

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AS A CORRELATE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE AMONG FORM THREE STUDENTS IN EMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: English language is an essential subject in the Kenya school syllabus as it is the standard language of instruction in most subjects in the school curriculum. This study was driven by the issue of insignificant performances among students. Its aim was to investigate students' success motivation as correlates of English language performance. The focus was specifically on form three students in Embu County, Kenya. The objective was to find out the relationship between students' achievement motivation and English language performance. This research was anchored in the achievement motivation theory by McClelland and Atkinson (1958) and a correlational research design was used. The study targeted form three students who were to sit for their KCSE examination in 2021, from a total of 50,675 students in 189 public schools within the county. In the first stage, the study employed simple random and stratified sampling to select 17 schools out of the 189 public secondary schools in Embu County and the study used Sadven's SP Profile (1975) in data collection. A preliminary pilot study was conducted on 26 students, a sample similar to the study's sample to determine the viability and reliability of the study instruments. The study found that students with high achievement motivation studied regularly and had good language skills, resulting in good performance in English. The findings also showed that male and female students differed significantly in achievement motivation. The main recommendation was that students with high achievement motivation should study regularly and productively, taking every opportunity to perfect their language skills to enhance good performance in English.

Keywords: Students' Achievement Motivation, English language, Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is crucial in every aspect of one's actions, such as learning, business, and social interaction (Matere, 2011). Not only is the English language the primary medium of instruction in classrooms across Kenya and other Anglophone countries, but it is also a vital tool for studying sciences, medicine, technology, and other subjects in the curriculum (Ushida, 2005). If one's performance in the English language is enhanced, one will have more opportunities to communicate with people from practically every country in the world (Wilkinson, 2015). As a result, English language performance remains a top priority for educators, psychologist and policymakers.

Educational performance in language learning has been a subject of extensive discussion and research in linguistics. Despite the efforts put by the Educators, English language performance still remains poor. In the USA, research by Olaniyan and Khalid (2013) reported that despite English being used as a first language in the country, students' performance in the language still continued to be poor. Raising concerns of educator.

Regionally, despite many interventions by the government towards improving the performance of English language among high school students, the efforts have proved insignificant. For instance, in Nigeria, Adeyemo (2010) points out n issues in education and emphasizes on the need to research n factors that may enhance English language performance.

In Kenya, English language performance is vital as English language is not only used as a national language but also as a medium of instruction in all schools. This has prompted the educators and researcher to study on factors that influence English language performance. In this effort different studies have been carried out. Different researchers have conducted research on factors influencing English Language performance (Prasangani , 2015; Adom et al., 2016; Alqurashi, 2014; Aina, 2013; Muya 2021). Although their studies were well articulated, they have not adequately solved the problem of English language performance. Some of these studies have focused on generally on English language underperformance in Kenya, which does not represent the situation in Embu County. Notably, none of these studies have focused on student achievement motivation and how its influence to English language performance in Embu County.

The relevance of student achievement motivation is underscored in different studies. In Sri Lanka, Prasangani (2015) explored the factors affecting the performance of second language acquisition among undergraduates by utilizing the Second Language Acquisition (L2) Motivational Self System. Prasangani found a significant association between the interactive necessities of English language acquisition and learners' motivation. In the study, it was established that students who viewed English as essential for their future goals and daily interactions were more motivated and performed better in their language studies.

Achievement motivation, the internal drive that compels individuals to achieve and excel, involves students' desire to achieve academic success, their persistence in the face of challenges, and their attitudes toward learning. Academic performance is often enhanced by high levels of achievement motivation, as such students are more inclined to actively engage with learning materials, contribute in class, and put substantial effort into their studies. (Alqurashi, 2014). In light of this background, this study aimed to examine the relationship between student achievement motivation and English language performance among form three students in Embu County.

Statement of the Problem

English language performance among in Embu County secondary schools has consistently remained below the expected level over the years. The Quality Assurance and Standards Office-Embu County (2023) reported that English mean scores in the county ranged between 4.02 and 4.53 out of 12 points between 2019 and 2023. These consistently low scores raised concerns about the factors contributing to subaverage performance in the subject.

Poor English language proficiency is not just an academic issue; it has significant implications for students' future opportunities, including limited competitiveness in subsequent tertiary level-courses and eventual careers. Further, students achieving poorly in the subject may find it hard to navigate the global job market and achieve socio-economic mobility, thus perpetuating cycles of poverty. This persistent gap between students' actual performance and the maximum attainable score highlights the need to thoroughly investigate the factors contributing to the underperformance.

