THE TEACHING OF SPOKEN ENGLISH IN KENYAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF THIKA DISTRICT

BY

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Declaration

This dissertation is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University or other award.

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Dedication

To
Julius
Acknowledgement

I am greatly indebted to my supervisors, Mr. Gecaga and Ms. Ndung’u, for their continuous support throughout the entire period of the research. A lot was gained from their expertise and practical suggestions. Moreover, their constant patience, interest and guidance have brought this research to its successful completion.

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to describe the practice of teaching spoken English in secondary schools of Thika district in central province of Kenya. This study was based on the premise that the spoken language should be the basis of the language learning experience. The literature review in chapter two provides a review of the characteristics of spoken language, the implications of these for language classrooms as well as activities that could be used to promote the development of speaking skills. Various classroom interaction studies are also reviewed. The conceptual framework that formed the basis of this study is also presented.

This paves the way for the development of a research design in chapter 3 to provide for analysis of the teaching methods, the learning activities and the assessment strategies utilised by the teachers. The investigation made use of the participant observation method. Data elicitation techniques included use of an observation schedule, a teaching inventory and observation notes.

The objective of the study was threefold. First, was an analysis of the teaching methods, which revealed that the majority of them were more teacher centred than learner centred. Second, was the observation that the learning activities were observed to contribute little in enhancing learner participation during classroom interaction. Thirdly, the assessment strategies teachers used to gauge the
development of the speaking skills of their learners were observed and found to make a minimal contribution to the speaking skills of learners.

The significance of this study is found in the way the insights from the classroom interaction study contribute to the field of applied linguistics. For instance, the findings give researchers, policy makers and practitioners insights into the language classroom that are important for both building theory and improving practice.
Contents

Title page (i)
Declaration (ii)
Dedication (iii)
Acknowledgement (iv)
Abstract (v)
Table of contents (vii)
Definition of terms (x)
Notations (xi)
List of tables and figures (xii)

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction 1

1.1 Background to the study 1
1.2 Statement of the problem 4
1.3 Research objectives 5
1.4 Research questions 5
1.5 Research assumptions 5
1.6 Rationale of the study 6
1.7 Scope and limitations 7
Chapter 2

2.0 Literature review 8

2.1 Introduction 8

2.2 Characteristics of spoken language 8

2.3 Implications for language classrooms 12

2.4 Activities to promote speaking skills 16

2.5 Challenges of assessing speaking skills 21

2.6 Classroom interaction 24

2.7 Theoretical framework 26

2.7.1 Introduction 26

2.7.2 Communicative language theory 27

2.7.3 Speaking skills and Communicative language theory 31

2.7.4 Consciousness raising 32

Chapter 3

3.0 Research design 35

3.1 Introduction 35

3.2 Study population and sampling procedure 35

3.3 Sampling procedure 35

3.4 Data collection 36

3.5 Data elicitation methods 37
# Chapter 4

**4.0 Presentation and Discussion of Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Teaching methods and their contribution</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Learning activities</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Learning activities and their bearing</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Assessment of speaking skills</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Assessing speaking skills and their relevance</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Chapter 5

**5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Findings and conclusions</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Areas for further research</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Bibliography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Observation schedules</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Teaching inventories</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definition of Terms

Accuracy refers to a focus on the language by the user on formal factors or issues of appropriacy that will be evaluated for their observed characteristics.

Authentic an authentic task is one that resembles very closely something that is done in everyday life. For example to engage in free conversation is an authentic task.

Communicative competence refers to knowledge of the rules of use and appropriacy and includes linguistic competence.

Fluency the ability of having appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts so that you do not become tongue-tied or lost for words when an unexpected situation arises.

Spoken language a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalised signs, gestures, or marks having understood meanings expressed, told, or delivered by word of mouth.

Tasks activities where the learner uses the target language for a communicative goal in order to achieve an outcome.
Notations

The following conventions will be used frequently in the study:

EFL  English as a Foreign Language
ELT  English Language teaching
ESL  English as a Second Language
KCSE Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
KIE  Kenya Institute of Education
KNEC Kenya National Examinations Council
List of tables

Table 2.1 Scale of oral testing criteria 23
Table 4.2.1 Teaching methods 40
Table 4.2.2 Distribution of lessons 41
Table 4.4.1 Learning activities 49
Table 4.6.1 Assessment strategies 57

List of figures

Figure 4.2.1 Teaching methods 40
Figure 4.4.1 Learning activities 50
Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The study was concerned with the practice of English language teaching in selected secondary schools in Thika district of Central province of Kenya. In particular, the study examines the methods teachers used during the English lessons for how they contributed to the development of speaking skills of learners. Other features that were investigated included the learning activities learners were involved in and the assessment strategies the teachers utilized to gauge the development of the speaking skills of their learners.

English in Kenya has gained importance especially in the education system where it is the medium of instruction, and as a compulsory and examinable subject both at the primary and at the secondary school levels. One of the objectives of teaching English is to enable the learner to listen with understanding and speak fluently in a variety of contexts (K.I.E. 1992). Implicit in the objectives is the importance of equipping the learner with ‘a practical tool, a functional means of communicating facts, opinions and ideas about real issues to other people’ (Otieno: 1996).

The regulations and syllabuses for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E.) English language state that oral work should be used to
help learners develop confidence in their ability to express themselves in English (K.N.E.C. 2001). It further recommends that the same lessons be used to provide an opportunity for the correction of mistakes in spoken English. However, the syllabus discourages teachers from concentrating on minor errors of pronunciation that may affect confidence and interest in the language.

Although the English syllabus acknowledges the importance of speech drills, it advocates that more time should be spent on remedial work when necessary and this should only be done in context. The value of teaching the correct pronunciation, stress and pitch in words and sentences is only emphasised where there may be problems of meaning depending on where the stress falls and where incorrect pronunciation and stress may lead to mistakes in written work.

The K.N.E.C. (2001) syllabus further recommends that more time be spent on activities that emphasize overall fluency in connected speech. Particularly recommended for the first two years of the secondary English course are various types of oral activities. These include: speech drills, debates, dramatization, language games, dialogues, taped poems, impromptu speeches and interviews. Also encouraged are discussions especially of literary works such as class readers, poems and narratives, riddles and proverbs and oral poetry. This study proposes that such activities be utilised in the English language classroom. For that reason, teachers should maximize the time for listening and speaking during every English lesson. This is because it might be
only during the English lessons that students may have the opportunity to develop their speaking skills. As Basturkmen (2001:1) observes,

English Language Teaching (ELT) has traditionally focused on the description and teaching of the written language, often to the neglect of the spoken language. Now developments in corpora of spoken language, and findings from discourse analysis of naturally occurring talk enable English language teachers to describe and present features of interactive speaking.

Consequently, for any language programme to be balanced it has to account for the oral component. This implies that speaking skills have to be accounted for in the language theory, in the belief about language learning and in the specific techniques to be used in the classroom. English has grown as an international language of communication, and there is clearly a need for learners to speak and interact in a multiplicity of situations through the language. This could be for foreign travel, business or other professional reasons. In many contexts, ‘speaking is often the skill upon which a person is judged at face value’ (McDonough 1993:151). People may often form judgments about a person’s language competence from speaking rather than from any of the other language skills. Language teachers, as proposed in this study, need not inform learners about the language but develop their ability to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes.

Wilkinson (1965) states that ‘to develop oracy is to develop personality in a more direct sense than by other educational means’ (as quoted in Stubbs, 1986). Oracy refers to both the production of spoken language and to listening
comprehension. It is characterized by such abilities as fluency, clarity, audibility, liveliness, intelligibility, development and argument of ideas as well as sustaining of interesting discussions. This implies that a learner’s command of spoken English is just as much the responsibility of the educational system as his command of the written form of language (Brown 1984). As a result, this study advocates that just as learners need explicit practice and guidance in developing competence in writing skills, they also need explicit practice and guidance in developing competence in speaking skills.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The focus of the study is to scrutinize the interaction in English language lessons with a view to investigating the teachers’ role in encouraging learners to speak. The research focused on three Kenyan secondary schools.

The study investigated the methods teachers made use of while teaching the English language especially those that were helpful in encouraging learners to speak. These methods were evaluated for their teacher-centeredness or learner-centeredness. The study also investigated the learning activities that were used to enhance the speaking skills of learners. These include such skills as fluency, clarity, audibility, liveliness and intelligibility among others. The strategies teachers employed to assess the development of the speaking skills of learners were also examined.
1.3 Research objectives

The research had the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the teaching methods used to promote speaking skills.
2. To investigate learning activities and how effective they are in contributing to learners' participation.
3. To identify the strategies teachers employ to assess the spoken language.

