

# Teachers' and Learners' Attitudes towards the Impact of Availability and Use of Daily Newspapers on Students' Speaking Competence in English Language in Secondary Schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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## Abstract

This paper highlights the results of a research conducted in Bungoma County of Kenya between 2008- 2009. The objective of the study was to investigate the attitudes of teachers and students towards the impact of availability and use of daily newspapers on students' speaking competence in English language. The study was based on the Communicative Language Teaching Approach and the theory underlying this approach is Krashen's Second Language Acquisition, the monitor model. The study used the mixed methods research approach adopting a correlation research design. Stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to get the sample. The sample involved 16 teachers of English language and 135 form three students. The questionnaire, students' focused group discussions, and interview guide were used to collect data from the students and teachers respectively. The data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypotheses were tested using non-parametric inferential statistics-Mann-Whitney U-test. From the analysis and interpretation of data, it was deduced that students who used daily newspapers showed better speaking competence in English language than those who did not use them. Consequently, it is recommended that the use of the daily newspapers as an instructional resource in teaching speaking skills in English language should be encouraged and improved in secondary schools in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, daily newspapers, English language, teachers, students.

## 1. Introduction.

The importance of English language in Kenya in general and the Kenya Secondary School Curriculum in particular cannot be overemphasized. Kenya Institute of Education (1992) pinpoint rightly that the aim of secondary school syllabus is to make students competent in the four English language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition to these, the Kenya Secondary Schools Syllabus K.I.E, (2002:3) states that:

*English is the official language of communication in Kenya and the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities. It is also the pre-eminent language for international communication. Consequently those who master English reap many academic, social and professional benefits. In the school setting, proficiency in English will make the learning of other subjects much easier. The importance of English cannot therefore be over-emphasized.*

Despite this realization, many students continue to perform poorly in English. There has been persistent outcry from educationists and other stakeholders about the poor performance in English language. For example, universities have voiced their concern about receiving first year students who can hardly write, read and hold discussions in English language. Even those applying for employment realize the same incompetence in oral interviews and written applications as observed by educationists, employers and ordinary Kenyan citizens that most form four leavers lack proper communication skills (Aduda, 2005; Barasa, 2005 and the Kenya National Examination Council, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2011; 2013). The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) has confirmed this general incompetence in communication.

*Many students perform poorly in the oral skills...teachers need to teach the four skills of English including speaking. Listening and speaking aspects cover a large section of the syllabus and need to be given the emphasis they deserve in teaching time and coverage. Etiquette and turn taking in conversation need to be emphasized (KNEC 2008:7).*

Since English is a core subject in the school curriculum and the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities, it is vital that this trend is checked in order to facilitate the attainment of the of the national goals of education in Kenya (KIE, 2002). If students are to develop positive attitudes towards speaking skills in English, it is imperative that they should be motivated through the provision of comprehensible input. This input can be provided through authentic educational media resources (Krashen, 1988).

## 2. Provision of Educational media resources.

Kochhar (1992) observes that apart from textbooks, there are other supplementary devices which a teacher can employ to help clarify, establish and co-relate accuracy concepts, interpretations and appreciations, increase

knowledge, arouse interest, evoke worthy emotions and enrich the imagination of children. These educational media include objects, resource persons, blackboard, flash cards, pictures, wall charts, overhead projectors, transparencies, slides and film strips, video, tape recorder, the language laboratory, fieldtrips, television, radio, newspapers, magazines.

Nkuuhe (1994), while writing on why instructional media need to be used, stated that words acquire a more concrete meaning when accompanied by visual aids. He gave the advantages of using media: easy and repeated reproduction of an event or procedure, provision of a common frame work of experience of learners, enhancement of a sense of reality, visual access to a process or technique, focusing of attention and highlighting of key points, saving time through avoiding wordy explanations, creation of impact and facilitating understanding of abstract concepts while Otunga et al.(2011) state that educational technology in teaching and learning enhances delivery of content and motivates the learner in the learning process.

Mukwa (2015) argues that while integrating educational technology in teaching we should not only focus on computers but also on other educational media such as real things, still pictures, motion pictures, audio media, video and television and written words and symbols such as text books, magazines, newspapers, etc.

