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Abstract

Language is the basic mechanism in representation and expression of information. It is instrumental in enabling human beings form social intuitions. The mental representation about the world that is communicated in any speech act is based on vocabulary as the building blocks. The approach to teaching determines the mastery of language vocabulary. Teacher Cognition is central to the process of understanding teaching. A key factor driving this research is the recognition of the fact that teachers are active thinking decision – makers who play a pivot role in shaping classroom events. Instructional process is determined and shaped by the teachers’ cognition. The congruence between teachers’ beliefs and actions is significant in teaching. Vocabulary is the first and foremost important step in language acquisition; words are the main carriers of meaning and thus the reason for this study to focus on vocabulary teaching. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore cognitive perspectives in relation to English language vocabulary instruction process in primary schools in Busia County, Kenya. The objective was to investigate teachers’ beliefs about English vocabulary instruction. The theoretical framework was based on Mezirow’s perspective transformation which explores teacher cognition reflecting current, real life situation vocabulary instruction needs. There was interplay between factors that shape teacher cognition as independent variable and the learning outcomes of teaching English vocabulary being the dependent variables. The philosophical paradigm underpinning the study was interpretivism. The research used descriptive survey design. The target population constituted of 548 primary schools in Busia County. The sample was 20 standard 8 teachers of English. Data collection instruments were classroom observations and interview schedules. The data collected was analysed by use of descriptive thematic analysis procedures, and were presented in various thematic areas based on study objectives. It provides insight for teachers to improve on English vocabulary instructions.

Introduction

The study of English as official Language cultivates real concern to improve the competence and proficiency of the language. The increasing status of English as a world language has created an escalating demand for English proficiency and competence. The more words learners are able to handle accurately the better their chances of understanding English and making themselves understood. Acquisition of vocabulary is arguably the most critical component of language learning. “Vocabulary acquisition is the largest and most important task facing the language learner”, (Swan & Walter 1984). As (Calderon et al 2005) states, poor vocabulary is a serious issue for students. Other components of language such as grammar, phonology, discourse analysis, syntax and semantics cannot be developed without vocabulary. This study looks at the cognitive approach to teaching English vocabulary. The mental constructs and parameters of teacher cognition are conceptualised. Vocabulary instruction draws relevance from teacher cognition.
Vocabulary is the first and foremost important step in language acquisition. In a classroom where learners find themselves uncomfortable with L2, language learning can be made interactive and interesting with the employment of appropriate approach and introduction of appropriate vocabulary exercises. A vocabulary is anybody of words someone knows and uses to express themselves in language learning. Vocabulary is an important part of English language art or second language classes. Regardless of the level or class of teaching, it is important that learners learn and practice new vocabulary as often as possible. Although it is important for learners to use correct grammar and structure, words are the main carriers of meaning. This means that the more words learners are able to handle accurately the better their chances of understanding English and making themselves understood.

Learning the meaning of words involves learning how one’s community labels content in their word. (Golinkoff, 1999). According to (Borg, 2015) education in the 1970’s was mostly on behaviours (Borg 2013). This was the dominant conceptual model of teaching in 1970’s. Learning was seen to be a product of teaching and teaching was conceived as a behaviour performed by teachers in class (Borg, 2015). Research in teaching aimed at describing these behaviours. It conceived that behaviours were determinants of learning outcomes. Developments in cognitive psychology as according to (Calderhead, 1987, 1996, Carter, 1990 in Borg 2015) highlighted the influence thinking on behaviour. Understanding teachers required an understanding of teachers’ mental lives rather than an exclusive focus on observable behaviours (Borg 2003, 2006, 2015). It is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think. Teaching based on the perception of teachers, actual thinking and practices. (Borg, 2015) asserts that recognition of this two-way interaction between thinking and classroom practice was an important step forward in conceptualizing the field of teachers’ cognition. It was affirmed that cognition shaped classroom practice and likewise classroom events shaped subsequent cognitions. This interest in congruence between teachers’ beliefs and actions remain current today. Nisbett and Ross (1980 P. 206) confirm that “all human perception is influenced by the perceivers schema constructs, existing beliefs and understanding. Arguing the same case, Halkes and Olson (1984 a: 1) states what is in the mind of teachers could explain classroom processes in one way or another. Teaching is more than merely transmitting information. Indeed the management, motivation and sustainability of learning can be understood only by exploring what teachers do in their specific working contexts. Teachers are the executive decision makers of the curriculum. Teachers wondering how to teach are not short of advice. Penny Ur (2013: 470) states that, while working within external constraints, teachers should adopt “their own situated methodologies, driven directly by the question, how are my students likely to learn best”. Teacher cognition research area is the source for the required insights. “Cognition refers to what teachers think, know and believe and the relationship of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom” (Borg, 2003: 81). It is recognized that separating the cognitive construction of teacher cognition (Knowledge, attitudes and beliefs) may prove difficult, as those are complex and overlapping components (Borg, 2003:86). Teacher’s belief is crucial in shaping their behaviour (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

