



The use of Kiswahili Language and Learning Approaches in Classroom Interaction: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Dodoma, Tanzania

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Abstract: *Creating learning approaches on classroom interaction for sustainable learning development among secondary students requires an understanding of proper language to use. This study explored the use of Kiswahili language in line with Education Policy imposes a greater role for Kiswahili in teaching and learning, particularly in classroom interaction in Dodoma, Tanzania. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the intervention strategies in classroom interaction that are better for students' learning, to analyze the use of Kiswahili in classroom activities and to show the usefulness of changing instructional language. The research employed a sample size of 30 respondents and was done qualitatively with the use of simple statistics. The data were collected through interviews, observations and focus group discussion. The findings revealed that most students are currently being instructed in the language which they are not confident and this impact on both their learning outcomes and experiences. Kiswahili seems to be a favourable language in Tanzania although the medium of instruction in secondary education is in English after primary education where teachers and students use Kiswahili as familiar and national language. Kiswahili was declared in classroom-based approaches centred on teaching and learning as well as a socio-cultural language. In additional, the study recommends East African countries to make use of Kiswahili in their national curriculum.*

Key words: Kiswahili, Approach, Strategy, Interaction, Dodoma, Tanzania

1. Introduction

Kiswahili language became the medium of instruction in primary schools in Tanzania from 1967 and English as the language of instruction in secondary schools. This has created a national debate on the language policy of Tanzania. Some scholars are in the opinion that Kiswahili should be the only medium of instruction throughout the educational system because English is limited in use and it is not used outside the classroom as well as where teachers provide group work activities in classroom activities, hence it is suggested that the government, through its organs, should revisit its language policy for education (Brock-Utne et al, 2003). However, other scholars like Kadege (2010) fear that Tanzania is ignoring global communication opportunities because of poor competence in English language.

Today, the Tanzanian curriculum emphasizes learner-centred approach in which the student is the focus. This implies that every learner has an ability to learn and the teacher's main task is to facilitate knowledge, through interactive approaches in the learning process. Therefore such curriculum emphasizes participatory methods of teaching and learning. In the whole process of teaching and learning, the teacher must ensure that every student gets an opportunity to participate fully in the learning activities, regardless of their differences. Such view of teaching and learning is mainly based on the philosophy of education for self-reliance.

This study argues that, intensifying the use of English as a language of learning and teaching at secondary level of education is a policy challenge in a country using more than one language where local languages are not emphasised. The context and country wide indicates that

the use of the Kiswahili (representing local languages) enhances meaningful interaction in the teaching and learning process, particularly in primary education, where it is used as a medium of instruction. This study puts that integrating learning approaches with intervention strategies and the language which students masters from their life experience, foster the learning development among students in secondary schools.

According to constructivists, both language and learning processes are socially constructed. Students learn new ideas by interpreting new experiences in light of their prior knowledge so that the new ideas come to make sense to the learner. The strengths of constructivism lie in the construction of knowledge and what it means for students and teachers. This implies that knowledge is constructed in action and must be constructed by individual knowledge in a shared language of reasoning whereby students dominate the process while teachers function as facilitators.

This study argues that when teachers talk to students in a language they understand, it creates meaningful interaction to their knowledge gaining and leads to sustainable learning. However, due to prevailing multilingual societies, the need for the useful language of instruction could be the base for communication in classroom interaction. For some years, Kiswahili has been a widely spread language and used for intercultural communication, the situation has taken on a strong position in east and central African countries. This favours the use of Kiswahili language in education.

In line with other researchers, including Maalim (2014), Brock-Utne (2012) and Babaci-Wilhite (2012), show Zanzibar as a Swahili-speaking island in which the linguistic situation of the use of Swahili favours its use in curriculum. Unlike the use of English or any other foreign language, the use of Swahili leads to no communication barrier for both learners and teachers. Similarly, Babaci-Wilhite (2013) study conducted in Zanzibar reveal the same results that the use of foreign language as a language of learning and teaching is an obstacle for the provision of quality education. The problem of mismatch between language of learning and teaching with teachers' and learners' competencies in English is also reported as a common problem in Tanzania.

