Relationship between the use of classroom tasks and activities as aspects of CLT and the performance in English among pupils in lower primary classes in Kenya

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between the use of classroom tasks and activities as an aspect of CLT and the performance in English in Kenya. Integrated Skills Approach Theory was used in the study. The population of the study was 2,562 teachers of English and 9,342 class three pupils. Stratified simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 255 teachers and 340 class three pupils respectively. The study adopted the Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods design. Research instruments were: questionnaires for teachers of English; English test for class three pupils; Interview schedule for teacher of English and classroom observation schedule for lower primary classes 1, 2 and 3. The study found a weak, positive correlation (r=.190, n=228, p=.004) between classroom activities and tasks as an aspect of CLT and performance in English. The Heads of Panels of English in primary schools should pay more attention to quality organization of classroom tasks and activities by teachers as they teach English. This would make learning to be more learner-centered as expected in CLT and would boost performance in the subject.

Key words: *Classroom Tasks, Activities, CLT, Performance, English, Kenya.*

1.0: Introduction

Language learning is an educational and political issue and therefore it is tied to language policy (Savignon, 2006). For instance, in the United Kingdom English is the mother tongue but it is taught as a compulsory subject from ages five to sixteen (Razzall 2007). English is spoken as a native language in the USA, Australia, parts of Canada, England, and New Zealand and taught to speakers of other languages as an additional language to enable them to participate in all domains of life of the target country (Zaline, 2014). In Spain, there is bilingual education in which all academic subjects are taught in native languages with gradual incorporation of English (Rowe, 2002). In Taiwan, Asia English is the official language and it is taught at elementary school level, senior high schools and colleges as a subject and the Chinese language is used as a medium of instruction (Wang, 2002). In India, English serves two purposes as an official language. First it is the main medium of instruction at the postgraduate level. Second it is taught as a second language (L2) at every stage of education in all states of India (Thurumalari, 2003). In Nigeria, English language is the lingua franca. It is the language of commerce, government and the language of instruction (Emme, Egu & Ogbonna, 2009). In Tanzania, Kiswahili is both the official and medium of instruction. English is taught as a subject in primary and secondary schools (Allen 2008). In Uganda, English is the official language it is taught as a subject and used as a medium of instruction in primary, secondary and at university level (Kioko & Muthwithii, 2001).

Richards and Rodgers (2001) assert that CLT approach is eclectic. This is because it constitutes different methods of teaching language such as Direct Method; Situational Language Teaching; Audio-lingual and Grammar Translation. However, CLT has evolved in phases. Richards (2006) identifies three phases of evolution, that is, traditional communicative language teaching (up to the late 1960s), classical communicative language teaching (1970s-1990s) and Communicative Language Teaching trends today (late 1990s to the present). Traditional communicative language teaching and classical communicative language teaching have been discarded mainly because of lack of proper guidelines on how to build and measure competence in language use (Richards, 2006).This is what led to the evolution of the third phase- Communicative Language Teaching trends today. Subsequently, research on oral reading fluency of comprehension in English in rural public lower classes, 1, 2 and 3 in Siaya County compared comprehension in Kiswahili and mother tongue and cited that children comprehended much more in mother tongue 43.4% than Kiswahili 15.4% or English 15.2% (Piper, 2013).

Maria Pigada and Schmitt (2006) reported that spelling was strongly enhanced whereas meaning and grammatical knowledge were also enhanced but not to the same extent. The conclusion was that vocabulary acquisition is possible from extensive reading. In Spain, Rosa Maria and Melania (2005) showed evidence of vocabulary competence in the learners' 4th year in school. Contrastively, in Libya Orafi and Borg (2009) established that new organizational skills in CLT, required by some activities such as pair and group work proved challenging to teachers to embrace. Njoroge (2016) established that there is significant improvement with learners that have songs applied in their teaching as attested by the high performance of the experiment class in the two schools. Vladia Borges (2008) study at University of Rhodes Island establishes that the main English textbooks are clearly not task-based in that they only provide the forms that learners are expected to use. In task-based language (TBL) Willis and Willis, (2001) explain that language forms are not prescribed in advance, to allow learners the freedom to use any language acquired as much as possible in completing the required task. In England, Crewe (2011) study established that the course book employed the common Presentation Practice Production (PPP) model. This model, does not involve

learners communicatively, but is good for teachers lacking the expertise and needing the support and guidance of predetermined procedural organization. In Nigeria, Emme, Ogbonna and Egu (2009) established that the availability of learning materials (textbooks) was inadequate for teaching to develop English competence in lessons and students did not have the recommended textbooks. In Namibia Junias (2012) asserted that insufficient teaching/learning materials pose a lot of problems to learning English. In Kenya, Omuna, Onchera and Kimutai (2016) established that textbooks are the most used instructional resources when teaching English reading skills.

