Creating and Sharing Open Educational Resources Through Action Research in a Challenging Context

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Abstract

Proverbs are expressions of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals, experiences, lessons, and advice concerning life and which have been handed down from generation to generation. Proverbs were used since the Middle Age as pedagogical tools in the study of language with the aim to enhance educational outcomes. With increased access to variety of technologies, teaching and learning has to be reformed to be in tandem with the times. Integration of videos in teaching Kiswahili proverbs was deemed by the author as an attractive teaching strategy because it is interactive therefore likely to provide great enthusiasm and motivation to students. My presentation will focus on how videos were integrated in teaching Kiswahili proverbs in a school in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya, with particular emphasis on bringing the context of the proverbs taught to class, to remove abstractness and replace it with a near representation of real objects and situations. This was a participatory action research involving one teacher and Form Two students in one secondary school. Data was collected through multiple methods that included document analysis, interviews, classroom observations, reflection, informal conversations and focus group discussion. Data collection and analysis were concurrently done since the findings of an earlier cycle had to inform a later one. Findings from the study suggest that when videos are used to bring real contexts of proverbs to class, they ease learners' understanding and are motivating because they appeal to the learners, audio, visual and kinaesthetic senses. The learners during a post-intervention focus group discussion suggested that videos attracted their concentration in the lessons because of its audio-visual nature that enabled them to engage more than one sense organ. As a practical contribution of this study, a selection of the videos of contexts in which proverbs exist were shared as Open Educational Resources (OERs) and can be found in http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmWuGFlr4vQ so that others from challenging educational contexts may have access. The author also took a commitment to develop more videos for sharing as OERs as a further contribution to improved teaching and learning.

Keywords: Teaching, Kiswahili, Proverbs, Videos

Introduction

Proverbs are expressions of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals, experiences, lessons, and advice concerning life and which have been handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 2004) fulfilling the needs of man to summarize experiences and observations into collections of wisdom packaged and stored for use in private relationships and public affairs. They are as old as man and as current as any imaginable modern-day context with its contradictions. Though proverbs do not stand for logical philosophical systems, a correct choice of a proverb for a particular situation is bound to fit perfectly and to communicate efficiently. Just as proverbs have been passed on for generations, they have been studied from classical times to modern day and are used to speak in friendly conversations, political talk, spiritual sermons, emotional poetry, best seller novels and the mass media.

By using videos to teach Kiswahili proverbs, the author wanted learning to be interactive and increase learner involvement. A research by Macaro (2005) indicates that videos provide visual context: an environment, background and settings within which objects and associated behavior are observed visually exposing learners to a variety of authentic materials as well as clarifying some cultural content. Further, research demonstrates that videos have advantages over audio aids particularly if they have

captions. This is because the words and pictures presented to the learner via a multi-media presentation enter the sensory memory through the ears and eyes and are processed along two separate, non-conflicting channels (Mayer, Heiser, & Lonn, 2001).

With increased access to a variety of technologies, teaching and learning has to be reformed to be in tandem with the times. There are many methods of teaching language but I tried videos – which are audio-lingual – to find out their appropriateness in providing great enthusiasm and motivation in learning (Mukalel, 2003). This is because 'what we learnt with has changed, how we learnt has changed' so teachers should use digital tools to create content and bring the world near.

Technologies and teaching/learning proverbs

The use of technology is commonly associated to teaching Science and Mathematics in Kenyan secondary schools (Bangura, 2011). It is common to find that teachers of Science and Mathematics are the ones in charge of computer laboratories or are the ones attending training sessions about integration of Information and Communication Technology in teaching. The benefits associated with use of the technology in teaching should accrue to Kiswahili language teaching as well. Integration of videos in teaching Kiswahili proverbs was deemed by the author as an attractive teaching strategy because it is interactive therefore likely to provide ease of understanding to the learners.

