

# Home Environment and Utilization of English Language in Public Day Secondary Schools In Bunyala Sub County, Busia, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

*Home environment as a context of learning outcome contributes to learner social interaction and self-actualization towards using English in a school setting. School systems expect learners to be competent in the English language being the medium for learning and instruction. However, social interaction at school and home varies, resulting in a need for more English input. The study focused on establishing the influence of the home environment on the utilization of the English language in school. Emphasizing language use at home, provision of reading materials, and attitude towards learning the English language, the study used descriptive survey design in six public day secondary schools in Bunyala Sub County. Bronfenbrenners ecological systems theory and Krashen's Input Hypothesis theory were used in the study with a sample of 160 from two learners and 12 parents. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaires and an interview guide. The findings revealed that learners used their mother tongue while away from school, which interfered with the usage of English at school. In addition, most parents needed to be economically empowered to provide extra reading materials and a favorable reading atmosphere for learners to have sufficient English language input.*

*Most parents had low academic backgrounds and did not monitor learners' knowledge of the English language. The study concluded that the home environment influenced the utilization of the English language.*

*The study recommends that parents develop a positive attitude towards the need for learners to know the English language for successful learning.*

**Keywords:** Attitude, English Competence, Mother tongue influence, Parental Involvement, Reading materials

## INTRODUCTION

The home environment in every perception is fundamental for a child's cognitive development, which results in learning. According to Sharma and Yadav (2013), the home environment ranges from ethical and moral values to social, emotional, and intellectual settings established in families for the healthy development of individuals. On the other hand, Khan, Begum, and Imad (2019) assert that the home environment, being a child's first learning institution, has a valuable connection with the learner's educational outcome and overall life. However, Shikalepo (2020) revealed that learners in rural setups experienced a gap between experiences in the home environment and practices learned at school. Umo-Udofia and Andera (2018) observed that the learning context contributed to the success of learning the English language.

Ideally, the home environment should create a social, emotional, and intellectual environment that contributes to a child's development for academic success.

Al-Sharqi and Abbasi (2020) posited that modern technology has put man in dire need of English. English being a world trade and technology language has obtained global growth, necessitating learners to be equipped with essential skills for indispensable communication and career growth. However, Kulo and Odundo (2019) observed that learners needed help to express the English language satisfactorily. More communication efficiency is likely attributed to less exposure and practice speaking English. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1987) postulates that comprehensible input and a bit of input above what learners already know ( $i+1$ ) will enhance the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, the English language has gained value globally, making proficiency in English a prerequisite to many career fields.

According to Sharma and Yadav (2013), parental involvement enhances language teaching and the development of language skills. Parents have a role in providing more input ( $i+1$ ) by providing reading materials at home to match experiences at school.

On the other hand, Nation (2014) opined that learning a language requires great motivation for desirable language proficiency to be achieved by learners. In addition, Amin (2018) reported that children whose parents did not provide a good home environment lacked self-esteem and confidence, affecting learning. However, Umo-Udofia and Andera (2018) observed that learners had a reasonably positive attitude toward learning English. A learner's perspective is thus regarded essential in learning a language. English is a core subject in the Kenya curriculum for consideration of career choice in tertiary learning institutions.

Therefore, for Kenya to realize sustainable development for global interaction, learners in secondary schools should endeavor to develop a positive attitude to acquire and learn all four English language skills.

#### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The language spoken in family setups will either enhance or interfere with the acquisition and learning of the English language. Amin (2018) asserts that a learner whose family members always use English at home feels the need to use language anywhere, which facilitates learning in the long term. Consequently, Demur et al. (2020) observed a relationship between learning language and environmental systems where learners grow up.

On the other hand, Kembo (2020) opined that competence in the English language steered understanding of subject content during learning. However, Singh (2015) observed that mother-tongue interference greatly hindered learning English.

Similarly, Igwebuikwe, Abam, and Etan (2022) observed significant mother-tongue interference in English language learning. Mother tongue interference results from different cognitive systems in different language structures. As a result, Thyab (2016) observed that native Arabic speakers face challenges in the use of 'articles' in the English language because of differences between 'article' systems in English and Arabic. Indeed, the home environment influences the process of English language learning.