1.4 Research questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Which methods do teachers use that encourage learners to speak?
2. Which learning activities are employed during classroom interaction to promote speaking skills and how effective are they?
3. Which strategies do teachers employ to assess the development of the spoken language of their learners?

1.5 Research assumptions

This study had the following assumptions:

1. The questioning technique is the most frequently used to elicit verbal responses from learners.
2. The learning activities used will influence the amount of learner talk.
3. Teachers will rarely be found to assess speaking skills explicitly.
1.6 Rationale of the study

It is hoped that this study will be one of the studies that sheds light on the nature of interaction in English language classrooms in Kenya. Specifically, the study aimed at establishing the methods used to teach during the language lessons as well as investigating learning activities utilised and the assessment strategies employed.

The information gathered may well be useful to teachers, as it may go a long way in helping them improve their performance during classroom interaction. Using interaction analysis for feedback purposes as Karani (1979) found out had some positive effect in modifying and shaping student teachers’ classroom behaviour.

Teacher educators could also benefit in the sense that the study may provide information that could be used in enriching pre-service and in-service programmes. Curriculum developers, researchers and practitioners may also gain insights important for both building theory and improving practice.

The Kenya National Examinations Council may also be informed on the value of re-introducing the oral component in the English language examinations, which would ensure that the speaking skills are taught.
1.7 Scope and limitations

The scope of the study was on three focus areas. First, it was to identify the methods teachers used to teach during the language lessons and evaluated the bearing of these methods in the development of the spoken language. Secondly, the study examined how teachers utilized learning activities so as to develop the speaking skills of form two learners during English language lessons. Thirdly, the study also aimed at identifying the strategies teachers used to assess the speaking skills that they had taught.

The research was limited to three schools of Thika district representative of the three types of the public schools available in Kenya. In each school two form two English language classes were observed since this is when the English syllabus recommends that speaking skills be emphasized (as further explained in the methodology section).

Learners’ performance as a result of the use of various methods to teach the spoken language was outside the scope of this study. This is because the focus of the study was mainly on the teachers’ role in the learning process. The structure of the classroom discourse was investigated but only as far as the teachers’ questions and learners responses were concerned. The study did not concentrate on listening comprehension because it would require highly developed instruments whose development would be outside the scope of this study.
Chapter 2

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this study, the characteristics of spoken language are examined. Various types of activities that could be used to promote speaking skills in the classroom are also considered. Various classroom interaction studies that have been carried out in language classrooms shall also be reviewed.

2.2 Characteristics of spoken language

Speaking skills have been considered a central component in the language learning experience (Basturkmen, 2000, Brown, 1984, Cook, 1991, Ur, 1996). Therefore, developments in studies about the spoken language and discourse analysis of naturally occurring talk have to be known to language teachers if they have to be utilised in the classroom.

An important characteristic of spoken language, as Brown and Yule (1983a) have shown is that spoken communication is essentially transactional or interactional. Transactional language is said to be that which contains factual or propositional information. The language used by the participants is primarily message based. This implies that learners have to be provided with the opportunity to practise passing messages effectively.
On the other hand, interactional communication is used to establish and maintain social roles. It is often when transactional and interactional language needs to be used at the same time that difficulties can occur even for native speakers. Consequently, Brown and Yule (1983a.) argue that it is a skill that non-native speakers may need to practice at length. Thus, it is important that learners be trained to use short turns to maintain relationships as well as use long turns to transfer information effectively and clearly.

For many people speaking is basically about learning to articulate sounds accurately. Speaking and pronouncing, according to McCarthy (1978), both relate to the same basic activity. Yet, pronouncing concentrates on how the speaking is done; while speaking takes into account what is said, the ideas expressed, the words used, the constructions and turns of phrase, the style and so on. It is apparent then, that speaking encompasses various aspects of which pronouncing is only a part. Therefore, when teachers concentrate on activities that only develop pronunciation they could be said to be neglecting the most important component of spoken language.

Such components include how language is patterned grammatically, how people use it to negotiate with others and how it serves its users in creating personal identities (Di Pietro 1987:6). Therefore, in a successful language programme areas to be covered include information exchange with its grammatical orientation, transaction with its focus on negotiation and the expression of speaker intentions and finally, interaction with an emphasis on
how language works to portray roles and speaker identities. Clearly, activities associated with speaking skills have to go beyond grammar and assist learners to acquire appropriate rules of use.

Rivers (1983) advocates for a model of language teaching activity that allocates a full role to the students' individual learning in communication. She proposes that the ability to communicate, to interact verbally, presumes some knowledge in two areas. This is in the perception of units, categories and functions, and in the internalising of the rules relating this categories and functions. She also stresses that students learn through doing. However, for learning to be effective students have to communicate what is of real importance to them and they should also receive genuine messages from others. Therefore, practice in formulating messages is what gives learners valuable practice (Rivers 1983: 42). Activities that are geared towards this goal are most preferable in developing speaking skills.

Brown and Yule (1983a) also examine the various forms of language, which are most frequently used by native speakers of the English language. These are known as the non-fluency features of speech. They include incomplete sentences, the use of generalized vocabulary such as, thing, nice stuff, place, a lot of, and repetition of the same syntactic form among other features. The challenge lies in what the teacher is supposed to do about the incompleteness and frequent ungrammaticality of spontaneous native speech. The question is whether the teacher should pretend that the issues raised above do not exist and
therefore essentially present a correct model that does not exist even for native speakers. The foregoing discussion reveals that there is clearly a great challenge for the teacher in the context where English is a second language.

Furthermore, spoken language follows certain distinct patterns or conversational routines and rules that must be observed if a satisfactory outcome for each participant is to be achieved. Within the framework of the conversation, turns have to take place if the conversation is not to be totally one-sided (McDonough 1993:156). Certain strategies have to be put into operation by the speaker. A speaker will need to have the knowledge of: how long or short the turn can be; interrupting the other speaker; anticipating and inferring what is about to happen next; changing the topic if necessary; and providing appropriate pauses and fillers while processing the language. The implication is that the teacher has to create a conducive environment where learners practise the skills outlined above frequently.

Cook (1991) suggests that if two people are talking, each of them has a choice of what to say and how to say it. She adds that there are certain opening moves, a further choice of conversational moves linked to these, and so on until the final exchange that ends the conversation. She further observes that much of conversation is made up of pairs of moves such as greeting and reply, question and answer, as well as statement and reaction. Learners have therefore to be made aware of the intricacies of the moves of conversation that make them efficient speakers.
2.3 Implications for the language classrooms

Teaching speaking skills is often considered one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for the teacher to help students with (Brown and Yule 1983b). They list a number of practical problems. For instance, in comprehension classes, whether written or spoken, the whole class can receive the same stimulus at the same time and each student can do whatever task is required of him by himself. In the production of speech, however they observe that each speaker needs to speak. He needs to speak individually, needs someone to listen to him speaking and to respond to him. A learner is expected to speak using complete sentences since saying 'yes' or 'no' gives little practice in producing the spoken form. The language produced is typically evaluated by the teacher for its correctness, either with respect to pronunciation or to grammar or both. 'Correctness in terms of complete sentences seems an inappropriate notion in spoken language' (Brown and Yule, 1983b: 26).

Even native speakers of English do not produce ideal strings of complete perfectly formed sentences. They use language manipulatively, explanatorily, to communicate with and make up what they say as they go along. Conversely, Speakers of English as a second language are said to speak language that is even better than that spoken by native English speakers, because they produce complete sentences and articulate them clearly. (Brown and Yule, 1983b: 22).
Such language is said to be formally correct but is certainly inappropriate (McDonough 1993). It would therefore, seem more sensible to concentrate on exposing learners to a range of models of speech appropriate to different contexts of situation than to demand of them an unreasonable ‘non-native’ standard of correctness in all situations.

It has been suggested that children learn the first language through conversational routines (Bruner 1983, Fletcher 1985). Similarly, Cook (1991:46) states that:

Conversational interaction is vital for children, not just for the moves themselves that they are learning, but also for the grammatical rules and lexical items that they are using in the moves.

She observes that the components of language are learnt through the moves of conversation. Therefore, learners need to be provided with as many opportunities as possible as far as speaking is concerned. Interestingly, in this study it was found that learners are hardly provided with the opportunity to practise the moves of conversation as shown in chapter 4.

