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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PATTERNS OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN THE TESTING OF THE SPEAKING SKILL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the use of written tests in examining the speaking skill in English language in secondary schools in Kenya. Based on the study, this paper presents and discusses findings on the nature of distribution of score patterns in the written and oral production test of the speaking skill in English language in secondary schools. The study was formulated and interpreted with reference to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach whose tenets the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) generally and the teaching and testing of the speaking skill specifically are intended to conform to. The study used correlation research design, which enabled the researcher to find out the scores attained from a written and an oral test of five sub-skills of the speaking skill and consequently assess the validity of written tests in examining the speaking competence of secondary school learners of English language. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used to select the twelve schools and 360 Form Four students who participated in the study. The research instruments used were two speaking achievement tests – one written and the other oral. Descriptive statistics such as mean, mode and standard deviation were used to compare the variables under study. The independent variable was speaking competence while the dependent variables were the speaking sub-skills tested. These were rendition of an oral narrative, word stress, intonation, contrastive stress and conversation. The study found out that students attained higher scores in the written test and that there was a high positive correlation between the scores of the two tests. These findings should guide the testing of the speaking skill. They should be significant to the Ministry of Education, Kenya National Examinations Council and teachers of English.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of English as a medium of communication nationally and internationally makes it an important subject in Kenyan schools and colleges. It is made even more critical by the fact that, other than Kiswahili and the foreign languages, it services all other subjects in the curriculum. Proficiency in the language would therefore enhance understanding of the other subjects that are taught in English. Effective communication through English is important both in and out of school since most jobs require good oral or written communication as an essential ingredient. In the secondary school curriculum English language is a compulsory subject and continues to be used as the medium of instruction. At the end of the four-year secondary course, tertiary institutions and universities demand a pass in English as a major requirement for admission.

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The current English syllabus (KIE, 2002) has elevated the status of listening and speaking skills, and seeks to correct the imbalance that has been evident in the treatment of the two skills. In the past, undue emphasis has been laid on reading and writing skills at the expense of listening and speaking. This syllabus states that: ... listening and speaking skills play a primary role in the social and academic life of a person. One who listens effectively is able to respond to information appropriately. These two skills also contribute significantly to the development of reading and writing skills. In addition, one who has mastered these skills is likely to create favourable impression of themselves (KIE, 2002, p. 4). The language teacher therefore should make every effort to help the learner acquire and continually refine the two skills to enable the latter interact with others effectively and confidently. The learner should be given ample practice and exposure to good models. Pronunciation drills, role play, debate, listening comprehension, presentation of oral reports, reciting poems, interviews and conversation can all be used by the teacher to help the learner develop fluency and confidence (ibid.).

This study was based on the testing of the speaking skill. An understanding of the objectives of teaching speaking at the secondary school level as stated by the Kenya Institute of Education (ibid) would be necessary. It is stated that by the end of the course, the learner should be able to:

- Demonstrate awareness that spelling in English may or may not be related to
- Pronunciation
- Pronounce correctly sounds they find problematic
- Communicate, correctly, confidently and appropriately in different contexts
- Respond correctly to oral information on a variety of subjects
- Demonstrate acceptable communication skills
- Use non-verbal devices effectively in speech
- Use correct stress and intonation to bring out rhythm and meaning
- Demonstrate the ability to use correct register in different contexts
- Use tone to interpret attitude
- Use stress to distinguish grammatical meaning in words
- Present oral reports on literary and non-literary topics

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Kenyan Secondary Schools

There are two important issues I wish to note here. Firstly is the teaching approach. The Kenya Institute of Education (now KICED) states that the main goal of ELT at the secondary school level is to enable school leavers to be competent in communicating in English language both in speaking and writing (KIE, 2002). Accordingly the Ministry of Education has recommended the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the teaching of English language. Emphasis is on communication and as already mentioned earlier, this is in line with the fact that English is the official language of communication in Kenya as well as internationally. CLT is also referred to as the communicative approach. Since its inception in the 1970s, it has expanded in scope and is quite comprehensive. Adherents of this approach acknowledge that structures and vocabulary are important. However, they feel that preparation for communication will be inadequate if only these are taught.