According to Muhammad, Abdul, Numra, Samreen, and Huma (2019), effective utilization of English is determined by a learner's level of intelligence and the learning environment available. Ideally, parental and siblings involvement in learning will support effective English language learning. However, Hasan (2018) observed that learners in urban centers were more competent in the English language compared to their counterparts in the rural setup.

Hasan (2018), in a study to find out oral competence in English language learning of secondary students regarding different aspects of the home environment, revealed that students had a common vocabulary and a low level of accuracy in word pronunciation and word order. As a result, Wambiri and Ndani (2015) opined that parents should realize that the home environment is a medium to stimulate learning in children. In tandem with this argument, Etyang and Wanyama (2021) observed that exposing learners to a more learner-friendly environment improved their attitude toward learning English. Therefore, family settings in rural setups should strive to match experiences at home with those at school.

Reading materials provide learners with adequate language input that supports acquisition and competence in English. Kembo (2020), in a study on supervised extensive reading, observed that learners improved in the acquisition of English language proficiency, resulting in improved performance in other subjects. Kembo (2020) asserted that reading story books as extensive reading provides further input (i+1) for language acquisition. Furthermore, stories create a natural setting that reinforces English language rules and structures taught in English language classes.

However, Mwangi and Bwire (2020) observed that acute reading resource shortages were the most significant deterrent in extensive reading.

On the other hand, Mwoma (2017) found that the availability of reading materials and supportive parents enhanced children's learning of English. This reveals that supportive parents are critical in promoting knowledge of English by providing reading materials to learners. Consequently, parents with learners in day schools should provide extra materials to encourage independent reading and immerse learners in the target language. In addition, learners may choose to read books, listen to the radio, or watch English television channels as other language input alternatives.

On the other hand, Noam Chomsky postulates that each child has an inborn ability to learn a language, referred to as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky posits that LAD degenerates as one matures; thus, at about age 11, the capacity deteriorates. Concerning this, learners in Kenya join a secondary school at an average age of 14. If the English language is not acquired competently at the primary level, learning the language at an older age will pose a challenge.

Sharma and Yadav (2013) observed that parental involvement facilitated learners to learn English language skills.

Furthermore, Kembo (2022) postulates that providing reading materials at school improves learners' English proficiency. On the other hand, Wambiri and Ndani (2015) asserted that parental economic background determined the variety and quantity of reading materials to engage learners in acquiring language input. As a result, parents should play a significant role in their children's learning by providing reading materials that would enhance acquisition and competence in the English language.

A learner's attitude towards learning the English language determines the success or failure of learning the language. Viet (2017) argued that knowing learners' attitudes toward learning the English language will enhance language learning. Alkaf (2013), in a study on students' attitudes and perceptions towards learning English regarding whether the speech was complex, revealed that the majority had a positive attitude towards learning English and were eager to use the language despite having limited time to practice the language. However, Herwiana and Laili (2019) observed insignificant competence in the English language despite learners demonstrating a positive attitude toward learning the English language.

On the other hand, Igwebuikwe et al. (2022) observed that learners from good economic backgrounds were encouraged by parents compared to their counterparts from low-income backgrounds. Encouraging learners to learn English will result in significant competence in English.

The attitude learners bring to the learning environment affects achievement in English language competence. Nyamubi (2016) observed that students in Tanzania realized that learning English was vital because it was the basis for further education and provided an opportunity to communicate with people from other nations. Further, Rao (2019) observed that learners were aware of the vital role the English language contributed to career development. Ahmed (2015) investigated learners' attitudes toward using English in different areas. The qualitative study conducted amongst EFL in Malaysia showed that students were highly positive towards learning the English language and using the language in other areas.

Further, Umo-Udofia and Andera (2018) examined English language learners' attitudes toward competence in English in selected secondary schools in Ngong's Sub-County of Kajiado County in Kenya. The study's findings revealed that most learners had a positive attitude toward learning English.

