



SOCIO-CULTURAL LINGUISTIC ASPECT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF TEACHER-LEARNER INTERACTION ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ON SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN KENYA

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Abstract

It is believed that understanding the dynamics of classroom communication is essential because how students learn, talk and act in the classroom greatly influences what they learn. The current study therefore aimed at investigating the socio-cultural linguistic aspects influencing learner participation in the learning of English language in selected secondary schools in Kitui Central Sub-County. The study was prompted by the believe that since language is part of culture and learning takes place in a social environment, there is a need to study the socio-cultural linguistic aspects that influence the learning of English language. The objectives of this study were informed by Hymes (1972) Communicative Language Theory approach that promotes the idea that social and cultural knowledge are prerequisite for understanding and using linguistic forms. The researcher adopted a case study research design and purposive simple random sampling techniques was used to get a sample population of 100 students and 10 teachers of English from the target population of 522 students and 40 teachers of English. Questionnaire, interview guides and observation guide were used to collect data. Quantitative data presented an overview while the qualitative data either confirmed or disconfirmed the quantitative data. The key findings of this study revealed that three categories of classroom verbal interaction often used by teachers were teacher talk, student and silence. Teacher reprimanding students, poor pronunciation, overcorrection, fear to be laughed at, demotivating learners and limited vocabulary hinder learner participation. The study concluded that question and answers method should be emphasized since it influences positive learning outcome. The study further concluded that there is a big influence of Sheng outside classroom.

Keywords: socio-cultural linguistic aspects, teacher-learner interaction, English language

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1. Introduction

Studies have shown that as the world continues to become more and more interconnected, the spread and importance of English on every continent has become increasingly more pronounced and the link between globalization and English is tangible (The triumph of English, 2011). The power of the English language is seen in the political, economic and educational spheres of the global stage. According to Crystal (2003), English is an official or working language of most international political gatherings throughout the world and 85% of international organizations use English as the official language of communication. Furthermore, Coleman (2010), writing for The British Council, highlights the link between countries' educational and economic policies on English where he cites a study that found out that *"countries pursuing an economic strategy based on exports and the attraction of foreign capital should adapt their language education policies to the requirements of that economy strategy"*.

Today, 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa use English either as an official language exclusively (like Nigeria and Ghana) or as an official language alongside other African languages (like in Kenya or South Africa) (Negash, 2011; World Fact book, 2013). In Kenya English language has been given a high status than native languages. It is used in all government communications, compulsory subjects in education system hence taught from standard one to university Ongondo (2009). As such, the importance of attaining communicative competence in English language in Kenya Education system cannot fail to be overemphasized. However, in Kenya, studies have shown that students lack communicative and linguistic competence and often code switching to sheng, Kiswahili and English languages during conversation or in group discussion in class (Gudu, 2010). Globally, there is a debate that majority of high school graduates cannot speak language properly. (Albarbi, 2015)

2. Statement of the Problem

The studies done have consistently examined teacher factors and student factors as well as classroom factors that affect participation in the classroom as well as influencing the learning of English language. However, on the issue classroom interaction from the socio-cultural linguistic aspects in the learning of English language; there are scanty studies that have been done, particularly in Kitui County, Kenya. This is worrying given the fact that a classroom is a social environment comprising of members from variety of cultural background. This leaves a gap on ascertaining the interaction in English lessons with a view to investigate the socio-cultural linguistic aspects of teacher-learner interaction on English language learning in schools in Kitui Central Sub-County.

3. Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to critically analyze the impact of socio-cultural linguistic aspect of teacher –learner interaction on English language learning in secondary schools in Kenya.

4. Objectives

1. To analyse critically the verbal interaction patterns in the English language classroom in secondary schools in Kenya.
2. To analyze critically the socio-cultural aspects of teacher learner interaction that influences the learning of English in Kenyan secondary schools.
3. To analyze the extent to which these socio-cultural linguistic aspects affect learners' interaction in the English language classroom in Kenyan secondary schools.
4. To analyze critically the strategies that encourage learner participation in the English language learning classrooms in Kenya.

5. Research Questions

1. What are the verbal interaction patterns in the English language classroom that measure students learning outcome?
2. What are socio-cultural linguistic aspects in the classroom discourses that hinder learner participation in English language?
3. Which strategies can be employed during the teaching and learning process that encourages learner participation in English language?
4. To what extent do these socio-cultural aspects influence the teaching and learning of English language?