The use of newspapers is a CLT teaching resource material because it provides learners with authentic use of language in context. Research done in Pakistani Government by Muhammed (2016) found that learners showed favourable attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching. Newspapers have power to develop learners' speaking skills. The newspaper can be used in class for teaching speaking skills through the use of panel discussions. A group of learners for instance four to eight read a newspaper report or article and present to the class. The chairperson of the group presents a talk related to the report or article. After presentation, the remainder of the class could ask questions, clarify points or add to what the panel has said. Members of the group may raise questions or express their opinions. At the close of the discussion, weaving the various threads into an integrated whole. Second activity is holding debates. The learners can read news in the headline reports that are of national importance and then hold a debate on the issue. The third activity is carefully studying newspapers *cartoons*. Cartoons dealing with an election campaign, safety or healthy habits, good citizenship can provide a good deal of interest. The learners should be asked what or who the cartoons represent and why they appear so. Learners can also be encouraged to draw cartoons but they must avoid drawing offensive cartoons to individuals or groups. Fourth, newspaper issues can be dramatized. Items such as festivals, meetings, conferences, negotiations, if dramatized can create a good deal of interest (Kocchar, 1992:177-8). Kocchar observes that:

Newspapers can be effective teaching aids. They are full of information about the general, economic and social life of people. They are in fact the minimum text book for the study of current affairs. In spite of all the difficulties which they present for the immature reader, they all remain the indispensable source (Kocchar, 1992).

According to Kayih (2006), a teacher can give students just one picture or cartoon(s) and have them describe what it is in their picture or cartoon(s). For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture or cartoon(s). Students discuss the picture within their groups and then a spokesperson from each group describes the picture for the whole class. This activity fosters creativity as well as their public speaking skills. Also, students should be asked to first read the newspaper and then improvise a short role play in two ways: one learner plays the journalist and the other plays the protagonist of the story, the journalist does the interview or each learner takes the role of a person in the story or something that happens before or after the story. However, research done in Saudi Arabia by Algonhaim (2014) found that Arabia students realize high anxiety in oral activities which require students to make speech in front of other students. This requires the teacher that understands his learners' learning styles and needs.

A recent research done by Elmadwi (2014) in Libya and India indicated that the use of newspapers in teaching English encourage, motivate learners as well as help them to perfect their reading and comprehension skills. In addition, this research also found that 64% of Libyans and 100% of Indians prefer reading newspapers. Similar research done by Namata (2010) found that newspapers improve reading skills. Although a research done in Kenya by Omuna et al. (2016) indicated that newspapers were not available in secondary schools to be used in teaching by teachers of English language, teachers could arrange to photocopy the excerpts they intend to use for teaching speaking skills. Some reservations have been expressed on the efficiency of media in the process of teaching and learning. Haycraft (1995) warns that teachers should not become intoxicated with visual aids. Once they have been produced, there is sometimes a regrettable tendency to use them for everything. They can deteriorate into poor substitutes for preparing a lesson. Consequently, there is need for teachers to combine them with other teaching resources to fulfill immediate and long term aims.

It may be argued that there is a paucity of research in Kenya on the teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the use of newspapers in teaching speaking skills. This research was therefore urgently needed to enable the teachers of English to be aware of the attitudes learners and their colleagues hold towards the availability and use of daily newspapers in teaching English language as negative attitudes could impede the teaching and

learning of speaking skills in particular and English language in general.

### 3. Methodology.

The study was based on the Mixed Methods Research Approach, the Pragmatic Philosophical Paradigm and the correlation research design for the quantitative method and descriptive design for the qualitative method. Pragmatists argue that researchers should choose the research approach that most readily illuminates the research question (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2010). The mixed methods approach involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study. The use of both methods provided a more complete understanding of the research problem than if only one method was used.

The research took place in Bungoma North District before it was sub-divided into Kimilili-Bungoma and Bungoma North districts. These are presently some of the two districts out of the nine that form Bungoma County. The study drew its sample from students and teachers of 12 secondary schools from both public provincial (extra-county) and district (sub-county) schools on the premise that teachers posted to such schools have received training from institutions with similar characteristics and this was to control the likely intervention of the school status variable. The researcher made pre-visits to the schools and the items in the research instrument (interview guide) helped him to identify those that used daily newspapers and those that did not. Six schools used the daily newspapers, while the other six did not. The schools were put into two strata: newspapers user stratum and non-newspaper – user stratum. Stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to get the sample of 135 Form Three students and 16 teachers of English. These students were chosen because it was assumed that they had undergone most of what the English syllabus entailed and had learnt enough to be able to show a difference in their speaking competence.

