Suitability of Communicative Approach in Teaching English Language in Tanzania Secondary Schools

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Abstract

As a strategy to improve the English language proficiency in secondary school, Tanzania issued a communicative competence based English syllabus in 2005. This syllabus that accommodates Communicative Approach in teaching and learning process was introduced to replace the old syllabus which was claimed to be structure based and hence could not produce communicative competent learners. This study investigated the suitability of the Approach in Tanzania and revealed the practical problems encountered by both teachers and students over the use of the Approach in Tanzania. It revealed that the learning environment in Tanzania does not support the use of the Approach because there is a big number of students in classes, a large number of people use Kiswahili and Ethnic Community Languages as their languages of communication, just few students use English only when they are in school environment and most secondary schools use Kiswahili language as their language of communication, and even teachers in these schools use Kiswahili when teaching in the classes though the stipulated language of instruction is English. And finally the researchers conclude by arguing that there is a need of reintroducing the former methods that were used to teach English before CA.

Keywords: Communicative Approach; Tanzania; Syllabus; Kiswahili; English; Teaching competence

Introduction

In Communicative Approach (hereafter CA), both process and goals of classroom teaching are aimed at producing a learner who is competent in the target language. Thus, the central theoretical concept in CA is 'communicative competence', which is perceived by Hymes as the ability to use language in social context and to observe sociolinguistic norms of appropriateness. Grenfell and Harris augment that the purposes of communicative teaching are to make learners use language in the real world to operationalize real-life events; to convey personal experience and information, and to help learners make genuine exchange of information with other people. Bhushan provides the following appearances of communicative language teaching and learning:

The Learner's Character

The needs of the learners are very important and cooperation between learners is encouraged, fluency based activities which encourage learners to develop their confidence is also important. The role of the learner in CA is of negotiator learning in interdependent way. A learner takes a joint responsibility for a failed communication; similarly, a successful communication is an accomplishment jointly achieved and acknowledged [1-5].

The Instructional Materials

The ultimate role of materials is to promote communicative language use and influence the quantity of classroom interaction and language use. Task-based materials with variety of games, role plays, simulations in terms of exercises, cue cards, pair communication are preferred. Thus, authentic materials based on real life like signs, magazines, advertisements, newspaper, maps, picture, symbols, charts, etc. are encouraged.

The teacher's role

In CA the teacher has two main roles: (i) to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and (ii) to act as an independent participant within the learning and teaching process. Besides, the teacher is an organizer of resources and is a resource himself/herself and a guide within the classroom procedures and activities. A teacher also acts as a researcher and learners' needs analyst, counselor and group process manager.

The observation made from the above description of the CA suggest that, Tanzania having adopted the CA in English language teaching, the process of language teaching and learning should be built on more interaction between teachers and students, students and students, students and peers, etc. as well as students and materials. In the use of CA, Tanzania teachers should stopover lecturing, and particularly the grammatical part of language since in CA the role of a teacher is that of lone facilitator; instead, they have the crucial role of scheming language materials that influence communicative interaction, i.e. they should design games, role plays, stories and other activities which will produce a native like language learning environment and the end result is to produce a learner that can confidently communicate in the English language.

Setting up of CA in Tanzania

As a strategy to improve the English language proficiency in Tanzania, the Government issued a communicative competence based English syllabus for ordinary level[1] (O-level) in 2005 to replace the old

syllabus which was claimed to be structure based and hence could not produce communicative competent learners. The new syllabus embodies CA, which require teachers to use the CA in teaching the English language. Ms Temu, the School Inspector from MOEVT and the Coordinator for English language as reported by the Daily News says that "the new syllabus is competence based and targets at producing competent students, it requires students to learn the skills imparted in the subjects." As well, an inspector for secondary schools, Dar-es-Salaam Zone, Ms. Modesta Msuya as reported by the Daily News (ibid) argues that: "The 2005 Syllabus based on competence means that what the students get from teachers is supervision and not lecturing."

The syllabus clearly states that the objectives of teaching English in Tanzania are to enable students to communicate effectively with other speakers of English, both inside and outside the country, use the knowledge of English to demonstrate one's awareness and consciousness of society and the part one can play in its development, read widely for pleasure and for information, express oneself in both spoken and written English. Also, the 2009 English Language Pedagogy Syllabus for Diploma in Secondary Education an improved version of the 2007 syllabus which replaced the 1997 syllabus focuses on developing the student teacher's pedagogical knowledge and skills to cope with competence based teaching and learning. In the syllabus, for each topic the teaching/learning strategies, resources and assessment procedures to be employed by the tutor in the classroom interaction are suggested [6-10].

