



Full Length Research Paper

Use of textual materials and teaching learning activities by teachers of English in Eldoret municipality, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper sought to establish the relevance of teaching and learning activities and textual materials, in relation to the teaching and learning theories and approaches that were designed to achieve teaching goals. Basically, the study sought to determine the relevance of textual and nontextual materials to the goals of curriculum delivery and evaluate how their choices influenced teachers' theoretical dispositions. These were achieved through the objectives of the study which included analysing the textual material which teachers used in curriculum delivery and evaluate the teaching and learning activities teachers designed and their correspondence to stated second language teaching and learning theories. The study involved 30 teachers of English in 10 selected secondary schools within Eldoret Municipality. Of the teachers, six taught in girls' schools, six in boys' schools and 18 in mixed schools. Proportional stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select two girls' schools, two boys' schools and six mixed schools. This was a qualitative descriptive cross-section survey study. Data was collected by use of structured interview with selected teachers, observation of teacher's lessons in classes, and structured questionnaires. The study concluded that several factors including teacher personality and training, planning procedures, form of language used in the classroom and the calibre of learners influenced teachers' choice of the textual materials and teaching learning activities in the teaching of English language skills.

Keywords: Textual/non-textual Materials, Teaching/ Learning theories, curriculum delivery, theoretical approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of teaching and learning shows that there are many factors that influence teachers' selection of strategies that aid them in achieving teaching goals. Primary among these is the demand placed on teachers by the dictates of the language syllabus and teaching resources. In Kenya's context there are two sets of syllabi that influence teachers' choice of the English language experiences. These syllabi are the English language syllabus by Kenya institute of education (KIE, 2006) which outlines the experiences to be taught at a particular level in a given order, and Kenya national examination council (KNEC, 2011) syllabus, which describes how the subject will be examined. Cases arise where teachers teach with a view to enabling the learners excel in national examinations (NT, 2012). Richards *et al.* (1994) argue that where teachers teach students to pass exams,

they provide learners with insufficient help to clearly understand how language activity should be developed in the context of the various curriculum elements and how in turn this can be learnt through appropriate language activities. This clearly indicates that the examination approach to teaching is not the ideal for teaching language. The syllabus emphasizes that for a teacher to effectively help the learner to acquire proficiency in language skills, it is important to use appropriate human and non-human resources. In every lesson, (KIE, 2006) the teacher should determine the best resources for a particular learning activity. These resources include audio, radio broadcasts, radio programmes, audio visuals, resource persons, books and other print materials. Based on all these, this paper will therefore introduce, examine and demonstrate how teachers use

textual materials and teaching learning activities in the teaching of English language skills in Kenyan secondary schools.

Study Objectives

The objectives of the study were: to interrogate the textual materials used by teachers in delivering the English language content, investigate the commonly designed activities in teaching English and give suggestions to improve overall teaching of English as a second language (L2.) in Kenya.

Literature Review

Teaching contexts and styles

The teaching of English as a second language is formed by diverse teaching traditions (Stables, 1988). Part of the problem facing teachers is to weave elements of these differing traditions into a coherent and acceptable pattern. Sometimes the manner in which this is done contributes to the chaotic situation that English teaching finds itself in given that teachers give these various traditions their own interpretation.

Different contexts in which teachers work also involve teachers in different types of roles. In some contexts teachers are fairly autonomous and are free to make decisions regarding course goals, teaching materials, teaching methods and assessment procedures (Harmer, 1991). In such a setting a teacher prepares his own schemes of work, chooses his own reference books and decides on the number of internal examinations that learners will sit. In other settings such decisions are made by a supervisor such as a subject head or by a panel of teachers. The teacher is thus seen as someone who primarily carries out decisions made by others. Even when teachers bear the responsibility for how they teach they may assume totally different roles within their own classrooms. Some teachers see their roles in managerial and organizational terms (Hammer, 1991; Cross, 2002; Richmond, 2003). Such teachers spend a considerable amount of time planning their lessons monitoring their teaching and managing student learning and behaviour to ensure that their goals are accomplished. On the other hand some teachers view themselves as facilitators of language learning and believe that the best kind of learning arises from the dynamics of the teaching - learning situation. Teachers of English are graduates of different teacher training backgrounds. Depending on the depth of understanding of second language teaching theories and coupled with meaningful supervision upon employment, their application of these theories cannot be expected to be uniform. It might be possible that most teachers end up teaching the way they were taught

(Borg, 2003; omulando and Barasa, 2009:104), resulting in the design of activities that might not be relevant and in line with the dictates of the current teaching syllabus. Such activities include the use of structural repetitions that could promote rote learning and use of translations.