**Importance of Teacher Cognition**

Research reveals that approaches to teaching has been changing from time to time in the last few decades. One predominant approach in the earlier studies was process – product approach which focused mainly on observable teaching events and students learning outcomes (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Green, 1960; Rosenshine, 1971). In this approach researchers aim to discover the relationship between teacher behaviour and student achievement, which is applicable to a wide range of circumstances. The assumption is that specific teaching behaviour could be casually linked to particular learning outcomes and the behaviours characteristics of effective teacher could be used as a basis for training other learners (Zan, 2013). However, classroom contexts are by nature diverse; teacher behaviour that is effective in one context may be inappropriate and ineffective in another. Process-product approach has contributed to our knowledge of what teachers and students do in the classrooms, and how teacher behaviours related to students,
learning and studies. Adopting this approach failed to produce any contribution.

Importance of Vocabulary in Learning English Language

For many years vocabulary has been undervalued in the field of second language teaching and learning, but the last decades have seen a change of attitude towards vocabulary. Laufer (1997) says: “vocabulary is no longer a victim of discrimination in second language learning research, or in language teaching. After decades of neglect lexis is now recognized as central to any language acquisition process, native or non native. What many language teachers might have intuitively known for a long time, that a solid vocabulary is necessary in every stage of language learning, is now being openly stated by some language researchers”. Change is due to the spread of the audio lingual method followed by the communicative approach, since then the findings of applied linguistics slim down the syntax and gives more importance to the lexicon. This revolution of vocabulary has created explosion of publications on vocabulary aimed at second language teachers and course designers. Carter (1998) thinks that vocabulary was neglected in second language researches, as a result of syntax and phonology domination in this field. Moreover, vocabulary presentation seems to be difficult task for syllabus designers because of its infinite nature. But now vocabulary is in the top of second language research. Jordens et al. (1996) believe that vocabulary is more important than grammar because people generally use vocabulary and reduce grammar particularly when getting a message across quickly and precisely and is of the utmost importance; like telegrams, panic situations or times when emotions are very high. Moreover, the number of ungrammatical sentences people speak and write is enormous, unless they need to convey complex messages precisely. It is clear that vocabulary has been recognized as a key area of language knowledge. Hatch (1978) believes that what the foreign language learner needs lexical elements in early stage as well as in later stage of the learning process, is often far greater than the need for grammatical rules. This why travellers take dictionaries not grammar books when going abroad. Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand or express their own ideas Wilkins (1972: 111) states: While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. Call (1987) cited in Jordens (1996) points out that we can give a clear image without using certain grammatical categories for example: storm fall tree dead, this explain why text comprehension is determined to a large extent by vocabulary acquisition. A considerable amount of research has been devoted to second language classrooms in order to ascertain where the type of instruction has an effect on second language development and achievement. As Ellis (2012) points out that this kind of research aims at the clarification of theoretical issues but above all aims at the improvement of language teaching by means of developing teachers awareness of the nature of the input that learners are exposed to. In order to become proficient in a foreign language therefore, a learner has to learn thousands of words before taking care of grammar , and language teachers should spend considerable time on teaching vocabulary in their classroom, and examining the relationship between vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore cognitive perspectives in relation to the teaching and learning of English language vocabulary with the view of improving pedagogy of English in primary schools in Busia County, Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To investigate Kenyan primary school teachers’ beliefs and perception about English vocabulary instruction in primary schools.

Justification of the Study

The need for research on teacher cognition in vocabulary instruction is justified on several grounds. First, examining the relationship between teacher beliefs and actual classroom action can inform educational practices. Second, if teacher education is to have an impact on how prospective teachers will teach vocabulary, it must engage participants in examining their beliefs, attitude, perceptions, assumptions, values and knowledge. Third, attempts to implement new classroom practices without considering teachers’ beliefs can lead to disappointing results.
Significance of the Study
This study aims to provide insights into teacher cognition in vocabulary teaching, which may provide pedagogical guidelines for language educators, policy makers and curriculum developers to plan and prepare English language instructional material in particular contents.

