

# Learning English Language by Radio in Primary Schools in Kenya

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Radio is one of the most affordable educational technologies available for the use in education and development in developing countries. This article explores the use of school radio broadcast to assist teachers and pupils to learn and improve English language both written and spoken in Kenyan primary schools. English language occupies a central place in formal education in Kenya. It is one of the compulsory subjects in both primary (aged six to 13 years) and secondary education (aged 14 to 18 years). It is also a medium of instruction in upper primary from standard four to university education in Kenya. However, teaching and learning English remains one of the most difficult and taxing assignment to primary schoolteachers, because when children join class one they go to the classroom with pre-set language skills. They have developed skills in their vernacular which is the language of instruction in most of rural schools or Kiswahili in urban schools. Sometimes, they mix vernacular, Kiswahili and English and come up with another language called “Sheng”. This makes it very difficult for them to learn English language. Research from developed and developing countries indicates that the use of school radio programmes assist pupils and teachers to learn foreign language like English faster and help them to improve pronunciation of difficult words. School radio broadcast was introduced in Kenya in 1961. One of the reasons was to help improve the standard of spoken and written English language and set the standard for the spoken English in the country. Radio was chosen, because it is affordable and simple to maintain. Despite of the existence of the program in Kenya for many years, there has been an out cry over falling standard in English language evidenced by poor performance in national examinations. The purpose of this study was to find out if teachers in primary schools use broadcasts to schools radio programmes to assist them in teaching and learning the language. The study was based on a descriptive survey. The area of study was Kisumu district and saturated sampling technique was used to select a sample of participants. Data were collected by use of questionnaire for pupils and teachers, while semi-structured interview was used to collect information from head teachers. The main findings indicated that most teachers were not listening to the school radio broadcasts. Very few of them used radio lessons citing various problems, such as lack of resources, broadcast time tables and teachers guide notes, negative attitudes and large number of pupils in the class. Those, who listened to English radio lessons, valued them very much and noted how it has helped to improve the pupils spoken English and performance in Kenya certificate of primary education examination. In view of the findings, the paper recommends that head teachers should provide teachers with radio sets and support materials, encourage and assist them to use English radio lessons.

*Keywords:* radio technology, affordable, English language, use, primary schools, Kenya

### **Introduction and Background Information**

One of the objectives of teaching English in primary schools in Kenya is to enable the learners to communicate fluently, independently and accurately in English language in everyday life (KIE (Kenya Institute of Education Primary), 2002). This means that at the end of primary education course, all pupils are expected to have acquired a sufficient command of English in spoken and written forms to enable them to communicate fluently, follow subject courses and textbook, and read for pleasure and for information. Being an integral subject in the curriculum, a declining standard of performance in English at primary level should worry many teachers and stakeholders in education sector, because when primary children join secondary schools with poor English language, they will continue with poor knowledge of the language. Even though some researchers and linguistics (Ngonga, 2002; Bett, 2008) have dedicated a considerable amount of time to unravel the cause of poor performance in English language, there is an urgent need for us to reflect on the causes and possible remedies to avert this situation. They noted that some of the factors as attitudes, lack of adequate resources, the growth of “Sheng” as well as use of mother tongue. “Sheng” was originally a slang language that blended Kiswahili and English, created by the children of Nairobi City living in Eastland area. Gradually, this language incorporated other ethnic Kenyan languages. The interference of “Sheng” a street slang continues to havoc on the English language acquisition in primary and secondary schools and the children face a lot of problems with spoken English. At the beginning, “Sheng” was confined to urban centers, but it slowly infiltrated rural areas.

The process of language acquisition entails learners to practice all the four skills in all contexts so as to grasp how to manipulate it. Spoken English has been overridden by “Sheng”, as most learners are more comfortable using it than English. The use of “Sheng” must be discouraged at all costs. For these reasons, the Kenya government introduced schools radio lessons to enhance the teaching and learning of English language by reinforcing the teachers work and help them develop efficient communication skills in English language. It was also hoped that the use of radio lessons would help improve students’ spoken and written English and also set up a uniform standard of English in all schools in Kenya. Therefore, all primary schools were expected to incorporate radio lessons in teaching and learning English language.

However, despite of all the government effort to improve English language proficiency in primary schools through a policy of school radio, broadcast to schools pupils graduating from primary schools cannot communicate effectively in English language. It was, therefore, necessary to find out the extent of implementation of school radio program government policy in primary schools.

### **Benefits of Using Radio Broadcast English Lessons**

Odera (2006), writing on the use of school radio program in schools, noted that radio technology is viewed by teachers as a useful tool for teaching and learning languages like English, French, German and Kiswahili at all levels of education. Language programmes on radio helps to increase the students’ mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation as students learn to imitate the radio presenters. She further noted that if this learning resource is carefully selected and used, then learning becomes more interesting effective and meaningful.