Multiple factors may influence English performance, including student motivation. A deep dive into the factors is crucial to developing effective interventions to improve English proficiency. Students with low English proficiency often struggle to participate in classroom discussions and group activities. Their reluctance to seek help further compounds their academic difficulties, leading to a cycle of low engagement, poor performance, and reduced motivation.

Comparative data compiled from eight counties in the Eastern region, including Machakos, Marsabit, Isiolo, Embu, Makueni, Kitui, Meru, and Tharaka Nithi, illustrated the county's unique challenges in English performance. Embu ranked low compared to its peers, with a higher concentration of students in lower grades like C and D. The disparity in performance between Embu and other counties like Machakos further emphasized the need for localized studies and interventions.

Given the persistently low English language achievement levels and their socio-economic implications, the inquiry primarily sought to address the following: What factors are responsible for the consistently low English language achievement levels among Form Three students in Embu County, and how can they be addressed?

Objective of the Study

The following objective guided the study:

To examine the relationship between student achievement motivation and English language performance

Research Hypothesis

The following hypotheses guided the study:

H_{a1}: student achievement motivation and English language performance are statistically related.

Theoretical Framework

The Achievement Motivation Theory was developed by David McClelland and John Atkinson in 1958. The theory suggests that individuals are driven by an internal need to achieve, excel, and attain challenging goals. This need for achievement is seen as a crucial determinant of behavior and performance, particularly in academic and work settings. The theory identifies three primary motivational drives: the need for achievement, affiliation, and power. These needs influence how individuals approach tasks, set goals, and interact within their environments.

The core of the theory is that people with a high need for achievement are likely to take up challenging tasks, persist in the face of difficulty, and seek continuous feedback. McClelland also contends that those who have a strong urge for achievement are self-motivated. They prefer somewhat tough activities and derive personal satisfaction from achieving their objectives.

In the context of this study, the Achievement Motivation Theory was relevant as it helped explain why some students performed well in the English language despite challenges while others struggled. Students with a strong drive for achievement approached learning English with enthusiasm, persistence, and resilience, vital for language acquisition and proficiency. These students could seek teacher feedback, set personal learning goals, and engage actively in lessons. The study aimed to investigate how the need for achievement influences student behavior, learning strategies, and their performance in the English language.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Students' motivation to learn English is the extent to which they struggle to perfect the targeted language and be competent. Building on the pertinence motivation in English-as-Second-Language classrooms, Peng (2021) studied the factors underlying student achievement. Consequently, numerous empirical studies have explored how personal factors impact students' motivation and participation. However, the role of achievement motivation in relation to English language acquisition performance has received limited attention. Therefore, this review study aims to close these gaps by discussing students' achievement motivation and how it affects EFL students' motivation and engagement. Based on empirical and theoretical studies, students, achievement motivation has been shown to improve students' academic enthusiasm and engagement.

In the context of this study, Trigueros et al. (2020) studied the influence of students' motivation, emotions, and academic achievement in subjects such as English and math, focusing on students aged 13 to 19 in Spain. The findings revealed significant challenges Spanish students face in achieving proficiency in English, as reflected in their relatively poor academic outcomes compared to other European Union countries. This study is in an effort to address the gap on a sample of Form Three students in Embu County, Kenya. Unlike the general findings from Trigueros and colleagues, this study narrowed its focus to examining how student motivation specifically impacted English language performance. This research aimed to contribute localized insights that can guide interventions and strategies designed to address the educational challenges within Embu County.

These findings align with previous studies, such as those by Cortright et al. (2013) and Hendijani et al. (2016), which also highlighted the incremental role of motivation on students' performance, while extrinsic motivation had little to no effect. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews provided additional insights into the cognitive, affective, and social domains influencing students' motivation and performance. In the cognitive domain, most interviewees acknowledged the importance of English for career, travel, and further education. Many struggled with vocabulary and lacked an environment to practice English, leading to decreased interest and achievement. In the affective domain, negative learning experiences in junior middle school and un motivating teaching methods contributed to demotivation. Socially, insufficient family

support and a non-conducive learning environment were significant barriers. These qualitative findings point to the centrality of intrinsic motivation and highlighted the complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and social factors in influencing English language performance in vocational schooling contexts.

Kariuki and Mbugua (2018) utilized a descriptive survey research approach involving a diverse sample of 270 administrators, 270 teachers, and 9,980 students. The study employed questionnaires to gather data, which was analyzed using SPSS version 19. The finding revealed high levels of agreement between teachers and students regarding key motivational factors. Specifically, 68.5 percent of teachers and 64.3 percent of students agreed on the importance of clear academic expectations. In comparison, 90.7 percent of teachers and 84.6 percent of students emphasized the value of positive teacher-student relationships. Additionally, 81.5 percent of teachers and 86.5 percent of students acknowledged the role of rewards in enhancing student motivation.