However, CA in many third world countries faces many challenges; a number of studies (for example, Mustafa in Indonesia; Ha in Asia; and Rew-Jan in Northern Taiwan) have identified that the Approach face limitations in the countries, including negative responses from English teachers, lack of enough and qualified teachers to meet the needs stated above and the materials for teaching English are either not communicative or not relevant to the context where they are used. The learning environment in Tanzania is more or less comparable to these countries, so the researchers questioned whether the approach would be applicable in Tanzanian context given that the approach faced severe challenges in similar countries. Accordingly, the study sought to examine whether CA is appropriate for teaching English language in Tanzania.

Area and Scope of Study

This study which examined the appropriateness of CA in Tanzania was conducted within Dodoma Region. Dodoma (found in central Tanzania) is the capital city[2] of Tanzania. It is the trade center for agriculture, producing beans, seeds, corn, peanut, tea, and tobacco. Cattles are also raised and marketed.
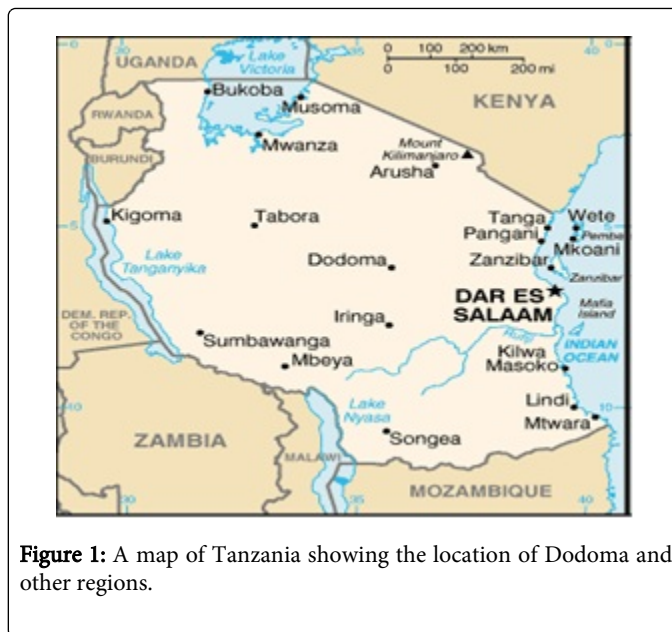

Figure 1: A map of Tanzania showing the location of Dodoma and other regions.

This study involved only Ordinary-level secondary schools around four districts (Dodoma Urban, Chamwino, Bahi, and Kongwa) in the Region. Thirteen (13) schools were deliberately sampled where Form I[3] students and Form I English teachers in the sampled schools were involved in this study. This group was selected based on the assumption that it would provide realistic data that would help in identifying the challenges of using the CA in teaching English language in Tanzania.[4]

The researchers used distance criterion in selecting the schools to be surveyed and observed. In each district, two schools closer to the District headquarters and two schools at least twenty (20) kilometers away from the District Headquarters were selected based on the researchers own assumption that the schools near the District Headquarters do try to observe the teaching rules despite the challenges facing them, fearing that they may get frequent unexpected visits by District officials, and that District officials send their children to the nearby schools. So, it is easy for the District officials to know the teaching processes at the schools; and that those schools away from the District Headquarters rarely follow the rules when they have challenges facing them in the whole process of preparing the materials for teaching and the actual teaching process in the classes. The researchers intended to include at least one private owned secondary school from each district, which was within the distance criteria. A total of 208 students and 13 teachers were involved as a sample size for this study.

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1   Ordinary level is the lower secondary level in which range from Form I to Form IV, where students take national examinations. If they pass, they continue to upper secondary level (Form V and VI).

2   is the country's political capital. Dar-es-salaam is the country's commercial capital (Tanzania National Website). In 1973, plans were made to move the capital to . Tanzania's National Assembly moved there in February 1996, but many government offices remain in the original national capital, .

3   Form I is the first class in secondary school level in : Students get into Form I when they have passed their primary school National examination.

4   In , English is introduced as a medium of instruction when students get into Form I class: all subjects are taught in English from this level to higher levels of education. Students are supposed to use English in everything they do around the school compound, except for Kiswahili subject only; however, many studies including this present study show that this is not the case in schools.

Methods of Data Collection

To find out if CA is an appropriate method of teaching English language in Tanzania context, the study used qualitative approach whereby the data were gathered through questionnaires, observation and interviews [11-16].

