

Language Games and Language Teaching in Kenya: The Case of Kiswahili in Lower School

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Abstract

Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. W. R. Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms. Language games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely. They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of using language games in teaching lower primary. The paper adopts a quasi experimental design and thus uses a pre test and post test. It has been appropriate to analyse the treatment effect of using language games in teaching lower primary learner in one group while applying the natural teaching methods on the control group. The target population is four primary schools which are sampled in Machakos town and four other primary schools sampled in the rural area of Machakos. A standardized examination is given to the two groups of lower primary learners from different localities and results recorded. Another examination was given after the treatment of teaching one group using language games. Methods used by the teachers to teach the Kiswahili Language to lower primary learners are mainly assignments and group discussions. The paper recommends that other strategies for teaching lower primary learners may include teacher assistance teams and shorter assignments. Ultimately, this paper suggests that use of language games in teaching lower primary school learners can improve their academic performance.

Keywords: Teaching aids, teacher competence, attitude, self concept, instructional resources, stimulus, mediated learning.

1.0 Introduction

Njogu (2008) asserts that during the first years of school within the 8-4-4 education system in Kenya, the medium of instruction is "mother tongue" or the "language of the school's catchment area." This means that in urban areas, the language of instruction is Kiswahili. However, schools, especially urban-based private ones, insist on use of English as a medium of instruction right from Class 1. This is as a result of the power and prestige that English continues to have in the region where it is viewed as the language of upward mobility and international relations (Iribemwangi: 2010). The government policy is that in classes 4 to 8, English be used as the medium of instruction while both Kiswahili and English are compulsory and examinable subjects.

When the dismal performance in English and Kiswahili in Kenya is taken into account, it becomes important that there be a re-evaluation of language teaching in Kenyan primary schools. Even without turning the tables on English, attention to language issues within the current curriculum might involve a number of policy and pedagogical actions. One of these has to do with the qualification of language teachers. Primary school teachers are currently expected to teach all subjects, yet some of them may have done very poorly in the language examinations. Language games can be used to boost performance in early age of child development. Games are fun and children like to play them. Through games children experiment, discover, and interact with their environment (Lewis: 1999). Games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. For many children between four and twelve years old, especially the youngest, language learning will not be the key motivational factor since they may not realize the value of the exercise. However, as (Lewis: 1999) observes, games can easily provide the necessary stimulus. As a result, their use would be very advisable.

Kiswahili is the national language of Kenya and lingua Franca of East African countries (Iribemwangi: 2010). It is used in international publications and is taught as a subject in many universities the world over (Mbaabu: 1978). The teaching of Kiswahili in schools in Kenya dates back to the colonial days when the British government initiated the teaching of native languages in African schools. English language was elevated to official status and made the medium of instruction in the education sector - including primary schools - and other institutions. Since then, although Kiswahili was gradually (albeit slowly) recognized as an important local language, it was left out education and other official engagements until the year 2010⁵.

⁵ On August 27th 2010, the current constitution of Kenya was promulgated. This constitution recognizes Kiswahili as an

After Kenya became independent in 1963, the importance of Kiswahili was recognized by Mackay education commission in the country (Republic of Kenya: 1981). This commission declared that Kiswahili warranted attention in the education system. The recommendations of the Mackay commission had the greatest impact on the status of Kiswahili; it was declared a compulsory and examinable subject both at primary and secondary levels of education in Kenya. Today Kiswahili is a widely used language. Many Kenyans in the urban and rural areas use the language (Mbaabu: 1978). At grassroots level, Kiswahili is a widely used language in Kenya (Mbaabu: 1978). Administrators and politicians address people in Kiswahili. This implies that they ought to have a good command of spoken Kiswahili.

