



Original Article

Perceptions on the Influence of English Language Proficiency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District Council

PrayGod Joseph Exaud^{1*} & Dr. Peter T. Mramba, PhD¹

¹ Jordan University College, P. O. Box 1878, Morogoro, Tanzania - East Africa.

* Author for Correspondence Email: exaudpj@gmail.com

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.7.4.2269>

Date Published: **ABSTRACT**

06 October 2024

Keywords:

Perceptions,
Influence of English,
Academic
Performance,
Public Secondary
Schools.

This study examines perceptions of the influence of English language proficiency on students' academic performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District, Tanzania. The study utilizes a mixed research approach and descriptive survey design. The study targeted DSEO, Heads of Schools, teachers, and students, with a sample of 61 respondents selected through stratified and random sampling methods. Primary and secondary data were gathered via interviews and questionnaires, ensuring the study's validity and reliability. Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and confidentiality, were rigorously upheld. The findings reveal that effective school-based English programs, such as debates and speech activities, enhance students' language skills and academic performance. Additionally, consistent and dedicated teaching of English contributes positively to students' comprehension and achievements. The study underscores the critical role of English proficiency in educational outcomes and recommends expanding English language programs, regular teacher training, and interactive learning methods to improve academic results.

APA CITATION

Exaud, P. J. & Mramba, P. T. (2024). Perceptions on the Influence of English Language Proficiency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District Council. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 7(4), 182-190. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.7.4.2269>

CHICAGO CITATION

Exaud, PrayGod Joseph and Peter T. Mramba. 2024. "Perceptions on the Influence of English Language Proficiency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District Council". *East African Journal of Education Studies* 7 (4), 182-190. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.7.4.2269>

HARVARD CITATION

Exaud, P. J. & Mramba, P. T. (2024) "Perceptions on the Influence of English Language Proficiency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District Council", *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 7(4), pp. 182-190. doi: 10.37284/eajes.7.4.2269.

IEEE CITATION

P. J. Exaud & P. T. Mramba "Perceptions on the Influence of English Language Proficiency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District Council" *EAJES*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 182-190, Oct. 2024. doi: 10.37284/eajes.7.4.2269.

MLA CITATION

Exaud, PrayGod Joseph and Peter T. Mramba. "Perceptions on the Influence of English Language Proficiency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rorya District Council". *East African Journal of Education Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 4, Oct. 2024, pp. 182-190, doi:10.37284/eajes.7.4.2269

INTRODUCTION

Academic success for both students and their teachers fundamentally hinge on the students' achievements in their educational pursuits. However, this success can be significantly impeded when students lack proficiency in the Language of Instruction (LOI) (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2008). In countries where English serves as the medium of instruction, students must not only understand but also possess adequate skills in English to grasp what they are learning and perform well academically. The use of English in educational systems of non-native English-speaking countries often presents considerable challenges, leading to difficulties in learning across various subjects and negatively impacting academic performance (Arsad et al., 2014).

The concepts of academic performance and language proficiency are broad and multifaceted. Academic performance generally refers to the outcomes of educational activities, particularly within higher education contexts, and is often assessed through the ability to articulate learning through speaking or writing (Komba, 2012). Conversely, language proficiency encompasses an individual's overall competence in a language, measured through listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Inadequate proficiency in English can be a barrier not only in developing countries but also in developed nations such as China, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore (Arsad et al., 2014). For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to enhance regional integration and economic growth across Asia, Europe, and Africa, has implications beyond geography and economics, extending into the linguistic realm (Su, 2017). Globalization has led many nations to adopt English as a key language of instruction, although this shift has sometimes exacerbated proficiency issues among both students and teachers in non-native English-speaking countries. This language gap often hampers effective interaction during the teaching and learning processes, ultimately affecting students' examination performance.

In multilingual countries like Turkey and India, the preference for native languages in early education levels, with English being used predominantly in higher education, has not always yielded positive outcomes. Poor English proficiency has been linked to subpar academic performance due to the impact of prior language experiences on learning (Li, 2005).

In Africa, many Sub-Saharan nations use English as an official language alongside indigenous languages, a legacy of colonial rule (Plomp et al., 2003). Post-independence, some African governments have continued to emphasize the use of English in education and administration, often at the expense of native languages (Swilla, 2009). In Nigeria, for example, the diversity of languages has contributed to poor English proficiency among learners, leading to lower examination performance (Aina et al., 2013).