6. Research Methodology

The researcher employed the Communicative Language Theory (CLT) by Dell Hymes (1972), in his work, Hymes extended Noam Chomsky's theory of "linguistic competence". Michael Canale & Merrill Swain (1980) further developed the concept of linguistic competence. Canale defines communicative competence as the underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication. He divided the communicative competence into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

In this study, a case study was adopted in this study to have an in depth understanding of what goes on in the English language classroom. This means that case studies can be used to understand real life phenomena. This design was therefore adopted because the researcher believed that it had the potential for providing important data that could capture and answer the study's objectives and questions. Furthermore, it was to enable the researcher to correctly explore and collect richer and greater depth of data. Another case

studies research design is that it allows one to present data from multiple methods such as interviews, document reviews and observation (Sibanda, 2012).

7. Literature Review

7.1 Critical analysis on the impact of verbal interaction in English classroom in secondary schools in Kenya

Ibrahim (2012) carried a study with an aim of investigating the influence of classroom interaction in second language (L2) teaching and learning among the teachers of British University, Dubai. His study was guided by Vygotskian socio-cultural theory of development. In this study, the researcher found out that the classroom interaction might depend on teachers preparedness of activities that arouse students attention and stimulates them to learn so the lesson which had variety of activities were more interactive than those with minimal interactive activities. He further noted that in-group and pair work activities learners have the opportunity to engage in the zones of proximal development and consequently learning is facilitated. The researcher then concluded that classroom interaction is sustained during interaction as students negotiate meanings and modify utterances hence feedback, is essential to explain whether the acquired utterance is correct and gives opportunities to focus on production and comprehension. He then recommended different patterns of interactions to be employed like pair/group work which will extend opportunities for output and results in negotiation of meaning which enhance SLA.

Joan Gorham (1988) identified a set of verbal teacher immediacy behaviors, which similarly relate to increased student learning. Results indicated differentiated use of various types of verbal immediacy messages between small and larger classes, and that the impact of teacher immediacy behaviour (both - verbal and non- verbal) on learning is coincidentally enhanced as class size increases. In contrast, Tsomet Nugent (2009) examined interaction and vocabulary. In his study, he determined the value and impact of student –teacher interactions in relation to student motivation and achievement.

Meanwhile Cheruiyot (2015) did a study on verbal interaction patterns in relation to students' performance in physics in Baringo sub-county. In his study, he used Flanders Interactional Analysis Categories System FIACS (1970) Theory. The findings obtained showed that teachers whose classrooms were dominated by indirect verbal interaction patterns had their students participate more than those of teachers whose lesson were dominated by direct verbal interaction patterns. The ultimate results of this study revealed that schools which used indirect verbal interaction recorded higher performance in physics as compared to those schools, which used direct verbal interaction. These studies informed this research to categorize verbal interaction patterns and student learning outcome in the classroom. Cheruiyot's study is similar to the current study in that both studies employ similar methodologies in analyzing data and making the conclusions. However, Whereas Cheruiyot's study aimed at determining the relationship between verbal interaction patterns

and learner performance the current study aimed at investigating the socio-cultural aspects of classroom interaction.

7.2 Related studies on socio-cultural linguistic aspects of teacher-learner in learning of English in secondary schools

The nature of silence in classroom is complex with different students possessing distinct beliefs, social norms, and cultural backgrounds. There are several factors that contribute to students' reluctance to speak up and participate in classroom activities. One of these factors is the method of teaching. According to Valiathan (2009), Direct Instruction is used to describe learning material in which the teacher or expert transmits information directly to learners structuring learning time to reach a clearly defined set of objectives as efficiently as possible. Direct instruction is described as teacher-directed and fast-paced, using a highly structured presentation of antecedents and consequences (Gersten, Woodward, & Darch, 1986). This meticulously developed, highly scripted method allows constant interactions between the student and the teacher. The responsibility for student learning rests directly with the teacher's design and delivery of instruction, which includes frequent opportunities to respond during the initial teaching sequence (Texas Guide for Effective Teaching, 2010). Direct Instruction according to Binder and Watkins (1990) is based on the assumption that disadvantaged children can catch up with their more affluent peers if they are provided with effective and efficient instruction. This method of teaching does not give learners in class enough time to contribute. The main purpose of a direct instruction is to meet the unique needs of low achievers or students who are struggling in school or students with special effects of Direct & Indirect Instructional Strategies on Students socio cultural (Harumi, 2010) issues.

Gholami (2012) did a study in Malaysia with students of Pacific Campus enrolled in teaching majors from the campus of Costa Rica. His main objective was to explore the different social conditions that influence the effective learning of second language. According to Gholami, the social contexts is believed to have an influence on students' attitude and motivation by providing learning opportunities that will enhance learners' outcomes. Based on this study, it is understood that students acquire a language by using social interaction with speakers of that language. However, according to the researcher, the significance of the social context is usually underestimated in many countries.

