

Content- Based Instruction: A Study of Methods of Teaching and Learning English in Primary Schools in Butula District

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the elements of Content-Based Instruction and its process in the teaching and learning of English in primary schools. This was accomplished through the following study objectives: to find out how Content-Based Instruction approach is used in the teaching of English in Primary Schools in Butula District; to examine the nature and relevance of material used to facilitate Content-Based instruction approach in English language teaching, to determine the perception of teachers of English to the use of Content Based Instruction in the teaching and learning of English, to determine the perception of learners to the use of Content Based Instruction in the learning of English and to investigate the challenges the teachers of English face in the attempt to use Content Based Instruction. The theoretical framework was based on Krashen's theory of input hypothesis which states that language acquisition is based on input that is meaningful and understandable to the learner; learners should be exposed to different learning situations in order to comprehend what they are taught in the classroom. Levy Vigosky's social development theory of learning was also used. The study used descriptive survey design, which is suitable for the study of behaviour, attitudes, values and characteristics. The target population constituted 74 primary schools in Butula District. Proportionate simple random sampling was used to select 21 schools which is 30% of the target population. A total of 21 standard 7 teachers of English and standard 7 pupils of the sample schools were used as the sample population. Twenty one lessons were observed and 210 pupils' exercise books were analysed. The primary instruments of data collection were questionnaires, document analysis, interview schedules and structured observation. The data collected was analysed by use of descriptive statistics and was presented in graphs, tables and various thematic areas based on study objectives. This study found out that teachers' ability to use CBI was low although the attitude was high. The teachers found value in CBI. However, they lacked proper understanding of the methods. It is hoped that this study will provide insight for curriculum developers, policy makers, language educators and teachers to understand and use Content Based Instruction.

Key Words: Content based instruction, teaching, learning methods and krashen's theory

Introduction

There are many methods of teaching English. This study looks at the characteristic features of CBI approach of teaching English. It elaborately defines CBI and presents resource material used in the method. English language teaching in Kenya is looked at in relation and comparison to CBI. The success of a learner in academic endeavours entirely depends on proficiency in the language of instruction. It is through language that learners gather information from printed and visual sources both for academic purpose and information that is important in everyday life. Language is an important tool for learning and its inadequacy can be an impediment to effective teaching and learning of other subjects across the curriculum. The mastery of the language of instruction therefore plays a significant role in the learning process.

According to the language policy of Kenya the medium of instruction in lower primary is the learner's native language. English is the official language of communication as well as the medium of instruction in upper primary, secondary school and tertiary institutions. Mastery of English is of academic, social and professional benefits. Proficiency in English cannot be underscored in the school setting since it makes the learning of other subjects easier, RoK (MoE,2002).

The assumption that standard four pupils will start communicating and receiving instructions in English immediately on transition from standard three is likely unreliable. It is a serious mistake to believe that teaching and learning is taking place through English where a majority of pupils are from African language speaking communities (Heugh, 2002). There is a gap between lower and upper primary in terms of communication. Using mother tongue in lower primary as a medium of instruction bridges the gap between home and school. Parents supply their children with useful information related to their studies and language development in mother tongue. This abrupt switch from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction, coupled with inadequate linguistic preparation of pupils in English prior to its use as the medium of instruction and lack of pupils' exposure to English outside the school leads to communication difficulties. There is a linguistic mismatch between the natural language of pupils thought process and the imposed English on their lessons. The mastery of language is the ultimate indicator of successful learning process and how English is taught can be a remedy. This mismatch creates fear of English and negative attitude towards the language/ subject (Kamwangamalu, 2000).

Specific Objectives of the Study

The above purpose was attained through the following objectives:

1. To find out how Content-Based Instruction is used in the teaching of English in Primary Schools in Butula District.
2. To examine the nature and relevance of material used to facilitate Content-Based Instruction in English language teaching.
3. To determine the perception of teachers of English to the use of CBI in the teaching of English.
4. To determine the perception of learners to the use of CBI in the learning of English.
5. To investigate the challenges teachers of English face in the attempt to use Content Based Instruction.