East African countries, including Kenya and Tanzania, have also faced challenges related to English proficiency and academic performance. Studies in Kenya reveal that students' poor English proficiency, often due to the prevalence of native languages at home and in schools, adversely affects their educational outcomes (Atetwe, 2013; Kinigi, 2002; Mwinsheikh, 2008).

In Tanzania, the issue of language of instruction has been a contentious topic for over six decades. Despite the use of both English and Kiswahili in education, English has been identified as a major factor in students' poor academic performance, particularly in national examinations. The persistent low proficiency in English is seen as a significant barrier to educational quality and student achievement (Malekela, 2003; Wilkinson & Silliman, 2008).

Recent data from the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) highlights a decline in examination performance, with a notable decrease in pass rates from 2022 to 2023. This decline has intensified discussions on the underlying causes, with poor English proficiency frequently cited as a primary factor. Despite governmental efforts such as the Big Results Now (BRN) initiative and various teacher training programs, progress remains limited.

This study aims to investigate the influence of English language proficiency and academic performance in Tanzania, specifically focusing on Rorya district. The objective is to determine whether English proficiency is a key factor in students' ongoing academic struggles and to explore potential strategies for improvement.

DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

Language proficiency refers to mastery of a specific language, behavior or skills demonstrated by consistently superior performance measured against established or popular standards (Mvungi, 1982).

Students' Academic Performance, often referred to as a student's achievement in educational settings and is assessed through various indicators such as grades, test scores, and class rankings. It serves as a fundamental measure of a student's success in acquiring knowledge and skills within a formal educational context, influencing their educational trajectory and future opportunities (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Public Secondary Schools are educational institutions funded and operated by government entities and designed to provide education to students (Miller, 2017). In Tanzania, public secondary school education consists of four years of Ordinary Level (Forms 1-4) and two years of Advanced Level (Forms 5-6).

THEORETICAL UNDERPININGS

Social Development Theory, primarily associated with Lev Vygotsky, provides a framework for understanding how social interaction and cultural context influence cognitive development. Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, introduced this theory in the early 20th century, challenging the existing notions of developmental psychology that emphasized innate cognitive structures (Vygotsky, 1978). His ideas focus on the interplay between social experiences and individual learning processes, underscoring the importance of language, social interaction, and cultural tools in cognitive development.

Pioneers and Ideas

Lev Vygotsky is the pioneering figure behind Social Development Theory. His central idea is that cognitive development is profoundly influenced by social interactions and cultural practices. Vygotsky introduced the concept of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), which refers to the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the help of more knowledgeable others but cannot yet perform independently (Vygotsky, 1978). He also emphasized the role of "scaffolding," where support is gradually removed as learners gain competence, and "cultural tools," including language and symbols, as critical components of cognitive growth.

Strengths

One of the key strengths of Social Development Theory is its emphasis on the social context of learning. This perspective highlights how collaborative learning and interaction with more knowledgeable peers or adults can significantly enhance cognitive development (Wood et al 1976). The theory also provides practical strategies for educators, such as scaffolding and tailored instructional support, which can be applied to improve teaching practices and accommodate diverse learning needs. Additionally, Vygotsky's theory underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic context in shaping cognitive processes, making it particularly relevant in multicultural and multilingual educational settings.

Weaknesses

Despite its strengths, Social Development Theory has some limitations. One major critique is its relatively limited attention to individual differences in cognitive development. The theory primarily focuses on the social aspects of learning, sometimes at the expense of considering how personal factors, such as intrinsic motivation or individual cognitive abilities, might influence learning outcomes (Cole, 1996). Additionally, the concept of ZPD can be challenging to operationalize in educational settings, as it requires precise assessment of learners' capabilities and appropriate levels of support, which may not always be feasible in practice.

