Responding to English Grammatical Challenges: The Design and Development of Exemplary Material for Form One Learners in Tanzania

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Abstract

This article proposes strategies for designing and evaluating curriculum materials for enhancing English language grammatical competence among Form One learners in Tanzanian secondary schools. Using quasi-experimental and phenomenological designs, the authors developed an exemplary Learner Centered Instructional Grammar Material (LCIGM) focusing on Form One learners. Materials design approach and Constructivism Theory of learning guided the exercise. The data for the study were collected through documentary review, interviews, questionnaires and teaching and learning observations of 40 Form One learners chosen from three randomly selected secondary schools in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania. Both pre-test and post-tests were done to understand the suitability of the newly developed material to meet the purpose of enhancing grammatical competence among Form One learners. The findings and observations revealed that both teachers and learners benefited from the designed activity-based material which, in turn, enhanced learners' grammatical performance, both in spoken and written form. The authors concluded by urging the stakeholders to design the material that are activity based to improve the learners' grammatical competence.

Keywords*: exemplary material, grammar, design, evaluate, efficiency, effectiveness, LCIGM

Introduction

English has become the language of business in the world (Schutz, 2005; Neeley, 2012; Triumph of English, 2013). This claim is consistent with the findings which indicate that about 85% of the international organizations use English as the language of communications (Triumph of English, 2013). It is an irrefutable fact that many academic works and publications worldwide are written in English (Negash, 2011). Currently, English is both the subject and language of instruction in post-primary education in Tanzania (William and Ndabakurane, 2017). Given the extensive use of the language, communicative competence in English becomes necessary among people in Tanzania. This demand is further necessitated by the fact that English is the language of instruction in post primary education in both Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar (Mary, 2014 and Barrett *et al*., 2014). However, research has revealed that the learner's command of English language within and outside Tanzania is low (Barrett *et al*., 2014; Muzale and Rugemalira, 2008). The sociolinguistic situation in Tanzania poses challenges in using English as a medium of instruction. For instance, it is often claimed that poor performance in English among learners in Tanzanian secondary schools is attributed to the learners' low command of English language (Vuzo, 2010), especially for the learners with different linguistic backgrounds (Fielder, 2011). The problem of limited performance in English among learners in Tanzanian secondary schools is also associated with teaching approaches in use, inadequate learning and teaching supportive activity-based materials, the lack of quality textbooks (including reference books), inadequate skilled and incompetent English language teachers among many other factors (Mtana, 2013, Mosha, 2013, Bhalalusesa, Westbrook and Lussier, 2011 and Osaki, 2007).

The noted limited performance in English grammar in Tanzanian secondary schools raises the need to devise some strategies that would enhance learners' grammatical competence in the nation's secondary schools. This need is primary because communicative competence requires pupils to be able to write and rewrite sentences with specific word choices, alter tenses, change the sentence types, and explore the impact of different connectives when they have attained communicative competence. According to Hedge (2008), achievement in English language writing proficiency requires explicit pedagogy in grammar. Hymes (1972) argues that communicative competence consists of not only an inherent grammatical competence but also the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. Canale and Swain (1980) contend that grammatical competence is concerned with mastery of the linguistic

code which includes vocabulary knowledge as well as knowledge of morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic and orthographic rules. This is what this article seeks to address here by proposing the appropriate strategies to develop the material that would enhance learners' grammatical competence. Senior (2006) suggests that the central aspect of learner-focused teaching is creating a classroom functioning as a community of learners. Enhancement of language competence and performance in language teaching requires teachers' collaboration and effective introduction of the learners to collaboration (Johnson, 2009). Throughout the planning process, teachers draw on outside resources, including textbooks, research and teaching theories and encourage extended conversations while focusing on learner learning and the development of specific outcomes (Richards, 2011).