On the language as a whole, reports from the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC)⁶ assert that “Judging by some of the examination scripts that land in the councils marking rooms, one can say that some of the candidates are virtually illiterate as they can hardly communicate” (Muya: 1991). Kiswahili language is not an exception as learners are unable to communicate using it. It is therefore important to look for ways and means to improve Kiswahili language as a medium of communication. If the learners perform poorly in Kiswahili language, communication is interfered with. Such performance may even affect the learners’ employment chances in later days (Sossion: 1993).

Teachers can use language games as a way of mediating Kiswahili learning by making the process interesting. Children learn the first language through playing many games. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners would want to take part in the games and in order to do so they need to understand what others are saying or have written. They also need to speak or write in order to express their own point or give information. The need for meaningfulness in language learning has been accepted for some years. A useful interpretation of ‘meaningfulness’ is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised the content is clearly meaningful to them. Thus the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered. If games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher’s repertoire (Wright A. et al. 1984).

1.1 Research Problem

Kiswahili is mainly learned as a second language in multilingual Kenya. This means that learners will already have mastery of their first language when learning it. Kiswahili is a language learned by many people whose native languages are not linguistically related to it (Muya: 1991). Many indigenous African languages are not taught in schools. Some languages like Kiswahili however, are widely taught in Kenya and Tanzania. Kiswahili is an important subject in primary schools since it is one of the three compulsory subjects alongside mathematics and English. However, given its performance, there is a question pertaining how the language is taught. Poor performance in Kiswahili language can impact very negatively on a pupil’s general performance. Besides, Kiswahili plays a very important role in promoting national unity (R.O.K: 1964 in Ominde Commission). Kiswahili plays the role of *lingua franca* among the educated and the uneducated. As a result, its poor performance in the Primary schools compromises the achievement of the six goals of education set up as millennium development Goals (Otieno: 2005).

The poor performance in Kiswahili prompted this study in Kiswahili language teaching especially because Kiswahili is a compulsory subject and a medium of communication in Kenya. In Machakos County for example, learners who sit for their primary exam⁷ do not perform well and this affects their joining good National and Provincial Secondary Schools in the country thus affecting their final performance in secondary education. In Kenya the unstable performance in Kiswahili by the learners raises the question whether there is a problem in the manner that learning and teaching of Kiswahili takes place. This is an issue that is of importance top this research. The main purpose of this paper is to determine whether mediated learning using language games has any effect on the performance of Kiswahili to class three pupils. The paper, therefore, investigates the effect of learning using language games on performance of Kiswahili language among class three pupils of Machakos County in Kenya.

1.2 Significance, Scope and Theoretical Perspective

This study is significant because of the elevated status of Kiswahili in Kenya. Kiswahili is used widely by a large section of Kenya in the urban and rural areas (R.O.K 1988, Mbaabu, 1978). The language is used in official circles like in parliamentary deliberations and in law courts at the district level. Presidential speeches on public days are written in Kiswahili and English. The primary school teachers use Kiswahili in teaching the learners and also when interacting with other citizens. Kiswahili is a compulsory and examinable subject in Kenya’s first two levels of education. The language is ethnically neutral and is not associated with any community thus

official language in Kenya (alongside English) as well as the national language of Kenya.

⁶ This is the official examining body in Kenya.

⁷ The national exam offered after eight years of school is known as Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE).

making it a language of unifying Kenyans (Mazrui 1984:300).

At the international level, Kiswahili language is the *lingua franca* of East African countries and is used in commercial and general communication. It is taught as a subject in many universities the world over. Given that Kiswahili is taught in many other countries, then it is an important language and its poor performance can lower its status. Poor performance therefore means one is not competent in the language and may not easily secure jobs that call for expertise in the language. The other significance arises from the fact that Kiswahili is seen as a language that can forge national unity. This paper investigates the effects of language games used by teacher trainees and performance of Kiswahili in lower primary classes in Machakos County of Kenya.