Through questionnaire students were asked to give reasons to why they are learning English language to see if the purpose of learning English language matches the kind of students that the CA wants to produce. Through questionnaire the study also examined areas where people (students) can speak English out of school compound in Tanzania. Two English teachers (one from each school) were also given the questionnaire. Permission was sought from the school authority to distribute the questionnaire to Form I students in the schools. The questionnaires were filled by students and teachers at their convenience.

Observation to both teachers and students was a method used to supplement the findings obtained from questionnaire. The schools were observed to see if they have English materials that are communicative in nature; national examinations were also examined to see if they test students' communicative abilities. The information obtained under observation relates to what is happening in the field; the method demands relatively less active cooperation from the respondents as it is the case for questionnaires and interviews. In the observation process, all classroom practices in the English lesson were recorded. The purpose of class observation was to objectively record the situation in the class: communicative activities, or other activities in the class and the language of interaction in the classes.

Interview questions were asked to the teacher and two students who were randomly chosen from the observed classes after the lesson to know why the teacher chose to use the activities he/she used and not others and from the students to know the common practices by their teacher, knowing that the teacher might have acted differently in the presence of the observer. The responses were analyzed as part of the observation results. The interviews provided information to support some of the questionnaire findings and also reveal other practices which were not shown by the teacher in the classroom observation.

Findings and Discussion

The following findings from the study show how CA is less appropriate in Tanzanian context built on the reasons discussed in each finding:

English language in Tanzania has turned into a foreign language

Though English is said to be a second language in Tanzania, the domain of its use is rather a foreign language; it has a very limited domain of use in Tanzania. A foreign language takes place within English speaking environment where people will have no greater needs to communicate in the target language. Rubagumya ; Rubagumya, Afitska, Clegg and Kiliku observed that the domains of use of the English language in Tanzania were being continuously taken by Kiswahili. This observation is quite so with the present status of English in Tanzania where there are very few English speakers, who

mostly use English when communicating with foreigners. It was found, in this study, that students in Tanzania have a very little chance to interact in the English language in their schools and out of their school environment.

In the researchers' observation, students used the native language in schools to communicate to each other and with their teachers too. English is used only when learning the subjects taught at school, with an exception of Kiswahili subject only. Teachers and students code mix between Kiswahili and English languages when learning in the classes. This is so because both the teachers and students are not competent in the language. For example, in students' questionnaires, students were asked to say which language they use in doing classroom assignments. Only 4.7% of the involved students said that they use the target language (English), 18.6% said that they use Kiswahili, and 76.3% said that they use both English and Kiswahili, 0.3% said that they use vernacular language in their discussions (see Fig 2 below).

From the descriptions above, one can amenably say that the environment in Tanzania does not motivate students, which makes it the sole initiative role of the teacher to motivate students, either through giving grades, rewarding students or clapping hands for students when they do well in the language, which is not satisfying motivation to students. What we want to suggest here is that CA is less appropriate in Tanzania because there is not enough support from the environment (the community) which would motivate students. One of the interviewed students said that "people will take you as showing off, if you speak English let us say in a daladala[5]
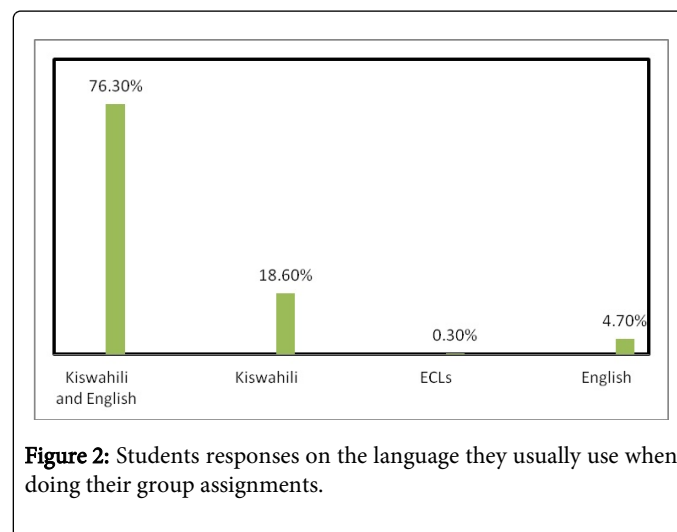

Figure 2: Students responses on the language they usually use when doing their group assignments.

