

Investigating the Effectiveness of L₂ Kiswahili Teaching Strategies in Kenyan Primary Schools

Salome Jeromin Kotira^{1,2}, Lou Shizhou¹

¹Zhejiang Normal University

²University of Dar Es Salaam

Abstract: *This research intended to investigate the effectiveness of teaching strategies of Kiswahili as a second language (L₂) in primary schools in Kenya. The study was conducted using interview, observation, and focus group discussion to examine teaching strategies of Kiswahili as a second language in primary schools. The focus was to explore the effectiveness of teaching strategies of Kiswahili L₂ in Kenya. The findings explored that some of the teaching strategies of Kiswahili (L₂) in Kariobangi North, St. Daniel Comboni and Ngungumu primary schools are facing several challenges due to school and classroom environments. The findings also discover that some of the L₂ teaching strategies are being skipped by teachers because they cannot be used in Kenyan classrooms. The underlying reason could be overcrowded classrooms, and lack of teaching tools. This paper concludes with some suggestion about second language teaching in Kenya.*

Keywords: Second language (L₂), teaching strategies, Kenyan primary schools, Kiswahili language

1. Introduction

In Kenya Kiswahili¹ is used as a second medium of communication and used as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools from grade I-IV and being taught as a subject from standard V-VIII and in secondary level of education. Students starts to learn Kiswahili in primary schools, this is raising a question of what a teaching strategies and practice for Kiswahili teacher can be effective to Kiswahili learners in primary schools. Kenyan education system uses the second languages as their medium of instruction as Kiswahili used in lower primary schools and English used in upper primary school and secondary schools and tertiary education Mose (2018). The using of strategies in teaching second language generally or Kiswahili in particular is very helpful in the sense that students differ in their learning style and nature so using of different strategies in teaching will help student to master the language easily.

Teachers are the ones who determine the good teaching in the classroom. Language teacher education programs have preparing teachers with different strategies of teaching so that teachers can successfully increase learning in all students Sun (2015). Teachers who are in service are the one who cause ineffectiveness in teaching program Darling-Hammond (2000). Teachers should pay attention on the strategy they are applying in second language teaching in the classroom. This research can help teachers in the teaching of second language to students of different backgrounds.

Primary school students have difficulties with second language learning, and therefore support from teachers via proper language teaching strategies is needed Käsper, (2018). Teachers are supposed to make decision about their

instructions in the classroom considering the needs of students and the endeavor of teaching Pianta, (2006). Silva and Cain (2015) stressed that developing students' vocabulary knowledge and teaching grammar rules support further in improving language knowledge. Primary school students can acquire language easily through proper language teaching strategies. Applegate and Applegate (2010) indicated that students' reading interest are connected, and therefore it is extremely important to support all reading outcomes, through different language teaching strategies. Language teaching strategies can help students in different language skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading).

The following recommended strategies for language teaching in general and second language in particular will be described in further detail. Marzano (2004) developed a six-step process for language teaching to students of all ages. The author suggested that the first three steps aim to introduce the new word: (1) an explanation of the word; (2) asking students to describe the word in their own words; (3) asking students to construct a picture or symbol representing the word. The final steps involve putting the new word in different context: (4) engage students in activities that help them add new words to their knowledge; (5) ask students to discuss the terms with one another; (6) involve students in games that allow them to play with the terms. Fisher and Frey (2008) recommended four steps for developing language knowledge. In the first step, teachers should give a student-friendly definition of the new word and then assess how students use it. The second step suggests providing opportunities for students to use new vocabulary on their own, with the teacher present to assist, when needed. The third step includes ways to clarify meaning and usage in groups – students teaching their peers. The last step includes practical use of the term in independent reading, writing and discussion. Foorman et al. (2016) discovered a three-way interaction between word reading, teaching effectiveness, and time spent on teaching grammar. This interaction revealed positive relationships between vocabulary

¹ Kiswahili is the language that is spoken by Swahili people. Swahili is a community of people and Kiswahili is the language they speak. The Swahili people in Kenya live in the coastal area. Kiswahili is a mixer of Bantu languages and it is widely spoken in Tanzania.

knowledge and reading on the one hand, and ratings of teaching effectiveness on the other. All of these need good teaching strategies which will help students with second language learning. The proper choose of strategies will facilitate teaching and enhance language learning to second language learners. This is why this study intended to investigate the effectiveness of the strategies that Kiswahili teachers used in teaching primary school students.

