

English Language Learners' Attitude on Competence in English Grammar among Selected Secondary Schools in Kajiado County, Kenya

Authors: Idongesit Umo-Udofia and Adam Andera

Department of Languages, Literature and Communication
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Catholic University of Eastern Africa
P.O. Box 62157-00200 Nairobi-Kenya
Email of Corresponding Author: iddykoko@gmail.com

Abstract: *The main purpose of this study was to examine English language learners' attitude towards competence in English grammar in selected secondary schools in Ngong Sub-County of Kajiado County. The specific objective that guided the study was to establish the kind of attitude English language learners have towards learning English grammar in secondary schools in Kajiado County. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Six public secondary schools were selected and the sample for the study was 120 students. For the purposes of the study, the schools and the students were stratified based on gender and category of school. Random sampling technique was used to identify the study sample. To elicit responses, the study used a questionnaire as a tool of data collection. The responses, gathered from the data collected was ordered, coded, and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that most students had a fairly positive attitude towards learning English grammar. The study recommended among other things that learners should be helped to understand that they have a responsibility towards learning. Hence the attitude they bring in to learning environment affects their learning outcome and so be encouraged to develop positive attitudes.*

Keywords: *English Language Learners' Attitude, English Grammar Competence, School English competence, English grammar attitude*

1. Introduction

The ability to achieve grammatical competence, in English language is a major facet of language development and academic success among students at the secondary school level (Cook, 1994). It is at the heart of all human activity whether it be declaring war, writing a love poem or a prescription, sentencing a prisoner to life imprisonment, advertising soap powder, praying, whatever their differences of motivation or seriousness, all would effectively be impossible without grammar. It provides the speaker with the needed structures to organize words and ideas in a comprehensible form. It is by using correct grammar that people communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings. Therefore, developing competence is not just important for academic purposes but social purposes as well.

The learners' attitude, as a major factor affecting learning processes, may be implicit, consequently, has not attracted enough attention from stakeholders in education. It is thus important to consider the fact that learners contribute to their learning outcomes as a direct

consequence of their perceptions about the subject matter. Thus, expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may affect the degree of difficulty one has and places on language. This is in line with Kara (2009) who asserts that attitudes towards learning besides opinions and beliefs have an obvious influence on students' behaviour and consequently on their competence. It is also believed that those students who have more positive beliefs about language learning are also more likely to have more positive attitudes that would enhance language learning.

Specific attention has been given to English in the context of this study because English language plays a vital role in the language situation in Kenya. Currently, it has the status of a national language and a compulsory subject in schools. It is rated same with Kiswahili and also the language of official institutions, of law courts, local and central government and education. English is not only a core subject, but also the language of instruction from primary four through secondary education, colleges and universities it is also the language of examinations in all school subjects except for other language subjects such as Kiswahili, German, French, and Arabic among others (Ongong'a et al., 2010).

It follows therefore, that mastery of English language enables one to excel in business, various professions and also enable one to communicate across tribal or racial lines. According to (Otieno, 1996). The continued importance of English language cannot be over emphasized. However, in spite of the important role played by English language and the various interventions put in, the level of competency displayed by a majority of students still leaves a lot to be desired. This study therefore seeks to explore learners' attitude towards English grammar in Kajiado County and will be helpful to language teachers to understand students' attitudes towards grammar in order to be able to help them achieve competency.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design in order to study people's feelings, thinking and attitudes about specific aspects (Graziano & Raulin, 2009). Furthermore, since attitudes cannot not be directly measured or observed, but would be inferred from certain cues which depicted the implicit nature of students' characteristics, the design therefore, provided quantitative as well as qualitative description for the study. The target population included form two and three students. Form two and three students were considered appropriate for this study because they had more exposure and interacted with secondary school language syllabus.

For the purpose of this study, the schools and the students were stratified on the basis of gender and category of school. The sample for this study therefore constituted 10% of the total number of secondary schools in the study area. Ary & Razariah (1972) argued that, 10 % to 20% of accessible population is acceptable in a descriptive research. Therefore, the study selected 6 schools for the study in category of public secondary schools in Ngong Sub County. These were selected from the 58 public secondary schools in the sub county. The total population of form two and three students from the six schools selected was 1,200 and the sample size calculated at

10% of 1,200= 120 participants in total were engaged in the study. The study then applied random sampling in selecting 60 boys and 60 girls as participants for the study.

