

The Use of Oral Language Approaches in Developing Writing Skills in English Language Among Kalenjin Secondary School Students in Rift Valley – Kenya

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Abstract

In English Language, there is a strong correlation between oral language skills and achievement in the written language among learners in schools. However, one of the most important ways of learning oral English is adequate vocabulary so that a learner can use a wide range of vocabulary in writing. This study sought to investigate the use of oral language approaches in developing writing skills in English in Kenyan Secondary Schools in Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was used. The schools under investigation were a sample size of 28 (30%) was selected from 64 secondary schools categorized as district and provincial, girls school boys' schools. Stratified random sampling was used to get the schools from the categories and simple random sampling to get respondents from each school into the samples. Questionnaires were used to solicit information from teachers, observations and tape recording was used to record linguistics data exactly as it occurred while he learning in classroom took place. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used during data analysis with the help of percentages, frequently tables and pie chart. Analysis was done using statistical package for social sciences SPSS. The findings of the study revealed that problems found in schools were associated with student's attitudes, teachers' methodology of teaching, unavailability of instructional materials and inability of learners to express themselves orally thus hindering development of competence in writing.

Introduction

According to shorthand and Gregory (1991) "Successful language communication through the modes of speaking and writing requires constant practice. This means taking interest in the target language, making mistakes and putting them right. At the end of it all, you will find more challenges of language use which enhance communication in context". Floden (1997) emphasizes the need for teachers to investigate their teaching of speaking and writing. He advocates for content and methodology that would help students to learn about them and the target environment in which language has to be used accordingly. He continues to argue that classroom teaching espouses language communication that takes advantages of the emerging global consciousness through speaking and writing with some objectives and aims. English language is taught as a subject and at the same time it is a medium of instruction for other subjects except Kiswahili. A study carried out on educational implications of using English as a medium of instructions in secondary school, Makori and Mumiukha (2008) revealed that there was a clear problem for students in using English to convey their thoughts and in their effort to grasp classroom tasks. This was one reason for the declining performance in National examinations. They further explained that lack of sufficient learning materials is the main handicap schools suffer while attempting to overcome, the logistic problems they face. Also from classroom observation, mother tongue use inhibits the use of English in interaction and expression. The study however, suggested that the straight for English approach is favored because parents see English as means of pre-requisite to socio – economic advancement for their children than mother tongue. Findings further revealed that students switched from English to Kiswahili and hesitance manifested, teachers explained that their school policy was English, Kiswahili only. In fact there were even placards placed all over the hall ways and on door entrance calling on everyone to speak in English.

KIE (2006) outlines specific objectives of teaching oral skills in English to be covered in the syllabus. The aim is to make the student communicate effectively and intelligently in English. It also helps the student to develop

confidence in his ability to express himself in English as fluently as possible and provides an opportunity for the correction of mistakes in spoken English.

Bruner (1978), snow and Ferguson (1977), Waterston and Snow (1978) say that when one starts to write, he or she has already a good knowledge of how to use spoken language in ordinary conversational exchanges. They acquire these communicative skills from social interaction; therefore they find it a very effective way of achieving communicative goals. Hence people come to written language with a concept of spoken language as a rewarding social reciprocity attained with apparent easy compared with speed.

Statement of the problem

Due to failure to achieve writing objectives in English, communication competence in oral and writing have not been achieved. However, oral approaches are one of the most important ways that promote learning and understanding of English written form. The daily nation (2005) raised concern over oral tests being left out K.C.S.E. is a big blow to development of speaking skills.

From the KCSE (2008) report, Minister for Education revealed that writing instructions has gone sour because it is conceived as primarily a communicative skill rather than a process and product of critical thinking as it applies to oral communication. Therefore teachers rarely bother to teach speaking except for a few oral practices given in textbooks. There has been a general outcry expressed by educationists, employers and ordinary citizens to the effect that most of form four leavers are not fully equipped with proper communication skills evidenced in oral interviews and written application letters for job employment. Barasa (2005:15) says that Universities have voiced concerned about receiving first year students who can hardly write, read and hold discussions in English. This was revealed by the study “The role of speaking and writing in communicative competence by (Bigambo 2000) with the same view.