Students may know the rules of language usage, but will be unable to use the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Its main concern is to develop the learner's communicative competence, which proponents define as the ability of the learner to use language accurately, fluently, coherently, appropriately meaningfully. Learners are therefore supposed to be involved in activities that facilitate communication as a strategy to improve their communicative competence; depending on the linguistic needs and learning styles within the learners socio-cultural, educational and political contexts (Savignon, 2002). CLT has been criticised by some scholars in ELT. For example, Bax (2003) in an article entitled *The End of CLT* argues that CLT has increasingly paid minimal attention to contexts of language learning. Kumaravadivelu (2006a) notes that research findings have shown that CLT does not offer the communicative opportunities it claims, since

communication may either take place or fail to take place in every classroom situation. His criticism can be summarized as follows:

In fact, a detailed analysis of principles and practices of CLT would reveal that it too adhered to the same fundamental concepts of language teaching as the audio-lingual method it sought to replace. These are: the linear and additive view of language learning, and the presentation-practice-production vision of language teaching. The claims of its distinctiveness are based more on communicative activities than on conceptual underpinnings (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). These issues raised by critics of CLT make a lot of sense when one keenly observes teaching and learning activities in the Kenyan classrooms. However, one needs to understand the fact that language-teaching methods do not necessarily come up with totally new ideas rather the old methods are restructured to fit new trends in language teaching and learning. Other factors that influence new methods and approaches are the ever changing learning needs.

Secondly, is the issue of integration which means merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both (KIE, 2002). Integration is based on the premise that good mastery of language enhances effective appreciation of literary material. On the other hand, literary material provides a natural context for the teaching of language. Integration is both at the skill as well as at the content levels. The language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are not taught in isolation; they complement one another. At the content level, integration involves getting language structures from literary material. In the teaching of listening and speaking for example, the teacher is required to use content from oral literature and poetry. These two provide content that is naturally oral. The folk stories, songs, poems and the short forms are shared by word of mouth, that is, they are communicated through verbal utterances.

At the same time, the features and content of oral literature and poetry are also taught. This makes learning more meaningful and interesting. However, since the two genres call for reading they will also be taught under the reading skill using material that is recorded in books or any other print media. Written literature is also covered under the reading skill. Through exposure to literature the learners improve their language skills, enrich their vocabulary and learn to use language in a variety of ways. Literature also provides genuine and expressive examples of language in context and helps learners develop critical thinking – a crucial element in intellectual development (KIE, 2002).

Approaches to Language Testing

Heaton (1995) discusses four approaches namely: essay translation, structuralist, integrative and communicative approach. Tests should reflect the approach used in teaching. The teaching approach used in the Kenyan secondary schools is the CLT approach already discussed in details above, so, naturally communicative testing best fits in this circumstance. However, it is important to note that the four testing approaches are not mutually exclusive. For that reason, the communicative approach is sometimes linked to the integrative

approach. In the integrative approach, language is tested in context and the test items are thus concerned with meaning and the total communicative effect of discourse (Heaton, 1995). Consequently, integrative tests do not seek to separate language skills into neat divisions in order to improve on test reliability.

Rather, they are often designed to assess the learner's ability to use two or more skills simultaneously. Integrative tests are best characterized by the use of cloze tests. Indeed the current English paper 101/1 has taken cognizance of this fact and question two of this paper is a cloze test. The principle of cloze testing is based on Gestalt theory of closure (Heaton, 1995) explained as closing of gaps in patterns subconsciously. These tests measure the readers' ability to decode interrupted or mutilated messages by making the most acceptable substitution from all the contextual clues available. Other areas dealt with in an integrative test include: dictation, oral interviews, translation and essay writing. Again it is worth noting that in the same paper 101/1 a functional essay is tested in question one. Both integrative and communicative approaches emphasize the importance of meaning of utterances rather than their form and structure. Nevertheless, there are fundamental differences between the two approaches.

