INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BEHAVIOR ON SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS' VERBAL COMMUNICATIVE ABILITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT: *Learners' verbal communication in the classroom is influenced by many factors, teachers' communicative behavior being one of them. Teachers play a crucial role in moulding patterns of communication in the classroom. Studies that have been done have revealed that most of the students in schools are unable to communicate in the English language especially in multilingual countries like Kenya. Learners are exposed to the target language within a very short time of 40 minutes lesson per day while the majority of the talking is done by the teacher. The objective of the study was to establish the behavior of an English language teacher in the classroom and how it influences learners` verbal communicative abilities. Hyme`s (1972) theory of communicative competence was used as a basis of the theoretical framework. This study was conducted in Kericho County, Kipkelion District in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised of 600 learners and 30 teachers of English from 15 secondary schools. Purposive and stratified random samplings were used to select 4 schools, 8 teachers and 100 form 3 students. Questionnaires and lesson observation guides were instruments of data collection. Validity was ascertained by experts from the department of education. Reliability was done by use of pilot study through test-retest to obtain reliability at 0.05 level of confidence. Data were analyzed by use of descriptive statistics in the form of mean and percentage. The findings revealed that 10% of teachers use English, while 20% use Kiswahili(an East African Lingual franca) while 30% use vernacular and sheng (slang). It implies that teachers as role models influence their learners not to communicate in English by using other languages. The study recommends that teachers should attend English induction courses and language laboratories that will train them to develop competence in using the English language, throughout in classroom for learners to get the desirable language output.*
KEYWORDS: Teacher language behavior, learner verbal communication.

INTRODUCTION

Researches have been done on classroom interaction towards improving the performance of students in all subjects, English included. Classroom-based researches suggest that the process of classroom interaction determines what language learning opportunities become available to be learnt from (Johnson 1995). One of these studies was done by Njuguna (2000) on verbal classroom interaction patterns of home science secondary school teachers with their students in Nairobi Province in Kenya. She found that the lessons were highly controlled by teachers, who

determined the type of learning taking place, thus teaching is teacher-centered. Njuguna, further, acknowledges that the essence of teaching is communication. Pupils are expected to talk as a way of learning how to communicate.

Gathumbi (1995), in her study on verbal discourse events in a bilingual formal setting in some secondary schools in Kenya, found that 75% of classroom time was spent on teacher-talk; learners were just passive recipients of knowledge. Muthwi (1987), in his study on verbal discourse events and teaching styles, also found that teacher-talk was dominant with pupil-talk accounting for only 16.7% of the total talk. These studies reveal the importance of interactional processes in the classroom to the whole process of teaching and learning. It is through these processes that learners acquire skills and knowledge in any subject. The English language facilitates the interaction process because it is the medium of instruction. Learners need to take an active part in the process, but from research findings, this has not been the case. Learners have been found to take a passive role during classroom interaction processes. This has been partly attributed to lack of verbal communicative ability in the English language.

Classroom communicative ability is believed to be an essential component in the process of second language acquisition. Recent classroom-based research suggests that the process of classroom interaction does not only mean successfully participating in classroom activities but also becoming communicatively competent in the second language. This study was an investigation into the factors affecting learners' verbal communicative ability in English language during classroom interactional processes. In multilingual countries where English is used as a second or third language such as Kenya, a good performance in the English language examination is supposedly an indication of one's ability to express oneself in the English in different situations. It is arguable that pupils practice the language skills regardless of any real need other than passing the written examinations and those oral skills are of marginal importance.

