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Perceptions of Boys towards English Language Subject in Secondary Schools in Uganda: Implications on Performance

Nicholas Itaaga¹, Yuda Taddeo Kaahwa^{1*}, Richard Ssentamu Baguma¹, Florence Nansamba¹ & Charles Muweesi²

¹ Makerere University, P. O. Box 6270, Kampala, Uganda.

² Busitema University, P.O. Box 236, Tororo, Uganda.

* Author for Correspondence Email: nitaaga@gmail.com

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Self-fulfilling Prophecy.

The purpose of this study was to investigate why boys perform poorly in the English language in secondary schools in Uganda. An explanatory case study research design was adopted for the study. The population were English language subject teachers, head teachers, director of studies and students in two secondary schools, one mixed boarding private secondary school and one mixed day government secondary school. The sample size included 02 head teachers, 02 directors of studies, 06 subject teachers and 10 students. Purposive and Random sampling techniques were used to reach the respondents and the primary data was collected using interview guides, observation check-list and document analysis. The findings revealed that boys feel that the English language is meant for girls; they see no career paths through the English language subject; and there is a challenge of the teachers' self-fulfilling prophecy towards boys. The study concludes that boys' poor performance in the English language subject in Uganda is due to their perception that the subject is for girls. In addition, boys find English language lessons time-wasting to concentrate on reading an English textbook. They do not see career paths through the English Subject. It was recommended that teachers should use pedagogical approaches specifically targeted at engaging boys in the English Language subject. Teachers should always encourage boys to work harder in all subjects English language inclusive because it determines their grade.

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INTRODUCTION

English is one of widely spoken languages in the world. It is spoken by a quarter of the world's population, enabling a single market in knowledge and ideas (Martirosyan, 2015). The English Language plays an important role in several fields such as education, science, politics and technology (Mwiigi, 2014). In the education context, English as a subject has become one of the core subjects that students have to master at school in many countries. In Uganda, English is one of the core subjects that students must pass with at least a credit to get a first grade in national examinations. Therefore, students need good motivation to encourage them in learning and perform well in the English language subject. The issue of poor academic performance in the English language subject in secondary schools in Uganda has become a great concern to teachers and all those who are interested in the education sector. However, there is an assumption that all students admitted into secondary schools, regardless of their gender, can cope with the academic demands and responsibilities, but on the contrary, some students tend to concentrate on particular subjects and give less attention to others and end up with either good grades or low grades. This has been observed especially in Ugandan secondary schools, where boys perform poorly in the English language subject during their continuous assessments and final national assessments. Therefore, the study investigated the perception of boys towards the English language subject and how it impacts performance in the same subject.

Globally, before the 20th century, men were expected to be breadwinners (Faisal et al., 2017). Due to these expectations, boys lived separate lives from girls in preparation for different future roles in society (Igbudu, 2015). In Europe, boys would help their fathers on the family farm, picking apples and feeding animals. Due to this kind of gender-based work, Europeans saw boys' education as being more important since they were the expected breadwinners. Before the 1990s, boys used to perform better in both Europe and America. In pre-colonial Africa, the situation was not different because the society had many expectations for the boy child (Mkandawire, 2005). When Western education was introduced in Africa by the missionaries, it was received with a gender-based mind because Africans saw the education of boys as being more important than that of the girls. In the African culture, men are praised and are naturally believed to be brilliant all round; academic spheres included and hence assumption of better performance in all areas is presumed. Because of this presumption, African parents gave boys priority in education since they were expected to be bread winners in future. This prioritization of boys' education led to boys' good academic performance. In the British former colonies such as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) for example, boys' scores on average were two times those of girls by 1985 (Heinzmann, 2009b).

In the past three decades, however, trends started changing. Boys' academic performance started declining and gender research in education has started to focus on boys (Njuguna, 2012). More

