

Original Research Article

Relationship between Secondary Students' Attitude towards English Curriculum Learning Experiences and Achievement in English Language in Emuhaya Sub Counties, Kenya

Isabel Amoit Ettyang^{1*}, Elizabeth Gloria Wanyama¹

¹Tubi Girls' High School, Vihiga County, Kenya

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Abstract: Poor performance in English in secondary schools in Kenya is a problem that acts as a hindrance for learners to join institution of higher learning; since most courses offered in these institutions require one to have passed highly in the subject. In Emuhaya Sub County, majority of learners have been posting very low mean grades. Between 2013 and 2017 the Sub County posted an average mean of 4.26 compared to the neighboring Hamisi, which had an average mean of 4.51. Studies have revealed that attitudes towards English language can be caused by various factors. The relationship between students' attitude towards English curriculum learning experiences and achievement in English is however not known. The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between students' attitude towards English curriculum learning experiences and achievement in English. The conceptual framework had the independent variable as attitude towards learning experiences and the dependent variable was achievement. The study concluded that the relationship between students' attitudes towards the English language curriculum learning experiences and achievement was generally significant with a Pearson's r of .67. This means that when students are exposed to more learner friendly experiences, they will improve on their attitudes and therefore better achievement will be noted. The study recommended that teachers should employ more learner centered activities in the teaching process. The findings of this study are significant in helping teachers change their approaches to teaching English subject and help curriculum developers in in-servicing teachers on the best approaches to use while teaching. In the long run, an improvement learner achievement is to be noted.

Keywords: Secondary Students' Attitude, Learning Experiences, Achievement, Emuhaya, Luanda, Sub Counties and Kenya.

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INTRODUCTION

English is an important language that enables people to attain their personal goals such as to further studies, travel abroad, prepare for the working world and be able to access the world of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The traditional view is that the younger we start to learn a second language, the better the chance of success we achieve. Linguists like Noam Chomsky argue that each child has an inborn capacity to learn a language and this is what he refers to as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to Chomsky, the LAD declines with age and once a child reaches an age of about 11, the capacity goes down and thus the introduction of a new language at this age proves difficult. This therefore leads to attitude, hence poor or low achievement. Research carried out by Ardeo (2003) at the University of Basque

Country on attitude towards English and English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition indicates an overall favorable attitude towards English. The study indicates that both bilinguals and multi-linguals are reluctant to be taught in English. Lennartsson (2008) in her research in Britain and Sweden found out that certain social factors that can be considered when looking at attitude are age, gender, social class, and ethnic identity. She also notes that motivation has a major role to play while learning a second language. Therefore, the more motivated students are the more and better they will learn. On the other hand, Lennartsson (2008) states that according to teachers, learners must be interested in learning second languages; otherwise it is pointless since they will not develop.

According to Vo (2017), most students are aware of the importance of English in their studies and

in future career development. This is because it is an important and useful tool in modern society, in education and also in scientific research. Gömleksiz, (2010) adds that the role of the teacher is an important factor to develop positive attitudes towards learning English. The teachers should therefore provide a more active, free learning environment for their students. Poor attitudes towards learning English prevent students from participating in classroom activities actively. It is therefore important to understand how negative attitudes to learning English can be avoided to develop students' interests, self-confidence and positive attitude towards learning English. To do that, teachers should be aware of the factors affecting students negatively and should take the needs of the students into consideration. English is used as a medium of instruction at all levels of the Kenyan education school system. Thus, a good mastery of the language is key to any academic achievement. English as taught in schools covers all aspects and skills required of the language including listening and speaking, grammar, writing and reading. By the end of the schooling session, learners are expected to use all these skills learnt to communicate effectively in their daily activities. In most situations, the learning of English is greatly hindered by the attitudes these learners develop towards the language. This has led to studies being conducted (Abu-Melhim 2009; Bidin 2009; Karahan 2007) to find out the reasons for the negative attitudes English language learners adopt, leading to poor achievement.

Karahan (2007) and Tsuda (2001) have revealed that there is a significant relationship between various factors and learners attitudes towards the English language curriculum. Where languages are concerned, attitudes to a language could be described as positive, negative or indifferent. Attitude towards a language depends heavily on its status and prestige. Such prestige results from its symbolic or utilitarian value. Gardner (1985) suggests that learning a foreign language is a true social psychological experiment.

