

Effect Of Teachers' Mother Tongue Interference On Learners' Reading Proficiency In Government Owned Schools In Kenya

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Abstract: Proficiency in reading especially in The English language is hindered by mother tongue interference. The study was conducted with the aim of examining the effect of teachers' mother tongue interference on learners' reading proficiency in government-owned schools in Kenya reference was grade one learners in Uasin Gishu County Kenya. The study adopted a pre-test post-test experimental design. The sample consisted of 104 learners obtained through stratified simple random sampling. Data were collected using a reading test and an observation schedule. Descriptive statistics used in the analysis included counts, means, and percentages. The study's findings were that teachers' mother tongue interference had a negative effect on learners' reading proficiency. The study also established that teachers were not aware that they were to adhere to the phonetic script while guiding learners to read. The study thus concluded that proficiency of a learner's reading ability was begged on the positive or negative input of a teacher, especially during oral lessons. The study recommended regular retraining of teachers of English.

Keywords: Teachers' Mother Tongue Interference; Learners' Reading Proficiency; Government Owned Schools

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of mother tongue interference can be viewed as a transfer that affects learning both negatively and positively. It means that there is a possibility for the learners to produce some mistakes or errors in learning a second language especially English. The explanation behind this idea is that there is high probability of cross-linguistic influences in second language acquisition and this influence produce errors which are caused by negative transfer (Mede, Tutal, Ayaz, Çalışır, & Akın, 2014). Mispronunciation and grammatical errors are the most common types of interference between the mother tongue and the target language (Manrique, 2013).

Corder (1981) had observed that when people are learning a second language, they already have a first language. He also revealed that the rules they had learned and understood in the mother language were used in the English language. As a result, people form habits of using the rules of mother tongue in the second language and therefore make errors. McLaughlin (1990) noted that there was an influence between mother tongue and English languages because acquiring one's first

language gives one a certain routine or experience, strategies, and metacognitive skills, which could be generalized to subsequent languages, but there were also language-specific constraints in perception and comprehension.

According to Suntharesan (2012), mother tongue can be used when giving instructions which learners might not be able to understand in English, and for checking to understand, especially when using complex contexts. Mother-tongue use has an impact on the development of a student's oral competence in the English language (Schweers, 2009). It is through oral production in the first instance that oral vocabulary is built; the ability to process and produce complex sentences is first practiced through speaking. The way words are put together to form sentences and the way the sentences are put together in a text requires oral competency in the English language (Scarborough, 2006).

Gass (in Bailey, 2006:94) explained that the logical problem of language learning is caused by messy and fragmentary input, making abstract concepts based on limited examples of languages. Gass (in Bailey, 2006:65) refers to input as "... the language to which the learner is exposed to,

either orally or visually ...", in other words, the language which "surrounds learners living in a second language learning environment". The mismatch between the language used in schooling and spoken at home might have important inferences for educational attainment, (Ramachandran, 2012). It is natural as well as scientific that every language is governed by rule, style, and even appearance. Besides, whenever we encounter a foreign language, our natural tendency wants to hear it in terms of the sounds of our own mother tongue language that, we actually perceive it rather differently from the way native speakers do, (Wells, 2000).

Patrick, Mingcai, Didam, and Gyang (2013) established that Mother Tongue interference on English language reading of senior primary school pupils in Nigeria had pedagogical implications. Senadeera (2006) supported the need for Mother Tongue in education for communication. Krashen (2004), stated that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the English language. Brown (2006) argued in favor of the group that using the Mother tongue language, students learn to think, learn to communicate, and acquire an intuitive understanding of grammar. Mother tongue largely refers to not only the language one learns from one's catchment environment but also the speaker's dominant and home language. It's also called native language (Denizer, 2017) reported that language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) referred to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language.

