloted and refined. Ethical approval was obtained from St. Augustine University of Tanzania. Participants provided informed consent, confidentiality was assured, and data were anonymized.

## 5. Findings

The findings are presented according to the three research objectives, integrating quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Objective One: Content and Thematic Focus of Kamusi ya Mtaa**

The study sought to examine the content and thematic focus of the *Kamusi ya Mtaa* program. Quantitative data indicated that a plurality of respondents (43.8%) understood the program's primary purpose as educating viewers on the proper use of Swahili. When asked to identify the dominant theme, 37.5% pointed to the "explanation of street Swahili words," making it the most recognized thematic element (See Table 4.7).

Qualitative findings richly elaborated on these quantitative trends. Youth participants and producers described the program as a deliberate "bridge" between informal and formal language. A key strategy involved selecting popular slang terms and deconstructing them. One producer (KI 3) explained, *"We listen to what youth are saying on the streets, in songs... then we take those words and break them down. We show the slang meaning, then the standard Swahili equivalent, and explain the difference."* This process of translation and explanation was consistently highlighted. Furthermore, the program was found to extend beyond mere vocabulary building to actively promoting Swahili cultural heritage. Participants noted the use of proverbs, idioms, and historical narratives that connected language to Tanzanian identity. A Swahili teacher (KI 2) remarked, *"This program reminds us that Swahili is not just a language—it is our culture, our history, and our pride."* The documentary review of episodes confirmed this, showing segments where words like *"demu"* (slang for girlfriend) were traced to their original, non-romantic meanings (a piece of cloth), shocking some viewers and fostering a deeper appreciation for linguistic precision.

### **Objective Two: Youth Perceptions of the Program's Relevance**

The second objective analyzed how youth perceive *Kamusi ya Mtaa* and its relevance in promoting standard Swahili. The perceptions were overwhelmingly positive. Quantitatively, 75% of respondents agreed that the program increases awareness of language diversity, and 60% believed it fosters national unity through a shared language (See Table 4.8).

Qualitatively, the program's **edutainment approach** was identified as the cornerstone of its appeal. Youth consistently described it as "fun," "engaging," and "not like a classroom lesson." A student participant (FGD 2) stated, *"The presenters talk in our tone; they joke and make learning fun. That's why I never miss an episode."* The use of humor, relatable young presenters, and street interviews were cited as key factors that sustained interest and made the educational content palatable. Despite the positive reception, a significant challenge emerged regarding **accessibility and reach**. Many participants reported that the program's impact was limited by its irregular broadcast schedule and minimal online presence. One youth suggested, *"They should make Kamusi ya Mtaa available on YouTube or repeat it on radio, because not everyone owns a TV, especially in rural areas."* Media producers acknowledged this limitation, citing financial constraints as a barrier to multi-platform expansion. This gap between the program's high perceived relevance and its limited accessibility points to a critical operational challenge.

### **Objective Three: Influence on Youth Attitudes and Practices**

The third objective assessed the program's influence on youth attitudes and language practices. The quantitative results revealed substantial self-reported impacts. A remarkable 81.3% of respondents reported learning new Swahili words from the program. Furthermore, 68.8% expressed increased confidence in using Swahili in public, and 60% stated they consciously avoided using slang after watching the program (See Table 4.10).

Qualitative data provided depth to these statistics, illustrating a process of **attitudinal and behavioral shift**. Participants reported becoming more mindful of their speech. One youth shared, *"I have become more aware of what I say. I now think twice before using a slang word if I know its proper equivalent."* This heightened awareness often translated into action, with many participants reporting that they now correct their peers, a finding supported by 62.5% of quantitative respondents.

Crucially, the program appeared to reshape the **prestige associated with standard Swahili**. Before exposure, many youth associated fluent, standard Swahili with formality and older generations. After engaging with *Kamusi ya Mtaa*, their perception shifted. One

participant noted, "I used to think speaking deep Swahili was for teachers and elders... but this program makes it look modern and cool." This re-framing of standard Swahili as a contemporary and intelligent mode of expression is a significant outcome, aligning with the agenda-setting function of the media.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study present a compelling case for the role of edutainment media in language maintenance. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative data across all three objectives allows for a robust discussion of the program's impact. The content of *Kamusi ya Mtaa*, with its dual focus on translating slang and celebrating cultural heritage, effectively bridges the gap between the linguistic realities of youth and the ideals of language standardization. This approach resonates with global edutainment principles (Singhal & Rogers, 1999) and addresses the specific challenge of linguistic hybridity in urban Tanzania (Mtengeti, 2020). By not dismissing street language but rather engaging with it, the program validates youth culture while guiding it toward standard forms, a strategy confirmed as effective by regional studies (Banda, 2019).