2. Methods

Area of study and design

This study was conducted in three primary schools in Kenya located in Nairobi. The study was focusing on the understanding the effectiveness of teaching strategies of Kiswahili L₂ in the classroom. We conducted interview and focus group discussion for the teachers who teaches Kiswahili in those primary schools. Observation of the Kiswahili teaching was also done in the classrooms.

Research Instrument

This study applied variety of research instrument to collect data. An observation was conducted in the Kiswahili classroom when teaching was in progress. Face-to-face interview was conducted with the 6 teachers participated in this study, two Kiswahili teachers from each school with the purpose of knowing the strategies that they used in their Kiswahili language teaching in the classroom. Focus group discussion was also conducted with the 6 teachers. We discussed about the strategies they used to teach Kiswahili L₂ in their classroom and if those strategies are effective in their teaching. We conducted discussion about 20 – 30 minutes with each group. A questionnaire was provided to the teachers. Ten questions about strategies they use in their classroom was asked. Kiswahili teaching class of about 30-40 minutes each class was observed This study is qualitative in nature; the researcher summarized the key findings from interviews, focus group discussion and observation with brief explanation, interpretation and conclusion. In each school six Kiswahili teachers were randomly selected from three schools in Nairobi.

3. Findings and Discussion

This paper aimed to understand the effectiveness of Kiswahili L₂ teaching strategies in Kenyan primary schools. Results of the data collected from interviews, focus group discussion and observation are exploring the strategies that teacher uses in their Kiswahili L₂ teaching task. It shows the strategies used by teachers in teaching Kiswahili and the effectiveness of those strategies.

Effectiveness of Strategy Use

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is one of the teaching strategies through which the constructivism reaches its apex. Scholars argue that, the effectiveness of cooperative learning is more than other methods or procedures are used in classroom learning. Judith and Voorhis (1992) presented at the International Convention on Cooperative Learning in Netherlands, citing various examples of research that had been done on cooperative learning in classrooms. This

strategy requires students to cooperate with a different group of classmates who differ in their academic ability, gender, culture, and native language while working together toward a common goal. There are benefits like increasing student involvement in classes, leading student to enjoyment in the process of learning, students' improved attitudes toward learning, which finally leads students into mastery of course content Palmer (2007). Working together to achieve a common goal has been producing higher achievement and productivity compared to working alone, as it also stands as one of the strongest principles of social and organizational psychology in the classroom Palmer (2007).

Teachers from Kariobangi North, Ngungumu, and St. Daniel Comboni primary schools in Kenya who teaches Kiswahili as a second language, explained that how simple it is to use this strategy because students feel more comfortable to cooperate with their fellow students in the classroom more than with the teacher. Most of teachers participated in this study mention this strategy as their favorite strategy because it allows every student to interact with each other. He also said when you choose a strategy for teaching and the students seem not to be interested with that strategy it is better for a teacher to look for another strategy because that strategy will not help students to catch up with the language knowledge as teacher expected. He insisted that teacher choose strategy that best suit the learning style of his/her students. For him he decided to use cooperative strategy on his Kiswahili teaching.

Language Comparative technique

This is the strategy that teacher uses familiar language to the students compared to the target language. Kenya uses Sheng² as the language of their daily conversation. Because English structure differs from Kiswahili, especially in *syntax* (syntax is a set of rules that govern the arrangement of words and phrases in a process of making a well-formed sentence), a standard six teacher in Kariobangi North primary school uses the strategy of comparing and contrasting every aspect she teaches in syntax class. According to her, comparing and contrasting strategy helps students to avoid transferring the knowledge of English to Kiswahili language. The teachers explained that it happens for first-time learners of Kiswahili to use English structure to construct Kiswahili Sentences.

According to the discussion done, students appeared to be more active by asking more comparative-sentence questions so as to know more. The method appeared steering up the discussion, and showed that students knew a lot in English syntax, that they thought the same rules could apply in Kiswahili. One student was heard asking question for more clarification from her prior knowledge of English, and now learning new language which goes with new and different rule. This strategy is more effective when you have same background of the language. If Kiswahili teacher in Kenya

² Sheng, popularly defined as an acronym for "Swahili-English slang" (Mazrui, 1995), emerged in the 1960s in the multicultural environment of Nairobi. It is an urban language which combines mainly Kiswahili and English but also other Kenyan languages such as Kikuyu, Luyha, Dholuo and Kikamba.

understands Sheng and English it is easy for him/her to use this strategy to teach Kiswahili language.

