

**TEACHING OF LISTENING SKILLS IN KISWAHILI LANGUAGE:
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USED BY SECONDARY SCHOOLS TEACHERS
IN WARENG SUB-COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the influence of the instructional process on the teaching and acquisition of listening skills in Kiswahili language. Based on the study, this paper examines the type of instructional strategies used by secondary school teachers in the teaching of listening skills in Kiswahili language. The study was based on two theories, the theory of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as advanced by Widdowson in 1978 and the Top-down theory propounded by Mendelsohn in 1995. A sample of 13 secondary schools was purposively selected from a total of 41 secondary schools in Wareng' Sub-County. Thirteen (13) teachers and 130 Form Two learners of Kiswahili formed the study sample. The study was a descriptive survey since it set out to discover, describe and interpret existing conditions focusing on secondary school teachers of Kiswahili and Form Two learners. The research instruments used to collect data were two sets of interview schedules and an observation schedule. The 13 teachers were interviewed whereas the 130 learners participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Moreover, 13 Kiswahili lessons were observed and tape-recorded. Tape-recording was used to record data during observations while note taking was used during the focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. Analyzed data was presented using frequency tables, percentages, graphs and charts. The study revealed that poor teaching strategies used in the teaching process contribute heavily to poor levels of acquisition of listening skills. In view of the findings, the study recommends that teachers of Kiswahili should build into their classrooms listening activities that have as much of the characteristics of real life listening as possible. In particular, there should be a purpose for listening that should be known before the listening activity commences. This paper is significant in that it seeks to provide impetus for Kiswahili language educators, teacher trainers, curriculum designers and the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) to re-examine their policies on teaching listening skills.*

KEYWORDS: Teaching, Listening Skills, Kiswahili Language, Instructional Strategies, Teachers, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Effective oral communication in any language requires that language users must be able to speak and listen well and have a ready tongue, ear and eye (Burton & Humphries, 1992). Listening skills enhance mastery of and performance in a language. Therefore, learners of language who are provided with an opportunity to develop their listening skills attain significant comprehension and speaking proficiency in any language. Language proficiency implies ability in all language skills, and these skills do not develop in isolation (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1992). As such, good mastery of language enhances effective communication.

Listening is the first language mode that children experience (Groenewegen, 2008). Hyslop and Bruce (1988) say this about listening: "...it provides a foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development and it plays a lifelong role in the process of learning and communication essential to productive participation in life" (p. i). Studies by Noam Chomsky indicate that every child is born with an innate ability to interpret language (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998). Listening contributes enormously to a child's acquisition of speech during the period of rapid growth.

In language acquisition, speech along with listening is learnt first before reading and writing (which are themselves based on the spoken word). Of all language skills, speaking (speech) skills are the most used; it is estimated that on average a person utters hundreds of words each day (Pearson, 1981). Many linguists recommend the oral approach (or more accurately the aural-oral approach) to language instruction. This means that these skills should be taught first, beginning with listening, then speaking. Learning to read and write in second language should come later. Interestingly, children master language skills within the first five years of their lives. Of all human skills, language skills are used more than any others. They are applied in every possible situation.

Studies indicate that majority of second language learners spend most of their time listening (Flanders, 1970; Krashen, 1987). Flanders (1970) posits that communication in the classroom is dominated by teacher talk which demands proper development of listening skills among learners. Byrne (1986) suggests that learners' ability to comprehend needs to be considerably more extensive than their ability to speak, if they are to be "comfortable" in a foreign or second language, and therefore be able to communicate effectively.

Effective Instructional Strategies for Teaching and Acquisition of Listening Skills

Listening strategies are activities that contribute directly to comprehension of listening input. They are classified based on how the listener processes the input into: Top-down and bottom-up strategies. Top-down strategies are listener based (tapping from background knowledge on the topic) to help listeners interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. They include listening for main ideas, predicting, drawing inferences and summarizing (Mendelsohn, 1995). Bottom-up strategies are text based: the listener relies on language in the message, that is, a combination of sounds, words and grammar. These strategies include: listening for specific details, recognizing cognates and recognizing word-order patterns (Brown, 2007).

Role-playing can also be used to teach listening skills. In this activity, learners take on roles and act out a given scenario (Petty, 2004). A few students can take on roles of characters in a play/novel/short story then they are interviewed by other learners in the class about their motives. Alternatively, role-play can be a single performance viewed by the rest of the class. In this case, the teacher could possibly give the observers in various groups a specific listening task.

Brainstorming is technique of producing a large number of creative ideas for subsequent evaluation (Petty, 2004). The teacher may start by carefully defining the topic to be brainstormed, brainstorm for ideas as students take turns at writing on the board or flipchart, and after the session, they can choose the most useful ideas (Baker & Westup, 2000).

Language games can similarly produce intense involvement and a quality of concentration no other teaching method can match. They increase the amount of interest and motivation towards

the subject (Petty, 2004). Most games used for teaching listening can be played by students individually or in groups. Students can engage in various games such as picture recognition. Pictures can be cut out from colour magazines and each picture assigned a number and spread on the table. Then the teacher describes pictures one by one as students identify them (Petty, 2004). Alternatively, students in groups may be given a set of twenty cards with each group having the same set of cards of which each has a different phrase with an underlined word. Then students work in pairs to sort the underlined words into various parts of speech; nouns (*nomino*), verbs (*vitenzi*) adverbs (*vielezi*) adjectives (*vivumishi*) and pronouns (*viwakilishi*). Similar games can also be devised for classifying types of oral narratives and nouns. The value of simulations or games lies in the freedom it gives the learner to choose the activity he/she likes best and the scope it gives them to experiment with the knowledge and skills being learnt.