In Kenya, it has been observed that most of the students in schools are unable to communicate effectively in English. Complaints abound about the inability of secondary school graduates to express themselves verbally in English. The situation has not improved over the years. Gathumbi (1995) in her research shows that students in Kenyan secondary schools speak Standard British English only when they are in their classrooms. She also adds that exposure to the target language in the classroom is limited to the time on the timetable and controlled by teachers who do much of the talking. This study was an investigation of factors that affect learners' verbal communicative ability of the English language. This is a very important aspect of language learning. The ability to communicate in a language makes it more useful to the individual and those around him, that is, speak it and communicate fluently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of any teacher in a classroom should be to manipulate and control the learning stimuli in ways that will result in maximum pupil learning (Edmund and Hough, 1969). This implies that the behavior of the teacher more than any individual sets the climate in the classroom. Teaching per se does not cause learning but rather creates (or fails to create) the conditions in which

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learning can occur. The language teacher is therefore faced with a dilemma. How does he or she control the lesson yet encourage pupils to talk as much as possible?

Barnes (1969) says that control is a matter of inducing pupils to give their serious attention to the matter at hand. For the language class, the British Department of Science (1975) recommends that the teacher structures the learning so that the pupils become positively aware of the need for complicated utterance and is compelled to make skillful use of the questions to facilitate this. Practice under supervision is an essential stage in any skillful learning process. According to Bright and McGregor (1970), language teachers try to teach skills to pupils who are supposed to use them for the rest of their lives. These skills can be acquired only through practice. Much as the teacher can expose pupils to oral language, he cannot practice for them, at best; he can provide the necessary stimulation and environment to enable pupils to practice.

Mackay (1965) posits that language is a habit and habits are not established by one or two performances but many speaking, he presupposes a certain reservoir of structure and vocabulary and, therefore, requires a great deal of practice which gives skill and facility in the interchange of speech. Practice also builds in learners the confidence needed to become fluent speakers of the language. Lado (1964) asserts that long explanations of language rules without practice is a waste of time, so most of the class time should be devoted to practice. Without practice therefore, pupils' knowledge of the language will remain essentially analytical and intellectual. Allwright and Bailey (1991) explain that it is the interaction between input and output that promotes language learning.

Ellis (1994) also says that classroom interaction determines second language learning by constraining the forms to which the learners are exposed. It also provides the learners with ready-made chunks of language, which they can incorporate into their utterances. The language teacher should make use of every available the opportunity to elicit spoken language from the pupils. It is in recognition of the importance of practice that the KNEC in a KCPE of 1992 advised the teacher to ensure that whatever time he spends with pupils allows for opportunity to practice the language. This should be done orally as well as in writing. Teachers should encourage pupils to take a more active part in oral work since English is not used very much outside the classroom in many cases. This study looked at the role of the language teacher during classroom interaction. Does he/she provide adequate opportunities for learner interaction?

The teacher's overall purpose is to prepare the learner for later communicative activity by providing him with the necessary linguistic forms and the necessary links between forms and meanings. Spontaneous dialogue is a major classroom activity questions and answers are based on the dialogue topics and on the situation. Students are encouraged to contribute to discussions and to interact through group and pair work. In this respect, the teacher acts as the initiator and facilitator of the communication process by creating opportunities for everyone to participate and also act as an independent participant within the group.

Bright and Macgregor (1975) say, there are certain factors such as awareness of individual need for language, the status accorded the language in a country, the teaching environment, the teacher and attractive textbooks that can either have a negative or positive effect on learning.

Another very important factor is exposure to the language. Students have to be exposed to situations where they can practice using the language. Ayot (1984:1), supports this argument when he says, the development of competence in the English language depends on a large extent on whether the students are given sufficient opportunities to become productively involved in practical language using situations. This study was an investigation of teacher-learner interaction processes in the classroom to find out factors that affect learners' verbal communicative ability in English. Wilkins (1974), clearly points out that, the teachers' understanding of the methods and techniques of a language teaching process is very important in the English language teacher professional skills

