

## The Competence of Language Skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing and Its Impact on the Performance of Kiswahili Literature among Secondary School Students in Wareng' Sub County, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

Pauline Ndave Wambua<sup>\*1</sup>, Mohochi Ernest<sup>2</sup>, Florence Indede<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Maseno University: School of Art Social Sciences, Department of Kiswahili and other African Languages, P.O Private Bag Maseno, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Rongo University, Kenya

<sup>3</sup>Prof. Maseno University, P.O Private Bag, Maseno, Kenya

### \*Corresponding author

Pauline Ndave Wambua

### Article History

Received: 02.02.2018

Accepted: 10.02.2018

Published: 17.03.2018



**Abstract:** This paper is based on a study of the competence of language skills and its impact on the performance of Kiswahili literature among form two and form four secondary school students in Wareng' Sub county of Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The author argues that for the students to perform well in Kiswahili literature, then they must have a high competence in language skills. This includes competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Once this is acquired or not, students will tend to have either a positive or a negative attitude which further would impact on the performance of literature in Kiswahili and the general performance of the Kiswahili subject. This paper uses the Pragmatic theory an approach whose main tenets states that practical approach to language skills is core in the foundation of competence in literature and language as a whole. The theory also postulates that students should be exposed to the language skills early in their education, so that as they progress from one level to the next, they will be able to build the necessary competence for good performance in their exams. The students were exposed to the practical literature excerpts where their interaction in usage of literature materials enabled the researcher to assess measure and record their competence in the language skills. The findings showed that the students had challenges in the language skills and that affected their performance in Kiswahili literature. This finding of this study makes recommendation that would mitigate the situation. First being the core importance of language in any society is communication. Secondly, knowledge generated will benefit students, teachers, scholars and the society in general, on the importance of competence in language skills, for communication and good performance among students.

**Keywords:** Competence in language skills, attitude, performance Kiswahili literature communication.

## INTRODUCTION

The competence in language skills among secondary school students is core for their performance in Kiswahili literature. According to Ogechi *et al.* [1], Kiswahili is the Lingua Franca of Africa, and its literature is the symbol of unity of the people of Africa. Nkwera [2] says that literature is an art that uses highly skilled language in order to pass its message. This thought is also shared by Richards [3] and Njogu and Chimera [4], who state that literature as an art uses creative language that captivates the reader; a language that artistically uses figures of speech such that the reader must have a high competence in the skills of language in order to discern the meaning involved. According to Watson [5], any student reading search a literary work must be well versed with the language skills so that they benefit fully from the writer's skill. Ndunguru [6] is of the opinion that for a student to have

a competence in language skills, they have to be exposed to literature reading right from early stages of their secondary education. Alvarez [7] has a similar opinion, that early exposure to the use of language skills sets the bar high; that reading literature at every level of education makes the student create consistency and therefore, they have enough time for the competence in language skill to develop. If a student does not start reading literature from early stages like in form two, they will have failed to plant a seed, and this failure will deprive them of huge amount of quality input that is needed to progress to high levels, in terms of competence and performance. For example, proper pronunciation at the beginning should be encouraged since it will make the learner study the hard sounds as it will be hard to relearn. Students in form two may not have the capacity and competence required to successfully handle literature exam because they are

using the skills that they are not exposed to. This is a setback which impacts negatively on their performance. The form four students also face a challenge since they are exposed to large quantities of literature work to read, which if they would have started at earlier stages they would have managed with less challenges. This paper adopts pragmatic approach in order to find the right approach which can mitigate the situation and also counter the challenges faced by students in their acquisition of competence in language skills.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Pragmatism**

This paper is based on the Pragmatism theory, whose main proponents are Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey [8] and later on advanced by Susan Hack (1945). The major developments of this theory are found in the research of Charles Sanders Peirce found under the topic *Structural Linguistics, Semiotics and Communication Theory* which was retrieved from [faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/semiotics-and...](http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/semiotics-and...) The main tenets which guided this paper are; first any scholar or learner should be exposed in every day learning such that they have the competence to explain their interactions with literature works. This study will expose form two and form four students to similar literature works in order to examine their level of exposure and competence in the skills of listening and speaking. Secondly, any learner should be exposed practically, by taking part in the learning experience. The result of this should be seen live, such that a learner is able to produce either positive or negative result based on how competent one is in the skill being used. The skill of reading will be applied to examine this. Thirdly, the meanings of literature works should be viewed from the perspective of a chain that is continuous, such that the success of one level is dependent on the success of the previous stage or level. Based on this, the respondents will be exposed to similar works of literature and testing of their writing skill. From this experience the researcher will be able to determine if the form four students is competent much more than the form two students are having been exposed to literature works much longer.

