

The Influence of Secondary School Students' Attitudes towards the Implementation of Kiswahili Curriculum in Igembe South District, Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

In the Kenyan education system, Kiswahili is taught as compulsory and examinable subject at primary and secondary schools. This study sought to find out the influence of students' attitudes towards the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum at secondary level in Igembe South District. The study employed descriptive survey research design where the target population was 2,400 form four secondary school students from all 24 public secondary schools in Igembe South District, Meru County, Kenya. Data was collected through questionnaires from thirteen (13) students who were selected using simple random sampling method. The findings revealed that secondary school students in Igembe South District have a negative attitude towards Kiswahili as a subject which affects its implementation. The study recommends that the school administration and the Kiswahili subject teachers should find ways of helping students cultivate positive attitude towards Kiswahili through drama competitions in Kiswahili, poetry competitions in Kiswahili, taking students to theatres which show Kiswahili plays, encouraging students to join Kiswahili clubs such as journalism, debating, and young writers in Kiswahili.

Keywords

Students' attitudes, Kiswahili curriculum, Igembe South District, curriculum implementation

1.1 Introduction

Language is part and parcel of human life as it is the most effective means of human communication. Language also necessitates national and international interaction between people. It is common for people to identify with those who speak the same language as themselves (Gathumbi & Masembe, 2005). Apart from being a means of communication, it is also a means of getting education, a career and participating in national building. From the proliferation of new technology worldwide, the world seems to be getting smaller and smaller (what is popularly known as the global village). This technological knowledge is passed on through language.

Kiswahili is the national language and the official language alongside English in Kenya and the most common medium of communication. Both English and Kiswahili languages are taught as compulsory and examinable subjects in primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Unlike English, Kiswahili is not a medium of instruction in the learning institutions in Kenya except in Kiswahili lessons. This makes it have limited time for practice by learners. Kiswahili is the most international of all indigenous languages of Africa (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995). It is the national language in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. It is one of the four national languages in Zaire and it is extensively used in Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Mozambique and Somalia. More importantly, Kiswahili is one of the working languages of the African Union.

According to K.I.E. (2002), the objectives of secondary school Kiswahili curriculum in Kenya are to enhance what was learnt at primary level; enable the learners achieve a lasting ability to listen, speak, read and write in Kiswahili; enable them to be creative, analytical and can express themselves in Kiswahili. It is also to identify and take part in seeking for solutions in emerging issues that affect the society such as health, HIV/AIDS, gender, technological development, children's rights and labour issues.

Language learning is closely related to the attitudes of the students towards the language (Starks and Paltridge, 1996). The secondary students are the consumers of Kiswahili curriculum because they are the target audience for the curriculum. Their attitudes toward Kiswahili directly affect their performance and achievement in the subject which ultimately affects the implementation of the curriculum. The Government of Kenya is putting a lot of effort to ensure that there are qualified teachers of Kiswahili to implement the curriculum in secondary schools. In addition, it has also been organizing workshops and seminars for Kiswahili teachers in conjunction with various textbook publishers. Time allocation for Kiswahili in secondary level has been revised and increased by one to make five in Form 1 and 2 and six in Form 3 and 4 (KIE, 2007).

Despite the effort made by the Government of Kenya to improve Kiswahili, the students' performance in Kiswahili has been deteriorating over the years. According to the Kenya National Examination Council, the trend of students' performance in Kiswahili in Igembe South District has been below average (KNEC 2009) as shown in Table 1:

Table 1
Kiswahili performances in Igembe South District 2004 – 2008

Year	Mean	Grade	Maximum attainable performance	
			Mean score	Grade
2004	4.34	D	12	A
2005	5.29	C-	12	A
2006	5.22	C-	12	A
2007	5.17	C-	12	A
2008	5.09	C-	12	A

Source: DEO Igembe South District, 2010

Table 1 presents the data on Kiswahili performance in Igembe South District. From the data it is evident that the performance of Kiswahili in the District has been deteriorating for the last five years. This kind of a situation threatens the success of the Kiswahili curriculum implementation in Igembe South District.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Kiswahili is one of the compulsory and examinable subjects at KCSE examinations in Kenya and a key determinant to joining many careers after secondary education. Students are important stakeholders in the process of curriculum implementation. However, the trend of students' performance in Kiswahili in Igembe South District has been below average since the year 2004. This study investigated the influence of students' attitudes towards Kiswahili curriculum implementation in Igembe South District in Meru County.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the attitudes of secondary school students towards the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum in public secondary schools in Igembe South District in Meru County.