Theoretical Framework

A theory is a set of properly argued ideas intended to explain the phenomenon. A theoretical framework is an examination of the existing theories in relation to research objectives. A conceptual framework is a scheme of concepts (or variables) which the researcher operationalized in order to achieve the set objectives. It's a diagrammatic presentation of the theory (Oso and Onen, 2009).

Input Theory of Language Acquisition

Content based language instruction is based on the theory that language acquisition is based on input that is meaningful and understandable to the learners. Parallel drawn between first and second language acquisition suggests that the kinds of input that children get from their caretakers should serve as a model for teachers in the input they provide to second language learners regardless of age. Input must be comprehensible to the learner and be offered in such a way as to allow multiple opportunities to understand and use the language. If comprehensible input is provided and the pupils feel excited then language acquisition takes place. Content across the curriculum as envisaged in CBI provides multiple opportunities for language input, to understanding and use of the language. Furthermore, this content is meaningful and understandable since it is drawn from the context relevant and appropriate to the age, interest and cognitive level of the learners. Thus what Krashen considers as comprehensible input.

Social Constructivism and Language Theory

The Social constructivism and language theory of learning was propounded by Lev Vygotsky (2006) and is also referred to as 'Social Development Theory of Learning'. Constructivism involves actively assimilating knowledge while constructing and interpreting new ideas. It attempts to solve the problem; how do people go beyond their experience in order to learn and interpret new concepts and ideas. Its two principles are that learners do not passively receive knowledge, but rather actively assimilate it and that learners construct new ideas or interpret concepts based on their current and past knowledge.

Constructivists build on the concepts of scaffolding, whereby learners constantly use their existing knowledge to help to bridge between known and unknown information. This method allows learners to grasp information that may be slightly above their current ability level by using what they know to inform what they need to know. It provides tools and environments that help learners interpret the multiple perspectives of the real world. The learners' environment plays a critical role in learning and development. Learners' consciousness is achieved by internalization of shared social behavior. The learner picks up observable social behavior which is built into his or her consciousness and is carried on into later life. Constructivism has no fixed rules other than offering an alternative to the traditional, teacher-centered lessons. Constructivism is applied in a practical, real-life context just the way CBI is applied.

Relevantly relating to this theory, CBI assimilates content and language acquisition and interpretation of language is based on content and CBI has no fixed rules. Furthermore, materials for CBI are slightly above the current ability of the learners.

Rationale for Content-Based Instruction

Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) defines and presents the rationale for CBI. First, the CBI removes the arbitrary distinction between language and content. The second, it reflects the interests and the needs of the learners. Third, it takes into account the eventual uses of the learners' will to make use of the second or foreign language. It exposes the learners to authentic materials and tasks. Fourth, it offers optimal conditions for second language acquisition by exposing learners to meaningful, cognitively demanding language. Last, it provides pedagogical accommodation to learner proficiency levels and skills. Different areas are included in Grabe and Stoller (1997)

Potential Problems of using Content-Based Instruction Approach

CBI is not explicitly focused on language learning. Therefore, some students may feel confused or may even feel that they are not improving their language skills. The teacher should deal with this by including some form of language focused follow-up exercises to help draw attention to linguistic features within the materials and consolidate any difficult vocabulary or grammar points.

Particularly in monolingual classes, the overuse of the students' native language during parts of the lesson can be a problem. Because the lesson is not explicitly focused on language practice, students find it much easier and quicker to use their mother tongue. The teacher should try sharing his/her rationale with students and explain the benefits of using the target language rather than their mother tongue.

It can be hard to find information sources and texts that lower levels can understand. Also the sharing of information in the target language may cause great difficulties. A possible way around this at lower level is either to use the target language for the sharing of the information and the end product, or have texts in the target language, but allow students to the end product in their native language, (Nik Peachery 13 August, 2003- 13.00).

