

# **Education in an Unfamiliar Language: Impact of Teachers' Limited Language Proficiency on Pedagogy, a Situational Analysis of Upper Primary Schools in Kenya**

by

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## **Abstract**

This article reviews the pedagogical constraints imposed by teachers' limited language proficiency in the medium of instruction in Kenyan primary schools by examining classroom interaction and suggests how an improved understanding of the role language ability on the development of cognitive skills in learners can be accessed. Emerging from these investigations is the need for more specific research pertaining to the causal link between teacher language proficiency and teacher-led approaches in countries that have adopted foreign language policies. Finally, recommendations are made for the introduction of internationally recognised English language assessments and second language programmes for Kenyan primary school educators.

## **Introduction**

This paper reviews empirical studies and current educational reform initiatives underway in Kenya. Articles from other post-colonial African nations will also be examined to provide a deeper insight into the relationship between language proficiency and teaching ability. A sustained focus throughout the research is on the nature of teacher-pupil discourse in regions where English is regarded as a second language and used as the medium of instruction. The journals forming the subject of this review have been sourced from a number of national and international publications in the fields of linguistics, language, and education. The articles represent a geographical spread of developing and developed countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, South Africa and New Zealand.

A holistic view of the literature has been taken, encompassing theoretical frameworks, research goals and contexts. The articles were accessed through electronic searches and educational databases. Most of the studies are small scale and based on classroom observations, interviews and questionnaires.

Research dealing with the medium of instruction has focused largely on observations of African pupils and their assessment performance (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009; Owu-Ewie & Eshun, 2015; Uwezo, 2016). In many ways, it is far easier to access data from learners as academic results are readily available. Fewer studies have explored how teachers' proficiency of English may impact on pedagogy and language development and this is the central issue within this review. This paper has both a research and teacher development component; if it inspires scholars to adopt an interactive research perspective on the medium of instruction it will have served its purpose. The following critique will draw on comparative studies of classes undertaken in English and mother tongue languages to assess and gauge potential differences in instructional styles. The decision to focus on Kenya was influenced by the author's own observations and continued involvement as an educational consultant for a private peri-urban school on the outskirts of Mombasa.

## **Language of Instruction Policy**

The language through which teaching and learning takes place has always been a contentious issue in multilingual nations because language policies have the capacity to influence practice. Kiswahili is the national language of Kenya and together with English they are the official languages in an ethnically diverse population comprising over 40 mother tongues (Begi, 2014; Masau, 2003; Ogechi, 2009). Education policy recommends that the language of instruction (LOI) from Primary 1 - 3 should be in the tongue of the catchment area. English and Kiswahili are taught as separate subjects until Primary 4 when English forms the medium of instruction (Nabea, 2009; RoK, 1976). With the exception of Kiswahili, the upper primary curriculum is printed in English. Several studies have found that pupils are not sufficiently prepared for the transition (e.g. Gacheche, 2010; Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, 2016). In an extensive analysis of African language practices, Heugh (2011) concluded that the concept of early-exit mother tongue languages is not based on sound theory or research evidence. Many reasons have been advanced for the shift; including lack of training opportunities and absence of culturally-specific resources in vernacular languages (Begi, 2014; Steiger, 2017).

## **State of Education**

The education system in Kenya has an 8-4-4 structure: 8 years of primary school, 4 years of secondary school and 4 years of tertiary education. The primary curriculum covers a wide range of subjects including English, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Religious Education (MoE, 2002). During the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, Kenya was one of 164 governments that established six key goals aimed at meeting the needs of learners and pledged commitment to achieving education for all citizens by 2015 (RoK/UNESCO, 2012).