1.4 Review of Related Literature

Literature on attitudes are many and diverse (Kenchie & Doyle 1966, Gardner 1994, Chamber 1999, Haitema 2002 & Ombui 2012). For instance, Kenchie and Doyle (1966) defined attitude as an organization of concept, beliefs, habits and motives associated with a particular object. They further indicate that there are three components in relation to the object. The first one is the concept of the knowledge one has about the object, the second one is the action (habit) component. This is related to how we overtly behave towards the object. The third is the effective component (motive). This is concerned with what we feel about the object of concern. The knowledge we have about a particular object and the intensity of our feeling about the object will cause us to behave in a particular direction- positively or negatively in relation to the object.

Other scholars like Chamber (1999) and Ombui (2012) advance the argument that attitudes of students towards a subject have an implication on their academic achievement. If students have a positive attitude towards a subject there are high chances of them performing well in the subject. Attitudes influence behavior. Students learning a second learning, like Kiswahili, can be influenced by the attitudes they have towards the subject.

A number of scholars agree that attitude is a psychological issue. For instance, Eagly & Chaiken (1993) are of the view that attitude is a psychological predisposition that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour. An attitude towards an idea, object, person or situation may be positive, neutral or negative. Attitudes are positive or negative views, feelings, prejudice or reactions to certain a person, idea, objects, institution, circumstances, place, thing or event. Attitude influences the behavior of an individual behavior, choice of action and the

way one reacts to a certain issue. An individual's reactions towards certain issue, to a large extent, depend on how the individual perceives or views it.

Studies have been conducted on language attitudes (Gardener & Lambert 1972, Baker 1992 and Momani 2009). Gardner and Lambert (1972) observed that the students' attitudes towards a second language affect their ability to learn and master it. They concluded that attitude enhances the process of second language learning, influencing the student's behaviors and feeling towards the language, its culture and community. Momani (2009) examined the secondary stage students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and their achievements in reading comprehension. The findings revealed that the students had neutral positive attitudes toward learning English which affected their performance in reading comprehension. Language attitudes influence the views of a language learner towards the language. Language attitude can hinder or enhance the learning and achievement in that language.

Kiswahili is a compulsory and examinable subject in both primary and secondary schools in Kenya (KIE, 2002). All learners are expected to study and sit for Kiswahili examination at the end of the primary and secondary level leading to the attainment of the KCPE and KCSE certificates respectively. According to Wilkins (1987), when a class consists of voluntary learners, a certain degree of self-motivation can be taken for granted and exploited, but when learners are not volunteers, the teacher must stimulate and retain their motivation. This is a tough task to the teacher because motivating learners is not something that a teacher can turn on and off at will. It can be influenced by other factors like the learners attitude towards the subject.

A recent study by Suter and Busienei (2013) established that Kiswahili teachers do not have a favourable attitude towards the teaching and learning of Kiswahili oral literature in Marakwet District, Kenya. Teachers' negative attitude towards Kiswahili affected students' attitudes towards the subject. This ultimately resulted to poor performance of students in the subject. Attitude is an integral component in learning any language (Haitema, 2002) especially a second language like Kiswahili. Positive attitudes enhance the learning and acquisition of relevant language skills. On the other hand, negative attitudes towards the second language hinder its learning and academic achievement in the language.

1.5 Research Methodology

This study used descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey research design was used for its appropriateness in making reality known through collecting detailed factual information that describes existing phenomena at a given moment in time (Vyhmeister, 2001). This research design sought to obtain information by asking respondents questions about their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. This design was appropriate in this study because it enabled the researcher to collect detailed data from the respondents, through the use of questionnaires. There are 24 public secondary schools in Igembe District (Education Office, Igembe District, 2010) and all were included in the study. The study targeted 2,400 form four students. The study focused on Form four

students as they had been in the schools for a relatively longer period of time hence more versed with factors affecting the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum than other students.