Richards (1990) advocates two complementary approaches to the teaching of conversation. These include an indirect approach, which focuses on using communicative activities to generate conversational interaction and a direct approach, which addresses specific aspects of conversational management. In the direct approach to teaching conversations
Richards suggests that:

such aspects of conversation as strategies for turn taking, topic control, and repair; conversational routines; fluency; pronunciation; and differences between formal and casual conversation styles are taught explicitly

(Richards 1990: 79).

Richards goes on to suggest an indirect approach, in which conversational competence is seen as a product of engaging learners in conversational interaction. Thus the conversation class should provide opportunities for learners to engage in natural interaction through the use of communicative tasks and activities. This leads to the use of pair-work and group-work activities that require learner-to-learner interaction. The focus is on using language to complete a task, rather than on practising language for its own sake. What is important though is that a balance has to be reached when utilizing the two approaches.

The ability to produce long transactional turns, in which clear information is transferred, is not an ability that is automatically acquired by all native speakers of a language, but rather it is an ability that appears to need adequate models, adequate practice and feedback (Brown and Yule 1983b: 19)

The essential thing to note from the foreign language teaching perspective is that what may appear to be casual and unplanned in a conversation follows a deeper organized pattern that the learner has to be made aware of. By the same
token, in the context where English is a second language there is clearly a need for learners to be properly trained as far as speaking skills are concerned. Moreover, Brown and Yule (1983b) add that simply training the student to produce short turns will not automatically yield a student who can perform satisfactorily in long turns. Learners have sometimes been described as being inarticulate (Gathumbi 1995). This could be because they do not succeed in transferring information effectively in long turns.

Another implication of the importance of conversation routines is that there is a need for speaking skills classes to place more emphasis on the “frames” of oral interactions. These frames refer to the way conversations have to be started, maintained and finished. The phrases used to accomplish this are called ‘gambits’. An example of an opening gambit could be: ‘Excuse me, do you happen to know if...’ (McDonough 1993: 157). Within the framework of the conversation speakers also take turns and where necessary change the topic under discussion. This is not always an easy task to accomplish successfully.

The discussion so far goes to show that what is needed is to teach speaking skills explicitly in language classrooms. Learners will consequently find themselves much more able to cope later when they need or want to take part in real conversations outside the classroom. It is apparent then, that learners need to be taken beyond the grammar exercises advocated in most language textbooks. As Di Pietro (1987) observes, experienced language teachers know that to become accurate and fluent in a new or second language requires
competencies beyond the bits and pieces of grammar and vocabulary that are highlighted in textbooks. He advocates for strategic interaction where learners are allowed to rise to the challenge of human interaction, with all its uncertainties and ambiguities. However, such an approach is hardly feasible where teachers would rather control the interaction in the classroom than give learners leeway as was found out in this study.

2.4 Activities to promote speaking skills

Any course in spoken English production should prepare the learner to express himself or herself in the target language. The learner should also cope with basic interactive skills like exchanging greetings, thanks, apologies, and so on. The learner should also express his needs or request for information or services. The focus is not so much with the process by which the learner comes to learn the forms of the language, but with the process by which the learner may come to use those forms creatively and appropriately (Brown and Yule 1983b, Willis and Willis 1996). The present study agrees with Ur (1996:120) who states that:

Speaking seems intuitively the most important language skill. People who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would seem an important component of a language course.

Thus, speaking activities should be seen to comprise the core of an efficient language course. This is imperative especially in the context where English is a
second language. Ur goes on to describe an effective speaking activity as one that has the following characteristics:

- Most talk is learner talk.
- A minority of talkative participants do not dominate classroom discussion; all get a chance to speak.
- Learners are eager to speak because they are interested in the topic.
- Learners also express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other, and of an acceptable level of accuracy.

(Ur 1996: 121)

However, she cites problems that are associated with speaking activities. First, learners may be inhibited because of real time exposure to an audience. Learners may find difficulties because they are afraid of making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts. Secondly, learners may have no motive to express themselves. Thirdly, some learners may tend to dominate while others speak little or not at all.

Moreover, in order to develop the skills needed for speaking, the teacher has to cope with a number of obstacles, such as:

- the size of the class (often thirty or more learners);
- the arrangement of the classroom (which rarely favours communication);
- the number of hours available for teaching the language (which cannot and should not all be spent on oral work);
- the syllabus itself, and particularly examinations, which may discourage giving adequate attention to the spoken language.

(Byrne, 1986: 1)
Nonetheless, in spite of all these challenges teachers should ensure that they engage their learners in a variety of speaking activities. Various activities could be used to promote the development of the speaking skills of the learners. These activities reflect either a formal or a functional focus. During the 1970s, major attention was devoted to the teaching of pronunciation. (Brown and Yule 1983b: 2). They add that students of the spoken language spent many hours learning to pronounce the ‘sounds of English’, first in isolation, then in short isolated words, and finally in short isolated sentences. This scenario is still very reminiscent of the Kenyan language classrooms.

They further observe that, in the 1990s, students were not only taught to pronounce, but they were given practice in listening to examples of carefully spoken English. This provided the opportunity for many learners to talk and listen in a second language. In Kenya there is clearly a need for teachers to involve their learners in more interactive speaking activities. According to Mathews (1985) student interaction provides greater and more authentic practice for each student. Communicative activities increase students’ interest, understanding and retention of the new language.

Mathews (1985), further distinguishes between drills and activities. Drills are normally paced, cued and conducted by the teacher with the class responding either chorally or individually. An activity is paced and controlled more by the students themselves as they talk to one another, prompted by visual or written cues. Therefore, teachers have to utilise the activities more as opposed to the
drills, which make a minimal contribution to the development of the speaking skills of learners. Depending on the resourcefulness of the teacher and the creativity of learners, there are various activities, which could provide opportunities for meaningful practice.

Brown and Yule (1983b) give an example of an activity where learners may be asked to give instructions to a listener on how to carry out a procedure such as assembling a meat grinder or mending a bicycle puncture. Such varied situations, feelings and relationships give learners opportunities to try using the target language.

The oral activities recommended by the syllabus provide a rich resource to English language teachers as cited in the background to the study. Among other activities, learners could be taught brief dialogues which could be learnt by heart. These are especially meaningful for beginners. Drama can also be a powerful tool in language learning. For instance, in simulations individual participants speak and react as themselves. Role-plays are activities where learners imagine themselves in situations outside the classroom. These activities give learners opportunity to practise improving a range of real life spoken language in class. These and other activities were the main interest of this study.

Simulations and language according to Jones (1982) are virtually inseparable. He adds that almost all simulations involve a substantial amount of interaction
between the participants, and interaction involves language that could be either spoken or written or both. He further observes that language in simulations tends to have two dominant characteristics that is, it is cohesive and functional. The language is cohesive because of the structure of the simulation. The participants have a built in motive to analyse, discuss, argue, report, question, negotiate, explain, agree and make decisions in a cohesive manner. The language is functional because the participants have jobs to do, duties to fulfil, and problems to solve. From this description it is apparent that simulations fit in well with communicative teaching since they provide the participants with the mutual need to communicate.

In language learning one must make an effort to understand, to repeat accurately, to manipulate newly understood language and to use the whole range of known language in conversation or written composition. This implies that effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Wright et al (1983) underscore the importance of language games in encouraging many learners to sustain their interest and work.

Communication games could also be utilized in the language classroom not just as a form of diversion, but also to contribute to language proficiency in some way by getting the learners to use language in the course of the game. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to
express their own point of view or give information. Wright *et al* (1983) observe that many games cause as much density of practice as more conventional drill exercises. Yet, games provide the key feature of drill with the opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication. Games also give practice in all the skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in all the stages of the teaching/learning sequence (presentation and practice) and for various types of communication for example, encouraging, explaining or agreeing.

### 2.5 Challenges of assessing speaking skills

The field of applied linguistics has provided a broadened multicomponential view of communicative language abilities as a dynamic interaction between the speaker, the situation, and the discourse, termed ‘communicative competence’. Canale and Swain (1980) identified four components of communicative competence. These include (1) linguistic form; (2) sociolinguistic (affective, cultural); (3) strategic (repertoire of communicative strategies for access when communication breaks down); and (4) discourse competence (use of cohesion devices for coherence). This broader view of second language communicative competence, which involves several distinct language abilities, provides practitioners with valuable information for testing procedures. The challenge for second language teachers according to Amodeo (2000) then, involves identifying and describing which aspects of communicative competence should be measured in a given test. She further observes that the variety of
components of communicative competence described by applied linguists suggests the great complexity of oral language production and the difficulty faced by practitioners concerning what should be tested.

