

Motivating Learners in the Teaching and Learning of the English Language Curriculum in Schools in Kenya: The Teacher's Role

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Abstract

In Kenya, English is the medium of instruction in all subjects (except other languages like Kiswahili and French) from upper primary school and beyond. It is also the official language. However, despite the importance attached to English in Kenya, cries have been heard over the falling standards in English in both primary schools and secondary schools. Motivation is one of the most important factors influencing learning success and especially language learning. This paper is a report on a study that investigated the strategies that teachers used in motivating learners in the teaching of oral communication skills in English. The study was undertaken in Nandi North district, Kenya in the year 2010. The study adopted Vygotsky's theory of social development and interaction. It utilized a qualitative research approach with a heuristic methodology. An exploratory research design was used. The research population consisted of primary school teachers teaching English in upper primary classes and standard six pupils. Data was collected using structured and focused group interviews and observations. This paper is a discussion of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this study.

Key words: English language, communication, motivation, language learning

1.0 Introduction

Motivation can be defined as the driving force felt or demonstrated by an individual in carrying out a task (Brumfit & Roberts, 1983). Ryan and Deci (2000) state that to be motivated means to be moved to do something. Unlike unmotivated people who can lose impetus and inspiration to act, motivated people are energized and activated to the end of a task. Croll and Hastings (1996:55) argue that motivation appears to explain so much that it is important in schools and should be given a priority concern for educational research. They postulate:

Motivation seems to explain why some children engage enthusiastically with their work, some misbehave and others sit quietly and do little; why some persevere in the face of difficulty and others give up as soon as the going gets tough; why some make good progress and others make little or none; why some take care with their work and others seem not to care.

Teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness (Thenasoulas, 2002). According to Ebata (2008) motivation in language learning plays a vital role. It produces effective second language communicators by planting in them the seeds of self-confidence. It also successfully creates learners who continuously engage themselves in learning even after they complete a targeted goal. Thenasoulas (2002) asserts that motivation in the classroom is indicated by appropriate teacher behaviour and good teacher-student rapport, a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere and a cohesive learner group characterised by appropriate group norms.

In language learning, motivation creates in students the drive in to acquire the targeted language, enjoy the learning process, and experience real communication (Ebata, 2008). Oxford and Shearin (1994) stipulates six factors that impact motivation in language learning. These are attitudes, beliefs about self, goals, involvement of the learner, environmental support and personal attributes.

Of importance is the fact that despite the importance attached to English in Kenya, cries have been heard over the falling standards in English in both primary schools and secondary schools (Syomwene, 2013). In the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Examination (K.C.P.E) results of the year 2005, the performance in English was poor. English recorded a mean score of 39.3. On releasing the KCPE results of the year 2006, the then Minister for Education Professor George Saitoti lamented that English was the worst performed subject in the examination recording a mean score of 40.68 (Daily Nation, December 29, 2006). He added that this trend had persisted. There was an improvement in the national mean grade in English in the KCPE results of the year 2007 from 40.68 to 43.35 respectively (Daily Nation, December 22, 2007). However it is important to note that the performance in English was still below average. At the time of this study, the performance in English in Nandi North district had been persistently poor. In the KCPE results of the year 2005, 2006 and 2007, English was the poorest performed subject recording a mean score of 48.82, 49.86 and 48.84 respectively (DEO's office, Nandi North District, 19th May, 2008). Table 1 below summarizes the performance in KCPE examination in Nandi North district in the years 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Table 1: Performance in KCPE Examination in Nandi North district in the years 2005, 2006 and 2007

<i>Year/Subject</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
English	48.82	49.86	48.84
Kiswahili	50.36	51.70	51.71
Mathematics	52.96	53.78	53.27
Science	51.95	53.65	53.35
Social Studies and Religious Education	52.58	51.82	52.01

(DEO's office, Nandi North District 19th May, 2008)

The poor performance in English in primary schools in Kenya and specifically in Nandi North District can partly be attributed to poor motivation of the learners. This is because motivation is one of the most important factors influencing learning success and especially language learning (Norris-Holt, 2001; Lile, 2002). This paper is a discussion of a research that was undertaken in primary schools

in Nandi North District on the strategies that teachers used in motivating learners in the teaching of oral communication skills in English.