Different scholars with an attempt to improve the whole process of interaction have done researches on classroom interaction. Flander (1960) found that if a teacher teaches in an indirect fashion rather than teaching directly, the kids learn more and feel better about going to school. Barnes (1969) did a study in language to find out the effect of teacher's language on pupils especially where the teacher's chosen terminology might act as a barrier to learning. He also looked at the teacher's questions and how pupils participated in class. His findings showed that the style of language used by the teacher could prevent the content from getting through to the pupils and prevent some pupils from contributing to the classroom dialogue. This is so when teachers use a specialist language of instructions in which pupils are not accustomed. He noted that some teachers used certain terms not because it was necessary to use them but because it was conventional, unaware that pupils may not share those adult or specialist conventions. His other observation was that in most classes, teachers mostly asked factual questions and students remained passive. Sinclaire and Coulthard (1975) were interested in the structure of classroom dialogue. From their analysis, they identified a typical exchange structure in many classrooms. The basic type of teaching exchange that they identified consisted of teacher's 'initiation' by asking questions followed by the pupil's 'response' followed by teachers 'feedback'. In the above studies, it is evident that teacher talk dominated most of the classroom processes, while students take a passive role.

Several types of research done in Kenyan schools focused on classroom interaction, with an attempt to improve the performance of students. Muthwii (1987) carried out research on teacher-pupil discourse events and teaching styles of 14 chemistry teachers in Machakos County in Kenya. He found out that teacher-talk was dominant with pupil-talk accounting for only 16.7% of the total talk. Teacher's questions were of low cognitive level requiring recall of facts and principles. Muthwii focused on interaction processes in chemistry centering on teacher-pupil talk.

Gathumbi (1995) did a study of verbal discourse events in a bilingual formal setting in classrooms in Kenyan secondary schools. She addressed the issue of pedagogy in verbal events in some ESL schools. The purpose of the study was to reveal teaching styles used by English language teachers in Kenyan schools. She also found out that teacher talk which mostly consisted of soliciting and reacting moves was dominant in the study at 75% while pupil talk was mainly in form of responding to the teacher utterances (25%). She recommended more teaching techniques that are task-based.

Otieno (1996) did research on oral questions in English language classes in selected secondary schools of Nakuru County in Kenya. He found out that most of the questions asked in the classroom demanded that pupils give answers based on knowledge of the content of pupils' responses rather than to the form, thus responses were accepted as long as they contained the required information. He recommended that topical issues of interest to the pupils should form the basis of classroom discussions and that social-based questions can be used to initiate these discussions, which should be part of the pupils' day-to-day encounters with the language. Secondly, that, pupils should be exposed to spoken English from a wide variety of sources including the audio and audio-visual media

Njuguna (2000) observed that verbal classroom interaction patterns of selected secondary schools Home science teachers with their students in Nairobi County in Kenya. She found out that the lessons were highly controlled by the teachers, who determined the type of learning taking place. As a result, the students had no opportunity to participate in the lesson creatively. They had to comply with the teacher's directions and questions as they made verbal responses. She recommended teaching through creative inquiry patterns than drilling teaching. Students must be able to express their own feelings and ideas. For them to do this, the teacher should provide an environment that encourages them to participate freely with limited directions. She adds that it is the teacher's obligation to help the student develop a positive attitude towards that particular subject and to succeed, the teacher should try to create situations which encourage the student to discover and be creative. There is a need to find out why teacher talk is common as compared to pupil talk in most Kenyan classrooms. Being a medium of instruction, English plays a major role in instructional processes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hyme's theory of communicative competence was a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. In his view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use. Learning a second language was similarly viewed by proponents of communicative language teaching as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions. This theory has a rich, if somewhat eclectic, theoretical base. Some of the characteristics of the communicative view of language include:

i). Language is a system of the expression of meaning.
ii). The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
iii). The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
iv). The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.
Communicative language teaching advocates the use of techniques that promote learners' communicative abilities. These features are summarized in the diagram below.
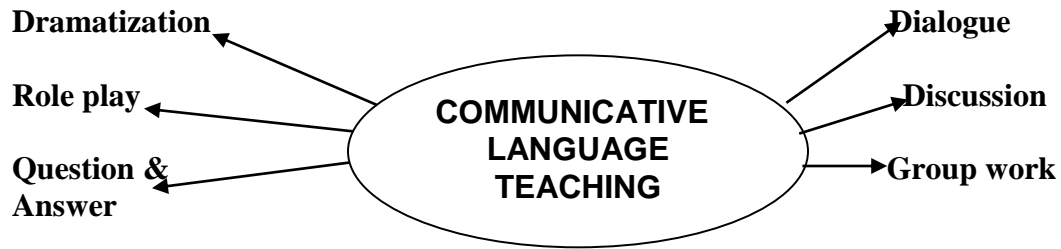
Fig: 1 Features of Communicative Language Teaching
Source: Adapted from Hyme (1972)

Languages are learnt for purposes of communication all over the world not only in Kenya. The learner is expected to acquire both receptive and expressive skills in the language. This can be possible through practice. This practice can be more effective during classroom interaction, whereby the needs of the learner in the language are realized by his/her peers and the teacher. The needs of the learner in the language can be realized if the learner is involved in the process of learning as a whole person. This study looked at factors that affect the verbal communicative abilities of learners in English during classroom interaction and how classroom activities are organized to promote verbal communicative abilities of learners in English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design approach. The design enabled the researcher to get students' and teachers' opinions on learners' verbal communicative abilities during classroom interaction. Wiersman (1985) says that any study that deals with how people feel or behave is considered a survey. Gay (1992) also supports this view by stating that a survey study can be used to assess personality variables such as attitude and opinions about events, individuals or procedures. This study was conducted in Kericho County, Kipkelion District in Kenya. The study population comprised of 600 learners and 30 teachers of English from 15 schools. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were used to select the four secondary schools. Lecompte and Preissle (1993:79) observed that stratified sampling requires that the total population be divided into relevant subsets and that individuals are selected from each subset. Four schools were selected on the basis of gender and setting. There is only one boys' boarding secondary school in the division; hence it was purposively selected for the study. The sampling techniques ensured the representativeness of all groups of students, hence most appropriate. The sampling was based on gender, setting and type of schools, whether single- sex or mixed. One girls' school was chosen basing on performance in K.C.S.E in the division through stratified random sampling. Two mixed day schools were selected, one in a rural setting and another in an urban setting. Stratification is considered important in order to cater for the various types of schools in the country. From each single- sex school, twenty students were selected through stratified sampling to fill in the questionnaire, ten best and ten poor performers in an immediate examination. Thirty students were randomly selected from each mixed school to fill in the questionnaires (fifteen girls and fifteen boys to maintain gender sensitivity). One English language teacher teaching the class under study was observed while teaching in an actual

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classroom setting in each school. In all the four schools, eight English language teachers and their Form three students were involved in the study.

The sample of this study comprised of four schools, Form three students in each school and eight teachers of English from a selection of boys, girls and mixed secondary schools in the division. One hundred Form three students and eight teachers were randomly selected to fill in the questionnaires. One English language teacher was observed while teaching a Form three class in each of the four schools selected. The three types of schools are deemed important because they represent both the single- sex and co-educational institutions. The researcher used one boys' school, one girls' school and two mixed day schools in the division - one in a rural setting and the other in an urban setting. The researcher used two mixed day schools because there are more mixed day schools than single-sex boarding schools in the division. Data were collected using the following research instruments; Questionnaire for teachers of English and students was used and lesson observation guide. Validity was assured through the contributions of experts in the department of educational communication technology and curriculum studies. A pilot study was carried out to establish the reliability of the instruments. The test-retest method was employed to obtain the reliability of the instruments at 0.05 level of confidence. The findings yielded qualitative and quantitative data which was analyzed using descriptive statistics; mean and percentages. The findings were presented in frequency tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The behavior of the teacher, more than of any individual, sets the learning environment in the classroom. Teaching creates (or fails to create) the conditions in which learning can occur. The language teacher should, therefore, establish a balance of controlling the lesson and at the same time encourage pupils to talk as much as possible. The findings are presented in table 1 below.