Second language theories focus on different dimensions of second language teaching; therefore, it cannot amount to a uniform view of teaching. Similarly, teachers work in different kinds of situations with different bodies of learners who demand different teaching methods and approaches (Richards *et al.*, 1994). The fact that what happens in teaching is unknown to the teacher, teachers are often unaware of the kind of teaching they do or how much they handle many of the moment-to-moment decisions that arise. This partly explains the different teaching styles that are witnessed in different language teaching classes and result in different achievement levels.

Critical Issues on Second Language Teaching Approaches

Clear, specific and strong theoretical frameworks of language acquisition and practice should be able to provide insightful teaching. Webb and Kembo (2000) observe that teachers of English should possess attitudes that allow for flexibility and should have a knowledge base that is both theoretical and practical. These should enhance the teacher's skills that allow for a trial of various approaches before deciding on the one that works.

This argument is crucial since few approaches and theories that were once practiced have disappeared completely. Some aspects of a theory could be integrated in succeeding ones. For example Krashen's monitor model has gone through various adjustments and yet it is still considered vital in explaining second language acquisition.

In language teaching, according to Harmer (1991), nature is intractable and reason intervenes in the form of linguistically organized syllabuses, sociologically responsible curricular and psychologically well-organized methods. These result in an educational system full of restrictions, examinations and regulations which are blamed for the intermittent success that natural approaches in language acquisition have met (Richards *et al.*, 1994). How teachers weave these realities into their teaching defines their beliefs in how language should be taught and learnt.

Similarly, language teaching is a practical rather than a theoretical activity. It draws insights from many fields notably linguistics and socio linguistics. The need to interpret this activity in relation to theoretical developments that have significant bearings in linguistics and socio-linguistic disciplines is significant. Such interpretations could reflect different teaching

dimensions. Richards et al. (1994) identifies teachers and learners as enduring dimensions that meaningful trends in second language teaching recognize. Teaching could therefore be seen as either being learner or teacher centred depending on what dimensions teachers emphasize.

Many times language teaching has emphasized the mastery of language structures. This has led to language teaching being associated with the teaching of structural items that learners can handle. Success or failure both in language teaching and learning is interpreted through judgment of the learners' ability to manipulate the structures of the language and through examination results.

In teaching English the tasks that confront a teacher include; the selection of language learning activities, checking students learning and providing opportunities for practice of new items (Richards *et al.*, 1994; Barasa,2005; Borg, 2006). To perform these tasks teachers are informed by their theoretical beliefs. Differences in theoretical beliefs often result in differences in the nature of language instruction. To understand how teachers discharge their functions, it is necessary to examine the theories, beliefs and thinking processes, which underlie classroom teaching. Granted that what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe, teacher knowledge and teacher thinking provide the underlying framework which guide teachers' action in classrooms (Richards *et al.*, 1994; Borg,2003).

Any claim to professionalism, Richards (1990) argues, should be supported with systematic evidence of student achievement and curriculum planning. This should be coherent and should meet the needs of the client group and be consistent with strong theoretical frameworks that are acceptable to the profession.

This paper, attempted to put various theories and their applications in a perspective that sought to determine teachers understanding of the frameworks out of which their teaching of English was informed. If the knowledge of theory is taken as a necessary ingredient of one's professional knowledge, then interpretation of theory and practice is a problem worth researching. One should be interested in the relevance of the teaching and learning activities and resources and procedures to the second language teaching approaches. Kembo's (Webb and Kembo, 2000) description of a teacher of English, as one who possess attitudes that allow for flexibility and has knowledge base that is both theoretical and practical which allows him to try out various approaches and theories before deciding the one that works, aptly reflects the problem of this study.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out among selected teachers within Eldoret Municipality of Uasin Gishu County. Eldoret

municipality was selected because of the researchers' conviction that teachers within the municipality have similar characteristics with teachers from any other region within the country, and this guaranteed the selection of the county for this study.