The Education for All (EFA) initiative is a global movement of signatory nations and agencies, such as UNESCO and the World Bank, working together to provide quality basic education in developing countries. As the leading agency, UNESCO focuses its activities on policy building, monitoring, advocacy, mobilising funds and capacity development (UNESCO, 2011). Though many critical items were highlighted during the conference in Dakar, the issue of language was not raised in the plenary sessions despite the fact that millions of children enter schools every day without knowing the language of instruction (Dutcher, 2004). The only form of education for these children is in a language they cannot speak and in which teachers have limited proficiency. Ferguson (2013) concluded that the English medium of instruction will not work effectively unless the standard of English for teachers is raised.

One of the most successful interventions introduced by the Kenyan government as a result of the agreed EFA goals relates to the abolishment of primary school fees; this action accelerated student enrolment and led to an improvement of access, equity, and overall efficiency of the education sector (Orodho, 2014). Nevertheless, the ever-growing attendance rates have not been matched with a corresponding improvement in the quality of education. A recent assessment found that a significant proportion of Standard 3 learners cannot read a single word (English/Kiswahili) or identify numbers correctly and even more disconcerting is that the national mean score for Standard 8 pupils in the final primary school examination remains less than 50 percent (RoK/UNESCO, 2012; Uwezo, 2016). It must be borne in mind that these children are simultaneously learning English as well as learning in English. The centrality of the teacher in the learning process is widely acknowledged and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has noted that teacher training programmes “are viewed as being largely unfit for purpose and in need of radical reform” (MoE; 2012:22). Teacher quality has the capacity to narrow achievement gaps and studies offer compelling evidence that teacher preparation has a great impact on scholastic performance (Liston, Borko & Whitcomb, 2008; Rice, 2010; Wasanga, Ogle & Wamabua, 2012).

## **Pedagogical Reform Agenda**

Kenya has embarked on an ambitious program of educational reform. The national objectives for 2013-2018 set out to shape the education system by making teachers more responsive to the needs of learners through a deep understanding of innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogical approaches (MoEST, 2014). From a pedagogical perspective, Kenya, along with several other East African nations, has agreed to implement learner-centred teaching and learning in primary education (EAC, 2014). In the midst of this reform, education boards have also been vested with the responsibility of promoting the two official languages in and out of school, as provided for in the constitution (MoE/MoHEST, 2012). According to Bunyi (2013) there has been a shift away from teacher-led instruction ever since the Ominde Commission in 1963; however, recent evidence shows that classroom discourse continues to be dominated by teacher-talk and choral responses (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Dubeck, Jukes & Okello, 2011; Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, 2016; Majanga, Nasongo & Sylvia, 2010).

The new goals of primary education in the above framework also include developing the ability for critical thinking and logical judgement. The focus on intellectual functions which go beyond memorisation and recall of facts represents a desire to anchor learning in higher order cognitive processes that make education purposeful and of strong economic value. This view is enshrined in a number of policy documents, including Kenya Vision 2030 (MoEST, 2014; RoK, 2007).

A key challenge for the government, therefore, is to prepare a nation of teachers to effectively deliver pedagogies that are learner orientated. Schweisfurth (2011) examined the literature on the implementation of 72 learner-centred programmes in scores of developing countries and found that such initiatives are marked with failure. The problems identified within these articles range from overly complex reform agendas to training inadequacies and limited resources. The issue of competency in the LOI was not addressed per se and this may reflect the dearth of research in this field. It should be acknowledged that one of the main differences between traditional and innovative methods of teaching lies in the ability of educators to encourage communication so that learners are actively engaged in the negotiation and construction of meaning. Vygotsky (1978) concluded that language facilitates cognitive development and the organisation of inner thoughts; enabling learners to move into the zone of proximal development. This is particularly important in learner-centred education because it involves the generation of knowledge through the development of cognitive skills (APA, 1997). Consequently, in classroom interactions, teachers must have considerable proficiency in the LOI in order to stimulate and extend the thinking of learners during individual, group or whole class verbal exchanges. Modern approaches to language teaching also advocate communicative exchanges that focus attention on the dialogic process, leading participants to an understanding of each other's views (Anton, 1999).