Research Design and Methodology
This study adopted qualitative approach with interprertivism as the underpinning philosophical paradigm. The study was conducted through descriptive survey design.

Findings of the Study
Influence of Teachers’ Teaching Experience on the Mastery of Vocabulary Knowledge
Teachers of various experiences in teaching English were interviewed. The range of experience varied from those newly trained to those pending retirement from the government teaching service. Response from the respondents revealed that the longer the experience the higher the teachers competence in teaching English vocabulary. Teachers’ mastery of knowledge is gained as the teacher takes time in the process of teaching. The longer the teacher is in the field the better the teacher of language becomes. Teaching the same content repeatedly is the cause of English vocabulary familiarity and mastery. More ideas are acquired with time. Meaning of words is internalized and diversified according to context. Familiarity creates perfection. Teaching is made easy. More is ideas are acquired with time. The longer the teacher teaches the more knowledge is acquired. This knowledge makes teachers preparation easy and efficient. The teachers’ level of preparation is enhanced. The teacher is apparently ever prepared to teach. The teacher has more to teach than time available. The teacher do not have to spend time in preparing lessons. Experience makes teachers attain various ways of reflecting real life situation when teaching vocabulary. Experience cultivates teachers’ perception, attitude and belief towards teaching. The way to teach is compared to the way to master operating a machine. The longer one operates a machine the higher the expertise and skill to manipulate it with ease and the joy derived in operating it. Experience makes teaching easy, enjoyable, real, and meaningful.

Experience makes a teacher feel self-fulfilled and actualized in teaching. Experience develops the teacher’s skill of understanding the learners since every learner is unique. The long term serving teacher has had opportunity to meet every character of learner. Past experience is compared to the roots of a plant. Roots are the first to develop and all the parts of the plant depend on the well-developed roots. The way of teaching improves with time. The teachers’ proficiency in teaching improves with time. Performance in the examination improves as the teacher teaches the English language year after years. Experience is an asset in teaching language. Experience reigns superior to qualification.

The Influence of Teachers’ English Learning Experience on the Teaching of English Vocabulary
Experience is a major agent to the mastery of knowledge. Experience improves efficiency, enhances confidence to deliver a lesson. Experienced teachers have good command and mastery of vocabulary. The teacher can relate and apply to various real life situations. Teacher’s performance improves with time. Experience is an asset to teacher regardless of the qualifications. Experiences enhance originality, creativity, humor and attention capturing ability of the teacher. The teacher with long experience feels self-actualized and personally fulfilled. Teaching becomes enjoyable and fun. There is high ability to vary the teaching techniques and according to the learning institution, environment and the learners, ability. Experience reign superior to other attributes of ESL learners, the teachers pedagogical skills are developed to a high level. The advantage gained through experience in teaching can be compared to riding a bicycle or swimming. The long a time one has swum or ridden a bicycle, the higher the competing and ability to carry out the exercise with ease. The experienced teacher has content to deliver than the less experienced teacher. The teacher cultivates and develops burning desire to teach with time. Knowledge accumulates high time one cannot give what has not been acquired. The experienced teacher motivates learners. The teacher is generous with knowledge. The long experienced teacher has in built passion and zeal to teach. Experience enhances effectiveness. Learners
find value in the experienced teacher since the teacher is a resource. The enhanced mutual relational between the learner and the experienced teacher since the teacher has intended with all kinds of talents and abilities. The error correction process methods, techniques are well polished and admirable. The instruction is well fulfilled with experienced teachers. Teaching and learning become easy and enjoyable. Experience of the teacher makes learners to like the teacher and the language. The teacher determines the interest of the learners in the subject.

The experienced teacher is by the learners as the source of English language and the role model. The teacher has a high reportage of vocabulary, proficiency in, pronunciation and speaking, spelling and skill of writing. Experience influences learners to cultivate positive attitude toward the subject. Through experience teachers expose themselves to more vocabulary items. Experience makes teacher enhance and develops admirable personality and quality personal attributes. The teacher with long term experience has increased content. The longer the teacher in the field the more the content in English vocabulary. Experience teacher have varying methodology for learner with different abilities. Experienced teacher have admirable approaches to error correction. The longer the teacher stays in the field al the wider the exposure to the learners with different abilities and challenges.