Communicative tests are concerned primarily (if not totally) with how language is used in communication. Communicative language involves negotiation and exchange of information between two parties through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs, oral and written forms. Most communicative tests aim to incorporate tasks, which approximate as closely as possible to those facing students in real life. Success is judged in terms of the effectiveness of the communication, which takes place rather than formal linguistic accuracy. Language use is often emphasized to the exclusion of language usage. Use is concerned with how people actually use language for multitude of different purposes while usage concerns the formal patterns of language (described in prescriptive grammars and lexicons). In practice, however, some tests of a communicative nature include the testing of usage and also assess the ability to handle format patterns of the target language.

In view of these concerns, the test items in the study were carefully selected to cater for both use and usage. Items such as stress and intonation were marked for accuracy, that is, usage while rendition of the oral narrative and the conversation were marked for usage. Kathleen (1996) argues that in the communicative approach to testing language, the intention is to measure how testees are able to use language in real life situations. In testing productive skills, (speaking and writing) emphasis is placed on appropriateness rather than on the ability to form grammatically correct sentences. For the receptive skills (listening and reading) emphasis is on understanding the communicative intent of the speaker or the writer rather than on picking out specific details. Communicative tests are often very content specific. The test should reflect the communicative situations in which the testees are likely to find themselves. These include the general social situations where they might be in a position to use English. This basic assumption influences the tasks chosen to test language in communicative situations. In this study, the testees were

involved in at least one communicative task in an achievement test situation.

The other test items fall short of communicativeness but are still within the scope of speaking activities. The testees, in preparation for KCSE, had covered the course material in the sort of tasks the test asks them to perform (Kathleen 1996). The functions the testees were expected to perform had been covered as stipulated in the syllabus. As propounded by Kathleen, evaluation of communicative tests has elements of subjectivity. Real life situations have no objectively right or wrong answers and so band scales befit evaluation of the results. Each band has a description of the quality and sometimes quantity of either the productive or receptive performance of the testee. In line with this proposition, the researcher used a band scale in addition to objective answers to evaluate the speaking competence of the study subjects. The band scale incorporated some level of accuracy in so far as the utterances were intelligible.

The Testing of Speaking in Kenya

The testing of speaking has for a long time been ignored by the KNEC. Though listening and speaking skills have been in the syllabus since the inception of 8-4-4 system of education in 1985, the speaking skill was first tested in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) English paper 2 (102/2) in 2002. Only one aspect of speaking namely pronunciation (homophones) was tested. The current secondary school English syllabus underscores the importance of speaking and recommends a comprehensive evaluation. It is suggested that this be done through dictation, listening comprehension, role play, note taking, making oral presentations, speeches, telling stories, reading aloud, reciting poems, oral interviews, conversation or even interpretive reading of extracts from books (KIE, 2002, p. 19).

Currently, the Kenya National Examinations Council examines English language in three papers 101/1, 101/2 and 101/3. Paper 101/1, which tests functional skills, has three questions:

- Question 1- Functional writing
- Question 2- Cloze test
- Question 3- Oral skills

The speaking skill is tested as part of the oral skills in paper 101/ 1 question 3. The oral skills cover the bulk of the paper, with an allocation of thirty marks out of the possible sixty marks for the total score. The syllabus recommends that the students sit for an oral examination at the end of form four; however, this is not the mode of testing currently. Oral skills are tested in writing as evident in the past KCSE papers (2006 to date). The essence of this study was to establish whether the written examination currently used in the evaluation of oral skills yields results adequate enough to ascertain oral competence of students.