When learners are being tested for their oral proficiency they may simply be interviewed and the responses assessed. Various activities such as role-play, group discussions and picture descriptions could be used as elicitation techniques (Underhill 1987). However, Ur (1996) notes that choosing an appropriate elicitation technique is only part of the problem; there are many other problems associated with design, administration and assessment. She adds that so serious are these problems that most language exams either do not include oral testing techniques or give them very low weighting in the final grade.

For example, in Kenya oral language was last tested in the East African Certificate of Education Examination of 1974. The test consisted of reading and a conversation test. The K.C.S.E. examinations lack this oral component in their evaluation of language skills. Teachers teach what is examinable. This is attributed justifiably to the tendency of the education system in Kenya of being examination oriented (Otieno: 1996).

However, oral tests have desirable and valuable effects since they assess how well learners can communicate with other people. For Instance, Ur (1986) and Underhill (1987) suggest that the oral component would bring a noticeable rise
in the emphasis on oral work in language classrooms and a corresponding improvement in learners’ speaking skills. It was of interest in this study to identify how teachers assessed the development of the speaking skills of their learners.

The assessment could be made objective by having an objective rating scale. For instance, Ur (1996:135) gives an example of a rating scale used in an Israeli exam. The candidates are tested on fluency and accuracy and may get a maximum of five points on each of these two aspects, ten points in all. This is as shown on Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or no language produced</td>
<td>Little or no communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor vocabulary, mistakes in basic grammar, may have very strong accent</td>
<td>Very hesitant and brief utterances, sometimes difficult to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate but not rich vocabulary, makes obvious grammar mistakes, slight foreign accent</td>
<td>Gets ideas across, but hesitantly and briefly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good range of vocabulary, occasional grammar slips, slight foreign accent</td>
<td>Effective communication in short turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide vocabulary appropriately used, virtually no grammar mistakes, native-like or slight foreign accent</td>
<td>Easy and effective communication, uses long turns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL SCORE OUT OF 10**

*Scale of oral testing criteria used in an Israeli language examination (as quoted in Ur 1996:135)*
2.6 Classroom interaction

Stern (1983) asserts that research problems that demand investigation in language education are rarely of a kind that a single investigation can resolve in a conclusive way. It is often the cumulative and complementary effects of several studies carried out by different investigators or over several years that can be beneficial.

In Kenya, there have been relatively few classroom interaction studies carried out. Gathumbi observes that ‘important as it is, English language classroom observation research has been overlooked in Kenya’ (Gathumbi 1995:29). She carried out a research on English language verbal discourse events between teachers and learners in secondary schools in Kenya through recording of live transactions. The study investigated the mode of instructional procedures with the view to establishing the relative learner-centeredness of the instruction.

The analysis of data revealed individual variation across the teachers in the use of various instructional behaviours. Teacher talk dominated the classroom. Pupil talk was only a quarter of the total verbal transactions and mainly in form of responding to teachers’ questions. It is doubtful whether teacher dominated methods are conducive to the development of the speaking skills of learners. Evidently, there is need for activities that could be used to prompt learners to express themselves more frequently and freely.
Otieno (1996) carried out a study to investigate how classroom questions are used as a tool in second language learning. It was found that English language teachers asked more content-based than social-based questions. They also asked more closed than open-ended questions. An interesting finding was that most of the pupils had not uttered more than four words of English at the end of most lessons. Yet, as long as the teachers’ questions allowed them, most pupils were ready to give lengthy responses. Skilful use of questions and learning activities provide learners with the much-needed opportunities to practise speaking.

Rwakyaka (1976) carried out a study on teacher-student interaction in English lessons in Uganda. The purpose of the study was to describe classroom communication in terms of five characteristics: the source, the pedagogical function, the medium used, the way in which the medium was used and the content of each communication. It was found that the teachers observed dominated classroom discourse. Preferably, teachers should create the right conditions for creative language use through the appropriate use of learning activities.

Ochola (1985) did a study on teaching methods used in Kenyan secondary schools. He found out that both science and art teachers used the lecture method more than any other method. A method that was common to science teachers was the demonstration and experimentation method. Art teachers preferred the discussion method. The lecture method is a more teacher-centred
method as opposed to more heuristic methods where learners are allowed to discover knowledge for themselves. Learning activities could be geared towards giving learners room to develop their speaking skills. This is possible because learning activities ensure that the focus remains on the learners as opposed to more teacher-centred methods.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 Introduction

In the 1960s and beyond, there was the belief that mastery of grammar would lead to the mastery of a language, as McDonough (1993: 21) observes, language learners were required to manipulate grammatical forms accurately. This procedure was the main measure of competence. Common types of exercises for students included instructions that required students to convert active sentences to their passive voice equivalent or to supply the correct verb form for a given tense, or to distinguish adjectives from adverbs. This scenario is still true of the Kenyan context even though it has been largely relegated to the background as an approach that is ineffective.

Towards the end of the 1960s, there was a growing dissatisfaction amongst language teaching practitioners and applied linguists with the prevailing methodology of the time. It was argued that this kind of teaching produced 'structurally competent' students who were often 'communicatively incompetent' (Johnson 1982). This kind of grammatical competence has been
described as 'necessary but not sufficient' (McDonough 1993:21). Students are able to form correct sentences but are unable to transfer this knowledge to real life settings.

The 1970s were the years in which ‘structural’ design criteria started to receive widespread critical attention. Chomsky (1965) had demonstrated that the prevailing standard structural theories of language were incapable of accounting for the fundamental characteristic of language, the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences. There was need for emphasis for another fundamental dimension of language, the functional and communicative potential of language. This was inadequately addressed in the prevailing approaches to language teaching at the time. The change to a communicative view of language was a response to the sort of criticism levelled at the structural view of language.

2.7.2 Communicative Language Theory

The communicative approach in language teaching and learning starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as “communicative competence”. This is ‘what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community’ (Richards and Rogers, 1986:70). Hymes coined this term in order to contrast a communicative view of language and Chomsky’s (1965) theory of competence. For Chomsky, the focus of linguistic theory was to characterize
the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language. Hymes held that such a view of linguistic theory was sterile, that linguistic theory needed to be seen as part of a more general theory incorporating communication and culture.

Halliday (1975) also elaborated a theory of the functions of language, which complements Hymes' view of communicative competence. He describes seven basic functions that language performs for children learning their first language. For instance, using language to get things, to control the behaviour of others, and to express personal feelings and meanings. Children also use language to learn and discover, to create the world of imagination and to communicate information. Proponents of communicative language teaching similarly viewed learning a second language as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different functions.

Widdowson (1978) also presents a view of the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative value in text and discourse. He focuses on the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes.

Canale and Swain (1980) identify four dimensions of communicative competence. Grammatical competence refers to what Chomsky calls competence. It is the domain of grammatical and lexical capacity. Sociolinguistic competence refers to an understanding of the social context in
which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the participants and the communicative purpose for their interaction. Discourse competence refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relation to the entire discourse or text. Strategic competence refers to the coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication. Tarone (1989) states these components are important to communicative competence and not just grammatical competence as was emphasized in traditional approaches.

The language learning theory in the communicative approach to language teaching is informed by various principles. These principles also inform various aspects of this study. Johnson (1982) elaborates on the communicative principle in which activities that involve real communication are encouraged as they promote learning. He argues that every lesson should end with the learner being able to see clearly that he can do something that he could not do before.

In order to develop the ability of students to communicate, practise of the forms of the target language should take place within a communicative framework. This involves replicating the processes of communication. Therefore, the aim of the teacher should be to set up situations where information gaps exist and learners are motivated to bridge the gaps in appropriate ways. For instance, language games, drama activities and other speaking activities as outlined in chapter 2 would be appropriate.
Communication also takes place in real time; this means that there is always doubt in the listener’s mind about what is to come next. Thus an exercise such as a speech drill, where the teacher controls speaker and listener in their language use fails to practice the choice aspect of communication. This study advances the view that teaching methods that are teacher centred are not adequate for the language learning process. Of more value are learner centred methods where learners are involved in situations that require real communication.

There is also the element of feedback where speakers usually have an aim of some kind in their minds when communicating. This study advocates that teachers should assess the development of the speaking skills of their learners in order to make learning purposeful and meaningful for the learners.

