

Perceptions of English Language Teachers and Learners about an Effective English Language Teacher (Eelt) in Kenyan Secondary Schools

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Abstract: *Between January, 2013 and March, 2013, an investigation of the perceptions of teachers and learners of English about an effective English language teacher was carried out. The research involved 10 teachers of English and 50 Form Three students of English in Kimilili-Bungoma district, Bungoma County, Kenya. Specific objectives of the study were to: investigate English language teachers' perceptions about the qualities of an effective English language teacher (ELT); to investigate English language learners' (ELLS) perceptions about the qualities of an effective ELT and to investigate the factors that promoted and/or impeded effective English language teaching in Kenyan secondary schools. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, constructivist-interpretative philosophical paradigm and descriptive design based on neuro-linguistic programming, cognitivist, constructivist and transformational theories of adult learning. Stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to get the sample. In- depth interview and Focus group discussions (group interview) were used to collect data from the teachers and learners respectively. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. From the analysis and the interpretation of data, it can be deduced from the findings that most of the teachers perceived possessing academic, professional and pedagogical knowledge; reflective teaching and inspiring students to learn the language as the most important characteristics of an EELT while most of the students perceived teacher's pedagogical skills and personality as the most important characteristics of an EELT. Most teachers perceived heavy work load and lack of motivation while students perceived lack of enough teaching and learning resources and scarcity of ELTs as the most important factors that impeded effective English language teaching. Consequently, it is recommended that English language teachers (ELTs) should inspire their students to learn the language ;should be motivated by their schools and the government; should individually and collaboratively engage in continued professional development ; and schools and the government should support them in this endeavor in order to bring about desired learning of the language among the students.*

Keywords: English Language Teachers (ELTs); English Language Learners (ELLS); an Effective English Language Teacher (EELT); Perceptions. Board of Management (BOM)

1. Introduction

The aim of teacher education is to produce quality teachers who can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the learners. The teacher is an essential facilitator in the implementation of the curriculum. Proponents of teacher education distinguish it from teacher training. They argue that teacher education embraces a wider perspective of continued learning within the teaching process. They also perceive teaching as a profession where there is initial and in service training (Borg, 2006; Barasa,2005) .In education therefore, the importance of the teacher takes second place only after that of the learners so that the quality of the teacher is of great concern to the education system (Republic of Kenya, 1995; 2005a). Research supports this notion that a good teacher and actions to be taken on his part in the classroom play a vital role in provoking effective and efficient learning on the part of the students(Markley,2004).

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology Policy Framework for Education and Training (2012) states that: "the government will develop and implement a balanced education curriculum aligned to the implementation and achievement of vision 2030. This will require development of teachers with a different mind- set; that focuses on core educational outcomes, based on developing a repertoire of skills and competences on subject matter mastery, pedagogical skills and upgrading school based quality assurance..."English

language teachers are by no means an exception and their role in effective language learning cannot be overlooked. Special attention must be paid to this link between teachers and learners in countries like Kenya which teach English as a second/foreign language, which use English as an official language, as a medium of instruction and where language learning happens through formal classroom setting and teachers as the main source of input (KIE,1992,2002;Shishavan& Sadeghi, 2007).In language education, the primary purpose is to explore the pedagogy of English. It focuses on what promotes or what impedes the teaching of the English language (Barasa,2005).

2. Literature Review

Literature on teacher education, an effective teacher and effective English language teaching are reviewed.

2.1 Teacher Education

In order to understand developments in research in teacher effectiveness, we start with a short review of research trends in teacher education.

Before the 1970s research in teacher education (TE) was mainly concerned with what has been referred to as process product designs which 'examined teaching in terms of the learning outcomes it produced. The aim was to understand how teachers' actions led or did not lead to student learning' (Freeman, 2002:2 in Ong'ondo, 2009). During this time,

there was a general belief that: 'learning to teach involved mastering specific content one was to teach and separately mastering methodology for conveying that content to learners' (ibid: 3). From the mid-1970s to 1980s, questions started to be asked about the efficacy of this process-product (micro) approach to research considering the recognition that teaching is a complex phenomenon (Borg, 2003, 2006; Freeman, 2002; Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Borg indicates a shift to that thinking towards: 'the recognition that teachers are active, thinking decision makers who play a central role in shaping classroom events'(2006:1) and 'make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically oriented, personalized and context sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs'(2002:8).