Poor performance across the curriculum has become a matter of concern to the government of Kenya because English language is used to teach all other subjects except Kiswahili, African and other foreign languages. Therefore, lack of its mastery can be an impediment to the acquisition of skills and knowledge other subjects that require an English background for teaching and writing (KNEC report 2008).

Therefore this study was a response to this need and investigates the use of oral approaches in developing writing skills in English in Kenyan Secondary schools in Bureti District.

Objectives of the study

The following objective guided the investigations to achieve the intents of the study as stated below:

- To investigate the value and constraints of using oral approaches to develop writing skills.
- To find out the learning experience constraints and the extent to which forms of oral approaches teachers use as guidance to enable students meet their needs while writing.

Theoretical & Conceptual framework

Krashen (1982) input theory and functional theory were used to enable the study to come up with findings. Krashen input theory was used to show the learning experiences, forms of oral approach that teachers use. While functional theory was very important to show the value and constraints of using oral approaches to develop writing skills.

In Fig. 1 (see Appendix) it shows that students learn various oral language skills to be able to perform several functions such as the ability to communicate effectively. Teachers create a classroom setting in which students perform tasks by using certain required languages form in terms of input hypothesis while the way they are used influences the outcome of writing skills developed.

Research Design

Descriptive Survey research design was used in this study because the main tool used for data collection was a questionnaire. Bryman (2004) observes that the design is relevant since it entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of data in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect the patterns of association. Surveys are particularly useful when

researchers are interested on aspects of behavior that are difficult to observe directly and when it is desirable to sample a large number of subjects for investigation.

Population of study

The population of study was obtained in Bureti District, Bomet County. The population included teachers of public secondary schools and students from 64 secondary schools which are categorized as district and provincial schools. The target population included Form three students. They were used on the assumption that their language mannerisms are developed and established as compared to those of form twos and ones. The form four classes were avoided because it was an exam class and school administration was relevant to allow external interference.

Sampling procedures and sample size

The sample size for the study was determined according to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) a final sample estimate n_{uf} using the formula $n_{uf} = n/s + n/n$ was used;

Where, n_{uf} = The desired sample size when population is less than 10,000

n = The desired sample size when the population is greater than 10,000

N = The population size

Therefore $n_{uf} = 41$

When the sample size had been obtained, proportional sampling was then used to select the number of schools to be included in the sample as shown in the table 1. see appendix to establish the sample size.

In order to get the number of respondent's 1/3 of the total number of teachers through simple random sampling and 4 students from the sample schools. The total number of respondents therefore was 92 form three students of the sample secondary schools.

Results and discussions

Teachers' questionnaires were used to confirm the value and constraints of using oral approaches to develop writing skills. The value was looked in terms of objectives on how oral approaches influence their choices of strategies on methods, materials and content in writing instructions. A likert rating scale was used to make respondents give their personal opinions concerning the items mentioned through the statements that were given.

The first statement was that learners wrote what the teachers presented orally to express ideas logically and correctly. The results were presented as shown in the table 2: See appendix to get the responses.

For their own benefit in other fields in higher institutions also it assists them when they are going through an interview where some of the employees check for language competence in spoken and written forms as a way of making one either pass or fail the interview. 12.2% were on the extreme of disagreeing, it revealed that these teachers had an opinion that they didn't value the statement.

The last statement was that oral and writing skills are academic, students need to learn speaking and writing in school. Table 3 in appendix summarizes the results.

From the table the findings revealed that 20 (48.8%) of the respondents agreed that oral and writing skills are academic and students should learn speaking and writing in school class assignments while 15 (36.8%) disagree and 6 (14.6%) had no opinion.

The researcher concluded that the teachers' view speaking and writing are academic, and learners should be taught in school but no much emphasis was to be considered. It revealed that no much emphasis was put on the use of oral approach to teach learners to speak and do their classroom assignments and even passing examinations.