Sampling makes it possible to draw valid inferences or generalizations on the basis of careful observation of variables with a relatively small proportion of the population (Best & Khan, 2008). To sample students, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was used. According to the table out of 2,400 students, 331 respondents should be selected. This number was divided by the number of schools (331/24) which yielded 13. Therefore, thirteen (13) students were selected using simple random sampling method for each school using box method. The data was collected using a questionnaire. Section A of the questionnaire sought the background information of the learner while section B was organized in order to collect information on the attitude of the learners towards the Kiswahili subject and its implementation in secondary school in Kenya.

To establish the attitudes of the students towards the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum, the students were asked to indicate on a Likert Scale their feelings and biases towards Kiswahili. Half of the items (6) were written in positive and the rest (6) in negative form. The positive items were scored by the following key; Strongly Agree (SA) was awarded 5 points, Agree (A) was awarded 4 points, Undecided (U) 3, Disagree (D) 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1. For negative items, the key was reversed so that, Strongly Agree (SA) 1 point, Agree (A) 2, Undecided (U) 3, Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (SD) 5. Reversing the scoring of the negative items has the advantage of reflecting positiveness towards the object in question. The scores were added for all the items to give a measure of the attitude of the responses of students. The maximum score possible was therefore 5 points x 10 items = 50, representing perfectly positive attitude, on the other hand the lowest score was equal to 10, that is 1 point for 10 items, representing perfectly negative attitude. A perfectly neutral level was represented by a score of 30 that is 3 x 10 = 30 (Nyaga, 1997).

1.6 Results and Discussion

In this study, out of the 331 questionnaires issued to the students, 330 (99.6%) questionnaires were returned. These questionnaires return rates were deemed adequate for the study.

In order to establish the attitude of the students towards the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum, the attitude scale test was computed from the Likert Scale items for students. The attitude of the students towards Kiswahili curriculum implementation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Students' attitude towards Implementation of Kiswahili Curriculum

Category of attitude	Number of students per category	(%) of students
Negative	130	40.5
Neutral	124	36.5
Positive	76	23.0
Total	330	100.0

The data was collected from both male and female students. Their responses in Table 2 indicate that a majority of them (40.5%) had negative attitude towards Kiswahili while others were neutral and a only 23.0% having positive attitude towards the subject.

The students' negative attitude towards Kiswahili is partly due to the fact that the subject is a compulsory one and examinable at secondary level. Another contributing factor to the unfavourable attitude toward Kiswahili is the misperception that Kiswahili is a simple Bantu language that does not require much attention. It is important to note that Kiswahili is a second language to many students hence a lot of time is needed to acquire appropriate language skills in the subject. Students' negative attitudes towards Kiswahili hamper effective implementation of the subject. A favourable attitude towards a language enhances performance in the subject hence improving its implementation. A negative attitude towards Kiswahili obviously results to poor achievement in the subject. Students negative attitudes towards Kiswahili, is one of the contributing factors to poor performance of Kiswahili at KCSE level in Igembe South District.

To further establish the attitude of students towards Kiswahili, the students were asked which language they mainly use while at school for communication purposes. The results of the data is tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3
Students' responses on the language they often speak at school

Language often spoken	Frequency	%
Vernacular	277	83.9
Kiswahili	49	14.8
English	3	0.9
Total	330	100.0

The findings in Table 3 indicate that a majority of students use vernacular (83.9%) in school. Kiswahili curriculum implementation in schools is hampered by the students' attitude towards it when they mostly use vernacular instead of English or Kiswahili. It is interesting to note that English and Kiswahili are the official languages for use in secondary schools yet students prefer to use vernacular which is not taught nor examined at secondary school in Kenya. Learning a second language requires adequate practice in the language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing in the language.

The students were further asked to indicate whether they allocated themselves time for revision of Kiswahili work. Their responses showed that the majority did not allocate themselves time for revision of Kiswahili work but just studied it only when the subject teacher is in class. They were further asked to indicate whether teachers gave them extra work/assignment in Kiswahili. Data showed that 272 (82.4%) were given extra work against 54 (16.4%) who were not given. Research has revealed that students with positive attitudes will spend more effort and time to learn the language by using strategies such as asking questions, volunteering information and answering questions (Baker, 1993).