Consequently, the mid 1980s through the 1990s saw research in TE shift from process product paradigm to investigating of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, perspectives, thinking, reasoning, etc. This has been termed the hidden side of teaching (Freeman, 2003:1); teacher cognition (Borg; 2006); Pedagogical reasoning (Johnson, 1999; McClellan, 2002; Richards, 1998); a macro approach or direct/active teaching (Richards & Nunan, 1990).

2.2 Effective Teaching

Effective Teaching is typically defined as bringing about desired student learning. If the objective of a particular classroom lesson or unit is to have every student spell new words correctly, then the teacher who brings all the students to that happy conclusion is said to be effective. Further, the more students learn, the more effective is the teaching (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998:107).

2.3 Importance of Teacher Effectiveness

Why is measuring teacher effectiveness so important? Because the evidence produced is used for major decisions about our future in the academe. There are two types of decisions: formative which uses the evidence to improve and shape the quality of our teaching, and summative, which uses the evidence to 'sum up' our overall performance or status to decide our annual merit pay, promotion or tenure (Berk, 2005). The summative decisions are final and they are rendered by the administrators or colleagues at different points in time to determine if we have a future. These decisions have an impact on the quality of our professional life.

Teaching effectiveness has been accepted as a multidimensional construct since it measures a variety of different aspects of teaching such as; subject mastery, effective communication, lesson preparation (Onyeachu, 1996). Therefore teachers should produce students of high academic performance. Poor academic performance of students in Kenya and Nigeria for example is linked to poor teachers' performance in terms of accomplishing the teaching task, negative attitudes to work and poor teaching habits which have been attributed to poor motivation (Ofoegbu, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2009; Republic of Kenya, 2006:13). Republic of Kenya (ibid) argues that some graduate teachers from public universities and diploma teachers from Diploma Teacher Colleges did

not have the expected depth in content of their teaching subjects and were not well grounded in teaching methodology. Many stakeholders felt that teachers were inadequate because there was no sufficient time during pre-service education to cover their teaching subjects in sufficient breadth and depth.

2.4 Characteristics of an Effective English Language Teacher

Over the short history of ESL/EFL field various methods have been proposed. Each method has in turn fallen out of favour and has been replaced with a new one. Since no method has been proven to be more effective than another, many teachers have jumped on the 'eclectic' bandwagon. Common sense would have this as the best available choice since variety is the spice of language (Sheen, 1994:127).

Other than considering method, there are characteristics that can make a good/effective ELT. A good effective ELT should have the following characteristics: Brosh (1996) cited in Shishavan & Sideghi (2009) found out the characteristics of an effective language teacher to be: having knowledge and command of the target language; being fair to students by neither showing favourism or prejudice; being able to organize, explain and clarify, as well as arouse and sustain interest and motivation ;and being available to students.

According to Pettis (1997), an effective language teacher should be principled, knowledgeable and skillful; his/her professional needs must change over time and develop during his/her teaching and he/she must be personally committed to his/her professional development.

Vadilio (1999) argues that effective language teachers should have a profound competence in the target language and a set of personal qualities such as sensitivity, tolerance and warmth.

Kalebic (2005) conducted research on the Development of Standards in Foreign Language Teacher Preparation in Croatia and found out that beginning language teachers should possess the following fourteen competences: linguistic and communicative competence; ability to motivate learners for learning; ability to plan the lesson ; ability to choose appropriate teaching strategies; ability of pedagogical action; ability to respond to learners' abilities and needs; ability to deal with unpredictable situations and maintain discipline; ability to organize learning activities; ability to create friendly atmosphere in the classroom; ability to assess learner language knowledge competencies; and knowledge of methods and theoretical concepts in English language teaching; knowledge about teaching strategies; competence in communication and presentation skills; and knowledge about the culture and literature of the target language.