1.1 Objective of the study

The objective of this study was: To explore the strategies that teachers used in motivating learners in the teaching of oral communication skills in English.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Vygotsky's (1978) social development and interaction theory. Vygotsky (1978) social development model asserts that interactions with the surrounding culture and social agents such as parents, teachers and more competent peers contribute significantly to a child's intellectual development. Cognitive development therefore is as a result of interaction. Cognitive development results from a dialectical process whereby a child learns through problem solving experiences shared with someone else, usually, a parent, a peer or a sibling. Initially, the person interacting with the child assumes most of the responsibility for guiding the problem solving but gradually the responsibility transfers to the child.

Based on this theory, Vygotsky advanced the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This is the difference between what a child can do on his/her own and what the child can do with help. In other words, it is the difference between the child's capacity to solve problems on his/her own and his/her capacity to solve them with assistance. It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. The actual development level refers to all the functions and activities that a child can perform on his/her own, independently and without the help of anyone else. According to Vygotsky (1978) full development of ZPD depends upon full social interaction.

The implication of Vygotsky's theory for this study was that motivation in language learning and teaching is dependent on interaction between the teacher, the pupils and the learning tasks.

1.3 Literature Review

Motivation is the backbone of any classroom and the language classroom in particular. In Kenya, most students come from rural environments and are therefore dependent on the classroom instruction in the learning of English (Syomwene, 2013). This section provides some literature review on motivation strategies in a language classroom.

1.3.1 The different types of motivation in the language classroom

In language learning, it's important to understand the distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is the desire to learn a language in order to achieve some goal that is not actually connected with the language itself but for which language is needed as an "instrument" in its attainment (Brumfit & Roberts, 1983; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Norris-Holt, 2001). According to Els et al, (1984) a student is instrumentally motivated if the purpose of language study reflects the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement such as getting ahead of one's occupation. Integrative motivation on the other hand comes about if the learner has the desire to master the language for its own sake and to "integrate" to some extent into the society which speaks it (Brumfit & Roberts, 1983; Ryan & Deci (2000; Norris-Holt, 2001). A learner who has integrative motivation wants to learn the Second Language as a means for close communication and acceptance by people who speak it (Lile, 2002). Norris-Holt (2001) asserts that while both integrative and instrumental motivations are essential elements of success, it is integrative motivation which has been found to sustain long-term success when learning a Second Language. The implication is that in Kenya, teachers should strongly motivate their learners because of the fact that most learners in Kenya are instrumentally motivated.

Motivation can also be said to be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Lile, 2002). Intrinsic motivation is motivation from within the student. An intrinsically motivated student studies because s/he wants to study. The material could be interesting, challenging and rewarding and the student receives some kind of satisfaction from learning. An extrinsically motivated student studies and learns for other reasons. Such a student studies in order to receive a reward like graduating or passing a test or getting a present or to avoid a penalty. Teachers should foster intrinsic motivation in their learners. This can be by helping lower the anxiety levels in the learners (Krashen & Terrel, 1988).

1.3.2 Recommended motivation strategies in the English language classroom

There are many ways through which teachers can motivate learners in English language learning. One way is by the teacher making his/her learning more meaningful and effective by using teaching techniques which involve the learner in communicative tasks, problems solving and information seeking. Els et al (1984) postulate that communication exercises stimulate motivation not only because they actively involve all learners but also because most learners conceive language as a means of communication. Teachers should ensure that learners are actively involved during English lessons by having them engage in communicative practices like dialogues, poetry recitation, discussions, drama, role plays and question and answer drills among others.

Stimulus variations serve to motivate learners as well. Perrot (1982: 28-29) defines stimulus variations as "those teacher actions sometimes planned and sometimes spontaneous that develop and maintain a high level of attention on the part of the pupils during the course of the lesson". The purpose is to have pupils attention focused on the lesson. The teacher should create a good classroom atmosphere by moving round the classroom while teaching and by varying the rate, tone and volume of his/ her speech (Perrot, 1982). If the teacher speaks too softly, the pupils will strain to hear him/her and lose interest in what is being said. Pupils can also lose interest if the teacher speaks in the same tone always.

Elicitation is a useful way of involving the class by focusing students' attention and making them to think (Doff, 1988; Baker & Westrup, 2000). Elicitation occurs when the teacher asks a series of simple questions that lead the students towards finding the answer for themselves (Baker & Westrup, 2000). It establishes what students know and what they do not know; encourages students to make guesses and to work out rules for themselves.