The use of radio lessons motivates the learners, if they are used in such a way as to stimulate learning (Bates, 1984). Radio also helps the learners and the teacher to avoid falling back to mother tongue. Broadcast lessons help simplify language teaching process and make it perfect. Odera (2008) added that broadcast helps provide opportunity to provide stimulating and rehearsing communicative situation to be encountered outside

the language classroom.

Language is an integral part of human behavior. It is a skilled behavior which is only effective when two or more people are involved and more so in using audio or face-to-face communication. Since the introduction of school radio broadcast, the emphasis has been on the role played by the classroom teacher who is expected to be a facilitator doing only what is directed by the radio teacher. The rationale is that learners benefit from listening to the well researched English lessons and learn the language taught by prepared radio presenters.

Language, therefore, functions as a means of communication between two or more people. The sender is the teacher and the receiver (who are the pupils). The sender of the message (the teacher) may intend to instruct or direct learners. For example, when an English teacher teaches the preposition on a pencil on the table and under the table the learner will be shown and asked "Is the pencil on the table? The classroom teacher also responds to the radio teachers?" instruction. Therefore, before a teacher start teaching language to any child, it is important to know what stage of language learning the child is and to be aware of what level of language learning the class has reached. It is important because children who are taught in English for the first time experience problems to understand the words, sentences structures, phrases and pronunciation of words. School radio lessons are very useful and are used to improve the quality of learning new English words and set up standard for the spoken and written English (Thompson, 1982).

Furthermore, school radio broadcast English program aims to assist teachers and pupils to develop further the necessary language skills which enable them to improve their spoken and written English. It also aims to improve their command of the various sentences structure, vocabulary, various grammatical errors, structures encountered in primary English language and widening their horizon and scope in all subjects (Bates, 1984).

Experts in linguistics have demonstrated that communicative competence in any language requires more than simply knowing pronunciation of word formation and vocabulary (KIE, 2002). The learner needs to understand how to organize speech beyond the level of single sentences, about how the language is used in different situations (Odera, 1996). Scholars, Heininch, Russell, Molenda, and Smaldino (2002), noted the value of radio technology and recommended its use to increase and improve learners imagination and listening skills. They recognized the importance of radio as a medium that relies on a single sense (hearing) and with which listening is the only method of learning.

### **Improve Students' Confidence in Spoken English**

The use of radio has been widely argued to be capable of motivating learners to develop confidence to learn and communicate effectively in English language. This includes listening to radio, as they talk and pronounce different words correctly. This helps listeners to set up pattern of speech, phrase and sentence pattern through distance learning (Odera, 2006).

English language is the base on which the whole school curriculum stands in Kenya. It is important to note that a child's personal development stems from his/her ability to speak, read and write. Learning to speak relies heavily on listening, and that all the linguistic skills can best be fostered, when the child has experiences directly gained from listening and seeing. Therefore, the lack of set standard leads to confusion among teachers and pupils, when they are teaching and learning English language. This has also been confirmed by a report in the East African Standard Newspaper of June 19, 2010 which indicated that teachers of English are confused, because primary schools books lack uniformity and standard format English books from different publishers giving varying orders of adjectives. For example, in Longman publisher standard eight English books, the order

is listed as opinion, size, shape, age, color, nationality and materials. But, the progressive English for standard eight lists the order as size, general descriptions, age, shape, color, material and noun. The same series for standard five give the order as size, color, material and noun in English. It is common to use more than one adjective, before a noun is put in the right order according to type.

The use of schools broadcast helps such pupils to learn the concepts and provides a uniform standard in teaching and learning English and removes any form of confusion in teaching and learning English. The program supports that the teachers' work, because the broadcast materials are well researched and produced by English experts (Odera, 2008), would remove all these confusion and provide a uniform standard.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by the work of Bates (1984) who identified different aims and objectives of the use of educational radio broadcast in teaching and learning, which includes: to improve the quality of learning and education, to extend educational opportunities through distance learning, to improve the quality of classroom instruction, to teach communication skills and to support teachers work as well up grade their qualification.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following questions:

- (1) Do schools have functional radio sets?
- (2) Are teachers using radio lessons in teaching and learning English language?
- (3) What support materials are available for teachers to use during broadcast to schools?
- (4) How do teachers prepare their learners to listen to broadcast lesson?
- (5) Are there factors affecting the use of radio in teaching and learning?

### **Methodology**

The research design used was the descriptive survey design that included both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Area of study was Kisumu district and the participants consisted of 40 head teachers, 40 English teachers and 400 pupils. Saturated sampling technique was used to select head teachers and English teachers, while purposive sampling was used for pupils. Data were collected by use of questionnaires for pupils and English teachers, while semi-structured interview was used to collect information from head teachers. The population and sample of the participants are displayed in Table 1.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The instruments that were used in collecting data from the participants were questionnaires and unstructured semi-structured interviews, but secondary data were collected by looking at the documents. Data collected were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. This included the use of frequency counts, percentages, graphs and tables.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis included the use of qualitative and quantitative methods. The data obtained from interviews using semi-structured method, both basic descriptive statistics and qualitative techniques were used to demonstrate to readers the different groups of data, their characteristics, range and average. Similarly, qualitative data obtained from closed ended responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as

frequencies, percentages, tables and graphical presentation where necessary (Gall & Borg, 2006).

