

## The Nature of Communication Process in Kiswahili Language Classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

*Communication in the classroom is an essential part of teaching and learning process. Teaching and learning of Kiswahili occur as a result of the interaction between the teacher, learners and learning environment. Factors such as learner's attitude, teaching style, feedback and learning environment influence communication process in the classroom. This study thus sought to establish the nature of communication process in Kiswahili classrooms with regard to these factors. The study sample was composed of 25 Kiswahili teachers and 317 Form 4 students from 32 secondary schools in Hamisi District, Kenya. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Based on an observation framework, direct classroom observation was used as the approach to data collection. The study found that teachers rarely accepted students' feelings and were least concerned with the mood of the students during Kiswahili lessons. Most Kiswahili classrooms were also seen to be dominated with teachers using the lecture method and in few instances asking students questions and students responding to what had been asked by their teachers. The results of this study may assist teachers in improving their classroom communication and instructional strategies and promote students' academic achievement in Kiswahili.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the study

Classroom communication plays a central role in language teaching and learning process. The teacher is expected to develop an environment that encourages learner participation in class activities and diversify communication channels involving the teacher, student and other learning materials (Bett, Indoshi & Odera, 2009). The general importance of communication in instruction was not widely recognized until the 1972 International Communication Association (ICA) convention focused on communication and learning (Sorensen & Christophel, 2010). This led to classroom research by Vygotsky (1978) whose study on classroom interaction found that interaction played an important role in the learning process. By this time, second language classroom communication research had the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of interaction in language acquisition (Brown, 2001).

Inamullah (2005) notes that classroom climate is built up by the pattern of interaction between teacher and students' verbal exchange, asking and responding to questions. The most important factors in a classroom situation are the interactions and exchanges initiated by teacher and students. It is important to note that the above author only focused on teacher talk in classroom interaction. The current study examined other important factors of classroom communication process such as; learner's attitude, teaching styles, feedback and learning environment. Osakwe (2009) found that there existed a positive and significant relationship between attitude, knowledge base, communication skills and classroom communication process. This study only made use of questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The current study gives a detailed analysis of classroom communication process by use of both questionnaire and lesson observation schedule as modes of data collection.

In a study on approaches to life sciences teaching and learning, Tanner (2009) observed that teacher talk dominated classroom talk and students talked only when called upon like in the case of answering questions. Callahan (2005) opined that the lecture-based format of most secondary school instruction lacked the flexibility necessary to meet the linguistic and academic needs of learners. Roblyer (2006) noted that constructivists believe that knowledge is generated by the learners through experience-based activities rather than directed by instructors. This study sought the methods of instruction employed by Kiswahili teachers.

In a study on using classroom assessment to maximize student learning, Earl (2003) opined that effective feedback in the process of classroom interaction gave students detailed and specific information about improving learning. Learning environment supported or deterred the students' quest for participating in the classroom activities (Tomlinson, 2003). Teachers should use the classroom environment as a means to communicate their own interests, engage learners in communication and thus strengthen rapport in the classroom (Rothenberg, 2007). Rothenberg (2007) focused on English language teaching and learning while the current study established the nature of environment in Kiswahili classrooms.

Flander (1970) originally developed a research tool, named Flanders' Interaction Analysis (FIA). FIA system was designed to categorize the types and quantity of verbal interaction in the classroom and to plot the information on a matrix so that it could be analyzed and interpreted. The results gave a picture as to who was talking in the classroom, how much and kind of talking that took place. FIA became a widely used coding system to analyze and improve teacher student interaction pattern. This study adopted Flanders' system and modified it to capture the four important elements of the study; learner's attitude, teaching styles, learning environment and feedback. This is because the categories on FIA system clearly reflect the factors of classroom communication process.

### Statement of the Problem

Most classroom communication researches have been focused on teacher and learner talk and opportunities for negotiating meaning as major parts in classroom interactions. However, the effectiveness of communication in the teaching and learning process can be enhanced or disrupted by factors such as; learner's attitude towards the subject, teaching style, learning environment and feedback. The researchers therefore sought to establish the nature of classroom communication process with regard to these factors.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the nature of classroom communication process in Kiswahili language.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Hamisi District, Vihiga County in Kenya. The study population comprised of 1,800 Form 4 students and 76 teachers of Kiswahili in 36 secondary schools. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 25 teachers of Kiswahili while Krejcie and Morgan (Kathuri & Pals, 1993) formula was used to select a sample of 317 students. Therefore, 25 classrooms were observed. An observation guide was used by the researchers to collect data on classroom communication process. Classroom observation guide adopted Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories System (Flanders, 1970). Flanders' System was adopted for this study because it analyses the main factors of classroom communication process such as attitude, teaching styles and feedback. Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) System of observation did not provide for the observation of learning environment which was one of the factors of classroom communication process. Therefore, an additional category (category 11) was introduced to collect data on learning environment. The observation system used in the study is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC)**