In China, for instance, Chinese students tend to have difficulties pronouncing English sounds because they are deeply influenced by similar Chinese sounds (Zhang, 2009). The author further reported that a particular sound that did not exist in their mother-tongue language could, therefore, pose a difficulty for the English language learners in China to produce or some times to try to substitute those sounds with similar ones in their mother-tongue. The sounds include both vowels and consonants. For example, there are no vowels like /æ/ or consonants such as /ð/, /ʃ/. Therefore learners get difficulties in pronouncing as well as read the sounds. In Chinese the sound /i/ exist, but whether the vowel is long or short does not make any difference in meaning among learners of English, while the English phonemes /i:/ and /i/ differ a lot in meaning as in the word 'sheep' and 'ship'. The result is that Chinese learners are not naturally aware of the difference in English and Chinese and may not even hear that difference when speaking (Zhang, 2009).

Thyab (2016) carried out an investigation in Iraq. The study aimed at finding out the problems Arabic students faced when using definite and indefinite articles in the English language. The finding was that the students faced problems when using the articles because in there their first language they had articles which functioned differently from that of the second language. Elif (2017) did a study to explore whether mother tongue interfered in English language learning. The main intent of the study was to find out whether mother tongue hindered the performance of students in the following skills of English; speaking, listening, reading and writing. The findings of the study showed that mother tongue affected reading in the second language. The sections of English that were found to be affected by mother tongue were grammar

(determiners, articles and tenses) and the speaking and listening skills.

Usman, J. (2014). investigated on the challenges of teaching oral English in Nigerian high schools. Questionnaires were used to seek teachers' and students' opinions concerning the problem. The research participants consisted of the teachers of English Language and students, particularly, Senior Secondary School Students within four selected schools. The results showed that interference of mother tongue, unqualified teachers and dearth of relevant teaching materials were the major challenges.

In Nigeria Kolawole (2009) conducted a study on students' performance in English language in secondary schools. The study established that the performance was very poor. The study further revealed that the standard of English was poor due to several reasons. Some of them being mother tongue interference; some students did not understand the grammar because the teachers themselves did not know it and in most cases, English language teachers in senior primary and junior secondary schools resorted to the use of mother tongue to teach concepts which they felt were difficult.

A study conducted by Adebayo (2008) in Western Nigeria to examine the influence of mother tongue on performance of English language in Junior School Certificate Examination revealed that mother tongue influenced the students' performance in English language. The recommendations were that English language should be used as a medium of communication within and outside the classroom and that both teachers and students should endeavour to improve their proficiency level of the language which would eventually lead to improved performance.

In South Africa, Sharo (2014) conducted a study. The intent of the study was to establish the nature and extent of mother tongue interference by Sepedi on the effectiveness of learning English among information technology foundation students. The finding of the study was that the students' first language affected their English learning.

Atetwe (2013) conducted a study in Kiambu County, Kenya. The focus of the study was on Analysis of the Influence of Mother Tongue on Students' Performance in English in KCSE in Public Day Secondary Schools in Gatundu. The study found out that use of mother tongue had a negative influence in performance of English in public day secondary schools of Gatundu. It emerged from the study that use of mother tongue influenced the way students wrote and pronounced words in English. The study recommended that teachers should come up with teaching methods that were interactive in the English curriculum so as to ensure that students were given an opportunity to interact with each other in English.

Mbui (2013) conducted a study in Imenti Sub-County, Kenya. The study investigated on syntactical errors as a result of mother-tongue interference. The study established that in syntax, students fail to conform to English syntax rules. The finding was linked to oral skills attained in mother -tongue (mother-tongue influence). For instance, structures like "how is you" possesses the errors of verb agreement which translates to syntactical errors because of the wrong use of the auxiliary verb "is" instead of "are".

Bartoo (2004) investigated on the acquisition of English syntax by Keiyo native speakers in Kenya. The study focused on syntactic errors that resulted from mother-tongue transfer in the process of acquiring English as a second language by Keiyo speakers of English. The study focused on the effects of the errors on the performance of the pupils, and whether teaching played a role in eliminating the errors. The study established that Keiyo native speakers made omissions, miss ordering, and miss information errors in the process of acquiring English. These errors, according to the author, inhibited the performance of learners.