The government of Tanzania has endeavoured to combat the challenges of English learners although there are shortfalls. Our study addresses these shortfalls. For example, based on Tanzania's 2010 curriculum reform, the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) under the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training changed the Ordinary Secondary English Syllabus from content-based to competence-based focus which accord, among other things, with developing communicative competence. This reform aimed at promoting the learners' linguistic ability and effective use of English in various settings and at improving academic performance in all content areas. Although the English language syllabus defines the communicative competences to be acquired by learners at each level of secondary education, one of the limitations that faced this reform was a lack of authentic materials that were prepared for its implementation. Given this shortcoming, learners' competency in the language has worsened rather than improved. It is important to recognize that English as the language of instruction is difficult for many Form One students in Tanzania. This is a transition class from primary school to secondary school (William and Ndabakurane, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Several studies and projects on improving the quality of education in Tanzania have emphasized the design of supportive material for implementing competence-based curricula (William, 2012; William, 2009; Mafumiko, 2006; Ottevernger, Feiter, O-saki, and van de Akker, 2005). These authors support the implementation of the new curriculum through designing innovative instructional materials to promote a new change rather than the traditional use of textbooks and teacher guides. One of the reasons for limiting the materials currently used for teaching and

learning English language grammar in Tanzania is that they promote surface learning rather than deep understanding of concepts. There have been some research and projects, like TEAMS project (Ottevernger, Feiter, O-saki, and van de Akker, 2005), to improve learning in Tanzania but most of them are set to provide supportive education material in science subjects: Chemistry (Mafumiko, 2006; William, 2009; William, 2012, Mathematics (Kitta, 2004) and Physics (Tilya, 2003). Only a few studies were conducted on the social sciences, and none on English subject. Sylvester (2013), Maghembe (2012) and Kamugisha (2010) conducted studies on Geography subject area.

While this situation of lack of appropriate competence-based teaching and learning materials remains pervasive as those authors insist, learners' command of English language continues worsening. Based on that reason, this study is an attempt to prepare a learning material that would enhance the learners' command of English grammar. This article, therefore, provides information about applicable strategies to design, implement and evaluate interactive teaching English grammatical material to enhance communicative competence for Form One in Tanzania's ordinary level education. Such projects are emphasized by Schneider and Krajcik (2002) who insist that the designed educative curriculum material should support teachers' and learners' teaching and learning respectively.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to provide information on three objectives, namely:

1. Design interactive exemplary Learner Centered Instructional Grammar Material (LCIGM) for enhancing Form One learners' communicative competence.
2. Try-out the material in the classroom to assess their practicality.
3. Investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of the material in enabling the implementation of Learner Centered Approach (LCA) in English language grammar.

The Conceptual Framework for the Study

We deem the description provided by van den Akker (2010) and Nieeven (2010) a suitable approach to meet the purpose of this article. The approach was linked with the three typologies of curriculum representation.

Intended curriculum

This is what the teacher plans to teach. It is considered to either be *ideal or formal* curriculum. Ideal curriculum is related to the vision of each specific country; focusing on the rationale or basic philosophy underlying the curriculum. The formal curriculum refers to the target as identified in curriculum documents. Formal curriculum was the main focus during design. The teaching and learning target as stipulated in Tanzania's formal curriculum was met by developing the material to suit different levels of proficiency. It started with design guidelines and specifications based on the challenges or difficulties encountered by the teachers and learners during teaching and learning. The Learner Centered Instructional Grammar Material (LCIGM) was designed from the competence-based English syllabus of 2010 that, among other things, emphasizes the learners' acquisition of competences that would enable them to manage their life in school and after school.

Implemented curriculum

This is what was designed to actually be taught. This type of curriculum is either *perceived or operational* curriculum. The perceived curriculum is what is interpreted by its users (especially teachers) and operational curriculum is the actual process of teaching and learning. The design and development of the material were done focusing on learning outcomes as proposed by Kirkman (2014) The classroom try-out assessment of practicality, effectiveness, and efficiency (validity and reliability) of the material was done using a single group followed by a control, and experimental groups.

Attained curriculum

This can be *experiential or learned*. Experiential curriculum refers to the experience as perceived by the learners and learned curriculum is the resulting learning outcomes of learners during and after the process of interacting with the designed materials (Kirkman, 2014).