A structured questionnaire was designed to elicit responses from the respondents on attitudes towards learning English grammar. All the respondents were expected to return answers in the form of a Likert scale. The responses were then organised, analysed using descriptive statistical techniques in the form of frequencies and percentages and presented in a table.

3. Results and Discussion

The research objective sought to establish the attitude of learners towards learning English grammar as an aspect of a subject. Their level of agreement or disagreement was assessed through a 5 point Likert scale of 1 to 5 ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Percentage figures obtained were used in making comparisons and conclusions. The attitude test results obtained from the study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of responses regarding attitudes towards learning English Grammar

Item	N	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
I like to study English grammar	120	32(26.7)	48(40%)	8(6.6%)	32(26.7)	-
I look forward to the time I spend in English grammar class	120	20 (16.7)	40(33.3)	32(26.7)	16(13.3)	12 (10)
The study of grammar is vital to master the English language properly	120	56(46.7)	44(26.7)	8 (6.6)	12(10)	-
Grammar helps us to learn the basic rules of English which we follow in language learning	120	48 (40)	56(46.7)	16(13.3)	-	-
I never use English anywhere else other than in school in my conversation	120	20 (16.7)	8 (6.6)	20(16.7)	36 (30)	36 (30)
In my opinion, English grammar is difficult and complicated to learn	120	12(10)	25(20.8)	31(25.8)	20(16.7)	32(26.7)
Grammar has too many rules for easy understanding	120	16(13.3)	44(36.7)	12 (10)	36(30)	12 (10)
I find homework in English grammar difficult	120	16(13.3)	17(14.2)	15(12.5)	36(30)	36(30)
I really have little interest in my English grammar class	120	12(10)	32(26.7)	16(13.3)	20(16.7)	40(33.3)
English grammar class is boring	120	28(23.3)	8 (6.6)	20(16.7)	20(16.7)	44(36.7)

Key: SA-strongly agree; A-agree; U- unsure; D-disagree; SD- Strongly disagree

According to Table 1, a little more than half of the respondents, (66.7%) indicated that they liked to study English grammar. Half of the respondents (50%) agreed that they looked forward to the time spent in the English grammar class, while another half (50%) agreed they were interested in their grammar class. In addition, the findings clearly reveal that close to two thirds of the respondents (73.4%) thought that grammar was vital to mastery of the language which highlighted that they were well aware of the place of grammar in second language learning in school and were willing to learn. According to the information in table 1, a little more than half of the respondents (60%) agreed that they use English language in conversations outside the classroom. This implies that for this learners there is a sense of pride in being able to communicate in English language. It is also clear from the table that half of the respondents (50%) agreed that grammar has too many rules for easy understanding. This could be indicative that English grammar is stressful to learn hence a negative attitude towards it. However, it is encouraging to note that even though half of respondents (50%) agreed that grammar had too many rules for easy understanding, a little more than half (53.4%) of the respondents agreed that their grammar class was not boring. This is confirmed by (43.4%) of the respondents, who did not believe that English grammar is difficult and complicated to learn and another (60%) agreed that they did not find homework in grammar difficult.

The findings suggest that most of the learners have a fairly positive attitude towards learning English grammar. It also implies that learners who like English grammar, look forward to the grammar class, will most likely be participative in class and therefore have positive attitudes which is a recipe for attaining competence. This is because their positive attitude will help them continue learning even if they find grammar a difficult and stressful aspect of English language. The finding is consistent with Karahan (2007) who asserted that positive attitudes toward language allow learners have positive orientation towards learning English. In the same token for these learners who find the grammar classes boring, too many rules, there will not be any real positive effort towards learning. This finding is also in line with Kara (2009) who asserted that attitudes towards learning besides opinions and beliefs have an obvious influence on learners' behaviours and consequently on their competence. Consequently, attitudes form a very essential part in language learning as they seem to significantly influence learners' success or failure in their learning.