Park & Lee (2006) cited in Shishavan & Sideghi (2009) investigated the characteristics of effective English language teachers as perceived by teachers and students in high school in Korea with a self-report questionnaire consisting of three categories: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills. Their findings indicated that on the

whole the teachers' perceptions of characteristics important for an ELT to possess differed significantly from those of students in all categories, with the teachers making English proficiency and students making pedagogical knowledge the first respectively. Borg (2006) found out that language teachers need to be more up-to-date to cope with advanced and progressive nature of language teaching methodology; the ELT should be proficient and have the command of the target language; and should have closer, more relaxed and generally more positive relationships with learners in comparison with other teachers. Richards (2011) states that a language teacher's confidence is also dependent upon his or her own level of language proficiency, so a teacher who perceives herself to be weak in the target language will have reduced confidence in her teaching ability and an inadequate sense of professional legitimacy (Seidlhofer, 1999).

Lastly, Shishavan & Sideghi (2009) studied the perceptions of teachers and students of English in Iran. It was found out that teachers and learners of English hold different views towards some characteristics of an effective English language teacher. Both teachers and students elicited the following opinions: being patient, flexible, caring about learners' needs, have positive attitudes towards learners, being smart and creative. Most of these teachers perceived a good knowledge of the language and pedagogy and teacher's personality factors as characteristics of an effective English language teacher while students gave more weight to personality of a teacher and the way s/he behaves towards his/her students.

The next sub section highlights different strategies used to measure teacher effectiveness.

2.5 Strategies used to Measure Teacher Effectiveness

Berk (2005) states that teacher effectiveness can be measured through the following strategies: learning outcomes, students' ratings, peer ratings, self-evaluation, use of videos, students' interviews, exit and alumni ratings, employer ratings, administrator ratings, teaching scholarship, teaching awards and teaching portfolio.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth interview of teachers and focus group discussion of students. Teacher participants were informed as to the purpose of the research and that the findings were not to be used to evaluate them as individuals, but rather to describe the characteristics of an effective English language teacher (EELT). The students were also to give their views on which an effective English language teacher was? The in-depth interview provided in-depth data that met the specific objectives of the study and focused group discussions encouraged students to open up and provided an opportunity to generate data within a short time.

4. Study Findings

The following are the findings from both teacher interviews

and students' focus group discussions about their perceptions of the qualities of an EELT.

4.1 Teacher Interviews

Most teachers stated that an effective English language teacher should be both academically and professionally trained and must be a long life learner. For example, Teacher A said that:

“An effective English language teacher, just like any other teacher, should be academically and professionally qualified so that s/he can have the mastery of the subject matter. This will make him/her to be confident, use appropriate teaching strategies and be effective while in class...”

They also perceived that an effective English language teacher should: inspire students to learn the language; plan the lessons well; control his/ her class; answer students' questions; assess learners' progress and be English language role models in the school, always communicating in English. For example, Teacher F commented:

“According to me, an EELT is one who is knowledgeable in subject matter and pedagogy. He/she must prepare well for the lessons, control his/her class, does not spoon feed the students but gives some challenging assignments to students and marks them, he/she motivates students to learn the language and perform better in it, he/she is creative and is patient with learners' language mistakes and errors.”

Finally, the other qualities of an EELT that the teacher participants mentioned included: adopting reflective and collaborative approaches in English language teaching; being eclectic in the use of teaching methods and possessing good verbal skills.

4.2 Students' Focus Group Discussions

First, most students perceived that an EELT should: be competent in the language; always use English in his/her communication and must use different and interesting methods while teaching. For example, the Group B participants agreed that an EELT speaks in English most of the time and rarely joins other teachers in the staff room in speaking in mother tongue; uses different and interesting methods to teach the language; he/she explains clearly; he/she is not so fast in his/her teaching and answers students' questions.

Second, students also agreed that an EELT should plan his/her lesson well; rarely misses the lessons; is not harsh but friendly to the students; accepts students' mistakes/errors and helps to correct them; manages the class well; picks on different students in the class to answer questions and is not biased and gives assignments to students and marks them. Third, most students also perceived that an EELT should make notes for the students ; should teach both English language (language skills and language areas) and Literature in English; should not waste time by talking about himself/herself and other things unrelated to the lesson and he/she motivates the students and makes them happy during the lesson. For example, one of the students in Group G said:

“an EELT is one who doesn’t delay to come to class; who doesn’t waste time talking about himself; who doesn’t read to students notes from a textbook; is one who teaches both grammar and literature, but not the one who just like literature and doesn’t teach other topics in the syllabus; is also one who completes the syllabus early and whose students love him and many of them pass highly in English.” Lastly, most students perceived that an EELT should have been trained and qualified to teach in a secondary school.