Statement of the Problem

The centrality of speaking in life cannot be overemphasized. The ability to speak English is a valued skill particularly in an

education system in which English language is the medium of communication. Speaking as a skill is used more than writing in the day-to-day communication. English being a second language to most Kenyans, majority have problems in the listening and speaking skills (KIE, 2002, p. 7). The unique problems that learners have arise from the wrong forms of spoken English which have become institutionalized in society. The wrong forms result from the influence of mother tongue and/or the first language. It has been observed that most school leavers, university graduates, practicing teachers of English and those of other subjects do not speak English fluently, accurately and appropriately. This fact has been expressed by a number of scholars, educators, government officials, employers, politicians and journalists (Ong'ondo and Barasa, 2006, p. 181).

Professor Eshiwani, the then vice chancellor of Kenyatta University (*Daily Nation*, 1993, May 7), addressing freshmen also observed that university graduates were unable to express themselves in good English. The British Council Report (1992) and others, on the teaching of language skills, also conclude that the skill of speaking is second to that of listening in terms of neglect in the teaching of the four language skills. The reasons the reports give for this trend are that oral skills are not tested by KNEC and secondly language teachers do not get enough guidelines from the course books on how to teach the skills. This scenario has undergone a slight change since the revision of the curriculum in 2002. However, from the researcher's experience in many classroom practices, the speaking skill has not been accorded the attention it deserves.

The current syllabus (KIE, 2002, p. 19) now emphasizes speaking and recommends an oral examination at the end of the four-year secondary English course. However, KNEC is still assessing oral skills using a written mode of testing. Response to the oral skills section of English Paper 101/1 has been in writing. Indeed, the use of spoken English can only be promoted in schools by incorporating an oral test into the overall testing requirements. This can be a valuable additional means of improving oral abilities. Lee (1991, p. 342) identifies tests as the driving force behind learning. This fact applies to the Kenyan situation as well. Many teaching and learning activities are geared towards excellence in national examinations. Given that the teaching approach used is Communicative Language Teaching, Lee is right to suggest that the tests in a communicative syllabus should be adjusted to be more communicative and to incorporate evaluation of oral abilities. A number of pitfalls have been identified in the testing practices even with the revised curriculum.

The tests used to evaluate speaking are new and purport to address the objectives for the teaching of speaking but are in fact almost similar in design and therefore effect to those, which they replace. The course content is truly communicative and oral oriented but the tests particularly for speaking and even listening are as they have been. This is unfair to students who study according to one set of parameters during class time while preparing for a test based on differing principles. The problem addressed in the study was the use of written tests in the assessment of the speaking skill. The researcher proposes that oral tests of communicative competence be designed (Lee,

1991). If the aim of teaching speaking is to promote oral skills in the target language, then it seems reasonable that this ability should be at the heart of the testing. Such tests will definitely conform to the learning goals set for the students and taught in the learning programme.

The tests would also have a positive wash back effect on the whole English course for oral skills in general and speaking in particular. Failing to test oral production practically has resulted into inaccurate assessment of students and negative wash back effects on the teaching of oral skills. As such, it was necessary to ascertain through research whether or not indeed written tests are valid in assessing the speaking skill. A comparison of scores attained by individual candidates in written and oral examinations of the speaking sub-skills tested would further be used to establish the relationship between the two sets of scores and, therefore, the extent to which the current written mode of testing used is a valid measurement and an accurate way of establishing speaking proficiency of users of English language at the secondary school level. Furthermore, there are very few (if not none) publications (especially research based) that provide a justification, evidence or support for the current mode of testing speaking. It became necessary to carry out an investigation into this aspect of English Language Teaching.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in secondary schools within Eldoret Municipality using correlation research design. The study involved collection of two sets of measurements and computation of the coefficient of correlation between these two sets of measurements to determine the magnitude of relationship. On the average each school had two streams. Students' population was found to be approximately forty-five per class. This gave a total of 1080 students from the twelve schools. Records available at the Uasin Gishu District Education office (2009) indicated that the Municipality had thirty-three (33) secondary schools at the time of the study. Out of these, sixteen (16) were public while seventeen (17) were privately owned. In order to get a representative sample for the study, the thirty-three schools were stratified into national, provincial, district and private schools. There was only one national school, which was purposively sampled. The remaining thirty-two (32) had the following distribution: six provincial, nine district and seventeen private schools. Stratified random sampling was used to select two provincial schools, three district schools and six private schools.

