Teaching Strategies Employed by ACSE English Teachers in Implementing CBLT in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

English in Tanzania is taught as one of the major subjects at Advanced Certificate of Secondary School Education (ACSE). This paper explores the strategies employed by teachers in implementing the ACSE curriculum. The curriculum requires that the subject be taught using the competence based approach where learner-centred strategies are emphasized. The study employed mixed methods and descriptive design. Purposive sampling was used to get schools and teachers because it was only schools that had English as a major subject in the municipality that were selected. The findings reveal that the teacher-centerd strategies dominate the curriculum implementation as opposed to learner-centerd ones as required by the curriculum. The paper therefore recommends that teachers in Iringa municipality be oriented on the learner-centred strategies in the implementation of English at ACSE. It is further recommended that since oral language skills form a large part of the curriculum, these skills be assessed at both school and national based assessments if they are to be taught and learnt. This is because no teacher can waste time teaching what is not assessed and no student can take trouble to learn what is not assessed.

Key Words: Teaching strategies, learner-centred, curriculum, English, secondary education.

1.   Introduction

Despite the fact that English language in Tanzania begins to be taught as a subject from Class Three in primary school education, language of instruction (LoI) at Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) and taught as a subject in that level of education (MoEC, 1995), its mastery among students in different levels of education is low (Komba, 2012; Qorro, 2012). English is also one of the major subjects at Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education (ACSE). In 2009, the curriculum for ACSE changed from content to competence based (MoeVT, 2009). This change was applied to English in order to go for more learner-centred methods as opposed to the former content-based which was considered teacher-centred.

Teachers' decisions on the strategies to teach a subject have impact on its success. Language curriculum planners have in their mind that what is suggested is followed but the reality in the classroom may be different due to a number of factors. Teachers' motivation and training on the strategies, learners' readiness to learn, learners' attitude towards the language, learners' level of language and their number in the classroom are some of the factors that may hinder proper implementation of the curriculum as planned. Other factors that Toth and Davin (2016) refer to them as pedagogical nonnegotiable are participants' background knowledge, the complexity of instructional targets, the nature of human cognition and social interaction, and the available time.

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Toth & Davin further argue that it is the teacher's power and responsibility in determining the strategies and this responsibility is carried out through decisions made before and during learners' engagement in learning.

The teaching and learning in recent years are influenced by the participatory and learner-centered approaches. This has also affected the teaching and learning English language as a subject. Learner-centered English language teaching has taken the names of communicative language teaching (Richards, 2006) learner-centered language education (Nunan, 2013). This shift from content based to communicative approach came because it "was recognised that simply being able to create grammatically correct structures in language did not necessarily enable the learners to use the language to carry out various real-world tasks" (Nunan, 2013:18). In Tanzania, communicative language syllabus for secondary education began to be used in 2005 for Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) and in 2009 for Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education (ACSE) in 2009 (MoEVT, 2005; 2009). Since "a basic principle underlying all communicative approaches is that learners must not only learn to make grammatically correct, propositional statements about the experiential world, but must also develop the ability to use language to get things done" Nunan (2013:18), oral skills remain important to be taught and assessed. It is a common practice that oral language skills in English as second language are not well taught, let alone being assessed (Nation & Newton, 2009: Onsare, 2013). This has resulted in the trend where much of classroom time being spent on the skills that are assessed (in this case writing and reading) and neglect the unassessed ones (in this case speaking and listening).

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in Iringa Municipality and employed mixed research methodology to explore the teaching strategies employed by teachers in implementing the ACSE English curriculum. The qualitative and quantitative approaches were integrated because both methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself (Creswell, 2012). The study employed descriptive survey design. Purposive sampling was used to get schools where schools that had ACSE with English as one of the subjects were selected. Teachers were also obtained through purposive sampling since it was English teachers who were needed for the study. Cluster sampling was applied to get students where students in a selected class were administered a questionnaire.

Non-participant classroom observation was used to obtain information pertaining to strategies employed by teachers in teaching English at ACSE. Specifically, observation was done to witness what takes place in a classroom setting. The data collection method was meant to supplement what was provided by teachers and students in the questionnaire regarding the use of various teaching and learning strategies used in implementing CBLT.