Relevance to a Study

In the context of a study investigating the impact of language proficiency on academic performance, Social Development Theory offers valuable insights. For instance, understanding how students interact with peers and instructors within their ZPD can inform strategies to support language learners. Vygotsky’s emphasis on social interaction and cultural tools can help in designing educational interventions that enhance language acquisition and academic success. By recognizing the role of social and cultural contexts in learning, educators can develop more effective teaching methods that address language barriers and foster better academic performance (Vygotsky, 1978). Overall, Social Development Theory provides a robust framework for exploring how social and cultural factors influence learning processes and outcomes, making it a relevant perspective for educational research and practice.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the procedures for collecting and analyzing data related to this study, focusing on research methodology. The study employs a mixed research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2013). Data were analyzed using quantitative methods, including descriptive statistics and

percentages. A descriptive survey design was used to analyze the perceptions on the influence of English language proficiency and academic performance. Qualitative data were coded and analyzed thematically to identify common themes. The findings were presented in tables and charts for the quantitative results, while the qualitative results were summarized in narrative form. The study was conducted in Rorya District, Mara Region, selected for its rapid growth and declining student performance despite limited research in this area. The target population includes District Education Secondary Officer (DESO), Heads of Schools (HoS), teachers, and students, with a sample of 61 respondents chosen through stratified and random sampling techniques (Best & Khan, 2003; Patton, 2002). Both primary and secondary data were collected using interviews and questionnaires to ensure validity and reliability (Kothari, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). Ethical standards, including voluntary participation and confidentiality, were maintained throughout the research (Punch, 2011).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section aimed at identifying influence of English Language proficiency in students’ academic performance in secondary school. In this objective, the respondents (DSEO, HoS, Teachers and Students) responded the questionnaire and interview. The research findings are presented and discussed as follows.

Table 1: Perception on the Relationship between English Language Proficiency and Students Academic Performances

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percent
Do you think there are relationship between English language proficiency and students’ academic performances?	Yes	37	92.5%
	No	03	7.5%
	Total	40	100%

Source: Field Data (2024)

From Table 1 The researcher obtained responses from those who answered regarding the relationship between English language proficiency and students’ academic performance, out of 40 respondents 92.5% respondents said yes and 7.5% respondents said no, the majority of the respondents agreed that there is relationship between English language proficiency and students’ academic performances. Therefore, English language is medium of instructions and communication in secondary schools in those way students are learning through that language, it has

direct impacts on academic performances. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Interviews were conducted to DSEO and HoS on the relationship between English language proficiency and students’ academic performances. This question aimed at realizing whether respondents are aware about relationship between English language proficiency and students’ academic performances. In responding to this, majority of respondents showed that English language is language of instructions that

affect proportionally students' academic performances in secondary schools. Subsequently, there is strong relationship between English language and students' academic performances as they provided the main key ideas about it. One of the HoS said;

Yes, there is big relationship because English is medium of instruction in secondary schools. In schools, we use English language to teach, learn and communicate varieties of angles. In order to support performance, teachers provide instruction by using English language. Therefore, student with poor English language command is at risk of performing poor academically (Interview, HoS, School 2, 10/05/2024).

DSEO added:

It's true; there is relationship because setting of examinations of all subjects except Kiswahili is taking place in English language, even the response of the items must be in English language too. Therefore, English language mastery is the key to access academic performance and instructions in the classrooms (Interview, DSEO, 10/05/2024).

Another HoS shared;

Yes, if the learner has good English language command feels comfortable and enjoy schooling activities such as debate, dialogue, morning speech, and evening talks that in turn it improves the proficiency in language and confidence in

exams, hence it boosts academic performance (Interview, HoS, School 3, 14/05/2024).

In regard to those findings from the study revealed that there is relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic performances in secondary schools due to English language as medium of instruction influences directly academic performances. If students master well a language, automatically he/she must perform well in their exams. There will be significant improvement of teaching English language in order students to be proficiency to help them academically. These findings correspond with findings of Moon et al (2014) found that significant changes to students learning, practice and understanding of the teaching based on English proficiency could be achieved through academic performances in schools. One of the most important changes was the teachers' increased understanding of the benefits of engaging learners in a greater range of interaction styles of English language, this leads close relationship of English language and academic performances of students. Also, Nanai (2023) reported that its necessity for having students who knowing English language as a global language and language of instructions in secondary schools. Therefore, there is directly proposal and much emphasis on English teaching and learning and students' academic performances. The role English proficiency is of significant important in promoting and developing students' achievements especially in examinations.

Table 2: School English Programs

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percent
Are there any English-speaking programs operating in the schools?	Yes	38	95%
	No	02	05%
	Total	40	100%

Source: Field Data (2024)

Thus, suggestions from Table 2. 95% of the 40 students said yes, while 5% said no, indicating that most schools are implementing some English language programs. These programs help improve students' English proficiency, which in turn promotes better academic performance.