This has not only been the case in secondary schools, even in Universities in Tanzania Kiswahili language has been dominantly used by university students. In conversation with one student from Mozambique studying at one of the universities in Tanzania, the student raised the following complaints:

My classmates discuss in Kiswahili, I don't understand them, when I ask them to discuss in English so that I understand what is being discussed, they say that Kiswahili is their language, kwanza wewe ni mkongo unatudanganya tu,[6]"

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5   Daladala is a common name for public transport which go for short routes, so called because in old days the transport cost for daladala was five shillings which was equivalent to one dollar, hence the term dala

6   You are just pretending we know that you are a Congolese: Most Congolese people understand and speak Kiswahili language.

This concurs with the study by Malekela (n.d.) who observed that students as well as their teachers are not yet sufficiently proficient in English language. Even student teachers at Universities and colleges are not proficient in the language. Students communicate in Kiswahili when discussing their questions in groups under trees or in seminar rooms, even among lecturers in non-official gatherings, Kiswahili is the language mostly used. This situation does not give the students in Tanzania supportive environment to become fluent in the English language.

The overloaded task of teachers

Research findings show that teachers in Tanzania are overloaded with subjects to teach and so they don't have enough time to prepare the necessary activities for the CA. All the (5) teachers (see the table below) who responded to the questionnaires said that they have more than one subject to teach, other teachers have up to three subjects to teach at their schools, given other responsibilities like family responsibilities, it is clear that these teachers do not have enough time to prepare the materials that are communicative in nature. One of the observed schools had only one English teacher who taught English to the whole school where Form I, II and III have three streams each and form IV had two streams, the teacher complained to have a tough job to do in the school.

TEACHER	SUBJECT (S) TEACHING	NUMBER OF ENGLISH PERIODS IN A WEEK
F	English and History	25
G	English and Geography	20
H	English and Geography	25
I	English and Geography	25
J	English and History	24

Table 1: Summary of teachers' loads in five of the surveyed schools.

One of the surveyed schools had two classes (Form I and II) with only two teachers since it started (two years ago, from the time of data collection). The school offers about ten subjects which are taught by the two teachers. The problem here is not only that these teachers do not master all these subjects, but also that they hardly have time to prepare their lessons before they get into the classes. CA will be useless in such schools where a teacher teaches more than one subject in more than one class, since it needs time to prepare the teaching and learning materials. The researchers asked the head of one of the schools to know why the school has only two teachers, the answer was that the government sends many teachers to the school but the teachers do not stay at the school because of poor living conditions (the school has no houses for teachers, even the environment nearby the school has no good houses that teachers can rent). Many government schools in face the same problem, hence teachers run to private schools or other government schools which provide good living conditions.

Poor proficiency of the English language teachers

Most of the English teachers in Tanzania are not well prepared to use the Approach. Most of them lack an understanding of the communicative approach. Through questionnaires and interviews, teachers were asked to define the Communicative Approach, some teachers left the term undefined, and others could not clearly define what Communicative Approach is. Teachers' lack of understanding about the Communicative Approach is seen in their definitions of the Approach, the following are definitions quoted from some teachers' questionnaire:

The means in which students and teachers communicate well during teaching and learning process (interactive approach)

The most important way of interacting and learning English

Is all about the use of English language as a medium of instruction in transferring different knowledge found in school

It is a participatory approach

The teachers could not tell about the activities which make the teaching activity communicative. One of the interviewed teachers was asked to define the communicative approach and this was the reply:

Teacher: mmm...I don't know

Interviewer: what does the new syllabus require you to do?

Teacher: the new syllabus is student centered but it...it...it is hard because students have little knowledge since they are not well prepared in the primary schools; it is a tough job for us.

Only two out of five interviewed teachers could clearly tell what is CA and the activities which make a communicative teaching. A research into languages in education in Tanzania comparing classroom processes in Kiswahili and English medium schools done by EdQual[7]Rubagumya et al. (2011) indicate that in natural classroom settings teachers used a wider range of teaching and learner engagement strategies more frequently when teaching the lessons in Kiswahili than through English. It further reports that neither teachers nor students were sufficiently competent in English to ensure effective teaching and learning.

Poor English proficiency is also seen in the English student teachers in universities expected to be English teachers in secondary schools. The Government has its trust on these teachers that they are proficient teachers (English experts) who are going to produce English competent students in the country. In reality, most student teachers have very poor English competence and they don't qualify to teach English even at primary schools. The following are some of essay extracts obtained from third year students at one of the universities in Tanzania; funny enough, these students were discussing the appropriateness of the CA in teaching English language in Tanzania.

Student 1: Teachers role in Tanzania evidenced to make method to be appropriate: Many employed teachers are not specializing and have experience in teaching English language. The teacher themselves are not fluent speak of English after coming to the Tanzania context.