To motivate learners, teachers should use a variety of teaching aids. A well designed aid should promote perception, promote understanding, help reinforce the spoken word, aid memory retention, motivate and arouse interest through requiring students to use different senses to learn and make effective use of the teaching time available to learn. In the teaching of English, teachers can use such teaching aids like flashcards, pictures and real things.

Flash cards are cards showing a series of pictures or messages. They can be used to tell stories or to teach skills step by step. Their main advantage is that they are flexible because they are not attached together in a given order. They can be rearranged to tell different stories or to teach different ideas. The size of the cards normally depends on how they are to be used and how big the group is. The teacher can ask students questions based on the flash cards. The teacher should also pause after asking a question to give students time to think, encourage a range of answers from different students and write students' responses on the blackboard.

Real objects are things that the teacher and/or the students bring into the classroom (Doff, 1988). By using real objects, learners are able to conceptualize teacher's explanations of abstract ideas. Real objects add interest and relate language to the real world thereby sustaining the learners' interest in the learning process (Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

Pictures are effective in the teaching of English as they provide good opportunities to elicit a language (Afolayan et al, 1980, Doff, 1988). This is by asking students to describe the picture, to interpret things which are not clear in the picture and to imagine things beyond the picture. A series of pictures can provide the stimulus for telling a story and for work involving several tenses (Afolayan et al, 1980). The teacher can devise questions based on the pictures to practice a particular structure. The pictures used should be clear, recognizable and if are to be shown to all pupils must be visible from the back of the class. Krashen and Terrel (1988) advocates the use of pictures and other visuals in the teaching of a Second Language as well and says that they supply the "here and now" for the Second Language learner. They supply the extra linguistic context that helps the acquirer to understand and thereby to acquire.

At certain times during the lesson, like the start of a different activity or a new stage in the lesson, the teacher should call all the students to attention and make sure they are listening (Willis, 1984). Willis (1984) continues and suggests what teachers should do to aid pupils understanding: use gestures, speaking very slowly and clearly all the time, speaking simply with natural stress and intonation, repeating and paraphrasing, giving students time to think it out for themselves sometimes, giving lots of examples, using visual aids and establishing routines in class for various activities like pair work so that students know what to do without being told.

To motivate pupils, teachers should use English language only during English lessons (Doff, 1988; KIE, 2006; Willis, 1984; Baker & Westrup, 2000). English should be used in teaching the lesson, giving examples, asking questions, conveying the meaning of new language items, checking attendance, telling students where to sit, controlling the class, chatting to students and all other class activities. Another scholar, Willis (1984) recommends that teachers should teach English through English. This means using English in the classroom always like when organizing teaching activities or chatting to the students socially. English should be the main language of communication between the teacher and the students. The students should not mind if they make mistakes when they are talking or if they fail to understand every word said by the teacher. This is crucial in that it provides adequate exposure of pupils to English language and gives students the feeling of English as a real language used for communication not just as a language in a text book (Doff, 1988).

It is vital for the pupils to be exposed to situations where accurate English is spoken. The teacher should provide the model which the pupils can imitate. The teacher should perfect his speech so as to serve as the language model. Pupils learn language by imitating what they hear so if the model makes mistakes, pupils will also make mistakes (Afolayan et al, 1980). These sentiments touch on the importance of the teacher in providing correct pronunciations, stress and intonation patterns in words and sentences so as to serve as a correct role model for the pupils. Teachers should keep consulting the dictionary for correct pronunciation, stress and intonation. Learners are like sponges, they soak up everything that the teacher says and how it is said. Clear and correct pronunciation is of vital importance therefore, since young learners repeat exactly what they hear.

Teachers should encourage their pupils as a way of motivating them (Thenasoulas, 2002; Lile, 2002). Quist (2000:60) postulates that:

Genuine praise and encouragement are the methods that can be used to encourage a feeling of confidence and achievement and also to improve attitudes and change pupils' behaviour. Let each one know that you are interested in him/her, smile and speak in a friendly way and let pupils know that you really value their contributions.

In fact, every learner needs encouragement in language learning (Lile, 2002). Given the right help and encouragement every child can be keen to succeed in learning a language (Afolayan et al, 1980). Encouragement is an affirmation of belief in the pupils' potential and capacity to do better. The teacher should show interest in the subject matter. S/he should present the subject matter in a stimulating and interesting manner. This way the class cannot get demoralized.