In addition, the National Language and Educational Policy that supports the use of local languages of instruction in lower primary classes, one, two and three have been consistently contravened by choices about languages of instruction. This has resulted in low students' achievement in English comprehension in Siaya County (Bunyi, 2005; Kioko 2013; Trugdell & Piper 2013). Further, UWEZO (2013) reported that pupils in class 1, 2 and 3 have low levels of literacy and numeracy competencies in Kenya. Specifically, 25% passed the literacy test meaning that 75% which is a big percentage failed. Moreover, Research Triangle International (RTI) TUSOME Early Grade Reading program report in Kenya reveals that children in class 1 and 2 in Siaya County can read Correct Words per Minute (CWPM) at 26% and 21% respectively. This compared to Kisumu County which is 34% and 34% for both class 1 and 2 respectively (RTI TUSOME, 2016). This depicts Siaya as, a low performer in literacy in English. Furthermore, UWEZO (2016) reveals that Public lower primary schools in Siaya County have shown a steady low performance in Literacy levels in class 3 from 2012 to 2016. The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between the use of classroom tasks and activities as aspects of CLT and the performance in English among pupils in lower primary classes in Siaya County of Kenya.

2.0: Research Methodology

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods design was utilized and provided specific direction for procedures in this study. This design entails first collecting quantitative data, and analyzing it and second collecting qualitative data then the analyzed quantitative results are used for explanation in more details with qualitative data. Thus, quantitative and qualitative data provided a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). It was appropriate to use this design because it ensured that the strengths of one method overcome the weakness of the other, hence showing quality and reliability of the findings (Creswell, 2014). The population for this study was drawn from lower primary classes in all public primary schools in Siaya County. The teachers of English for these classes answered the questionnaires and interview questions to obtain information on how CLT is implemented and used in teaching/learning English. Class three pupils, on the other hand, undertook the English test to help get information about their competence levels in English after having been subjected to its development by methodological principles of CLT for learning English for three years during their lower primary training.

A sample size of 340 pupils were utilized. For interviews, the researcher sampled 12 teachers of English of class three randomly from the 85 sampled public primary schools to obtain qualitative data. The sample size of 12 was considered appropriate because, according to Ritchie et al (2003), for qualitative sample sizes, the recommended samples range from 10-30. This test adopted the instrument components based on Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) for English by (USAID-World Bank, 2010) and versions that relate to exercises in Lower Primary Pupils' textbooks (KICD, 2012). It was administered to class 3 pupils in term three in public primary

schools to measure the level of their achievement in language skills in lower primary classes, one to three, in line with the syllabus requirements. The content, face, and construct validity of the instruments were determined by the experts in the Department of Curriculum and Educational Management. The reliability of the instruments was determined through split half technique. The value for r for ETCTP was found to be 0.75, TEQ was found to be 0.7, COS was 0.65 and ISTE was found to be 0.67. Pearson Product-Moment of correlation, regression analysis and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to investigate the relationship between the variables. Thematic analysis was used for identifying, and analyzing patterns or themes within data. It was appropriate for this study because it could be applied across a wide range of qualitative approaches, making it flexible.

3.0: Findings & discussion

To investigate whether there was any statistical significant influence of classroom activities and tasks as an aspect of CLT on the performance in English among pupils in lower primary classes, the null hypothesis was tested. A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed, with combined scores on classroom activities and tasks as independent variable and performance in English as dependent variable. The scores of the independent variable were computed from frequency of responses from English teacher questionnaire. On the other hand, the dependent variable was computed from a written standardized achievement test administered to measure skills learners mastered in the English language. The p-value was set at .05, the null hypothesis was rejected when the p-value was less than .05 but it was accepted when the p-value obtained was greater than .05. Table 1 shows the correlation analysis results in SPSS output.

