

Home Based Factors Influencing Enrolment and Retention of students in German Language Classes in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya

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Abstract

German has been taught as a foreign language in Kenyan secondary schools since 1954 and it is characterized by low enrolment and retention of students up to form four level. This study sought to establish home based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in secondary schools. The study was carried in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya. The study adapted the descriptive survey research design. Form three students in all the schools offering German language were considered in the study. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select a sample size of 410 respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedule were used to collect data which was analyzed using frequencies and percentages. It was found out that parental guidance, family members' influence, parents' and students' contacts with Germans and parents' perception of German language influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes. The study suggested that parents need to be sensitized on the importance of foreign languages and urged to encourage their children to learn German. The findings of this study will provide information on factors influencing enrolment and retention in German language classes and provide a basis for further studies.

Key Words: Factors, Enrolment, Retention, Home based

Background Information

With globalization and the modern information technology, foreign languages facilitate communication and access to varied information (Fasold and Conor-Lintan, 2006). French, German and Arabic are the main modern foreign languages that are taught and examined in secondary schools in Kenya (KNEC, 2009). More effective German language learners' appreciation of such topics as international relations, education for environmental awareness, health, gender issues and global peace can be attained through meaningful interrelationships with other subjects such as

geography and history (KIE, 2006). Through German language, the learners are able to critically compare the way of life in German speaking countries with their own and utilize the insights gained to reduce prejudices against others. The enrolment and retention of students in German language classes has been low in secondary schools in Kenya especially in form three and four.

Parents can greatly influence their children in foreign languages by encouraging them to learn or by discouraging them not to learn more than one language right from childhood. According to Curtin and Pesola (2004) when one understands at least one foreign language, he/she will have a better chance of understanding other people in today's multicultural world. Some parents however understand the role that multilingual individuals can play in an increasingly diverse society and the academic and cognitive benefits that may accrue from learning other languages (Thomas, Collier & Abott, 1993). According to Thomas (2004) a multilingual business person can easily communicate and translate to prospective viewers. This reality however is not reflected in enrolment and retention of students in German language classes.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that exposure to foreign language increases divergent thinking strategies, helping not only in language related tasks but also in other subjects, the enrolment and retention of students in German language classes has been continuously low. This study sought to determine home based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties.

Objective

The objective of this study was to establish home based factors that influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes in secondary schools.

Methodology

This study used descriptive survey research design. The design allowed for the information to be gathered, summarized, presented and interpreted for clarification without any manipulation. The target population was 3,827 subjects comprised of 3638 students and 189 teachers from the secondary schools offering German language in Meru and Tharaka Nithi Counties. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to get a sample size of 410 respondents. Questionnaires and

interview schedule were used for data collection. A pilot study was done in a neighbouring county to ascertain the reliability of the research instruments. A reliability coefficient of 0.939 was computed. The instruments were scrutinized by the university supervisors to ensure construct, content and face validity.

Results and Discussions

The study sought information on parents' level of education. The findings revealed that 58% of the sampled students' fathers had university level qualifications. About 16% of the parents had diploma qualifications while 9% had schooled up to form four or form six. Another 11% of the parents had a certificate course while 4% had not schooled up to form four. The findings also revealed that 44% of the students' mothers had studied up to university level, 23% had diplomas, 15% had certificate training, 12% schooled up to form four or six while 5% did not get to form four. The findings imply that majority of the sampled students' parents were educationally informed. This means that they were capable of providing informed guidance to their children on the selection of German as a foreign language.

The study also sought information on students' agreement with the statement that their parents' level of education discouraged them from choosing German language. The responses are indicated on Table 1.

Table 1: Students' Response to Discouragement by parents' Education Level

	Group A		Group B	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	2	3	5	2
Agree	12	9	13	5
Undecided	22	16	15	6
Disagree	30	22	41	16
Strongly Disagree	72	52	186	72

The information on Table 1 shows that 52% of the sampled students who enrolled in German language classes in form one strongly disagreed that their parents' level of education discouraged them from choosing German language, 22% disagreed, 16% was undecided, 9% agreed while 3% strongly agreed. The information also shows that 72% of the students who never enrolled in German language classes strongly disagreed that their parents' level of education discouraged them

from choosing German language, 16% disagreed, 6% was undecided, 5% agreed while 2% strongly agreed. The data indicates that most of the students disagreed that their parents' level of education discouraged them from enrolling into German language classes. The findings therefore imply that parents' level of education did not negatively influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes.

The study found out that 51% of the students who enrolled into German language classes in form one were living in small towns, 38% were living in big towns while 11% were living in rural areas. The findings also revealed that 43% of the students who never enrolled in German language classes in form one were living in small towns, 32% were living in big cities while 25% were living in rural areas. The information shows that majority of the students who enrolled in German language classes were living in urban areas as compared to those who never enrolled. It was also found that more of the students who never enrolled in German language classes in form one were living in rural areas as compared to those who enrolled. The findings imply that students living in urban areas may have had more exposure to the importance of German language as compared to those in rural areas. This agrees with Curtain and Pesola (2004) who argue that parents who see the use of foreign languages could influence their children on their choice of optional subjects.