This paper is guided by Bruner's mediated theory of 1966. The theory states that for learning to take place, there has to be some interventions between the material to be learned (content) and the learner (Bruner, 1966). Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) describes a special quality of interaction between a learner and a person, who is called a "mediator". According to the theory, the function of a mediator is different from that of a teacher. According to this approach, a teacher provides a suitable stimulus (home work, test, assignment etc) and then observes the response of the learner to the stimulus. Based on the responses, the teacher interacts with learner (praises, criticizes, encourages, grades, gives new assignments, plays games, etc) and the process is continued until either the teacher or the learner is satisfied or time runs out. This means that Kiswahili teachers in Primary schools must be competent and willing to follow up pupils' progress until they grasp the subject matter.

The mediator is not concerned with solving the problem at hand; rather, the mediator is concerned with how the learner approaches solving the problem. The problem at hand is only an excuse to involve the mediated learning theory; it is the teacher who determines the tempo of learning. In mediated learning, the teacher takes the central role of controlling the classroom for effective learning which is learner centered. The teacher can use language games in class to enhance learning. Language games will make learners motivated and therefore by playing the games they will grasp easily the vocabulary and use it to answer questions. This will make the teacher realize his/her objectives in teaching vocabulary. Games can bring a positive impact on performance in Kiswahili in the primary schools in the county, province and the country at large. This paper examines if mediated learning using language games has any impact in Kiswahili performance in primary schools in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

This section reviews literature that relates to Kiswahili language in primary schools. Literature reviewed is that on the language situation in Kenya, on Kiswahili as a second language, on performance of Kiswahili in national examinations, literature on instructional resources, literature on language games, that on teachers training and competence as well as other related literature.

2.1 *The Language Situation in Kenya*

Kenya is a linguistically diverse country, with over 42 spoken languages (Ogechi 2012: 6). Roughly 66% of the population speaks languages of Bantu origin about 31% of the population speaks Nilotic Languages. The rest of the population speaks languages of the Indian sub- continent (Mbaabu: 1978: 398). It should also be pointed out that Kenya has a small number of large ethno linguistic groups. For example, according to Ogechi (2012), the Kikuyu comprise about 21%, the Luhya 14%, the Kalenjin 12%, the Luo 12%, and Kamba about 11%. Each of these languages has more than one million speakers and is mainly spoken in particular geographical area. For instance Kikuyu is spoken in central Kenya, Luo around Lake Victoria and Kamba in Eastern Kenya. Ogechi (2012:6) further observes:

The numerical strengths of these codes are diverse. Some are spoken by over a million people, e.g., Gĩkũyũ, LuLuhya, Dholuo, Kikamba and EkeGusii while others have as a few as less than one thousand speakers, namely, the Elmolo, Sengwer, Njemps and Yaaku. Hence, some codes have less than one percent speakers ... Speakers of these 42 codes are also associated or usually identified with Kenya's 42 ethnic groups. That is, although a code is just but one characteristic for identifying an ethnic group (Kasfir 1976), in the Kenyan context, a code is a crucial basic marker of an ethnic group. These codes are the mother tongues of the respective ethnic groups.

Kiswahili is the national language while English is the official language in Kenya. Kiswahili is an indigenous African language of Bantu origin spoken by over 65% of Kenya's population (Heinne, quoted in Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995: 19). It's the language of inter-ethnic communication in Kenya. It is also the language of wider communication in East and Central Africa (Iribemwangi: 2012). Kiswahili is the declared national language in Kenya. It is also one of the two official languages. Since 1984, Kiswahili has been a compulsory and examinable subject from the first year of primary school, through secondary school up to the highest levels. The main advantage of Kiswahili is that it is considered ethnically neutral and is not associated with any ethnic community although it originated from the east coast of Africa (Mazrui: 1984).

2.2 *Kiswahili as a Second Language*

Chiraghdin and Mnyampala (1977) and Iribemwangi (2010) point out that Kiswahili is a Bantu language.

