ENHANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS TO ACCOMMODATE VERNACULAR LANGUAGE DIVERSITIES IN HANANG DISTRICT, TANZANIA

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Abstract:

The study assessed public primary school teachers' strategies for accommodating learners with vernacular language backgrounds in Hanang District, Tanzania. The study involved 110 participants, including 44 teachers and 49 pupils, 4 Ward Education Officers, 1 School Quality Assurance Officer, 1 District Primary Academic Officer, and 11 head teachers. The study employed a mixed research approach. The study selected the sample size using simple random and purposive sampling, and we collected the data through questionnaires, interviews, and observation. The collected data was analyzed using computer software, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). The study's findings indicated that most public primary school teachers in Hanang used multiple teaching strategies, such as songs, total physical response, questions and answers, the direct method, and reading aloud, to accommodate pupils with vernacular language backgrounds. These strategies were most frequently employed in lower levels, exceptionally standard one and two. Further, primary school teachers were using teaching and learning materials like pictures, photographs, drawings, cards, flip charts, and natural objects. Also, primary school teachers assess and evaluate their pupils through written exercises, tests, questions and answers, and oral quizzes. The study concluded that multiple teaching strategies helped learners with vernacular backgrounds in public primary schools to master Kiswahili. Also, the assessment and evaluation tools

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in public primary schools effectively accommodated all pupils' capabilities and levels of skills. Therefore, teachers should construct standard tests. Hence, the study recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) organize seminars, workshops and in-service training (IN-SET) to update and impart new knowledge to the teachers on using teaching strategies and preparing practical assessment tools. The government should also employ enough primary school teachers specialized in early childhood education, construct many classrooms and supply sufficient and relevant teaching and learning materials.

Keywords: vernacular languages, teaching and learning strategies, language of instruction, public primary schools

1. Introduction

In many multilingual countries, the ongoing debate revolves around the choice of language for classroom instruction. Globally, The World Bank (2021) estimates that 37% of students in low- and middle-income countries must learn a different language, which places them at a significant disadvantage throughout their school life and hampers their learning potential. Ball (2014) asserts that 50-75 million "marginalized" children not enrolled in school and those whose primary language is not the language of instruction are at a higher risk of dropping out of school or encountering earlygrade failures.

Kioko, Ndung'u, Njoroge, and Mutiga (2014) affirm that in most rural areas in Africa, children still enter schools and face a foreign medium of instruction that differs from the one spoken at home even though research has consistently shown that children acquire linguistic and cognitive skills more readily in their home languages. Therefore, education systems should prepare appropriate teaching strategies to help learners unfamiliar with the language of instruction.

According to Magulu (2016), practical teaching and good participation of learners depend much on the learners' proficiency level in the language of instruction. The familiar language of instruction encourages an active learning process because it allows students to express their full range of knowledge and experiences and show their competencies. On top of that, it encourages students to be more active in discussing, debating, asking questions, and solving problems with peers and their teachers. In short, pupils learn better when they use a familiar language.

According to Tibategeza (2010), Tanzania is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, home to about 150 languages. Also, Brock-Utne (2002) confirms that Kiswahili is used by about 95% of the community, while English is spoken fluently and used by only about 5%. The vernacular languages in Tanzania have no status in Education. On the language of instruction in Tanzania primary schools, the education and training policy stipulates that *"Swahili language shall be used as the medium of instruction at the primary school level and English will remain the medium of instruction for a secondary level to the university level"*.

Regarding the strategies used to accommodate learners with different language backgrounds, Olds, McCraney, Aguilar & Cale (2021) have conducted a study on adopting instructional strategies for English language learners in elementary classrooms in the United States of America. The study found that teachers used familiar instructional strategies and consistently applied them to the whole class. About South Africa, Ngubane, Ntombela, & Govender (2020) submit that teachers mostly use a process approach to writing, which aligns with their curriculum, and generally use a question-and-answer method to teach writing. This entails teachers controlling the interactions in the classrooms through a nomination-response cycle.

