An Assessment of the Teaching Strategies Employed By English Language Teachers in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya

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Abstract
This paper assesses the extent to which teaching techniques affect the performance of students in English language as a subject. The study sought to identify the teaching strategies employed by English language teachers in secondary schools and recommend how performance in the subject can be improved in secondary schools within Eldoret Municipality. The study used a mixed methods research by design. It involved all form three students and relied on a sample size of 180 students drawn from six secondary schools within Eldoret Municipality, form three English teachers, heads of the selected schools and education officials in the district. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques including purposive and stratified random sampling were utilised. The study used questionnaires, interviews, documentary data and non-participant observation for data collection. Both qualitative and quantitative data analyses were employed. The study found that lecture and group discussions are the common methods employed by teachers in their teaching. Debating and drama or role-play is not fully utilized. The study recommends that students, teachers and the Ministry of Education should work together to enhance the attainment of class teaching objectives in the language. The findings of the study may offer a step towards the improvement of the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools hence improvement in performance.

Keywords: assessment, teaching strategies, English language teachers, Eldoret municipality, Kenya

INTRODUCTION
English plays a key role in Kenya’s educational system, not only as an important subject but also as the medium of instruction (Barasa, 2005, p. 3). It has been claimed that the model and the norm of the English used in Kenya, apart from pidgin varieties, is the British Standard variety and in particular, Received Pronunciation (RP) (Schmied, 1990; Zuengler, 1982).

Language in education in Kenya has faced and still faces many challenges. The issues often revolve around the place and development of the local indigenous languages (Kioko, 2000; Mbaabu, 1996; Ryanga, 2000); the need and means to strengthen English as it is the national language (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995; Mbaabu, 1996; Musau, 1999, 2000), and concerns about the usefulness of the English language, its effective teaching and/or its falling standards (Abdulaziz, 1982; Angogo & Hancock, 1980; Kembo-Sure, 1994; Nyamasyo, 1992, 1994). Sometimes the problems have had to do with the competition that the languages have had in the nation and especially in the education system due to the fact that each language was, and still is, associated with a certain social meaning (Mbaabu, 1996; Muthui, 1994; Whiteley, 1974). For example, English, introduced early in Kenya’s colonial history, played a significant role in the growth of nationalism (Crampton, 1986; Whiteley, 1974), a role which it no longer enjoys. It also played and still plays a key role in the country’s legal, economic and educational systems.

In the school system, English is not only one of the most important subjects in the curriculum but is itself the medium of instruction. The roots of this significant function of English can be traced back to Kenya’s colonial period when it was instrumental to an individual’s access to white collar jobs, European thought, and other privileges (Mazrui, 1992; Whiteley, 1974). English was a language with a lot of prestige and power and the British model was unquestionably the one used in Kenya. Kenyans learnt it from the native speakers and unlike Kiswahili, English in Kenya, as in all non-native contexts, was/is largely a taught language, conveyed through formal education.

The issue of how English is taught and acquired is, therefore, very important but this must be looked at in the light of the fact that it is also now a second language in Kenya. The main focus of this paper is the quality of teaching skills that teachers use in class. According to Orlich et al. (1985), "next to lecturing, questioning is the single most common teaching method employed in schools in the world" (p. 168). There is no doubt that questioning is crucial in the performance of both teachers and learners because questioning can be facilitative of teaching and learning (Ondiek, 1974). In life, peoples' need to ask and respond to questions is imperative. The
centrality of questioning in life and especially in classroom cannot, therefore, be underscored. The absence of adequate data on the aspects of teaching strategies has resulted in a knowledge gap and it is the aim of this paper to generate information to fill it. Findings of studies such as those by Onyiek (1974), Okere (1984), Dillon (1988), Oke Takona (1996), Dyanda (1997) and Ipara (2003) are not definitive as to the number of classroom questions and whether they are an effective pedagogical device or not.

This paper, therefore, evaluates the discrepancies that exist between theoretical curriculum norms and expectations, which are the ideals, and the actual teaching skills employed by teachers and how these affect performance of students in English language.

Critical Issues on Teaching Methods
In 1990s and the preceding years, Kenya’s poor language proficiency in English by students in secondary schools turned on the spotlight on the teaching and learning of English language (Barasa, 2005). According to Oladej (1991), "the major threat comes from lack of professionalism in English as a Second Language (ESL)" (p. 195). Barasa (2005, p. 2) identifies various instances recorded that emphasize this concern, including:

- The Minister of Education, stating that performance in English had deteriorated when announcing the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education results for the year 1994 (Daily Nation, March 1, 1995).
- Universities have voicing concern about receiving first year students who can hardly write, read, and hold discussions in English.

The question that this paper seeks to answer is: what happens in class at the secondary level that leads to this scenario? What does this change of affairs present to an education system that relies heavily on the use of the English language?