Wagikondi (2004) did an investigation on factors contributing to poor achievement in English in Kirinyaga District, Kenya and identified that when language of communication at home and school was mother tongue, then acquisition of English skills was inhibited and thus, the performance of English was affected.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Mother- tongue use has an impact on the development of a student's oral competence in English language (Schweers, 2009). It is through oral production in the first instance that oral vocabulary is built; the ability to process and produce complex sentences is first practiced through speaking. The way words are put together to form sentences and the way the sentences are put together in a text requires oral competency in English language (Scarborough, 2006). The development of oral skills which is a foundation of a student's proficiency in reading in The English language is affected by use of mother tongue in that too much reliance on it hinders the interaction in English (Schweers, 2009). This is because learners never manage to shake off the lexical stress pattern of their mother tongue in their English oral production and thus their reading proficiency is low (Warthon,2007).

Alonso(2000) in a study to establish the main types of interference mistakes that Beginner Spanish students made when learning English as a foreign language revealed that phonetic, orthographic, syntactic, morphological and semantic features between mother-tongue and English language were problematic issues for the Spanish students. The study further established that most mistakes were due to transference of structures from Spanish to the English language

In Kenya, students from the rural areas face dialect problems in speaking English because they grow up in the villages where only one language is used, therefore, they face difficulties in acquiring proficiency reading skills in the English language (Gacheche, 2010).From these reviewed studies, there is evidence that scanty research had been conducted on the effect of teachers' mother-tongue interference on reading proficiency. Therefore, this study investigated on the effect of teachers' mother tongue interference on students' reading proficiency in government owned primary schools in Kenya.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Kenya with specific reference to government owned primary schools in Uasin- Gishu County. A pretest–posttest experimental design was employed. The study targeted 4032 girls and 3291 boys in grade one. Stratified simple random technique was used to get a sample size of 104 pupils. Data for the study was collected by use of an observation schedule and a reading test. The data was then organized by use of SPSS. Descriptive statistics used in data analysis included counts, means and percentages.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate whether mother tongue interference was a factor affecting attainment proficiency in reading skills the researcher constructed items on the observation schedule which focused on articulation mainly; stress, intonation and pronunciation. The researcher presented the results of teachers while they taught oral lessons and the results of the pupils while they took the reading activity. The results are presented in Table 1 and 2 respectively.

| | | | Location of School | | Total |
|--|---------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| | | | Rural | Urban | |
| Teacher used stress and Intonation | Poor | Count | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| | | % within Location of School | 64.7% | 60.0% | 63.6% |
| | Average | Count | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| | | % within Location of School | 35.3% | 40.0% | 36.4% |
| Teacher used proper pronunciation of words | Poor | Count | 11 | 2 | 13 |
| | | % within Location of School | 64.7% | 40.0% | 59.1% |
| | Average | Count | 6 | 3 | 9 |
| | | % within Location of School | 35.3% | 60.0% | 40.9% |

Table 1: Distribution Frequency of Mother Tongue Interference on Teachers while Teaching Oral Skills

As shown in Table 1, 11 (64.7%) of teachers in rural schools and 3 (60.0%) of teachers in urban schools scored a poor grade on the usage of stress and intonation on words in order to bring out the intended meaning. For instance, while teaching was being conducted, the researcher heard a teacher pronouncing \love\ which refers to a noun as /lo've\ meaning a verb. Another teacher pronounced /'present \ which is a noun while through explanation she\he meant \ pre'sent\ which refers to a verb. The finding meant that the teachers were not able to place force on words in order to bring out the difference that existed between nouns and verbs. The outcome of the finding was the likelihood of transference of the problem from the teacher to the pupils was high. This would also mean that the pupils could acquire limited vocabulary. However, 6 (35.3%) of teachers in rural schools were awarded an average score as well as 2 (40.0%) teachers in urban schools on the same aspect. The finding meant that the teachers might have undergone in - service courses in English and hence the noticeable improvement.