Afandi in Kenya (2018) asserts that teachers use textbooks and newspaper/magazine cuttings as the preferred teaching and learning material for teaching oral English skills. Furthermore, Medard (2020) states that pre-primary teachers use different methods to teach reading skills early in Tanzania. Some of them use phonic and reading-aloud methods. In addition, many pre-primary teachers prefer to use the phonic form with didactic and interactive strategies using cards of sounds, vowels, words, songs, and charts.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of the Study Area
The study was conducted in Tanzania in the Manyara region in Hanang district by choosing four wards: Laghanga, Dumbeta, Nangwa, and Wareta. The wards were selected because they were in rural areas where vernacular languages are typically used. The main languages in the area include Iraqw, Mang'ati, and Nyaturu.

2.2 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size
The study used both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Simple Random Sampling was used for selecting pupils and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to determine head teachers, ward education officers, school quality assurance, District Primary Academic Officer, and primary schools. The study sampled nine public primary schools from two wards and one school from each of the remaining two wards to make up 11 schools. Then, 44 teachers, 49 pupils, four ward education officers, and 1 District Primary Education Officer were also sampled to be included in the study.

2.3 Research Approach and Research Design
The study employed the mixed research approach to collect, analyze, and interpret data. This approach enabled us to overcome the weaknesses of each technique. The study also employed a concurrent nested design whereby two data collection methods were embedded within the other. Qualitative was embedded by quantitative. This design helped to collect two types of data simultaneously and helped to address different research questions and gather information from different groups or levels within an organization.

## 2.4 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Three research methods were basically used. These included questionnaires, interviews, and observation. The study used questionnaires to collect data from teachers and pupils, and interview guides were used to collect information from head teachers, ward education officers, the school quality assurance, and the District Primary Academic Officer. The researcher used the observation to identify primary school teachers' accommodated teaching and learning strategies to manage learners with vernacular language backgrounds.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Language Proficiency and Vernacular Languages Backgrounds

The study examined the languages used by pupils to communicate both at school and at home. Responses shared that most pupils, 34 (69.4%), spoke and understood vernacular languages and Kiswahili. At home, pupils were communicating through their vernaculars, which were Iraqw 18 (36.7%), Mang'ati 6 (12.2%) and Nyaturu 7 (14.3%). Those who were using both their vernaculars were 18 (36.7%). It is evident, therefore, that most of the pupils used their language than Kiswahili, mainly for communication at home.

The findings on pupils' proficiency and vernacular backgrounds are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Shows pupils' language proficiency and vernacular backgrounds
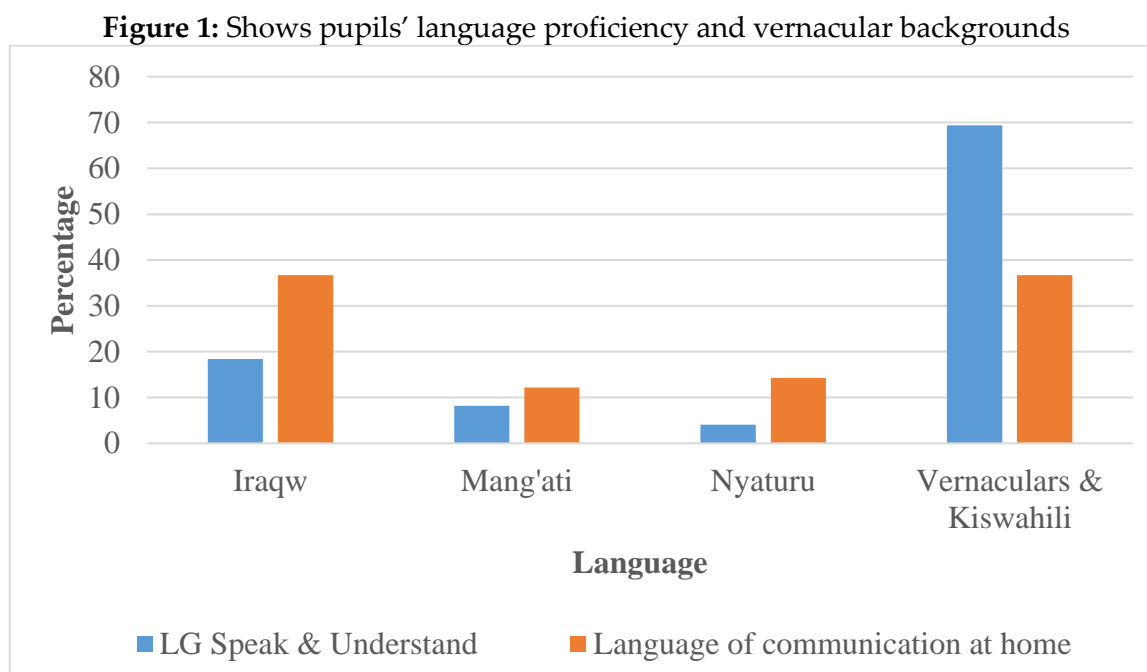
Source: Field Data (2023).