Ambuko and Odera (2013) in a study on 'the use of media in teaching Kiswahili language' carried out in Emuhaya district, Kenya showed that there was inadequate provision of instructional media for teaching Kiswahili in schools from which teachers could select. Their study also revealed a low frequency use by teachers of the few available instructional media during Kiswahili teaching. The study recommended an increase in the selection and use of media in teaching and learning Kiswahili. It also suggested the establishment of a regional instructional centre and formation of a body called 'KIVIKI' (Kituo cha Vifaa Vya Kiswahili) which would plan, produce, avail and evaluate Kiswahili Instructional Media, and lastly it recommended a model from which decisions on media selection and use by teachers could be based. Therefore, by preparing videos and availing them freely for reuse, is a positive contribution in line with the foregoing recommendations and in accordance with the current technological innovations in teaching and learning.

Nsookwa (2011) carried out a study on the 'metaphorical implications between Kiswahili and Luganda Proverbs'. He was motivated by the feeling that despite the fact that many Kiswahili and Luganda writers have listed and classified proverbs according to specific contexts, they did not critically review these proverbs' choice, work and character of symbols manifested by these proverbs. This study was guided by the social structure theory, founded on family, marriage language and economic activities and the theory of intercultural translation. This theory states that in order that effective translation between two cultures is done, the translator has to go deep to every culture for the sake of recognizing differences and similarities of those cultures so as to enable corroboration between two cultures or more (Honeck, 2013). The study used comparative ethnography, a random sample of 200 proverbs, 100 from each proverb language and 50 native speakers from either language. The study found that in both languages, the metaphorical implication of Kiswahili and Luganda proverbs was similar. Used under similar circumstances, the meaning of the proverb from either language is the same and can be used in both cultures. This study recommended a translation of proverbs from either language with the knowledge that what is written in Kiswahili or Luganda belongs to that language. Similarly, the use of videos is a step towards understanding the context of where the proverb originated.

Audio-lingual, that which can be heard and seen, according to Mukalel (2005), is the direct relation between language and experience with the aim of teaching language to achieve development of communicative skills. Experience is that which is filtered through the senses and the mind while language is packaging it in vocabulary and grammar (Wright, 1992). Audio-lingual method uses among other methods demonstration, verbal illustrations and pictorial illustrations. Audio-lingual method advocates for the introduction of the cultural background of a language (Mukalel, 2003), in this case of a proverb to those learning it. The audio-lingual aids recommended and developed by the pioneers of the audio-lingual

method of language teaching have been used to help in the classroom by bringing the latest technology into the area of language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000)

The use of videos, among other programmed instructions, marks the technological advancement of contemporary education as a whole (Onguko, 2012), and language teaching in particular thus laying the foundations for application of technology to the teaching of language. Despite some attempts to change teachers' practice, the problem of abstractness of some Kiswahili proverbs when they are taught still persists. I set out in this research, to explore if videos might be a good way to address the way Kiswahili proverbs are taught.

Action Research Process

This presentation will focus on how videos were integrated in teaching Kiswahili proverbs in a secondary school in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya, with particular emphasis on bringing the context of the proverbs taught to class, to remove abstractness and replace it with a near representation of real objects and situations.
This was a participatory action research involving one teacher and students in a form two class. I adopted a spiral action research model that shows four important steps: plan, act and observe, reflect then move on to a revised plan (E. Koshy, Koshy, & Waterman, 2010), as indicated in Figure 1.