Data presented in Table 1 show that 11 (64.7%) of the teachers in rural and 2 (40.0%) of teachers in urban schools respectively, did not use proper pronunciation of words while teaching oral skills. In pronouncing consonants the teachers were found to be having difficulty in plosive and nasal sounds.

And in pronouncing the plosive sounds /p/, /t/, /k/, /d/,/g/ the teachers produced them without the explosive sound and for nasal sounds, the teachers could not pronounce /m/. This meant that the teachers exhibited different symbols in naming the sounds. The differences assigned to the symbols were found to make students confused on how to pronounce them because the symbols were not familiar with what they encountered in books or in their mother tongue. The finding was attributed to the fact that, the teachers were not conversant with the phonetic script that should help them pronounce sounds correctly. The result was supported by the researcher’s own observation that, some teachers while they taught vocabulary, they had difficulties pronouncing the following words /girl/ was pronounced as /kirl/; the word /dog/ was pronounced as /tog/; /ball/ was pronounced as /fall/; /that/ was pronounced as /tat/; /go/ was pronounced as /ko’/ and /bad/as /pad/.

The finding meant that the teachers had mother tongue predisposition and that the same problem was likely to be transferred to the pupil. The other implication of the finding was that the teachers were unaware that proper pronunciation of words is vital in effective communication (Hewings, 2004). The author further asserted that difficulties with pronunciation meant that learners failed to get their message across, even when the correct words were being used, or they failed to understand what was said to them hence reading proficiency was low. The finding is as well supported by (Mbui, 2013) who established that syntactical errors produced by students were as a result of mother- tongue interference acquired from their teachers. The data on how the pupils’ reading proficiency were affected by mother tongue interference is presented in Table 2.

INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON PUPILS’ READING PROFICIENCY

In order to establish whether a teacher who was affected by mother tongue predisposition influenced the reading proficiency of pupils, the researcher listened to pupils’ performance as they undertook the reading test and the results were presented in Table 2.

| | | | Total |
|--|---------|-------|-------|
| The pupil used intonation, stress, pitch and juncture appropriately on different words and sentences | Poor | Count | 67 |
| | | % | 64.4% |
| | Average | Count | 37 |
| | | % | 35.6% |
| The pupil pronounced all words correctly | Poor | Count | 66 |
| | | % | 63.5% |
| | Average | Count | 38 |
| | | % | 36.5% |

n=104

Table 2: Distribution Frequency of Mother Tongue Interference on Pupils’ Reading Proficiency

As shown in Table 2; 67 (64.4%) of the pupils who took part in the study were awarded a poor grade in regard to how they brought out the intonation, stress, pitch and juncture

appropriately on different words and sentences while they took the reading test. Only 37(35.6%) of the pupils were awarded an average performance. What was deduced from the finding was that the teachers, who were affected by mother tongue interference, transferred the same problem to the pupils whom they taught. Results further show that only 38(36.5%) of the pupils were awarded an average grade in regard to pronouncing of all words correctly. While 66 (63.5%) of the pupils were awarded a poor grade on the same. The information discussed herein was evidenced by the following; the pupils read the word \jump / as /chump/ the word \cook\ was read as “gook” some children read the word / house/ as /ouse/.This was evidence that the pupils were affected by mother tongue interference. This finding is in agreement with that of (Elif, 2017) who established that mother tongue affected the second language learning.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it was concluded that a teachers’ mother tongue interference had a strong effect on pupils’ reading proficiency. It was recommended that teachers of English be retrained often especially on the sound script so that they can re-learn how to pronounce words correctly and thus reading proficiency of learners will be achieved.

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