The research adopted the descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey was chosen as dictated by the nature of study which was to describe the state of affairs as it exists, (Kombo and Tromp; 2006). Proportional stratified sampling was used to stratify the 22 secondary schools into three categories of girls, boys and mixed schools. Six teachers of English were sampled from the girl's schools; another six teachers of English from boy's schools while from the mixed schools' eighteen teachers were sampled for the study. The total number of teachers sampled was 30. The current study made use of various research tools and techniques i.e. teachers were interviewed to seek their opinions about their perception of second language teaching, their training and teaching experiences. An analysis of teachers' interaction in class was also carried out through classroom observation to identify teachers' theoretical competencies in their teaching. All the instruments were tested for validity and reliability before administration.

DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

Textual Materials

The purpose of this study was to interrogate the textual materials used by teachers in delivering the English language content. As such, the study found it paramount to interview, observe and question information from teachers of English and their learners. The interviewees were of the view that the current texts that have been approved for the teaching of English met their beliefs. Some interviewees were of the opinion that what a teacher needs is a variety of textbooks and not just one text. This is because different texts give different experiences and different degrees of emphasis. Some texts emphasize the mastery of rules and are therefore grammar inclined. Some emphasize reading passages, enabling the learners to experience how language functions. Some emphasize exercises only. Therefore, to strike a balance, teachers would need several texts. Some interviewees felt that if teachers wrote their own books they would put more emphasis on the teaching of grammar and writing of compositions. These they felt would greatly help learners to master the rules they would need for writing.

The current study, however, found that many teachers do not use a variety of texts since they only chose those that the schools availed. Some were not even aware of the existence of other books apart from the ones available in schools. Therefore, the interviewees could not conclusively talk of a designed text that would meet

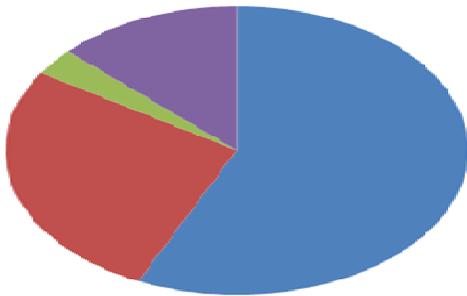


Figure 1: Figure showing percentage use of real objects

KEY

- 56 % did not use objects
- 26.7% used objects always
- 13.3% could not tell their position
- 30% used always

their needs. No single book can be designed to meet all requirements. Very accurate and totally accurate were considered positive responses and therefore meant that the tasks were appropriate.

The findings show that teachers gave learners room to practice in class the particular language points they had been taught. This is because 50% of the respondents felt that tasks were very accurate while 40% totally gave learners opportunities to practice. This means that teachers consider the learning of specific points as central to language teaching. This reflects a structural view of language that emphasizes a mastery of linguistic structures.

While teaching English, the findings indicated that only 4 teachers (13.3%) could not tell whether or not they used real objects at all, whereas 16 teachers (56.7%) did not use them at all. Only 10 teachers (30%) used real objects sometimes, whereas 8 teachers (26.7%) used them always (Figure 1).

This shows that most teachers do not value the use of real objects in teaching. This is possibly due to the fact that many teachers favour the use of approaches that do not require the use of objects to support teaching such as behaviourist approaches.

Most respondents' designed tasks that would be helpful to the communication needs of learners. This is because 18 teachers (60%) indicated that their tasks totally contributed to learners practicing the skills they would need for communication while 10(33%) teachers gave tasks that were accurately designed to help learners communicate. Only 2(7%) teachers did not provide such tasks.

Learners were given tasks that evaluated their mastery of language. Seventeen (56.6%) of the teachers felt that the tasks were totally evaluative and six (20.1%) felt that tasks were very evaluative. For many teachers, it is apparent, the goal of teaching English is for the learners to master the language. The approaches that teachers

adopt are therefore seen as being productive and they have led to the acquisition of linguistic skills.

To evaluate the learners' progress, the respondents gave different types of assignments to learners. All the teachers gave learners assignments from different sources such as recommended texts, 28(93.3%), other teachers, 4(13.3%), own questions, 11(36%), past papers, 16(53.3%), other books, 16(53.3%), and newspapers, 8 (26%).

From the foregoing, it is evident that teachers consider performance of learners as a major determinant of what theories and approaches to use. This is because the learners are evaluated in preparation for terminal examination.