Kiswahili originated from northern Kenya in the Lamu archipelago. Kiswahili as a second language for the non-Bantu communities may be difficult to use in communication, for example among the Nilotes and Cushites. Such groups may have problems in spelling and pronunciations of Kiswahili words. The structure of Kiswahili and other Bantu languages has a great similarity. The word formation is in the sequence of the consonant-vowel, which is not necessarily the case in non-Bantu languages word structures. Kiswahili teachers ought to understand the problem of language structure and intervene to assist affected learners. Teachers should be ready to address the individual differences of learners in order to improve language performance in schools. Therefore, the issue of second language acquisition is of much relevance to Kiswahili teachers.

2.3 *Performance of Kiswahili in National Examinations*

In terms of examinable languages, Kiswahili has been trailing behind English in national examinations in Kenya. Learners in primary schools score low marks in Machakos County in Kiswahili language. This has a negative impact when it comes to joining secondary schools. The pupils are disadvantaged considering that the learners will proceed with the compulsory subject in the secondary level.

2.4 *Instructional Resources*

Apart from text books, teachers can use other forms of instructional materials to facilitate learning. Nkuuhe (1995) comments that, words alone are liable to distortion. This is especially so with learners. With such a prevailing situation, teachers are compelled to seek aiding that encounters the necessity of educational media. The media used by the teachers determine whether the learners will get captivated and alert or they will lack zest (Joyce et al: 1972). Media facilitates the understanding of complicated concepts and ideas. They make the learning a captivating and fulfilling experience. They make it easier for learners to follow, understand, respond to and retain the content of the lesson as reflected by Gamble (1984). Psychologists are of the view that in human life, people learn eleven percent (11%) through hearing, eighty three percent (83%) through sight and retain only twenty percent (20%) of what they hear (Ayot and Patel: 1992). It is necessary to vary the pace and source of information that has to be assimilated. Instructional media possesses that quality of giving words concrete meaning. It furthers hearing and creates or increases interest. One can therefore use magazines, radio, video tapes, charts, maps and life shows as instructional materials to vary his or her teaching (Romiszowski: 1981).

Mukwa (1979) investigated the availability of audio-visual media in Kenyan secondary schools and the role played by such media in improving classroom teaching. The study showed that the main media available in schools were printed media, posters and flat pictures, tape recording and radio programs and television. The present study found out the positive impact of language games in teaching Kiswahili grammar and performance in lower Primary classes.

Mutua (2013) asserts that lack of adequate teaching/learning resources result to poor performance in Kiswahili Language. The available teaching/learning resources motivate learners to participate and enjoy learning in class. The teaching/learning resources also enhanced the memory of the taught concepts as the learners have a chance to learn in a friendlier environment.

2.5 *Language Games*

Andrew et al (1984) assert that language learning is hard work and if it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language; then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire. Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation. Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication. Language games may be used to teach Kiswahili language in lower primary.

Lee Su Kim (1995) points out that there is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games. There are many advantages of using games in the classroom; games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class; they are motivating and challenging. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning; they provide language practice in the various skills - speaking, writing, listening and reading. They also encourage students to interact and communicate. Language games create a meaningful context for language use.

According to Uberman (1998), many experienced textbook and methodology manual writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. Lee (1979:2) states that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms. He also says that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. A similar opinion is expressed by Richard-Amato, who opines that games are fun but warns against overlooking

their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching. There are many advantages of using games, for example, Richard-Amato (1988:147) states that, "Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely". Games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen 1994:118). They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Furthermore, to quote Richard-Amato, games "add diversion to the regular classroom activities, break the ice and they are used to introduce new ideas" (1988:147). In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better (Wierus and Wierus 1994:218). Silvers says many teachers are enthusiastic about using games as "a teaching device," yet they often perceive games as mere time-fillers, "a break from the monotony of drilling" or frivolous activities. He also claims that many teachers often overlook the fact that in a relaxed atmosphere, real learning takes place, and students use the language they have been exposed to and have practiced earlier (1982:29). Further observations come from Zdybiewska, who sees games as a good way of practicing language, for they provide a model of what learners will use the language for in real life in the future (1994:6).