Factor	Category
Learners' attitude	1. <i>Accepts feeling.</i> Accepts and clarifies an attitude or the feeling tone of a pupil in a nonthreatening manner. Feelings may be positive or negative. Predicting and recalling feelings are included.
Teaching style	2. <i>Accepts or uses ideas of pupils.</i> Clarifying, building, or developing ideas suggested by a pupil. Teacher extensions of pupil ideas are included but as the teacher brings more of his own ideas into play, shift to category five. 3. <i>Asks questions.</i> Asking a question about content or procedure, based on teacher ideas, with the intent that a pupil will answer.

	<p>4. <i>Lecturing</i>. Giving facts or opinions about content or procedures; expressing his own ideas, giving his own explanation, or citing an authority other than a pupil.</p> <p>5. <i>Giving directions</i>. Directions, commands, or orders to which a pupil is expected to comply.</p> <p>6. <i>Pupil-talk-initiation</i>. Talk by pupils which they initiate. Expressing own ideas; initiating a new topic; freedom to develop opinions and a line of thoughtful questions; going beyond the existing structure.</p>
<b>Feedback</b>	<p>7. <i>Praises or encourages</i>. Praises or encourages pupil action or behavior. Jokes that release tension, but not at the expense of another individual; nodding head or saying "Um hm?" or "go on" are included.</p> <p>8. <i>Criticizing or justifying authority</i>. Statements intended to change pupil behavior from nonacceptable to acceptable pattern; bawling someone out; stating why the teacher is doing what he is doing; extreme self-reference.</p> <p>9. <i>Pupil-talk-response</i>. Talk by pupils in response to teacher. Teacher initiates the contact or solicits pupil statement or structures the situation. Freedom to express own ideas is limited.</p>
	<p>10. <i>Silence or confusion</i>. Pauses, short periods of silence and periods of confusion in which communication cannot be understood by the observer.</p>
<b>Learning environment</b>	<p>11. <i>Learning environment</i>. A compound of the ambiance and atmosphere in which students and teachers work and interact.</p>

A blank observation form was coded using Flanders' Categories while collecting data. Various categories on FIAC system that occurred during the communication process were coded on a blank sheet of paper at an interval of three seconds in a normal 40 minutes lesson. Lesson observation schedule helped the researcher get a complete and detailed understanding of the classroom communication process (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Data collected was analyzed and presented in form of frequencies and percentages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to find out the nature of classroom communication process with regard to the following factors; learner's attitude, teaching style, learning environment and feedback during normal classroom teaching and leaning. The frequency with which these processes were observed is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Nature and Frequency of Classroom Communication Process

Factor	Category (Nature)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Learner's attitude	1. Accepts feeling	44	0.63
Teaching style	2. Accepts or uses ideas of pupils	412	5.94
	3. Asks questions	1,374	19.82
	4. Lecturing	2,639	38.06
	5. Giving directions	220	3.17
	6. Pupil-talk-initiation	224	3.23
	Feedback	7. Praises or encourages	216
8. Criticizing or justifying authority		140	2.02
9. Pupil-talk-response		1,240	17.89
10. Silence or confusion		226	3.26
Learning environment	11. Change in learning environment	198	2.86
Total		6,933	100

As shown in Table 2, there was low (0.63%) occurrence of category 1 that represented learner's attitude. Occurrence of category 1 (accepts feeling) means that the teacher might be making statements like; "You look bright this morning." "This class looks excited or this class seems bored and disinterested." The low occurrence of category 1 may be because teachers have no idea of the effect of appreciating the mood of the learners before the lesson begins and as it progresses. There is need for teachers to be aware and appreciate the mood of the learners during teaching and learning. In doing so, the morale of learners during lessons may be boosted.