In light of Kenya's plan to reform education, an international non-profit consortium is in the process of assessing the implementation of 8 non-state learner-centred programmes for primary and secondary school teachers in urban, peri-urban and rural regions of Kenya (Jordon, 2015). One of the aims of the study is to provide input for the development of a national teacher training program on learner-centred pedagogy. The preliminary results obtained during data collection suggest that the administration of learner-centred pedagogy has been hindered by the communication skills of teachers; recommendations include that teachers avoid relaying information and instead facilitate the growth of pupils' knowledge through the use of probing questions that scaffold learning (CEI, n.d.). Another factor highlighted during site visits relates to the enhancement of teachers' classroom management skills so that an environment for group work and pupil participation is created. These proposals may not be feasible if teachers themselves lack fluency in the English language. Unfortunately the research does not distinguish between lower and upper primary level which is where the medium of instruction changes from local languages to English. It should be pointed out that the scope of this paper is not concerned with which medium may be better or at what age the transition from primary languages to English should occur.

## English Language Proficiency of Teachers

To fill the gap in knowledge about how Kenyan primary teacher preparation programmes impact on practice, a comprehensive study explored the approach used by pre-service and newly qualified educators to teach reading and mathematics (Bunyi, Wangia, Magoma & Limboro, 2013). The study relied on qualitative and quantitative data drawn from 1,299 trainee teachers, 137 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and 23 experienced teachers who had taken part in continuing professional development at four different teaching colleges in the Central Province and Coast Province. The researchers noted that although the minimum academic requirement for entry to Primary Teacher Training Colleges is the grade of C minus in English and D plain in mathematics in the certificate of secondary education, this policy has not been implemented and therefore it is reasonable to assume that results in English may sometimes be lower than the standard stipulated. Indeed, Ogechi (2009) noted that Grade 4 maths and science teachers from rural and peri-urban parts of Kenya had particular difficulty using grammatical English. He believes this may be the result of low admission requirements for trainee teachers or because teachers in these areas rarely converse in English outside of school. Kioko and Muthwii (2001) also claim that the standard of English has declined since Kenya attained independence due to native English-speaking teachers leaving the country; prior to independence, teachers were assessed against native-speaker norms, yet afterwards, this was no longer a criterion and teachers who simply spoke English were eligible to teach it as a subject or use it as the LOI in other curriculum areas.

In terms of reading, Bunyi et al. (2013) found that NQTs had passages read many times over; by the teacher, by pupils reading after the teacher, by groups and by individuals. When asked why they had chosen this approach most participants were unable to give a satisfactory explanation. Even the trainers were observed taking a dominant position in the class and one explained that teachers “need to understand that reading requires a lot of imitation and repetition...” (p. 16). As with other studies (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Arthur, 2001; Nomlomo, 2007), repetition and recitation are common practices in African primary schools. Although students can exhibit accuracy in recall, such gains may not transfer to communicative language usage and these strategies have been widely discredited in second language acquisition (Jones, 1997). Despite the fact that Bunyi et al. limited their research to reading and mathematics, target language (TL) proficiency cannot be ruled out as a casual factor in teacher-led instruction.

Research on the English medium of instruction at two different primary schools, one from the Mombasa District and the other from the Kisumu District, found that the English language was unfamiliar to both pupils and teachers (Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, 2016). Participants came from linguistically diverse backgrounds; however, both groups could communicate in Kiswahili. The data was selected from a broader study carried out in 2005 on the efficacy of English as the LOI and the results were based on Standard 4 mathematics and science lessons. The teachers in question were trained at P1 Grade Level and it was estimated that the first school had an average of 100 pupils per class. Scholars generally concede that the adoption of learner-centred teaching in Kenya is made all the more difficult because of swollen class sizes (Metto & Makewa, 2014).