Constraints

It was great concern for the researcher to find out constraints that make it difficult for a teacher to organize oral learning activities. Some of the constraints looked at have been summarized in the table4 in appendix.

This findings reveal that majority of the respondents 31(15%) view that 40 minutes time allocated for teaching English is limited to cover the given content to deliver to learners while 10(24.4%) did not agree.

Learners indiscipline was also a major constraint whereby 21(52%) of the respondents had the opinion that indiscipline has greatly affected the teaching and learning of writing skills by use of oral approaches.

Concerning the number of students 31(69.6%) had the opinion that too many students is a major constraint that hinder the development of writing skills in classroom. It reflects that the enrolment is increasing and teachers are not able to cope with more than thirty students in a class. The research showed that most of the schools had a large number of teachers in the school which cannot look into the needs of individual learner. Learner's foundation in primary school was investigated and it revealed that 37 (90.2%) revealed that foundation in primary was poor and therefore teachers at primary level have a lot to do to improve learner's performance at secondary level.

Finally, lack of exposure ICT revealed that 27 (65.9%) of the respondents do not expose learners to ICT hence leaving learners naïve and not getting access to learn through ICT equipments that can promote their oral language.

The study also investigated learners' attitude towards oral approaches. Teachers had their opinions as reflected in the table 5 in the appendix.

The study revealed that if learners were subjected to oral presentation they were likely to refuse or do the presentation poorly. It shows that learners don't put into use oral approach; teachers don't organize learners to speak orally. The reason is that learner's feel that they will be laughed at when they make mistakes as they speak.

From the observation schedule in classroom where respondents were learners towards English language. Table 6 in the appendix shows the results:

Learners opinion showed that their attitude towards English language is negative because (61%) of the respondents reveal that they don't like the language and even some of them are not aware if learners like the language. This is the main reason that has led to poor use of English language in spoken and written form. The outcome is that it has led to poor performance in English subject in internal and external examinations of schools.

Learning experiences

The researcher went further to get information concerning aspects of language including comprehension, fluency, proper flow, vocabulary, pronunciation / proper articulation and grammar / language use of inflection. Experience a tongue twister was used and it was purely student to student respondent as illustrated below:

Student 1: Write she says she sells sea shells at the sea shore.

Student 2: *What is that? You have said he sell shells at the show?*

Student 3: I heard properly she is selling shells at the sea.

Student 4: Me tont understand tang twist..... shies off.

Students: *It is even hard (in unison) English is hard*

Illustration: shi sey shi sel si shells (direct pronunciation spellings)

It revealed that learners were hesitant, often forced into silence by language limitation. Majority of the learners misused words as they had limited vocabulary masterly that made the comprehension quite difficult. Most frequently, learners repeated sentences in order for them to understand speech production was virtually impossible making even articulation of tongue twisters to be a problem; till some could codeswitch to Kiswahili 'Rudia' meaning repeat. Learners were not able to understand simple conversation and could not explain aspects and no response to oral questions. It also revealed that some of the learners' pronunciation problems led to misunderstanding; pronunciation problems were so severe to make speech virtually impossible. Learners were not able to articulate some words appropriately as expected showing inappropriate patterns of pronunciation. K.N.D.F (2000), (2001) had the same view that students who were able to speak fluently could do well in their English examinations as supported by Barasa and Ong'ondo (2006) in their paper "Impact of drama in English Language".

The researcher made a summary concerning features of language and their impact on student communication as shown in table 7 in appendices.

The researcher was keen to observe the pronunciation /proper articulation of learner's speech the findings were put on a table by use of a rating scale of 1 to 5 meaning that those who scored 1 had the least mark while those who scored 5 had the best mark as shown in 8 table and illustrated by figure 2 in appendix.

Recommendations

The researcher makes the following recommendations.