The next sub section highlights briefly the findings on factors that promote and/or impede the effective teaching of English language in Kenyan secondary schools. Most teachers said that heavy work load was one of the most important factors that impeded effective teaching of English in Kenyan Secondary schools. For example, Teacher B commended that: “English is a compulsory subject in Kenyan secondary schools and it means that all students from Form One to Form Four learn it. The ELT has 6 lessons in Form One and Two and 8 lessons in Form Three and Form Four every week. No free day! Worse still if you are the only teacher of English in the school. ELTs must give seatwork and mark within the lesson or assignments to be marked within the school day or at home...there are also compositions to be marked! This leaves less room for teachers to relax, are tired by the end of the day. These will automatically compromise their effectiveness.” Teacher J also complained: “There are very few Teachers Service Commission (TSC) ELTs in our schools. Some schools have only one ELT, and those with more than one teacher have very many students. How can they be effective if their workload is too much? Teachers need to collaborate in order to be more effective...how do you collaborate alone?” Another factor that impeded effective English language teaching was lack of motivation. All the interviewed teachers lamented about the withdrawal of the special allowance for English, Mathematics and sciences. This factor was strongly brought out by Teacher C: “I am very bitter with the TSC! There was special allowance for us...and teachers of English and Mathematics teach every day. A chemistry teacher with those chemicals...This allowance was withdrawn. This has really demotivated us and if I find greener pastures, I’ll just quit. Why teach many lessons, mark books every day, give compositions and get same pay with teachers with fewer lessons, who don’t teach everyday, who only marks exams...It is very discouraging and something must be done about it. It is now being reflected in course combinations among student teachers in universities. Many have opted for other subjects but not English...”

Teachers also said that lack of enough teaching and learning resources was an impediment to effective teaching. For example, some teachers lamented that more than three students shared one course book and that compromised effective teaching and learning. Teachers further lamented that modern technology, like the use of mobile phones had affected students’ reading culture. Most students spent more time on phones than on course books and literature in English set books. The use of sheng among students also impeded the effective learning of English in Kenyan secondary schools. Most students cited lack of enough

learning resources and fewer ELTs as factors that impeded effective teaching of English in Kenyan secondary schools.

5. Discussion

From the above findings both the teachers and students held some overlapping views towards the characteristics of an EELT. Both the teachers and the students perceived that an EELT be academically and professionally trained and qualified to teach English in a secondary school. This agrees with the findings of Brosh (1996), Pettis (1997) Shishavan and Sideghi (2007) who state that an EELT should be profoundly competent. ELTs are profoundly knowledgeable in English. Also, they both perceived that an EELT should plan his/her lesson well, teach it well; answer students’ questions and give assignments and mark them. As Feldman (1976; 1988) notes, teachers perceived features of an effective teacher as: high knowledge of pedagogy and use of particular techniques and methods such as preparing the lesson well, using lesson plans, unbiased assessment of what students have learnt, integrating group activities to class and assigning homework to be possessed by effective ELTs.

However, other characteristics of an EELT differed significantly between teachers and students. For example, most teachers perceived that for an ELT to be effective, s/he should adopt reflective and collaborative approaches and be eclectic in the use of teaching methods. This finding is similar to findings of Richards (1996), Bezzina (2002), Freeman (2002) and Sandholz (2002) who contend that reflection ‘must be the central pillar’ in teachers’ development and teachers should value to talk and reflect with others in their discipline about their strategies. They also perceived that an EELT must be a life-long learner. This finding agrees with Lange’s (1990), Freeman’s (2001), and Richards’ and Farrell’s (2005) who state that teachers should engage in learning through a number of formal and informal ways. Lange (ibid) describes teacher development as a process of continued intellectual, experiential and attitudinal growth of teachers which is vital in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teachers and learning experiences. Gardner (2013) argues that ELTs must be interested in current/new ELT books, journals, mind bogglingly good links, a conference near him/her or on the web. Be life-long learners...not life-long forgetters. Lastly, most teachers perceived an EELT as one who inspires his/her learners to learn the language and whose learners’ rarely complains about his/her teaching. This agrees with Mohamed’s (2006) findings where ELTs perceived effectiveness of their teaching when they did not receive complains from their learners. Students on the other hand perceived teacher’s personality as a very important factor among the characteristics of an EELT. Most of them agreed that an EELT should: be friendly but not harsh to students; motivate them to learn and speak the language; rarely miss lessons or waste lesson time; be unbiased; accommodate learners’ mistakes and help them to overcome; manage the class well; always communicate in English and rarely joins others in the staff room to speak in mother tongue and balances the teaching of English language and literature in English. This findings to a great extent confirms those of Feldman (1976) and Broch (1996) where Feldman found out that learners perceived superior teachers to be more friendly; helpful and