Table 1:
Influence of Classroom Activities and Tasks on Performance in English

		Performance in English	Classroom Activities and Tasks
Performance in English	Pearson Correlation	1	.190[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	228	228
Classroom Activities and Tasks	Pearson Correlation	.190[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	228	228

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The finding of the study shows that there was statistically significant positive correlation (r=.190, n=228, p=.004) between classroom activities and tasks as an aspect of CLT and performance in English, with improved classroom activities and tasks resulting in to improvement in performance in English language and vice-versa. Given that the relationship was statistically significant, the hypothesis that *there is no statistically significant relationship between classroom activities and tasks as an aspect of CLT and performance in English language* was rejected. It was therefore concluded that improved classroom activities and tasks as an aspect of CLT has positive influence on performance in English language among the learners in lower primary.

To further illustrate this relationship, a scatter plot was generated as shown in Figure 1.
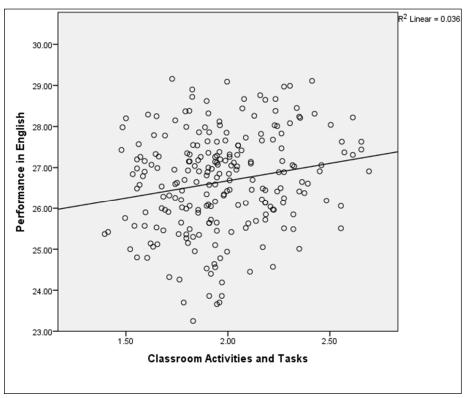
F**igure 1:** *Influence of Classroom Activities and Tasks on Performance in English*

The scatter plot indicates that there was some faint evidence of a positive correlation between classroom activities and tasks and performance in English language. It is evident that the pattern of dots seems to slope from lower left to upper right, implying a positive correlation between the two variables. Further, the line of best fit (trend line) reveals that there was some correlation between the two variables. To estimate the level of influence of classroom activities and tasks and performance in English language among learners in lower primary school, a coefficient of determination was computed. This was done using regression analysis and the results were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2:

Model Summary on Regression Analysis of Influence of Classroom Activities & Tasks on Performance in English Language

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.190[a]	.036	.032	1.19399

a. Predictors: (Constant), Classroom Activities and Tasks

The model shows that use of Classroom Activities and Tasks accounted for 3.6%, as signified by coefficient $R^2 = .036$, of the variation in performance in English language among lower class pupils. However, to determine whether Classroom Activities and Tasks was a significant

predictor of performance in English, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed as shown in Table 3.

Table 3:

ANOVA –Influence of Classroom Activities & Tasks on Performance

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	12.044	1	12.044	8.448	.004[b]
1	Residual	322.190	226	1.426		
	Total	334.234	227			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance in English

b. Predictors: (Constant), Classroom Activities and Tasks

From Table 3, it is evident that Classroom Activities and Tasks was a significant predicator of performance in English among the learners in lower primary [F (1, 226) = 8.448, p = .004]. This further confirms that Classroom Activities and Tasks significantly influence performance in English language among the learners in lower primary. In addition, the study sought to establish the relationship between individual aspects of teaching methods (Listening & Speaking, Reading and Writing) as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4:

Correlation between Aspects of Classroom Activities and Tasks and Performance in English Language.

		Class Act. & Tasks: Listening and Speaking	Class Act. & Tasks: Reading	Class Act. & Tasks: Writing
Performance in English	Pearson Correlation	.172[**]	.138[*]	.162[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.037	.014
	N	228	228	228

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows that there were statistical significant (p < .05) positive correlation between performance in English and all the three aspects of Class Activities and Tasks. Although all the relationships had significant positive correlation, classroom activities and tasks on listening and speaking had the highest correlation (r=.172), while reading had the least correlation (r=.138).

To further explain the mean integration results and the results from interview schedule with teachers of English, there was a clear contrast with the reality on the ground. The large extent integration seen in the overall means in integrating language skills in activities and tasks in listening and speaking; reading and writing as well as the information from the interview that role plays, and oral questioning were used well to promote learning in the classroom, had little relevance to acquisition of language use for lower primary pupils as was observed. Truly, Classroom observation schedules indicated that the theme of tasks and activities emerged and teachers were involved in several tasks such as discussion about the new words, reading with pupils and practice of structures