Studies by Criper and Dodd (1984) and Malekela (2003) as well as Ndabakurane (2012), as cited in Samweli (2014), show that low knowledge of proficiency in English between teachers and students is among the factors that lead to low standards and quality of education in Tanzania. Poor learning approaches have been blamed for this low academic achievement. However, little has been carried out through studies to determine the link between learning approaches with teaching strategies and language use in classroom instruction. This study sought to find out how Kiswahili language influences learning approaches and strategies on learners' academic

achievement in secondary schools of Dodoma municipality.

2. Review of Related Literature and Studies

Classroom intervention strategies have been changing for many years. It is very essential to see how classroom interaction enables teachers and students learn better in classroom interaction. Positive social interactions among students are keys to cognitive, social, and language development (Bruce & Hansson, 2010). While constructivism theory has been found positive in classroom interaction (Samweli, 2014; Maalim, 2014; Duke et al, 2013), it is very important that knowledge is actively constructed from the experience and is modified through different learning activities. Problem solving and understanding are emphasized in this theory. Authentic tasks, experiences, collaboration, and assessment are among other important factors in this view of learning (Save the Children, 2011; Brock-Utne et al, 2014).

Studies show that learners are to be responsible for their own learning (Chika, 2012; Dude et al, 2013). This is based on the view that learners' involvement must engage students in learning, and bring their current understanding to the front position. This implies that to understand means to discover or reconstruct by means of rediscovery. Learners go through stages in which they accept ideas they may later change or do not accept. Therefore, understanding is built up through several steps of participation and involvement and learners cannot be considered as passive in any of stages of learning development. The current study sought the approaches of classroom activities employed in Kiswahili and their influence in learning development.

The language policy by Spolsky (2009) was a good guide to this study. The policy points on language beliefs, language practices, and language management. Language beliefs refer to a people's set of ideologies about the suitability of language practices. This may be a guide leading to choosing which language is appropriate in the community. Researches conducted in the African context and globally indicate that the use of the mother tongue as a proper medium of instruction enhances learning (Save the Children, 2011; UNESCO, 2010).

This study considered the change of instructional language associated with mother tongue as important to maintaining learning development. This implies that it is our right to choose to use a language. Tanzania has more than 120 diverse languages. Kiswahili serves as a mother tongue and the most familiar language identifying national as well as official language. This language is a resource tool that can be used to alleviate tension, contradiction, and challenges that emerge from classroom interaction.

3. Research Methodology

This section discusses the methodology used in this study. It includes research method used, study area, and data collection procedures.

3.1 Research Methods

Descriptive survey design was adopted in conducting the study. Descriptive survey design was chosen because it is appropriate for educational concept finding as it yields a great deal of accurate information. It also enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The sample size was 30 including 16 students, 10 teachers and 4 educational administrators. Purposive sampling was used to allow the researcher to get the required cases in congruent to the objectives of the study. In addition, the study employed simple random sampling to get students.

3.2 Area of Study

The study was conducted in Dodoma Urban District. The area is also known as Dodoma Municipal Council being one of the seven districts of the Dodoma region in Tanzania. It is bordered to the west by Bahi district and to the east by Chamwino. Its administrative place is the city of Dodoma. The area was selected in the fact that it is the largest city and capital of the region, consisting multi-ethnic groups. The main tribes of the region are the Wagogo, the Warangi and the Wasandawe. All these drew an attention to work on language use in classroom interaction. In many school activities, teachers were aware that the use of English as a language of learning and teaching was a problem. Instead they used Kiswahili to communicate and solve students' problem.

3.3 Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data were obtained from a total of 30 respondents who were purposively selected. Primary data was collected using self-prepared interview from teachers and students. The interview criterion was that the person interviewed from each school should be permanently residing in that area for the past one year. In the interview, participants responded to the questions that addressed the following particulars: the usefulness of both languages Kiswahili and English, learning approaches with strategies and changing language. Secondary data were obtained from governing authorities and published materials like journals, books and other relevant materials.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are discussed in three subsection guided by the research objectives. The researcher asked respondents to provide their views and experiences on teaching and learning in classroom interaction in line with the use of language.