Three research instruments were used in this study: students' questionnaire, teachers' interviews and students' focus group discussions to investigate the attitudes of teachers and students of English towards the impact of availability and use of daily newspapers on students' speaking competence in English. Teachers' interviews and students' focus group discussions were also used to investigate the extent to which teachers of English used daily newspapers to teach speaking skills. This provided in -depth data that met the main objective of the study. In depth information was obtained from 16 teachers of English. Interviewing was chosen as a powerful avenue to ascertain thorough understanding of the questions in hand (Fontana and Frey, 1994). The researcher/interviewer used a loose, semi-structured guide. The students' questionnaires were used to provide quantitative data while students' focus group discussions and teachers' interviews were used to provide qualitative data.

### 4. Findings.

The following are the findings from students' questionnaires, focus group discussions and teachers' interviews about their attitudes towards the impact of availability and use of daily newspapers on students' speaking competence in English.

#### 4.1 Students' Questionnaire.

One hundred and thirty five (135) participants from both schools that used daily newspapers and those that did not were asked to respond to a few questions about their attitude towards the impact of availability and use of daily newspapers on their speaking competence in English. As can be seen from table 1 below, the majority of the participants' responses to items 1 to 7 are on the agree side. 79.8% of the students agreed while 18.3% on disagreed with the statements. These findings indicate that availability and use of daily newspapers resulted to a positive attitude among learners in learning speaking skills and developing their speaking competence in English. From table 2, the inferential analysis yielded a calculated chi-square value of 87.85 with 24 degrees of freedom at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The value is greater than the critical table value of 36.4251 thus suggesting that there was a statistically significant difference. Consequently, the null hypothesis which stated: 'there is no statistical difference in students' attitude towards the teaching and learning of speaking skills between those who used daily newspapers and those who did not use' was rejected at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

**Table 1: Students' Attitudes towards the Availability and Use of Daily Newspapers in the Teaching of Speaking Skills in English.**

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY					TOTAL
	SA	A	U	D	SD	
1. Newspapers are available in the school and students read them regularly to improve on their language	20 (14.9)	48 (35.8)	4 (2.98)	40 (29.9)	22 (16.4)	134
2. Teachers use daily newspapers in the classroom to teach speaking skills which develops learners' speaking competence.	22 (16.3)	46 (34.1)	13 (9.6)	33 (24.4)	21 (15.6)	135
3. Use of newspapers in the classroom arouses the learners' interest and enrich their imagination	61 (45.5)	49 (36.6)	10 (7.5)	7 (5.2)	7 (5.2)	134
4. When newspapers are used in speaking lessons, they elicit active participation and responses from the learners, to the content of the lesson.	63 (47.0)	50 (37.3)	8 (6.0)	10 (7.3)	3 (2.2)	134
5. Newspapers provide opportunities and encouragement for learners to produce meaningful spoken messages where the messages have real communicative goals.	83 (61.5)	74 (34.8)	2 (1.5)	1 (0.7)	2 (1.5)	135
6. Newspapers activities help in developing learners' speaking competence.	70 (51.9)	40 (29.6)	3 (2.2)	12 (8.9)	10 (7.4)	135
7. If newspapers were in my school, I would use them to improve on my speaking skills.	40 (29.9)	84 (62.7)	5 (3.7)	2 (1.5)	3 (2.2)	134
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>359 (38.2)</b>	<b>391 (41.6)</b>	<b>45 (4.8)</b>	<b>105 (11.1)</b>	<b>68 (7.2)</b>	<b>941</b>

**Legend: the figures in parentheses are percentages.**

**Table 2: The Students' Attitude Chi-square Statistics Table on the Use of Daily Newspapers in the Teaching of Speaking Skills in English.**