open to others' views and Broch (ibid) cited in Shishavan and Sideghi (2007) who found out that students perceived an EELT as one who has good character; who is friendly to learners; who inspires them to think positively towards the teacher and the subject matter being taught. When we critically assess the above findings, we can observe that most teachers made academic and professional qualification and teacher's proficiency in the use of language the most important characteristics of an EELT while the learners made pedagogical skills and teacher personality as the most important. This finding is similar to that of Park and Lee (2006) where teachers stated proficiency in English while students stated pedagogical skills as the most important characteristic of an EELT. The factors that impeded effective English language teaching as perceived by ELTs included: heavy teaching load; lack of motivation and inadequacy of professional development programmes. On the other hand, most students perceived lack of enough teaching and learning resources and few English language Teachers Service Commission (TSC) employed teachers as factors that impeded effective English language teaching in Kenyan secondary schools. This confirms Barasa's (1997) findings when he made a study on: 'Factors that cause poor performance in English in Kenyan secondary schools.' These factors were: lack of resources and teaching materials; heavy teaching load; lack of in service or refresher courses for teachers of English; the quota system; the influence of mother tongue and Sheng within and without the classroom; learners' level of speech; lack of role model for the language learner and poor reading culture.

6. Conclusion and Implication

The relationship that exists between teachers of English and learners of English perceptions towards an Effective English Language Teacher (EELT) leads to the conclusion that learners and teachers of English may have overlapping and at times divergent perceptions on important characteristics of an EELT. Consequently, to make their teaching of the language more effective, ELTs need to collaborate with their colleagues and their students in order to discover the qualities/characteristics of an effective or superior ELT and strive to acquire them. This will help them to plan their lessons effectively in order to meet the language needs of their learners.

Both the teachers and learners perceived an EELT as one who is academically and professionally qualified to teach English in a secondary school. This has the implication that teacher education institutions in Kenya through the Ministry of Education should endeavor to invest more resources in this sector in order to produce high quality ELTs. These teachers are the main source of language input to their learners and if they are well trained/educated, they will effectively help them to learn the language. This means that the first thing to deal with in teacher education is the training/education of effective teacher educators. Also, it is imperative that the in-service education programmes should be strengthened in order to equip ELTs with up-to-date skills and knowledge. The manner in which ELTs choose to go around the instructional process should be grounded on the theoretical and pedagogical orientations they have towards English as a language; the manner in which it is learnt; the

way they view and regard their learners; the structure of the classroom among many other things. This means that an ELT should have a philosophy shaping what s/he does, what to teach and when they do it and how to do it. A teacher's orientation about what English is all about and what s/he believes it entails, will shape the manner in which s/he will conduct his/her instructional process. This means that a good/effective and focused ELT will have a philosophy statement. This will enable him/her to establish and identify what works well and why in relation to the knowledge about how students learn the language most effectively. It should be noted that it is not enough to hold a sound philosophy of teaching statement, putting it in practice is the most important thing about good/effective teaching practice.

7. Recommendations

- [1] Teachers of English should be role models, motivate and inspire their students to learn the language.
- [2] ELTs in particular and all teachers in general should be motivated by the school principals, BOMs and the government in order to enhance their effectiveness.
- [3] ELTs should be encouraged to be life-long learners: engage in individual and collaborative professional development in order to enhance their pedagogical effectiveness.
- [4] Schools with more than one ELT to promote the culture of collaborative supervision where teachers share ideas, reflect on current practices, expand, refine, build new skills, do research and solve problems in order to bring about desired student learning of the language.
- [5] Schools and the government through the Ministry of Education to support teachers in general and ELTs in particular to attend in-service programmes: seminars, workshops etc.

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