Rixon (1979) suggests that games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet, as Lee observes, a game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Games can be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All authors cited in the article agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence, and generate fluency. In Rixon's study, language games were found to be very helpful in the lower primary in assisting learners to learn.

Fall (2000) observes that games are fun and children like to play them. Through games, children experiment, discover, and interact with their environment. On his part, Lewis (1999) notes that games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. The game context brings the target language to life (Lewis, 1999). The game makes the reasons for speaking plausible even to reluctant children. Through playing games, lower primary learners can learn language the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, they can learn a lot. Even shy students can participate positively.

Aydan (2000) points out that language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Teachers can mediate learning by use of language games in teaching Kiswahili just as games are used to teach English language. Well chosen games are invaluable as they give learners a break and at the same time allow them to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging.

Nguyen (2003) asserts that games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. Games bring relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily. It is through the intervention of games that learners find learning to be interesting and involving friendly competition. Games create the motivation for learners of Kiswahili to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities. Learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. The results of the research suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.

2.6 Teachers Training and Competence

Education certainly is important for all aspects of economic and social development especially for developing country whose structure of the economy is changing. Relevant education and training is therefore important for the developing countries. The aim of education is to expose the youth to reality of national development and facilitating the development of positive attitude towards labor rather than focusing on white collar jobs in urban areas (Gachathi: 1976). One common assumption is that teachers' training helps the individual to acquire a skill in using teaching methods and teaching media or aids. Sifuna (1990) expresses his doubts in effectiveness of untrained teacher (helpers). He specifies activities and materials to be handled by such a teacher. This is a measure to ensure that such a teacher does not endanger learners' learning through inappropriate use of media materials and teaching methods. Teacher trainees are trained on how to use teaching aids in teaching Kiswahili and English languages. In Machakos teachers college, teacher trainees are taught how to use language games in teaching Kiswahili and English vocabulary. K.N.E.C trains teachers before they are used to mark national examinations. Such trainings are vital to equip the examiners with what is required of them. The same examiners can then be used to train other teachers in the country what is expected for the candidates in the national examination.

Fuller (1985) revealed that in service training positively correlated with achievement. He further emphasized that

if a learner's achievements is to be improved, teachers must have in-service training. Maundu (1986) asserts that, marking examination enables a teacher to learn about requirements of the examiner and therefore help the teacher to completely prepare students for national examination. The performance of both Kiswahili and English has been dismal nationally. This performance may be attributed to several reasons. One of these has to do with the qualification of language teachers. Primary school teachers are currently expected to teach all subjects, yet some of them may have done very poorly in the language examinations. It may be advisable that in all cases only those teachers who performed well in languages are mandated to teach English and Kiswahili. Language teaching requires certain skills and sensitivities that may not be possessed by all primary school teachers.

3.0 Discussion and Results

3.1 Language Games

Learning a second language like Kiswahili is not easy. If learning itself feels like a game, and if the learners feel they are discovering a fascinating new world through games which they would also enjoy playing, then learning languages would be easier for learners. This way, games would be used in mediating learning. Games can make learning of languages such as Kiswahili easier. Teachers need to know that with the changing times, teaching process requires new techniques. Games represent a bridge between studying and fun, between teachers and learners. Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give learners a break and at the same time allow learners to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. They also encourage and increase cooperation (Wright: 1984).

Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely. Games are motivating and give shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. Games enable learners to acquire new experiences with a foreign language which are not always possible during a traditional presentation. Games add diversion to the regular classroom activities. They are also used to introduce new ideas to the learners. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in pleasant, entertaining way.

Language games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. Games bring in relaxation and fun for learners, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily. Friendly competition is built through games. Vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom, and enhance learners to use language in a flexible, communicative way (Nguyen: 2003). The role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However, in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is essential that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of learners, level, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors to be taken into account. Mediating learning by use of language games can make Kiswahili learning interesting and boost performance. In Kenya, games are not usually used in teaching languages, however, in Machakos Teachers college games are used to enhance learning. This is done by the teacher trainees when they go for their intermittent teaching practice which takes 3 weeks in three 3 terms.

