

PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS METHODS USED IN TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: *Writing skills are important for effective communication. However, the development of writing skills among learners depends on the methods used in teaching and learning. Recent survey of writing competence among students in schools shows that majority of them cannot write properly. This raises concern regarding methods used in teaching and learning. Low levels of writing skills in West Pokot have greatly affected overall mean scores in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations for the years 2009 to 2011 with mean scores dropping from 7.66 to 5.09. The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of teachers and students towards the methods used in teaching and learning of English writing skills in secondary schools in West Pokot County of Kenya. The objectives of the study were first, to establish teachers and students perception of methods used in teaching and learning of writing skills and second, to compare teachers and students perceptions of methods used in teaching and learning writing skills. The study population was 31 teachers of English and 2580 form four students. The sample size included 31 teachers of English and 334 form four students selected through simple random sampling technique. Data was collected through questionnaires and analyzed by use of mean and t-test. The study revealed that both teachers and students had negative perception towards methods used in teaching and learning of English writing skills and this was not statistically different(p -value=0.1594).*

Keywords; Perception, teaching methods and writing skills

INTRODUCTION

Writing is fundamental to effective communication as revealed by Driscoll (2012). This is particularly so in an era in which e-mail and other word processed documents are the norm rather than the exception in a work place. Min (2006) reveals that teachers in Britain where English is first language, teachers pay more attention to practice in writing class, encouraging students to familiarize with the language structure and have a good opportunity to express their ideas more easily through appropriate writing method. This view is similar to that of Chandler (2003) who also advocates for good opportunities for learners to familiarize with good topics of encouragement.

A teacher is an investigator of the writing processes employed by the students, using observation and discussion to identify successful methods to teach different aspects of the writing process (Ambuko, 2008). Teachers play different roles in the classroom through different ways. Richard (1990) presents a comprehensive list for teachers' role in a writing programme. The roles include:- keeping writing task clear, simple and straight forward, teaching the writing process, developing meaningful assignments, outlining goals for each writing assignment and teaching the principles - rules, convention, and guideline of writing as a learner who has a good command of English language will effectively present his ideas in an organized form, understandable to the examiner and this will logically translate into a better examination scores(Ellis,1991).

Ahmad and Aziz (2009) note that some teachers believe that classes should be teacher - centered, where the teacher is the expert and the authority in presenting information while other take a learner centered approach viewing their role as more of student learning. Ndirangu (2004) notes that inappropriate classroom. Skills such as the use of teacher centered methods sabotage the achievements and goals of even the meticulously designed curriculum. Eken (2000) noted that in a student centered class, teachers are more of facilitators and students take on the discussion role; students are seen as being able to assume a more active and participatory role vis-a-vis traditional approaches. This teaching method promotes active participation of students in classroom activities.

However, in a classroom setting a teacher should be well equipped with different methods of teaching English. Ahmad and Aziz (2009) concurs that students generally have a poor grasp of a language and part of the problem lies with the conventional teaching methods employed. From a research carried out by Ng'ong'a (2002) it was revealed that Kenyan school leavers continue to perform poorly due to poor teaching methods. This is because as Alexander (2000) noted instructors develop a teaching style based on their beliefs about what constitutes good teaching, personal preferences, their abilities, and the names of their particular discipline. This is done in disregard of the learners' needs.

Due to deteriorating of performance in English subject, objectives of writing skills have not been achieved, yet writing competence is one of the vital requirements outside the school and promoting teaching and learning of English language skills. There has been persistent complains about poor English language use in written expression .As reported by KNEC(2010,2011,2012) the compositions candidates wrote for the last three years reveal serious weaknesses in writing skills and this has greatly affected the mean scores which dropped from 7.66 in the year 2009 to 5.09 in 2011 as shown in the Table 1:

Table 1: Trends in performance in KCSE mean scores

Year	Mean score
2009	7.66
2010	5.83
2011	5.09

(Source: KNEC 2010 – 2012)

The mean score is below the average mark required by higher institutions to select students for competitive courses. English language is a medium of instruction and a compulsory subject in which a student is supposed to do well to be selected for a competitive course.

There has been a general outcry expressed by educationalists, employers, parents on the view that most of the form four leavers are not fully equipped with proper communication skills evidenced in oral interviews and written application letters. Barasa (2005) noted that universities have voiced concern about receiving first year students who can hardly write, read and hold discussions in English. The downward trend in performance across the curriculum has raised concern to the curriculum developers because English is used to teach and test other subjects except Kiswahili, African and foreign languages. Therefore little mastery of writing skills can be a serious impediment to the acquisition of skills and knowledge for other subjects that require an English background for teaching and writing (KNEC, 2010). Therefore this research was a response to this need and focus on necessary resources and methods used in teaching and learning English writing skills among students in secondary schools.

The purpose of the study was to establish perception of teachers and students towards methods used in teaching and learning of writing skills in secondary schools in West Pokot County, Kenya. Objectives of the study were:

- Establish perceptions of teachers and students towards methods used in teaching English Writing skills.
- Compare perceptions of students and teachers towards methods used in teaching English writing skills.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research design adopted was descriptive survey. As Bryman (2004) observes, the design is relevant since it entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of data in relation to two or more variables, which are then examined to detect the patterns of association, of behavior that are difficult to observe directly and when it is desirable to sample a large number of subjects for investigations.