Statement of the Problem

Kiswahili language learning targets five sets of skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and language use. In the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination, all these skills, except listening and speaking, are examined in three papers, i.e. Paper 102/1, Paper 102/2 and Paper 102/3. For learners to be comfortable in learning Kiswahili as a second language and be able to communicate effectively, a broad base of expressive and receptive oral skills must be developed since effective communication requires integration of listening and speaking skills. These two skills go together as the “active” speaker becomes the “passive” listener; people speak expecting to be listened to and vice versa.

Kigotho (2010) decries the lack of well rounded students asserting that young people’s incompetence in communication skills has been a barrier to employment in Kenya. Kigotho (2010) cites surveys undertaken by the World Bank that reveal that most youths leaving schools in the sub-Saharan Africa have no problem solving, communication and social skills. Communication skills can be developed in classrooms if Kiswahili, which is one of the compulsory languages in the Kenyan secondary school curriculum, is taught properly.

Education plays a vital role in the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In Kenya, proper training in Kiswahili can enhance the country’s global development outreach and partnerships. In line with this, the Kenya Vision 2030, the long-term development blue print for the country, articulates the appropriate national goals to meet the nation’s aspirations motivated by a collective aspiration for a better society (Government of Kenya, 2007). In a world that is becoming more dependent on information, communication technologies (ICTs), skilled and proficient use of language is a key factor in economic and social opportunities (Mogambi, 2011).

Within school systems, listening skills are vital in helping learners to master language content as well as the content of other subjects in the school curriculum. Despite the pivotal role that Kiswahili plays, its teaching has long been overlooked in the teaching of foreign and second languages the world over (Dimitrijevic, 1996; Groenewegen, 2008). Furthermore, there is a dearth of research and literature on the teaching of listening skills in Kiswahili language. Mendelsohn (1995) identifies the following three key reasons to explain why teachers of second languages ignore the listening skills:

- 1) It is assumed that students will pick up the skill along the way by simply hearing the teacher talk; Mendelsohn refers to this as the “osmosis” approach.

- 2) Language materials in listening courses are often not suitable for training students to listen to spoken language because they consist of written language that is either read out loud by the teacher or tape-recorded. Mendelssohn contends that such content is inappropriate, boring and irrelevant to learners.
- 3) Teachers lack confidence when teaching this skill; as such they take refuge in just exposing learners to listening rather than training them on how to listen.

Although the development of all language skills is outlined as one of the goals of Kiswahili language instruction in Kenyan secondary schools (Kenya Institute of Education [KIE], 2002), a closer analysis reveals that there is no systematic approach to the teaching of listening skills at any level of instruction. This implies that there is an underlying assumption that listening skills will develop on their own. Many teachers of Kiswahili have concentrated on content delivery; seldom do they concentrate on the teaching and learning tasks that enable learners to acquire various language skills.

Groenewegen (2008) also talking about language teaching in Kenya is of the opinion that although the skills of listening and speaking are planned for in the syllabus, in reality, teachers of second languages do not teach them, the main reasons being: lack of sufficient time, lack of guidance on how to go about teaching them and knowledge of the fact that the two skills will not be examined in terminal examinations. They recommend that more attention should be given to the listening and speaking skills. This paper, therefore, examines the types of instructional strategies used in the teaching of listening skills in Kiswahili language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Wareng' Sub-County in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study targeted all Form Two students and teachers of Kiswahili in Wareng' Sub-County. This study adapted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative inquiry helped to fully describe why and how teachers and students apply certain activities in the teaching and acquisition of listening skills in Kiswahili classrooms. Form Two students were selected since they constitute a class in the middle years of the current secondary school course in Kenya, and it was, therefore, presumed that they had acquired sufficient listening skill to give valid responses to the research questions. There were a total of 41 secondary schools in Wareng' Sub-County at the time of study. The research employed purposive sampling techniques to select 13 teachers of Kiswahili and 130 students.

For data collection, thirteen (13) focus group discussions were held with Form Two students. Moreover, the 13 teachers were interviewed and 13 Form Two Kiswahili lessons were observed. The collected data was analysed by coding and organizing it into themes and concepts from which grounded theories and generalizations were formulated. Part of the data from the FGDs, direct observation and one-on-one interviews was analyzed and interpreted in the field or at the point of interaction with the respondents. Such interpretation of data was guided by the conceptual framework which provided several themes to guide the critical analysis of the views of the respondents in order to make inferences and draw conclusions.

RESULTS

Types of Instructional Strategies Used for Teaching Listening

The study sought to examine the strategies used in teaching listening skills and how they influenced how learners acquired these skills. To achieve this objective, 13 teachers were observed in a classroom situation to determine the type of instructional procedures they employed and the influence of these strategies on the teaching and acquisition of listening skills. Questions in the interview schedule for teachers and students' FGD guides were also used to investigate various strategies used by teachers. The research results were as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Teachers' Use of Listening Sub-skills

Sub-skill/Strategy	No. of teachers using it	Total no. of occurrence	%
Arousing learners' expectation	3	4	23
Directing learner listening	4	7	31
Selection of authentic texts	6	6	46
Provision of conducive environment for listening	6	12	46
Attending behaviour	7	21	54
Teacher activities	13	33	100
Involving learners in activities	8	23	62
Provision for wait time	6	18	46
Checking learners understanding	13	28	100
Focusing listening	7	18	54
Use of visuals	13	22	100
Regulated rate of speech	13	22	100

The study also sought students' opinions about whether or not teachers specified what they (students) should listen for before lesson presentation. This was important because in order for students to become more affective listeners, they should be helped to keep the purpose of listening in mind. On this issue, 45(35%) students said teachers told students the objectives of the lesson. Such can be interpreted to mean that the learners are inadequately prepared to listen before the start of Kiswahili lessons.

