

Enrolment and Retention of Students in German Language Classes: Influencing School Based Factors in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya

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Abstract

German is a language spoken by more than 100 million people as a mother tongue in Europe. It is one of the foreign languages taught and examined in secondary schools in Kenya. German as an optional subject is characterized by low number of students at form four level. The purpose of this study was to investigate school based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties in Kenya. The study adapted the descriptive survey research design. Both purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedule were used. Data was analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The study found out that students' career orientation, teachers' teaching methods, teachers' handling of students' learning difficulties, students' performance in German in form one and two, learning resources and prospects of German language influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes. The findings of this study will provide knowledge in regard to enrolment and retention of students in German language classes and provide a foundation for future studies.

Keywords: Enrolment, Retention, School based, factors.

Introduction

Language plays a significant role in the society by enabling human beings to communicate ideas, intentions and emotions to others of the same language system. Language facilitates personal discovery, development and participation in society (Fasold & Connor-Lintan, 2006). Critical thinking and ethical judgment can also be developed through language. Foreign languages on the other hand play a facilitating role in the tourism industry and international cooperation. According to the ministry of education, one of the goals of education in Kenya is to enhance understanding and appreciation of interrelationships among nations, which can be achieved through students' learning of foreign languages (KIE, 2006).

While the performance in German at KCSE level has been impressive over the last six years (with average mean mark of 62.61%), the average enrolment in candidature has been low, with an average of 391 students (KNEC, 2010). According to Inman (1997) students mainly choose subjects which they believe will help them in future career. According to Inman (1987) proficiency in a foreign language, especially when combined with knowledge of and skills in another professional area is highly desirable in the job market. Several studies reveal that career choice influences choice of foreign language (Stewart-Strobel, 2003). This means that when students are well informed and guided by their teachers on what they can do with various subjects, they will tend to incline more on subjects they believe will help them to form a cluster requirement for university admission.

According to a study by Mantle-Bromley (1995) in the UK, students run away from sciences and mathematics and thus portray sciences and mathematics as boring or irrelevant to modern life. Mantle-Bromley (1995) concludes that inspired teaching is the key to inspiring students towards continued study of optional subjects. This implies that teachers' impressions, feelings and perceptions on the subjects they teach ultimately influence students' attitude and learning of a subject.

Learning facilities are key elements in any teaching-learning process. Krogh (1994) argues that it is possible that students' interest and abilities in different subjects vary according to the type of resources they have mainly in school. According to Chabari (2010) if facilities such as classrooms, library, laboratories and books are not provided or are inadequate, then curriculum implementation is affected. This may lower students' interest and consequently enrolment in the subject.

Students' performance and enrolment in a learning subject are interrelated. According to Stewart-Strobel (2003) both absolute and relative levels of ability are relevant to the choice of optional subjects as it was found out that students choose subjects that they are relatively good at compared to other subjects. Based on these ideas, it was

necessary to investigate school based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

With globalization trends, foreign languages play a critical role in enhancing international trade and relations. The Kenya government has emphasized the need to promote foreign languages in secondary school curriculum. Despite this emphasis, enrolment and retention of learners in German language classes has remained low. This study sought to determine school based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in secondary schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya.

Objective

This study sought to establish school based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in secondary schools.

Methodology

The study used descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design was applicable in this study because it was intended to produce statistical information about aspects of education that are of interest to policy makers and educators without manipulation of variables. The target population was 3,827 subjects and the sample size was 410. The content, construct and face validity of the instrument was ensured through the assistance of the university supervisors. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a pilot study and the correlation coefficient computed was 0.939.

Results and Discussions

The information got showed that 60% of the teachers had a bachelor degree in education while 40% had a diploma. None of the teachers had a master degree in German or education. The results imply that all teachers of German who were involved in the study were well trained to teach in secondary schools and had the ability to guide students in an informed manner when choosing German as a foreign language. The findings are consistent with Datta (1992) who found out that the most important resource a school should have to achieve its roles is the knowledge and the skills of its teachers.

The study sought to establish the teaching experience of German Teachers. The results showed that 40% of the sampled teachers had 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, 40% had 11 to 15 year of experience while 20% had over 15 years of experience. The information reveals that most of the teachers had more than five years of experience. This could enable them to positively influence the students on the best ways of acquiring necessary skills in German language and consequently motivate them to continue with the language up to form four and beyond.

The study sought to know from the students who enrolled into German language classes in form one on what motivated them to do so. The responses are given on Table 1.

Table 1

Students' Reasons for Choosing German

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Because of friends	10	7
German teachers/Career masters explained prospects	44	32
Needed it for dream career	63	46
Others	21	15

The results on Table 1 indicate that 46% of the students enrolled because of their dream career while 32% enrolled because the prospects of German language were explained to them by either the German teacher or career master. About 7% chose German because of influence from friends while 15% enrolled because of other reasons such as passion for languages and desire to venture into new fields of study. The results imply that dream career led in influencing students' enrolment into German language class followed by prospects of German language while friends' influence was the least determiner of students' choice of German. The findings concur with Inman (1985) who notes that students will always choose subjects which they believe will help them in their future careers. The findings however differ with Gelles and Lavine (1999) who say that a lot on one's study area or preference depends on whom the adolescent students choose as their reference group.

To establish whether teachers influenced students' selection of German, teachers were asked to indicate if they limited the number of students in German class in form one and form three. The responses indicated that all the teachers (100%) revealed that they limited the number of students in form one. The findings also indicated that most of the teachers (80%) did not limit the number of students in form three. The findings imply that teachers of German played a major role in students' enrolment into German language classes in form one.