Student 2: Firstly, teachers are not competent in English, most of Tanzanian teachers when taught for the purpose of communication

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7   EdQual is a research project consortium involving five countries-U.K., Tanzania, South Africa, Ghana and focusing on quality education in low-income contexts (EdQual, 2006, qtd in Rubagumya et al. 2011).

they failed because they themselves, when teaching there are mixing Kiswahili and English, may be because of the lack of vocabularies.

Student 3: Backgrounds: our backgrounds lead us not to speaking good English, because of our first fundamental from primary school up to secondary school, most teachers or schools are using Kiswahili in teaching and sometimes they mix (code mixing) Swahili and English which basically affect us (learners) on communicating by using English.

Student 4: Responsibility: there are some learners have many responsibility it suffer to done homework sometimes got frustration so this is the problem which face individually.

These students were expected to graduate from the university and be employed as professional English teachers in secondary schools; the situation is the same in many universities in Tanzania. Good questions to ask are how did these students pass their secondary examinations and join university studies with such poor English? How did they get selected to learn to become English language teachers? If the students' explanations in written form (where they have time to organize their thoughts and present them in written form) are so poor, then you can clearly tell how worse these student teachers are in spoken English, and therefore, they do not qualify to be English language teachers.

Lack of English teaching and reading materials

As the findings of this research show, there is a great deficit of teaching and reading materials which are necessary in the communicative way of teaching in Tanzania. The CA requires the teaching materials that are interactive in nature. They should be task-based materials with variety of games, simulations in terms of exercises and which are presented in a novelty way; authentic materials based on real life like signs, magazines, advertisements, newspaper, maps, pictures, symbols, charts, etc. We expect to find such materials in secondary school, given that the Government has decided that the teaching should be communicative.

Contrarily to this requirement of the approach, these materials are not found in Tanzania, even where some of them are found, they are not enough to meet the needs and number of students in the classes. Findings from teachers' questionnaire show that teachers use materials like text books, reference books, dictionaries and story books. The findings show that the story books are not the books that give a student enough interaction with the target language. For example, a form I student reads only two books with twenty five pages to thirty pages in a year. These are not the books we expect that they will help a student to achieve communicative competence. Only two out of the five teachers who responded to the questionnaires said that they use pictures, magazine, newspaper, drawings and story books. The observation found only one out of five observed teachers had pictures and drawings that she used in the previous lessons in her office; in the day of observation the teacher had a reading lessons, perhaps that is why she did not have different materials than reading books.

Similarly, findings from students questionnaire show that students use such materials like English books, dictionaries, exercise books, and reading past examination papers to learn the language when they are out of their school. Very few students said that they use the materials like story books, newspapers, text books, films to practice the language when they are out of their schools. In a context where schools do not have reading materials for students and their teachers are not creative enough to design local materials for the communicative teaching, it is obvious that teachers will resort to transmitting knowledge through lecturing their students rather than using the communicative way of teaching the language.

Therefore, the three requirements of the communicative approach: The facilitative teacher's role, interactive teaching materials and student centered role can hardly be found in Tanzania today and even in short while to come. For example, to have qualified English teachers, the government will need more time to screen people from higher secondary level to be trained as proficient English teachers to teach in secondary schools. The government will need more time and money to invest in books and teaching materials for teachers to prepare learner engagement strategies.

Conclusion

This study has examined the appropriateness of CA in teaching and learning English language in Tanzania. The data were gathered from Dodoma Region. The findings show that there are less qualified English language teachers in secondary schools. In the absence of qualified English language teachers and teachers in Tanzania act the role of specialization in more than two teaching subjects as it has been discussed in this paper; having the crisis of teaching and learning materials and the fact that the examinations in Tanzania still don't measure the communicative competence of students, but rather paper and pencil oriented examination; it is quite certain that the CA to teaching English in Tanzania is not the most appropriate method in Tanzanian context. The method is also inappropriate because of the 'three-tier citizenship', where the majority of Tanzanians (more than 90%) speak Kiswahili and ECLs and they have no access to the English, the foreign and international language. This means that students will only access English when they are at schools with their teachers (the type of teachers we have seen above) and in some schools students interact with their teachers through their easily accessible language and the language that makes them comfortable (Kiswahili language), hence they don't have enough time to speak in English to develop the communicative competence. Thus, it is time to rethink about the previous methods that were used to teach English in Tanzania since they produced better results, i.e. those who were taught through the methods are more fluent in English language compared to the current English speakers produced through the CA today.

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