Agreement is generalized when it is stated that attitude, together with other aspects like motivation, personality, among others, affect the level of proficiency achieved by learners, although the way these affect vary from situation to situation. Gardner (1985) also suggests that attitudes are one of several components of affective variables of language learning. When learners embark on the study of a second language, they are not merely empty vessels that will need to be filled by the wise words of the teacher. Instead, they carry a considerable personal language course that will have a significant bearing on how learning proceeds (Ogidefa, 2010). He goes on to note that what experts refer to as individual differences in the learners can create attitude in them.

In Kenya, English is a significant language and it serves various functions including instrumental, interpersonal and regulative functions. Although attitudes towards the English language vary, there is general consensus that English is a useful language in terms of bringing about social mobility (Michieka 2002). He also adds that Kenyans' linguistic repertoire falls into various categories. Some Kenyans are monolingual, speaking only their mother tongues while others are bilinguals and multi-linguals. The language use patterns in urban areas differ from those in rural areas (Michieka 2002). With the different ethnic groups and the international population coming together, there is a stronger need for a lingua franca, and most people strive to achieve multilingualism. It is mainly in these urban areas that English is used. This is a very vital factor to this study as the focus will mainly be in the rural areas where English is less often used. Due to this, learners in such areas may develop a negative attitude towards the language hence the achievement is low. In Emuhaya Sub County, majority of learners have been posting very low mean grades in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE). Between 2013 and 2017 the Sub County posted an average mean of 4.26 compared to the neighbouring Hamisi, which had an average mean of 4.51 (Table 1).

Table-1: KCSE Performance in English Language Subject in Emuhaya and Hamisi Sub Counties, Kenya (Years 2013 to 2017).

Sub Cty/ Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Average
Emuhaya	4.22	5.34	5.08	3.61	3.34	4.26
Hamisi	4.88	5.58	5.40	3.60	3.12	4.51

Source: Vihiga County Education Office, 2017

Crystal (1997) asserts that for some time, Kenyans have been known to have a hostile attitude towards the English language. Soon after independence, many people had sentiments about the continued use of the colonialist's language. Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president made the following statement, "The basis of any independent government is a national language and we can no longer continue aping our colonizers" (Crystal 1997). This statement led to the declaration of Kiswahili as the national language. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is another Kenyan personality who amplifies the

attitude towards the English language. Ngugi began writing in the English language but has now switched to the use of his native Kikuyu language.

Several studies have been conducted to find out the reason for this kind of attitude in learners in various parts of the world. They generally look at the curriculum, parental and learner background factors. This research, however, looked at the relationship between attitude and performance in terms of

objectives, learning experiences, methods and achievement and the English language curriculum.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between students' attitude towards English curriculum learning experiences and achievement in English language subject in secondary schools in Emuhaya Sub County, Kenya.

Synthesis of literature on relationship between learners' attitudes towards the secondary school English language Learning Experiences and achievement

The activities that the teacher engages the learner in the process of learning are quite important in attitude formation. Some of these experiences according to then Kenya English language syllabus are: discussing, questioning and answering, explaining, note taking and making, role playing, storytelling, dramatization, analyzing comprehensions, oral presentations and debating among others. The teachers and learners play a huge role in ensuring that these experiences work for them. Development of a negative attitude towards any of these experiences in the learner will consequently lead to an attitude towards the English curriculum and hence low achievement. The teacher should therefore strive to ensure that this does not happen. Teachers are quite important in shaping learners in all aspects. This is because they aid the students in classroom learning. A negative attitude towards the teacher will in turn create a negative attitude towards the subject in the learner. Kioko and Muthwii (2001) note that the challenges facing English language education in Kenya start from the colonial period. These challenges include, who were qualified to teach, that is the teacher. It is important to note that most if not all teachers of English are not native speakers of the English language.

During the colonial period, teachers of English were mainly native English speakers. Standards of English could still be improved because the learners were few, the teaching of the language was controlled and the motivation to learn the 'English of the English' was very high. At the present moment, conditions have greatly changed. The fact that the language teacher is a non-native speaker who has been taught and trained by non-native speakers of English makes the task of teaching the standard English especially speech skills a very difficult one. An example of an especially difficult task to teach is pronunciation as the Kenyan teachers are likely to have different accents and speech patterns depending on their ethnic background. This therefore makes teachers leave pronunciation tasks out of their lessons, much to the disadvantage of the learners. This will in turn lead to falling standards of the English language hence all the blame goes to the teacher (Kioko

and Muthwii 2001). Consequently, the teacher factor creates an attitude in the learner towards the whole curriculum.