The overwhelmingly positive perceptions held by youth underscore the importance of **relatability and entertainment** in educational media. The findings strongly support the edutainment model, demonstrating that learning is significantly enhanced when it is enjoyable and culturally resonant (Arno, 2020). The program's success in making standard Swahili appear "cool" and "modern" is perhaps its most significant achievement, as it directly counters the forces that often drive the adoption of slang—the desire for a modern identity. This aligns with Rubagumya's (2010) argument that the prestige of a language variety is socially constructed and can be reshaped by media representation.

The reported changes in attitudes and practices provide strong evidence for the operationalization of **Social Cognitive Theory**. The program's presenters serve as effective models, and the entertaining format ensures attention and retention. The high percentages of youth reporting learning, increased confidence, and reduced slang use demonstrate the processes of reproduction and motivation at work. The fact that youth reported correcting their peers indicates a diffusion of media influence beyond direct viewership, creating a ripple effect in social networks (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). This study thus offers a clear empirical demonstration of how SCT can explain linguistic behavior change through media.

However, the identified challenge of **accessibility** cannot be overlooked. The limitations of broadcast television—irregular schedules and limited reach—echo the findings of Nyakeriga and Mwangi (2021) in Kenya. In an era dominated by digital and social media, the program's minimal online presence is a critical weakness that constrains its potential for greater impact. This highlights a disconnect between the consumption habits of the target audience and the program's distribution strategy.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Star Television's *Kamusi ya Mtaa* program is a significant and effective media intervention in the effort to maintain standard Swahili among Tanzanian youth. It successfully functions as an agenda-setter, elevating the importance of linguistic correctness, and as a social model, facilitating observational learning of standard Swahili in an engaging and relatable format.

The program has fostered positive perceptions, enhanced linguistic awareness, and encouraged the use of standard Swahili among its youth audience in Mwanza City. It has

contributed to a cultural shift by re-branding standard Swahili as a contemporary and prestigious form of communication. The theoretical frameworks of Agenda-Setting and Social Cognitive Theory have proven highly effective in explaining the mechanisms behind this influence.

However, the full potential of *Kamusi ya Mtaa* remains untapped due to challenges of accessibility and inconsistent broadcast reach. For such initiatives to maximize their contribution to national language promotion, they must evolve to meet the digital and on-demand consumption patterns of modern youth.

### **8. Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### **For Media Practitioners (Star Television and other broadcasters):**

1. **Expand Digital Presence:** Prioritize uploading full episodes and creating shorter, shareable clips for platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to increase accessibility and appeal to a digital-native audience.
2. **Enhance Interactivity:** Incorporate interactive elements such as weekly "word challenges," viewer polls on social media, and Q&A sessions with language experts to boost engagement and community building.
3. **Ensure Broadcast Consistency:** Work towards a consistent and predictable broadcast schedule, and explore syndication or partnerships with radio stations to amplify reach.

#### **For Language Policymakers (BAKITA, TATAKI, Ministry of Culture):**

1. **Formalize Media Partnerships:** Develop formal collaboration frameworks with media houses to support the production and airing of high-quality, linguistically accurate edutainment content.
2. **Integrate Edutainment into Language Policy:** Recognize and formally incorporate media-based edutainment as a legitimate and valuable strategy within national language promotion and preservation policies.
3. **Provide Funding and Incentives:** Allocate funds or create incentives for media producers who develop content that explicitly supports national language objectives.

#### **For Academia and Future Research:**

1. **Conduct Longitudinal Studies:** Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the long-term impact of programs like *Kamusi ya Mtaa* on language retention and use.
2. **Explore Cross-Media Comparisons:** Investigate the relative effectiveness of television, radio, and social media in promoting language learning among different youth demographics.
3. **Investigate Gender Dimensions:** A focused study on how gender influences the perception and adoption of media-modeled linguistic behavior could yield valuable insights.

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