The longer the experience of the teacher the better the teacher becomes in all standards of English language instructional process. Experienced teacher have good, classroom control not only because of the potential and also because of the enforcement passed to them by the earlier learners taught by the same teachers. Prominent people and celebrities taught by the same teacher makes learners develop confidence in the teacher earn respect for the teachers and develop interest and curiosity with the hope of being made equally successfully. Exposure to multiple content through experience enhances mastery, proficiency and fluency in language use and teaching. Experienced teachers ability to attend to learners makes the humble performers in English language to develop interest and learn in the ease. Experienced teachers have the ability to identify learner language deformities, problems and errors with for they have met several such cases in the past. They have a wide repertoire of various ways of approaching the correction of the same errors including using peers, learner centered techniques and groups learning.

The experienced teachers have ability to explain the meaning of words without referring to the dictionary. They have a wide range of vocabulary; they are more fluency, competent and have enhanced communicative competence. The experienced teacher has learned a lot from the learners. They know various learners ways of learning, thought pattern, common errors. Experienced teachers are not slaves to books; they refer to books for guidance but not verbatim transfer of information. They have enhanced confidence welcome learners questing with ease and a lot of familiarity. They have ability to vary teaching methods accordance to context. They generate numerous instructional activities. Experience teacher are aware of learning challenges facing learners.

They are familiar with the learners’ errors. Experience teachers have a lot of influence on the learning process and the novice teachers. They have corrected errors and solved language problems year after year and are thereafter familiar and competent to correct and find remedy. They have long term, reflection of learning and teaching. They have seen many learners become competent in language while others struggle to achieve the required competence.

Teaching being dynamic practice they have gone through various trends that lay foundation for the present teaching and learning and create projection for the future. They have interacted with different levels of learners and have integrated the practice of teaching them. They have the ability to derive meaning from real life situation and the immediate environment at the same time utilizing the prior knowledge of the learners.

They understand the child better interest, needs challenges and ability. They understand how to approach each level of learners in relation to the class, ability and age. They cultivate teacher learner relationship and harmonious interaction is chanced. They easily and quickly adapt the learning levels. Experiences develop language teachers. It makes a better teacher. Experience creates the uniqueness of the language teacher. The interruption of a science teacher with the chemicals only creates familiarity but the fluid nature of
language and its dynamism makes the teacher unique in special way. Experience increases the expressive functions of language. It makes teacher humorous motivating, arousing. Aroused and interesting. The experienced teacher is a role model; inspiring the learners to speak likes the teacher. Experience enhances interactive learning. Error correction skills are enhanced with long experience of the teachers. Experience enhances interactive learning. Experienced teachers are able to change teaching approach to fit the level of the teachers. Experienced teachers are deprive to the teaching environment determined by the class size and learners ability. Teachers bring into play the experience of other class taught in the past. Experience enhances the teacher ability to improve learning resources and being creative. Experienced teachers are familiar of with extensive form of content in language and other forms of knowledge. This widens the scope of vocabulary. Experience increases the teachers’ confidence and interest. The experienced teacher level of preparation is high creativity in preparation of teaching aids in high. The teachers’ skill of asking questions is well developed through experience. The teachers order and presentation of the lesson vocabulary items, one leading to the order is enhanced. Creative presentation of new words. Each word acts an introduction to the other.

**The Influence of Academic Qualification on the Teachers Pedagogical Competence.**

The level of education and training of the respondents ranged from primary teachers education certificate, diploma in education and undergraduate degree. Other teachers specialized in language option at primary teacher education certificate; other teachers studied other disciplines at diploma and degree levels. The respondents who studied English language manifested higher competency in the classroom practice compared to those who studied other disciplines. Teachers who advanced in education to diploma or degree level portrayed superior competency in communication. They had good command of the language and they were eloquent. Their approach to teaching was administrable. The class control was good.

**The Influence of Teacher’s Primary and Secondary Education on Pedagogy**

It was noted that no teacher professed to have received very satisfactory instruction in English at primary and secondary levels. The respondents had varying information regarding their primary and secondary education. Those who had satisfaction attention in the learning of English during early schooling time developed positive attitude towards English language. In contrast, those who received unsatisfactory instruction developed negative attitude and lacked interest in the language. The construct between the two categories was vividly seen in the interview response and classroom observation. Those who received satisfactory instruction expressed high competency and commitment to teaching the language while those who received unsatisfactory attention appeared to be forcing themselves to teach the language with a lot of difficulties. Primary and secondary education shapes the interest and attitude of the learners of English. Basic content in the language is mastered at the lower levels of learning.