A formula advanced by Kathuri and Pal (2000) for the required size for randomly chosen sample from a population, which is highly homogenous on the variable being studied, presented as:

$$S = \frac{\chi^2 NP (1 - P)}{d^2 (N - 1) \chi^2 \cdot P (1 - P)}$$

This yielded a sample of 400 participants who were equally distributed among the 12 schools resulting into an average of 30 students per school. This figure further apportioned to the streams in each school resulted into 15 students per stream. In

summary, 12 schools and 360 students were involved in the study. Simple random sampling, specifically the lottery method, was used to select students to take part in the study. These were Form 4 students. They were chosen because they had undergone adequate instruction in the revised English language curriculum. The written production test and the oral one, used in the study, were criteria-based. The tests assessed whether or not the students possessed the sub-skills of rendition of oral narratives, syllabic stress, intonation, contrastive stress and all the skills involved in conversation. The test takers were expected to clearly display their competence levels. The examiner or scorer would then identify the level and scored accordingly. The tests were thus designated as tests for mastery. In such forms of tests, the teaching of content is based on the concept that students are different primarily in the speed at which they learn rather than in the amount they can learn. Thus the amount is fixed for all learners but the rate is allowed to vary (Weir, 1990). The syllabus takes care of the amount of content to be taught. Accordingly, the researcher set certain criteria, which guided assessment of levels of performance.

The mean scores attained in the overall marks of both tests as well as the means of the individual sub skills were categorized. The test items used in the study were both the objective (test items have only one correct answer) and the subjective type in which correctness is relative. For the written test (response to written questions was in writing) which is the current mode used by KNEC, while for the oral test (response to written and oral questions was oral), which was modelled in line with KCSE French oral examination. The rationale here was that the acquisition of French language as a second language (L2) or a foreign language (FL) is not far removed from that of English. The tests were set in consultation with experts in English language education at Moi University and Kenya National Examination Council (KCSE) French and English language examiners. In the selection of tests for data collection, the evaluative criteria considered desirable for a good test, i.e. validity, reliability and usability were considered.

The scores for each test from the 360 participants were entered into separate mark sheets. During the entry of the written scores, it was discovered that some participants did not attempt all the questions. These were a total of 19 and were considered unusable data and as such were eliminated. The data was quantitative-marks attained in two tests. The remaining 341 sets of marks were subjected to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and the Stata computer program for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to compare the variables under study. Further, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) the f-test was used to compare the means and test the hypothesis.

RESULTS

Students' Score Patterns in the Written and the Oral Test Items of Selected Speaking Sub-skills

The study sought to investigate the score patterns of students in selected speaking sub skills. To achieve this objective, the participants sat two tests- written and oral achievement tests of five speaking skill items. The skills tested were rendition of an

oral narrative, syllabic stress, intonation, contrastive stress and conversation. The mean scores of the total marks attained in the written test and that of the oral test were computed using the SPSS computer program. The results were as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Students' Scores in Written and Oral Tests

| Class interval | Frequency | | Percentage | |
|----------------|-----------|------|------------|-------|
| | Written | Oral | Written | Oral |
| 0-6 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0.88 |
| 7-9 | 7 | 0 | | |
| | 8 | 1 | | |
| | 9 | 3 | | |
| 10-12 | Total | 4 | 23 | 1.17 |
| | | 10 | 8 | 6.75 |
| | | 11 | 15 | |
| 13-15 | Total | 13 | 24 | 10.56 |
| | | 13 | 25 | 19.35 |
| | | 14 | 22 | |
| 16-18 | Total | 15 | 32 | 23.46 |
| | | 16 | 34 | 31.97 |
| | | 17 | 30 | |
| 19-21 | Total | 18 | 20 | 28.74 |
| | | 19 | 38 | 26.10 |
| | | 20 | 33 | |
| 22-24 | Total | 21 | 19 | 26.39 |
| | | 22 | 8 | 12.02 |
| | | 23 | 10 | |
| 25-27 | Total | 24 | 12 | 8.80 |
| | | 25 | 2 | 2.93 |
| | | 26 | 1 | |
| | 27 | 0 | | |
| | Total | 3 | 0 | 0.88 |
| | | | | 0.0 |