All the teachers reported using the *Integrated English* books for teaching English: 30% used *Headstart in English* and 26.6% indicated using *New Horizons* in English. These are the books that are commonly used. For example, in the ten classes that were observed all teachers used the *Integrated English* for various forms whereas one of the interviewees used *Headstart in English*. Many other books are used as reference or supplementary texts. These include books such as *English in Practice* and *Common Errors in English*. Of all teachers, only one interviewee used class readers in teaching English in form one and two. The rest of the teachers either do not have specific class readers or are not aware of their value in teaching language or merely took it for granted that class readers are not textbooks. The textbooks are chosen due to a number of reasons. These included the fact that they were recommended, they were available or they could easily be used by the learners. The books are selected by the teachers themselves from the list that the ministry recommends. A majority of the teachers select the books because they are recommended. Teachers then view the books as having the capacity to treat the recommended syllabus which is integrated and meet the objectives of teaching languages. This fact is supported by Broughton (1988) who avers that books are normally designed with a given theory and approach in mind. It is therefore possible that the books which are written by practicing teachers or teacher educators are designed with a view to fulfilling the curriculum goals of the integrated syllabus. These books are important to teachers since apart from facilitating knowledge they are listed as the single-most source of exercises and drills for the learners. It is established that teachers do not select books outside those recommended by the Ministry. This is illustrated by table 1 below.

Implementation of Teaching / Learning Theories and Teaching/ learning activities

Following the structure of the syllabus, making schemes of work and arranging the topics in a manner which the

Table 1: Commonly used textbooks

| Type of textbook | No. of teachers who use | % |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|
| Integrated English old and new Series | 30 | 100% |
| Headstart English | 9 | 30% |
| New Horizons | 8 | 26.6% |
| English in Use | 3 | 10% |
| English in Practice | 2 | 10% |
| Revision English | 2 | 6.6% |
| Skills of English | 2 | 6.6% |

teachers thought reflected their views were given as some of the strategies they used to implement the said personal theories. Two of the interviewees felt that since they operated within the set syllabus they automatically were following their theories. Four other interviewees thought that apart from following the syllabus, the fact that they chose which books to use, they applied a methodology suitable to them and selected experiences which they felt their learners needed, gave them room for self expression. For example, one interviewee thought since she taught in a school where speaking English the correct way was emphasized (pronunciation, stress and intonation) with a native like precision, she did not have to teach pronunciation and speech work but instead exposed the learners to authentic texts. In this way learners would not shy away from using the language even when they met a native speaker. The other respondents felt that they needed to spend more time on grammar activities, giving learners opportunities to practice language through activities such as role plays and debates and providing native like situations so that the learners would listen to the way the language is spoken authentically. Most of the activities cited included debates, dramatization, teacher explanation, model reading, silent reading and written exercises.

From the foregoing, the study established that there were no disparities between the teaching and learning activities which the teachers used or would use in actualizing their theories. The difference is only on emphasis depending on the environment that the teachers worked in. The activities foster language acquisition controlled practice for those learners who are not yet proficient in the language is emphasized. These are the learners who were taught by teachers who emphasized the mastery of rules.

Evaluation and Instructional Planning

Generally, learners were constantly evaluated with questions sourced from textbooks, past papers and teachers own questions. One item sought to establish how the respondents structured their schemes of work. The respondents were expected to choose an alternative

from four choices given. These were meant to give the analysis systematicity. The alternatives given were: following the syllabus structure, following the textbook presentation, rearranging topics to suit the needs of the learners and following externally prepared schemes of work.

The study considered the preparation of schemes of work as something personal and would reflect the teacher's own view of teaching in relation to the environment in which he taught.

The findings reveal that many teachers structured their teaching to suit the needs of the learners by making their own schemes of work. This is because 12(42%) of the teachers arranged topics in their own personal way, 11 (39%) teachers followed the syllabus structure, and 6(19%) follow the textbook arrangement. Teachers who based their schemes on their own arrangements are always guided by their own views regarding teaching. In so doing, they are close to the needs of the learners and can be said to favour learner centred approaches in scheming.

Forms of Language Use in the Classroom

We sought to establish teachers' presentation in relation to how they focused on form and the sensitivity they sought for learners to develop the correct use of language. This was done by observing how teachers focused on either fluent forms or accurate forms in their teaching. To rate the forms on which concentration was focused, the researcher awarded percentages for which a teacher dedicated the lesson to either fluent forms or accurate forms. These were later expressed into a mean percentage that represented the whole observation process.