Therefore, learners must develop an interest in learning the target language to realize the intended knowledge and skills.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Effective utilization of English language skills is enhanced with an appropriate and encouraging learning environment. The home environment, the first learning setting, should provide both intellectual and psycho-social support to match experiences learners encounter at school for competence in English to be realized. However, learners in day schools in Bunyala Sub County are subjected to different language experiences at home where their mother tongue is commonly spoken, thus presenting their mother tongue interference in using the English language. As a result, mother tongue interference has compromised academic achievement in English. This study, therefore, sought to establish the relationship between home environment and utilization of English language in public day secondary schools in Bunyala Sub County, Busia County, Kenya.

The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains how the environment influences inherent child growth and development features.

A child's development varies in different ecological systems, from the cultural orientation at home to the broader expansive.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to establish a home environment and utilization of English language in secondary schools in day secondary schools in Bunyala Sub County.

The following objectives guided the study:

- i. To establish the effect of the use of mother tongue on the utilization of English language in day secondary schools.
- ii. To find out the effect of the provision of reading materials on the utilization of English language in day secondary schools.
- iii. To determine the effect of learners' attitudes on using English language in day secondary schools.

### Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey design to understand feelings and opinions about specific aspects (Graziano & Raulin, 2009). The target population was form 2 learners in public day secondary schools in Bunyala Sub County, Busia County, Kenya. Bunyala sub-county has six purely day secondary schools with similar characteristics of mixed gender. Random sampling was used to arrive at a sample of 160 students from six schools and 12 parents, two from each school as study respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the learners while parents were interviewed. Data was coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics in frequencies and percentages and illustrated in tables.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish the influence of home environment on the utilization of English language in school, emphasizing language use at home, provision of reading materials, and attitude towards learning English language. The findings are discussed according to the study's objectives and presented in frequencies and percentages.

#### Language use at home

The study sought to establish learners' language use at home and school. The findings are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Language Use at Home**

VARIABLES	DISAG REED	AGRE ED
I speak my mother tongue while at home	6(3.7%)	154(96.2%)
I also speak English while at home	145(90.3%)	15(9.7%)
I speak both English and my mother tongue while at home	148(92.5%)	12(7.5%)
I only speak English while at school	157(98.1%)	3(1.9%)
I also speak my mother tongue while at school	18(11.2%)	142(88.7%)

The findings in Table 1 reveal that 96.2% of the respondents agreed that their mother tongue is spoken at home, 88% agreed they talk about their mother tongue while at school, and 98.1% disagreed that they did not speak English at school. The findings reveal that most learners used their mother tongue at school and home, which interfered with the utilization of English language.

The results are supported by sentiments from parents who showed that the mother tongue was used at home. The parents felt no need to speak English while at home but advocated for English to be spoken at school. The findings confirm a gap between experiences at home environment and school, as reported by Shikalepo (2020). This gap influences the acquisition and learning of the English language because learners are drawn away from the language input at home, resulting in mother interference. Similar observations were found by Singh (2015), who found that experiences in rural setup schools led to mother tongue interference in learning English.

On the other hand, only 12% agreed that they speak both English and mother tongue while at home. The findings reveal that most family setups needed to speak English at home. Amin (2018) asserts that a learner whose family members always use English at home feels encouraged to use the language that facilitates learning. Ideally, speaking English at home encourages learners to practice language structures learned at school and later internalize them to effectively utilize English language.

**PROVISION OF READING MATERIALS**

The study sought to determine if reading materials were available for learners at home. This was in terms of storybooks and other media like television, radio, and newspapers that could provide comprehensible language input to learners. The findings are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2: Provision of Reading Materials**

VARIABLES	DISAG REED	AGR EED
I have several storybooks at home	148 (92.5%)	12 (7.5%)
I always read my storybooks at home	155(96.8%)	5(31.2%)
I always watch television ( English channel) at home	129(80.6%)	9.7% ( )
I always listen to the radio( English channel) at home	150(93.7%)	10(6.3%)
I always read newspapers at home	160(100%)	0

Further findings in Table 2 reveal that 92.5% disagreed that they had several story books, 96% did not read story books, and none read newspapers. On the other hand, only 31% watched television (English Channel), and 10% listened to the radio (English Channel). The findings show that parents needed to provide learners with adequate reading materials or media to enhance language learning.