The teachers of German were further required to indicate what they considered in limiting the number of students who enrolled into German language class in form one. The information obtained showed that 80% of the teachers of German considered students' KCPE mark while 20% considered students' interest in the language. The information implies that students' KCPE marks highly determine students' admission into German language class. The results imply that even when a student has interest in the language, one must meet the minimum Kcpe mark required. The results also imply that students' interest in the language was given attention by the minority of the teachers as indicated by 20% of the respondents. The findings further imply that no teacher considered availability of learning resources or other factors when considering students for admission into German language classes in form one. The results reveal that students' selection of German in form one was mainly controlled by teachers of German.

High percentage of students' continuity with German language in form three and four would imply high retention of students in German language classes. The respondents were required to indicate if they were continuing with German in form three and why. The results are given on Table 2.

Table 2
 Students' Reasons for Continuing with German in Form Three

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Encouraged by friends	12	9
Encouraged by German teacher	24	17
Fun and adequate learning resources	34	25
Future/Dream career	39	28
Motivated by performance in German	29	21

The results on Table 2 show that 28% of the students enrolled in German language classes because of their future career. About 25% continued with German because of fun and learning resources, 21% were motivated by their good performance in German, 17% were encouraged by the German teacher while 9% was encouraged by friends. The findings imply that career orientation had the greatest influence on students' choice of German language in form three, followed by fun and learning resources, students' performance in German in form one and two and encouragement by German teacher. Friends had least influence on students' choice of German in form three. The findings agree with Inman (1887) who asserts that proficiency in foreign language is highly desirable in the job market. The results also agree with Datta (1992) who observes that the most important resource a school can have for achieving its educational purpose is the knowledge, skills and dedication of its teachers who are eventually a motivation to their students.

The study sought information from the students who dropped German in form three on why they did so. The results are given on Table 3.

Table 3
 Students' Reasons for Dropping German in Form Three

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Discouragement from friends	6	4
Discouragement by German teacher	9	7
Inadequate learning resources	20	14
Not needed in future career	49	36
Discouraged by poor performance in German	54	39

The results on Table 3 show that 39% of the students dropped German in form three because of discouragement by their poor performance in German in form one and two while 36% dropped because they didn't need it in their future careers. About 14% of the students were discouraged by inadequate resources, 7% was discouraged by German teacher while 4% was discouraged by friends. The findings imply that performance is the highest cause of students' dropping of German in form three followed closely by career orientation. The results agree with Osborne (2002) who found out that as students realize that they have to get a certain number of points to go to university, they choose subjects that they realize can help them to attain that requirement. The results reveal that students' dropping of German in form three is least influenced by friends or peer. The findings thus least agree with Stewart-Strobelt (2003) who found out that the most important factor for choosing optional subject by young students was whether or not friends were in that class.

The study sought to obtain information on what German teachers considered to allow students to continue with German in form three. The information obtained showed that 60% of the teachers considered students' interest while 40% considered students' performance in German in form one and two. The results imply that students' interest in the subject played the greatest role in deciding students' admission into German language class in form three. The findings reveal that no teacher considered students' career orientation or availability of learning resources.

Students normally experience learning difficulties in a foreign language class. The respondents were asked if

they were satisfied with teachers' handling of their learning difficulties or not and why. The results on Table 4 show why students were satisfied with teachers' assistance.

Table 4

Students' Response to Satisfaction With Teachers Assistance

Reasons for satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher ensured they understood	32	24
Teaching methods were good	21	15
Teacher was very encouraging	42	30
Teacher gave them adequate attention	43	31

The results on Table 4 indicate that 31% of the students who enrolled into German language class in form one were satisfied with teachers' handling of their learning difficulties because the teachers gave them adequate attention. About 30% were satisfied because of teachers' encouragement, 24% because the teacher ensured that they understood while 15% were satisfied because Teachers teaching methods were good. The findings agree with Mantle-Bromley (1995) who says that inspired teaching is the key to inspiring students towards continued study of optional subjects.

Students who were dissatisfied with teachers' assistance gave reasons for their dissatisfaction. The results are shown on Table 5.

Table 5

Students' Dissatisfaction With Teachers' Assistance

	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher was very discouraging	51	58
Teacher showed no future in German	14	16
Teacher removed students from class	23	26

The results on Table 5 show that 58% of students were dissatisfied because of teachers' discouragement, 26% because teachers removed students from class while 16% were dissatisfied because teacher showed no clear future in studying German language. The findings imply that teachers' conduct in class and their classroom management strategies highly influenced students' dropping of German in form three. The results therefore agree with Mantle-Bromley (1995) who asserts that teachers' conduct and attitude towards some subjects such as science, influenced students' dropping of the subjects

Conclusions

The results from the study show that students' career orientation and KCPE performance highly determined enrolment and retention of students in German language classes. This means that it is necessary to make students aware of the careers that require German language. It is also important to harmonize students' performance at KCPE level with their interest in German language. This is because while students may not have done very well in English and Kiswahili at KCPE level, it does not automatically mean that they can't learn a foreign language in secondary school. The results from the study also reveal that teachers' control of number of students in German language classes and their handling of students' learning difficulties, students' performance in German in form one and two, learning resources and peer pressure also influenced enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in secondary school. This means that it is necessary for teachers to be aware of the implications of their conduct in German language classes. Students' understanding and good performance in German language in form one and two is also very important if the retention of students in German language classes has to be improved. From the study, it is evident that school based factors highly influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes.

Recommendations

This study recommended that the ministry of education through seminars and workshops could make the prospects of German language clear to career masters and teachers of German. The ministry of education could also sensitize teachers on motivating students to learn German and how to handle their learning difficulties without discouraging them.

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