The teacher should persuade the students to speak English by praising them (Willis, 1984). The teacher should tell them how clever they are and after a few weeks or months, the students will try things out for themselves. A tense classroom climate can undermine learning and demotivate learners (Thenasoulas, 2002). To be motivated to learn, students need both ample opportunities to learn and steady encouragement and support of their learning efforts. Encouraging students to become more active participants in a lesson can sometimes assist them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language (Lile, 2002). A positive and relaxed atmosphere is vital in achieving maximum results in language learning and teaching. A free and light-hearted atmosphere promotes communication, while a nervous and stiff atmosphere builds invisible obstacles in communication.

Another strategy of motivating learners in the learning of English language is that teachers should ensure that all the pupils participate in classroom activities. According to Thenasoulas (2002) everyone is more interested in a task if they feel that they make a contribution. To involve the class as much as possible, the teacher should think of interesting situations and examples, ask questions during the presentation, ask students to propose what to write on the board and have students give examples of the structure.

The questioning method is one way through which teachers can strive to have all pupils participate in the lesson. The use of skilful questioning to encourage children to clarify their thinking is central to the process of teaching and learning. According to Doff (1988) and Quist (2000) this can be achieved by:

- i) Pausing after asking a question to allow pupils time to think.
- ii) Prompting slow learners by asking the question in a different way.
- iii) Encouraging shy learners and those with learning difficulties by praising their answers.
- iv) Stretching brighter pupils by asking more difficult questions.
- v) Avoiding scorn and ridicule if the answer is incorrect.

The teacher should praise a pupil for attempting to answer a question before correcting him/her (Willis, 1984). This method increases students' motivation by making them keen to try again and not nervous of making mistakes. Both the teacher and the students should not worry too much about small mistakes. The important thing is for students to understand and be understood.

The use of gestures and facial expressions can also motivate pupils. This calls for the use of demonstrations and role play during oral work lessons by the teacher and pupils. The teacher should also vary the classroom interactions like teacher- group interactions, teacher- pupil interactions and pupil- pupil interactions (Perrot, 1982). A variety can also be achieved by mixing oral and written work, individual and group activity, demonstrations and by asking stimulating questions.

Reinforcement is another motivation strategy which teachers can employ during English lessons. Els et al (1984) argues that reinforcement is needed in language proficiency because it strengthens habits. When pupils answer questions right or when they produce grammatically correct utterances, they should be reinforced. Perrot (1982) distinguishes between verbal and non-verbal reinforcement. Verbal reinforcements are the one word or brief phrase responses like good, well done, splendid, great, fine, and remarkable. It is a way of praising a learner. Praise is important in that it not only changes behaviour but also develops confidence and positive self-image (Perrot, 1982). Non-verbal reinforcements include physical messages sent by teachers through cues such as eye contact, facial expressions and body position. Quist (2000) cautions teachers to avoid giving the wrong impression in their learners. He cautions teachers to note the following:

- i) Your impressions and body language can give the impression that you do not have time to waste listening to pupils.
- ii) You may not realize that you make some pupils feel that you do not expect good work or correct answers from them.
- iii) Don't assume that a particular pupil will always be lazy, dull and a trouble maker.
- iv) Don't allow some pupils to answer questions more frequently than others.
- v) Don't make fun of incorrect answers.

- vi) Don't always ask boys or girls first. Avoid gender bias.
- vii) Don't be sarcastic or make comparisons with older brothers or sisters.

Also, KIE (2006) lists various ways through which teachers can reinforce pupils during the teaching of English thus: Expressing approval when a child is talking through facial expressions; encouraging learners to ask questions; responding to what learners say; encouraging those who give wrong answers and leading them to the correct answers; paying attention to the learner when they are talking; praising a child; clapping for learners in appreciation of an attempt made and giving a pat to show appreciation.

Teachers should provide immediate reinforcement too. Delayed reinforcement may not be effective in motivating learners. Quist (2000) also argues for the need for teachers to provide immediate and continuous feedback as a way of motivating learners. Teachers' feedback has a strong influence on the performance of the students. Teachers should use a friendly tone, positive non-verbal cues and provide positive feedback. The teacher should motivate and boost the pupil's morale by recognizing each child's contribution during oral work lessons (KIE, 2006). The teacher should acknowledge each pupil's response and encourage the child. For pupils who make a grammatically incorrect response, the response should also be acknowledged and the pupil should then be given the correct response.