Data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Some information obtained from a few open ended items in the questionnaires and classroom observation was subjected to content analysis. Data that was obtained using questionnaire administered to both teachers and students was analyzed using SPSS version 19 sub-programme frequencies.

3. Data presentation and discussion

Teaching strategies used by the ACSE English language teachers

The results regarding strategies used by teachers to teach the advanced level English language students are presented in Table 1. For the purpose of discussion, always and often were treated as the most used; sometimes and never were treated as the least used. Not all teachers answered all questions in the questionnaire. Some responses have total less than 13.

Table 1: *Teaching Strategies Used by English Language Teachers in Classrooms -Teachers' Questionnaire (n=13)*

	Always	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
I teach through discussions	6(46.2%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	5(38.5%)
I teach through lecture	8(61.5%)	1(7.7%)	0(0%)	3(23.1%)
I teach through role play	1(7.7%)	2(15.4%)	2(15.4%)	8(61.5%)
In an English class there is a debate	2(15.4%)	2(15.4%)	4(30.7%)	5(38.5%)
I provide assignments to my students	2(15.4%)	3(23.1%)	2(15.4%)	6(46.2%)
I give feedback on my students' assignments	2(15.4%)	3(23.1%)	3(23.1%)	5(38.5%)
The language laboratory is used	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

From Table 1 the findings show that the most commonly used teaching strategies by the ACSE English language teachers are lecture (69.2%) and discussions (46.2%). The findings also show that the least used strategies are role play (76.9%), debate (69.2%), assignment provision (61.5%) and timely feedback provision (61.5%).

Some questionnaire items were administered to both teachers and students to crosscheck responses. From teachers' responses in Table 1 and students' responses in Table 2, there are similar results in four strategies. The items with similar results in terms of least used are class repetition, the use of role play, the use of debate and the use of discussion.

Different results from teachers and students were obtained in two strategies: assignment provision and provision of feedback on the assignments. While teachers indicated that assignment provision as a teaching strategy was the least used (61.5%), students' responses indicated that the strategy was the most used (74.7%). Regarding feedback on the assignments, whereas teachers indicated that the strategy was the least used (61.5%); students indicated that the strategy was one of the most used (59.5%). This discrepancy could be a reflection of students' negative attitudes towards assignments. In this respect, students evade their role of taking responsibility of their learning as the constructivist theory suggests.

In order to implement CBE appropriately, the number of students in one class has to be small. In Tanzania, the recommended size of ACSE classes is 40 students. It was witnessed in classroom observation that two classrooms had more than 40 students. Giving many exercises and immediate

feedback is difficult when the number of students in class is big. The same applies to teaching at the learning pace of the students. As pointed out in the literature review, it is impossible to attend to every student learning needs when their number in class is large. Richards (2006), Melton (2008) and Nkwetisama (2012) have recommended that the number of students should range between ten and fifteen for an effective CBE class. This means that the number of learners in class is a crucial aspect to make CBE a success.

From Table 1 the findings show that lecture method is the most commonly used strategy by the ACSE English language teachers. Lecture method has been claimed to dominate teaching in Tanzania secondary schools (Kasuga, 2012; Mpayo, 2012). Lecture method is not to be used to such a large extent particularly for ACSE English language classes. The problem with overuse of lecture method is that it makes students passive recipients of knowledge. It also hinders the students' critical analysis of issues. It also goes against the constructivist theory which demands that students become responsible for their learning.

The second most used teaching strategy was discussions where 46.2% of teachers indicated to use it. 61.4% of students also indicated that their teachers taught them using discussions. The use of discussions as a teaching strategy is advocated for implementing CBE. However, not all teachers seem to use discussions as a teaching strategy. In one of the observation sessions in form five, the researcher witnessed the way the teacher taught the subtopic *selecting a topic of a speech*. The lesson was poorly conducted because lecture method was dominant. Students were passive and the teacher dominated the class. Discussion would have made the lesson better because the students would have had a chance to argue on the various ways presented by the teacher and a better choice of the topic basing on the arguments of the strengths given by the majority. Where discussion strategy is applied, it enhances freedom and ability of learners to express themselves and hence improve learning.