and analysis of comprehensions by marking passages assignments given to pupils. However, it was realized that this was very hurriedly done as pupils didn't have time to internalize the content taught. Likewise, Pair and group work activities (cooperative learning) that help pupils internalize the content learnt in class were observed to be minimally and casually practiced in English lessons. It was a fact teachers also alluded to in their responses, Table 4.11, where a half of them (49.2%), said they hardly practice role plays/simulation. Inadequate use of games and role plays is enough evidence of low internalization of language structures and vocabulary. Coincidentally, Youngqi Gu (2003) cites that cooperative learning is a very learner-centred activity since it allows learners to learn from peers closest to them. Concurrently, Murphey and Rao (2001) assert that in cooperative learning students feel more relaxed and learn more from peers since they realize that making mistakes is acceptable and learning can be fun which may necessitate learning more vocabulary in the end. Moreover, writing activities (composition) in lower primary classes was observed as ignored. This task came last in the teachers' preplanned *Tusome Lesson Plan,* but due to time limit was not attended to. It was even evident from the teachers' responses that they rarely teach composition and other related activities to it like, separating irrelevant information from a text.

Incidentally, from the Interview Schedule, most participants reported that the teachers of English used several tasks and activities to enhance the mastery of the language among the pupils in the lower primary level of schooling. One of the themes on tasks and activities included use of dramatization in class. Drama refers to a play in a theatre or on television or radio, or plays and acting generally (Abbott & Wingard, 2003). Most participants were of the opinion that the use of drama during English lessons enhanced the academic achievement. Some teacher respondents said the following during interviews:

> *As we read stories during English lessons, we encourage dramatization by the learners to help them understand better the concepts of language structures and vocabulary that have been taught in class.* (Teacher, 3)

> *I use drama a lot while teaching English language and it has helped my pupils a lot to improve their speaking skills in the classroom.* (Teacher, 1)

> *Pupils dramatize characters after reading parts of the story. They try to learn moral lessons from such stories. They also identify the good characters that they have learnt by reading and they have it dramatized in class.* (Teacher, 7)

From the three interview excerpts, it can be concluded that dramatization was used by teachers to enhance teaching and learning of English, hence it led to increased interest in the subject, thus performance. In disagreement to the fore going finding Adeyemi (2012) in Botswana reports that, teachers' product oriented approach resulted into learners' inability to compose, lack of ideas, vocabulary and general apathy to composition and dramatization would be key in ensuring the comprehension of content is achieved.

Another qualitative finding on tasks and activities as was reported by the teachers was the use of oral questions in class during English lessons. Use of oral questions is a practice in many schools and disciplines in which an examiner poses questions to the student in spoken form. The pupil has to answer the question in such a way as to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the subject to pass the examination (National Reading Technical Center, 2010). Most participants of the current study reported that they intensively used oral questions to enhance the teaching and learning of English language. Some respondents said that:

> *Pupils are actively engaged in the oral questioning and this helps them to develop good speaking skill which is a major component in teaching and learning of English.* (Teacher, 3)

> *During our English lessons, the learners speak a lot for they answer the oral questions posed. We have them encouraged to speak the English language actively in school.* (Teacher, 8)

> *We use oral technique quite often to enhance the teaching and learning of the English language and this has led to increased achievement in English language use.* (Teacher, 6)

From the interview transcripts, it can be concluded that oral questioning has helped to improve the teaching and learning of English language, hence, the academic performance in the subject. National Reading Technical Center (2010) concurs that children's understanding and memory of the words increased when teachers asked questions and made comments clarifying the meaning of new words. However, this finding disagrees with Onchera and Manyasi's (2013) study which established that teachers have different understanding of functional writing skills. It reflected in their different practices, where they gave minimal support to learners in the classroom. Learners were not fully exposed to the appropriate styles of different genres for effective communication in writing. In addition, teachers' attitude, lack of accuracy and in-depth teaching, turns out negatively on learner language in written output.

4.0: Conclusion & Recommendation

There was variation with qualitative findings (classroom observation schedule) about the implementation of aspects of CLT in the classroom. What the classroom observation schedules exposed depicted a situation that is indicative of less development of communicative skills as expected in CLT. *Tusome Program* approach as the method used in lower primary classes, had CLT ingrained in it. Therefore, it was observed to be very relevant approach in teaching English. The content areas of each lesson taught in class 1, 2 and 3, had language structure, vocabulary, reading and writing. Therefore, the Heads of Panels of English in primary schools should pay more attention to quality organization of classroom tasks and activities by teachers as they teach English. This would make learning to be more learner-centered as expected in CLT and would boost performance in the subject.

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