To motivate learners in language learning, Krashen and Terrel (1988) postulate that teachers must create a favourable environment to language acquisition by lowering the anxiety level of students, establishing a good rapport with the teacher and a good relationship with other students. Otherwise, learners will feel uncomfortable and insecure which will further induce a psychological barrier to communication and learning. Anxiety is often related to a sense of threat to the learner's self-concept in the learning situation, for example if a learner fears being ridiculed for a mistake. A free and light-hearted atmosphere promotes communication while a nervous and stiff atmosphere builds invisible obstacles in communication.

Teachers should encourage students to express their ideas, opinions, desires, emotions and feelings. The environment in the classroom should consist of low anxiety level, good rapport with the teacher and a friendly relationship with other students. Also, having a right attitude encourages language acquisition. Schwartz (1998) advises teachers that listening to students is as important as speaking to them as it makes them feel that the teacher hears their concerns and questions. To listen well, the teacher needs to pay attention to what is being said. The teacher should not assume that s/he knows what students are going to say. Apart from that, the teacher should let students completely finish speaking before answering them.

Schwartz (1998) continues and adds that the teacher should keep good eye contact with the student who is speaking and with the rest of the students to see their reactions. In addition, while a student is speaking, the teacher should use his /her body language to show that s/he is listening. The teacher should also restate what the student said and pause before responding to think about what the student said. If necessary the student should be asked to come to a conclusion and then paraphrase what was said.

2.0 Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach with a heuristic methodology. The epistemological position of constructivism was adopted. An exploratory research design was used too.

2.1 Research Population and sample

The research population consisted of primary school teachers teaching English in upper primary classes and standard six pupils. Stratified sampling method was used to divide the schools in the district into their respective divisions and in terms of whether they were private or public. From each of the groups obtained, the schools to participate in the study were selected purposively depending on accessibility. The total number of schools that were selected was 31. In addition, all the 31 schools were of mixed sexes. Out of the 31 schools, 25 were public and 6 were private. The teachers to participate in the study were selected using purposive sampling technique too. The teachers selected were those that were teaching English in upper primary classes. Two teachers from each school were selected giving a total of 62 teachers. Out of the 62 teachers, 28 were females and 34 were males. To select the pupils, the stratified random sampling method was used. The pupils were first divided into males and females. Simple random sampling method was then used to select four pupils from each category giving a total of eight pupils from each school. In total, three hundred and ten respondents (310) participated in the study. These included sixty two (62) teachers and two hundred and forty eight (248) pupils.

2.2 Instrumentation and data analysis

Data was collected using structured and focused group interviews as well as observations. The structured interview schedules were administered to the teachers while the focused group interview schedules were administered to the pupils. The researcher also observed ten oral work lessons in progress. Data was then analyzed qualitatively by discussing the emerging themes.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The study explored the strategies utilized by teachers in motivating pupils in the learning of oral communication skills in English. It was found out that the teachers adopted various methods in an attempt to motivate pupils. These were praising pupils who gave correct answers, encouraging pupils who gave incorrect answers, asking the class to clap for pupils who got answers right, using an audible voice, varying tone and volume of speech, using written reinforcement, giving immediate reinforcement and using correct stress patterns in words and/or sentences. Conversely, although teachers would strive to use correct pronunciation, interesting and relevant examples, correct intonation patterns in sentences and to have all the pupils participate in lesson activities, they did not do it effectively.

In addition, the teachers evaded some fascinating motivation strategies like use of gestures and facial expressions, moving round the classroom when teaching and prompting slow learners to attempt answering questions and the use of a variety of teaching aids. Likewise, the teachers would mix English with other languages during the lesson and scorn and ridicule pupils at times which should be avoided. Consequently, it was concluded that although the teachers would use some intriguing methods in an attempt to motivate the pupils during oral work lessons, some of the methods used were ineffectively used. Similarly, the methods were inadequate in enhancing interaction during oral communication lessons. Moreover, some of the methods used by the teachers like mixing English with other languages

and scorning and ridiculing pupils at times were inappropriate as they would discourage the learners instead of motivating them.

4.0 Recommendations

It was recommended that teachers should motivate their pupils extensively in the learning of oral communication skills in English. One of the strategies is for teachers to use English language only during oral communication lessons and all English lessons in general. In addition, the teaching and learning methods used should foster interaction between the teacher, the learner and the learning tasks.

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