The study assessed the ability of the material to enhance communicative competence of learners and ability of teachers to adopt the designed approach in improving grammatical competences. Hence, the study proposed cooperative leaning and role play methods to enhance grammar in communicative English language. This was done with the knowledge that in communicative language teaching, the teacher must utilize a variety of approaches and create situations that would allow learners interact and communicate with each other to facilitate their mastering of the rules of grammatical sentences. Richard (2011) proposed that communicative

language teaching methodology should make real communication to be the focus of language learning; should provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know, and should be tolerant of learner's errors as these indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence. Such methodology, he argued, should provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency, and should link different skills such as speaking, reading, and listening together, since in the real world they usually occur together so that learners can induce or discover grammar rules.

Methodology

To come up with the relevant information about practicality, effectiveness and efficiency of the designed LCIGM, the authors adopted a developmental research approach adhering to the principles and methods of designing and developing education instructional material (Akker, 2010). A mixed methodology was used in which both quantitative and qualitative paradigms were used to generate and analyze the data. A phenomenological design enabled the study to build up teachers conception of the ability of LGIGM to enhance learning of English language grammar. This was possible by creating an understanding of what was done in both the control and treatment groups. Unstructured interview protocols were used to get teachers and learners' views on the usefulness of the lessons designed through LCIGM in enhancing their understanding of linguistics and correct grammar expressions.

A quasi-experimental design was used for studying the expected and actual practicality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the LCIGM in classroom settings. The study did not sample the participating learners during field-testing of the effectiveness and efficiency of the material in the treatment and control schools. Rather, Non-Equivalent Groups (NEGs) pre- and post-tests quasi-experimental design was used during the field testing in the Treatment Group. The traditional approach was used in Non-Treatment groups to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the material in enhancing English communicative competence and addressing grammatical challenges among teachers and learners in secondary schools.

A total of four ordinary level secondary schools in Dodoma Municipality in Dodoma Region in Tanzania were selected for data collection; their Form One learners and teachers participating in the study. The selected schools were St. Peter High School for the pilot study, Sechelela Secondary School for the try-out, Viwandani Secondary School for the control group

and Ng'ong'ona Secondary School for the treatment group. Sechelela Secondary School and St. Peter High School were selected purposely for formative evaluation in assessing the validity and practicality of the material before field testing. Two schools were selected for field testing one treated as the treatment group (Ngo'ng'ona Secondary School) and the other as a control group (Viwandani Secondary School). Ng'ong'ona Secondary School experienced intervention with the new material whereas Viwandani Secondary School did not receive the intervention and their teachers kept on teaching using the traditional approach. The pre-post test was used in both schools to find out the effectiveness and efficiency of the material by calculating the significant difference, mean and standard deviation. The methods that were used to solicit the data are interview protocols, observations, tests, and questionnaires. Documentary review was also used to collect secondary data on the features of the learner-centered lesson during the material design.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from observations, questionnaires and interviews were analyzed thematically. The organization of data involved making key statements, coding them, categorizing, analyzing and, finally, generating the message. SPSS version 16 was used to analyze quantitative data collected from the questionnaires and test scores. The analysis of the descriptive and inferential statistics (mean, standard deviation, standard error and t - test) was used to compare mean scores and test for significant difference of the mean scores. An independent sample t - test analysis was used to find out any significant difference in mean scores of pre- and post-tests between the control and experimental group. The paired t - test was used for the comparison of the pre-and post test in Sechelela, Ng'ong'ona and Viwandani Secondary Schools.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study were presented in line with the data collection tools and procedure used during the study. The discussion considered only a few findings that are important for readers to get a comprehensive idea about the implementation and evaluation of the LCIGN.

LCIGM Design

The design specifications and guidelines used in designing lessons in the LCIGM were guided by the question, *what is the nature of the material suitable for enhancing communicative ability among the learners?* The identification of the research problem was done through a preliminary study which revealed that grammar was a communicative challenge among Form One learners.

Hence, the designed lessons contained grammatical instructional activities that focused on the learner-centered approach. The exemplary material aimed at improving pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in the teaching and learning process to motivate the learner's interest and communicative competence. A sample of the lesson (Lesson One) developed using the selected design guidelines and specifications for LCIGM is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: A Sample Lesson in LCIGM Developed through this Study

Lesson 1: Expressing Likes and Dislikes		

Lesson Overview
The lesson is organized in such a way that it stimulates the learners' critical thinking skills through a variety of interactive activities that motivate them to learn English grammar. These activities are such as argumentative sentences, filling in the table, discussions, presentation and role play.
 	