Concerns have also been raised over the discrepancies that exist between theoretical curriculum norms, regulations and expectations, which are the ideals, and actual teaching skills employed by teachers (KNEC, 2004; Barasa, 2005). It seems that the way English is being taught in secondary schools within Eldoret Municipality has a bearing on students' overall performance in national examinations; that English teachers either do not adequately apply teaching skills in English as specified by the curriculum of the Ministry of Education (MOE) or they do apply it appropriately. Therefore, the need to link teaching skills and students' performance in English is a crucial one. The problem of this paper, therefore, is to generate information on the teaching practices of English language teachers in selected secondary schools in Eldoret Municipality.

Some Common Teaching Methods
The following are some of the teaching methods employed by English teachers in secondary schools as given by McCarthy (1992), except for debate.

The Lecture Method
The lecture is a method where factual material is presented in a logical manner. It contains experience that inspires and stimulates thinking to open discussion. Lecture needs clear introduction and summary that should include examples and anecdotes. The limitations of lecture include the idea that the experts are not always good teachers, audience is passive, learning is difficult to gauge and communication is one way.

Group Discussion
Group discussion involves preparing specific tasks or questions for group to deal with. It allows participation of everyone. People are often comfortable in small groups and the group can reach a consensus. The disadvantage is that groups may get side-tracked and therefore careful thought as to purpose of group is needed.

Role-playing
Role-playing introduces problem situation dramatically; it provides opportunity for learners to assume roles of others and thus appreciate another point of view. It allows for exploration of situations and provides opportunity to practice skills. The instructor has to define the problem situation and roles clearly. He must give very clear instructions. Some limitations of role-playing are that people may be too self-conscious and it is not appropriate for large groups.

Debate
Debate is a verbal activity where points in favour of or against a topic are presented. There is a topic called the motion and speakers either support the motion or oppose it. The instructor divides the class into two groups; proposers and opposers. Each group then subdivides into smaller groups, of say five, to prepare the points and a speaker is chosen to present the points. This gives an opportunity for all the learners to participate in the debate. The disadvantage with the debate is that organisation is time-consuming and the class can be very noisy during presentation (KIE, 1989, p. 18).
Use of Practical Examples
According to Courter et al. (1995), the use of practical examples in the classroom is targeted at the following two main goals:

- Help illustrate and explain new material making the theoretical basis of the material more accessible to the students. Practical examples help students understand the new concepts being introduced.
- Teach students how to apply their knowledge of course material to new situations that are not directly covered in class. The goal here is to show the students not only that what they are learning has practical applications, but more importantly, how to apply their understanding of the basic principles to real engineering problems.

Teachers, especially in lower level education such as lower primary, need to effectively utilise relevant illustrations to enhance their teaching and students’ learning and achievement in class. In fact, in the author’s opinion, and based on her own experience, colourful and well-designed illustrations not make teaching more effective, but they also make learning more interesting and exciting for students.

The Flow-Chart Technique
Courter et al. (1995) argue that the technique of flowcharting, as applied to a classroom scenario, is a tool for precisely and concisely representing the flow of information among various stages in the development of a theoretical concept or in the formulation or analysis of a problem. Flowcharts are a tool to organize the flow of logic and thought in a classroom, much in the way that flowcharts help in presenting the flow of materials between various units of an industrial process. The ability to organize one’s flow of thought needs to be inculcated in learners as early as in primary level. As such, this technique, as well as others related to it, needs to be utilized by teachers in their lessons.

Brainstorming
This is most effective in the teaching and learning of art-related courses. According to Courter et al. (1995), brainstorming encourages students to participate actively in idea-generation exercises and experience benefits of a multi-dimensional approach to analyzing problems or solutions. Teaching is also supposed to be a process of leading students to discover that they know, and that they can apply their minds to discovering solutions to the problems that are facing them in and out of school. In this case, brainstorming becomes a good strategy that a teacher can use with a measurable control with respect to scope of what is examined and thought about and the length of time that students take to come up with a specifically identified problem.

Other teaching strategies that can be employed by teachers, given the capacity, include the use of power point presentations and other computer software material available in schools. These are especially relevant as globalization and the spread of ICT gradually affect the way people learn, the content being disseminated for knowledge and the sources of information. The man purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss the teaching strategies that are employed by English language teachers in secondary schools of Eldoret Municipality and recommend ways ion which they can be improved to enhance achievement in the English language teaching/learning.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
The study was limited to responses that were obtained from the questionnaires, the interviews and observations. Since the study sought information on teaching strategies, it was possible that teachers could not be willing to divulge information on their weaknesses. To overcome this, the author, thus, used observations. In addition, some of the questionnaires were not returned making it difficult to draw the entire picture of the challenges of teaching strategies. Nevertheless, the author used the information obtained from the three methods to corroborate the responses.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
The study was conducted in Eldoret Municipality, Uasin Gishu County in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. The study mainly employed the mixed methods research design. This design involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process (Creswell, 2003). It focuses on collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a series of studies. Its premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than can either approach.