The Role of Teachers in CBI Lessons

The success of lessons in the learning of English is determined by the role played by the teachers. The teachers' role influence and direct the learners activities in relation to the context. According to Stryker and Leaver (1993), teachers play the following role during CBI lessons:

- (1) They must be knowledgeable in the subject matter and able to elicit that knowledge from their learners.
- (2) Teachers are responsible for selecting and adapting authentic materials for use in class.
- (3) Teachers must create truly learner-centred classroom.
- (4) Teachers must keep context and comprehensibility foremost in their planning and presentation.
- (5) Teachers must contextualize their lessons by using content as their point of departure.

The Role of Materials in CBI Lessons

Materials are very important during the instructional process of English language. They play an essential role in the development and practice of CBI. The same material must bear certain characteristics. The characteristics are as listed below with reference to Stryker and Leaver (1993):

- (1) Materials must contain the subject matter of the content course.
- (2) Materials must be authentic – like the ones used in native language instruction.
- (3) Examples must be drawn from realia and real life experience and contemporary issues from newspapers, magazines, radio and TV.
- (4) Material must bear linguistic simplification to adopt texts and promote comprehensibility.

Reasons for Incorporating Content into the ESL Class

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1994), there are at least four reasons for incorporating content into English as a Second Language (ESL) class. First, content provides students with an opportunity to develop important knowledge in different subject areas. Second, students are able to practice the language functions and skills needed to understand, discuss, read about, and write about the concepts developed. A third reason is that many students exhibit greater motivation when they are learning content than when they are learning language only. Finally, content provides a context for teaching students learning strategies.

Course Objectives Based on Content-Based Instruction

Objectives in any course in the classroom serve a very important purpose in the process of learning. Taba (1962) identified reasons which warrant the writing of objectives in any course. Objectives serve as the guiding decisions about the selection of content and learning experiences and also providing criteria on what to teach and how to teach it. They also help the teachers to select from vast areas of knowledge in the various disciplines that which is realistically necessary for some valid outcomes.

Development of a Content-Based Lesson

Lesson planning and development serve invaluable function in the learning process. A well planned lesson acts as a guide to the teacher to streamline instructional activities. It helps to avoid deviation from the mainstream of the lesson. Therefore time is saved and the planned activities accomplished within the specified period of time. A possible way of developing a CBI lesson may follow a specific procedure. Lesson preparation is the first step. It follows the following steps:

Choose a subject of interest to the learners. Find three or four suitable sources that deal with different aspects of the subject. This could be reference books, audio or video of lesson/lectures or even real people.

During the lesson, divide the class into small groups and assign each group small research tasks and a source of information to help them fulfill the task. Then once they have done their research they form new groups with students that used other information sources and share and compare their information. There should then be some product as the end result of this sharing of the information which could take the form of a group report or representation of some kind.

English Language Teaching in Kenya

Language teachers need to be familiar with the content material. The primary English teaching adopts a thematic approach to teach various skills. The themes (English lessons/content) are derived from things and situations that learners are likely to interact with in everyday life. The primary curriculum incorporates vital emerging issues. These include: industrial transformation, environmental education, health (for example drug abuse, HIV/AIDS pandemic), gender issues, human rights, Child's rights, moral values and social responsibility. Owing to the policy of integration in the primary school curriculum, all teaching and learning experiences across the curriculum contribute towards the development of English language. The above themes are reinforced and developed in Science, Religious Education, Social Studies and Creative Arts materials (KIE, 2002).

One of the goals of education in Kenya as outlined in KIE (2002) is to promote individual development and self fulfillment (KIE, 2002). Thus, education should provide opportunity for the fullest development of individual talents and personality. It should help children to develop their potential, interest and abilities. A vital aspect of individual development is character building. This development cannot be achieved nor fulfilled without language. Likewise, language cannot be acquired without a rich academic environment which is formed by the curriculum content. All subjects contribute towards this goal thus the essence of integration and CBI.