The findings are particularly relevant as it was noted that in both classes teachers had difficulty explaining scientific and mathematical concepts (e.g. meaning of a fraction) in English due to their limited vocabulary and communicative ability. Furthermore, the classes were characterised as teacher-led with mother tongue discourse being used not only as a strategy to overcome linguistic weaknesses, but also as a way to engage restless learners. This study demonstrates that teachers themselves struggle with subject-specific topics when engaging in formal classroom talk.

Cummins (2003) describes three dimensions of language proficiency: conversational fluency, discrete language skills, and academic language proficiency. Academic proficiency not only includes knowledge of less frequently used vocabulary, but also the ability to interpret and produce written and spoken language that is increasingly complex. One should not assume that fluency in conversational skills implies academic language proficiency. According to Krashen (2009), there is a broad distinction between the subconscious and informal process of language acquisition and the learning of specific rules that govern language usage. Of concern is that many non-native English-speaking teachers' proficiency in English is equivalent to the beginner A1 or A2 levels under the European framework (Young, Freeman, Hauck, Gomez & Papageorgiou, 2014). These teachers often depend on indigenous first languages due to their own limitations in English or because they simply believe students will not understand them when they communicate in English. The realities of teaching a foreign language evidently highlight the importance of language proficiency; Elder (2001) argues that effective classroom delivery involves simplification strategies and a range of questioning techniques that render specific knowledge comprehensible to learners.

Presently, there is no published literature on the TL proficiency of teachers in Kenyan schools and in order to gain a better perspective of this critical issue it is necessary to draw inferences from other former colonial nations where foreign language policies are in place. For example, research from South Africa found that teachers' perceptions of their own English proficiency contradict assessments of their written work in portfolios (Nel & Müller, 2010; Uys, Van der Walt, Van den Berg, & Botha, 2007). Both of the cited studies focused on English competency and incorporated questionnaires and the submission of portfolios from either in-service subject content teachers or student teachers enrolled in the final year of an inclusive education course. In the quantitative component, the majority of the participants claimed they were proficient in English; however the qualitative analysis revealed poor language proficiency and error transfer from teacher to learner. Uys et al. (2007) observed that some sentences within the portfolios were incoherent and incomplete. Although the in-service teachers were given an opportunity to edit their work, they were incapable of recognising their own mistakes. The researchers concluded that teachers were often unaware of their inability to fulfil the language requirements of learners and bereft of the knowledge to teach core language skills.

In a landmark study examining why teachers and students resist egalitarian ways of interacting, Chick (1996) concluded that classroom choral responses may indeed be a deliberate strategy designed to obscure the poor command of English among teachers and pupils.

The research centred on a mathematics lesson of 38 students in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of a South African school in the KwaZulu-Natal province where English served as the LOI from the 4th grade onwards in circumstances akin to Kenya. It was speculated that the practice of coordinated teacher prompts followed by pupils' responses, identified as 'safe-talk', maintained a facade of effective learning through the medium of instruction. Chick also surmised that the control of discourse would reduce the likelihood of students raising problems that go beyond the English language capacity of teachers. The phenomenon of safe-talk has also been linked to more recent Africa studies (Arthur, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2007; Hardman, Abd-Kadir, Agg, Migwi, Ndambuku & Smith, 2009; Owu-Ewie, & Eshun, 2015). The transcribed classroom conversations shed light on discourse interaction; nevertheless, the fact that the analysis of data was based on a single lesson renders the argument less persuasive and has the potential to bring the interpretations into question as no cross verification was done. More conclusive findings into the specific nature and extent of this issue can be gleaned from comparative studies of lessons undertaken in both English and vernacular languages.