Training during teacher primary education course serve pivotal role in both content acquisition and the way to teach English language. Most respondents reported to have received satisfactory instruction in teacher training colleges. Tutors were knowledgeable and inspiriting. Competent tutors enhanced passion to learn English language while incompetent teachers demoralized learners. Teachers who attend courses in any aspects of English add a lot of value to their professional development. Short courses and workshops organized to refresh teachers in reading speaking, speaking or writing were of great use to teachers. More courses and workshops should be organized. Any course in English regardless of the aspect being emphasized develops vocabulary. Those who attended workshops in writing skill improved their vocabulary because as they mark the learners’ compositions, they learn words that they have never come across. They also encounter the use of words in various contexts. Workshops influence the way to teach English. Methodology is made easy. Teachers who trained by KNEC as composition markers or item makers are very competent because of exposure to the syllabus objectives, content and basic methodology. The status of school attended also contributed to the type of instruction received. CDF and community based (Harambee) schools lacked facilities and well trained teachers. The school environment was not motivating and some teachers required competency in terms of content and pedagogy. This poor handling created the desire in the
students to learn given opportunity. It enhanced their passion to learn and longed for the opportunity. Grade scored in English at Primary and secondary school examination, manifested the quality of instruction received only one respondent out of the sample population scored grade A at primary level and non at secondary level.

Advantages of Reflecting Real Life Situation in Learning English Vocabulary

Classroom practice cannot be detouched from social cultural setting of both the teacher and the learners. The following is a list of advantages of the aforesaid as reported from the respondents.

1. Easy lesson preparation by the teacher, enhances creating learning creativity, learning becomes real and natural, promote interest eagerness and curiosity in learners, make learning active. Learners actively participate in the lesson. Promote understating of concepts, application of knowledge learned is easy and use of vocabulary becomes effective, makes learners learn friendly, promote learners active participation in the learning process, promotes the teachers each passion and interest to make learners understand the meaning of words. Meaning of words are derived from the real life situation reflected, develop examples and illustration because easy when teaching vocabulary, Provides good background for construction of secondary. Enhances memory, enhances mastery of the content of vocabulary being taught makes lessons enjoyable, communicative competence is enhanced to a higher level. Learners become curious, eager to learn and interested in the lesson. The lesson becomes active; deriving meaning becomes easy for the learners. Makes teachers preparation easy. Enhances learners active participation in the lesson and learning becomes natural and real. Promotes content delivery with ease. Promotes learning of vocabulary to in a given situation. Promotes contextual use of vocabulary, Makes the goal of learning to be communication but not memorization of words. Discourages rote learning promotes comprehension and reasoning application of language use becomes effective. Enhance good mastery of content. Makes it easy for the teacher to develop tasks and activities for the English vocabulary instruction process. Sentences construction becomes easy. Use of pictures reflects what learners know. Learners bring their experiences and background in the learning process, vocabulary proficiency is improved enhances teachers and learners creativity in deriving meaning of words. Error correction becomes meaningful. Learners are involved in the error correction process. Enhances the learner’s zeal, passion and interest to make learners understand the meaning of words. Promotes effective use of teaching aids.

Learners’ involvement in the learning process is high. Makes a vocabulary lesson learners centred promotes storytelling and narration of experience. Promotes drama lesson. Makes the teacher composed, relaxed, confident and interested. Enhances confidence in the teacher, learning words serves a genuine need to fill the gap of knowing the right words to use in a given context. Learners construct sentences to convey meaning but not mere grammatical structures, enhances defining words from context instead of referring to the dictionary. Provides opportunity for learners to share experience. Develops learner’s confidence to use language. Learners’ personality is developed since they speak with confidence, enhances the meaning of English language but not knowledge about English language, links the mind to the situation and thus enhances conceptualisation of meaning. Links the symbol of the word to the meaning. Enhances reflective teaching, enhances creativity and imagination. Makes learners to actively be involved in the learning process. Vocabulary is learnt for use in day to day life but not just for knowledge. Develops the cognitive skills of observation and imagination creates room for observation.

Study Conclusion

From the summary of findings, the following conclusion were made.

1. Teachers experience in teaching has a lot of influence English Vocabulary instruction process.
2. Training and continuing education impact positively on teaching.
3. Primary and secondary school education shapes the attitude of learners towards English language.
4. Reflecting real life situation in teaching vocabulary is of great advantage to the teaching of English.

Recommendation

Mulamba et al. (2018)
The findings of the study on language teacher cognition and classroom practice and the teaching of the vocabulary call for attention in the following areas.

1. Regular workshops, seminars and refresher courses on the teaching of English should be organised.
2. Instructional material in English should reflect real life situation.
3. Teachers should customize and domesticate content and classroom practice to suit learners need.

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