Teachers' arousing of learners' expectations occurred 4 times involving 5% of the learners. Directing listening concerned itself with directing teacher and other learners' listening by use of sentence connectors. It occurred two times as affirmed by 9% of the learners. The usage of this skill was quite low. Learners' use of discourse markers that aid in showing direction, presentation of ideas and suggestion of sequence was quite low. Students also gave their opinions about the types of texts they listened to. It was important to establish whether or not they listened to a variety of texts because success in training learners to listen depends on the quality and variety of texts provided. On this issue, only 27(21%) of the students agreed while the majority, 103(79%), that they listened to a variety of texts.

Students were also asked to specify the strategies commonly used to enhance listening in Kiswahili classrooms. The results in Figure 1 illustrate the findings.

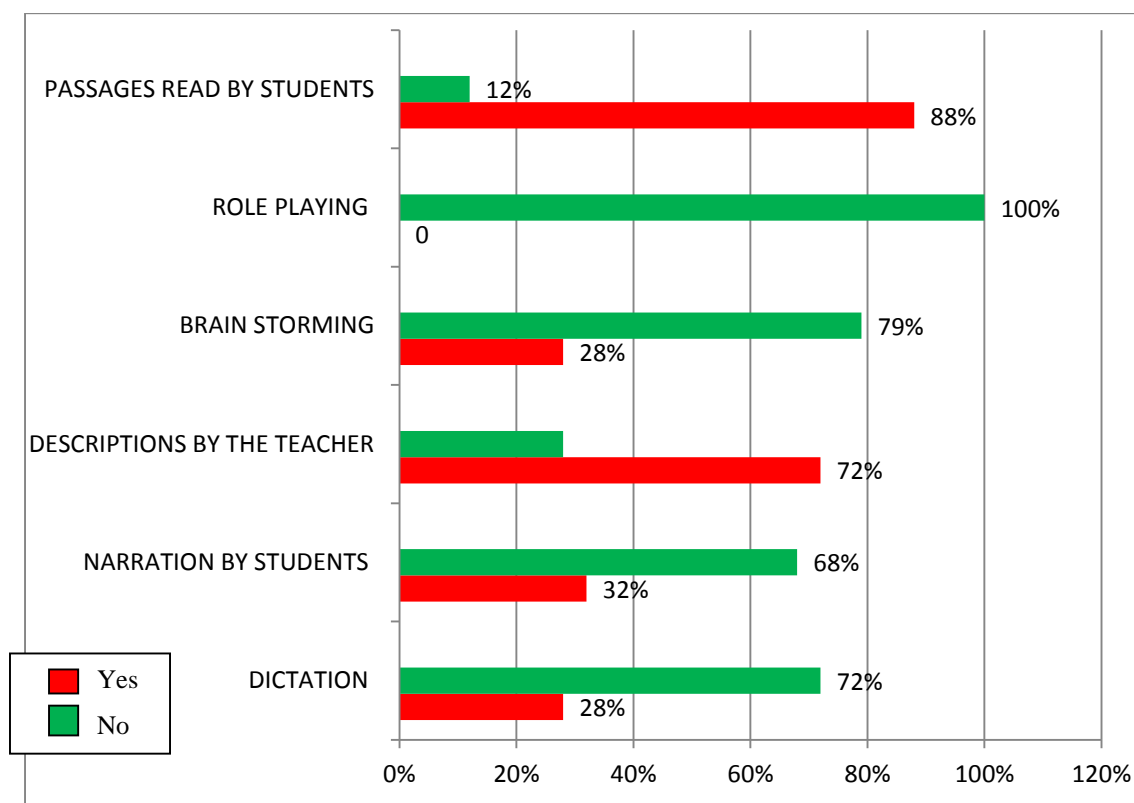


Figure 1: Use of Language Strategies

As shown in Figure 1 above, most teachers, 94(72%), did not use dictation whereas only 36(28%) used it. Only 42(32%) agreed and 88(68%) disagreed that narration by students as a strategy was also not widely used by teachers. Descriptions by the teachers were widely used as indicated by 94(72%) who agreed and only 36(28%) who disagreed. Moreover, brain storming was not commonly used by teachers, as only 27(21%) of the students affirmed its use against a majority, 103(79%), who disagreed. Role playing was also never used at all by Kiswahili teachers. This was attested to by all, 130(100%), the students who indicated its non-usage. Therefore, dictation (28%) and brain storming (21%) were the least used.

Based on the results from the observation schedule, only 6(46%) teachers made use of the environment to influence teaching and acquisition of listening skills. In two of the lessons observed, there was background noise as teaching was going on. In another instance, there was a lawn mower on the field whose work made it almost impossible for anyone to hear what was being said. In yet another instance, the students in the next classes were very noisy and no observable interventions were being made by the teachers concerned. As a result, many of the learners in these two classes were unable to concentrate on what the teachers were presenting due to noisy environments and distractions. Furthermore, some teachers interrupted whenever learners tried to present their ideas. This did not encourage effective interaction between teachers and students. It was, however, observed that in some teachers created conducive environments for learners by giving directions on where to find information, allowing them opportunity to respond to questions and pin-point pictures. It was further noted that in these lessons most learners gave the correct responses to questions asked by teachers.

