

**INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT TEACHERS ON LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENT CATEGORIES IN ENGLISH SPEECH FUNCTIONAL WRITING SKILLS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Functional composition writing is a pragmatic use of language for social and personal expression. It is a universal communication tool that determines the achievement of students' lifelong goals. Functional writing skills recorded the lowest mean score in the Kenya certificate of secondary education (K.C.S.E) examination at 33.7% compared to 62.5% for cloze test and 45.6% for oral skills, for the period 2011 to 2019 as revealed by KNEC examination reports. Performance of functional writing skills in the country has been below C+. The purpose of the study was to establish the Influence of different Teachers on Learners' Achievement Categories in English Speech Functional Writing Skills among Secondary School Learners in Kenya. The objective of the study was to: establish the Influence of learners' achievement categories on English functional writing among secondary school learners in West Pokot County, Kenya. The study used descriptive survey and correlation study designs. The study population consisted of 2580 Form 4 students who had been taught all functional skills and 34 teachers of English subjects from 34 schools. The study used a saturated sampling technique to select 31 teachers while Krejcie and Morgan table was used to determine the sample size of 334 students who were then randomly sampled. Data collection was done through learners' achievement tests. The pilot study comprised of 3 teachers of English and 250 students from 3 secondary schools. A pilot study was done to establish the reliability of the instrument through the test-retest reliability method of the same test administered to the same sample on two different occasions. Supervisors from the Department of Educational Communication Technology, and Curriculum Studies of Maseno University ascertained the content validity of instruments. Descriptive statistics (percentages and mean), were used to analyze quantitative data. A random-effect model was used to show the magnitude of the relationship between variables. The findings revealed that the average student performance in speech writing was below average 46 (sd: 21.7). The median student mark was 50 (ranging from 25-60). The study concludes that teacher preparedness determines the outcome of composition differently. The study recommended that teachers should prepare well to meet the needs of the learners.

**Keywords:** Functional speech writing skills, Achievement

**1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Functional skills approach to language includes functional writing, functional cloze test, and oral functional skills. They are effective means of communication with others, not merely a

means of displaying academic knowledge. Furthermore, writing is enhanced when instruction is explicitly designed to address learners' specific needs and objectives; it becomes the main device for self-expression, sharing ideas, and convincing others (Salem, 2013).

Driscoll (2012) holds the view that speech writing is fundamental to effective communication as a way of passing information from one person to another. As a mode of communication, functional speech writing has been given a lot of emphasis across Australia and the United Kingdom whereby secretaries are supposed to be aware of the needs of written speech. Good speech writing instills competence in career development and makes ideas flow during speech delivery (Littlewood, 2004).

Reilly (2013) highlights the importance of a good functional written speech. The importance includes presuming that the real speech presentation dazzles the audience and achieving two objectives i.e. impressing and leaving the audience with two or three takeaways besides entertainment. Further observation is that writing a speech involves meeting the expectations of others, whether it is to inform, motivate, entertain or even challenge by using or adopting the right tone, and also when writing a speech, one should come out swinging by sharing a shocking fact or statistic. From the speeches mentioned, presenters could try to capitalize on the goodwill and momentum. Effective speech writing worldwide depends on how learners are handled by instructors. UNESCO (2004) emphasizes that to achieve proficiency in speech writing, emphasis should be put on appropriate pedagogy, proper teacher training and learning materials should be of core importance to improve the quality of learning functional speech writing but studies reveal that performance of functional speech writing is still below the average mark of fifty percent.

Ahour (2009), in a study on factors affecting writing performance, revealed that learners had weakness in components of grammar and cohesion making them not to communicate appropriately among Iranian students in relation to resources they use. Studies that have been done in America reveal that students lack writing skills as noted by Leal (2012). The findings showed that students were not able to communicate effectively, even when they were allowed to use spell check, thesaurus, and other word processing tools in computers.

Swaga (2013) revealed that many learners in Rwandan schools complete their studies when they do not have adequate functional writing skills. They have trouble in writing job application letters and other related documents, but they are not to blame. The challenge is that teachers of the English language focus more attention on the examinable aspects like reading comprehension, summary writing, grammar, and phonology.

There is dissatisfying teacher English proficiency levels in Tanzania and this has prompted some schools to recruit teachers from other countries notably Kenya and Uganda where the English curriculum is well developed, and the teaching of functional writing is emphasized in the syllabus and its importance ( Rugemalira, 2005).

Primary education in Kenya lays the foundation for learning English among pupils. The secondary cycle improves and develops language skills whose acquisition begins in primary school. A lot of emphases is put on the acquisition of written communicative competence and not simply on the passing of examinations because writing proficiency is a desirable life-long goal. Many private companies and government organizations desire to employ workers with

competent writing skills where functional writing plays a crucial role in achieving the National goals and objectives stated in the syllabus.