Basic Competence
To enable learners' demonstrate oral and writing ability in order to express their needs, feelings and ideas using appropriate English grammar expressions in their daily communications.
 	
General Learning Outcomes
To enable learners express what they *like* or *dislike* and retell what others like/dislike in appropriate English grammar.
 	
Specific Learning Outcomes
By the end of 80 minutes, every learner in Form One class should be able to:
    a) Use real objects to express on *likes/dislikes*;
    b) Demonstrate different activities which express *likes* and *dislike and*
    c) Construct negative and positive sentences using the vocabulary *like*.
 	
Teaching and Learning Materials/Resources
Varieties of real objects such as fruits, balls and different colored flowers.
 	
Lesson Plan and Timing		

Activity and teaching strategies		**Time (mins.)**
Introduction i) A teacher has to assign learners to brainstorm learners on argumentative sentences. ii) The learners have to listening to teacher's argumentation and then deduce the objectives of the lesson. (iii) The learners have to carry out presentation of the subject matter and teachers' follow up activities through their pairs or groups.		**10**
Presentation The teacher is advised to guide the learners through: (i) Correct pronunciation and spelling of various words during the lesson;		**30**

(ii) Construction of grammatical sentences using *likes/dislikes* with reference to real and objects (iii) Demonstration and role play by expressing themselves using likes/dislikes.	

Practice
 The teacher has to guide the learners in group discussion & presentation as they make conversation using likes/dislikes by:
     a) Filling in a table
     b) Constructing grammatical sentences from the table
	30

Lesson Summary/closure The teacher is advised to provide a brief summary on the important lesson points such as how to construct sentences using expressions "likes/dislikes". Then, the teacher has to wind up the lesson by assigning the homework questions to individual learners.	10
Lesson Notes	
Evaluation of the Lesson In a friendly situation, the teacher has to discuss about the evaluation of the lesson with his/her learners. If the learners show fear, he/she may give them exit cards without mentioning their names. **Reading Material** Randolph, Q. & Sidney, G. (1993; pg 47-49). *University Grammar of English*. Longman Group, England. Murphy, R. (2012). *English Grammar in Use*: 4th edition. Cambridge University Press. Bukagile, G.R (2005). *English for Secondary School Book*. Nyambari Nyangwine,Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.	

It was observed that clear design guidelines and specifications are very crucial in any developmental study because they act as a blueprint for any intervention material or programme. They also give the interventions shape and direction. The findings are supported by Davis and Krajcik (2005) who maintained that curriculum material, when properly designed, are expected to support teachers to increase their pedagogical content delivery knowledge and skills through authentic activities that address the needs of learners.

Findings from Lesson Observation and English Usage

The study observed that grammar posed a challenge to the learners' communicative competence especially in the area of tense formation and identifying subject-verb relationship. The reason identified is that teachers did not properly address the grammar patterns in English lessons. Teachers lacked pedagogies and instructional materials to guide them on how to explore and teach sentence structures. The study finds that English teachers lacked adequate linguistic skills and vocabulary to express complex ideas and ask critical questions. This agrees with the study on ensuring quality by attending to Inquiry Learner Centered Pedagogy in Sub-Saharan Africa done

by Vavrus, Thom1as and Barletta (2011) that teachers often do not have adequate linguistic skills in their communication. This is also supported by the responses of 33 or 73% of the 40 interviewed learners on the Likert scale who were discouraged by the use of English language *frequently* in classroom teaching. Moreover, their teachers used teacher-centered approach in implementing the syllabus. These findings concur with Tilya (2003), William (2012) and Mafumiko (2006) who found that Tanzanian classrooms were still dominated by traditional ways of teaching (talk-chalk way of teaching). Contrariwise, teaching and learning should be learner-centered, the learners interacting with the material, the teachers, and among themselves.