Teachers of English should:-

- Correct oral errors during less controlled and guided phases, by walking round the class discretely, listening to pairs or groups and quietly repeating the correct form where there is an error giving the student time to repeat it and continue the flow of speech.
- Use finger correction where errors are in tense, stress or pronunciation by pointing where there is a mistake. This will help to correct missing words and incorrect words.
- Use classroom interactive activities to boost learning of speaking and writing activities like debates, story telling, dialogues play, speech writing e.t.c.
- Learners should be encouraged to have positive attitude towards the English subject. Teachers should provide learners with a variety of books and to read and expose learners to audio visual aids. Learner's attitude was found to be negative from the findings
- Schools should develop a language policy so that learners speak English language at the required time.
- Teachers should emphasize the importance of English subject in relation to other subjects. Apart from that teachers should encourage learners by informing them on the careers that can be done in relation to English subject so that learners can know that English is like any other subject that has careers.
- Based on the research findings, the study concludes that the value of using oral approaches is not popular with most of the teachers. Teacher respondents indicated that learners didn't like oral approaches as it revealed weaknesses of the learners.
- In relation to the conclusion in the foregoing paragraph teachers should design oral activities such as discussion debates reciting of poems, implement the use of radio lessons so that they listen to how lessons are presented orally and the importance of using oral mode. This will help learners generate ideas, encourage a free flow of thoughts and help students discover proper ways of presenting themselves orally and written forms.
- The study takes the view that teachers should vary the teaching methods and integrate language arts when integration supports desirable growth and also recognize the need for planning independent and discrete learning experiences in the two skills oral and writing for learners and achieve their goals. The tally's with the findings of Magut Z (2003) who suggests that oral skills should be integrated with the other skills which are listening, reading and writing.
- Teachers should be innovative; apart from what is in the curriculum to teach oral skills they should develop other ways of using oral approaches to develop writing skills.

Conclusion

The recommendations should encourage teachers of English to appreciate the components of the oral forms that helps teachers to improve writing skills for the learners. The study holds the view that oral language approaches towards developing writing skills provides basic principles of instruction which if applied consistently, can make the learning of English language more effective and the learning experiences of the learners more concrete and more enjoyable. Speaking fluently will help improve writing skills if the English language is used consistently.

However, more emphasis should be put in speaking and writing because they serve as end product of learning experiences. Interviews mostly test on speaking competence (ability to speak fluently) while curriculum vitae and application letters tests one's ability to write coherently concerning the flow of ideas.

Suggestions for further research

From the discussion it is realized that in practice, many teachers do not effectively utilize the appropriate methodology, contents and learning experiences for effective use of oral language approaches. The information

obtained can provide data for those concerned with English Language, teaching, researchers and educationists. In order to obtain more information on the use of oral language in Kenya Secondary Schools the following are suggestions for areas of further research:

- The impact of early childhood education on performance in oral and writing skills in English subject
- Integration of oral approaches and other English approaches and their effects on learning writing skills.