Repetition

This is the strategy that a teacher repeats some new words or sentence in order to make students catch and remember them. In Nyungumu primary school, the Kiswahili class which focused on pronunciation was observed and the researcher had an interview with the teachers about the strategies he used that day in the classroom, as well as other strategies of teaching other elements of language in his class. With respect with *pronunciation*, repetition seemed to be the preferred technique of teaching and making students master the pronunciation. The teacher listed few new vocabularies on the board that were going to appear in the text of the day. She read them and the students repeated after her, before she started to explain their meaning with examples from students' real life. Repetition can be in form of word a teacher repeats the word or sentence when teaching as it was explained, but repetition can also be in form of lesson or topic as teacher from Nyungumu primary school explained in the interview. She said most of the time when she realized that her students did not understand the lesson, she often use repetition strategy that she will repeat the whole lesson to the students. This strategy is effective depending on the time. If a teacher has enough time it is easy for her to use this strategy especially in the level of lesson, but because the time is very limited most of the interviewed teachers said that they only use this strategy to repeat some parts of the lesson which they think is more important.

Communication strategies

This strategy is used by Kariobangi North Kiswahili teacher Communication as a strategy of teaching Kiswahili L₂ in her classroom. Students from Kariobangi North primary school are encouraged to speak Kiswahili during the Kiswahili class as well as when they meet with the Kiswahili teacher in the office. According to the interview which was done with the standard III English teacher, no punishment which is given to student who speaks ungrammatical Kiswahili, or who is anxious to speak, but motivation and friendly environment is being put to make sure that students are motivated to speak Kiswahili.

Different prizes are given to students who try to speak Kiswahili every time. Prizes do not consider the correctness of the sentences or speech used by students. According to the teacher interviewed, awarding students basing on the goodness of his/her Kiswahili makes those who cannot speak good Kiswahili feel inferior and get discouraged to continue speaking. Punishment for those students who were speaking other languages apart from Kiswahili was once employed, but it later proved failure because more than half of the class would keep silent the whole day because they could not speak Kiswahili and they were afraid of being punished. In general, punishment discouraged even student-to-student interaction inside the classroom. After that first trial, Kiswahili teachers in Kariobangi North primary school decided to minimize punishment and encourage more prizing. Today, there is no punishment for students who do not speak Kiswahili, but the students' courage to speak Kiswahili is higher than the time when punishments were been applied.

Communication through classroom and school debates

Debate is another aspect through which students in most of the schools learn Kiswahili. In *Ngunyumu* primary school, Kiswahili teachers organize debates for students to learn Kiswahili more practically. Through debate, students learn how to argue, make point and convince by using Kiswahili language. It also helps them to improve their listening and speaking skills. A teacher prepares a class debate by announcing it prior to the day of debate. Because the debate needs to have two antagonistic groups which are against each other, teachers give freedom to students for them to choose the side they wish to be. However, depending with the nature of the topic, teachers may also intervene in creation of groups. Topics of discussion are always interesting and age-related ones for them to feel the sense of arguing for or against it. Every week, Kiswahili teacher prepares one session of debate, however, it is not a universal or common strategy that forces every teacher to apply it, but the interviewee (Kiswahili teacher) said he likes to use debate strategy because it does not only teach them language skills, but also tolerance and thinking abilities.

Use of game

Puzzle is one of the vocabulary identification challenges. It has been in use by Second Language teachers around the world since 1950's. The game is not only a fun way of acquiring and revising vocabularies, but they also exercise student's brain. Despite the fact that most of the schools in developing countries have not moved to ICT, where these crossword games are played online, the situation is different in Kenya. Most of the schools use puzzles that are either drawn computer and printed out, or drawn by a teacher on the board for students to form words by looking at the board and writing them down. In St. Daniel Comboni primary school, teachers are designing crossword puzzles and print them out for students to work through it in groups.

The list of words is given as a clue to find the words that a student needs to fill in the grid, whereby, the clues are either vertical or horizontal. For example, if the clue for vertical 1 is "*The front part of your head*", this means that a student will need to look for a word with four letters that will need to fit vertically in the grid. Given the number of boxes in the grid and the clues, the answer will be "*face*". Another type of clues used in crossword puzzle involves filling the gap. For example, clues number 21 (horizontal) reads "*Excuse me for not speaking clearly, I have got a.....in my throat*" (4). Here a student needs a four-letter word that will fill the gap, but also fit with the number of boxes in the grid. Sometimes with this crossword puzzle, a teacher provides what he called cryptic clues which will make students think harder.