Secondary education is a stage where the teaching of writing skills is taught comprehensively. Therefore, the determinants (Teacher qualification, pre-service training, teacher performance, used to teach functional writing skills) are supposed to be developed by teachers of English, to encourage learners to participate in classroom learning activities towards the development of writing skills through the appropriate procedures in the syllabus.

## **2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Secondary schools in Kenya have continued to post poor performance in KCSE English Functional writing skills that the average mark for functional writing was below the average mark of 50% compared to cloze test and oral functional skills. Performance in English functional writing skills has declined compared to other skills tested in English over the decade. It, therefore, reveals that objectives stipulated in the syllabus book have not been achieved, therefore posing a problem. Research in other subjects like education administration and mathematics has taken the interest of researchers, but research on determinants of achievement in English functional speech writing skills has not been conclusive. There is an acknowledgment from Existing research and syllabus that scholars and examination markers have expressed concern about performance in English functional writing skills (KNEC,2015).

Iyumagonya (1989) and Okwara (2012) raised concern about persistent complaints about poor English language use in speech and written expression in examinations. Barasa (2005) reports that universities have voiced concern about receiving first-year students, who can hardly write, read and hold discussions in English. This situation has posed a challenge to university and secondary schools currently. Determinants of achievement in English functional speech writing skills have not attracted the interest of researchers. Further, the weighting of the determinants has not been established for indicating areas of activity in intervention strategies. The study focused on determinants which English syllabus has given more emphasis in a classroom setting.

### **2.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to establish the Influence of Different Teachers on Learners' Achievement Categories in English Speech Functional Writing Skills Among Secondary School Learners in Kenya.

### **2.2 Objectives of the study**

Establish the Influence of Different Teachers on Learners' Achievement Categories in English Speech Functional Writing Skills Among Secondary School Learners.

Literature review reveals that much concern has focused on other functional writing skills and imaginative skills. More closely, a recent action research study by Williamson (2013) investigated whether the achievement levels in L2 can be raised. Following observation of functional skills in English practice, learners appeared to struggle with the requirements of

the writing curriculum. Abdallah (2014) has identified functional writing skills from a previous study but the area of determinants influencing achievement levels in functional writing has not received research attraction and therefore needs to carry the current research on functional speech writing.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and correlation design. The descriptive survey is a method of collecting information without changing the environment and providing information about the naturally occurring behaviors, attitudes, or other characteristics of a particular group (Orodho, 2003). The researcher interacted with respondents to collect the relevant information needed. Correlation design was also used to show the existence of some definite relationship between two or more variables (Saleemi, 2011). The study correlated the influence of selected determinants and achievement of students in English Functional writing skills.

#### **3.2 Target Population**

The target population comprised 34 teachers of English and 2580 Form 4 students drawn from 34 secondary schools. Only students from form participated in the study because they had covered all functional writing skills and they have acquired the necessary functional writing skills.

#### **3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

A saturated sampling technique was used to select a sample of 31 teachers of English. Thirty-one teachers of the total population were picked for the purpose of classroom observation. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining Sample for finite population, was used to select a sample of 334 students through a simple random sampling technique. The table is in Appendix M.

**Table 3.1 Sampling frame**

Respondents	Population	Sample	Percentage
Students	2580	334	13
Teachers	32	31	91.2

A simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample sizes of form 4 students in schools who were subjected to a test. The population to be sampled was not homogenous in terms of certain characteristics like boarding, day, and different learning abilities. A saturated sampling technique was used to select teachers. It was appropriate because teachers of English have different qualifications and experience. Simple random sampling was used because it is not biased, Donald and Tromp (2006) and Gupta (2002).

#### **3.4 Research Instruments**

### 3.4.1 Students’ English Writing Skills Test

A standard test from the KCSE examination was used to measure the achievement of students in English Functional writing composition. The student was supposed to demonstrate various writing skills in functional writing they have learned in forms 1, 2, 3, and 4. Marks were awarded according to the marking scheme in appendix E. Thereafter put in different categories for analysis.

The researcher adopted a test in functional writing for the year 2010 from KCSE. It was administered to Form 4 learners as a way of measuring their achievement levels in English functional writing skills. The text was a composition in form of guided writing whereby learners were supposed to write down a speech with directions on how to write it. The test was given to 10 or 11 students based on the number of students in a school. Three hundred and thirty learners did the test and were marked based on the marking scheme and every learner was awarded a score to show the grade he or she obtained as shown in table 4.2.