The given situation on the pupils' vernacular language backgrounds was said to pose difficulties for teachers in the teaching and learning process as one of the District Primary Education Officers (DPEO) said;

"I have been here for eight years now as an academic officer; I know my teachers' challenges regarding pupils who cannot speak Kiswahili well. Many families in this district use vernaculars to communicate in all activities. Using vernacular causes children to become more proficient in their vernacular language than in Kiswahili. Thus, it is difficult to learn when they are enrolled in schools where Kiswahili is generally used as the language of instruction."

3.2 Teaching and Learning Strategies Used

The objective is to identify teaching and learning strategies to accommodate learners with vernacular language backgrounds. The strategy and methods identified were total physical response, i.e. using language and answer, e.g. stand up, sit down, come here (100%); the direct methods, i.e. using Swahili with no use of vernacular (100%), reading aloud methods (100%), questions and answers (100%) songs (100%), the natural process and immersion, i.e. mixing up pupils who don't know Swahili with the ones who know Swahili (95.5%), and discussion (56.8%) on the other hand, the direct translation i.e. translating to and from Swahili and vernacular languages was reported to be rarely used (15.9%). Those were the strategies and methods used by teachers to enhance communication and accommodate pupils with different linguistic backgrounds.

The summary of the findings is given in Table 1:

Table 1: Strategies used by teachers to accommodate
pupils with vernacular language backgrounds

Teaching Strategies	Teachers' Responses		Pupils' Responses	
	n	%	n	%
Direct translation	7	15.9	4	8.2
Total physical response	44	100	47	95.9
Direct method	42	95.5	49	100
Natural process & immersion	42	95.5	47	95.9
Discussion	25	56.8	29	59.2
Read aloud	44	100	49	100
Questions & answers	44	100	49	100
Songs	44	100	49	100
Actual conversation	42	95.5	49	100

Source: Field Data (2023).

Further, in response to such methods and strategies, the head teacher from school E had the following to say:

"The issue of vernacular language causes difficulties for my teacher to teach. Therefore, to overcome the problem, the teachers use multiple teaching strategies like pictures, charts, drawings, real objects, total physical response, natural process and immersion, questions and answers, reading aloud, and songs. These strategies help pupils with vernacular language backgrounds become more proficient in Kiswahili, the language of instruction, and hence learn effectively in the classes."

The findings also revealed that the participatory methods were mainly preferred as they effectively accommodated learners with vernacular language backgrounds. Similarly, the study by Medard (2020) assessing teaching and learning methods that enhance reading skills among pre-primary children in Chamwino District, Tanzania, revealed that many pre-primary teachers preferred to use the phonic form with didactic and interactive strategies using cards of sounds, vowels and words, songs, and charts.

3.2.1 Learning Strategies for Students
On the other hand, pupils affected by vernacular languages adopt the language of the instruction environment through various strategies like peer group discussion and sports and games. In all primary schools, there were sports sessions through which pupils interacted with each other, which got them used to Kiswahili, the language of instruction.

In comment to this, the head teacher from school K said the following during the interview session:

> *"One of the important strategies to help pupils who don't know Kiswahili is sports and games. This strategy helps pupils to master Kiswahili easily because pupils learn better when they are interacting. Therefore, as a head teacher, I ensure enough time for sports and games to give pupils time to interact with each other. We have different ethnic groups here, like the Iraqw, Mang'ati, and Nyaturu. When they interact through playing, they get to know Kiswahili better."*

3.2.2 Learner Engagement and Inclusion
The teaching strategies allow pupils to engage in the teaching and learning process and participate in a lesson. Techniques like songs, questions, answers, reading aloud, the natural process, and immersion, i.e., mixing up pupils who don't know Swahili with those who know Swahili, help the pupils be engaged and included in the teaching and learning process.