Code switching strategy

Code switching refers to the alternate use of more than one language in conversation. It may be two languages within the same sentence or two languages that are sequentially used from one sentence to another. In a second language teaching most of teachers prefer to use the known or familiar language to teach the second language. In Kenya, most of the students get into primary school with a very little knowledge about Kiswahili language. In this case, teachers find it is difficult to teach Kiswahili by using the same

language as a medium of instruction in the classroom. However, teachers are encouraged to speak Kiswahili in most occasions so as to motivate and act as role model to students. Most of the time, code switching is used to emphasize a point. During the classroom, a researcher observed the code switching from Kiswahili to either English or Sheng, in Ngunyumu. However, Sheng was the mostly used language in the classroom despite the fact that the subject (content) being taught was Kiswahili.

The practice of such code-switching strategy in a sequential order (from L1 to L2 dominated conversation) is supported by scholars like Krashen (1981) and Saville-Troike (1988) who describe that English language learners are progressing through a series of levels in English proficiency (second-language development). The scholars explain that these stages are namely; home language use (hereby means Sheng), preproduction, early production and lastly the speech emergence. During the preproduction phase, Kiswahili-language-learning students usually take in the new language and then go through “*silent period*” (one to three months). This is because, in this stage, students understand most of the discourse which are expressed to them, without being able to reply in such particular language. However, in the last phase of emergence, Kiswahili language students will be able to produce longer and understandable phrases and sentences (Reynolds & Herrell, 2001).

In the above case, especially with the phases described, code switching is vital during the first to the third phase. As Kiswahili teacher in Ngunyumu primary school explained above, during the lower level of primary school, the use of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction during teaching may leave most of the students (if not all) behind. The first phase of “*home language use*”, teachers will be forced to use languages which are known by all the students, the second phase (silent phase) will never be interactive in the classroom, unless the teacher allows the minimal use of first language among the students during the discussion. In this case, code switching during Kiswahili teaching as a second language is supportive toward reaching the native-like fluency. Switching from Kiswahili to English or Sheng language seems to be the most useful strategy to Kiswahili language teachers in Kenya. During Kiswahili class observation most of the Kiswahili language teachers used the code-switching strategy. The teachers from Kariobangi North primary school explained to the researcher that it is easy to use English or Sheng to explain Kiswahili content than using Kiswahili itself.

4. Discussion

This study understands the Kiswahili L₂ teaching strategies in Kariobangi North, St. Daniel Comboni and Nyungumu primary schools in Kenya. We further inquire the effectiveness of the strategy use in these schools. Teaching strategies found to be used by participated teacher in this research are repetition, code switching, and cooperative learning, language comparative technique, teaching communication strategy, use of games. We further researched on the effectiveness of these strategies on the teaching of Kiswahili L₂. Several studies have researched on the strategies of teaching second language in different

contexts, this study focused on the strategies of teaching Kiswahili as a second language and the effectiveness of those strategies. This study, to the best of author knowledge is the first to explore the effectiveness of Kiswahili L₂ teaching strategies in classroom context.

The finding of this study does not differ with the findings of other studies about L₂ teaching strategies. Teaching strategies like use games in teaching, cooperative learning (Marzano 2004), teaching fluency and jigsaw strategy of cooperation in teaching (Fisher & Frey 2008). another study in line with this is the study of (Facella 2005) found repetition as the teaching strategy of second language. Code switching as a teaching strategies mentioned by teachers is one of the strategies that many scholars have insisted not to be used as a teaching strategies but the study of (Songxaba 2017) proved that it is hard to avoid it as it help students in their learning. Although teachers in that study was fully aware that using code switching in their teaching is not allowed but they said it help them a lot in their teaching of second language. The use of games as strategies for teaching L₂ has been proved to help the students in grammar learning (Sekelj & Rigo 2011), this also was proved to this study as the strategy that can help students in learning language. Many L₂ learners have been interested with games in their language learning.