Although Kariuki and Mbugua's study provided valuable insights into the relationship between teacher motivation and student achievement, it primarily focused on teachers' perspectives and general academic outcomes. The current study sought to fill this gap by focusing specifically on student motivation in the context of English language performance. In this subject area, performance has been particularly challenging in Embu County. By investigating how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence English language outcomes, this study aimed to offer targeted strategies for improving performance, drawing on the insights from Kariuki and Mbugua while addressing a more specific educational challenge. This study aims to determine if and how student achievement motivation correlate with English language performance.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The current study employed correlational research design to investigate the relationships between the student achievement motivation with English language performance. The researcher found this design justified and relevant to this study as it was a statistical measure of a relationship between two or more variables, and gave an indication of how one variable affected another.

Participants and Procedures

The study targeted form three students due to sit for their KCSE in 2024 from a total number of 50675 in 186 public schools within the County (Embu County TSC Director Office, Embu County Quality Assurance and Standard Office 2023). Form three students were selected because these students were within the age bracket qualified to fill in Sandven's SP Profile for collection of students' achievement motivation data.

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to select the students. Additionally, stratified sampling was applied to categorize schools into boys', girls', and mixed schools. Purposive sampling was used to select Embu County and the specific schools for the study. The sample was from a pool of 16 girls' boarding schools, 12 boys' boarding schools, 24 mixed boarding schools, 135 mixed day schools, and 2 mixed boarding schools.

Instruments

Research data on students' achievement motivation was collected using an adapted questionnaire items from Sandven's (1975) SP profile which was modified to suit the study requirements and since it was an open-source tool, permission from the source was not required. This was a project metric test comprising 18 stimulus situations, with which each having a combined four response situations. The SP profile was considered appropriate for this study because it was intended to measure the subject's need to excel in school and the impending career. For the purposes of interpretation, a score of 0 to 107 represented very low achievement motivation. A score of 108 to 215 means that the subject had a below average need for achievement. The uniform range for average achievement motivation was 216 to 323. The range of scores from 324 to 432 denotes above average achievement motivation levels. The SP Profile used in this study was adapted from the original SP Profile developed by (Sandven, 1975). A few changes in terms of language used and the content was done on the instrument to fit the current study, hence adaptation was embraced rather than adoption. All the 72 items in the SP Profile were identical to the original instrument. The test instrument is created for use by the respondents that fall between age ranges 15 to 19.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's objective was to examine student achievement motivation as a predictor of English language performance. For the purpose of testing the null hypothesis, the researcher presents descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

The Table 4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Students Achievement Motivation Scores

The Table 4.1 displays the minimum scores, the maximum, mean and standard deviation of the scores which provided the descriptive analysis of the students' achievement motivation scores.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Analysis of Students Achievement Motivation Scores

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| SP Profile Score | 314 | 90.00 | 432.00 | 369.34 | 59.54 |

Table 4.1 reveals that the achievement motivation scores of the 314 students ranged from a minimum of 90.00 to a maximum of 432.00, with a mean score of 369.34 ($SD = 59.54$). This indicates that the majority of students scored above average, reflecting generally high levels of achievement motivation. The standard deviation suggested moderate variability among the scores, indicating differences in the degree of motivation across the student population. This could be attributed by individual differences where students had diverse backgrounds, personalities, and experiences, leading to variations in their levels of achievement motivation. In addition, personal goals and aspirations could have led to the results above, whereby, students may have different personal goals and aspirations, influencing their levels of motivation.

4.2 Achievement Motivation Scores and Sex of Respondents Cross tabulation

Table 4.2 presents a cross-tabulation of achievement motivation scores by sex for male and female respondents. The table highlights the minimum and maximum scores, as well as the mean and standard deviation, to provide insights into the differences in achievement motivation between the two groups

Table 4.2: Achievement Motivation Scores and Sex of Respondents Cross tabulation

| Sex of the Respondent | | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Male | SP Profile Score | 151 | 90.00 | 432.00 | 347.25 | 67.25 |
| Female | SP Profile Score | 163 | 174.00 | 432.00 | 389.82 | 42.25 |

Table 4.2 shows the average achievement motivation score was higher for female as opposed to male. Female respondents also exhibited less variability in achievement motivation scores, as indicated by the lower standard deviation. The higher mean achievement motivation score among female respondents suggested that, on average, female were more motivated in the context being measured. This could be an indicative of a positive attitude towards academic achievement or other goals.