Table 1 reveals that the highest score for the written test was 26 out of 30, which is 87% while the lowest score was 07. The highest score for the oral test was 23 out of 30 representing 77% while the lowest mark was 06. This showed that the written test registered a higher score than the oral one. It was further revealed that the number of students who scored above 50%, that is, 15 marks and above out of the possible 30 marks, were 254 out of 341. This was 74.5% of the total number of the sampled study participants. In the oral test, on the other hand, the number was much lower –185 which was 54.3%. This was an additional indicator that there was better performance registered in the written test.

Table 2. Percentage Passes in Written and Oral Tests

| Test Type | Above 50% | Below 50% | Total |
|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Written | 254(74.5%) | 87(25.5%) | 341(100%) |
| Oral | 185(54.3%) | 156(45.7%) | 341(100%) |

The levels of performance were also looked into in terms of excellent, good, average and weak. The grades A, B C and D were labelled on the categories respectively. This grading system in terms of ability broadly corresponds to the KCSE grading system. Table 2 displays the contrasting levels of performance in the overall marks attained in the two modes of testing used. From Table 3, only 15(4.04%) of the testees attained excellent performance of grade A. These were only in the written mode of testing.

Table 3. Levels of Performance in Written and Oral Tests

| Mode of testing | 24 - Above 80-100% Excellent (A) | 18-23 60-79% Good (B) | 14-17 45-59% Average (C) | O6-13 44% & below Weak (D) | Total |
|-----------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Written | 15(4.04%) | 142(41.64%) | 119(34.90%) | 65(19.06%) | 341(100%) |
| Oral | 0 (0%) | 71(20.82%) | 146(42.82%) | 124(36.36%) | 341(100%) |

There was none in the oral test who attained grade A. In the subsequent categories, 142(41.64%) scored grade B (Good) in the written test while only 71(20.82%) scored the same grade in the oral mode. This was roughly half the number in the written test. In the third category, that is, average performance (Grade C) there were 119(34.90 %) in the written mode and 146(42.82%) in the oral one. Lastly, in the weak category (Grade D) the written mode registered 65(19.06%) while in the oral test there were 124(36.36%) of the testees. This distribution of grades is a further indication that the scores of the written test were comparatively higher than those of the oral one. The histogram presented in Figure 1 provides a clearer picture of performance in the two modes of testing used. The figure shows that the marks for the written test are concentrated between 13 and 21 out of 30 while for the oral test the concentration is between 10 and 18. This is an added display of comparatively higher performance in the written test.