As pointed out in the literature review, the reasons for non-use of participatory methods including discussions have been provided by Tilya and Mafumiko (2010) as:
- To cover the content of the curriculum within the time set by the school timetable and as specified in the syllabus
- There are too many students in some classes and the teacher works in favour of lecturing as other methods require a lot of time to attend to individual student's needs
- The teaching resources that support interactive and student-centred teaching methods are lacking especially in the science subjects and languages

However, active and meaningful discussion is possible where the learners have mastered the language of instruction. In one of the classroom observations, the researcher witnessed a discussion where the students had little command of the English language such that it was difficult to understand what they were discussing.

Both Table 1 and 2 responses show that role play as a teaching strategy was not widely used. It ranks among the least used strategies where 61.5% of the teachers indicated to have rarely or never used it. Similar results obtained from students show that 88% of teachers never used the strategy in teaching. This suggests that despite the paradigm shift from content to competence based curriculum the teaching and learning process in English language classrooms has remained unchanged. Tilya and Mafumiko (2010) reported the same phenomenon. The authors argued that despite the shift to CBE,

teaching in Tanzania had remained traditional and teacher-centred, incorporating only some elements of participatory teaching method.

The classroom observation in one of the sampled schools revealed that the teacher employed lecture method when teaching the subtopic *listening to a gapped telephone conversation*. The role play strategy would have been a better method because the students would have been taking turns in the conversation. This avoidance by teachers to use the participatory teaching strategy leads into improper implementation of the innovation. Their non-use of participatory teaching strategies can partly be because of lack of in-service training as it is reported in section 4.2.3.

Debate was pointed out as one of the least used teaching strategies in teaching and learning English where 69% of teachers reported it as the least used teaching strategy. The same was reported in students' responses where 74% of the students indicated that the strategy was not used. The avoidance of debate could partly be due to the time it takes to conduct. Teachers are concerned with covering the topics specified in the syllabus. The need to cover the syllabus is achieved at the expense of participatory teaching and learning strategies which would otherwise enhance what is learnt. Use of debates enhances the development of both speaking and listening skills among students. It also helps them to have confidence in public address. These skills are the ones that the learners will encounter in their daily lives or in work place. It is the same skills that the 2010 ACSE English language syllabus advocates.

Language laboratories were not used in any of the sampled schools because none of the schools had a language laboratory. Language laboratory is essential as it enables the students to learn the sound systems of a language practically. The absence of language laboratories poses a great setback to implementing the English language CBE at ACSE.

Teachers were asked to indicate what they did when students had learning difficulties. Two aspects were asked: if they gave personalised assistance to students and if students repeated class after it was found that they did not attain the expected learning in a particular class. The responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: *Remedial Steps Taken by Teachers to Build Competence to ACSE English Language Students –*
Teachers Responses (n = 13)

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
When a student does not understand, I give him/her a personalised assistance	4(30.8%)	1(7.7%)	8(61.5%)	0(0%)
When a student does not understand after personalised assistance, he/she repeats a class	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(7.7%)	12(92.3%)

Table 2 shows that 61.5% of the teachers provided personalised assistance only sometimes. With regard to class repetition, 92.3% of teachers indicated that students never repeated a class as a result of failure to attain the expected learning. This may lead to non achievement of CBE objectives. To implement CBE successfully, necessary conditions need to be in place, including class repetition. Table 3 shows the students' responses regarding the teaching and learning strategies used by teachers.

Table 3: *Teaching and Learning Strategies Used in English Language Classroom -Students' Questionnaire (n=202)*

	Always	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
The teaching and learning process is based on discussions	60(29.7%)	64(31.7%)	74(36.6%)	4(2.5%)
I am taught through role play	9(4.4%)	15(7.4%)	46(22.7%)	132(65.3%)
The teacher gives us opportunity to share our experiences	106(52.2%)	58(28.7%)	33(16.3%)	4(2.5%)
We work in groups	64(31.7%)	55(27.2%)	74(36.6%)	9(4.4%)
There is a debate in an English class	23(11.3%)	46(22.7%)	64(31.6%)	69(34.1%)
The teacher provides us with many exercises	74(36.6%)	77(38.1%)	46(22.7%)	5(2.5%)
I am given feedback on my learning process	50(24.8%)	70(34.7%)	59(29.2%)	20(9.9%)
I am given oral examination or test	7(3.5%)	15(7.4%)	67(32.2%)	112(54.4%)
I am given projects and field work as part of my learning	13 (6.4%)	37(18.4%)	85(42%)	66(32%)
I use language laboratory	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

The students' responses about the most frequently used strategies (always and often) by their teachers are: allowing the students to share their experiences (80.9%), provision of many exercises (74.7%), discussions (61.4%), feedback provision on assignments (59.5%) and group work (58.9%).