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Appendix

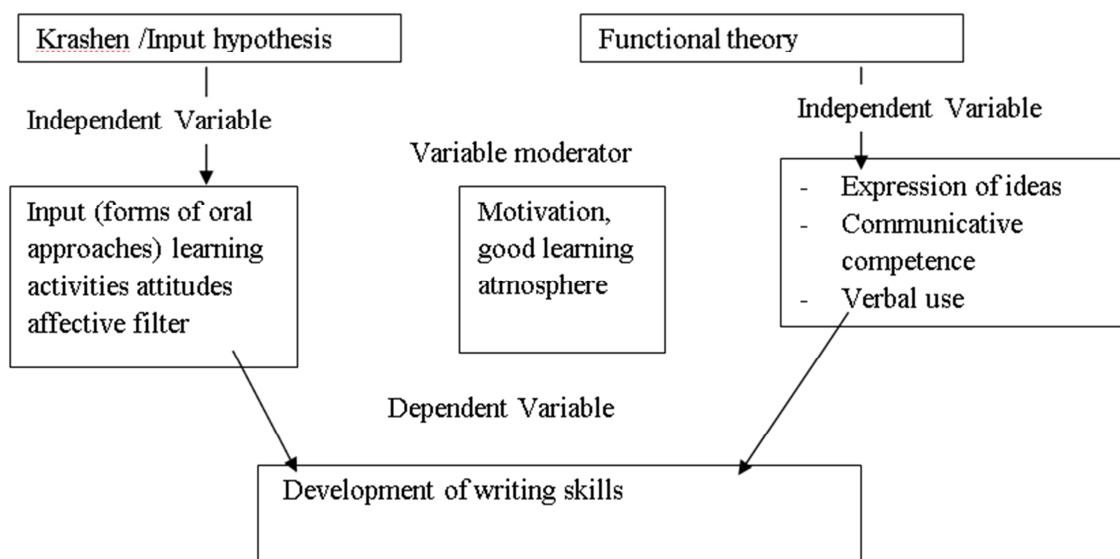


Figure 1: Theoretical and Conceptual frame work showing relationship between oral approaches (independent variables) and writing skills (dependent variable).

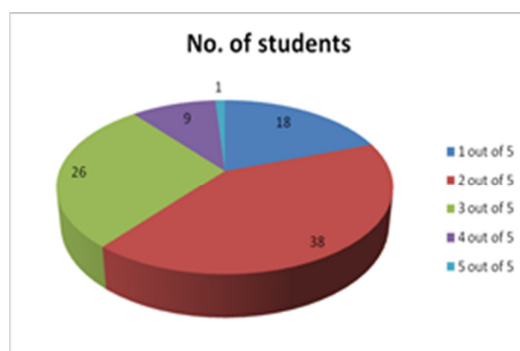


Figure 2: Pie chart on observation scores on pronunciation/proper articulation of learners' speech.

Table 1: Sample size

Category of school number respond	Total number of schools	Sample size in category	Actual
Provincial	14	14/64x20 = 7	6
District	50	50/64x30-23	22
Total	64	64/64x30=30	28

Table 2: Expressing ideas logically and coherently

Valid scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	1	2.4	2.5	2.5
Disagree	1	2.4	2.5	5.0
Neutral	2	4.9	5.0	10.0
Agree	15	36.6	37.5	47.5
Strongly agree	21	51.2	52.5	100.0
Total	40	97.6	100.0	
Missing system	1	2.4		
Total	41	100		

Table 3: Oral and writing are academic, students need to learn speaking and writing in school

Valid scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	5	12.2	12.2	
Disagree	10	24.4	24.4	
Neutral	6	14.6	14.6	
Agree	15	36.6	36.6	
Strongly agree	5	12.2	12.2	
Total	41	100	100.0	

Table 4: Constraints

Valid scale	Limited time	Learners indiscipline	Too many students	Learners primary foundation	Lack of exposure to ICT
Strongly agree	9(22%)	7(17.1%)	16(39%)	21(51.2%)	14(34.1%)
Agree	15(36.6%)	14(34.1%)	15(36.6%)	16(39%)	13(31.8%)
Neutral	7(17.1%)	7(17.1%)	4(9.8%)	2(4.9%)	6(14.6%)
Disagree	7(17.1%)	8(19.5%)	4(9.8%)	1(2.4%)	7(17.1%)
Strongly disagree	3(7.3%)	5(12.2%)	2(4.9%)	1(2.4%)	1(2.4%)

Table 5: Attitude towards oral approaches

Item	Frequency	Percentages
Positive	12	29.3
Neutral	10	24.4
Negative	19	46.3
Total	41	100.0

Table 6: Attitude towards English Language

Item	Frequency	Percentages
Positive	16	39.0
Neutral	15	36.6
Negative	10	24.4
Total	41	100.0

Table 7: Features of Language and their impact on student communication

Features of language	Impact on student communication
Poor language grammar	Fear to talk
Poor sentence construction	Lack of confidence in expression
Inaccuracy in message deterring	Giving wrong meaning
Poor interpretation of context	Improper choice of language for occasion (code switching)
Weak vocabulary	Lack of variety words and phrasal application, repetition of common words.

Table 8: Observation on pronunciation / proper articulation of learners' speech

Score	No. of students	Percentage
1 out of 5	18	19.6
2 out of 5	38	41.3
3 out of 5	26	28.3
4 out of 5	9	9.8
5 out of 5	1	1
Total	92	100