The study sought information on students' agreement with the statement that their parents' residence discouraged them from enrolling in German language classes. The responses are shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Students' Response to Influence from Parents' Residence

	Enrolled in German		Didn't enroll in German	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	9	7	11	4
Agree	10	7	15	6
Undecided	15	10	7	3
Disagree	28	20	89	34
Strongly disagree	76	55	138	53

The information on Table 2 shows that 55% of the students who enrolled in German language classes in form one strongly disagreed that their parents' residence influenced them to choose German language. About 20% disagreed, 10% was undecided, 7% agreed while 7% strongly

agreed. The information also indicates that 53% of the students who never enrolled in German language classes in form one strongly disagreed that their parents' residence discouraged them from choosing German language, 34% disagreed, 6% agreed, 4% strongly agreed while 3% was undecided. The findings imply that majority of the students did not agree that their parents' residence discouraged them from enrolling in German language classes. The data further reveals that parents' residence may not have encouraged them in their selection of German as a foreign language.

The study sought information on students' prior knowledge of German language or Germany as a country. The responses are illustrated on Table 3.

Table 3: Students' Prior Knowledge of German or Germany

	Enrolled in German		Never enrolled in German	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Germany is industrialized	25	18	76	29
Job opportunities in Germany	50	36	43	17
German is hard to learn	45	33	86	33
Basic greetings in German	8	6	15	6
Racism in Germany	10	7	40	15

The information on Table 3 shows that 36% of the students who enrolled in German language classes in form one knew of job opportunities in Germany while 33% thought German was very hard to learn. About 18% knew Germany is industrialized, 7% indicated that there was racism in Germany while 6% knew basic greetings in German. The information also shows that 33% of the students who never enrolled in German language classes thought German was very hard to learn while 29% knew Germany was industrialized. About 17% indicated that they knew of job opportunities in Germany, 15% said there was racism in Germany while 6% knew basic greetings in German.

The findings on Table 3 reveal that a higher percentage of the students who enrolled for German (36%) knew of job opportunities in Germany as compared to 17% of those who never enrolled. The findings also indicate that a higher percentage of those who never enrolled for German (15%) said they believed there was racism in Germany as compared to 7% of those who enrolled in German language classes in form one. The findings indicate that the same percentage of respondents (33%)

from both groups said German was very hard to learn. The findings disagree with Osborne (2004) who argues that when students are given an option to choose subjects, they select the subjects that they believe are not hard to learn. The findings also imply that more of those who never enrolled in German language classes in form one (15%) than those who enrolled (7%) could have been influenced by the perception that there was racism in Germany.

The study sought information on students' agreement with the statement that their parents played a big role in their selection of subjects. The findings revealed that 46% of the students who enrolled in German language classes in form one strongly agreed, 33% agreed, 7% was undecided, 7% disagreed while 7% strongly disagreed with the statement. The information also revealed that 38% of those who never enrolled in German language classes agreed, 35% strongly agreed, 13% disagreed, 10% strongly disagreed while 4% was undecided on whether parents played a big role in their selection of subjects or not. The findings imply that most of the respondents agreed that parents play a major role in students' selection of German as a subject of study. This agrees with Curtain and Pesola (2004) who assert that the sentiments that parents pass on to their children regarding school subjects, have significant impact on their selection of the subjects.

The study sought information on students' agreement with the statement that family members had little influence on students' choice of German language. The results showed that 53% of the students who enrolled in German language classes strongly disagreed, 23% disagreed, 10% strongly agreed, 18% was undecided while 7% agreed. It was also found that 49% of those who never enrolled in German language classes strongly disagreed, 36% disagreed, 8% strongly agreed, 6% agreed while 1% was undecided on whether family members had little influence on their choice of German language or not. The findings imply that majority of the respondents were influenced by their family members in their decision on whether to enroll in German language classes in form one or not.

Based on their experience with parents, teachers were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement that parents who had no contact with German discouraged their children from choosing German language while students who had contact with German or Germans were more interested in German language. It was found that 60% of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement while 40% was undecided. None of the teachers disagreed with the statement. The findings imply that

most of the teachers strongly believed that parents and students who had contact with German were more interested in German language as compared to those who were not. The findings agree with Collier and Abott (1993) who argue that parents who understand the role that multilingual individuals can play in a diverse society encourage their children to learn foreign languages.

Conclusions

The findings of the study reveal that parental guidance, family members, parents' and students' contact with German or Germans and parents' perception of German or Germany highly influence enrolment and retention of students in German language classes. This means that it is important for parents to know the place of foreign languages in the world today. The perception that parents have on German and foreigners generally influences their attitude towards the study of German language. Students need to be made aware that they are living in different times from that of their parents and that they have to embrace the modern global trends. It is also essential to ensure that parents' and students' attitude towards German and Germans is not negative since it consequently influences the students' choice of German language.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. Schools should sensitize parents on importance of foreign languages in the world today.
2. The government of Kenya should urge Parents to encourage their children to learn German.
- 3 The ministry of information should avail information to the general public on ways of life of other countries of the world to avoid prejudices and negative attitudes towards other countries and their culture.

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