This implies that learners at home were not immersed in the target language for the successful acquisition of competence in English language. Similarly, Mwangi and Bwire (2020) observed that an acute shortage

of reading resources was the most significant deterrent in extensive reading. However, Kembo (2020) asserts that reading story books as extensive reading provides further input (i+1) for language acquisition. On the other hand, Wambiri and Ndani (2015) observed that parental economic background determined the provision of reading materials. Findings in this study indicate that parents needed to be economically empowered to support learners with extra reading materials.

Additional findings from parents revealed that storybooks were rare in homes, and learners hardly had enough time to read if there were any. Parents indicated that learners spend the most time at school, and when they came home, some were engaged in home chores before going to bed. Lack of independent reading disadvantages learners in day schools compared to boarding schools. Furthermore, Hasan (2018) found that learners in urban centers were more competent in English than their rural setups counterparts. Parents need to support learners in terms of providing reading materials bearing in mind that most day schools are situated in rural settings for competence in English to be achieved.

### Attitude toward Learning English

The study further sought to establish learners' attitudes toward learning English. The attitude one has determines the outcome

of a task accomplished. In this case, a positive attitude towards English language will enhance learning and effective utilization of English language. The findings are illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Attitude towards English**

VARIABLES	DISAGREED	AGREED
I have good grades in English Subject	137 (85.6%)	23(14.3%)
I enjoy learning English	104(65%)	56(35%)
Reading stories written in English is difficult	29(18.1%)	131(81.9%)
I speak English language without mistakes	129(80.6%)	31(19.4%)
I know that English is an important subject	3(1.9%)	157(98.1%)

Findings in Table 3 reveal that 85% of learners disagreed that they had good grades in English, and 81% agreed that reading in English was difficult. As much as 98.1% agreed that English is an important subject, only 56% agreed that they enjoyed learning English, and only 19% agreed that they spoke English without errors. The findings show that learners did not perform well in English because they experienced difficulty in reading English language. This also may be attributed to their not enjoying learning English, revealing a negative attitude towards it.

On the other hand, interest in learning English contributes to the overall academic achievement of learners because English is the language of instruction and examination in schools in Kenya.

The findings are contrary to Herwiana and Laili (2019), who established that learner's attitude toward learning the English language was positive, resulting in success in learning English. However, Nation (2014) opined that learning a language requires great motivation to achieve desirable language proficiency. Therefore, the attitude learners bring to the learning environment should be encouraged for effective utilization of English language.

Kulo and Odundo (2019) observed similar findings and established that learners in Kenya secondary schools mispronounced words unless subjected to constant practice in speaking English. Different languages having different language systems and patterns should be practiced regularly for mastery of the target language. On the other hand, Etyang and Wanyama (2021) observed that exposing learners to a more learner-friendly environment improved their attitude toward learning English language. A warmer climate could be implemented by availing materials and media to support language learning. Anwar and Abdullah (2021) observed that learners might choose to read books, listen to the radio, or watch English channels on television as learning contexts. A friendlier environment acts as a stimulus to the learner resulting in total absorption of content delivered.

Additional findings from parents revealed that learners' performance in English was low because of their social interaction with friends who spoke 'sheng' and some who did not take learning seriously. Most parents revealed that they were engaged in fishing activities and other small-scale farming, which kept them away from home, and they needed to be economically empowered to support learners with extra reading materials.

The findings also revealed that most parents were only sometimes available to follow up on learners' academic achievement. Similar results were observed by Amin (2018), who indicated that children whose parents did not provide a good home environment lacked self-esteem and confidence, affecting learning. On the contrary, Sharma and Yadav (2013) observed that parental involvement enhanced the development of language skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

Home environment enhances the acquisition of competence English language for academic development and career growth. The home environment should be learner-friendly to enable experiences encountered at home to match those at school to effectively utilize the English language.

Parental support through extra reading materials for independent reading will provide comprehensible language input for learning English language in a natural setting. In addition, encouraging learners to speak English constantly will build self-esteem and confidence for learners to practice correct language structures. In the long run, this will eliminate mother tongue interference resulting in academic achievement for career development and global interaction.

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