4. Conclusions

The findings of the study indicated that while most of the learners have a fairly positive attitude towards learning English grammar they were others who did not. For these learners with positive attitudes, this indicates willingness to learn. Conversely, for the learners with negative attitudes, their level of competency will leave a lot to be desired. Consequently, attitudes form a very essential part in language learning as they seem to significantly influence learners' success or failure in their learning. It is important that, learners be helped to understand that they have a personal responsibility towards learning. Hence the attitude they bring in to learning environment affects the outcome and so be encouraged to develop positive attitudes. In addition, there is also the need therefore for continued attention directed towards creating, developing and reinforcing positive attitudes towards English grammar and English language as a whole.

Teachers could also help change and shape learners' attitudes by adapting content to the learners' level of understanding and selecting methodologies that would make the class more interactive. They should also be role models by speaking to the learners in English and encouraging them to converse in English.

References

- Abidin, M.J.Z., Pour-Mohammad, M., & Alzwari, H. (2012). EFL students' attitudes towards learning English language: The case of Libyan secondary school students. *Asian Social Science* , 8(2), 119-134.
- Akurugu, B.M. (2010). *The attitudes and perceptions of students about the study of English grammar: the case of selected students in northern region. M.Phil thesis*. Ghana: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
- Cook, V. (1994). *Universal grammar and the learning and teaching of second language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dehbozorgi, E. (2012). Effects of attitude towards language learning and risk-taking on EFL student's proficiency. *International Journal of english Linguistics* , 2(2), 41-78.
- Du, X. (2009). The Affective filter in second language teachin. *Asian Social Science* , 162-165.
- Falk, J. (1978). *Linguistics and language: A survey of basic concepts and implications* (2nd Ed.). John Wiley and Sons
- Gardener, R. L. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second langauge learning*. Rowley,MA: Newbury House.
- Gardner, R. (2010). *Motivation and second language acquisition. The socio educational model*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Grazino, A.M., & Raulin, M.L. (2009). *Research methods: A process of inquiry* (7th ed.). Boston, MS: Allyn & Bacon
- Hamidah, A.R., Azizah,R., Shah,R., Abdul,W. Faizah,M.N & Wan Z. (2017). Factors affecting motivation in language learning. *International Journal of Infromation and Education Technology* , 7(7) 543-546.
- Karahan, F. (2007). Language attitudes of turkish students towards the English language and its use in Turkish context. *Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 7, 73-87

-
- Kotut, J. (2016). *Factors influencing performance of English as a subject in Kenya certificate of primary education in Nakuru town, East sub- county, Kenya M.ed Thesis*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Mommani, M. (2009). The Jordanian secondary stage students' achievement in reading comprehension according to their views towards learning English as a foreign language. *Journal of Human Sciences* , 42, 1-36.
- Munir, F. & Rehman, A. (2015). Attitudes of secondary schools towards English as a foreign language: a case study at Lahore. *Pakistan International Journal of Research*, 2 (4) 637-650.
- Mustafa, H.H, Muhammad, A.R., Hariyanto, A. & Syarifuddin, D. (2015). Students' attitudinal factors in learning English as a foreign language. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* , 6 (6) 1187-1194.
- Otieno, A. (1996). *A study of teacher oral questions in English language classes in secondary schools of Nakuru District, Kenya . M.ed.thesis*. Nairobi: Kenyatta University.
- Ouya, J. (2015). *Socio- psychological factors influencing learning of English language among students in day secondary schools in Muhoroni sub-county, Kisumu County. M.ed. thesis*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Padwick, A. (2010). *Attitudes towards English and varieties of English in globalizing India*. New Castle: University of Groningen.
- Shahzadi, A., Janjua, F. (2016). Pakistani ESL students' attitude towards English language grammar: A case study of University of Education Lahore. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 20, 17-22.
- Shams, M. (2008). *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education*, 2, (2) 121 -144
- Spolsky, B. (2000). Language motivation revisited: Anniversary article. *Applied Linguistics*, 20 (2) 157-169.
- Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner strategies for learner autonomy*. London: Prentice Hall.

Wu, K. (2010). The relationship between language learners' anxiety and learning strategy in the CLT classrooms. *International Education Studies*, 3 (1) 174-191.

Wu, L. (2013). A study of factors affecting college students' use of ESl vocabulary learning strategies. *International Journal of Humainites and Social Sciences*, 3 (19) 202-208.