### 3.5 Reliability of Instruments

Reliability is a measure of how consistent the results from test areas are noted by Kombo and Tromp (2006). A pilot study was carried out to ascertain the reliability of the standard test.

A standard test from KCSE for the year 2010 was adopted. The reliability for the test was administered; the test-retest reliability method was used at an interval of two weeks. Hilton – Bayre (2010) notes that in the test-retest reliability method the same test was administered to the same sample on two different occasions.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study observed the following ethical considerations:

- i. The researcher received a research authorization letter from the Teachers Service commission County office to carry out the study.
- ii. The researcher reported results without any alteration and plagiarisms to meet the ethical issue.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish the Influence of different Teachers on Learners’ Achievement Categories in English Speech Functional Writing Skills Among Secondary School Learners

**Table 4.1 Students' Achievement Scores in Different Levels**

Teachers’ Performance			Students’ performance			
Range of marks (%)	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Mean mark(SD)	Median mark(IQR)
<=45	4	13	40	12	29(14.2)	25(18-38)
45-50	8	26	86	26	44(20.4)	50(25-60)
50-55	14	45	153	46	47(22.0)	55(25-65)
>55	5	16	55	16	60(16.9)	60(50-75)

Overall	31	100	334	100	46(21.7)	50(25-50)
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The findings of the study revealed that 13% of teachers scored below 45 with 12 % of students having a mean of 29, which is far below the overall mean. However, in the category of 45-50, there were 26% of teachers with 26% of students having a mean of 44 that is slightly below average. The number of teachers in a range mark of 50-55 was 45% with 153 students having a mean of 47, which is below the average mark. The majority of the students were found in this category.

The study revealed that the ability level of students ranged within the category. The final range of marks was above 55-100, where 16% of the teachers with 16% of the total students were able to have a mean of 60, which is above the average mark. The overall findings revealed that a small number of students were above average in their achievements while a large number were below average.

The study established students' achievement levels in English functional speech writing. The assessment was done through a test that was given to students to do to establish their achievement by categorizing achievement levels in terms of grades from A being the highest and E being the lowest as presented in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 Students' Achievements in Functional Writing Skills**

Grade	No. of students ( <i>f</i> )	Percentage	Marks <sup>x</sup> /100	( <i>fx</i> )
E	81	24.5	20.2	1435
D-	20	5.99	30	600
D	21	6.29	35	735
D+	27	8.03	40	1080
C-	45	13.47	45	2025
C	24	7.19	50	1200
C+	10	2.99	55	550
B-	28	8.38	60	1680
B	16	4.79	65	1040
B+	20	5.99	70	1400
A-	14	4.19	75	1050
A	28	8.38	83.5	2338
Mean= $\sum fx$ /no of students				45.31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>334</b>			<b>15135</b>

**Key:**  $\sum fx$  = Total marks scored by all students

The average student performance was 45.31%, which is below the pass mark. The pass mark for any test including the K.C.S.E examination is 55, a mean grade of C + (Plus) which is the minimum grade requirement for entry to training as a teacher of English.

From table 4.2, the findings revealed that even at form four, the majority of students had not acquired pre-requisite knowledge in English functional speech writing. The majority of learners scored below average scoring between grades C and E. It implies that functional writing has not been mastered. Learners who scored D+ (plus), D (plain) and D- (minus) were 68 (20.4%).

The study revealed that functional writing achievement was below average. The speech written had broken English with grammatical errors such as capitalization, spellings, poor sentence construction, and hanging sentences characterized the speech written. Students' written work lacked coherence making communication to be hard. The researcher concluded that the flow of thoughts of such kinds of learners was impossible to be followed by everyone reading their composition.

The current study finding concurs with a previous study done by Street (2002). The findings indicated that the writing process is still low in the United States, as instructors might have hoped. Street (2002) revealed that there is a need for improving the effectiveness of writing in the future. The study indicated that only half in grade 49 equivalents to C+ are able to write adequate responses to students' general instruction in the writing process.

Ahour (2009) in a study diagnosing areas of strength and weakness in writing of TESL undergraduate students also found that students had weaknesses in components of grammar and cohesion as revealed in the composition writing. It shows that if students have not developed proper functional writing in university, then the situation is worse at secondary school levels that concur with the findings of the current study.

The current study findings are similar to the findings presented by Awg, Hamzah, and Rafidee (2010). The research titled 'a comparative study on the factors affecting the writing performance among Bachelor students' whereby the average mark of the majority of learners is below 50 in functional composition writing skills. Another study that has similar findings of the current study is that of Leal (2012) in research entitled 'Students lack writing skills' also revealed that majority of the students were below the average mark and they could not communicate effectively in written work portraying poor writing skills.