The skills for paying attention occurred 21(54%) times and involved 13 teachers. This skill is concerned with giving attention to the speaker/learner and the use of non-verbal cues to indicate

listening. Although all teachers, 13(100%), said they gave full attention to the learner, such attention only lasted for a short time. It was observed that as learners made presentations, read texts out loud or gave verbal response, some teachers either got engrossed in reading or making reference to text books or looking at other learners. Some teachers simply interrupted learners. Such interruptions caused learners either to remain silent or give irrelevant responses as they diminished their intrinsic motivation.

In the 13 lessons observed, only two teachers used non-verbal cues to indicate to the learners speaking that they were being listened to. Only two teachers used encouraging comments and cues that they were listening to learners' responses. This is contrary to the position maintained by Staton (1996) who observes that one way to stimulate listening skills is by being a good listener as a teacher since students tend to emulate what their teachers do. There was, however, an overwhelming attention to the visual stimuli (98%) when the teacher in one of the observed lessons used pictures in class. The pictures displayed on the chalkboard seemed to effectively capture the learners' attention. The same learners also responded to questions posed after the presentation better than learners observed in other classrooms. This can be interpreted to mean that attentive behaviour plays a crucial role in the mastery of listening skills.

The study further investigated teacher-learner activities in order to understand how the sequence of lesson presentation influenced mastery of listening skills in Kiswahili language. The study results revealed that 8(62%) teachers involved learners in activities with a frequency of 23 times in a total of 13 lessons observed. Given that each lesson lasted for an average of 40 minutes, this level of learner involvement was minimal. Moreover, it was noted that the learners' main activities mainly involved listening and answering comprehension questions either orally or in writing. Such an approach does not encourage learners to exercise different listening skills and strategies. The approach tests the learners' abilities in listening instead of training them on how to listen.

An inquiry was also made from teachers about the common sequence in which they presented lessons. Of the teachers, 8(62%) said they referred students to passages in the course book, asked students to read passages aloud in turns, summarized and then gave learners questions to answer. However, only 5(38%) said they reviewed students' previous knowledge on the topic, helped learners to become conscious of the purpose of upcoming input, involved them in carefully designed listening activities, made a summaries and provided feedback on learners' performance. This is the expected sequence for better listening.

Learners' activities occurred 183 times involving all learners. These included asking/answering questions, speech work and writing. Role playing, debates and language games were never used. Learners said they mainly engaged in listening to teacher talk, speech work, answering questions and writing. Most teachers tended to construct activities that either left the learners out or made them remain passive. When learners were involved in pinpointing pictures that suited description, learners seemed to have a better grasp of content through actions such as answering questions posed, offering information and using clarifying.

It was noted that teachers of Kiswahili used various activities in class to start off lessons. A majority (86%) of them indicated they asked questions to start off class presentations. However, most (58%) of the teachers did not use story telling in class as a means to jogging the memories of learners about previous content learnt in class. Only 2% of the teachers agreed 98% disagreed that demonstrations and role-playing were used as a strategy. However, although 2% indicated they used role-playing, none of the 13 teachers observed in class used

this sub-skill. This can be interpreted to mean that learners were hardly adequately prepared for new content.

The study also investigated how the teachers prepared learners for listening. Only 17 students (13%) indicated that teachers prepared them by stating the objectives of the lesson, 82(63%) indicated that teachers delivered the new content straight away, 49(38%) indicated that teachers referred to their past experiences and 53(41%) indicated that teachers prepared them by referring to what they had learnt in previous lessons. The fact that 63% of the teachers delivered new content without incorporating pre-listening tasks implies that either these teachers have limited awareness about a variety of advance organizers available for teaching listening or they do not value introductory pre-listening activities. Inadequate use of such activities could certainly be a contributor to poor acquisition of listening skills.

All the 13(100%) teachers indicated that they referred to previous knowledge to introduce learners from the known to unknown. Nevertheless, observations indicated otherwise. This is an indication that although teachers of Kiswahili are aware of the right sequence of teaching listening, they do not practice it in class. Often, teachers ignore the subtle features of good introduction to lessons. Such a practice could partly be attributed to unpreparedness on the part of teachers. This skill occurred only 4 times as used by 3(23%) out of 13 teachers. This skill is important in helping students to link prior knowledge to new content, make predictions and inferences essential for comprehension.