The task principle, states that activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks are said to promote learning (Johnson 1982). Only by practising communicative activities can learners learn to communicate (Rivers 1983). The meaningful principle holds that language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. Therefore, learning activities are selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use rather than mechanical practice of language patterns.
This study was mainly informed by the task principle, which was used to evaluate the usefulness of learning activities that learners are involved in. Task-based activities are activities that have meaning as their primary focus. Success in the task is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear some resemblance to real-life language use. Willis and Willis (1996) observe that task based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language teaching. 'A task-based approach sees the learning process as one of learning through doing—it is by primarily engaging in meaning that the learner’s system is encouraged to develop.' Willis and Willis (1996: 20). This is as opposed to a structural approach where learning is a process of learning discrete items and then bringing these items together in communication to provide further practice.

2.7.3 Speaking Skills and Communicative Language Theory

In their analysis of the theoretical base of communicative language teaching, Richards and Rogers (1986) offer the following four characteristics of a communicative view of language:
1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning
2. The primary function of language is interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse

(Richards and Rogers 1986: 71)

This analysis shows how easily speaking skills can be accommodated within the communicative view of language. McDonough (1993) observes that when students are asked to actively use the spoken language in the classroom, they are required to take part in a process. In addition, this not only involves knowledge of target forms and functions, but also a general knowledge of the interaction between the speaker and listener in order that meanings and negotiations of meanings are made clear.

2.7.4 Consciousness Raising

Consciousness raising (C-R) is a theory that has been proposed as an alternative to traditional grammar teaching methods (Rutherford 1987, Willis and Willis 1996). Ellis (1993) contrasts C-R with practical activities. C-R encourages learners to examine their own experience of language and to make generalisations from it.
Among the characteristics he lists include:

- The attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention
- The provision of data which illustrates the targeted feature
- The requirement that learners utilize intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature.

(As quoted in Willis and Willis 1996:64)

According to Rutherford (1987) there are three stages in drawing up a grammar centred curriculum. These include data identification where considerations are made in regard to the grammatical system to be made available to learners to afford them the most powerful generalisations. Secondly there has to be decision making as to how this data is to be made available to learners. Rutherford argues that no two learners are alike and therefore, the data cannot be made available uniformly. Thirdly, data dissemination involves the provision of pedagogical instruments that will enable learners to work on the data. The essence of Rutherford’s approach is that the study of grammar cannot be separated from the study of naturally occurring texts which are genuine acts of meaning and not illustrative pieces devised to demonstrate specific grammatical points.

Increasingly, it has become important that learners be exposed to naturally occurring spoken data that should be from a variety of sources such that the data is representative of typical conversational interaction. Although difficult to obtain, the emphasis should be on informal speech genres rather than on
more formal varieties (Carter 1997, Basturkmen 2001). The task of the language teachers is therefore to expose learners to this type of naturally occurring spoken language data. The goal of such an endeavour would be to raise the consciousness of learners by exposing them to salient features of conversation.

C-R is also related to learning through interaction as advanced by Hatch (1987). This relation is explained by the fact that a number of studies of learners have shown that the comprehension of and the participation in discourse involves the constant generation and checking of hypotheses.

In second language learning, the basic assumptions have been that: learners learn to manipulate structures, they gradually build up a repertoire of these structures and they learn how to put the structures to use in discourse. Hatch argues that the reverse is what happens. One learns how to do conversation, to interact verbally and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed. Therefore, if one is to raise the consciousness of learners the learners need to be able to talk about a number of social topics. They should practise predicting and asking questions relevant to given topics. Learners should also be taught ways of getting topic clarification and practise ways of eliciting repetition. These are all activities that learners can be engaged in no matter what the content of the lesson is if they are considered important enough by the teacher.
Chapter 3

3.0 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research design is outlined. Data elicitation methods are also discussed. The methodology used relied heavily on the principles of obtaining natural spontaneous data during the interaction between teachers and learners during the English language lessons in three secondary schools in Thika district. The corpus of data comprised the observations made during the language lessons.

3.2 Study population

This study was carried out in three secondary schools in Thika district of Central province in Kenya. The population for this study consisted of six form two classes from the three schools. The form two classes were preferable since this is when K.N.E.C. (2001) syllabus recommends that learners be involved in activities to develop their speaking skills.

3.3 Sampling procedures

The schools were chosen randomly from three categories of schools namely a national school, a provincial school and a district school. This formed a representative sample of the public schools available in Kenya. The choice of public schools was to control for extraneous variables such as economic factors.
and variability in teacher training that might affect learners' performance. For the purposes of this research, the population consisted of two form two classes chosen randomly in each school selected. Such a sample is sufficient since as van Lier (1988:19) observes, classroom research is context based with each classroom being a unique context. Owing to this uniqueness, generalizations of results of such studies should not be a primary aim.

3.4 Data collection

The researcher collected data by conducting a classroom interaction study. The participant observation method was used to observe the six selected form two classes for two weeks each. The first week was for familiarisation of the researcher to the learners and the teachers while the second week consisted of the actual data collection. Therefore, the two teachers from each school were observed for six lessons, which are the stipulated teaching sessions for English in the form two classes.

The result was a total of thirty-six observation sessions. Generally these sessions provided an opportunity to observe the strategies that teachers employed while teaching the English language. Specifically, the study aimed at observing the methods teachers employed that encouraged their learners to speak, the learning activities they involved their learners in and how they assessed the development of the speaking skills of their learners.
3.5 Data elicitation methods

Various data elicitation methods were used including observation notes, an observation schedule and a teaching inventory. Notes were taken during observation in order to integrate those events that preceded or occurred together with the teaching sessions. For instance, the assessment strategies used were recorded by use of notes. Stubbs (1986) successfully used the same method to get conversational data from an Edinburgh school. He notes that field notes help in capturing all the relevant details.

An observation schedule was utilised to investigate the nature of teaching methods and the learning activities. This was adapted from Allen et al. (1984) who used the schedule to investigate the practice of grammar teaching among teachers. The observation schedule was found useful for this study since it provided the relevant categories for investigation of the teaching of the English spoken language. The recording system allowed the observer to code a particular aspect every time it occurred. In addition, the observation schedule was used to identify the type of activity and skill the teacher focused on (see appendix I). The teachers filled in a teaching inventory after the week's observation sessions. The teachers were required to rate various activities depending on how frequently they had used them in the classroom. This formed a basis for comparison between what teachers said they had done in the classroom and the actual practice as observed during classroom interaction (cf. appendix II).
Chapter 4

4.0 Presentation and Discussion of Data

4.1 Introduction

The study mainly adopted a qualitative and quantitative approach to data analysis. The descriptive and numerical data was generated from the analyses of scores obtained from the observation notes and schedules and the teaching inventories. The results of the analysed data are then presented and discussed.

The objective of the analysis was to generate a detailed record of the classroom interaction between teachers and learners. This was with a view to identifying the teaching methods employed, the learning activities utilised, and the assessment strategies applied.

The results were discussed in relation to the relative learner centeredness of the teaching methods. Learning activities were assessed for how much they influenced learner talk. The type of assessment strategies teachers employed while teaching the spoken language were evaluated for how much they assisted learners as far as the development of speaking skills is concerned.

The total frequency scores of each of the categories in all the lessons were obtained and the percentages of the occurrences worked out. The percentage of occurrence was calculated dependent on the number of times a category
occurred divided by the number of the lessons observed multiplied by a hundred. For example, if a certain category such as a learning activity was used sixteen times by all the teachers, this was coded as the frequency. The percentage of occurrence was calculated in the following way:

\[
\frac{16}{36} \times 100\% = 44\%
\]

This information was then tabulated and also represented diagrammatically where possible.

4.2 Teaching Methods

The teaching methods used during the observed sessions were put into the following broad categories.

- **Narration**: the teacher tells a fictional or factual story so as to put a teaching point across.
- **Explanation**: the teacher gives information, expresses her own opinion or ideas.
- **Discussion**: the teacher gives information while also allowing for learners' contribution.
- **Questioning**: the teacher uses a variety of questions to prompt learners to express themselves.
- **Group and pair work**: learners are involved in a task that requires them to work in groups or pairs.
- **Facilitator of communicative process**: the teacher initiates a communicative process that is learner-centred while maintaining a low profile.
Table 4.2.1 shows the frequency of occurrence of each of the methods used in the thirty-six (36) lessons observed. This is also illustrated in Figure 4.2.1.