The responses of the students in the item that required them to indicate whether they consulted their teachers for individual questions on Kiswahili subject during free time indicated that 256 (77.6%) did not consult while 74 (22.4%) consulted. These findings present the disinterest of students in Kiswahili which could adversely hinder its implementation. Kiswahili teachers ought to create and develop in their students' interest towards the subject. The students should develop a favourable interest towards Kiswahili if excellent performance in the subject is to be achieved.

Siti (2008) observes that attitudes do not remain static hence they can be changed through the learning process. Students' negative attitudes towards Kiswahili can be changed and improved to enhance their performance in the language.

Students were asked what mark they expected to get in Kiswahili in the K.C.S.E examinations. Their response is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Students' expectations in Kiswahili at KCSE examinations

Expected Kiswahili grade	Frequency	%
A	147	44.5
A-	70	21.2
B+	71	21.5
B	27	8.2
B-	5	1.5
E	1	0.3
No response	9	2.7
Total	330	100.0

Data in Table 4 show that the majority of the students expected high grades in Kiswahili. This is contrary to their attitudes towards the subject. It is general knowledge that students would often aim at high grades though they may not be working towards achieving it.

1.7 Conclusion

The majority of secondary school students in Igembe South District have a negative attitude towards Kiswahili which affects their performance and hence its implementation. Most of the students use vernacular in communication while in school. They also allocate very little time for Kiswahili hence poor implementation of Kiswahili curriculum leading to poor performance of the subject at the national examinations.

The study concluded that secondary school students' attitude in Igembe South District affected the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum. This was shown by a relative number of the students who had either negative or neutral attitude towards Kiswahili. Students' negative attitude was further seen in that most of them use vernacular while at school, and not allocating themselves time for revision of their Kiswahili work.

In light of the research findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- i. As it has been established that use of vernacular by students while in school has affected the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum, teachers and school administration should encourage students to use Kiswahili and English and not deem Kiswahili as a minor language.
- ii. The school administration and the Kiswahili subject teachers should find ways of helping students cultivate positive attitude towards Kiswahili. This can be done by planning for school drama competitions in Kiswahili, poetry competitions in Kiswahili, taking students to theatres which show Kiswahili plays, encouraging students to join Kiswahili clubs such as journalism, debating, and young writers in Kiswahili.

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APPENDIX 1: STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the factors that influence the implementation of Kiswahili curriculum in public secondary schools in Igembe District. You have been selected for this study and any information that you give will be treated with confidentiality. Please indicate the correct option as honest as possible by ticking one of the options and where explanations are required, use the space provided.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please indicate the correct option as honestly as possible by ticking one of the options. Kindly respond to all the questions.

1. Please indicate your gender Male () Female ()
2. What language do you mainly speak at school?
Vernacular () Kiswahili ()
English () Others
3. Do you allocate yourself time everyday for revision of your Kiswahili work?
Yes () Sometimes () No ()
4. Do your teachers give you extra work /assignment in Kiswahili?
Yes () No ()
5. Do you consult your teachers for individual questions on Kiswahili subject during your free time?
Yes () No ()
6. Given an opportunity to choose subjects, would you choose Kiswahili subject?
Yes () No ()
7. What mark do you expect to get in Kiswahili in KCSE?

SECTION B: Factors influencing Kiswahili implementation

Express your responses to each of the following statement by simply ticking the box against the response that best describes your feelings. The key below gives the responses and their corresponding abbreviations.

Please tick the option of your choice.

Key: Strongly Agree SA Agree A Undecided UD
Disagree D Strongly Disagree SD

Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
I like Kiswahili more than other subjects					
Kiswahili is interesting to me					
Kiswahili subject is difficult					
I study Kiswahili because I have no choice					
I like speaking correct Kiswahili always					
Lesson time allocated for Kiswahili is adequate					
We covered the Kiswahili syllabus in form 2 & 3					
Our headteacher supports Kiswahili speaking in our school					
What I learn in Kiswahili is relevant in my life					
Kiswahili will be useful to me in future					

13. How many days are you allowed to communicate in Kiswahili in school?

.....

b. Which days?

Thank you for your cooperation