4.1 Students' Intervention Strategies in Classroom Interaction

Pedagogical approaches were explored, which appeared to have strategies believed to improve the academic achievement of students' performance. Teachers and students were asked to mention the intervention strategies in classroom interaction that are better for students' learning. The results include: 1) approaches centred on students; 2) Engaging students in critical thinking activities; 3) approaches which attempt to create peer learning; 4) putting a learning environment through mastery language

Table: 1 intervention strategies in classroom interaction

Strategy	N= 20	%
Approaches Centred on students	18	90
Critical thinking activities	15	75
To create peer learning	14	70
Mastery of language	12	60

The most mentioned strategy in classroom interaction was classroom-based approach centred on students 18(90%) though few respondents reported that mastery of language was also the useful strategy. Results imply that there was no greater student involvement. The study further observed that Teachers' dominance in classroom interaction was due to the fact that most of them assumed to be sources of knowledge and only speakers of English language.

Nevertheless, the responses above show that these strategies are not self-contained and independent. As our work in secondary schools suggested, there must be an integration of different approaches if their impact is to be maximised. It is equally clear, however, that language of instruction is of central importance if schools are to be successful in developing images quality education and engaging them in classroom activities. Thus, the research suggests an integration of language use and learning approaches when:

1. A variety of interactive classroom activities are adopted, with Kiswahili so that both facilitate learning activities and more sustainability.
2. Acknowledgement is given to the central importance of talk, to speaking and listening as a means of supporting writing and reading.
3. Teachers should prepare class activities in local language that seem to bring more creativity and knowledge innovations.

The current study went further through FGDs to observe the teaching styles of using Kiswahili language in classrooms established by both students and teachers. Results showed that Kiswahili language employed in the teaching and learning of various subject contents as an integrated subject inclusive of grammar, composition and literature in relation to learners' academic achievement.

This could be interpreted that Kiswahili was easily understood and improved their interaction. The study by Johnstone (1989) gives an extended idea that language switch into mother tongue avoids communication trouble and creates cooperative interaction.

The research indicates that using Kiswahili as both local language and mother tongue, to most students in the classroom, enhances classroom participation and increases likelihood of teacher's engagement in the learner's critical thinking activities and problem solving learning. Research also shows that using Kiswahili as the medium of instruction enhances the learners' cognitive learning processes, and that learner-centred learning has to be carried out in a language the student speaks in order to be effective.

The study further revealed that most teachers resort to lecture strategy using both English and Kiswahili. This could be seen as an example of lack of English language in secondary schools that would enable teachers to engage students actively in the learning process. Tanner (2009) similarly found that teacher dominated classroom talk and students talked only when they were called upon like in the case of answering questions. Only that his study was on approaches to teaching and learning of life sciences while the current study focused on the teaching and learning through the use of Kiswahili language.

4.2 The use of Kiswahili in Classroom Activities

The researcher under this objective sought to know whether Kiswahili is used in classroom interaction. Two focus group discussions (FGD) of both teachers and students with 6 members each were conducted in the research area. Through this method, teachers and students were asked to mention the use of Kiswahili in classroom activities. The results showed evidences on teachers to dominate most of the lesson time using both English and Kiswahili while students were using Kiswahili throughout in group work activities.

The use of two languages is well known as code-switching. An analysis of respondents' use of code-switching revealed as functional tool for communication between classroom participants. In classroom activities, teachers' talk through code-switching enabled them to provide clarification, reasons and intended meaning while learners respond accordingly, interpreting and negotiating meaning of the target language skill which in its turn leads to a communicative classroom.

Interviewed students' reasons behind this use of Kiswahili in classroom activities include the following factors:

1. Kiswahili as mother tongue to most students in classrooms, enhances classroom participation;
2. When Kiswahili is used as the medium of instruction, it enhances the learner's intellectual abilities in the learning processes;
3. Kiswahili creates learner-centred learning that carried out in a language they speak in order to be effective.

However, all respondents agreed in the use of Kiswahili since it is the national language that has been recognized by law. The medium of instruction in primary education in Tanzania is Kiswahili while at tertiary education the language is taught as an option and a compulsory subject at secondary education.

Evidences above imply that for a student to gain a deeper understanding, language plays a vital role in improving the quality of education. The report finds positive links between using the learner's local language through the use of Kiswahili language and learning outcomes. The report highlights that other countries should promote their local languages or mother-tongue language policies. Despite the fact that practices in schools frequently diverge from local languages, international languages such as English and French are associated with colonialists and perceived as foreign language in Africa, particularly Tanzania.