The least used strategies from Table 3 include: role play (88%), provision of oral examinations and tests (86.6%), projects and field work (74%) and the use of debate (65.7%).

Students' responses (80.9%) indicated in Table 3 that their teachers allowed them to share their experiences. This enables students to learn not only from the teacher but also from their fellow students. In the same vein, 58.9% of students indicated that they worked in groups. The advantage of group work is that it enables students to learn from each other. When group work is minimal, learning among students becomes entirely dependent on the teacher.

CBE requires that students be subjected to oral examination or tests as part of assessment of the developed competences. Students' responses in Table 3 show that 86.6% of students indicated that oral tests or examinations were not used as a tool for assessment. Speaking skills, as listening, writing and reading skills; form a big portion of the ACSE English language syllabus. To let students go un-assessed in speaking skills is problematic in two major aspects: Firstly, we may not be sure whether the desired skills in speaking have been achieved by the students. If achieved, it could be difficult to tell the degree to which the skills have been achieved. Secondly, because we test other skills mainly writing, we may be victimizing those students who are better at oral presentation because they are not tested in that skill.

Related to speaking skills, is listening skill. Students were not tested in this skill while   they spent much time studying the skill. Such practice is contrary to the 2010 English   language syllabus (MoEVT, 2009, p.vii) which stipulates:

> ...a variety of assessment techniques including paper and pencil assessment, interviews, observation during classroom presentations, debates discussion, projects and questionnaires could be used for continuous assessment. The skills of listening and speaking also need to be included in the national based assessment/ examinations so that there is practical examination, listening and speaking should be given adequate attention so as to ensure that none of the skills is undervalued.

Both the internal school examinations and the ACSE ignore these aspects of skills by not assessing them. This may make students to ignore developing these skills in their independent studies because they know for sure that they do not constitute part of their assessment. It was also noted that the ACSE examinations set under the CBE of 2012 and 2013 did not have questions that assessed the speaking and listening skills even though the syllabus stresses the teaching and assessment of the listening skills.

The 2010 syllabus requires that ACSE English language students conduct one project work and one field work (MoEVT, 2009). Projects and fieldwork make students search for a topic and investigate or conduct an in-depth study to discover knowledge by themselves. The strategy is important in enabling the students to become independent learners. It also helps the learners to experience the real world of work as CBE demands and aims at making learners independent in their studies that may finally create their independence in real life. Despite this requirement, the results from Table 2 show that 74% of students (sometimes and never) indicated that they were not assigned field work and projects. When projects are not conducted as it is witnessed in this aspect and others, it implies that CBE is partially implemented. This may result in difficulty in attainment of results in learning as desired by adopting CBE.

Students were also asked to rate the extent to which they received remedial assistance. The results are shown in Table 4

Table 4: *Remedial Steps to Build Competence among ACSE English Language Students – Students' Responses (n = 202)*

	Always	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
The teacher repeats a topic until all of us have understood before she/he moves to the next topic	71(35.1%)	40(19.8%)	60(29.7)	30(14.9%)
When a student does not understand, the teacher assists him/her until he/she understands	85(42.1%)	48(23.8%)	58(28.7%)	11(5.4%)
When a student does not understand after assistance, he/she repeats the class	5(2.5%)	6(3%)	48(23.7%)	143(70.8%)

Table 4 shows that 54.9% (always and often) of students' responses indicate that the teachers repeated a topic until they had understood. It also reveals that 65.9% of the teachers gave them personalised assistance. However, the results show that 70.8% of students indicate that students progressed to the

next class even if they had not understood issues after personalised assistance. The repetition serves to ensure that learners have attained and can demonstrate the required mastery (Nkwetisama, 2012).