Table: 1 Use of Language by Teachers

When communicating with:	Language spoken by teachers			
	English (%)	Kiswahili (%)	Vernacular (%)	*Sheng* (%)
a) Students in the classroom	80	10	-	10
b) Students outside classroom	-	50.0	-	50.0
c) Other teachers	10.0	20.0	30.0	40.0

To establish the teachers' usage of the English language in the school, the researcher asked teachers to report on the language they use to communicate at various levels. Eighty percent of the teachers indicated that they use English to communicate with their students in the classroom while fifty percent communicate in Kiswahili and sometime *sheng* outside the classroom. Only 10% of the teachers who completed the questionnaires showed that teachers use English to

communicate among themselves, twenty percent use Kiswahili while thirty percent use Vernacular and *Sheng'.*

This implies that teachers, as role models, influence their learners not to communicate in English. Kimemia (2002) says that linguists and educationists believe that every teacher in a school is a language teacher whether he teaches a language or not. They teach through a language or about a language or in a language. As Rosen (1984) remarked in a paper 'Language across the Curriculum',' what is wrong in our teaching is not the content of our teaching but the discursive forms through which we transmit our teaching.' The languages teachers use in their teaching are very important not only for the subject matter of the curriculum but also for the impact it creates in the students they are teaching'. The teachers' disposition in the classroom is very important. Students also learn though imitation. If teachers cannot speak a language, they can least expect their learners to speak it.

The teacher should provide the necessary stimulation and environment to enable pupils to practice the language. Mackay (1965), says, language is a habit and habits are not established by one or two performances but much speaking. Practice also builds in learners the confidence needed to become fluent speakers of the language. Without practice, therefore, pupils' knowledge of the language will remain essentially analytical and intellectual. During classroom observation, it was discovered that most of the lessons were dominated by teacher talk. Most of the class discussions were initiated by teachers. This provided the learner with limited opportunity to practice the language in actual situations. Teachers said that they wish to use discussions as much as possible but lack time as there is much to be covered. In the secondary levels, English is dominantly used in the classroom situation but outside the classroom, both Kiswahili and English are used interchangeably. The communication abilities of learners in English depend largely on the language policies set by a school.

CONCLUSION

Eighty percent of the teachers indicated that they use English to communicate with their students in the classroom but only communicate in Kiswahili and *Sheng* outside the classroom. Teachers should be examples to the student by speaking English in and out of the classroom. The teachers whether they are language teachers or not have an important role in the growth and development of any language. For instance, if the teachers are competent in English, use the language in the classroom teaching and outside the classroom situation, the students will tend to copy and imitate their teachers. During classroom interaction, teachers made little effort to motivate learners to speak English because of the methods they employ during classroom interaction. Most of them use lecture, question and answer methods, which do not give the learner an opportunity to practice the verbal skills in English. Most of the questions and dialogues were initiated by the teachers which gave the learner limited opportunity to speak. Research findings have revealed that knowledge of the spoken language is easily transferred to the written medium than the converse (Wilkins, 1974).

Recommendations

I.   During classroom interactions, a relaxed and purposeful atmosphere should be created by the teachers of English to help the learner develop new attitudes of enjoyment and enthusiasm towards the study of the language. It has been said that if you enjoy something you do it better. If students are helped to enjoy, understand, speak, read and write English, then they will go on practicing the four skills, which in return will help them improve their communicative abilities.

II.   Teachers of English should attend induction courses and visit language laboratories for training to develop their competence in classroom in using English language throughout so as to influence positively learners' use of English.

III.   Teachers of other subjects should be encouraged to use English to instruct students throughout their lessons. This will help teachers of English in developing and instilling English speaking and writing stills in learners leading to their improved language performance and competence.

Suggestions for Further Research

There is also need to look at the efficacy of using English language during classroom interaction to improve the acquisition of Language skills.

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