Classroom Interaction: A Key to Effective Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools in Tanzania. A Case of Arusha City

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Abstract
Studies have revealed that, through classroom interaction knowledge is constructed and skills are developed. Therefore, learners are supposed to be given opportunities to use language naturally rather than only memorizising dialogues and pattern practices. This article examines effectiveness of classroom interactions in promoting English language learning in secondary schools in Tanzania, a case study of Arusha city. The study employed a qualitative research design examining classroom practices so as to gain a deeper understanding on how English language teachers aid/hinder effective classroom interactions. A purposive sampling was used to select the sample for study, and observations and interviews were the methods for data collection. The study has clearly revealed unsatisfactory interaction in the classrooms due to primarily lack of teacher's creativity and language incompetency. English language teachers had a common shared thought that students have problems of inhibition because of shyness, anxiety and lack of motivation to learn English language. In addition, large number of students in the class inhibit effective interaction and opportunities for language practice. Among six English lessons observed, only two lessons promoted a meaningful classroom interaction. Learners had opportunities practicing English language in the classes that their teachers had creatively provided.Study recommends teachers to creatively improvise the available teaching- learning materials and teaching teachniques despite the challenges that are currently facing secondary schools. Teachers should participate in in – service training to equip them with current methodologies and techniques for language teaching - learning.

Key Terms: Classroom Interaction, Teaching Techniques, Questioning Technique, Language Learning

Introduction
Education is expected to equip learners with knowledge, competencies and skills that are basic conditions for active citizenship, employment and social cohesion (Tillya, 2006). For a learner to be quick, resolute and effective thinker, the mastery of language of instruction is a basic prerequisite to a learning process by both learners and teachers.
In Tanzania a bulk of studies done have revealed the detereoreting quality of education annualy and among the contributing factors is a poor language proficiency, that is; English (Mlama and Materu, 1978; Rubagumya and Mwansoko, 1998;

Rubagumya, 1997, 2003; Qorro, 1987, 1999; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2005, 2007 and Vuzo, 2005).

Students in secondary schools are said to perform poorly because of English as the language of instruction. Teachers and students struggle to express themselves clearly in a language they have not mastered. This has been contributed by poor preparation at primary level, poor teacher preparation, lack of relevant teaching-learning materials, inefficient techniques and lack of reading habits among students (Vuzo, 2002; Qorro, 2004; 2009; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2010; Rubagumya, 1997, 2003).

Learners in secondary schools are often disadvantaged because they lack opportunity of using English, the language of instruction and thus find learning difficult. For learning to be effective, teachers need to use a range of pedagogical strategies much more explicitly than if they were teaching through the medium of mother tongue, for this case is Kiswahili. There is evidence that many teachers in African schools and Tanzania in particular, either because of limited language ability or limited training, employ restricted range of strategies in teaching of second language (Qorro, 2004, 2009; Clegg, 2000). Promoting classroom interactions using the target language is one of the insisted techniques for teaching second/foreign language. For learners who are studying English in a non English speaking setting, it is very important that they experience real communicative situations in which they will learn how to express their own views and develop oral fluency and accurancy which are very important in succeding in foreign/second language communication. Classroom interaction is therefore a necessary and useful pedagogical technique to enhance learning of English language and mastery of subject contents.

This article looks at the patterns of classroom interaction in English lessons. It analyses teacher- learner talk, questioning strategies and techniques employed in order to identify the patterns of classroom practices.

Brown (2001) defined classroom interaction as the communication between teachers and learners in the classroom. He further highlighted that interaction is the heart of communicative competence, it is what communication is all about. Katy (2008) proposed that interaction is the best method for those beginning to learn English language. During interaction learners receive input and produces output. In this context, learners get opportunity to use the language naturally rather than memorizing dialogues and pattern practices.

Chafe (1998) argue that cooperative learning as opposed to individualistic and competitive learning promote interaction. It is an effective instructional approach that requires learners to work in groups to achieve a common goal. Consequently, working together maximizes opportunities for student-student interaction with meaningful input and output in a supportive environment.

Questioning technique is another influencial strategy in creating classroom interaction. Thus, where foreign language learners do not have a great number of

tools for initiating and maintaining language, encouraging them to formulate or answer questions provide opportunities for continued interaction (Vuzo, 2002; Aliponda, 2003).

In the view of the above, this article seeks to address the research question; how do teachers' pedagogical strategies and technique promote classroom interactions and how they aid or inhibit students language acquisition/learning. Specifically, the article looks at the kinds of interactional patterns in English lessons that may influence acquisition/learning of English language.

Research Methodology
This study used a qualitative research design. The data collection process was part of author's masters thesis which examined how conducive are the secondary school classrooms for the application of Content Based Instruction (CBI). Data were collected by means of classroom observations and teacher interviews in three secondary schools in Arusha city. The research participants were five English teachers and Form One students in three secondary schools selected through a purposive sampling. Two public secondary schools and one private secondary school were involved in the study. The study examined classroom practices in order to understand how teachers facilitate learners participation in the lesson, a significantaspect in language acquisition/learning.

Data Analysis and Discussion
As stated previously, this article focused on how teachers' pedagogical strategies promote classroom interation. It further explored how the patterns of interaction and teaching techniques facilitate the acquisition/learning of English language.

