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EFFECTS OF SYNONYMS IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE IN  
KENYA; A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW



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**EFFECTS OF SYNONYMS IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE IN KENYA; A  
CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** Synonym is a paradigmatic relation that enables lexically simple units to have same meaning as lexically complex units and vice versa. It is necessary to develop student's vocabulary by use of synonyms. By learning the synonym, the students not only know one word but also other words that have nearly same meaning on the text. The purpose of the study therefore is to evaluate the effects of synonyms in English as second language in Kenya.

**Methodology:** The paper used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes and to extract knowledge gaps.

**Conclusion:** Learning vocabulary is one of the most efficient ways in improving the English students' comprehension. The study concluded that it is necessary to develop students' vocabulary by use of synonyms. By learning the synonym, the students not only know one word but also other words that have nearly same meaning on the text.

**Recommendations:** The study concluded that teachers can use synonym in learning vocabulary with their own strategy or other subject to enrich students' knowledge of English vocabulary. Also, students can use synonym in learning certain subject when the aim of their learning is comprehended. Further there is need for the government to procure and distribute enough teaching and learning materials that can facilitate the improvement of learning English vocabulary.

**Keywords:** *synonyms, English, second language*

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In Kenya English plays an important function in national affairs since it is the language in which most government businesses are conducted. It also plays a key role in Kenyans educational system both as an important subject and as a medium of instruction. Due to the great importance of English, accuracy and fluency in all the aspects of the language is encouraged among pupils who need the language in their education as well as in the society. To be communicative is one of the aims of learning English. Children could speak well if they master the words of English language. If they have varied words, they will speak anything they want since it's better. Since all subjects in the school curriculum in upper primary and secondary schools are taught in English except other languages, proficiency in the language will no doubt help the pupils to understand them easily.

Acquisition of English competence is vital. Being a compulsory subject in school, mastery of its syntax is significant. This is evident from Robin (1964) assertion that acquisition of the syntactic components constitutes an important facility in grammar. Rederick (1968) observes that syntax is fundamental in that both semantic and phonological components operate on information provided by syntax. However, despite vigorous teaching of English, learners more often depart from the prescribed models of the language.

The value of vocabulary, according to David Wilkins, "very little can be conveyed without grammar, and nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary." He also stated that knowing more words and expressions will lead to greater progress. People may say a lot with words because they speak with words rather than grammar. As one of the three basic aspects of learning a foreign language, according to Qi Pan (2011), vocabulary is crucial (phonetic, vocabulary and grammar). Understanding the meaning of words can aid comprehension of sentences, sections, or courses.

While learning a language, students' word knowledge should be noted. Developing word awareness is one of the four techniques. In Richard's book, it is said that the minimum number of words that pupils must know is 2000 or so words that regularly appear in the written text (Richards and Rodgers, 1992). The teacher just gave them words from the textbook and instructed them to

look up the definition in a dictionary. The pupils will understand that the other terms have the same meaning, but they will rarely hear them because the teacher is only concerned with the task at hand. Students were generally unaware of whether they had discovered a new word that had the exact same meaning as the previous ones or not.

"Students should be able to reply to the meaning on the basic essay or text accurately and fluently related to daily environment in descriptive and recount text," according to the reading skill syllabus, implying that students should be able to comprehend the meaning of the material they read. Students are asked to accurately answer questions based on the text to determine the meaning of the basic text. In fact, pupils have trouble answering questions when the questions utilize a different word to describe what is in the text. To put it another way, they were still stumped when it came to answering the implied basic questions. The employment of synonyms is required to expand their vocabulary. By learning a synonym, students gain knowledge of not only one word but also other terms in the text that have a similar meaning.

### **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The focus of this study is effects of synonyms in English as a second language in Kenya. The study sought to examine the importance of using synonyms in teaching and communication in the English language in Kenya. This is because it has been identified that students do not know a lot of vocabulary hence end up not being able to answer simple questions with words of different meaning. The lack of enough vocabulary in the spoken and written English of the students called for more attention in this study as the lack of vocabulary was noted to interfere with the overall communication process and writing of English which is the target language (TL). Previous studies have been carried out focusing on English as the second language in Kenya but none has been able to cover on the effects of synonyms in English and this study aims at covering the gap.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to assess the effects of synonyms in English as second language in Kenya



## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study can be used by teachers, students and other researchers in increasing students' vocabulary. For both students and teachers, this study can be useful as a technique in teaching vocabulary since the treatment of this technique is conducted continuously, it will make the students comprehend the words easily. The teacher as a facilitator guides the students to improve their vocabulary by knowing the other words that have the same meaning. In addition, it is helpful for other researchers who may need to use and apply by using other technique in teaching synonym vocabulary.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Vocabulary**

Vocabulary is a list of words and its meaning. Vocabulary is about knowing the meaning of words accordingly, the aim of vocabulary tests is to expose whether the learners are able to match each word with a synonym, an equivalent word in their own language or not (Read, 2000). The word vocabulary generally represents a review of the words or their arrangements in a particular language. According to Joklova (2009), one item of vocabulary can consist of more than one word. For instance, the word 'bookstore', it consisted of two words 'book' and 'store' and still express an idea. The idea showed the place. That word is called a word phrase. According to Mukoroli (2011), vocabulary is a whole stock of words fitting to a branch of knowledge. He also claimed that the lexicon of language is its vocabulary included the expressions.

One of the issues contributing to the student's inability to learn English is the lack of vocabulary. One of the most important aspects of creating effective communication is vocabulary. Learners can't speak or write well if they don't know the words, they need to express their thoughts and feelings. When a pupil masters a good structure, it appears to lose its usefulness when it is not backed up by a large number of words. In other words, no matter how well children understand grammar and word sounds, communication will be pointless unless they have words to represent a wide range of meanings.

Learning vocabulary is one of the most effective strategies for English students to improve their understanding. 'The more complicated the information, the more likely it is that pupils will mistake it' (Nation, 2005). It's because pupils need to be guided through the knowledge step by step in order to grasp it. If the information has a hue to it, people will have difficulty understanding it.

## **2.2 Synonym**

Many scientists and authors have their own opinions about the definition of synonym. Synonym is the relation that hold between bound morpheme, lexemes, lexical units, phrases, clauses, sentences and preposition. Synonym is a paradigmatic relation, according to Stanojevic (2009), that allows lexically simple units to have the same meaning as lexically complex units and vice versa, for example, ophthalmologist and eye specialist. According to his assertion, a synonym is a simple word that has the same meaning as a complicated word.

According to Hatch and Brown, synonym is one of the semantics features. They define synonym as a group of words with similar meanings. They regarded that synonyms referred to the same thing. The words should be interchangeable if all features are the same. Native speakers, on the other hand, will consistently choose among them in similar ways. For example, we might attribute the same characteristics to the words 'cease' and 'stop,' but we know that 'cease' is the more frequently used in valid conversation.

## **2.3 Empirical review**

Kilanya (2016) conducted a research study whose aim was to analyze Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) on acquisition of English language. The research objectives were; to find out KSL and English language grammatical structures establish the influence of KSL on acquisition of English language, determine teachers' ability to cope with the integration of KSL and English language and assess implication of KSL on acquisition of English language. The purpose of the study was to analyze how the use of Kenyan Sign Language is affecting the acquisition of English language. The researcher used questionnaires, observation checklist and interview guide. These instruments comprised open-ended and closed-ended questions. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The study had a sample of 35 persons, which includes schools'

principal, teachers and pupils. The study showed that KSL has different grammatical structures from that of English language and its introduction had not boosted learning in schools for the learners with HI and this could limit employment opportunities among the deaf persons in Kenya. The researcher recommended that more teachers should be trained in KSL to equip them with adequate skills for effective teaching of KSL and English language.

Afandi (2018) carried out a study whose purpose was to examine the teaching strategies used in teaching oral skills in English language and their effects on pupils' performance among lower primary school pupils. The study used descriptive research design. The study employed stratified simple random sampling technique in selecting the sample size for the schools, classes and teachers of English giving final sample sizes of 10 schools, 100 teachers and 10 classes. Questionnaire, interview schedules, observation schedules were used to collect data. The study established that textbooks and newspaper/magazine cuttings were used as the preferred teaching and learning material in teaching oral skills in English. It was further established that most schools lacked a variety of other learning materials and resources to enable them effectively teach oral skills. The study established that there was a significant relationship between teachers' qualification and the teaching of oral skills in English. Among the challenges facing the teaching of oral skills in English, the study revealed that the teaching and learning of oral skills in English was greatly hampered by mother tongue influence, lack of constant practice in the use of oral skills and inadequate textbooks of oral skills in English. Based on these findings, the study recommends that teachers should design more interactive oral strategies such as role play, reciting of poems and instructional activities that allow students to participate in the learning process. Further there is need for the government to procure and distribute enough teaching and learning materials that can facilitate the improvement of learning English oral skills. Moreover, teachers of English should try and advance their teaching skills through attending more professional trainings and that they should adopt a learner centered method of teaching to allow for active participation of students in order to encourage them to communicate effectively and intelligibly.