Materials and Methods

Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this study was qualitative approach. In qualitative research, the information obtained from the participants is not expressed in numerical form (Kothari, 2004). The emphasis is on stated experiences of participants and on the stated meaning they attach to themselves, to other people and to their environment. Qualitative research is often more concerned about uncovering knowledge about how people think and feel about circumstances. In carrying out qualitative research, the use of direct quotations from participants are necessary since they are very revealing (Coolican, 1994).

Location of the Study

This study was carried out in Butula District of Busia County, Kenya. The main economic activity of the area is subsistence mixed farming with slight sugar cane farming as a cash crop. It is located in Busia County of Kenya. It has its neighbours as Nambale District on the North, Busia district on the North West, Samia District on the west, Ugenya District on the south and Matungu District on the east. It has seventy four primary schools evenly distributed and grouped into educational zones. Burinda zone has twenty four schools, Butunyi zone has twenty five schools and Tingolo zone has twenty five schools.

The performance of pupils in English in the district is wanting. In 2010 KCPE results, English scored the lowest mean score comparative and relative to other subjects. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 give the summary.

Table 1: Butula District Performance per Subject in KCPE, 2010

| SUBJECT | MEAN SCORE | POSITION |
|---------------------------|------------|----------|
| English | 50.52 | 5 |
| Kiswahili | 55.86 | 1 |
| Mathematics | 53.22 | 2 |
| Science | 53.11 | 4 |
| Social Studies & Religion | 53.12 | 3 |

Source: District Education Office, Butula (2011)

Table 2: Butula District Zonal Ranking per Subject in KCPE 2010

| ZONE | SUBJECT MEAN SCORE AND POSITION | | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------|
| | ENGLISH | KISWAHILI | MATH | SCIENCE | SOCIAL STUDIES/CRE |
| TINGOLO | 51.66 5 | 56.95 1 | 53.85 4 | 54.46 3 | 54.68 2 |
| BUTUNYI | 50.43 5 | 56.49 1 | 51.77 2 | 52.73 4 | 52.73 3 |
| BURINDA | 48.86 5 | 53.09 2 | 51.48 3 | 53.18 1 | 51.22 4 |

Source: District Education Office, Butula (2011)

Study Population

A study population is a complete set of individuals, cases or objects with some common observable characteristics (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). This study was conducted in primary schools in Butula District. The target population was made up of Standard seven pupils and teachers from twenty one schools out of the seventy four primary schools in the district.

Table 3: Study Population

| Zone | Tingolo | Butunyi | Burinda | Total |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Schools | 25 | 25 | 24 | 74 |

Source: District Education Office, Butula, (2011)

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The sampling unit in this study is the school. A sample is part of the target population that has been procedurally selected to represent it (Oso and Onen, 2009). The study employed simple random technique. The technique ensured choosing schools in such a way that each unit in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Kombo, 2006). This is because pupils in all schools bear the same characteristics by virtue of purpose and level of education. Using simple random sampling technique, the 7, 8 and 6 schools were selected in the respective zones. Only one standard seven English teacher of the randomly selected school was purposively selected since standard seven was the target sample. Each respondent teacher was observed in one lesson giving a total of 21 lessons to be observed during the observation schedule. A total of 10 standard seven pupils' exercise books were randomly selected from each class for document analysis giving a total of 210 books. Teachers likewise have the same characteristics by virtue of training regardless of their working station. Free Primary education has ensured similar and equal facilities in all schools. Sample size was 21 teachers and 210 pupils from 21 schools selected from 74 primary schools in Butula district. Two hundred and ten pupils' exercise books were randomly selected for document analysis. Table 3.4 provides this information. It shows how the study sample was obtained from the population.

Table 3: Study Sample

| Zone | Population (Schools) | Sample (Schools) | Teachers | Std. 7 Pupils' Exercise books | Observed lessons |
|---------|----------------------|------------------|----------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Tingolo | 25 | 7 | 7 | 70 | 7 |
| Butunyi | 25 | 8 | 8 | 80 | 8 |
| Burinda | 24 | 6 | 6 | 60 | 6 |
| | 74 | 21 | 21 | 210 | 21 |

Data Collection Tools

The main tools used for data collection in this study were the questionnaire, document analysis, interview schedules and observation schedule.