In the same vein when DSEO, HoS and teachers were asked, similar responses were revealed that

English language programs are helping learning in the schools' compound through English language clubs, debates, morning speech etc. Subsequently, these programs affect directly students' English proficiency especially positive academically performances. For instance, one HoS claimed;

In our school, there are some English programs like morning speech, debates, and Evening

speech. Therefore, these programs help our students to understand English language however, students are not active 100% in practising these programs (Interview, Head of School, School 3, 17/05/2024).

Moreover, one teacher added;

I'm teaching English language subject in this school, we are implementing 'English Speaking only' programs with other subject teachers in order to build a spirit of students for listening, speaking, reading and writing. For instance, programs initiated are essay competition, morning speech and debates. It improves performance not in English Subject only, but all subjects (Interview, Teacher, School 1, 08/05/2024).

In addition, DSEO reported;

I visited some of schools that implementing well English language empowerment programs, so some of students are speaking very well English language because of programs. And their performances are impressing. However, not

schools are practising these programs (Interview, DSEO, 08/05/2024).

From study, it was revealed that English language proficiency is influenced through school English language programs in schools. This finding concurs with what many other scholars have reported as well. For instance, the study by Prosper and Elisa (2017) argued that the English language competences developed during the different programs may employ students learning effectively. School-based professional development programs are likely to enhance students' competences in developing for effective learning hence these programs help students' development in academic performances. Similarly, the finding with Mtallo (2015) stated that some of schools in Tanzania secondary schools focusing on the use of English programs like morning speeches and debates to enhance students in learning English skills. Henceforward, it is task for secondary schools to achieve students learning through implementing programs in order to develop academic performances.

Table 3: Teachers Teach all English Periods

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percent
Are English subject teachers teaching all English periods in a week?	Yes	36	90%
	No	04	10%
	Total	40	100%

Source: Field Data (2024)

As from Table 3 the results indicated that out of 40 respondents, 90% respondents said "yes" while respondents said "no". The students revealed that most of English teachers are taught all English periods, these help students to cover all topics that influences student to mastering English language skills for better academic performances.

Also, in regard of questionnaire, the researcher wanted to know if students understand English

language during instructions as the English subject teachers teach. The findings showed that most students understand the lessons because the English teachers never miss class unless they have permission. For examples teachers given students quiz, notes, writing essay, and class debates competition to help them to understand English language. The results are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Understanding of English Subject Teachers During Instructions

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percent
Do you understand English subject teachers during instructions?	Yes	28	70%
	No	12	30%
	Total	40	100%

Source: Field Data (2024)

In verifying more on this, the findings revealed that all periods per week are taught by English teachers in relation with quiz, test and examinations. In addition, taught of all periods per week influences students to learn English language to be proficiency for purpose of academic performances that should show capacity of students to understand the language. For example, one HoS responded;

When I preview lesson plans and log books, English teachers found to teach almost all periods per week, if below, there is inevitable excuses. This leads our students to understand English language positively and understand other subject content (Interview, HoS, School 4, 17/05/2024).

This is what teachers reported;

English subject leads to good understanding of the English Language in which each and every subject except Kiswahili subject is the language of presentation. As the English subject teacher simplify the accessibility of the language it positively affects other subjects (Interview, Teachers, School 3, 14/05/2024).