3.3 Challenges and Limitations
The results showed that there are numerous challenges facing primary school teachers in teaching classes that include learners with vernacular language backgrounds; the challenges include the language of communication at home not being the same as the language of instruction 42 (95.5%), insufficient teaching and learning materials 44 (100%), poor support from parents/guardians and the community (63.6%), overcrowded classrooms 37 (84.1%), poor or no mastery of the language of instruction for pupils 40 (90.9%), and truancy 43 (97.7%).

These challenges are illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2: Challenges facing Public Primary School Teachers in Teaching Classes with Pupils

Challenges	Teachers' Responses	
	n	%
Overcrowded classrooms	37	84.1
Insufficient T/L materials	44	100.0
Pupils' Perception of the LoI	7	15.9
Poor support from parent/guardian and community	28	63.6
Language of communication at home is not the same as the LoI	42	95.5
Poor or no mastery of the language of instruction	40	90.9
Truancy	43	97.7

Source: Field Data (2023).

The current findings concur with previous studies conducted by Kotira and Shizhou (2022) & Afandi (2018). Kotira and Shizhou (2022) investigated the challenges of using strategies in second language teaching in Tanzanian public primary schools. The study found that teachers faced challenges like a lack of teaching and learning materials and overcrowded classrooms as well as crowded classrooms, which made teachers unable to help the learners during the teaching and learning processes.

Furthermore, the study by Raphael and Tibategeza (2022) investigated the perceptions and perspectives of stakeholders on the challenges facing pupils, especially in rural areas, in learning a second language in pre-primary and primary schools. The study revealed that pupils faced difficulties in the learning process because the language used in school differed from that used at home. These differences resulted in parents' need for more participation in assisting their children when doing their academic assignments at home.

3.4 Academic Performance and Teachers' and Pupils' Perspectives
3.4.1 Academic Performance
Effective teaching strategies impact the academic performance of pupils with vernacular language backgrounds. In light of the findings of this study, such techniques helped the majority of pupils change and master Kiswahili, which is the language of instruction. Mastering the language of instruction enabled them to perform well academically. According to Afandi (2018), pupils learn better when there are appropriate teaching and learning materials and resources, such as textbooks, newspapers/magazines, cutting cards, and charts.

3.4.2 Teachers' and Pupils' Perspectives
Teachers 44 (100%) and 49 (100%) agreed that the multiple methods and strategies used to teach classes, including pupils with vernacular language backgrounds, helped pupils change and master the language of instruction, Kiswahili, because those strategies were more participatory.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1 Conclusion
It is evident from the findings from this study and other past studies that vernacular languages may pose a challenge in the teaching and learning process, mainly when they are different from the language of instruction. In most rural areas, the mother tongues of most of the children are their vernaculars not used for teaching and learning. In such situations, therefore, effective strategies are needed, first of all, to make sure children master the language of instruction so that they can have effective learning in their subsequent teaching and learning processes. Teachers, therefore, need to be aware of this situation and equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to accomplish this critical task. In doing this, they also need to use effective and participatory teaching methods and strategies and use teaching aids to make the pupils master the language of instruction easier and faster.

4.2 Recommendations
Given the findings in this study, several recommendations are given to improve the situation. First, the Ministry of Education and its organs should ensure that teachers are equipped with knowledge and skills on effective teaching methods and strategies concerning accommodating pupils with vernacular languages. This can be done through seminars and refresher courses organized by the Ministry of Education at various levels. Then, it is also essential to make sure that there are adequate resources for effective teaching. This includes the availability of teaching aids, textbooks, enough classrooms and furniture, and enough qualified teachers. Through the Ministry of Education, the government needs to establish mechanisms to ensure the availability of such resources through internal and external resources. In addition, emphasis needs to be put on early childhood education, where some children come into contact with the language of instruction for first-time qualified teachers as well, as effective teaching methods and strategies will make such children acquire the language of instruction effectively and hence help them in their teaching and learning process.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest in the whole process and all study aspects.

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