In the light of the pragmatism approach by scholars such; Ishumi [9]; Watson [5]; Njogu and Chimera [4] among others, they have the opinion that a learner should be exposed to the skill of speaking and by asking them to explain what they have heard or read. The act of speaking will then expose the ability and competence that one has, showed the level of comprehension over the said issue and by use of the right words and terminologies. Likewise, by asking the learner to write what they heard and said, they will be exposed to the skill of writing, so that if they heard the correct word, they will say the correct word and write the correct word. The opposite will occur if the learner does not hear the correct information, they will say and write the wrong information.

Based on these guidelines this paper will be able to propose methods that can be put in place in order to improve the student's exposure to literature works, which will in order improve their competence in language skills and performance in Kiswahili.

### **What is Competence of language skill in literary works?**

Competence is the knowledge, skills, abilities, that a person displays while carrying out a skill. A skill is the ability to carry out a task with determined results within a given amount of time. Learners require language skills that include knowledge of structures and functions of language, as well as fluency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The knowledge and competence of these skills constitute a meaningful whole. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com>pii.> [10].

In view of the above, a competent learner should master these language skills since they allow him/her to convert the words of a literary work into a meaning. The competence the learner has will allow him/her to know certain conventions on how such a work should be read, or spoken, or written and understood. On a pragmatic approach, the student is supposed to be competent and familiar with these skills because this allows him to perform better in the exams.

According to Noaman [11] the teaching of language skills such as listening and reading in relation to literature works acts as receptive skills while speaking and writing act as productive skills. Pragmatism allows for these skills to be used live by the learner in order to display their real meaning. This paper will show how learning of Kiswahili literature should employ competence in the language skills for maximum success.

### **The place of Competence in Language Skills and Performance**

A Kiswahili literature learner is viewed as a critique of the literature work that he / she reads. They are expected to expose mature and competent ways of thinking when exposed to the skills of language. In this light, the learner should be exposed to the language skills in their early stages of learning, as Ndunguru [6] says. This long exposure will make the learner to have enough time to internalize what they will have learned over a period of time.

Yule [12] had a similar thought, that a literature learner should have the competence in language skills in order to be able to have maximum benefit of what they will have learned. High competence of language skills enhances proper communication through pragmatism which is experienced through listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to Wamitila [13], a learner who is exposed to the reading of literature for a lengthy period

of time, gets the full benefit of the competence in the language skills. Such a learner will be in a position to pragmatically employ the language skills and make a successful criticism of the work of literature.

#### **Limitations of the study**

This study was conducted in Wareng' Sub County of Uasin Gishu County. The competence of Language skills was conducted among the sub county schools only which displayed weak results of exams, both at school level and at national level. The main limitation was that probably not all sub county schools within the Wareng' Sub County experienced similar challenges. That notwithstanding, the results were generalized among the Wareng' sub county schools.

#### **METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study majorly adopted the qualitative approach, with quantitative elements that were used for complementary purposes. Qualitative design is explained by Patton [14] as best suited where the respondents are used to give their data in form of views in relation to a certain phenomenon. These views are later elaborated and explained in order to give results of what was researched about. At the same time, Patton (quoted) recommends the use of triangulation, which is the use of more than one research design for complimentary purpose. In this paper, quantitative was used to show the number of schools involved and the number of respondents in form two and in form four, qualitative approach was then adopted in order to give an explanation based on the views of the respondents.

#### **Sample size and sampling procedure**

At the time of the study, Wareng' Sub County had 39 registered schools. The researcher choose a third of the sub county schools randomly for the study. The target group comprised of all the form two and forms four students in the selected schools. This target group from the sub county schools in Wareng' Sub County were a total of 4335. This being too target a group, the researcher used the one third guide line given by Mugenda and Mugenda [15] in order to get a sample size. Therefore, only 12 sub county schools were selected. So, a third of the form twos from each of the

12 schools, and similarly a third of the form fours, was randomly selected. Therefore, total number of respondents from form two was 230 while the form fours were a total of 200. The selected respondents were then exposed to a literature excerpt from Mohamed [16] from which they were expected to interact by use of pragmatism approach, then their competence was examined based on the four skills of language.

#### **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

The researcher used a guide in form of a table with suitably selected areas that were to measure competence of respondents. The selected areas were based on each of the language skills as follows: After listening to the excerpt which contained approximately 250 words, the respondents were to identify characters mentioned and their features. Identifying the characters and their features correctly measured the competence of their listening skill. After listening at the excerpt a second time, the respondents were asked to state the figures of speech which were used. This measured listening and speaking and again correct answers were recorded based on the researchers check list. The respondents were asked to read the literature excerpt aloud and the researcher was able to examine correct pronunciation of specific words that were hard to read and pronounce. Hesitating and repetition were key guides. Finally, the researcher asked the respondents to write five correct sentences using the figures of speech used in the excerpt in order to produce their correct meaning. These researchers corrected and awarded scores in terms of percentages from each form and its total number of respondents.

#### **Data analysis and Presentation**

From the exposure discussed during data collection, the researcher was able to draw a score chart and a table which showed how each form performed. Correct answers were displayed, each skill showing percentage score in relation to the total number of respondents in each form. A comparison of the competence between form two and form four respondents was done then the researcher was able to make conclusions, based on detailed explanations on the outcome of the percentages that were displayed.