In the first cycle, I began by exploring the existing practices in teaching Kiswahili proverbs by analyzing curriculum documents (syllabus, schemes of work, lesson plan and course book), interviewing the collaborating teacher and later observing her teach Kiswahili proverbs at the reconnaissance stage of my study. I then made video clips that assisted in bringing the context of selected proverbs to class to bring the tripartite appeal to the visual auditory and kinesthetic senses of the learners. Mayer (2005) views a mixture of delivery formats as a way that teachers can use to meet multiple learning styles of their learners. I continuously reflected at pre-intervention, intervention, post-intervention (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) and eventually, I prepared and acted on a revised plan in the second cycle. Through an exit interview and a focus group discussion, I explored the views held by both the collaborating teacher and the Form 2 students about integrating videos in teaching Kiswahili proverbs.
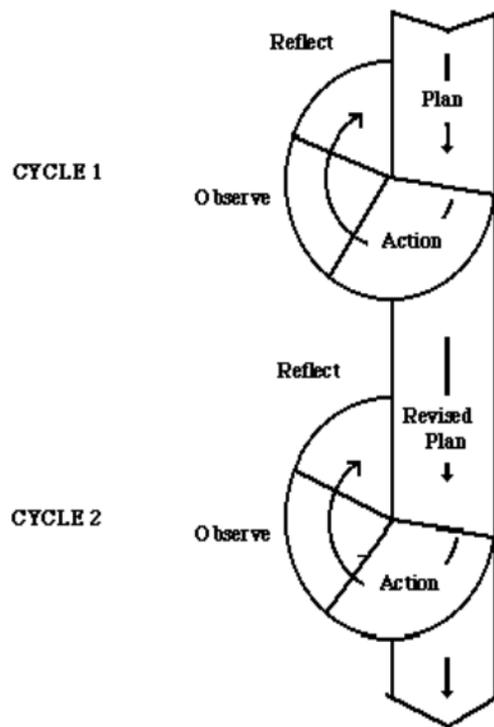
Figure 1 The Action Research Model (Source: E. Koshy et al., 2010)

Sampling and Sample

I selected a pubic secondary school with a Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) projector to accomplish my study. This is because I intended to show learners video clips played using a video player and projected on a screen. Secondly, I selected a public secondary school because majority of learners in Kenya attend public schools (Muema & Muia, 2011) making the study findings appropriate to inform the practice of teachers teaching Kiswahili proverbs.

Data was collected through multiple methods that included document analysis, interviews, classroom observations, reflections, informal conversations and a focus group discussion. Document analysis, observation and an entry one-on-one interview with the teacher was intended to find out how Kiswahili proverbs were taught. Focus group discussion with seven students, and an exit interview, provided participants' perception about the use of videos in teaching Kiswahili proverbs.

Data collection and analysis were concurrently done since the findings of an earlier cycle had to inform a later one. Audio data was transcribed and read together with accompanying field and reflective notes. Emerging patterns of similarity were identified leading to coding by placing like with like using a coding scheme. Open coding was used to bring meaning to information guided by the research question, data and literature.

Methods of Teaching Kiswahili Proverbs

Analysis of the collaborating teachers' professional records and interviews indicated that question and answer technique as well as explanation, were the approaches applied in teaching. During the entry interview the teacher said, "I use question and answer method". When asked how exactly she used question and answer, she said, "I do ask students questions and they answer" (Interview, 08/05/2013). These statements suggest that Halima considered the use of question and answer a fundamental

strategy in teaching Kiswahili proverbs. Further, her statement seems to show that questions were only posed by the teacher and the learners were only expected to answer. As indicated in the teacher's preparation documents and confirmed by the responses during interviews, no media was used in teaching Kiswahili proverbs.

Observation of the teacher in class confirmed that there was no use of instructional media in teaching Kiswahili proverbs. She was using the two techniques but explanations were dominant. When she was informed of the intended intervention, she expressed doubt. She said, "Videos for literature set books yes, but for Kiswahili proverbs? Am not sure" (Interview 08/05/2013).

Intervention

During the intervention, I prepared videos to capture contexts not easily expressed with words alone. I showed the videos to the learners, and then allowed them a brief moment of communication amongst themselves. This gave them a chance to ask and answer one another questions and generate knowledge as suggested by (Englander, 2010). This is in agreement with (Killen, 2006) that questions and answers should not be avenues for the learners to demonstrate knowledge but to allow learners to gain knowledge.