Swaga (2013) argues that English language teachers should teach functional writing skills to prepare learners for job-related writing tasks. It is important that learners leave high school when they can write a variety of formal documents. He observes that the world has become a global village whereby any job advertisement in the media attracts many applications and potential employers devise ways through which to eliminate some applicants. In most cases, applications that fall short of the basic information and those that are poorly arranged are dumped in trash bins.

There are many applicants with the right job qualifications after training, but not shortlisted for interviews. This is because of their failure to package their potential in job-related documents. This calls for guidance from the teachers but some people may argue that the

internet gives information about how to write such documents after completion of college training, but how many of our learners have access to the Internet facilities in schools? Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to put emphasis on functional writing skills to enable learners to compete for job opportunities favorably and also survive on the job by being able to write correspondences in the right way.

The findings reveal that aspects of speech writing such as speech structure, paragraphs, and form have been given little or no attention as seen from speeches written. Therefore, teachers should guide learners on the format, content, language, and purpose of all functional skills used in different situations. This can be done by getting different functional writing skills from the syllabus and helping learners do practice writing applications. If this is done regularly, it helps learners to master the concepts of writing such documents (Swaga, 2013).

The current study findings are almost the same as the research findings presented by Awg, Hamzah, and Rafidee (2010) whereby the average mark of the majority of the learners is below 50. Leal (2012) also revealed that the majority of the students were below the average marks and they could not communicate effectively in written work portraying poor writing skills.

The average student performance was below average 46 (sd: 21.7). The median student mark was 50 (ranging from 25-60). The big disparity between the average mark and the mean mark indicates there were more students who score marks below 50 thus pulling down the average student marks. The average student performance was also computed per teacher and the results were as tabulated in Table 4.3

The scores of students per individual teacher are shown in Table 4.3 below

**Table 4.3: Student's Achievement by Every Teacher**

Teacher	Sample size (n)	Teachers' mark	Class Size	Students' Mean Mark	Sd
1	11	64	45	61	19.2
2	11	61	44	60	15.9
3	11	60	45	60	19.0
4	11	58	45	63	19.5
5	11	57	44	58	12.9
6	11	55	44	52	19.4
7	11	54	44	55	14.4
8	11	54	44	50	20.5
9	11	53	44	44	24.9
10	11	53	42	43	29.7
11	11	53	43	45	25.4
12	11	52	44	49	25.0
13	11	52	45	47	21.8
14	11	52	42	41	22.4



15	11	52	43	49	26.6
16	11	52	45	50	20.1
17	11	52	44	44	19.6
18	11	51	45	42	21.4
19	10	51	38	45	22.4
20	11	50	42	52	18.2
21	11	50	45	51	20.2
22	11	49	43	40	22.9
23	11	49	44	45	22.9
24	10	48	38	46	27.1
25	11	47	45	43	18.5
26	10	47	37	39	16.0
27	11	46	43	35	16.3
28	10	45	37	33	17.4
29	10	44	38	28	15.5
30	10	43	37	30	14.7
31	10	42	38	25	8.5

The findings show that teachers' number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 20, and 21 had their students scoring an average mark above 50. The median for these students was also above the 50% mark. The rest of the teachers, 20 of them, had their students scoring a mark less than 50. This group had however a mix of those with a median mark below 50 and those with a median mark above 50.

The researcher prepared a test and administered it to form four learners as a way of measuring their achievement levels in English functional writing skills. The text was a composition in form of guided writing whereby learners were supposed to write down a speech. The test was administered to given to 10 students after observation of lessons. 334 learners did the test and were marked based on the marking scheme and every learner was awarded a score to show the grade he or she obtained as shown in table 4.2.

The scores were put into categories of (A) being the highest grade (B) followed by (C) then (D) and finally (E) being the lowest grade. The number of respondent learners, who got grade A, was 28 (8.4%). The category of these students was able to communicate their ideas not only fluently but also with attractiveness, and efficiency. The students were able to make the researcher share their deep feelings, emotions, and enthusiasms concerning various issues governing the nature of the question in a discussion. In addition, this category of students expressed their ideas freely and without any visible constraints. Their scripts gave evidence of maturity, good planning, and often humor. Many items of merit indicated that these students had a good command of writing skills with felicity of expression.

The number of respondents in category B was 78 (23.7%). The respondents demonstrated that the functional writing skills that they had acquired enabled them to express themselves; their sentences were well constructed. Some students in this category had ideas not over-

ambitious. Many writings were clean and unassuming but showed students easiness in writing skills. Their tenses and punctuations were quite good with gross errors found occasionally.