Target population

The target population of the study was 31 English teachers and 2580 form four students in West Pokot County secondary schools. The form four students were used because they were had experienced the curriculum longest to comment on methods used in teaching and learning of English writing skills.

Sample and sampling procedure

The formula of Krejcie and Morgan (cited in Kathuri & Pals (1993) was used to calculate the sample size by estimating the sample size (s) needed. The sample size was 334 students who were selected by use of simple random sampling technique. All 31 form four teachers were selected by use of saturated sampling technique.

Instruments

Teachers and students questionnaires were used to collect data. Teachers questionnaire had statements concerning the methods used in teaching of writing skills while student questionnaires had statements concerning the methods used in learning of writing skills. The Likert Scale was used to rate teachers and students' perceptions. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) to 5 (strongly agree). The teachers' students were to mark on every statement their perception in reference to the rating scale. The mean scores were used to judge teachers and students perception. A score of 3 denoted neutral perception, a mean score of less than 3 denoted negative perception and a mean score of above 3 denoted positive perception. The overall perception of teachers and students was attained by summing up the mean scores of all respondents (Σ ms) and divided by the number of respondents.

Validity of instruments

Validity of the instruments was ascertained by expert judgment of research specialists from the Department of Educational Communication, Technology and Curriculum Studies. The views of the experts were used to revise the questionnaires.

Reliability of the instruments

Reliability is a measure of how consistent the results from a test are (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Reliability of teachers and students questionnaires was determined by use of Cronbach's alpha formula for the internal consistency of the instruments. The results yielded 0.81 as the coefficient reliability for students' questionnaires and 0.87 for teachers' questionnaires. These values were considered high enough to judge the instruments as reliable.

Data collection:

Questionnaires were administered to teachers and students by the researcher personally, so as to make clarification when need arose. The researcher made personal visitation to the schools and met the respective Head teachers and informed them about the research and arranged for data collection.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed by use of mean scores to determine perception and t-test to determine difference in perception between teachers and students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Perception of Teachers and Students towards Methods used in Teaching English writing Skills.**

The findings of teachers and students on perceptions towards the methods used in teaching English writing skills are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Perception of Teachers and Students Towards Methods used in Teaching English writing Skills.

Respondents	Mean score	Perspective
Teachers	2.49	Negative
Students	2.32	Negative

The findings reveal that teachers' perception was negative; the mean score was 2.49 meaning that teachers are not aware of the appropriate methods used in teaching English writing skills. The findings also reveal that learners' perception was negative with a mean score of 2.32 which is lower than the teachers' mean. Students are not aware of the methods they are supposed to use in learning English Writing Skills. Teachers appear not to be informed in terms of the syllabus from the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development that contains appropriate methods to be used in terms of developing English writing skills. The findings reveal that development of writing skills is a challenge among students. The study implies that performance in English subject may be dismal as a result of poor methods of content delivery. This has implications for changes in training of teachers to focus on different methods selected in accordance with objectives, learners' needs, interests, beliefs and competencies (Simonsen, 2004). The findings concur with the observations made by Indoshi and Okwara (2011), with the view that majority of teachers who are adequately educated and professionally trained are capable of producing good results at the end of primary education and also having a high degree of autonomy and flexibility in the delivery of lessons, but may still fail to have their learners acquire proficiency in academic skills of writing.

Comparison of Perceptions Between Teachers and Students Towards Methods used to Teach English writing Skills

To find the differences in perception between teachers and students, a t-test was done on the mean scores of teachers and students. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Test for differences in the average perception scores on the determinants for achievement

Determinant	Mean difference	Standard error for the mean difference	95% confidence limits (95% CL) on mean difference		Df	p-value
			Lower limit	Upper limit		
Methods	-0.17	0.12	-0.41	0.07	363	0.1594

Mean difference = Average score for the students - Average score for the teachers

The difference in average perception on the methods used in teaching and learning of English Writing Skills between the teachers and the students is -0.17 (95% CL: -0.41, 0.07). This difference is statistically non-significant (p-value=0.1594). This means that both the teachers and the students are similar in their perception on the methods. However, Kang'ahi (2012) found that teachers and students in their perspective on methods of teaching Kiswahili were different. This comparison between teachers and students implies that teachers engage students with what they know and students cannot even learn on their own. The findings show that any kind of learning of writing skills among students depend on teachers. It shows that traditional methods of teaching writing skills are still being used, whereby teachers are still the source of everything. As Kutz (1993) observed, there is excessive trust in teachers towards learners learning without due regard to the learning conditions.

Yang and Huang (2008) argued that although teachers believed that students might benefit from utilization of appropriate method in instruction, they faced barriers that made integration difficult to implement. This observation could explain why the current study

findings of students' perception was negative and similar to other studies like of Al-Senaidi et al (2009) where by the findings revealed that students had low perception towards some teaching methods used to develop writing skills.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study reveal that teachers and students had negative perception of methods used in teaching and learning of English writing skills but the perceptions were not significantly different. It could be the reason why the students' performance in English writing skills has been deteriorating. These findings imply the need for paradigm shift in methodology for teachers to develop interest in writing skills to find in order to develop competence in written English. Also teacher training institutions may have to revise their curriculum to develop writing skills.

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