The study sought the opinions of students about the various means that teachers of Kiswahili could use to make listening interesting to students. The results were as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Means Used to Make Listening Interesting

Means to make listening interesting	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)
Use of media	93(72)	37(29)	0(0)
Varying activities	125(96)	4(3)	1(1)
Varying instructional methods	109(84)	21(16)	0(0)
Use of prior knowledge	112(86)	18(14)	0(0)
Provide necessary feedback	123(91)	9(7)	0(0)
Help learners narrow down their attention on relevant parts	130(100)	0(0)	0(0)

On the use of teaching and learning media, a majority 93(72%) of the learners agreed, 37(29%) were undecided while none disagreed. Therefore, majority of the learners acknowledged the role that media plays in enhancing acquisition of listening skills. This is in line with what Groenewegen (2008) advises, that in teaching listening skills, both auditory awareness and visual observation are important in enhancing understanding. In addition, most (96%) of the learners agreed that teachers could use a variety of activities to make lessons interesting to students. Indeed, all the students were in support of the use of a variety of instructional methods to engage learners' interest in meaningful learning activities. Use of prior knowledge was supported by most learners (86%) whereas 14% of them were undecided and none disagreed on this issue. Majority (91%) of the learners indicated that provision of feedback is necessary for learning. As indicated in the findings, this was one of the most widely used strategies for making learning interesting. It ensures mastery of concepts by learners. Learners also indicated that, to make listening interesting, they should be helped by teachers to narrow down their

attention on relevant parts during the lesson. All, 13(100%), the teachers interviewed in the study agreed that they helped their learners to narrow down their attention on relevant parts.

Focusing listening entails helping learners to concentrate their attention on important ideas. It involves making the speaker to repeat information or particular details. The study investigated on this skill because it helps learners to focus on particular details to be comprehended. From the research findings, this skill was used only 18 times involving 7(54%) of the teachers. Observation results showed that some teachers tended to repeat phrases rather than information. For example, one teacher kept repeating *waona...* (You see...). However, one observed lesson depicted a teacher focusing learners' attention to important areas like referring learners to a specific stanza of the song (lullaby) that was being studied in class.

Students process and organize information at varying rates. They, therefore, require time to enable them think and reflect on what they hear. Failure to provide for wait-time can be an impediment to listening. Students interviewed in the study were asked to state whether or not they were provided with time to enable them reflect on what they listened to. From the findings, 37(29%) affirmed this and 93(71%) students disputed it. This implied that most teachers never provided wait-time for students to take in and appropriately respond to content in class. This aspect occurred 18 times involving 6(46%) teachers. Teachers and other speakers in the class are expected to pause and check their pace after/when asking a question or presenting ideas in class. Data collected by means of FGDs corroborated this as 62% said their teachers of Kiswahili did not provide them with time to enable them reflect on what they listened to. This attests to the fact that poor listening among secondary school students could be attributed to teachers' inability to provide wait-time. Strong (1993) suggests that one of the most effective tools a speaker has is *no sound at all*. Use of pauses makes all eyes and ears focus on the speaker.

The study also investigated the use of teaching and learning resources. The use of visuals and other teaching aids occurred 28 times in the 13 lessons observed involving all 13 teachers (100%). All the teachers used the text/course books and the chalkboard at least once. One teacher used picture cuttings from newspapers. When this resource was used, learners seemed to have a better grasp of content through actions like offering information enthusiastically and answering questions asked by the teacher. Learners' use of visuals and non-verbal cues to support listening rarely occurred during classroom observation, as it had a score of 21%. The use of gestures, eye contact, eyebrows, hands and pauses to support verbal presentation was quite low.

Effective active listening is a product of the listener taking an active role. The students involved in the FGDs were asked to state how they were actively involved in listening during Kiswahili lessons. Table 4.9 has this information.

Question item 6 in the FGD guide was designed to provide information on if and how students showed that they were actively listening during Kiswahili lessons. Their responses were as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Students' Means of Showing Active Listening

Means	Yes	No
	F(%)	F(%)
Looking at the speaker	125(96)	5(4)
Nodding	71(57)	59(45)
Asking questions	93(72)	37(29)
Answering questions	102(79)	28(22)
Sitting up	117(90)	13(10)
Note taking	83(64)	47(36)
Using clarifying statements	44(34)	86(66)

The results indicate that all, 130(100%), of the students looked at the speaker to indicate active listening while 90(70%) showed active listening by asking questions; 63(49%) used non-verbal cues to indicate listening while 70(54%) paraphrased content. This could imply that majority of learners had an understanding of the importance of attentive behaviour to promote listening. However, it was observed that very few students asked questions, used non-verbal cues or did any paraphrasing of content as outlined above. Attentive behaviour manifested by students included provision of cues that they were listening or had understood the teachers' or other speakers' presentations. Also investigated was the student's sitting posture and attention paid to the speaker or visuals presented in class. Very few learners looked at the speakers most of the time; some were busy reading or looking at other materials like their exercise books or looking out the window rather than paying attention to the speaker.

The study also investigated how the rate of speech was regulated by presenters in classrooms. It was observed that most of the learners spoke too fast while others were inaudible. This consequently made their speech unclear. Regulated rate of speech in the study was mainly concerned with audibility, intonation, stress and pronunciation, all of which occurred only 22 times involving all the 13 teachers (100%) observed. Pronunciation problems were also noted in regard to some words. In some cases, mispronunciations distorted meanings of words or ideas. Some teachers also seemed to lack control over the speed at which they spoke and also in most of these cases students afraid to ask the teachers to repeat statements, words or phrases they may not have heard clearly.

The study also sought to establish how teachers checked learners' understanding of content in order to ascertain whether instructional objectives had been achieved or not. From the research findings all, 13(100%), of the teachers checked learners' understanding. Of these, 73% used the question-answer method, specifically the verbal stimuli as a means to evaluating learners' understanding, 37% used dictation while 62% used multiple choices while none used jumbled pictures and cloze tests. However, it was observed that most of the questions that were asked orally by teachers were closed-ended. For instance, they posed questions such as: "*does everyone understand?*" or "*are there any questions?*" and the chorus responses made by learners were sometimes seemingly unconscious. Basically, evaluation begins when teachers begin to plan; however, none of the 13 teachers observed in the study had prepared lesson plans. This possibly explains why teachers had limited options when making decisions on how to determine whether or not progress was being made towards achievement of lesson objectives.