On teaching style, it is evident that teachers dominated most of the lesson time. Lecturing (category 4) was observed the most (38.06%). Followed by (category 3) teachers asking students questions (19.82%) then (category 9) students answering the questions asked by their teachers at 17.89%. The high occurrence of category 4 (lecturing) means that Kiswahili classrooms are tied to the traditional mode of teaching where teachers view themselves as sole sources of knowledge. Learners are therefore passive participants who are expected to participate when called upon. The lecture method dominance in Kiswahili classrooms may be due to lack of resources in schools that would enable teachers engage pupils actively in the learning process. Tanner (2009) similarly found that teacher talk dominated classroom talk and students talked only when they were called upon like in the case of answering questions. Only that his study was on approaches to life sciences teaching and learning while the current study focused on Kiswahili language teaching and learning. From the observation schedule, categories 2, 5 and 6 on teaching style were not given much consideration. Teachers hardly accepted and used pupils' ideas (category 2) (5.94%). Similarly, they hardly gave directions to students (category 5) (3.17%) and students rarely initiated what they were to learn, expressed ideas, initiated a new topic or developed opinions (category 6) (3.23%). Students were reluctant to contribute their own ideas may be due to fear, lack of confidence and fear of teacher criticism. Besides, teachers may have not given them a chance to do so. Callahan (2005) observed that the lecture-based format of most secondary school instruction lacks the flexibility necessary to meet the linguistic and academic needs of learners. It is therefore of paramount importance that teachers involve learners during classroom communication process in the teaching and learning of the Kiswahili language.

Feedback was represented by categories 7, 8 and 9. Category 7 (praises or encourages), which was a low occurrence (3.13%) meant that teachers rarely praised or encouraged pupil action or behaviour. Thomas (2001) refers to praise as a positive reinforcement. Consistent praise is thought to encourage desirable behavior and extinguish undesirable behavior. He further suggests that praise can be a motivational tool in the classroom. Brophy (1981) reported that praise has been widely recommended as an important reinforcement method for teachers because it can build self-esteem, provide encouragement, and build a close relationship between student and teacher. Earl (2003) noted that effective feedback in the process of classroom interaction gave students detailed and specific information about improving learning. His study made use of the questionnaire to collect data on feedback adequacy while the current study used a lesson observation schedule and observed how feedback was incorporated in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili. It was observed that the most common form of feedback in Kiswahili classrooms was that of students responding to the questions asked by their teachers (category 9). Teachers appreciate the role of feedback in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili language but are always less keen on motivating students' actions through praises and encouragement.

The low occurrence (2.02%) of category 8 (criticizing or justifying authority) implied that the students paid attention and therefore did not frequently invite the teachers' anger, criticism or caution. Students responding to the questions asked by their teachers (category 9) was the most common form of feedback at 17.89%. Students attempted to respond to teachers' questions for fear of criticism and punishment and also for the effort to impress their teachers.

For most part of the lessons, the nature of the environment (category 11) was conducive. This changed in a very small extent (2.86%). There were very few interruptions especially from phone calls received by teachers. This at times interrupted the flow of the lessons. Finally, there were short periods of silence and confusion during the Kiswahili lesson in which communication could not be understood by the observer (category 10). At some point during the lesson, the teacher would give time to students to answer a question or to give their own point of view on an issue. It was observed that students at times did not seem to pick up the challenge leading to the silent

periods. The resultant low participation of students led the teachers dominating the classroom processes and thus low occurrence (3.26%) of category 10 (silence or confusion).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The low occurrence of category 1 (accepts feeling) could be because teachers have no idea of the effect of appreciating learners' feelings during the teaching and learning of Kiswahili. On the other hand, the high occurrence of category 4 (lecturing) may be because most teachers assume their role as the sole sources of knowledge and thus they do not recognize the importance of active learner participation in the process of teaching and learning Kiswahili. Lecture method may also be dominating most classrooms because school administrators do not allow for regular attendance of teachers in seminars and workshops to keep them abreast of innovation in the teaching and learning Kiswahili that can engage learners actively during the lesson time.

Teachers therefore need to embrace the culture of realizing the mood of the learners, praising and encouraging of pupil action and behavior as the lesson begins and progresses as this may enhance the attention of the learners during teaching and learning hence may improve their performance in Kiswahili subject. School administrators should also encourage regular attendance of Kiswahili language teachers at seminars and workshops to keep them abreast of innovation in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili subject that can improve performance. Teachers thus ought to involve learners actively during the teaching and learning of Kiswahili as most classrooms were seen to be teacher dominated.

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