4.3 Achievement Motivation Scores and Type of School Cross Tabulation

The Table 4.3 below shows the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of the students' achievement motivation scores across the various types of schools.

Table 4.3: Achievement Motivation Scores and Type of School Cross Tabulation

| Type of School | n | Min | Max | Mean | SD |
|------------------------|-----|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Girls Boarding | 112 | 174.00 | 432.00 | 397.39 | 38.72 |
| Boys Boarding | 71 | 90.00 | 432.00 | 341.49 | 83.44 |
| Mixed Day and Boarding | 31 | 330.00 | 432.00 | 401.23 | 36.88 |
| Mixed Day | 86 | 186.00 | 420.00 | 350.09 | 42.28 |
| Mixed Boarding | 14 | 192.00 | 390.00 | 333.86 | 36.81 |

Min =Minimum *Max* =Maximum

Table 4.3 above showed that Mixed Day and Boarding schools' category had the highest mean achievement motivation score of 401.23, indicating a relatively higher level of motivation compared to other groups. The standard deviation of 36.89 represented a smaller spread of scores around the mean implying that students tended to have more uniform motivation levels. Further, looking at Girls Boarding school's category, the mean achievement motivation score for this group is 397.39, which is slightly lower than Mixed Day and Boarding. This category has a standard deviation of 38.72 suggesting a moderate spread of scores around the mean which were relatively consistent, indicating similar levels of motivation among students.

The results also showed that Mixed Day had a mean achievement motivation score of 350.09, which is lower than both Mixed Day and Boarding and Girls Boarding. The standard deviation of 42.28 suggests a moderate spread of motivation scores in individual scores around the mean. The Boys Boarding mean achievement motivation score was 341.49, which was the lowest among the mentioned groups and the standard deviation of 83.44 was relatively high, indicating a wide variability in individual scores around the mean. This suggested that there may be significant differences in achievement motivation among individuals within this group.

From the results above, Mixed Boarding had the lowest mean achievement motivation score of 333.86, and the standard deviation of 36.81 suggesting a moderate variability around the mean score. In summary, the interpretation suggested that Mixed Day and Boarding had the highest average achievement motivation, while Boys Boarding had the lowest average, with a relatively higher degree of variability among individual scores.

4.4 Levels of Achievement Motivation

Figure 4.1 illustrated the levels of achievement motivation of the respondents as either high or moderate with corresponding percentages.