Effective communication requires a means of providing feedback in order to ascertain understanding of input and modification of messages to improve understanding. The study

sought to ascertain whether or not teachers allowed learners to react to what they listened to. From the results, 91(70%) students agreed and 39(30%) disagreed. When probed further on how often they reacted to what they listened to, most of them mentioned orally answering questions posed by their teachers. This was confirmed during lesson observation sessions. From this, it became evident that most teachers only gauged learners' listening abilities in Kiswahili language through posing comprehension questions.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to determine the strategies used in Kiswahili language classrooms to teach listening. In line with this objective, the third objective of this study was to determine how the strategies employed influence the teaching and acquisition of listening skills.

One of the strategies investigated in this study was the use of learners' prior knowledge. From the interview results, all the thirteen teachers indicated the value of activating prior knowledge from the schemata. However, few of them actually used this strategy as revealed by lesson observation. Students listen better by relating new input to already existing knowledge. Such an approach enables listeners to link what they hear to prior knowledge they have and on this basis make hypothesis, predictions and inferences (Wills, 1981; Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Underwood, 1989).

Baker and Westup (2000) also state that before listening in L1, people usually already know something about what they are listening to; using the skill of prediction based upon their previous knowledge or interest in the subject. This assertion is in line with the top-down theoretical approach which advocates for the utilization of schematic knowledge. The purpose of before-listening activities is to help learners of Kiswahili language get motivated to listen. This is further corroborated by Ausubel (as cited in Otunga, Odeo & Barasa, 2011) who maintains that learning begins with what the learner knows. For learners to acquire listening skills there has to be a concerted effort to explore varied ways available for activating the top-down approach to listening-reviewing what the learner already knows about the topic is useful. Rummelhart (1980) argues for the "expectative driven processing" when a listener hears one word, it calls up everything on the individuals' mind about that word thus causing some expectation. Kafu (2010) also notes that the knowledge possessed by the students always serves as the *host* for the new knowledge to be acquired and suggests that this can be achieved using appropriate media resources or posing suitable questions.

Data revealed that a reasonable number (67%) of teachers did not activate students' prior knowledge. Such an approach may not be sufficient and is not the way to approach listening tasks in language acquisition. Teachers of L2 are not expected to approach listening predominantly from bottom-up instead; they should use "*listener as active hypothesis builder*" which is a top-down approach to listening rather than the "*listener as tape recorder*" (Rummelhart, 1980). It was expected in the research that nearly all teachers would be equipped with this skill given the academic qualification of teachers who participated in the study. There are two main possible explanations to such limited use of prior knowledge. One could be that teachers are unprepared and once they reach the classroom, most of what they do is done haphazardly; they hardly prepare for pre-listening activities. The other possible explanation could be that such teachers were not exposed to a variety of advance organizers during training to acquaint them on possible innovative strategies for training learners to listen. Inadequate

activation of prior knowledge related to new content can be a hindrance to effective listening (Bruce & Weil, 1992).

Activation of prior knowledge is also referred to as schema activation. The study results revealed that learners whose schema was activated responded more positively to learning tasks. However, most of such activation during lesson observation was mainly done through asking questions, while role-playing was the least employed for schema activation.

Regarding whether or not teachers specified what students should listen for well in advance, the research findings revealed that a high percentage of teachers had limited awareness in the use and role of advance organizers available for teaching listening skills. None of the teachers observed specified the pre-listening tasks to the learners, and as a result of limited use of the skill, the learners tended to narrate details that were irrelevant to the questions they were being asked which is an overburdening exercise (Underwood, 1989; Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). Several writers (Koslove & White, 1979; Ausubel, 1980; Wills, 1981) maintain that pre-listening tasks are helpful in preparing learners to listen. They recommend a mixture of activities to be adopted to enhance students' existing knowledge of the topic at hand. Rummelhart (1980) refers to this as "*expectative driven processing*".

Arousing learners' expectation as a listening sub-skill was also studied. The use of this skill by teachers and learners during presentation of ideas in the classroom was minimal. In instances where it was used, it was either limited or misused. Subsequently, some learners could not adequately respond to questions asked by the teachers while other learners could not respond at all to questions posed after a presentation. Discourse markers help the presenter of information to announce each point and each of these cues serves as an invitation to listeners who have wandering minds to join other listeners; an indication that a new point is about to be made (Strong, 1993).

Teacher talk is the most commonly used strategy by teachers in the schools that participated in the study. A majority of the students noted that they were allowed to read passages out loud in class. This is a pointer to the fact that dictation and brain storming were the least used in teaching listening while role-playing was not used at all. This depicts a situation where many teachers of Kiswahili deny learners the opportunity to use language in interaction. This could be the reason a number of them appeared bored and this was evidenced when they kept quiet when asked questions or when they gave wrong responses. These findings show that the most commonly used strategies are mainly from the teachers, which disadvantages the learners. There are other useful means that could be used to get learners motivated to listen; they include brainstorming, discussion and use of visual stimuli (Baker *et al.*, 2000).