Data Analysis

Data analysis deals with the organization, interpretation and presentation of collected data. It is a postulate of how the data was analysed (Oso and Onen, 2009). Descriptive data analysis techniques were used. The analysed data was presented in tables, figures and themes determined by the objectives of the study

Discussion of Findings

The use of CBI in the Teaching of English in Butula District

The researcher agrees with Richard Jarasek (in Krueger and Ryan, 1993:85) that there is constant interplay between language and content. The summary of this states that:

A student's exposure to meaningful subject matter phased in the second language yields content mastery and linguistic mastery. This is a long way from the not-too distant past when foreign language teaching was basically content free. Class time was filled with manipulation of linguistic forms and discussion of correct usage. Since those bad old days, programme designers and researchers have been modeling the ways content-focused and use oriented programming can motivate, facilitate and recontextualise foreign language learning (Krueger and Ryan 1993:85).

The researcher is also in agreement with Brinton, Snow and Wesche that "content-based instruction aims at eliminating the artificial separation between language, instruction and subject-matter classes which exists in most educational settings" (Oller 1993, 137). The researcher further observed that an attempt to separate language and content is a barrier to the learning of English language. Stryker and Leaver (2007:7) identified a similar problem, they state that:

This artificial separation between language instruction and subject-matter remains an obstacle in many, if not most, foreign language settings. The reasons stem from a combination of cultural values- insular social values, a lack of perceived need for integration of language and content, old teaching habits based on false assumptions, and educational bureaucracy mired in the past. Teachers' unfamiliarity with second language acquisition processes such as the idea that the study of language equates to the study of grammar, that meaning should be communicated through translation, that the study of literature, or that students must be "fluent" before they are ready to study real content.

The use of CBI prepares the learners for self-reliance and survival skills. It provides for orderly and systematic exposure to the cultural heritage. This enables the learners to see the relationship among various elements in the curriculum and use it to learn English language. The use of content from other subjects makes English language sneak into the learner's cognition without pain. On this view, the research findings seem to differ with (Maly 1993; 40) that: sometimes learners do not feel that they are learning unless it hurts.

English language teaching in standard seven in Butula District adopts theme based approach. This enhances the learner's confidence with a feeling of using language to accomplish real tasks. Stryker and Leaver (2007) asserts that theme based approaches are often supplementary activities that interrupt the systematic study of grammar with teachings and activities on topics such as food, music and the family. English language cannot be taught in isolation from content of other subjects. This is in agreement with Abukaija (1987) who asserts that content cannot be separated from language because each has something important to offer in the development of a round learner.

Nature and Relevance of CBI Material

This study realized that materials play an essential role in the development and practice of CBI. The researcher is in agreement with Stryker and Leaver (1993) who state the characteristics of CBI material as follows:

1. Material must be authentic –like the ones used in native language instructions.
2. Examples must be drawn from realia and real life experience and contemporary issues.
The CBI materials make lessons interesting and real, enhance communicative language teaching, capture the learner's concentration, widen their scope of creative thinking and make language learning powerful and meaningful.

Perception of Teachers to the use of CBI

The study results revealed that teachers have positive attitude towards the use of CBI. It makes learning easy, arouses the learner's interest, facilitates understanding and enhances communicative competence. CBI provides teachers with a wide choice of knowledge to teach. It enhances synthesis of information and mastery of content. It makes the teaching of English lively as examples are drawn from day to day life experience. It expands the teachers' knowledge. Ngatia (1981:54) observed that: "An individual's attitude has an indispensable function towards an individual behavior."