Ximena & Medina (2013) did a similar study with an attempt to find out the socio-cultural factors involved in teaching of English as a foreign language in the rural areas of Colombia. The study findings showed that rural environment do not offer appropriate conditions for learning second language. Due to these rural areas, teachers face professional challenges and have to cope with different needs. In contrast, urban areas have a privilege of accessing to tools that aid language learning e.g. media, technology because language comes implicitly from using such tools. He then suggested that there is a need for more research based in rural areas to contribute to the betterment of language learning and teaching process in these disadvantaged and less privileged contexts such as most rural area of the country.

7.3 Related studies on strategies encouraging learner participation in English classes in secondary schools in Kenya

According to Yu (2009) two of the most common ways through which second language teachers create participation in class is to ask questions and provide feedback, and all of these need some considerations, focusing on questions and feedback can be anticipated to show useful findings which will cause to deeper perceptions about the ways to improve second language teaching and learning.

Teachers in the classroom can use a variety of strategies to develop classroom interaction by encouraging students to negotiate meaning when they do not understand what is required of them. Tran's and Le's (2013) examined the strategies the English teachers used in managing large classes. The results indicated that majority of the teachers reported to adopt teamwork, group work and peer work as strategies to make students more responsible and active in their study. Another strategy encouraging learner classroom interaction is the use of questions.

Hamilogh and Temez (2012) studied the impact of questioning behaviour in two EFL classrooms from one private primary and one from one state primary .The results showed that there is evidence regarding the impact of teachers' questions on students learning. Questioning as a strategy should therefore be encouraged as it elicits students' reflection and encourage students' engagement in the classroom.

7.4 Related literature on socio-cultural linguistic aspects influencing teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in Kenya

Anyanwa (2016) explored the factors affecting the English language use in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study findings revealed that the socio-cultural background of the learner has influence on the students' performance phenomena. It affects the student in the areas of grammar, phonology, semantics and spellings. The researcher concluded that teachers and learners of English should grapple with the challenges that impede effective mastery of English language.

According to the findings of Philip, Walter & Basturkmen (2010) peer interaction through tasks is an essential feature of communicative classroom; therefore, successful SLA requires peer interaction. While working in peers, students tend to write longer texts with more information than students working individually. Peer interaction complements teachers' fronted interaction by providing a context for greater opportunity for individual production and practice as well as meaningful use of the target language. It is therefore necessary for language teachers to initiate various activities and tasks that provide peer interaction.

Zhang (2008) conducted a study to reveal the interrelation between classroom discourse and student learning. This study concluded that, the quality of student learning is closely associated with the quality of classroom discourse. Therefore improving the quality of classroom discourse, will ultimately increases the quality of students learning.

8. Conclusion

Classroom verbal interaction patterns such as teacher having a good relationship with students, asking students questions while in class and encouraging learners in class are central categories of teacher- student classroom verbal interaction patterns and when emphasized , will influence students learning outcome. Majority of students preferred pair/group discussion method of learning. Lack of vocabulary, personal belief and cultural beliefs and customs are a major hindrance to learner participation in classroom; the study found out that the most preferred language used by students in class, outside and home was Swahili, even when majority of respondents said that English language was easy to them. Influence of sheng was evident where students even use it in class, outside and at home more than English.

9. Recommendations

Following the findings and conclusions made, the following recommendations were made by the researcher, which if implemented, would improve the implementation of the social-cultural linguistic aspect of teacher-learner interaction on learning the English Language.

- a) Students should be encouraged and motivated to use English language for communication most of the time while in class and even outside class to enhance their proficiency and boost their attitude and perception.
- b) English teachers' capacity building should be done regularly to enhance their ability to teach well on topics they find hard to teach.
- c) Although all aspects of classroom verbal interaction patterns are important, more emphasis on aspects like pair/ group discussions, dialogue and encouraging/ motivating students to participate should be emphasised
- d) Language teachers should learn to be friendly and not embarrass students who give wrong answers in classroom participation.
- e) The government and other education stakeholders should look for more career projects for English professionals in order to enhance students love and focus in English language.
- f) The researcher suggested that a comparative study similar to this should be done focusing on schools in urban and rural setting.
- g) A comprehensive study on effects of Swahili and Sheng language to English language in schools should be done by future researchers.
- h) The researcher recommends that a detailed study comparing schools with consistent higher and low mean grade scores in English language should be done

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