Fo	Fe	fo-fe	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> /fe
61	69	-8	64	0.9
49	48	1	1	0.02
10	6	4	16	2.6
07	6	1	1	0.16
07	3	4	16	5.3
63	69	-6	36	0.52
50	48	2	4	0.8
08	6	2	4	0.66
10	6	4	16	2.66
03	3	0	0	0
83	69	14	196	2.84
47	49	-2	4	0.08
2	6	-4	16	2.66
1	6	-5	25	4.16
2	3	-1	1	0.33
77	69	8	64	0.92
53	49	4	16	0.32
02	6	-4	16	2.66
02	6	-4	16	2.66
01	3	-2	4	1.33
75	69	6	36	0.52
47	49	-2	4	0.08
03	6	-3	9	1.5
05	6	-1	1	0.16
05	3	2	4	1.33
45	69	-24	576	8.34
56	49	7	49	1
13	6	7	49	8.16
19	6	13	169	8.34
02	3	-1	1	0.33
84	69	15	225	3.26
40	48	-8	64	1.33
05	6	-1	1	0.16
02	6	-4	16	2.66
03	3	0	0	0
				<b>87.85</b>

#### 4.2 Students' Focused Group Discussions.

The students' focus group discussions sought to elicit students' attitudes towards availability and use of daily newspapers in the teaching and learning of speaking skills in English; and the extent teachers of English used newspapers in teaching speaking skills. The discussions aimed at answering the following questions: 'Does the use of daily newspapers in the teaching and learning of speaking skills have any impact on students' speaking competence in English?' and 'How often does your teacher of English use daily newspapers to teach speaking skills?' From these discussions, it was found that majority of the students perceived that availability and use of daily newspapers could develop their speaking competence in English. For example, most of *Group 1* participants said that use of newspapers in the classroom made them to actively participate in the lesson, enjoy the lesson and helped them to give their opinions or comment freely on a given topic. Majority of *Group 7* participants stated that whereas newspapers were interesting and could be used to develop their speaking skills, they regretted their teacher did not use them in class. They only read them in the library and at home. *Group 16* participants lamented that their school rarely bought daily newspapers. They were not kept abreast with current affairs and that generally affected their speaking competence. One of the participants in this group said:

*Lack of newspapers in the school and teachers not using them in class makes us to be in the dark on current affairs. This affected us recently when we visited a neighbouring school to hold a debate. Many of us lacked facts and the language to argue on the motion: "The ICC should be allowed to prosecute the post- election violence suspects..."*

#### 4.3 Teachers' Interviews.

When asked about their attitudes towards the impact of availability and use of daily newspapers in the teaching and learning of speaking skills, most of them perceived that their availability and use impacted positively on students' speaking competence. For example *Teacher 3* commented that:

*Newspapers are a valuable resource in teaching of English. I use them to teach almost everything...listening and speaking, especially discussions and debates...reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, oral literature...my students enjoy the lesson a lot, they actively participate in the lessons when I use newspapers than in those I do not.*

While *Teacher 10* said:

*Nothing encourages students to talk and discuss with each other than when they use newspapers. For example, in a listening /speaking class, you guide students to look at cartoons or other pictures and ask them to describe the pictures or what is happening ...many will try to speak ... even those who rarely speak or are shy.*

On the other hand, *Teacher 14* said:

*Daily Newspapers are only good if well used. If students are given newspapers, many of them may not concentrate on the activity but would like to peruse through the whole paper thus wasting time and some don't take the lesson seriously if the teacher is not firm...*

When asked about the extent they used daily newspapers to teach speaking skills and the factors that affect their use, a majority of the teachers in the schools that did not use daily newspapers to teach speaking skills in English language lamented that they were aware of the value of newspapers in developing students' linguistic competence in general and speaking competence in particular but their schools did not provide them. A majority of the teachers who used newspapers agreed that they used them at least twice per week especially in listening/speaking and literature lessons. Most of them stated that the head teachers complained about lack of enough funds to purchase the newspapers. Also, some teachers complained that their principals bought newspapers and made them personal copies thus not reaching the learners through teachers of English which impacted negatively on the students' speaking competence. Finally, a few teachers argued that use of daily newspapers was a waste of valuable time needed to cover what was in their course books. For example, *Teacher 7* argued:

*I rarely use daily newspapers in my lessons because I think many of my students that I know will not concentrate in the lesson and also I have a lot to be covered in the course books. It may just waste time...*

#### 5. Discussion.

From the above findings, both students and teachers of English perceived that availability and use of daily newspapers impacted positively on students' speaking competence.