**Table 4.2.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group/Pair Work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of occurrence of the teaching methods*

**Teaching Methods**

*Figure 4.2.1*
To a large extent, the teaching methods were determined by the focus of the content of the particular language lesson. For instance, all the teachers observed relied heavily on the *Integrated English* course book two (K.I.E 1989). Consequently, most of the lessons observed were determined by what unit is recommended by the text for a week’s activities. This is illustrated in Table 4.2.2

**Table 4.2.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 a</td>
<td>Grammar Word order</td>
<td>Grammar Negative expressions</td>
<td>Study skills Ordering points</td>
<td>Oral literature songs</td>
<td>Speech work Short debates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 b</td>
<td>Grammar Word order</td>
<td>Grammar Negative expressions</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Oral literature songs</td>
<td>Writing Short reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 a</td>
<td>Oral Literature songs</td>
<td>Speech work Short debates</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Grammar Transitive and intransitive verbs</td>
<td>Study skills Faster reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 b</td>
<td>Study skills Faster reading</td>
<td>Speech work Telephone Conversation</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Grammar Transitive and intransitive verbs</td>
<td>Short class plays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 a</td>
<td>Writing Short reports</td>
<td>Speech work Short debates</td>
<td>Class reader</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Grammar Question tags</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 b</td>
<td>Writing Short reports</td>
<td>Speech work Pronunciation</td>
<td>Speech work Faster reading</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Grammar Question tags</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Distribution of lessons during observation period*
Therefore, in a week a teacher had an equal chance of teaching speech work, study skills, comprehension, grammar and writing. Other lessons could be used for oral literature, poetry and class readers. The use of the textbook in most of the lessons meant that other resources such as authentic materials such as recorded extracts of actual conversations or use of newspapers to generate discussions were not utilised. This practice is in contrast to those methods proposed by proponents of Consciousness Raising. They suggest that learners have to be made aware of the intricacies of conversation by bringing them to the attention of the learners so as to raise their consciousness (Rutherford 1987, Willis and Willis 1996).

In addition, the use of authentic materials and audiovisual materials leaves most of the learning in the hands of the learners as opposed to the scenario where the teacher is always the one in control. In the present study, for the whole period of observation none of the teachers made use of either authentic materials or audiovisual materials in the classroom.

4.3 The teaching methods and their contribution to the development of speaking skills

The data presented in Table 4.2.1 shows that most teachers used the explanation method whose percentage of occurrence was 47% to conduct their lessons. This was the case especially when the focus was on grammar and writing. This inevitably meant that teachers spent most of the time giving information and expressing their own opinion. It also demonstrates that
teachers preferred being in control of the interaction that goes on in the classroom indicating that they take the more traditional role of an instructor.

There are certainly advantages to such an approach such as covering content more rapidly and efficiently. Furthermore, there are definitely times when it would be beneficial for the teacher to clarify certain points. This is especially so during grammar lessons when points have to be explained and made clear. However, overuse of the method means that the learners become passive participants who contribute very little to the learning process. In most of the lessons it is the teachers who did most of the talking. Eventually when the learners spoke, it was usually to answer questions whose responses were mostly restricted to one-word answers. It is therefore apparent that for most teachers, what were important were the dissemination of information and explanation and not so much the participation of the learners.

There was also the use of discussion with a percentage of occurrence of 36%. In these lessons teachers sought to involve the learners in their expositions. These discussions were triggered mostly by use of thought provoking questions. For instance, during comprehension lessons there was use of the following questions:

What would you do if you were in the place of the girl in the passage?
Do you think parents should choose marriage partners for their children?
The discussions however seemed unplanned since it was extremely difficult to tell exactly who was talking at a particular time. The majority of the discussions were where learners responded in general as the whole class. This situation encouraged use of chorus answers and where the teacher insisted on one learner speaking, in most of the cases it is only the talkative students who participated while the majority of the learners remained passive.

According to Klippel (1984:9), there are a various procedures for handling classroom discussions. For instance, where the text is topical the teacher could use buzz groups when a problem is discussed in small groups for a few minutes before the solutions or views are reported to the whole class. The teacher may even decide to make sure that all the members of the class or group give their views in the discussion. This is made possible by distributing numbers that determine the order of speaking. When learners are not accorded with the chance to participate in as many discussions as possible then it is quite questionable whether they are getting the maximum chance to learn the language, which occurs mainly through the moves of conversation (Cook 1991).

Questioning, whose percentage of occurrence was 33%, was also another widely used method. Teachers mostly used the method to check understanding. According to Nolasco (1988) it is a method that can be used to keep all the learners awake and busy by rapid probing. The selection of learners during
such questioning should appear to be completely random to help keep everyone on their toes and to make sure the whole classroom is covered.

In most of the classrooms observed, teachers asked questions and most of the responses were from learners who occupied the front seats. The learners at the back of the class were to a large extent passive. On a few occasions they looked bored and ignored. Questioning also demands that questions are asked before appointing a learner to answer so that everyone listens to the question in case they are asked to answer (Nolasco 1988). Yet, most teachers seemed to prefer appointing certain students before asking the questions. To maintain brisk questioning it is often useful to script the questions at the lesson planning stage. This saves the teacher from searching for ideas on the spot and leaves her free to concentrate on what the learners are doing and how they are responding.

For most teachers the questioning seemed unplanned and was used mostly to check if the learners were following the content of the lesson. Consequently, only a few learners were asked questions and rarely were the questions directed to the whole class. In addition, the teachers sometimes asked questions but seemed to be more interested in the form than in the content of what the learner said. Essentially then, teachers asked display questions that the learners knew the teacher could answer and not questions that demanded genuine information. Yet, communication in daily life follows the principle of
information and opinion gap where one passes information or conveys an opinion that the receiver might be interested in (Wright et al 1983).

However, all the teachers used questioning rather frequently to prompt responses from the learners. This is an observation that confirms the assumptions of this study that teachers would use the method to elicit responses from the learners.

Teachers were observed to use group work with a percentage of occurrence of 14% especially when the learners were required to complete a task and it was deemed necessary to have the help of the other learners. For example, in one of the lessons learners worked in groups to come up with a short report of the group’s activities from a choice of topics in the textbook. However, the learners were not required to report to the rest of the class about their activities. The only requirement was that the learners hand in their books not as individuals but in groups. There were no time limits set and the only purpose set out seemed to be to write a report that would later be marked by the teacher. When pair work was used it was mostly to make learners read dialogues found in the textbooks.

There are various advantages of group and pair activities as a way of centering class attention on learners (Keller 1987). For example, the teacher is left free to help those who need extra attention, the learners get constant rather than occasional practice, shy learners are encouraged to participate more and
learners feel more comfortable asking questions as they sense that the instructor is more available. Activities designed to be performed in small groups or pairs to make the communication as natural as possible. Small-group work activities also ensure that each learner will have the greatest opportunity for participation. The present study agrees with Klippel (1984:6) who observes that it is apparent that ‘the atmosphere within a class or group can largely be determined by the teacher, who quite often without being aware of it sets the tone by choosing certain types of exercises and topics’.

The teachers observed in this study did not utilise group work and pair work to the full. It is very possible for the teacher to use the methods not only to provide an opportunity to use the language but also assess the speaking skills of the learners. Teachers should construct these activities in such a way that they promote communication and yet ensure that the new language occurs unprompted, naturally and frequently in the context of other previously learnt language.

Only one teacher who used the opportunity to set the pace for an oral literature lesson used narration whose percentage of occurrence was 3%. Learners followed the lead and also told their own stories. This lesson illustrated clearly that when learners are provided with the opportunity they are certainly eager to express their ideas and opinions. Furthermore, such lessons as Brown and Yule (1983) observe give the learners an opportunity to practise transactional language where they have to transfer information effectively and clearly.
In addition, there were instances when the teachers preferred to take a back seat and let the learners take the lead. This was the case when teachers acted as facilitators of a communicative process with a percentage of occurrence of 14%. This was clearly shown during debating sessions where the teachers only chipped in when there were glaring mistakes in the use of the language but otherwise they let the learners do most of the talking and controlling of the pace of the lesson. These lessons could be cited as instances where the teachers let the learners replicate the communication process as advocated by the communicative principle (Johnson 1982).

In the present study then it can be concluded that the teachers utilised more teacher centred methods than learner centred methods. This is especially so because learners are hardly involved in meaningful varied use of the language (Johnson 1982).

4.4 Learning activities

The learning activities observed were placed into the following categories.

**Speech drills** learners are led into practising a patterned drill of certain sounds.

**Dialogue** learners are encouraged to carry out a dialogue that may be read, memorised or created by the learners.

**Debate** learners are required to propose and oppose a given motion.

**Interviews** learners are asked to carry out an interview in front of the other learners.
Speeches learners are required to make speeches that may be impromptu or prepared.