3.2 Language Games in Teaching Kiswahili Vocabulary

In this sub-section, this paper describes some of the language games used by the trainee teachers and ultimately investigate their impact in teaching Kiswahili. These games are used in lesson development part of the lesson plan before an exercise is given in the evaluation part. The learners are taken through by the teacher on how to play the games using new words which will eventually be tested in the exercise.

3.2.1 Fishing Game

The teacher uses Manila paper to cut out words in the form of fish. The teacher then makes a box using cartons - called fishing pond - where he/she puts the fish (The fishing pond is colored to suit the reality). On top of the carton a round hole is made using cello tape to allow fishing out the fish.

How the game is played

The group leader mixes up the fish in the fishing pond. He/she asks the first learner to fish a word (fish). The learner then fishes and shows the reading card to the rest. He/she further says 'I have fished _____' and pronounce the word. The learner who pronounces the fished word correctly keeps the fish. If he/she does not read it correctly, he/she throws back the fish back into the pond and another learner fishes after the group leader mixes the model fish. The game continues in this manner. By the end of the game, the learner with most fish is the winner of the game. After the game, the learners are given an exercise where they will use the same learnt words in the game to give answers to the exercises.

3.2.2 Clock Face Game

The teacher makes the clock face using a carton/cardboard, and covers it with a plain paper to hide the carton. He/she makes pockets on the clock face and they should be placed on natural position of the clock face. The teacher then inserts words in the pockets. The clock face has a hand that spins from the back. The game has a string which is used by the group leader to hold the clock face game.

How to play the game

The group leader spins the hand and points at a word on one of the pockets. He/she asks each group member, one after another; to read the word pointed at. If the group member reads it correctly he/she is given a bottle top as a reward. By the end of the game, the learners are given an exercise to apply the words learnt from the game to give answers to the exercise.

3.2.3 Sentence Building Chart

The teacher makes a chart with pockets using manila papers and reinforces it with a carton and cello tape. The teacher then constructs sentences on a long strip of paper. Reading cards are made with one or two words. A string is used to hang the chart.

How to play the game

The group leader fixes a sentence into a pocket. The group leader then points at the first word in the sentence and the members look at their own reading cards. Whoever looks at the word and finds it says, 'I have it', and the group leader fixes it in the first pocket below the already fixed sentence. The process continues till the sentence ends. The sentence building chart is hanged on the wall bearing in mind the height of the learners. The members of the group form a curved line as they build a sentence. Once they have built a sentence on the chart, they read it aloud. After the learners are through with building the sentences on the chart, they are given an exercise to test on the words they were using on the game.

3.3 Results

The findings show lower primary learners who used language games in class to learn Kiswahili performed better than those who did not use language games. This study found out that the methods used by the teachers in teaching are significant to Kiswahili performance. Methods that the teachers used to teach the Kiswahili Language to lower primary learners were assignments and group discussions. The findings inferred that lower primary learners were better suited for the use of language games than the natural teaching methods.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games has been found to be an effective and interesting method that can be applied in any classroom. The results of this research suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence and Kiswahili language performance in the lower primary schools. The study recommends that the management of primary school institutions should invest on language games in enhancing their academic performance. The study further recommends that other strategies for teaching lower primary learners can be teacher assistance teams; shorter assignments should also be employed to enhance the Kiswahili language to learners at the lower primary. The significance of the study is that use of language games in teaching lower primary learners can improve the academic performance of the learners. This research has also found out that most significant teaching activities used while teaching Kiswahili to lower primary were discussion, group work and Peer consultations. However, the study recommends that other teaching activities like Teacher Assistance Teams be used to achieve higher performance in Kiswahili. The study is of the opinion that various interventions to reduce the effects of poor performance would greatly help to enhance the performance of the lower primary learners.

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