Furthermore, a majority of students enlisted background noise as a distraction when listening. It was also noted that when learners were making presentations, some teachers did not pay attention; some even interjected when learners were speaking. Such interruptions caused learners to either keep quite or give irrelevant responses when called upon to answer questions. The impact of environment on instruction is well documented (Dale, 1972; Erickson, 1968; Kafu, 2010). A deprived or less stimulating learning environment tends to have adverse effect on instruction; on the other hand, a rich and endowed environment stimulates learners. This fact makes it imperative that a teacher of Kiswahili language appropriately develops and manages the learning environment so as to facilitate acquisition of listening skills.

As regards teaching and learning resources, only a few teachers made an effort to use other forms of visual stimuli apart from the chalkboard and course/set books. This was despite the fact that these teachers had acknowledged during interview sessions that media enhanced language teaching and learning. Effective language learning can be enhanced through the use of teaching and learning resources. In support of the foregoing, Farrant (2006), talking about the role of visual aids, asserts that a lesson begun by showing something of interest gets off to a good start because it focuses the attention of the pupils and stimulates their interest.

Much dependence on the text book could be attributed to poor training. Beeby (1986) and Perrot (1982) also assert that poorly trained teachers cling only to what they know: the text book. While better trained and experienced teachers tend to be creative, innovative and easily improvise teaching strategies, inexperienced teachers rely on traditional methods that may not suit the purpose at the time. The text book, pictures, tape recordings, resource persons and the chalkboard were the only visuals and means available to help learners comprehend the presentations. In only one out of 13 lessons observed the teacher use tape-recorded presentations while in another lesson the teacher invited a resource person. The presence of a resource person in class positively influenced the learners' ability to participate in class and recall what they had been taught. It also appeared to have a positive impact on the way the teacher functioned in the class. This particular teacher's presentation seemed to become easier, more interesting and meaningful to the learners.

The research findings on the impact of instructional resources on the instructional process indicated that instructional resources helped hold the learners' attention and interest, challenged and helped the learners to recall, analyze and synthesize what needs to be learnt. They also influence the way teachers function in class (Wilkins, 1974; Miller, 1990). Such emphasis on the effectiveness of the use of instructional resources in teaching and learning has also been noted by Kafu (2010) who agrees that learning resources determine the kind of learning environment for students, the type of teaching approaches/methods/techniques and other strategies to employ in instruction. A similar position is maintained by Petty (2004) who underscores the importance of resources in instruction. Petty (2004) also notes that instructional resources aid conceptualization as many concepts or ideas are better understood visually rather than verbally.

It was apparent that non-verbal cues (gestures and facial expressions) that were used by the resource person formed part of how learners understood what the speaker was presenting. These are important since in real-life listening, listeners are often exposed to para-linguistic clues like facial expression and gestures (MoE, 1992). Aggarwal (2009) also points out that the sense of hearing is stimulated naturally by visual presentation and non-verbal forms like facial expressions and gestures that are essential in explaining words and sentences. On the other hand, it was observed in one of the lessons that tape-recording, rather than facilitating learning, it directly impinged on students' ability to comprehend input. Tapes can be good for teaching listening, but what the teacher in that lesson was doing was playing the tape and testing listening without teaching the learner how to become a competent listener. The learners here did not know exactly what to expect from listening to the tape, as they were not given the specific objective for listening. As such, the students simply passively listened to the tape-recording. Many of the learners seemed tired partly because the content was not comprehensible and motivating enough given their level of learning, neither did the teacher make them conscious of the purpose of the upcoming listening input. As a result, learners

basically became passive listeners throughout the lesson. Consequently, most of them gave wrong responses when called upon to answer questions.

Another skill that was investigated was the rate of speech of teachers and learners, especially in relation to pronunciations. It emerged that sometimes pronunciation of words, statements and phrases by some teachers resulted in confusion of meanings and ideas among students. In an observation of one of the lesson, it was noted that lack of clarity of speech (input) was an impediment to comprehension in the class. This is based on the argument that since comprehensible input is a factor in language acquisition, it follows that incomprehensible input also impedes language acquisition (Krashen, 1987). Such performance is contrary to what Groenwegen (2008) advocates for; that when teaching listening, the teachers' own performance as a speaker is of utmost importance because learners model their speaking on the pronunciation, pitch, volume, stress and intonation patterns of their teachers.

Selection of authentic texts was also investigated in the study. This skill was important because it is at the pre-listening phase that learners are motivated to listen. So in selecting listening texts, teachers must be sensitive to learners' level and interests so as to effect motivation. Staton (1996) suggests that in order to stimulate listening, learners should be provided with opportunities to listen and interpret various sounds and pieces of information. Such pieces should be appropriate for their comprehension level. Texts to be listened to in the classroom need to be interesting and designed tasks should arouse learners' curiosity. Variety and variance is the key to selecting such texts. The teacher should, therefore, expose learners to a variety of authentic real life listening situations that they are likely to encounter in their lives. This is corroborated by Harmer (1995) who asserts that in the choice of texts for students to listen to, the teacher must consider why and when they listen to it since students who fail to attain readiness to listen will not properly comprehend what they listen to.

Another important skill that was investigated was the attention behaviour. Although all teachers gave attention to the learner, it only occurred 21 times, which was negligible. It was evident from the study that learners' use of attention behaviour to indicate active listening was low, although results from the FGDs indicated that students were aware of the features of and used active listening, the reverse was true. From observation notes, learners did not use non-verbal cues, they failed to paraphrase content, sit up or look at the speaker/visual presentation most of the time.