Classroom talk should go with a language which enables students to understand well in their classroom activities. Anorue (2004) noted that an effective classroom is one in which the teacher uses varied teaching styles for instruction. In a study on approaches to teaching and learning life sciences, Tanner (2009) observed that teachers dominated classroom talk and students talked only when called upon like in the case of answering questions. Callahan (2005) found that the lecture-based format of most secondary school instruction lacked the flexibility necessary to meet the critical discussions and academic needs of learners. Roblyer (2006) noted that constructivists believe that knowledge is generated by the learners through experience-based activities using the language they understand rather than directed by teachers.

4.3 The Usefulness of Changing Instructional Language for Students' Achievement

The current study intended to explore the usefulness of changing instructional language for students' achievement. In the second objective teachers involved learners in communicative approaches to improve students' academic achievement through the use of Kiswahili language. Thus, teachers employed Kiswahili as a method of instruction in classes. From the data collection, this research coded responses on the views of respondents towards changing instructional language for

students' achievement. After tallying up respondents' responses, the results were summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table: 2 Reasons for Changing Instructional Language

Factors	N= 20	%
Adequate Kiswahili competency	20	100
Code Switching and Code Mixing	18	90
Poor English proficiency	17	85

The findings in Table 2 indicated that majority of respondents 20(100%) agreed to have adequate Kiswahili competence compared to 17(85%) who agreed to have poor English proficiency. It is interesting that both teachers and students in secondary schools agreed on lack of adequate English proficiency. The good example given was that when students were given questions to discuss in small groups, they used Kiswahili language, but when they were asked to present the given assignment, some were reported to ask their co-students for help because they were generally assertive and they could not give spontaneous responses to the teacher through English language.

Though, English and Swahili were used through code switching and code mixing as languages of learning and teaching, students seemed to follow when Kiswahili were used. This implies that students feared and preferred not to share their feelings in public as English language hinders them. This case may be explained through changing instructional language from English to Kiswahili. There is clear evidence that changing Kiswahili as instructional language for students' achievement in secondary schools is linked to adequate Kiswahili competency, Code Switching and Code Mixing as well as Poor English proficiency. However, achievement in the language is highly dependent on the methods used in its instruction.

4.4 Factors Limiting English language in classroom interaction

On this subheading through interviews and FGDs, respondents mentioned limiting factors on the use of English language in classroom interaction. Results showed that teachers and students were limited by a number of factors. These included:

- Negative attitude towards English language
- Lack of teaching and learning materials in English language
- Lack on English language competence to both teachers and students

All these show that both teachers and students lacked good foundations of English language skills.

Consequently, the mentioned factors contributed to poor performance and poor interaction in classroom learning.

4.5 Evidences of Using Kiswahili outside the Classroom Interaction

The current study went another step further through FGDs and literature review and observed that both Kiswahili and English are the most influential transethnic languages in East Africa (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998) and they are used in sacred to secular activities. However, Kiswahili is of identity and heritage to most East Africans (Ngugi, 1993). Responses from FGDs show some areas and activities where Kiswahili language has been used for a number of years:

1. In music though; lyrics, melodies and tune that finds expression in Kiswahili language.
2. In literary works through; those written in English have now been translated into Kiswahili eg, *Usilie Mpenzi* (weep not child); *Mfalme ediponde* (Oedipus the King). *Mabepari wa venisi* (Merchants of Venice); *Julius Kaizari* (Julius Caesar); *Mkaguzi wa Serikali* (The government Inspector) *na Barua Ndefu kama Hii* (Long Letter).
3. Politics through; join political ventures- Kiswahili in one of the optional language.
4. In religion through; preaching, interpretation and translation using the Bible and Quran.

All these facilitate interaction and integrate the East Africans people (Habwe, 2001). Thus; we would suggest an integration of Kiswahili language use as an intervention strategy for sustainable learning.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study evidences support several recommendations that the sweeping changes will put to an end the teachers' dominant talk. Sustainable development implies effective communication, which in turn implies the use of a language that is well understood (Kiswahili) by the target audience. It is time for the policy makers to begin to make a difference in how students learn by encouraging student-to-student interaction, initiating lessons that will foster cooperative learning, and provide opportunities for students to be exposed to interdisciplinary curriculum. Finally, language of instruction, along with other features of quality education such as appropriate curriculum, teacher learning approaches and effective strategies, is central to successful learning.

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