It was observed that most of the time teachers wanted learners to produce fluent forms (85%) whereas it is only in a few cases that teachers were bothered with accurate forms. Many times teachers controlled the speeches of their learners. This was observed even when teachers taught grammar, reading or writing. Teachers would provide models to help the learners understand. To achieve this, most teachers gave pair work, dialogues

and guided oral work in which the utterances of the learners were tightly structured. Teachers would constantly ask the learners to produce correct forms.

By emphasizing fluency at the expense of accuracy, the researchers felt that the teachers were being too structural and behavioural. Teachers believe that language teaching and learning should aim at fluent production of utterances with limited room for learners to communicate accurately. This should be the goal of teaching a second language.

Steps in the Teaching of Language

While observing different classes, the researchers noted that most teachers, 8(80%), incorporated various teaching and learning activities in their lessons at various stages. For example, at the introductory stage when teachers introduce a new concept to be taught, they assume either that the learners know nothing or they have heard of what is to be taught but they have not mastered it therefore, they ought to be reminded. For example teachers would write a concept on the board. They would proceed to explain it and give their own examples before asking learners to contribute. Alternatively, they would write a concept on the board and ask a common question "who can tell us ...?" This means that learners at the introductory stage of a lesson are treated as people with no knowledge at all of what is to be taught. At the development stage teachers elaborate the concepts to be taught by asking learners to generate examples, giving exercises, making notes or in one case that was observed in the teaching of vocabulary to memorize the concepts. Finally, the lesson would be concluded through feedback activities, such as written exercises, homework, learners exchanging their reports and role plays.

The study found that teachers followed the presentation-practice-production mode of teaching which combines various approaches that allow the teachers to anticipate the nature of classroom interaction and therefore prepare for it more carefully. This gives them room to concentrate on either individuals or groups or the whole class.

Modes of Teaching

A typical English lesson is a study of various modes of concentration. These could be individual students, groups of students in a class or the whole class. In the study, the researchers observed that 6 teachers (60%) concentrated on teaching the Whole class with instances where a learner would be asked a question. Only 3(30%) teachers attempted to teach the learners in small groups. The teacher moved to learners in groups and guided them as they went about learning the selected concept.

Seven teachers (10%) moved around the class correcting learners' work and attending to them individually. Of all the teachers observed only 3(30%) engaged learners in language activities such as singing narration and word play.

The study found that teachers prefer approaches that group learners together regardless of the fact that learning is a personal activity. This is possibly due to limitations placed on the teachers by the dictates of the timetable and teachers need to cover the syllabus and the philosophy of schools which stress teaching the whole class during lesson times.

Skills Practiced During Lessons

The four main skills that a language lesson targets are: speaking, reading, writing and listening. The study sought to establish how teachers balanced the attention that is given to each during lessons. This would explain teachers' beliefs regarding the particular skill in relation to second language acquisition.

Teachers mainly engaged learners in reading, writing and listening. The study reports that learners spent 75% of the time listening to teachers; they only read for 10% of the time and spent another 10% of the time writing. They only spoke for 5% of the time. Most of the time, it was the teacher who did the talking. This finding seems to agree with what (onchera and mwamba, 2009; Magno, 2010) found that most lessons are dominated by teacher talk. Reading is based on authentic materials such as textbooks. Learners write examples and explanations dictated by teachers.

This means that teachers consider themselves the models and sources of second language experiences. Learners are therefore expected to learn from the custodians of second language experiences who are the teachers. Second language learning is equated to listening. This view is considered fallacious since it does not built learners speaking competence.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that teachers pick books from the list that the Ministry gives. These included the *Integrated English* books both new and old series, *Headstart in English* and *New Horizons*. Other books were used only to supplement those books. The study also revealed that more than 65% of teachers used between 4-5 textbooks whereas only 19% used one book. Furthermore, the study revealed that most of the distinctions used to contrast theories and approaches particularly regarding classroom activities did not exist in actual practice. This therefore means that teachers cut across theoretical boundaries and approaches when teaching or they picked on activities that cut across most theories and

approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study on the textual materials and teaching and learning activities of English as a second language, the following recommendations were made:

- Teachers should choose textbooks they know are not only available but are designed in a way that their learners can identify with.
- There is need to design a policy that addresses the promotion of English language instruction. Such a policy would address such pertinent areas as the minimum competence for anybody wishing to teach English at any level, the place of personal beliefs that teachers hold about the teaching of English, the importance of teaching/learning activities in classrooms, and the availability of resources for retraining the teachers who are already in the field.

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