Note taking/making the learners take down notes as the teacher dictates or make notes as the teacher explains.

Song learners are engaged in a song to pass across a teaching point.

Language game learners are involved in a language game that encourages learner-to-learner interaction.

Role playing learners imagine themselves in situations outside the classroom.

Simulation individual participants speak and react as themselves.

Table 4.4.1 outlines some of the learning activities utilised in the thirty-six lessons observed. This is also shown in Figure 4.4.1.

Table 4.4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning activities</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of occurrence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note Taking/Making</td>
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<td>Dialogue</td>
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<td>Debate</td>
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<td>Language Games</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
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</table>

Frequency and the percentage of occurrence of learning activities.
4.5 Learning activities and their bearing on speaking skills

When commenting on management of lesson time and space, Nolasco (1988) states that to avoid boredom the teacher should plan frequent changes of focus or activity within a lesson. However, most teachers seemed to be content to keep the learners busy by either instructing them to make notes as the teacher explained or taking notes down as they were dictated. For instance, all the teachers were observed to make use of note making and taking at a percentage of occurrence of 17%. Moreover, time limits should be allocated for each activity to avoid the temptation of allowing activities to drag on until the
learners are bored. In most lessons learners were observed to be making notes even for an entire lesson.

On the contrary, if the activities are task-oriented the learners focus their attention on a task rather than on language (Johnson 1982). This allows for more natural, self-conscious communication and keeps motivation and interest high, since learners know they must complete the task within a certain amount of time.

Klippel (1984) states that by applying the principles of information gap and opinion gap to suitable traditional exercises the teacher can change them into more challenging communicative situations. Information-gap exercises force the participants to exchange information in order to find a solution. In this study, teachers were not found to utilise such activities.

Opinion gaps are created by exercises incorporating controversial texts or ideas, which require the participants to describe or perhaps defend their views on these ideas. Activities that could be described as such were the debating sessions. Although after the main speakers had been selected the debate went on while the majority of the learners remained largely quiet.

Teachers were also observed to involve their learners in debating sessions, which had a percentage of occurrence of 8%. In three schools the teachers asked the learners to have a debate. In two of these schools the learners were
consulted on the topics they would like to debate on. Consequently, the learners were enthusiastic and eager to participate in the debating sessions. However, in another school the learners were only required to pick a motion in the textbook. As a result, during the debating session the learners showed less spontaneity and indeed some of them literally just picked points from the textbook without even bothering to expound on them. This only demonstrates that opinion-gap activities have to have some content worth talking about. Learners do not want to discuss what is not of importance to them (Rivers 1983).

Learning activities are supposed to be designed to give students the opportunity to practise their speaking skills and develop fluency in English. Although some of the lessons are meant for teaching specific grammar structures, in general the lessons should be intended to promote fluency and improve communication skills.

When it came to the use of dialogues with a percentage of occurrence of 11%, in many cases, the learners were required to fill in blanks to complete dialogues. Such dialogues demand very little intellectually from learners and are to a large extent unchallenging. Only one teacher asked her learners to construct a short dialogue of their own. Most dialogues were used to provide learners with reading practice. However, during oral literature lessons the learners were given an opportunity to tell stories and in another instance to sing traditional songs.
Learners were also involved in role-playing at a percentage of occurrence of 6% exemplified by the lesson where the teacher had instructed the learners in their small groups to prepare short skits in advance of the lesson. The result was that all the learners had to participate in one way or the other during the role-playing activity. Most interesting was that the learners identified the errors that had been made by the actors during the performances. This accounted for a lot of interaction among the learners during that particular language lesson. Furthermore, this was an example of one lesson where the teacher decided not to use the textbook.

Conversely, during another lesson where there was role-playing, the learners were required to act out a memorised dialogue from the textbook to practise use of certain sounds. This lesson was a follow up to a lesson where the learners were involved in a speech drill that was repeated chorally after the teacher. Subsequently, there was certainly less spontaneity since all the learners had to act the same extract with very little input or ingenuity from the learners.

Problem-solving activities help learners develop skills in negotiation, reducing miscommunications and using various levels of directness and indirectness that are impossible to teach in more formal ways (Klippel 1984). Even so, most teachers were not observed to involve their learners in such activities.

One teacher encouraged her learners to participate in singing. This was during an oral literature lesson. Only one teacher was involved in leading learners
through a speech drill. The activity involved the learners articulating certain sounds after the teacher therefore it was difficult to tell how much the learners had gained. Drills make a minimal contribution to the development of speaking skills of learners as outlined by Mathew (1985) and McCarthy (1978).

However, there were other learning activities that were not used at all though recommended by the syllabus as proposed in the background to the study. For instance, interviews, speeches, language games and simulations were not used in the language classrooms during the observation period. It was also apparent that the teachers did not involve the learners in activities where they were required to assemble an apparatus as proposed by Brown and Yule (1983b). Certainly it is such activities that give learners practice in using long transactional turns.

The need to communicate in simulations as described in section 2.4 by Jones (1982) is inherent in the activity; it is not a teacher-directed need. The participants do not communicate in order to please the controller, or in order to learn language skills but because of the duties inherent in their functions. He adds that not only does talk generate talk within the simulation, but a good deal of the learning may occur afterwards through reflection and discussion. Participants remember vividly what they tried to communicate, how they tried to do it and what happened as a result. The vividness of such memories is highly beneficial for language learning.
The meaningfulness principle (as shown in section 2.7.2) is realised in language games since as Wright (1983) observes learners respond to the content in a definitive way. If the learners are amused, angered, challenged intrigued or surprised the content is clearly meaningful to them. Therefore, the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and thus better remembered.

4.6 Assessment of speaking skills

Assessment of speaking skills as outlined by Underhill (1987) could be carried out over a particular period of time or could be based on formal or performance criteria. The various learning activities as observed by Ur (1996) could also be used as opportunities to assess the speaking skills of the learners.

Assessment over time

Assessment could be on the spot over a specific period of time (such as in a week’s time) or over a long period of time (many weeks or months).

Formal criteria

Assessment of the formal type concentrates on the language produced reflecting the view that the accurate command of language is an end in itself irrespective of who is talking to whom and why. For instance, the focus could be on:
Grammar  the teacher concentrates on rules for forming words and combining them into sentences

Vocabulary  focus is on words and their meaning

Pronunciation  teacher concentrates on articulation of speech sounds.

Intonation  teacher concentrates on the rise and fall of the pitch of the voice.

Stress  concerns the extra force used in articulating a particular word or syllable

Performance criteria

This type of assessment requires consideration of the speaker and the context as well as the correctness of what is said. This covers aspects of the speaker's performance such as:

Audibility  learners are loud enough so as to be heard by others.

Clarity  learners are clear in their expression.

Intelligibility  learners express themselves in a way that can be understood.

Accuracy  concern is with if the learners are using correct English

Fluency  interest is with if the appropriate style or register has been used

Table 4.6.1 shows the assessment strategies utilized
Table 4.6.1

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<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>On the spot</td>
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<td>At a specific time</td>
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<td>Grammar</td>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
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<td>Pronunciation</td>
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<td>Intonation</td>
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<td>Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intelligibility</td>
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Percentage of occurrence of assessment strategies

4.7 Assessing the speaking skills of learners and their relevance to the advancement of speaking skills

The observer found the issue of assessment of speaking skills complicated since assessment implies that there has to be a certain type of an objective rating scale (for example the one described by Ur 1996 in chapter 2). In this study the teachers used no rating scale. Nevertheless, any occurrence of assessment even though not rated was still coded.

Assessment of speaking skills mostly occurred during classroom interaction as the need arose. There were 17% of occurrences where teachers were found to
assess their learners on the spot. There were no indications that teachers carried out assessment over a specific period or over a long period of time. This could be attributed to the fact that they are not aware of oral testing techniques.

The formal type of assessment was mostly when the teachers were concerned with grammatical errors accounting for 11% of the occurrences. Certain teachers were also observed to insist that their learners use the correct grammatical expressions. For instance, in one particular grammar lesson, learners were required to invert sentences that had been written on the chalkboard.

Sentence  On my way to school I passed her.
Answer   Her I passed on my way to school.
Teacher  Does that sound correct?

The teacher does not accept the learner’s response, as it is deemed not grammatical. In some instances, in 8% of the occurrences, teachers insisted on the correct pronunciation especially during the reading focussed lessons.