## **Teacher Classroom Interaction**

Tanzania, situated on the east coast of Africa has a common border with Kenya. The two countries share a similar background in that Kiswahili and English are both official languages and mediums of instruction at different educational levels. To understand the impact of language policies in Tanzania, Brock-Utne (2007) explored the differences between learning through the lingua franca of Kiswahili and through English. The research was part of a wider project on the language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) funded by the Norwegian University. A comparative design was used; two control classes from different schools were taught in English and two experimental classes were taught in Kiswahili. The participants came from schools outside of the capital Dar es Salaam and were in their first year of secondary school (Form 1), which is when the LOI switches from Kiswahili to English. The project was conducted over a twelve week period but the researcher's involvement was confined to two weeks and 20 hours of classroom observation.

The same female teacher at the first school taught a biology lesson in English to one class and then in Kiswahili to another. Conversational exchanges show that students in the English medium were given little explanation about subject-specific matter. The teacher also used the incorrect form of the Present Perfect Tense and displayed an abrupt manner. In contrast, her demeanour in the lesson taught in Kiswahili was relaxed and her explanations were easily understood. Observations from the second school were similar to the first and during the geography lesson in English students appeared timid and choral responses formed part of the discourse. The researcher concluded that chorus recitation was much more prevalent in lessons that were taught in English. Abd-Kadir and Hardman (2007) also studied the discursive style of 20 Kenyan and Nigerian teachers as they taught English to Standard 6 pupils in 20 primary schools. The findings revealed a similar pattern in that questions initiated by teachers were mainly closed requiring recall of information; in Kenya alone almost 60% of the responses were classified as choral. Previous interactional studies of Kenyan primary schools also support the above conclusions (Ackers & Hardman, 2001; Pontefract & Hardman, 2005).

The research in Tanzania and Kenya tends to confirm the speculative assertions made by Chick (1996) that teachers and students collude together to obscure their inadequate understanding of the English language. Murdoch (1994) asserts that language proficiency will always be the foundation of non-native English teachers' professional confidence and as noted by Brock-Utne (2006), teachers in Tanzania joked and smiled when they taught in Kiswahili. Although the findings add weight to the assumption that language proficiency impacts on pedagogy, the research itself does not address the more sensitive issue of whether teachers rely on choral interactions to overcome their own language shortcomings. For instance, Jones (1997) claims the "listen and repeat" approach is one of the oldest methods of teaching pronunciation and indeed opportunities for teachers to improvise and engage in dialogue may be fewer when learners have low language proficiency.

Most of the research cited in this paper (e.g. Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Ackers & Hardman, 2001; Chick, 1996; Hardman et al., 2009; Pontefract & Hardman, 2005) has relied on discourse analysis as a means of determining the level of classroom interaction in African primary schools. According to Wells (2004) nearly all classroom exchanges are made up of a three part IRF sequence: an *initiation* move by the teacher, usually in the form of question, a pupil *response* and then some level of *follow-up* (feedback or evaluation) from the teacher. In the hands of different educators, the IRF structure can lead to differences in pupil engagement and participation. For example, foreign language teachers with advanced TL proficiency were found to provide useful, accurate and meaningful explanations in observed lessons (Richards et al., 2013). By focusing on responses, teachers can engage pupils in productive dialogues that stretch and scaffold learning. Discourse analysis is a particularly important investigative tool because "pedagogy is defined as both the act of teaching and the discourse in which it is embedded" (Alexander, 2001, p. 507).

In the second stage of the LOITASA project, Nomlomo (2007) completed a doctoral thesis that focused on teaching and learning through English and isiXhosa at two primary schools in the Western Cape where isiXhosa is predominantly spoken. The comparative study explored the link between language proficiency and teacher-learner interaction in science over three consecutive years commencing in Grade 4. As noted earlier, the medium of instruction in South Africa is English beyond Grade 3. Class sizes ranged from 27 to 52 learners and each school had an experimental (isiXhosa) and control (English) group in which lessons were taught by one of four teachers.

Test results from pupils showed that those taught in isiXhosa scored significantly better than their control group peers. These results are not surprising given that it takes at least 5 years to achieve academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2003). Essentially, the pupils were in their formative years of English language development; had the research focused on upper primary levels the variance may have been less due to increased TL exposure. This highlights how important it is to focus on learners with at least intermediate language proficiency.