In line with the teaching strategies found in this study, we found some challenges which make the strategies to be ineffective to the teaching of Kiswahili L₂ in the classroom. These challenges have caused some teachers of Kiswahili L₂ to skip some strategies which may cause the strategy to be ineffective. Second language classroom should have small number of students, but most of Kenyan classrooms are overcrowded. If a second language classroom is overcrowded, it will make the whole teaching process to be difficult and the use of some strategies to be impossible because some strategies require a class to have few students. Challenges like lack of teaching tools and material are the challenging situation to the Kiswahili L₂ teachers. Teaching tools in the L₂ classroom like music, pictures, and some objects are very important in the teaching.

These challenges caused the student-centered strategy which is suggested by the scholars to be impossible to be applied in L2 classrooms in Kenya. Student-centered approach has been proved to be helpful in the teaching of second language. Student-centered approach gives the students chance to learn second language by using their knowledge instead of a teacher to input his knowledge in theirs. So Kiswahili teachers of St. Daniel Comboni, Kariobangi North and Ngunyumu primary schools have proved that the teaching of second language in Kenya are facing some challenges that has to be fixed. If these challenges will be fixed, the teaching of second language will be more successful and interesting.

5. Conclusion

In any second language teaching, the use of strategies is one thing and the strategy to be effective is another thing. In this study teachers have mentioned several strategies that they use in their teaching of Kiswahili L₂ in the classroom, but we

further researched on the effectiveness of those strategies in the teaching of Kiswahili as a second language in Kenya. Teaching strategies of Kiswahili L₂ have facing several challenges that make the use of some strategies to be ineffective. Having saying that we are suggesting that second language classrooms in Kenya to be restructured to make sure that the number of students in one classroom will be reduced. By doing that students will have more chance to interact with the teacher during teaching session and teachers will use different strategies as they want and the most importantly to use student-centered approach. It is concluded that Kiswahili L₂ teaching has no different with any other second languages in terms of strategy use and approach. It is suggested that the challenges that cause teaching of Kiswahili to be difficult should be solved so that the teaching strategies of this language to be effective. A teaching of second language should follow all the criteria of L₂ teaching for the teaching to be effective and attract learners.

References

- [1] Facella et al (2005), Effective teaching strategies forenglish learners. Bilingual research journal. Spring29, 1 eucation database pg 209.
- [2] Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C., Dimino, J. Wissel, S. (2016). *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2016–4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U. S. Department of Education.
- [3] Hapsari, A. (2019). Language Learning Strategies in English Language Learning: A Survey Study. *Lingua Pedagogia, Journal of English Teaching Studies*, 1 (1), 58–68.
- [4] Krashen, S. D. (1982). Language teaching methodology. *World Language English*, 1 (2), 97–101. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1982.tb00476>
- [5] Maile Käspera, *, Krista Uibub, Jaan Mikk (2018) Language Teaching Strategies' Impact on Third-Grade Students' Reading Outcomes and Reading Interest. *Journal of elementary education*.10: 5, 601-610 DOI: 10.26822/iejee.2018541309.
- [6] Mose P. N. (2018), Language-in-education policy in Kenya: Intention, Interpretation, Implementation. *Nordic Journal of African studies*.26 (3); 215-230 (2017)
- [7] Palmer, B. (2007). Cognitive and Constructivist Strategies for Teaching about Language and for Providing Reading and Writing Instruction. *Forum on Public Policy Online*, 2007 (3), 702–714.
- [8] Pianta R. C. (2006). Classroommanagement and relationships between childrenand teachers. implications for research and prtice. N. M Evرتون and C. S. Weinstein (Eds). *Handbook of classroom research, practice and contemporary issues* (pp.149-162).
- [9] Sekelj, A., & Rigo, I. (2011). Teaching English grammar in primary school. *Tabula-Časopis Odjela za humanističke znanosti, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli*, (9), 188-199. Accessed on December 10th, 2015, from <http://hrcak.srce.hr>.
- [10] Silva M \$ Cain K. E. (2015). The relation between lower and higher-level comprehension skills and their role in rediction of early reading comprehension. *Journal of education psychology*, 107 (2), 321-331.
- [11] Songxaba, S. L., Coetzer, A., Molepo, J. M., Teacher, P., Africa, S., Sisulu, W., ... Africa, S. (2017). *Perceptions of teachers on creating space for code switching as a teaching strategy in second language teaching in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa*.1–8.
- [12] Peijian Sun, Rui Yuan & Lin Teng (2015) Understanding L2 French teaching strategies in a non-target language classroom context, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 41: 3, 324-328, DOI: 10.1080/02607476.2015.1044228
- [13] Wyse. (2014). Tanzania English Language Teaching and Whole School Professional Development in. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 38, 59–68.