In category C, the number of respondents was 79 (23.7%). Their writing skills level were lower than that of categories A and B. it revealed that students here were able to communicate understandably but only more or less clearly. They were not confident with writing skills in the English language. However, their writings portrayed that they were undeveloped with some form of digressions from the main idea that was under discussion. Mostly, learners repeated themselves frequently ideally. It further revealed that the learners in this category arrange ideas weakly and with a jerky flow. Findings from the study further revealed that there was no economy of language whereby mother tongue and direct translation were common.

In most cases, the learners were able to communicate but not with consistent clarity, with limited knowledge and structure of the speech. Moreover, gross errors of agreement, spellings, and misuse of prepositions, tenses, and sentences were common with inconsistent clarity. The findings revealed that learners in this category expressed themselves clearly but in a flat and uncertain manner. Their simple concepts and sentence forms were often strained with the subject being undeveloped with a lack of writing skills and originality. This category of learners tried to show that they had the ability to use writing skills they had acquired in the lower forms averagely.

The second last category of learners was those who scored D, the number of respondents was 68 (20.4%). The findings revealed that the writing skills acquisition of these learners was dismal second to the last grade. Their composition was characterized by broken English full of grammatical mistakes such as capitalization, spelling, poor sentence construction, hanging sentences. The type of learners here are those who were not able to communicate at all, their writing technique was viewed as chaotic with vague meaning throughout. The researcher concluded that the flow of thoughts of such kinds of learners was impossible to be followed by everyone reading their composition. They are the type of learners who did not read the question and follow the directions given by the researcher.

Finally, the last category of the score was E with 82 (24.6%) of the respondents. Their scores were low. Their compositions were very short with only one or two lines or even a statement not related to the nature of requirements of the test. The researcher revealed that learners here had no idea of the composition and ended up being dumbfounded lacking what to write even after being given instructions. Their level of achievement of writing skills was at worse as depicted in the scores they obtained in the test.

From the findings of the learners' achievement levels, it revealed that even at form four, the majority of the learners had not acquired functional writing skills in speech writing. It revealed that learners had different abilities that are fostered by, resources, methods teachers, and students' attitudes towards the subject. The way teachers handle mentioned aspects played a major role in determining the achievement levels of writing skills.

The findings of the current study hold the same views of the previous study by Street (2002) indicating that the writing process is not well established in the United States as advocates

might have hoped. In a report, a street in his study says that the need for improving the effectiveness of future writing, teachers were underscored by the evaluation of the National Assessment of educational progress (NAEP). The report indicated that only half of students in grades 49 and 12 are able to write adequate instruction making the writing process not well established as reported by Street (2002) shows that the situation is poorly developed.

The findings of the current study and the study of Street show that students still perform poorly in writing skills when they are examined through composition writing. Ahour (2009) also found that students had weaknesses in components of grammar and cohesion as revealed in the current study in different categories of achievement as revealed through functional writing.

From the study findings, the relationship between the teachers' performance, attitude, resources, and methods and the students' performance was established using a random-effects model. The student's mark was taken as the outcome while the teachers' characteristics (teachers' factor, attitude, resources, and methods) were taken as the determinants. The summary of the regression model is shown in Table 4.4 below

**Table 4.4 Regression Model**

Number of students=334(100%), Number of teachers=31					95% confidence limits	
Variable mean	Coefficient	Standard error	Z	p-value	Lower limit	Upper limit
Students' Achievement 45.31	46.62	1.26	37.14	<0.001	44.16	49.09

The association between determinants in Table 4.23 presents the results of a multilevel regression model. From Table 4.24 every unit increase in the teacher's mark leads to an increase in the student mark by 1.59 (95% CL: 1.12-2.05). This increase is statistically significant at 5% level; p-value=0.000.

## 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The findings reveal that teachers' performance influences students' achievement in English functional writing skills. The relationship between teachers' performance and students' achievement was statistically significant (p- Value<0.001)

### 5.2 Recommendations

Teachers should use different strategies that cater to learners' individual differences that give learners the greatest opportunity for participation and allow them to relate their experiences. The more learners are involved in the classroom writing process and exposed to the six levels of the learning process, the more opportunity they will have for exposure, and the more likely to master the various writing skills through the most appreciated method by both the teacher and the learner.

Bearing in mind that English is a compulsory subject teachers' attitudes should foster teaching and learning of English functional writing skills and attainment of functional writing objectives, which teachers and learners have in common.

### **5.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

A study should be conducted to investigate the differences between the changes in the new curriculum and the old curriculum and correlate with students' achievement of English functional writing skills to realize the significant curriculum.

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