### **Research Finding**

The participants who took part in the study included head teachers, English teachers and pupils of standard seven. Participants experience with the use of schools broadcast in teaching and learning. The results showed that all head teachers had experience with the use of radio in classroom instruction. Fifty percent of the English teachers had more experience, but 30% had some experience, while 20% of them had a little experience. Further analysis revealed that the teachers who had little experience were the ones who were new in the teaching profession and had not been exposed to school radio program.

### **Availability of Radios and Support Materials**

The findings showed that availability of radio sets in the study schools. The findings indicated that 50% of the schools had purchased radio sets. Ten percent had radio sets there not functioning and 40% had no radio sets. Further examinations showed that some teachers used their own radio sets, which they used to listen to schools broadcast English lessons on their own and later they use the knowledge and the information to teach English later on.

### **Head Teachers' Response to the Use of Radio Lessons**

Most of the head teachers (50%) reported that they provided teachers with radios and support material and schools broadcast time table. Another 40% of them indicated that they provided suitable classrooms, but had no purchased radio set and other support materials.

### **English Teachers Use of Schools Radio Lessons**

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the extent to which schools radio programs are used in teaching and learning English in primary schools. Forty percent of the English teachers reported they listened to radio English programmes with the learners at the time of the interview, 10% of them indicated that they were planning to introduce radio lessons in teaching/learning English while, 10 of them did not have any plan to use radio lessons. The other 40% did not listen to schools broadcast.

### **Preparation for the Use of Broadcast to Schools**

Preparation included having English subject syllabus, schemes of work incorporating English radio lessons. Only 20% of the English teachers had schemes of work indicated radio lessons. The other 50% had schemes of work without radio lessons, but 30% had not prepared their schemes of work.

### **Lesson Planning**

The results showed that only 20% of the English teachers had consistently had lesson notes, while the majority of them did not prepare lesson plans but used radio in teaching and learning. Planning properly for a radio lesson is extremely important for the successful use of radio broadcast programmes in teaching and learning (Thompson, 1982; Sharp, 1985).

### **Using Radio to Teach Sentence Structure**

Most of the English teachers indicated that radio lessons help to improve teaching and learning sentence patterns. The amount of use, however, varied greatly. Twenty percent of them reported using English radio

lessons, according to the broadcast to school time table. Thirty percent were frequent users of programmes once or twice a week. While 50% did not listen to English radio programmes. None of them reported using recorded versions of the broadcasts.

### **Providing Standard of Spoken and Written English**

The results indicated that radio broadcast lessons provide short sentences and short story to teach new words. This helps pupils improve mastery of the contents and understand grammars and phrases. Most of the teachers reported that English radio lessons are presented in a good way. The programmes include music, songs and drama and good points that relate to the syllabus. It teaches new words, pronunciation of words that improves learners spoken and writing skills. English teacher agreed that primary children who use mix language: Kiswahili, English and vernacular change the way they talk after listening to radio presenters. Thirty percent of them praised the radio lessons, because they are well prepared, presented and provide interesting and enjoyable learning experiences. Thirty percent of them saw the program helping pupils to improve the spoken English language.

### **Expanding Knowledge of English Language**

English teachers reported that when schools broadcast English programme is on all those listening whether school children or those at home benefits and learn the language as well. In this way, radio helps to teach English language to all people in the country.

The other use of English radio lesson reported by the teachers was that it motivates pupils to want to learn English language. The program stimulates thinking and imagination, because radio uses music and different sound effects to make learning enjoyable. All the teachers acknowledged also that radio lessons act as a reference source which helps them to revise what they have taught. They also acknowledged that radio lessons provide them with correct usage of certain English words where an English text book is not available.

Some of the pupils 60% also noted that radio teachers makes them feel confidence, when they speak English language especially when the radio teacher ask them to repeat sentences, new words and the songs. Another teacher supported the pupils comment and said that when the radio teacher said something new, they write it down then we discuss this in the class after the broadcast. This helps them to increase their vocabulary. They also use the new words to write sentences. In this way, they learn correct pattern of written and spoken words and not mixing with “Sheng”.

## **Conclusions**

This study established that some of primary school teachers in Kisumu District have access to schools broadcast and listen to English lessons. All the head teachers had experience with the use of school radio programmes. Most of them also purchased radio sets for use during broadcasts to schools program. Fifty percent of the English teachers listened to English radio lessons and valued the program very much. They also noted that schools broadcast provide them with well research English language that helps to correct the confusion posed by different English text books they come across. This they believed helps to remove the confusion when they teach the subject. The pupils also acknowledged the benefits of listening to English radio lesson and noted that they gain confidence when they speak English language after listening to radio program and this helps them to avoid mixing English sentence with “Sheng”. The study, therefore, recommends that all schools should listen to English radio programs. The Quality Assurance Officers from the Ministry of

Education should ensure that English teachers use schools broadcast to improve the quality of English in schools.

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