**Table-1: Students Competence in Language Skills.**

Form 2			Form 4		Form 2			Form 4		
Listening			Speaking							
Feature tested	number	%	number	%	Feature tested	number	%	number	%	
1)Figurative speech	200	87	175	88	1)Figurative speech	200	87	180	90	
2)Similes	120	51	190	95	2)Similes	198	86	150	75	
3)Metaphor	50	21	120	60	3)Metaphor	15	7	80	40	
Form2			Form 4		Form 2			Form 4		
Reading			Writing							
Feature Tested	number	%	number	%	Feature tested	number	%	number	%	
1)Repetition	140	60	98	49	1)Figures of speech	<b>120</b>	<b>52</b>	130	65	
2)Hesitation	120	52	98	49	2)Sentence writing	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	78	39	

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the competence of language skills among form two and form four students in Wareng' Sub county. The form two respondents were involved because they were always exposed to examinations that captured all areas of examination in Kiswahili, which included literature in Kiswahili. In some of the skills, the form four respondents displayed a higher competence than the form twos; while in others the form twos showed that they had an average competence compared to the form fours. Examples; in listening skill, form two students were able to identify and mention figurative speech but notably only the most simple ones. The same applied to identification of similes. This was regrettably the scenario among the form four respondents who would have shown a higher maturity and competence when exposed to listening skill. This is because at form four they would have been exposed to the reading of Kiswahili literature longer than the form twos. The form two respondents had a challenge of stating metaphors used while the form fours posted better competence than the form twos. The same scenario repeated itself in the examination of speaking, with both forms showing lower grades when they were asked to state further examples of metaphors. In the skills of reading and writing, competence levels were almost at par in both forms, though the form fours displayed weaker competence in the writing of sentences using the figures of speech correctly.

The syllabus of the study of literature in Kiswahili requires that it starts while students are in form three, yet the form two students are examined in all areas including literature. From this study, the researcher was able to get the results that showed the level of competence of the form two respondents based on language skills in comparison to the form fours who had already started the study of literature. From this study, the researcher was able to make recommendations that would officially expose the form two students to suit them equitably in the study and exams of literature in Kiswahili.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study showed that form four respondents had a lower competence of language skill compared to form two respondents. This is because they were exposed to a similar test and by use of pragmatism, the form fours could not show higher mastery of skills, despite the fact that they had been reading Kiswahili literature texts since form three. This indicates that if the form two students would have had a better chance to read the literature texts, they would have shown better results. It is also an indication that if the form fours would have had less challenges in their study of Kiswahili literature they would have displayed better results.

The findings and conclusions of this paper leads to the recommendations that the Kiswahili literature syllabus be expanded, such that its study officially begins at form two level as opposed to the current situation, whereby the syllabus is allowed only at form three. This will give the learners a better chance to develop their competence of the language skills as they appear in the literature texts. This competence is inevitable, because the better it becomes, the better their performance. This paper also recommends that the Kiswahili syllabus be revised such that literature in Kiswahili (fasihi) should be approached as a different subject from Kiswahili grammar (matumizi ya lugha). This will provide the learners ample time to concentrate better in each separately for better results. This challenge goes to policy and syllabus makers to make the necessary amendments for better results in both Kiswahili lugha and Kiswahili literature.

## REFERENCES

- Ogechi N, Shitemi NL, Simala KI, Khamis S. Nadharia katika taaluma ya Kiswahili na lugha za Kiafrika; 2008.
- Nkwera FV. Request: A National Day for Repentance. Dar es Salaam: Marian Faith Healing Centre. 2003.
- Richards IA. Principles of Literary Criticism.-London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1924. Richards, IA. 1924.

4. Njogu K, Chimera RM. Ufundishaji wa fasihi: nadharia na mbinu. Jomo Kenyatta Fndtn; 1999.
5. Watson T. In search of management; 1994.
6. Ndunguru S. Kanuni na Mbinu za Kufundisha. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau; 1978.
7. Alvarez D. Reasons for Failing in Foreign Language. *Journal for Teaching Writing*; 2013.
8. Dewey J. Thomas Jefferson. Mondadori; 1952.
9. Ishumi AG. Education and development in theory and practice. 1976.
10. [facult.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/semiotics-and...](http://facult.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/semiotics-and...) Retrieved. <https://www.sciencedirect.com>>pii.
11. Noaman NN. Literature and language skill. AL-USTATH, Baghdad university. 2013;204(2):123-34.
12. Yule V. The study of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1985.
13. Wamitila KW. Uhakiki wa Fasihi na Vipengee vyake. Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers Limited.
14. Quinn Patton M. Qualitative research and evaluation methods; 2002.
15. Mugenda OM. Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches. African Centre for Technology Studies; 1999.
16. Mohamed SA, Chungu A. Utengano. Nairobi; 1980.