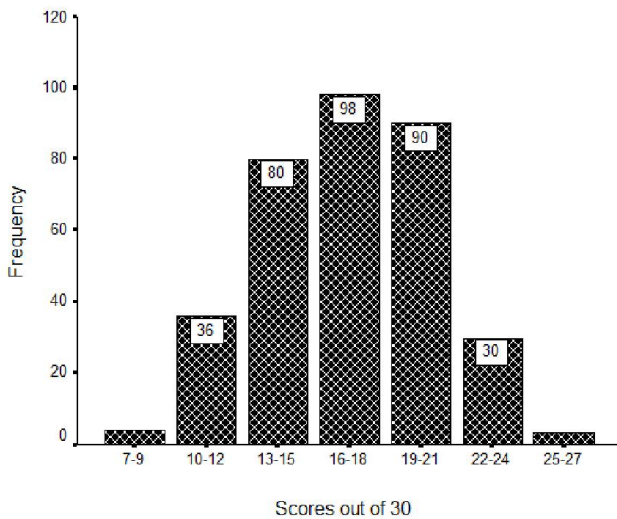


Figure 1. Performance in the written test

| Sub- skills | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Min. | Max. |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|------|------|
| Total Written | 341 | 16.95 | 3.61 | 8.0 | 26.0 |
| Total Oral | 341 | 14.72 | 3.59 | 6.0 | 23.0 |
| Rendition Written | 341 | 1.71 | 1.39 | 0.0 | 6.0 |
| Rendition Oral | 341 | 1.61 | 1.22 | 0.0 | 5.0 |
| Syllabic stress written | 341 | 2.19 | 1.32 | 0.0 | 4.0 |
| Syllabic stress oral | 341 | 1.40 | 0.94 | 0.0 | 4.0 |
| Intonation written | 341 | 2.71 | 0.65 | 0.0 | 4.0 |
| Intonation oral | 341 | 2.65 | 0.65 | 0.0 | 4.0 |
| Contrastive stress written | 341 | 0.30 | 0.71 | 0.0 | 3.0 |
| Contrastive stress oral | 341 | 1.17 | 0.52 | 0.0 | 3.0 |
| Conversion written | 341 | 9.77 | 1.49 | 6.0 | 12.0 |
| Conversion oral | 341 | 7.81 | 1.71 | 3.0 | 11.0 |

It was also noted that the means of the two tests varied. The written test had a mean of 16.9582 out of 30, that is, 56.50%.

The oral test on the other hand had 14.7214(49.06 %). This was also an indication of better performance in the written test. The significance of the difference between the means is discussed later.

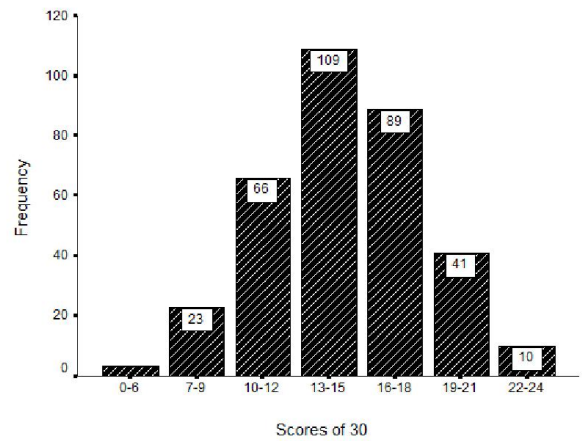


Figure 2. Performance in the oral test

The Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis stated that there is no difference between the scores attained by the students in the written and oral tests. To test this hypothesis, the significance of the difference between the means of the two tests was calculated. The t-test of correlated means was used. This was because the research design involved matched scores. The same subjects received two different treatments. Each was given a written test on five selected speaking skill items and after two weeks an oral test on the same test items. The scores were then matched. The mean score for the written test was 16.9581 and that of the oral test was 14.7214. The total number of study subjects was 341; therefore, the degree of freedom (df) was 340. A t-test value of 26.955 with a P value of 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance was attained. Since P = 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that the mean of the written test was significantly higher than that of the oral test. Therefore, students scored higher marks in the written test.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the score patterns of students in two speaking testing modes. Data analysis and interpretation of the test scores found out that there were higher scores in the written test. The average score for the written test was 16.95(56.80%) while that of the oral test was 14.74(49.06%). Moreover, 75.5% of the participants scored above 50% in the written test while only 54.3% scored the same in the oral test. The hypothesis test further revealed that there is a significant difference between the means scores of the two tests. The

scores attained in the written test were significantly higher than those of the oral test. This pattern of performance could possibly be explained from the fact that the written test is the current mode of testing the speaking skill both at the formative and summative levels. Porter (as cited in Fulcher, 2003) asserts that test format affects students' performance. This might be explained by the fact that the students were more familiar with the written test format and that the oral test was alien to them. However, as Krashen (1987) explains, in a written task the learners' attention is focused more on form while in speech, content is the learners' primary concern. This seemed to have influenced the accuracy with which the written responses were made. Krashen (1987) further explains that when individuals focus on form they monitor their language production by applying formally learned and consciously available rules.