Perception of Learners to the use of CBI

It was realized during the lesson observation that learners' attitude towards CBI was very positive. Content from other subjects and learners' experience rekindled the learners' schemata. The learners' interests and needs were put into consideration. They were encouraged, activated and curiosity aroused. Language learning is made real and natural and real to reflect real life situation of the learners and thus cultivates real positive attitude in the learners. During lessons where CBI was used the learners listening and speaking skills were enhanced. The learners acquire language without difficulty. The learners are encouraged to find out more about what they learn outside the classroom. The learners develop freedom to express their thoughts in relation they know when CBI is used.

Challenges of using CBI

The researcher found out that there are several challenges teachers face in attempt to use CBI. These included: lack of knowledge of the relevant material to be used. Teachers treat materials from other subjects irrelevant and attempts to teach English as a subject with experiences in grammar.

The use of CBI requires more time to cover content than the allocated frame of time. In need of covering the syllabus and outlined activities in the course book, teachers tend to neglect content and separate language from content thus making the learning of English difficult and boring. Furthermore, due to lack of knowledge from other subjects where content is borrowed, teachers tend to avoid what they do not understand. It therefore requires thorough prior preparation by the teacher to be familiar with the content.

Summary of Findings

The study results showed that the teachers carried out CBI under the guidance of the course books without real understanding of the concept of integration. There was intensive use of knowledge from other subjects. The teachers appeared uncomfortable with the use of content from other subjects as emphasis was put on language practice and grammar.

It was found out that English language teaching adopts theme based approach. The content is drawn from other subjects under themes such as sea travel, air travel, banking, tourism, agricultural show, deserts and disasters among others. This enhances the learner's confidence with a feeling of using language to accomplish real tasks. These themes provide activities that interrupt the systematic study of grammar. They make learning real, practical and learner friendly. It was found out that the teachers' attitude towards the use of CBI was positive. It made the learning of English natural. The learners enjoyed the lessons when content was integrated with language. It made them curious to talk about their experiences and common knowledge. However, the teachers lacked awareness of the method and much concentration was on language practice.

The fourth objective was, to determine the perception of learners to the use of CBI in the learning of English. It was realized that the learners' attitude towards the use of CBI was positive. The learners' real life experience was brought to the classroom. Learning English was natural and meaningful. The intention of the learners was to communicate and express ideas about content under study but not labouring to memorize current grammatical structures. CBI made the classroom environment and language learning process natural and friendly.

The researcher found out that teachers face real challenges in attempt to use CBI. These challenges range from lack of awareness, limited time to appropriately explore content to facilitate English language learning, lack of knowledge about some form of content and fear of the need for thorough lesson preparation. Teachers of other subjects are incompetent in English language. During lessons of other subjects, the subject teachers code-switch and code-mix to make learners understand. Their major concern is internalization of content but not language acquisition. Furthermore, CBI lesson requires a lot of time to prepare. Due to congested curriculum and overload of work, teachers rush through to cover the syllabus other than taking a long time preparing for English lessons.

Study Conclusions

From the summary of findings, the following conclusions were made:

- (1) Teachers tend to separate language and subject matter thus making the learning of English difficult. Many teachers are not familiar with the use of CBI.
- (2) Content of other subjects offers opportunities for teachers to match the learners' interest and schemata with meaningful content thus facilitating the learning of language.
- (3) Content of other subjects stimulates learners to think and learn English language.
- (4) Teachers of English in primary schools in Butula District have positive attitude towards CBI but lack sufficient ability to use the technique.
- (5) The use of content from other subjects makes English language sneak into the learners' cognition without pain.

Recommendations

The findings of this study on the use of CBI in primary schools in Butula District call for attention in several areas. These include:

- (1) Teachers should be in-serviced on the technique of integration to reinforce its appropriate use and practice in primary schools.
- (2) The publishers should use material that cuts across the curriculum and put into consideration interests and background of all learners.

- (3) The trainers of teachers of English should put emphasis on integration and train teachers on its value and how to do it. It should be taught as a topic in teacher training colleges. It is the quality training and not the number that is wanted.
- (4) There should be workshops and feedback programmes at Zonal education level for teachers to express their challenges towards integration periodically.

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