Likert Scale and Interview Findings of Learners Use of LCIGM

The study findings show—that both teachers and learners found the exemplary lessons useful in supporting teaching and learning. The designed material significantly enhanced the learners' participation and understanding of grammar. Most of the learners were able to demonstrate knowledge using real objects as reflected in the small group discussions and presentations and activities they were given. Feedback was given to the learners on grammar mistakes they committed. The findings concur with Makundan's (2009) formulation that a classroom should be like a jungle where chances, challenges, spontaneity, creativity and risk work are completely structured into planned activities. William (2009) also found that his newly designed activity-based material for improving teaching and learning Chemistry in Tanzanian secondary schools enabled learners to reflect learned knowledge and skills in real life; and that it promoted inquiry learning and improved learners' performance. This implies that developing materials for teaching and learning putting the learner in mind by using learner centered approach would help learners to acquire the required competence.

Also, the newly designed LCIGM facilitated learners' understanding of linguistic skills and helped to produce correct grammar expressions in their daily communications. The responses of 40 (100%) learners based on the Likert scale of the learners' responses on their perceptions on the ability of LCIGM to enhance English language grammatical competence among Form One learners in the treatment school indicated that teaching strategy in LCIGM *excited and motivated* them in learning grammar rules in English language. It also enabled them gain more confidence as they took their learning responsibilities seriously, and became competent in solving their communicative problems through role play, demonstration, discussion and presentation activities. The findings concur with constructivism theory which assumes that knowledge emerges through

interaction and experiences among learners' own ideas (du Plessis and Muzaffar, 2010). Hence, it is important to recognize that teachers need to be flexible in designing and using individualized grammar material when teaching certain contents in the syllabus and give continuous feedback to learners. Effective implementation of the learner-centered teaching is determined by the teachers' understanding of the approach and by their pedagogical motivation to engage learners in the instructional practice (Mushi, 2004).

Comparison of Schools Pre- and Post-test Findings

Finally, the pre-post test results show that despite the shorter time learners had during the trial with the material, the performance of the learners' post-test results revealed some improvement. The mean (*m*) scores for the pre-test in the control school was 34.44 (*sd* = 19.19) whereas the mean score for the post-test was 34.28 (*sd* = 20.77).

Table 2 Statistical Findings from Pre and Post Tests

Treatment Group						Control Group					
Pre-test		Post-test		Statistical test		Pre-test		Post-test		Statistical test	
M	Std	*m*	*sd*	*T*	*P*	*m*	*sd*	*M*	*sd*	*T*	*p*
32.50	15.65	47.25	21.12	0.39	< 0.005	34.44	19.19	34.28	20.77	6.68	< 0.005

Key: *m* = mean; *sd* = standard deviation; *t* = statistical test value of difference between pre and post-test mean scores; *p* is confidence interval. If $2.00 \leq t \leq +2.00$, and $p < 0.005$ then, the mean difference is significant.

The significance of pre and post-test in treatment school was *t* (35) = 0.39, *p* > 0.005. This shows that there was no statistically significant difference increase in the performance between pre-test and posttest in control school. However, in the experimental school, the mean scores for the pre-test was 32.50 (*sd* = 15.65) whereas the mean score for the post-test was 47.25 (*sd* = 21.12). The significant increase from pre-test to post-test in school M was *t* (39) = 6.68, *p* < 0.005. This shows that there was improvement in performance between pretest and post test in school M. The findings are in line with the findings by Kamugisha (2010) who designed and tried out materials in geography following a similar methodology. The study found that both experimental and control schools showed significant statistical improvement between pre- and post-test mean scores. However, the level of improvement in the experimental school was higher than that of control school.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that although teachers are aware of Competence Based Curriculum, they lack the necessary skills to use learner centered materials in classroom. Hence, there is a need to guide teachers and authors of secondary school books on how to develop learner centered materials which our study and similar others have proved to be useful. The use by learners and teachers of the LCIGM material that we designed and implemented in our study show evidence of raising teachers content and pedagogical knowledge of teaching English grammar. This material enabled constructive learning that engaged students in active learning as individuals and in groups helping them in acquiring grammatical competence. Findings from the use of our LCIGM material thus support the position of Pham (2011), Davis and Krajcik (2005) and William (2009) who call for study materials that actively engage learners in the learning process and those that integrate new knowledge with the existing one. The activities that were structured into our LCIGM material improved students learning and performance in the intervention school because of life experiences they included. Therefore, the authors recommend similar materials in other subjects to be used in Tanzania's secondary schools to enhance learning of English along with the subjects' contents.

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