There was one teacher who was observed to urge one learner to use the correct intonation when asking questions. However, the learner in question did not seem to get the message and still used the incorrect intonation. Yet another teacher instructed a learner to use the correct intonation while reading but did not provide any demonstration of what the correct form might be.
Teachers used the chance during classroom interaction to assess audibility whose percentage of occurrence was 17% by insisting that learners be loud enough so that other learners could hear them. One teacher was observed to assess fluency of one of the learners when she tried to assist one of the learners not to hesitate too much while reading. Other teachers 6% were concerned with whether the learners were using the appropriate language In one lesson where learners were supposed to come up with a dialogue, the teacher asked the learners if the way the head master had been addressed by some of the learners was appropriate. Other aspects such as clarity and intelligibility were not assessed during the observation period.

It is apparent that assessment of speaking skills is not an activity that the teachers use explicitly as had been assumed at the onset of this study. This is a situation that is understandable since teachers would naturally teach and concentrate on what is examinable. The examinable content includes grammar and writing activities. However, this is a situation that raises questions about the quality of the language instruction being offered.

The study also revealed that to a large extent teachers are hampered in their efforts to teach the spoken language by the sizes of the classes, which were large with thirty or more students. The teaching inventories revealed that most of the teachers were reluctant to portray the actual teaching practice because they probably did not want to be seen in a bad light.
Chapter 5

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The following section highlights the major findings and the conclusions regarding the relevance of teaching methods, learning activities and assessment strategies for speaking skills. Various recommendations are made regarding the appropriate practice and areas for further research are also suggested.

5.2 Findings and conclusions

An overview of the study reveals that to a large extent, the assumptions of the study were confirmed. To start with, the teaching methods used during the observation period can be described as being teacher centred. This is because except for the instances when the teachers let the learners take a lead in the debating and oral literature sessions most lessons were teacher controlled.

This scenario seems to be exacerbated by the over-reliance of the use of the textbook as the main teaching resource even where authentic materials would be more appropriate. The textbook is supposed to be used as a teaching resource to aid the teacher go through the content recommended by the syllabus. However, the drawback is that in case the course book does not cover an aspect stipulated in the syllabus it will be missed out altogether. Preferably, the teachers should cover as much content as possible from a wide variety of
sources. This is even more important as far as speaking skills are concerned where it is not only pronunciation that is important. Learners have to be provided with an opportunity to practise use of long and short transactional turns.

In all the language lessons the teachers were observed to involve their learners in note making and taking as one of the most widely used learning activities. Such activities certainly do not promote an atmosphere where speaking skills can be cultivated. Therefore, learners' participation was certainly hampered in some instances especially where the learning activities did not require the learners to participate in any useful or meaningful language use such as the ones cited in chapter 2.

As far as the assessment strategies are concerned, it was apparent that the teachers carried out this activity but on a very small scale. This meant that the teachers had limited access to information concerning the development of speaking skills. This translates to the fact that the teachers are not overly concerned with the assessment of speaking skills because they are not examinable at the end of the language course.

On the whole, the teachers also seemed to face the limitations faced by teachers in large classes (Byrne 1986:1). These include the size of most of the classrooms. For example, in the national and provincial schools all the classes had more than forty students. This posed difficulties for most teachers since
they had many lessons to handle (some up to 28 lessons), which definitely hampers effective teaching. In addition, the arrangement of the classrooms was in rows in all the schools. This is an arrangement that rarely favours communication. This was apparent in all the classes observed since the teachers were mostly at the front where they could be seen and heard by all the learners. On the other hand, learners were rarely asked to move into groups because that might apparently cause a lot of disruption. Furthermore, when learners are so many and teachers so few assessment of speaking skills becomes difficult because of the difficulty of testing so many learners.

5.3 Recommendations

Clearly, teachers have to provide for many and varied opportunities for practice in meaning focused communication. This would ensure that learners have the simultaneous development of the language system and the automaticity required for authentic communication. The aim of such an approach according to Amodeo (2000) is to enhance the learners’ ability to produce speech in authentic communication with improved accuracy.

Teachers should be encouraged to find more creative ways for language teaching where there is less reliance on core textbooks and an emphasis on more authentic materials. There is also need to centre teaching and learning activities on the learners to ensure efficient and effective learning.
There is also need for a shift in focus in the syllabus where teachers understand the importance of the spoken language in enabling learners to learn the language as a whole. This is possible if the education system values the spoken language to the extent that the oral component is re-introduced in the examinations.

As cited earlier, the field of applied linguistics has provided a broadened multicomponential view of communicative abilities as a dynamic interaction between the speaker, the situation and the discourse, also known as communicative competence (Amodeo 2000). It is therefore imperative that teachers are informed on what is required to be tested. Moreover, they must be trained on the appropriate scoring methods according to very explicit criteria to ensure effective assessment of the speaking skills. Clearly, the future development and use of valid and reliable scoring methods of oral language abilities is dependent upon teachers' access to this type of informed knowledge.

5.4 Areas for further research

The findings suggest a need for a change in focus in teacher training programmes and in in-service programmes. Consequently, there is a call for a survey of the needs, wants and problems of language teacher training programmes in Kenya in relation to the teaching of speaking skills.
An analysis of the course book currently used in secondary schools in language teaching in the light of the principles of communicative language teaching as a rationale for the preparation of supplementary teaching materials would certainly make a great contribution to the field of applied linguistics.

A related study would involve a survey of teachers' opinions about the *Integrated English* book series and their basic understanding of the communicative approach. A fascinating research would also be to have a survey of problems and practices of teaching spoken English in large classes.

This study undertook to identify and evaluate the learning activities used in language classrooms. Further research is required in studying the effect of negotiation of learning activities in the English language class on learners' motivation to learn English.

There were several learning activities that did not seem to be utilised. However it would be interesting to study the effect of activities such as simulation, language games and role play on learners' attitudes, achievement and self-confidence in speaking English.

The findings also suggest a need for second language testing researchers to conduct comprehensive studies to examine relevant components for the purpose of developing appropriate test elicitation and scoring methods.
Bibliography


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To whom Learning activities focus Teaching Medium Teaching Act

TEACHER (1a) – Mang’u High, 2E

Appendix I
| Class size | Drill | Dialogue | Debate | Interviews | Speeches | Free communication | Oral Literature | Song | Game | Simulation | Role Playing | Listen | Speak | Write | Text | Audio Visual | Authentic Materials | Poem | Narrate | Explain | Discuss | Compare | Answer | Question |

**Observation Unit (Lesson)**

**To whom**

**Learning activities**

**Skill Focus**

**Teaching Medium**

**Teaching Act**
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TEACHER (3b) – Ruia Girls, 2E
Appendix II

Teaching Inventories

Name

80

Appendix

Teaching Inventories

This is an inventory that asks how many times you used a given teaching practice in a particular class in a given week. Please rate each of the following statements according to the given key.

0 = Never  this is something I did not do in this particular class this week.

1 = Infrequently  this is something that I did once this week in class.

2 = Sometimes  this is something I did two or three times a week in this class.

3 = Regularly  this is something I did four or five times this week in class.

In presenting my teaching points in the English lessons I:

0  1.  Presented the teaching point orally and with visual aids.

1  2.  Conducted oral drills on the teaching point.

2  3.  Asked students to pronounce sounds correctly.

0  4.  Drew the teaching point from dialogues that the students had
memorized.

2 5. Relied on gesture and mime to present the teaching point.

1 6. Assisted the students in participating in a free conversation.

1 7. Consulted the learners on the activities to be involved in.

2 8. Chose activities that were interesting and enjoyable.

3 9. Gave the learners learning activities to complete a task.

1 10. Used group work and/or pair work activities that required learner-to-learner interaction.

2 11. Made learners simulate situations outside the classroom.

0 12. Asked learners to give instructions on how to assemble an apparatus.

3 13. Assessed the speaking skills of learners.

0 14. Used language games in the classroom.

1 15. Required the learners to participate in a formal conversation.
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5. Relied on gesture and mime to present the teaching point.
6. Assisted the students in participating in a free conversation.
7. Consulted the learners on the activities to be involved in.
8. Chose activities that were interesting and enjoyable.

9. Gave the learners learning activities to complete a task.

10. Used group work and/or pair work activities that required learner-to-learner interaction.

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7. Consulted the learners on the activities to be involved in.
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Made learners simulate situations outside the classroom.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Asked learners to give instructions on how to assemble an apparatus.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Assessed the speaking skills of learners.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Used language games in the classroom.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Required the learners to participate in a formal conversation.</td>
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