The main pedagogical approach across all groups was teacher-centred with few challenging questions being asked. These observations are contrary to those noted by Brock-Utne (2007) where a pedagogical disparity was found in lessons that were taught in Kiswahili and English. Conversational excerpts were not included in the article and therefore it is difficult to quantify verbal exchanges and gauge language deficiencies on both sides. If discourse skills are assumed to be a central feature in teaching and learning, determining the nature and level of this ability is crucial in foreign language mediums.

An investigation into a national teacher development programme for Kenyan primary school teachers showed that in-service training marginally improved teacher-pupil interactions in English, maths and science lessons in Standards 3 and 6; more significant gains were achieved in paired and group classroom activities (Abd-Kadir et al., 2009). The study centred on 137 teachers from 24 schools and 50 of them, identified as key resource teachers (KRTs), were trained under the state system with an expectation they lead school-based development within their subject area. The remaining teachers (non-KRTs) were recipients of the second tier of instruction provided by the graduates. Despite efforts to enhance classroom interaction, both groups of teachers frequently used cued elicitations, a mid sentence rise in voice intonation said to be a ritualised strategy designed to keep pupils involved rather than necessitating a thoughtful response. Findings showed that KRTs were generally more interactive compared to non-KRTs, encouraging questions while also providing further explanations. A factor not explored, however, relates to whether the KRTs proficiency in English may have been higher than the teachers they tutored.

Principally, discourse studies in Africa have been confined to three main subjects; English, maths and science. Researchers, such as Hardman et al. (2009), assert that in developing countries, there is an absence of explicit follow-up in the IRF discourse structure. This assumption fails to address the discourse taking place during subject-specific lessons in vernacular languages. In these situations, both teachers' and pupils' language proficiency would be higher; Brock-Utne (2007) has already shown that teachers in Tanzania encourage students to activate and build on existing knowledge in lessons undertaken in Kiswahili. If classroom discourse is to be explored at a micro-level then ethnographic researchers have a responsibility to examine the nature of verbal exchanges in former colonial nations where mother tongue language lessons exist. The omission of such data casts doubt on more general conclusions drawn from teacher-pupil interactions in Kenya because discourse patterns in Kiswahili classes have the potential to produce different results. In effect, all Kenyan teachers are second language educators and therefore their language proficiency is an instrumental part of teaching and learning. Foreign language research indicates that variations in teacher language proficiency influence classroom practice (Richards et al., 2013).

## Teaching a Second Language

Broadly speaking, language competency cannot be divorced from learning and Farrell (2007) claims that language teachers must reach a certain threshold of proficiency to teach effectively; without such proficiency educators will rely on the spoken mother tongue. To some degree, this may explain the prevalence of code-switching from English to Kiswahili in Kenyan primary schools (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, 2016; Ogechi, 2009).

Many researchers (e.g. Agudo, 2017) have expressed their reservations about the overuse of first language discourse in second language instruction and Macaro (2005) asserts that changing languages should be based on an informed decision whereby the benefits of the switch are at least equal to those of not code-switching. Of particular concern is that high school teachers in Tanzania (Namamba & Rao, 2017) openly acknowledge that they use Kiswahili to teach history as they lack English competency and fluency. In Ghana, learners in upper primary classes simply do not pay attention to English because they know the same thing will be repeated in Fante (Owu-Ewie & Eshun, 2015). The importance of language ability cannot be underestimated and, as the literature states, foreign language “teachers need to have an advanced level of TL proficiency so they can also provide meaningful explanations, rich language input for learners and respond spontaneously and knowledgeably to their learners’ questions on language and culture” (Richards, Conway, Roskvist & Harvey, 2013, p. 244). The question of what constitutes adequate TL proficiency is a key element in education and largely influenced by teacher entry requirements and training. Uys et al. (2007) recommend that second language medium of instruction take precedence over some of the more generic courses offered in South African pre-service education programmes.