To begin with, both students and teachers perceived that availability and use of daily newspapers in teaching and learning of speaking skills impacted positively on students' speaking competence as newspaper activities like headline discussions, debates, role plays, story- telling, etc elicit active participation and responses from students, encourage learners to produce meaningful spoken messages and encourage their imagination and makes them to freely express their ideas and opinions. This agrees with the findings of Cotter (2007) who states

that role play activities are valuable classroom techniques that encourage students to participate actively in the learning process, and Kocchar (1992) who claims that the newspapers have power to develop learners' speaking skills. This also agrees with Teacher 3 who stated that he uses daily newspapers to teach almost everything. Most teachers (83.3%) agreed that availability and use of daily newspapers to teach speaking skills draws attention of learners, motivates learners, offer some attention to the formal aspects of speaking such as pronunciation, grammar, and appropriate use of spoken language; develops learners critical thinking: separating facts from opinion and newspapers are the best authentic text which can be used to teach speaking skills. This agrees with Brown & Nation (1997) who argue that newspapers help to develop learners' accuracy and fluency in their speech.

Second, media such as newspapers help with many issues such as: motivation, clarity, recycling, drafting, revising, editing, variety, mixed ability classes, giving life and colour to classroom procedures and methods thus at the same time helping the students improve accuracy and fluency. They help learners to improve their language competence. They not only learn communication skills but also make them come out of the fear in speaking English. For instance, students argued that lack of availability and use of newspapers in teaching speaking skills impacted negatively in debate contest with a neighbouring school for they lacked facts and language to debate competently. This agrees with Rajeswari & Rhadika (2012) and Kocchar (1992) who argue that daily newspapers help students to reduce their anxiety, improve in their communication skills and help to speak English.

However, few teachers showed reservations for the use of newspapers. For example, *Teacher 14* argued that daily newspapers are only good if well handled because they may cause students not to concentrate in the lesson as intended by the teacher. This implies that teachers of English should undergo in-service training/education on the use of daily newspapers so that they can use them effectively in the teaching of English language.

## 6. Conclusion

From the above findings, it can be concluded that: one, students and teachers of English have positive attitudes towards the use of daily newspapers in teaching speaking skills in English for it arouses the learners' interest, enriches their imagination and develops their critical thinking by freely expressing their ideas and opinions, motivates them by creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere, develops learners' accuracy and fluency in English and fosters their public speaking skills. Two, the relationship that exists between "availability and use of daily newspapers as an instructional resource in teaching speaking skills" and "students' speaking competence in English language" as revealed by the findings gave the implication that availability and the use of daily newspapers in teaching speaking skills in English impacted positively on students' speaking competence in English language. However, unavailability and lack of use of daily newspapers in teaching speaking skills in the classroom impacted negatively on students' speaking competence in English language. This may be due to the advice and the corrections students get from their teachers within and at the end of the lesson when they engage in newspaper activities and the information they get from the newspapers also improves their frame of reference, hence their confidence in speaking the language unlike those who did not use the daily newspapers. Considering the fact that the teaching and learning of English in Kenya is quite similar, we believe that the analysis in this article is relevant to such contexts. However, it would be necessary to conduct research in other Kenyan counties and elsewhere to make a much bigger sample in order to corroborate the findings and make informed decisions about the use of daily newspapers in the teaching of English in general and speaking skills in particular.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, this paper recommends the following about the use of daily newspapers in teaching and learning of speaking skills in English:

1. Daily newspapers should be made available in schools and be used in the teaching of speaking skills in English in order to improve students' speaking competence in English language.
2. Due to lack of enough Daily newspapers, teachers of English should be encouraged to photocopy enough newspaper cuttings that are relevant in the teaching and learning of speaking skills.
3. The English and library departments in every school should be encouraged to bind newspapers for future use.
4. Teachers should be encouraged to start using newspaper sites on the internet to provide relevancy, variety and interest of what the course books can fail to do.

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