I played, paused and replayed the video as a reaction to feedback and to enhance details. By doing this, I was able to move the class from the constricted environment of the typical paper-and-chalkboard classroom to an interactive environment (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 2007). The learners were able to ask questions and requested for a replay to get better grasp as exemplified by frequent requests: "*Cheza tena mwalimu*" (Kindly replay for us teacher).

Reflections

In the teacher's eyes, a sense of satisfaction was observed when she managed to participate in writing a story board and to later take her class through a video mediated process: preparing, recording and using. The teacher said, "Am happy, and am learning to teach differently, I can write a storyboard, I have prepared a video. That's something! (Reflective notes). Additionally, the teacher appreciated the new way of teaching Kiswahili proverbs: "I did not think I would bring a motion picture to my class to simplify my work, now I know".

Findings from the study suggest that when learners interact during learning with videos that indicate real experiences or contexts, there is increased enthusiasm and motivation and therefore a positive climate for learning. With the objective of using videos in mind, I selected from a variety of settings of contexts of selected Kiswahili proverbs, captured settings and displayed them on the screen. I did this by imagining the things that words alone could not communicate. I took advantage of videos' ability to consolidate phenomenon or setting and realize presentation in time and place convenient to the learners. By using videos, executed activities are recorded and then presented, with the freshness just as they occurred. Videos can be used to tell stories as well as perform tasks that are related to proverbs directly in ways that are appealing to the visual, oral and kinaesthetic senses of the learners (Alexander & McCune, 2012). Reksten (2000) ; Chambers, Conacher, and Littlemore (2004); Chambers (2004) and Gayle et al. (2006) are of the view that accomplishment of this tripartite appeal to the visual, auditory and kinesthetic senses can only be displayed if the learners grasp the meaning of the proverbs much faster than through other methods. This is because images are quick to take in and that they cross language barriers (Mason, 2006) and language register barriers (Jones & D, 2013). We used videos to capture real objects, situations or relevant settings and brought them to class thus helping students to grasp the concept faster and engage more intimately with the lesson.

On this realization the teacher said, "I will use videos to teach topics other than proverbs". This was an indication that she had seen the benefit of using videos to teach she however was categorical about the amount of time necessary for making even one video. She said, "Only needs that you prepare more, for more proverbs, this requires more preparation time and probably the expertise to operate video equipment.This implied that there is awareness for use of videos to teach and the challenge was lack of time.

Sharing of videos

As a practical contribution of this study, selections of the videos of contexts in which proverbs exist were shared as Open Educational Resources (OERs) so that others from challenging educational contexts may have access. The author also took a commitment to develop more videos for sharing as OERs as a further contribution to improved teaching and learning as reflected in the video link below. (http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ukiona+vyaelea+vimeundwa&oq=ukiona+vyaelea+vimeu ndwa&gs_l=youtube.3...4800.21080.0.27570.24.24.0.0.0.0.461.7009.3j4j4j3j10.24.0...0.0...1ac.1.11.youtu be.X272povTap4), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmWuGFlr4vQ. I created other videos for sharing with other teachers of Kiswahili proverbs in challenging contexts http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sawQo_FDDyc,

The learners during a post-intervention focus group discussion suggested that videos attracted their concentration in the lessons because of its audio-visual nature that enabled them to engage more than one sense organ. They said, "We used to memorize for the sake of examination. Now we understand" This was an indication that videos made the learners understand more"

Challenges of Using Videos

The greatest challenge of using videos to teach was time. The teacher stated that it required time to prepare videos. To mitigate this challenge, I undertook to create videos for sharing as Open Education Resources as stated above and shared them on you tube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmWuGFlr4vQ.

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Conclusion

In my view, videos made the classroom interactions lively and the content was understood more easily because learners had an opportunity to ask and answer questions. They were able to get new vocabulary using representation of real objects. The teachers' main challenge was inadequate time to prepare videos. With the present digital world, videos can be prepared and shared as Open Educational Resources after initial use. I recommend a research to be carried out on how teachers are accessing and using the OERs in challenging contexts.

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