A study conducted by Narayan, Rajasekaran and Iyyapan (2008) shows that attitude is an important affective factor in learning a second language. The successful acquisition of a second language seems to some extent, contingent upon learners' views of the language learning environment, the learning situation and how they view the target language and its speakers. This together with other variable factors such as the desire to learn and past experience with learning a new skill may affect or significantly contribute to language learning outcomes. Al-Jamal(2007) also states that learners experience joy and a feeling of enjoyment and interest when they find out that they have communicated well or learnt new things by using the English language. But when they experience difficulty in using the English language, they tend to get bored and switch to using languages they are comfortable with. It is therefore important for the teacher of English to switch to experiences that can be of interest to the learners. In her article "Interesting Activities for Teaching English Literature in the ESL Classroom", Kate Bradley states that teaching can be fun and interesting. She further states that alien cultural references, unknown idioms and strange vocabulary make teaching English Literature very challenging. However, engaging in creativity, imagination and a good attitude will make both the students and the teachers find success in the lessons.

From the above studies, it is evident that much focus is put on the effect of these activities on the ongoing lesson especially in relation to the teacher, but not on how these activities relate to the achievement of the learner in the long run; a gap this study hoped to fill.

Conceptual framework

A Conceptual Framework that guided this study is according to Frankeal and Wallen (2001), a mental or visual picture that a researcher develops to show relationships between and among concepts or variables (Figure 1).The independent variable in this study was the English Curriculum in terms of teaching/ learning experiences while the English language achievement is the dependent variable. The class size and the teacher factor were the intervening variables. In the process of instruction, the learners may develop different attitudes, either negative or positive towards the English language teaching / learning activities, teaching/learning methods and evaluation. This therefore affects the learners' achievement either negatively or positively. On the basis of this conceptual framework, this study examined the relationship between the learners' attitude towards English and their achievement in the subject.

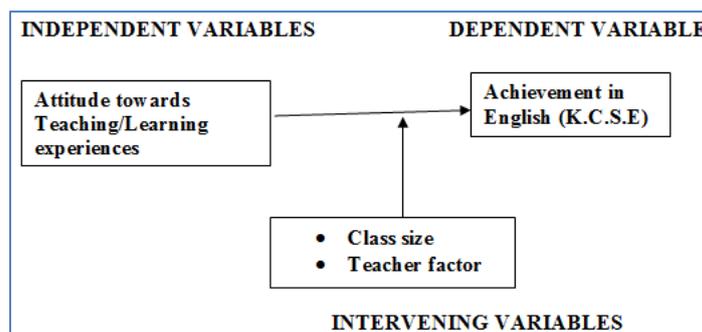


Fig-1: Relationship between learners’ attitude towards secondary school English language learning experiences and achievement in Emuhaya and Luanda Sub-Counties (Based on Literature Review)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research designs that were adopted in this study were Correlation and survey research designs. The target population comprised of 61 teachers of English and 2952 form four students from 36 schools in Emuhaya Sub-county. Simple random sampling was used to obtain 341 students and 20 teachers according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The research instruments used to collect the data were questionnaires and an interview schedule. A score sheet was also used to get students’ KCSE scores in English for years 2013 to 2017. To ensure content validity, experts from the Educational Communication Technology and Curriculum Studies Department of Maseno University scrutinized the instruments. To determine reliability, a test retest method was used to establish whether the responses given first corresponded to those given the second time. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) between the two sets of scores of the responses from the questionnaires administered on the two different occasions was used to calculate the reliability coefficient. For this study the r value of 0.7 was obtained which was considered reliable. A tally

sheet for the closed ended questions was prepared and the frequencies percentages and means computed. Pearson’s correlation was used to analyze the relationships between the variables. Coding frames were developed for qualitative data. The responses were then classified according to the emergent themes in the coding frames and their frequencies and percentages computed.

RESULTS

Relationship between learners’ attitudes towards English language Learning Experiences and their achievement in English in Secondary schools in Emuhaya and Luanda Sub Counties, Kenya

Learning experiences are quite important in ensuring learners understand whatever they are learning. A number of learning experiences were captured in the questionnaire and learners were asked to respond to them. These included teachers giving their learners notes, analyzing comprehensions, questioning and answering among others. The results were as shown in Table 2.