The participants in the study were all Form 3 students, English teachers and head teachers of the selected schools in the municipality, the inspector of schools and the District Education Officer (DEO) in charge of Uasin Gishu. The study relied on a sample size of 180 students drawn from six secondary schools in Eldoret Municipality. First, the researcher used stratified random sampling to select 3 public and 3 private secondary schools within the Municipality. This was followed by a systematic random sampling to select 30 students from each school. From a total of 686 Form 3 students in the six schools, 90 were selected from each category. The author used a questionnaire for students; the Form 3 English teachers had their lessons observed...
and tape-recorded and were later given a questionnaire after the observation. Heads of the English departments, heads of the selected schools, and the DEO all responded to key informant interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses were employed. Qualitative analysis involved the derivation of explanations and making of interpretations of the findings based on descriptions. The concern was on description of patterns, singularities or uniqueness in the data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Teaching Methods Employed by English Teachers
Use of Discussion Groups
There are various teaching methods a teacher can employ in teaching. In the study, the learners were asked to state how frequently the teacher used the various methods. From the results, 63(35.0%) of them ascertained that the teacher organized group discussions occasionally, 49(27.2%) said they did so frequently, 38(21.1%) said they rarely did so and 29(16.1%) said teachers never do so. The table below shows that the students who reported that the teacher occasionally and frequently organized group discussions were 112(62.2%) while 67(37.2%) said they rarely and never did so. These results seem to correspond with those of teachers where 11(64.7%) said they organized occasionally and 2(11.8%) rarely did so. Observations in class sessions also showed that after explanation by the teacher, most of them assigned their students to groups for discussions.

Table 1: Learning Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizing group discussion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>27.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
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Organising debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organising debates</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Use of lecture method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of lecture method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Organising role play or drama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organising role play or drama</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
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<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Debating
Debating was another learning activity, which the study sought to clarify whether teachers employed in their teaching or not. From the study, 51(28.3%) ascertained that their teachers never organized debates, 59(32.3%) said they rarely organized, 42(23.3%) said they organized occasionally and 23(12.8%) said they did so frequently. Table 1 above gives the summary of these findings. As represented by 110(61.1%) of the respondents, the results in the table show that a majority of the teachers did not “organize debates” as a learning activity. Those who organized were represented by 65(36.1%) of the respondents. During observations, there was no debate organized in all the lessons observed.

The Lecture Method
On the same note, the study sought to find out whether teachers used “Lecture” as a learning activity. From the study, 90(50.0%) said it was used occasionally, 22(12.2%) said it is rarely utilised and 9(5.0%) said it is never organized. Table 1 gives a summary of these results. As represented by 140(77.7%) of the respondents “Lecture Method” like “Group discussion” was used by a majority of the teachers as shown in the table whereas those who did not use it were represented by 31(17.2%). In addition, it was observed that many teachers employed “Lecture method” in the classroom in form of introducing the lesson, explaining and concluding.

Role Play or Drama
Another learning strategy that the study sought to find out whether teachers employ it is “Role Play or Drama.” From the study, 72(40.0%) of the respondents affirmed that their teachers never used “Role play or drama,” 50(27.8%) said they rarely used it, 45(25.0%) said they used it occasionally and
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Apart from oral questioning strategy that is utilized by all teachers, lecture and group discussion are the other methods that are frequently used. Suggestions given to improve the performance of English indicate that interactive learner-centred approaches, like debating and role-play or drama still need to be employed by the teachers frequently to enable the learners to participate actively in the learning process. However, debating and drama or role-play are not fully utilized. In addition, English language performance by learners in secondary schools can be improved. Apart from oral questioning, which should be appropriately employed by the teachers, other interplay of factors that should be improved include entry behaviour of learners, methodology, teacher training, provision of materials and equipment, integration and attitude towards the subject.

Lastly, it was noted that there is unnecessary wastage of time during lessons. The findings suggest that secondary school English language teachers treat the issue of time rather casually. Data from classroom observation revealed that not only do teachers go to class late, but they also leave early or long after the bell. It seems teachers don’t plan and allocate time for their oral questions, classroom responses and other activities appropriately. And if they do, then they don’t adhere to their plans and allocations. For second language instruction, such as the case is for English, any reduction of time of lessons that would provide opportunity for exposure of optimum language input and output means learners are short-changed.

It is recommended that the inspectorate, heads of schools, departments and teachers should ensure that time is valued and that time allocated for English language is utilised.

In addition, English language teachers should strive to improve second language classroom interactional situations so that they approximate first language acquisition conditions. For this to be accomplished a number of conditions have to be fulfilled. First, the teachers must get away from the teacher-dominated classroom teaching partly exemplified by a tendency to answer even their own questions. Second, it is necessary to pose questions that link the outside and the classroom by creating contexts where pupils are encouraged to draw responses from real life experiences. It is important for teachers to identify inhibitions such as shyness, noise and language problems and address them so that they do not become an impediment to language acquisition. Teachers should generate an inventory of learner characteristics through keen observation that should be used to encourage and motivate learners to speak freely than to ridicule them.

Lastly motivation for meaningful language use and scope of practice is crucial. Teachers should do this by asking oral questions that lead learners to use English language in a way that fosters communicative abilities needed in life for sharing accumulated knowledge.

REFERENCES