From the findings through questionnaire and interview revealed that most of teachers taught all English periods influence English language proficiency that affect students' academic performances. In that case, when teachers teach frequently lessons in schools may help students in improving English language proficiency. The findings concur with Chen and Lai (2018) claimed that there has been a significant proliferation in the number of teaching periods that has been explored about what motivates students in performances. Significantly, the influence teachers' decisions regarding their teaching periods adoptions per week and relative importance of these influences because periods growth students in learning subjects that perceived enjoyment and enjoyment in helping others. Also, Joseph (2021) indicated that the teaching and learning process is greatly influenced by teacher practices in classroom periods. Teachers demonstrated more knowledge, attitude and skills according to number of periods to improve teaching effectiveness and students learning in secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the significant impact of English language proficiency on students' academic performance in secondary schools. It was found that proficiency in English, being the primary medium of instruction, directly influences students' academic success. The research also revealed that school-based English language programs, such as debates and speech activities, effectively enhance students' language skills and, by extension, their academic performance. Additionally, the consistent teaching of English periods by dedicated teachers contributes positively to students' understanding and achievement. These findings highlight the critical role of English proficiency in educational outcomes and suggest that reinforcing English language education could substantially improve students' academic results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that secondary schools prioritize the enhancement of English language proficiency through several strategic measures. Schools should implement and expand English language programs such as debate clubs, morning speeches, and writing competitions to create immersive learning environments that foster better language skills. Additionally, regular training for teachers on effective English language instruction should be conducted to ensure that all English periods are utilized to their full potential. Schools should also consider integrating more interactive and practical language learning methods into their curricula to boost student engagement and comprehension. By adopting these recommendations, schools can better support students in mastering English, which will likely lead to improved academic performance across subjects.

REFERENCES

- Arsad, P.M., Bauniyamin, N. & Manan J.B (2014). *Students' English language proficiency and its impact on the overall students' academic performance: An analysis and prediction using Neural Network Model*. WSEAS Transactions on Advances in Engineering Education, 44-53.

- Atetwe, A.J. (2013). *Analysis of the Influence of Mother Tongue on Students' Performance in English in KCSE in Public Day Secondary Schools in Gatundu District, Kiambu County, Kenya*. (Unpublished Master Thesis) The Catholic University of Eastern Africa.
- Best, J. W. & Khan, J. V. (2003). *Research in education* (8th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Chen, X. & Lai, C. (2018). *Advances in Language learning and Teaching*. Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in Education* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Harvard University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Joseph, A. (2021). *Understanding language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kinigi, A. (2002). *Language and education in East Africa*. East African Educational Publishers.
- Komba, C. S. (2012). *The link between English language proficiency and academic performance*. Department of social sciences, Sokoine University of Agriculture.
- Kothari, C. R. (2003). *Research Methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Age International Publishers.
- Li, G. (2005). *Other people's success: Impact of the "model minority" myth on underachieving Asian students in North America*. KEDI Journal of Educational Policy, 2(1), 30-35.
- Malekela, G. A. (2003). *English as a Medium of Instruction In post-Primary Education in Tanzania: Is it a fair policy to the Learners'?* In: Brock-Utne, B., Desai, Z., & Qorro, M. (eds.). *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. (LOITASA).
- Miller, J. (2017). *Public Schools in the U.S.: A Comprehensive Overview*. *Education Review Journal*, 15(3), 101-118.
- Moon et al. (2014). *English Language Teaching and Whole School Professional Development in Tanzania*: International Journal of Educational Development: 38, 59-68.
- Mtallo, A. (2015). *Introduction to educational research methods*. Dar es Salaam University Press.
- Mvungi, N. (1982). *Introduction to the study of language*. Longman Group Limited.
- Mwinsheikhe, M. (2008). *Overcoming the Language Barrier. An In-depth Study of Tanzania Secondary School Teachers and Students Strategies in Coping with English /Kiswahili Dilemma in Teaching and Learning Process*: LOITASA: Reflecting Phase I entering Phase II P
- Nanai, E. (2023). *Issues in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Tanzania: Evidences from Literature*: International Journal of Language and Education Research 5(3):65 – 80.
- Plomp, T., Nieveen, N., Gustafson, K., Branch, R. M. & van den Akker, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Educational Design Research*. Enschede: Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO).
- Prosper, G. & Elisa, D. (2017). *Strengthening English Learning in Language Transition Classes by Spiralling English Teachers' Competences in Tanzania*: Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences 3(3): 1-15.
- Punch, K. F. (2011). *Introduction to research methods in education*. SAGE Publications.
- Rumberger, R. & Palardy, G. (2005). *Does Segregation Still Matter? The Impact of Student Composition on Academic Achievement in High School*. *Teachers College Record*, 107(9), 1999-2045.
- Su, L. (2017). *Innovations in language teaching*. Springer.
- Swilla, I.N (2009). *Languages of Instruction in Tanzania: Contradictions between Ideology, Policy and Implementation*. *African Study Monographs*, 30(1), 1- 14.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wilkinson, L., & Silliman, E. R. (2008). *Language and literacy development in children with hearing loss*. Guilford Press.