Table-2: Learners’ responses on learning experiences in English Language Curriculum in Secondary Schools in Emuhaya Sub County, Kenya (n= 341)

STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	M
Teachers should give notes while teaching English	F 152 % 45	79 23	31 9	48 14	31 9	1.9
Analyzing comprehensions is a waste of time	F 11 % 3	26 8	21 6	63 19	220 65	4.1
Question & answering in English should be limited to exams	F 31 % 9	31 9	42 12	95 28	142 42	3.4
I enjoy the lesson more when the teacher employs dramatization	F 200 % 59	94 28	0 0	21 6	26 8	4.2
Debates and debating sessions are a waste of time	F 16 % 5	21 6	5 2	52 15	247 72	4.4
Group discussions are interesting & helpful to the learner	F 273 % 80	42 12	16 5	0 0	10 3	4.5
Story telling sessions are a waste of time	F 37 % 12	10 2	16 5	73 22	201 62	4.2

Lessons that include role play enable us understand what is being taught better	F	231	94	16	0	0	4.6
	%	68	28	5	0	0	
Oral presentations among students should be encouraged	F	215	105	11	10	0	4.5
	%	63	32	3	0	0	
Dictations can help me improve my spelling and vocabulary	F	220	105	16	6	5	4.5
	%	65	31	5	2	2	
	Average						4.03

Source: Field Data, 2017

Key:

- Strong positive attitude: 4.1-5.0
- Positive attitude: 3.1-4.0
- Neutral: 3.0
- Negative attitude: 2.0-2.9
- Strong negative attitude: 1.0-1.9

From Table 2 it can be seen that a majority of learners felt that teachers should be giving notes while teaching English with 152(45%) strongly agreeing, 79(23%) agreeing, 48(14%) disagreeing and 31(9%) strongly disagreeing. Only 31(9%) of the learners were undecided on the matter. On analyzing comprehensions being a waste of time, 11(3%) of the learners strongly agreed, 26(8%) agreed, 63(19%) disagreed while 220(65%) strongly disagreed. Only 21(6%) were undecided. Learners were asked whether questioning and answering should be limited to examinations and 31(9%) of them strongly agreed, 31(9%) agreed, 95(28%) disagreed while 142(42%) strongly disagreed. On whether the lesson is enjoyable when the teacher employs dramatization, 200(59%) strongly agreed, 94(28%) agreed, 21(6%) disagreed while 26(8%) strongly disagreed. On debates and debating sessions being a waste of time, 16(5%) strongly agreed, 21(6%) agreed, 52(15%) disagreed and 247(72%) strongly disagreed. Only 5(2%) were undecided. On whether group discussions are interesting and helpful to the learner, 273(80%) of the respondents strongly agreed,

42(12%) agreed, 10(3%) strongly disagreed and 16(5%) were undecided. Learners were asked whether story telling sessions were a waste of time and should therefore be left for primary school pupils. Out of the total 341 learners 37(11%) strongly agreed, 10(3%) agreed, 73(22%) disagreed 201(62%) strongly disagreed while 16(5%) were undecided. On whether lessons that include role play enabled learners understand what is being taught better, 231(68%) strongly agreed, 94(28%) agreed and 16(5%) were undecided. Learners were asked whether oral presentations among them should be encouraged and 215 (63%) strongly agreed, 105(31%) agreed, 11(3%) disagreed while another 10 (3%) were undecided. On whether dictations help learners improve their spelling and vocabulary, 220(65%) strongly agreed, 105(28%) agreed, 6(2%) disagreed, 5(2%) strongly disagreed while 16(5%) were undecided. On average, a value of 4.03 obtained in this study indicates a strong positive attitude towards English Curriculum learning experiences.

To establish whether there was a relationship between attitude towards English curriculum learning activities and achievement in English, learning activities scores and KCSE results of years 2013 to 2017 were compared. The results were as shown in Table 3.

Table-3: Relationship between attitude towards English Curriculum learning experiences and` achievement in English (n = 341)

		ATTITUDE	KCSE
ATTITUDE	Pearson Correlation	1	.674**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	341	341
KCSE	Pearson Correlation	.674**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	341	341

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Key

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Value of r | Strength of relationship |
| 0.0 to 0.19 | Very weak |
| 0.20 to 0.39 | Weak |
| 0.40 to 0.59 | Moderate |
| 0.60 to 0.79 | Strong |
| 0.80 to 1.0 | Very strong |

From Table 3, the r value of 0.67 obtained reveals a strong correlation, signifying a strong positive relationship between attitude towards English Curriculum learning experiences and` achievement in English. A positive r means that as one variable increases in value, the second variable also increases in value. Similarly, as one variable decreases in value, the second variable also decreases in value.

DISCUSSION

The activities that the teacher engages the learner in the process of learning are quite important in attitude formation. Some of these experiences according to then Kenya English language syllabus are: discussing, questioning and answering, explaining, note taking and making, role playing, storytelling, dramatization, analysing comprehensions, oral presentations and debating among other.