Ayot and Patel (1992) state that the syllabus gives areas to be studied but it does not tell the teacher what kind of activities he/she should engage his students in when transmitting knowledge. This gives the teacher a chance to be more creative in his/her approach to the subject. From the research findings, teachers' failure to carefully design teaching/learning activities was one of the causes of poor acquisition of listening skills. A variety of interactive activities contribute to helping every learner make sense of incoming input. This is why Farrant (2006) advises that teachers should as much as possible engage learners in activity learning in developing skills and understanding. Farrant adds that efficient learning depends on well chosen and managed activities because children learn best by doing and find interest and enjoyment in activity.

The success of any language lesson or other subjects largely depends on the interaction between the teacher and learner in the classroom. The study's theme was mainly concerned with the transaction exchange between the teacher and the learner focusing on those activities the teachers of Kiswahili initiated. Results indicated that learners' involvement in activities that

foster listening was minimal. Consequently, it was observed, having been rendered inactive participants, feedback from the learners was minimal. It was apparent that teacher/learner activities had not been carefully designed and teachers seemed to have difficulties when deciding on the nature and type of activities to be used in class. The research could not establish whether this was due to some teachers having limited understanding of what activity is or whether they were afraid to use them lest they should lose control over the class. Task-based exercises like role-playing and labelling, which were not utilized by teachers observed in the study, could be helpful as well. Teachers of Kiswahili can create new environments in the classroom by encouraging learners to engage in such activities that foster communicative competence. Communicative methods work best if the teacher uses realistic activities based on situations which students experience in their lives, including everyday materials (Baker & Westup, 2000).

Generally, teachers and learners seemed clueless over what activities to engage in. As a result, there was minimal involvement of and feedback from learners. Teachers' activities during listening lessons were also haphazard. These could be attributed to failure by teachers to carefully design activities beforehand; most of the observed teachers depicted difficulties when deciding on the nature and type of activities to be used in class. These were characterized by traditional classroom listening practices that often took the form of listening comprehension in which one person read as others listened and gave the answers. This is in contrast with task-oriented listening activities that foster acquisition of listening skills. Teachers and learners in the study did not seem to know how to use most of the strategies to enhance the teaching and acquisition of listening in Kiswahili language. This could be the reason the level of acquisition of listening skills among students has remained low.

However, it was observed that a few teachers could present lesson content in a manner that facilitated listening. In one of the lessons, the teacher stuck five pictures cut out from newspapers on the chalk board with numbers above them. The teacher started describing the five pictures one by one as students were required to pinpoint the number of the picture that was being described. As a result, every student sat upright and showed eagerness to participate in the lesson. This practice is highly recommended in modern approaches to language teaching. Such an approach makes the learners the focal point in the instructional process as they are availed with opportunities to discover knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The research results show that teachers and students are aware of appropriate strategies available for use in enhancing acquisition of listening skills in L2 learning. However, teachers and learners do not use these strategies adequately. The study observed that very few teachers prepare for listening in the schemes of work. Furthermore, none of the teachers in the study had a lesson plan. Therefore, teachers of Kiswahili do not adequately prepare for instruction of listening skills. They do not prepare lesson plans for every listening session. Although they include listening in their schemes of work, the lesson objectives are not clearly stated. Most of them do not derive their objectives from the syllabus; instead, they are guided by various course books available.

In teaching listening, most teachers confine themselves to using the course book as the main resource. The study also established that teachers do not do prior planning of pre-listening,

listening and after listening tasks. Therefore, the teaching of listening skills in Kiswahili language is haphazard. In addition, the most common technique for teaching listening skills used by teachers is listening comprehension. Moreover, students listened mostly to the teacher and are hardly allowed to contribute or take part in the process of learning listening skills. The study further established that teachers' and learners' use of listening strategies during instruction is quite low.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and the above conclusions, the following recommendations are made to enhance the teaching and acquisition of listening skills in Kiswahili in Kenya:

1. Conscious effort should be made to improve the use of listening skills at all levels of education, beginning from primary, secondary and university, by encouraging teachers and learners to use different kinds of listening skills and strategies to achieve better instruction and understanding.
2. Greater effort should be made by the designers of course books to concentrate on non-examinable skills like speaking and listening. They should more explicitly give advice/direction on the most appropriate teaching and learning activities. Publishers should produce books that cater for listening skills; books that give more guidance on listening norms.
3. Secondary schools should invest more funds in purchasing relevant instructional resources. Listening in Kiswahili language classrooms should not be an activity that is divorced from visual communication. What learners see forms a part of the comprehension experience and body language also forms a large part of the comprehension process. Learning theorists have long held that images enhance comprehension storage and recall of information. In the language classroom, use of visual material of all kinds has been a predominant tool for instruction for quite some time. Pictures, slides, drawings etc serve many roles in language learning activities. In listening skills development, activities that focus learners' attention simultaneously on visuals and accompanying aural input support comprehension and contribute to higher levels of learner motivation.
4. Teacher talk should not be the primary delivery mode since it leaves learners out. Other modes can be helpful in teaching listening; these include demonstrations, audio-visual, delivery guest speakers, observations, computer delivery, reading, guided learner activities etc.
5. One of the least used teaching techniques was dictation. This study recommends that as much as dictations may be rejected by some teachers as being old-fashioned, they are very valuable; in fact, teaching listening skills in Kiswahili language should include the best of "old-fashioned" techniques applied in a modern and effective way. Dictations are a bridge between spoken and written language, and when words are pronounced correctly, dictation becomes a useful tool for teaching listening.

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