In a New Zealand study, foreign language educators were encouraged to sit language tests within their teaching domain and it was found that a non-native speaker of French downgraded her perceived TL proficiency after scoring less than expected in the written component of the exam (Richards et al., 2013). This study concluded that teachers who possess high levels of TL proficiency are better equipped to focus on teaching methodology. It is widely acknowledged that language teachers are not the only educators vested with the responsibility of developing reading, writing and speaking skills. While it is important for them to focus on linguistic elements (e.g. pronunciation and grammar), mainstream teachers also play a critical role in the development of literacy in countries with foreign language policies. For instance, everyday vocabulary such as “table” and “root” carry different connotations in maths and science. Uys et al. (2007) found that many subject teachers failed to teach language skills in their lessons. De Jong and Harper (2005) state that the chances of attaining academic language proficiency are higher when these teachers consciously promote subject-specific forms of language.

## Conclusion

This review sought to explore the impact of teachers' limited language proficiency on pedagogy in Kenyan upper primary schools. The majority of studies show that the TL competency of primary teachers is low in Kenya and evidence suggests they not only struggle with English grammar, but also find scientific concepts difficult to explain (e.g. Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, 2016; Ogechi, 2009). These language shortcomings are a matter of great concern for the education sector given the current focus on learner-centred principles and teacher communicative ability in the new curriculum framework (EAC, 2014). The promotion of innovative pedagogical approaches may well be in vain until the English language competency of teachers is uplifted. The findings also have implications for aid agencies and non-government organisations endeavouring to reform teaching and learning practices in countries with unfamiliar mediums of instruction.

Research indicates that teaching through a foreign medium promotes teacher-led instruction and ritualised patterns of classroom discourse in former colonial nations, including Kenya (e.g. Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Abd-Kadir et al., 2009). These traditional approaches are favoured because they reduce target language input and create a semblance of learning without drawing attention to the limited language proficiency of teachers and students (Chick, 1996). Richards et al. (2013) claim that an advanced level of language proficiency is necessary if teachers are to provide meaningful explanations and respond spontaneously to learners' questions; enabling them to move beyond the beginner level.

The incidence of teacher-centred education is a recurrent theme in research literature and the vast majority of studies attribute training and classroom barriers for the adherence to traditional methods (Schweisfurth, 2011). However, this paper has also identified that low teacher language proficiency has the potential to reinforce conventional teaching practices. If training is deemed to be a root cause of teacher-led instruction, how can pedagogical approaches simply change in Tanzania with a shift in the language of instruction during a controlled study? The importance of teacher TL proficiency cannot be overlooked and the literature increasingly suggests that TL proficiency is the hallmark of effective foreign language instruction (Andrews, 2003; Farrell, 2007).

Research in Kenya has yet to explore the nature of classroom interactions and discourse occurring in Kiswahili lessons as most studies have focused on English, Maths and Science subjects. This review calls for additional research to investigate whether teaching styles in upper Kenyan primary schools are indeed coping strategies, brought about by teachers' limited language proficiency, or if they are influenced more generally by teacher education programmes. Comparative research on discourse interactions in both English and Kiswahili lessons would yield more definitive results.

## Recommendations

If Kenya is to successfully reform primary education, then the government has to ensure that learner-centred methods are not inhibited by teachers' limited language proficiency. Therefore, this review recommends that English entry requirements for teacher education be raised so that newly qualified teachers can focus on implementing innovative pedagogies. It is also suggested that internationally recognised language tests be used to measure the English proficiency of teachers against established standards. Increased target language proficiency would uplift the academic language proficiency of learners and lead to improved discourse practices which develop critical thinking. Lastly, trainee teachers would benefit significantly from training that equips them with skills to teach effectively through the medium of English. Without some form of second language training, mainstream teachers will continue to use inappropriate communicative approaches.

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