Kerubo (2017) conducted a research study whose purpose was examining the strategies teachers use in implementing the Integrated English curriculum. The study adopted the mixed method

approach and utilized the descriptive survey design. The target populations for the study were 29 public secondary schools, 61 English language teachers and 872 students. Stratified random sampling was used to sample 8 schools out of the 29 targeted schools. The schools were first stratified into the three zones and then simple random sampling was used to pick schools from all the three zones to make up the 8 schools required for the sample. A total of 40 teachers and 320 students were sampled from these 8 schools for the study. Questionnaires and observation guides were used to collect data from the English language teachers and students. Piloting was done in 2 schools to test the validity and reliability of the instruments. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistics and presented by use of tables, graphs, percentages and ratios while qualitative data was categorized into themes and analyzed by use of narratives. The findings of the study showed that of the four strategies of implementing the integrated English curriculum explored in this study, use of discussion would be the most preferred strategy; though rarely used in implementation. Recitation was the least used and least preferred strategy for implementing the integrated English curriculum. All stakeholders therefore have a mandate to work out ways to help teachers use these strategies to implement integrated English.

#### **2.4 Research Gaps**

A knowledge gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the issue discussed. For instance, Kilanya (2016) conducted a research study whose aim was to analyze Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) on acquisition of English language. The researcher used questionnaires, observation checklist and interview guide. These instruments comprised open-ended and closed-ended questions. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The study had a sample of 35 persons, which includes schools' principal, teachers and pupils. The study showed that KSL has different grammatical structures from that of English language and its introduction had not boosted learning in schools for the learners with HI and this could limit employment opportunities among the deaf persons in Kenya. The researcher recommended that more teachers should be trained in KSL to equip them with adequate skills for effective teaching of KSL and English language. On the other hand, our study focused on effects of synonyms in English as a second language in Kenya.



Secondly, a methodological gap can be identified from the research, for example, Afandi (2018) carried out a study whose purpose was to examine the teaching strategies used in teaching oral skills in English language and their effects on pupils' performance among lower primary school pupils. The study used descriptive research design. The study employed stratified simple random sampling technique in selecting the sample size for the schools, classes and teachers of English giving final sample sizes of 10 schools, 100 teachers and 10 classes. Questionnaire, interview schedules, observation schedules were used to collect data. The study established that textbooks and newspaper/magazine cuttings were used as the preferred teaching and learning material in teaching oral skills in English. On the other hand, our study applied desk study review methodology.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to effects of synonyms in English as second language in Kenya. Three sorting stages were implemented on the subject under study in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. This is the first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on effects of synonyms in English as second language in Kenya. The search was done generally by searching the articles in the article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject on effects of synonyms in English as second language in Kenya. The third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to the effects of synonyms in English as second language in Kenya which was split into top key words. After an in- depth search into the top key words (synonyms, English, second language), the researcher arrived at 3 articles that were suitable for analysis.

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## **4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

Vocabulary is about knowing the meaning of words accordingly, the aim of vocabulary tests is to expose whether the learners are able to match each word with a synonym, an equivalent word in their own language or not. Vocabulary is one of the most essential elements in constructing meaningful communication. Without knowing the word needed to convey their ideas and feeling the learners cannot speak and write well. Learning vocabulary is one of the most efficient ways in improving the English students' comprehension. The study concluded that it is necessary to develop students' vocabulary by use of synonyms. By learning the synonym, the students not only know one word but also other words that have nearly same meaning on the text.

### **4.2 Recommendations**

The study concluded that teachers can use synonym in learning vocabulary with their own strategy or other subject to enrich students' knowledge of English vocabulary. Also, students can use synonym in learning certain subject when the aim of their learning is comprehended. Further there is need for the government to procure and distribute enough teaching and learning materials that can facilitate the improvement of learning English vocabulary.

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