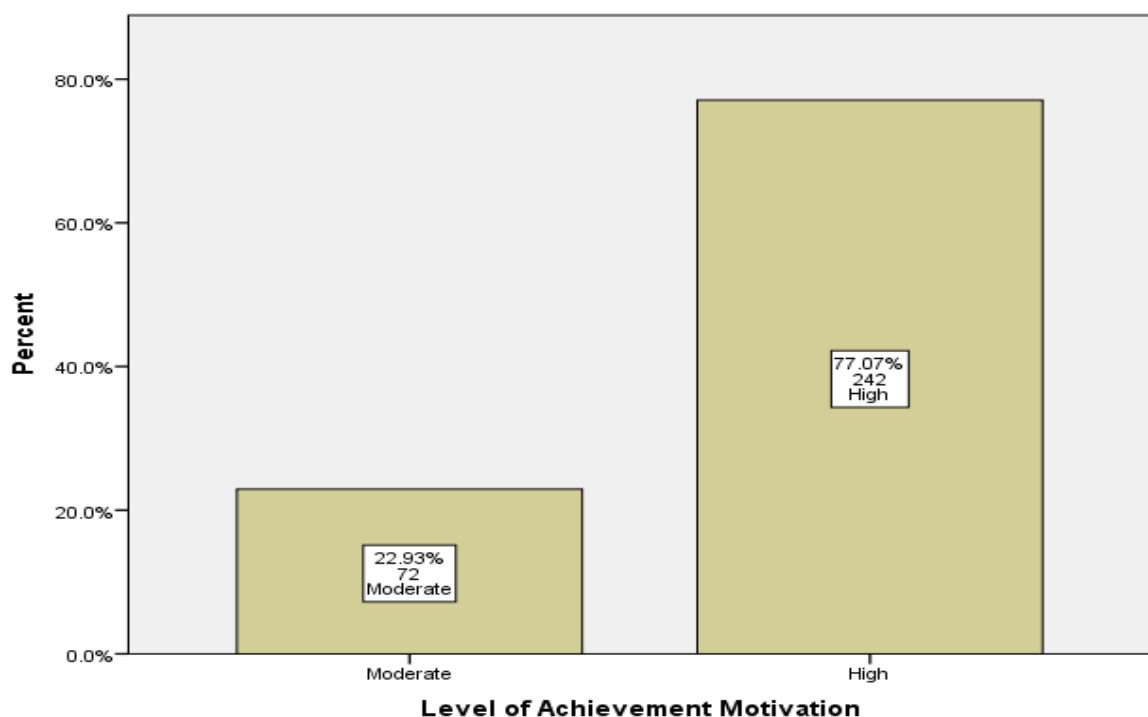


Figure 4.1: Levels of Achievement Motivation

From the graph analysis in Figure 4.1, it showed that most of the sampled students have a high level of achievement motivation of 77.07% implying that they are likely to be driven, ambitious, and motivated to succeed in their academic pursuits or other goals. A small number of sampled students had a moderate level of achievement motivation of 22.93%. This implied that these students may still be motivated, but perhaps not to the same extent as those in the high achievement motivation group.

Hypothesis testing

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between students' achievement motivation and English performance

If the hypothesis testing indicates a significant relationship, it suggests that achievement motivation plays a role in influencing English performance. On the other hand, if no significant relationship is found, it implies that factors other than achievement motivation may be more influential in determining English performance scores among the sampled students.

4.5 Relationship between achievement motivation and English performance

The Table 4.4 shows relationship between English performance and achievement motivation scores according to the Pearson Correlation.

Table 4.4: Relationship between achievement motivation and English performance

| | | EP | SPPS |
|------|-----------------|-----|------|
| EP | <i>r</i> | 1 | .33 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .00 |
| | N | 314 | 314 |
| SPPS | <i>r</i> | .33 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .00 | |
| | N | 314 | 314 |

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

SP Profile Score=SPPS; EP= English performance.

There is a significant positive relationship between English performance and achievement motivation scores ($r(312) = 0.33$, $p < .05$). The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.33 indicated a moderate positive correlation between English performance and achievement motivation scores. The p-value of less than 0.01 ($p < .01$) suggesting that this correlation was statistically significant. In other words, it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. This meant that as achievement motivation scores increased, there was a tendency for English performance scores to also increase. The correlation coefficient of 0.33 indicates a moderate strength of association between the two variables.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study reveals a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.33$, $p < .05$) between students' achievement motivation and their ELP, highlighting motivation as a critical determinant of academic success. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Dörnyei's motivational theory (2005), the findings underscore that students who are intrinsically motivated exhibit higher engagement and proficiency in English. This intrinsic motivation stems from factors like autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which empower students to actively participate in learning and persist through challenges. Educators can enhance motivation by fostering supportive classroom environments that encourage self-directed learning and provide meaningful feedback, aligning instructional practices with students' motivational needs.

Comprehending these motivational dynamics is pivotal for tailoring successful educational interventions that cater to diverse student needs and backgrounds. Factors such as cultural context and individual learning preferences influence students' motivational orientations towards English language learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). By acknowledging these influences and implementing targeted strategies, teachers can design inclusive classrooms that optimize students' motivation and ultimately enhance their language proficiency. Future research could delve deeper into specific motivational techniques in greater detail and how they affect student achievements, advancing our understanding and practice in fostering academic achievement through motivational enhancement strategies.

6. DISCUSSION

The study aims to uncover the link between students' motivation for achievement and their performance in English. This involves understanding how students' inner drive for academic success influences their actual language skills. Achievement motivation, the internal motivation that pushes learners towards excellence, plays a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes. As students' progress in learning a language, their level of motivation significantly impacts their involvement, perseverance, and overall success. This objective seeks to analyze this connection, exploring how students' motivation affects their proficiency in English.

The study reveals a compelling positive correlation between students' achievement motivation and their English performance. When students harbor a genuine desire to excel, they tend to invest more effort, participate actively in language

activities, and exhibit resilience when faced with linguistic challenges. Interestingly, gender dynamics come into play, with female students consistently displaying higher achievement motivation scores than their male counterparts. Perhaps societal expectations, personal aspirations, or cultural norms contribute to this disparity. Regardless, educators must recognize the pivotal role of motivation in language learning. By fostering a supportive environment that nurtures students' intrinsic drive, schools can elevate English language outcomes.

However, the findings should be viewed in light of its limitations. The study relied on self-reports which could have introduced an inevitable level of subjectivity. The study was also entirely correlational, thus causal inferences about academic optimism, school anxiety, fear of failure, and students' academic achievement could not be drawn.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, this study added to the literature on the prediction of English language performance from student achievement motivation. Findings indicate that student achievement motivation significantly and positively predict English language performance. It contributes to the understanding of psychological constructs that influence students' English language achievement across different cultures. It serves as an inception for further research on student's learning outcomes.

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