Krashen (1987) also argues that in writing there is more usage of the monitor. This involves application of the rules, which are consciously learnt. To use the monitor effectively, the performer must be focused on form or think about correctness. Conscious application of rules is not common in oral production. Further, the conscious application of grammar rules requires sufficient time. This is possible in writing because the learner has time to make whatever corrections they can to raise the accuracy of their output. This made the written responses more accurate and, therefore, comparatively higher scores were realized. Writing is a deliberate, conscious, planned and organized process. Speech, on the other hand, is spontaneous and random. It is also time-bound and transient. This denies it an opportunity of complex preplanning and correction. It is a fact that in speech, there is room for repairs, that is, use of strategic competence. These include correcting false starts, changing a poor choice of word or correcting mispronunciation among others. However, one cannot really edit what one says. It is worth pointing out that whereas the marking of written work concentrates on accuracy more than content; nevertheless, the scores of the written tests were still comparatively higher contrary to the fact that the oral responses were not over penalized for accuracy.

Another explanation that could be given for the low scores in the oral test relates to the affective filter hypothesis propounded by Krashen. The oral mode of testing considerably raises the anxiety levels of the performers. The findings of Hingle and Linnington (1997) on an English Proficiency Test (oral component) support this. They cite non-verbal factors such self-confidence, familiarity with the tester and presence of the teacher as possible factors that affect oral results. Brown (1993) and Bradshaw (1990) also support this view. Zeidner and Bensoussan (2005) on college students' attitudes towards written versus oral tests of English report that on the whole, students prefer written over oral tests of English language and rate the former more favourably along a variety of dimensions. Written tests are perceived to be more pleasant, valuable, fair, less anxiety evoking and more reflective of the student comprehension of the language than the oral tests. They also report that oral tests on the other hand are viewed to be more interesting to take than the written tests. A final explanation for the difference between the scores could lie in the distinction between knowledge and skill. At the level of the major learning domains, knowledge is purely cognitive while

skill is psychomotor. The two are apparently correlated. Even though a skill is a special ability in a task attained by training, knowledge still precedes it. Knowledge can be translated into skills and this is demonstrated by the ability to perform a task or tasks (Gathumbi and Maseembe, 2005). Hymes (1997) also states that a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use. The disparity between the scores of the written and the oral modes of testing as revealed by the study findings could gain explanation basing on these views. There was a display of knowledge about certain aspects of speaking. For example, a good number of the study participants were able to mark syllabic stress and indicate intonation in writing. Pure knowledge was used. On the contrary, the same participants lacked the skill or ability to demonstrate the knowledge practically. The same was evident in the other test items like intonation and contrastive stress. Most of them thus lacked the capacity to use the "known facts" in practical speech situations.

Conclusion

The study attempted to show that the use of written tests to evaluate speaking might not be adequate to ascertain the speaking proficiency of learners. Scores of the written production test were significantly higher than those of the oral one. This finding led to the conclusion that the use of written tests to evaluate a learner's speaking ability may yield inaccurate results. Oral performance, therefore, demands more attention in terms of the most appropriate mode of testing.

Recommendations

The most basic measure of proficiency or competence in a language is the ability to speak in that target language. Currently, the speaking skill is tested in writing. This has had serious negative wash back effects in the teaching and learning of the speaking skill. The skill is not treated with the seriousness it deserves. Writing and reading, on the contrary, have been accorded more attention. The Kenya National Examinations Council should consider implementing the recommendation by the Kenya Institute of Education (now KICED) that there should be an oral examination at the end of the four-year secondary English course. This recommendation gains support from the findings of the study. KNEC should explore ways of testing spoken production of the language. If practical testing is introduced, the learners will be motivated to improve their speaking. The teachers will also accord speaking its importance.

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