Diversity of Teacher's Teaching Techniques
Generally, teachers' teaching technique is one of the common strategy that promote classroom interaction. The task was set to establish the relationships between teaching technique and patterns of classroom interaction. An observation was made in the classroom to figure out varieties of technique used by English language teachers. The data gathered was cross validated with responses from teachers' interview. It was observed that classes were dominated by teacher talk involving demonstrations, explanations and short questions and answers. In the interview English language teachers had a common shared idea that students have problems of inhibition because of shyness, anxiety and lack of motivation to learn English language.Teachers claimed that large number of students in the classroom inhibit effective interaction, and hinders opportunity for language practice. Researches comparing classroom processes in lessons taught in English and African languages have clearly shown how language used impacts on teaching techniques. The fact that teachers are ill prepared to teach in English compels them to use restricted strategies which do not favour language acquisition/learning (Rubagumya,2003;

Mwinsheikhe,2007). This was also found out in this study that teachers employed a restricted pedagogical practices that could not facilitate students English language learning.

Questioning Techniques

Data from classroom observation indicated that there was much teacher talk and very little interaction among students. Teachers' questions were not cognitively demanding; some questions requested for factual information (recall), simple mentioning of one or two words answers and yes/no answers. The following fragments reflect the kinds of questions used by teachers;

Extract A

Teacher: *Can anyone mention three hobbies he/she likes most?*

Students: *'My hobbies are swimming, reading story books and traveling'.*

(it was inaudible and the teacher did not ask for repetition)

Teacher: *one more person to name his/her hobbies.*

Students: *'My hobbies are to be a driver, cooking and traveling'.*

Extract B

Teacher*: What is physical appearance?*

Students*: kept silence and looking at the teacher.*

Teacher*: Repeated the question and translated the sentence in Kiswahili. There was no discussion that followed and the teacher wrote the notes on the blackboard for students to copy.*

In the extracts A and B above, students were just receivers of the information where it was supposed to be their best opportunity to exercise their speaking skills through pair/group discussion, role plays and dialogues. Teachers could have used that opportunity for extended classroom discussion, but that opportunity was denied. However in another school observed where the lesson was the same as in extract B, the situation was different. Students were engaged in throughout the lesson. There were lots of demonstrations, explanations, role plays and pair/group work. The following extract illustrate this;

Extract C

Teacher: *I'm thinking of a girl in this classroom, she is tall, brown skin, pointed chin,brown eyes wearing glasses, dressed in brown skirt and white shirt. Who could that be?*

Students*: In pairs, attentively and looking around to identify who was being described.*

Teacher*: repeated the description a bit slower.*

Student*s: while cheering named the person being described.*

The lesson continued through out where students were maximally engaged through pair/group works, turn taking behaviours. These questioning techniques promoted classroom interaction, language acquisition/learning and encouraged students participation in the lesson.

Therefore in four out six observed lessons, students were not given the opportunity to practice any of the subject contents. For any group work arranged was meant for reading passage from the text book only. There was ample students' interaction in two lessons observed as the extract C illustrate. This is contrary to what scholars on second language acquisition/learning suggest on teaching. Aliponda (2003) recommend on the use of effective questioning technique as a tool for extended classroom interaction. Students need to be encouraged to formulate and answer questions. Moreover, Mercer (1995) argued that, for a healthy innovation to extend discussions in the classroom making open ended questions, inviting elaboration and encouraging questions from students is important for *language learning (the italicized part is my emphasis*.

Teaching Techniques
It was the researcher's assumption that the more students are involved in a meaningful student-teacher, student-student interaction the easier the teaching-learning process. In contrast, if there is no interaction, teaching/learning a new language will be difficult and inefficient. It was observed in the classroom that the dominant teaching technique used was generally teacher- centered. The common pattern of classroom interaction was between teacher-student (individual student) and there was very minimal pair/group work except for two lessons out of six lessons observed. Teachers did most of the classroom activities such as demonstrations, explanations, questionining and in some instances where students could not comprehend teacher's question, it was the teacher who answered the question or translated the question in Kiswahili. There were no teaching aid that were used in the lesson. This inhibit students thinking, participation and hinders creativity, and above all the language which is a means for communication and a vehicle through which knowldege is trasmitted. Studies conducted by Clegg (2000); Qorro (2009) depict that when teaching through a second language, teachers should use a full range of pedagogical strategies much more explicity than if they were teaching through first language. Moreover, there is a great deal of evidence that the more foreign language input learners are exposed to, the greater will be their proficiency. Research and theory on second language acquisition indicate that students' linguistic growth is related to the amount of time spent with the language in a meaningful exposure. Krashen (1982) refered to this as 'comprehensible input', Long (1970) named it 'negotiation of meaning', Vygotsky (1978) called it 'zone of proximal development'. All these researches argue for opportunities to communicate in target language among students, and to the teacher who is knowledgeable and input improvider and the students. In a classroom setting, the teacher working with the students on a given task explains, informs, inquires, corrects and forces the students to speak through a number of tasks.

Conclusion

In the field of second and foreign language learning, classroom interaction has long been considered to play a significant role. Interaction among students and between the teacher and students in classroom is one of the primary means by which language learning is realized. In a classroom setting, interaction in the target language plays a significant role, both as the medium through which language is practiced and a platform for students participation in the lessons. The study has clearly revealed unsatisfactory interaction in the classrooms due to primarily lack of teacher's creativity and language incompetency. Among six English lessons observed, only two lessons promoted a meaningful classroom interaction.

Studies have revealed that secondary schools are hit by lack of resources such as books, equipments, classrooms and teachers who are well trained and motivated. Large classes hinder effective classroom interactions. All these impediments should not be a block for effective classroom teaching. There is a possibility of improvising the teaching materials and teaching teachniques despite the challenges that are in schools. Teachers should participate in in service to equip them with current methodologies and techniques for language learning. Further more, similar studies can be done on how teachers and learners interprete classroom interaction in the environment where English is taught as second/foreign language.

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