It is therefore important for the teacher of English to switch to experiences that can be of interest to the learners. They can try and be innovative to match the needs of the learners. Such activities as language games can be explored in the classroom depending on the level of understanding of the learners. In her article "Interesting Activities for Teaching English Literature in the ESL Classroom", Kate Bradley (year) states that teaching can be fun and interesting. She further states that alien cultural references, unknown idioms and strange vocabulary make teaching English Literature very challenging. However, engaging in creativity, imagination and a good attitude will make both the learners and teachers find success in the lessons. Activities that are suggested for use to teachers on students include pre-recorded items so that learners can get exposed to natural speech patterns, syntax and speaking speed. Learners can also be involved in various writing activities to test their understanding of characters or even themes in set texts. They can also be involved in speaking activities where their speech abilities can be tested. A variety of learning activities can help learners see something that they found so boring interesting hence helping them improve their language skills. It is therefore important for teachers of English to shift from experiences that are more teacher-centered to those that are more learner-centered as these will help boost their understanding of concepts being taught. Teachers should therefore not stick to experiences that they are used to but try to be innovative and come up with more ideas on activities that can be helpful to the kind of learners they have.

The downside to this is that learners, on being interviewed noted that teachers rarely employ most of these activities but limit themselves to asking questions and giving notes. A majority of them noted that they would be very receptive if their teachers decide to vary these activities. "I think English lessons would be very interesting if teachers involved us more. We can even act out what is being taught and this will make us understand better." From the study, it is important to note that a variety of learning experiences help learners to properly understand what is being taught in class. Based on Table 3, it was the view of the teachers who participated in this study that their learners do not participate fully during the English lessons especially when it came to questions and answering. This they attributed to the fact that learners do not seem to enjoy the lesson when certain topics like grammar or oral

skills are covered. This is because such items require the full participation of the learners in terms of speaking, yet the same learners fear to speak lest they make mistakes and are made fun of by their colleagues. They however noted that they limit themselves on the kind of experiences they expose learners to. This is similar to Al-Jamal (2007) who states that learners experience joy and a feeling of enjoyment and interest when they find out that they have communicated well or learnt new things by using the English language. But when they experience difficulty in using the English language, they tend to get bored and switch to using languages they are comfortable with.

According to Nyamubi (2016), attitude towards the English language is an essential factor in the overall process of learning. This is in relation to Tanzanian students who he found out have very strong positive attitudes towards the English language because it is the basis for further studies and it provides them with an opportunity to communicate with other people inside and outside the country. He further states that students are very interested in learning English and that they like the language as it could help them learn other subjects better. Thus, despite the fact that Kiswahili is their national language, very few students would like the language to be adopted as a medium of instruction in secondary schools. In his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi (1986), he says that language should help us understand ourselves, and English in Africa is a 'cultural bomb' that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and is a way of installing dominance of new, more insidious forms of colonialism. This may be a reason why some Kenyans may have a negative attitude towards the English language. Despite this, it is still important to note that English plays a key role and holds a prestigious position in Kenya. Learners need to understand the important and special role English language plays both at local and international levels. Good achievement is therefore vital for career development. Each learner must achieve this at the secondary school in order to pursue his/her career.

This means that when students are exposed to more learner friendly experiences, they will improve on their attitudes and therefore better achievement will be noted. Learners tend not to concentrate when exposed to certain learning experiences. Such learning experiences include questioning and answering and lecturing. Activities preferred include dictation, role play, group discussion, dramatization and oral presentations. This is because most of these minimize teacher-learner contact which learners prefer. Kiswahili was also used as a language of instruction by some teachers to emphasize some points and explain areas where they had not understood.

Since the Pearson's r revealed a positive correlation of 0.67, the study noted that when learners

increase or improve in their attitude towards the English language, their achievement also increases or improves. Similarly, when learners decrease their attitude towards the English language, their achievement also goes down. This means that when students are exposed to more learner friendly experiences, they will improve on their attitudes and therefore better achievement will be noted. Learners tend not to concentrate when exposed to certain learning experiences. Such learning experiences include questioning and answering and lecturing. Activities preferred include dictation, role play, group discussion, dramatization and oral presentations. This is because most of these minimize teacher-learner contact which learners prefer. Kiswahili was also used as a language of instruction by some teachers to emphasize some points and explain areas where they had not understood.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there was a strong positive relationship between attitude towards English Curriculum learning experiences and achievement in English, as signified by Pearson's r value of 0.674.

RECOMMENDATIONS

English language learning should be learner centered and this can only be possible if teachers adopt learner centered experiences like dramatization, oral presentations and role play among others which this study recommends. When teachers do this, learners will have positive attitudes towards the English language hence improving their achievement.

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