In the same line, CBE demands personalised assistance to students. This is done because of the individual differences that each student has. Paces at which each student learns and the needs that each student requires from the course are important aspects in the learning process. These results are contrary to what Nkwetisama (2012) insists that the instruction or teaching based on CBE has to be paced to the needs of the learners. Likewise, Richards (2006) stressed that instruction in CBE has to be individualized and student-centred. Marcellino (2008) adds that since learners have different learning experiences, they have to be treated differently considering their learning pace. From teachers' and students' responses in Table 3 and Table 4, there is an agreement that students received teacher's personalised assistance. Personalised assistance is important in that it enables the students to understand what they had not understood in the normal teaching.

Regarding class repetition, both teachers' and students' responses indicate that there is no class repetition even when students have not attained the expected learning in the current class. 70.4% of students indicated that they never repeated a class. 100% of teachers' responses indicated that there is no class repetition. Literature review and the conceptual framework stress the importance of class repetition. The problem with non-repetition practice is that it will produce graduates who have not mastered what they should master. CBE advocates that a student stays at the same level until minimum level of mastery is attained. This means that the learners continue to learn the same thing until mastery is demonstrated. These findings are contrary to teaching and learning in CBE where teaching and learning is not time-based and therefore students should progress at their own rates and concentrate only on those areas in which they lack competence (Nkwetisama, 2012; Richards, 2006). This implies that the students should not move to the next class unless they have achieved mastery of what they have been taught in the current class.

Surprisingly, the ACSE English language curriculum is silent on class repetition. This could be the reason for the non-practice of class repetition in ACSE English language classes. The curriculum treats learning as it was treated in the content based curriculum. The MoEVT does not say anything regarding class repetition. This means that it does not advocate for it.

4. Conclusion

The study findings reveal that the English language classrooms are still dominated by the use of non-participatory teaching strategies. The results show that lecture was the most dominant teaching strategy with 61.5% of teachers reporting to use it always. There was very little use of role play as teaching and learning strategy because 61.5% of teachers reported to have never used it. The same was found with the use of debate where 69.2% of teachers never used debate as a teaching and learning strategy.

There was very little use of projects and fieldwork as part of learning strategy among students as 66% of students reported that they were never assigned to undertake projects and field work. Fieldwork serves to make students search for knowledge and appreciate what they learn and hence have a sense of belonging as opposed to what they learn in class as prescribed by the curriculum. In the curriculum, project and fieldwork comprise 10% of all the students have to learn in English subject at ACSE (MoEVT, 2009).

Despite the fact that CBE requires that the learner attains the minimum standard of learning in one class level before they can progress to another (Nkwetisama, 2012), 92.3% of teachers indicated that there was no class repetition. This means that learners are allowed to progress to the next class without basic competence in one class level. This practice handicaps the CBE practice.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers should be oriented on the use of more participatory strategies in teaching and learning English at ACSE as opposed to the domination of lecture. The use of lecture could partly be caused by teachers' ignorance of the more participatory strategies.

The use of debates in teaching and learning is recommended because of its strength in enhancing the oral skills in language. Since language is primarily spoken, it is important to have learners practice the oral skills. Students be assigned projects and fieldwork related to language studies for them to carry out. Projects and fieldwork is another important aspect that needs an attention since it helps in enhancing independent learning.

Since examinations influence the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Agrawal, 2004), what is taught has to be assessed to make teaching and learning meaningful. Since the ACSE English subject syllabus requires that students be subjected to oral assessment, it is high time that this is conducted. In an education that has allocated time for teaching oral skills (speaking and listening), it is imperative that these skills be assessed otherwise no teacher will spend time to teach them effectively and no student will take time to learn what they know it will not be assessed. Before ways of conducting national assessments for oral skills are put in place, school-based assessments have to begin immediately for improvement of oral skills among CSE and ACSE students in Tanzania. This is so suggested because even in the USA, where English is learned as first language oral assessments are conducted, although not in final examinations as Ryan and Frazee 2012: 42 states:

> Analyzing spoken messages, communicating with a variety of audiences, and integrating oral, visual, and graphic information are the key skills in the Common Core's Speaking and Listening strand. Although these skills are frequently evaluated in classroom and local assessments, they have not traditionally been included in high-stakes tests.

The National Examination of Tanzania needs to also set an examination that will assess these skills. Contrary to that the curriculum that is implemented is different from the official.

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