recently, Ministers of Education from across the Commonwealth have raised the issue of boys' underachievement at school, a growing phenomenon in all regions. The worry is that although boys' performance is declining, there are no convincing factors as to why the performance keeps declining (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). The English language subject is one of the subjects cited by many interested scholars in the subject, where such a sharp decline has been observed across the globe. Globally, there's a persistent decline in boys' performance in the English language subject (Ofori et al., 2020). In Kenya, the Ministry of Education expressed concern over the apparent decline in the performance of boys in English at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) National Examinations (Ofori et al., 2020). In Uganda, all the past UNEB reports on students' work from 2015 have indicated a good English performance on the girls' side and a poor one on the boys' side. Many boys fail to get better grades because they fail to get credit in English. In Uganda's secondary schools, it is quite interesting to observe that, much as boys are faring well in all compulsory subjects, the reverse is true with the English language subject. Over the last ten years, it is very interesting to note that boys' grades in the English Language subject have been declining steadily. This is evidenced by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) reports, whose findings show that males' performance is always declining and below that of the female candidates in the English language subject and male candidates perform better than females in sciences and mathematics subjects (UNEB, 2020). Considering that English language is one of the core subjects taught at all levels in Uganda secondary schools coupled with the students' performance in various subjects at both internal and external examinations, the inefficiency in boys' English competences and communicative skills which is a medium of instruction at secondary education level is likely to negatively affect their performance in other subject areas. Nobody seems to explain satisfactorily what

happened from 1990 onwards to assist girls on average to do better in English language than boys and improve year after year, nor why boys have begun to do so poorly (UNEB, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Boys' perceptions refer to all those processes by which boys receive information about their environment. These processes include hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting and smelling (Ofori et al., 2020). In a school situation, perception can be formed regarding particular teachers, school type, subjects, facilities, syllabus and other aspects of students' daily lives. Developing positive student perceptions toward English is a critical part of English learning. Students' perceptions are linked to their achievement in English and their motivation to persist in English language courses in high school and beyond (Jovanovic & King, 1998). However, national trends indicate that when boys reach middle school, their interest in English begins to decrease. Jackson and Hilliard (2013) found a persistent gender effect in favour of females, particularly among average and low-achieving students. Compared to boys, girls seem most interested in the English language and attach more importance to English language. Boys' perceptions towards the English language tend to become worse as they go to higher learning. Many schools are experiencing vernacular influence on English, leading to poor mastery of the language. Jibrin (2016), in a study in Rachuonyo district, found that students have negative attitudes towards learning English, which influenced their performance and that boys tended to have a slightly more negative perception towards learning English than girls. Still, van der Vleuten et al. (2016), in their study, found that there was a significant influence of perception on academic performance in English ($r = .33, < 0.05$). A weak, significant negative correlation was also found between mother tongue and academic performance in English, while gender differences in academic performance in English was not significant ($t=0.014, <0.05, df = 178$). Muyaka et al.

(2021), in a study, showed that the boys' perception toward the English language was negative and that many of them believed that the English language is a worthless subject which can't help them in their future career. Many learners have a belief that English is much more difficult to learn than other languages, while others have a belief that the most difficult part of learning English is learning Grammar, yet others had a belief that English is the world's most important language.

It is apparent from these beliefs that the learners' achievement of low or high grades would be determined by their own beliefs about the language that they are learning. If they, for example, believe that English is the most difficult language to learn, they may be discouraged from working hard, thus ending up with a low grade. (Al-Sobhi et al., 2018) In the study entitled Arab ESL Secondary School Students' Perception Towards English Spelling and Writing, it was found that learners' perception is considered a key motivational component and an important nonlinguistic factor that influences second-language learning. His research findings indicated that the students' perception towards the social use of English is the highest. There is a significant positive relationship between the students' perception towards spelling and writing.

In relation to the above, Tanni (2015) also conducted research on Perceptions Towards Learning English: The Case of the UAE Technological High School. His research was to identify applied technology high school students' perceptions towards learning English and to investigate whether the students' perception is affected by the teacher's nativity. The findings showed that the vast majority of students had positive attitudes towards English learning and the teacher's nativity (native and non- native speaker of English) did not influence students' positive orientation toward English. Kiziltan and Atli (2013) conducted research on Learners' Perception towards English. The findings of the study have revealed that the pupils seem to have developed

positive perceptions towards English language skills and sub-skills, materials, the course book, and activities. In the same line, Ali et al. (2013) in their study on students' attitudes and perceptions towards learning English, wanted to find out the students' opinion of the English language institute in King Abdul-Aziz University regarding the importance of English, whether they think it is difficult or not, and where the difficulty lies. The study showed that most students have a positive attitude towards learning English and that they try to improve their English and to use the language, even though there are a lot of demands on their time and few opportunities to practice it.

Tanni (2015) studied perceptions towards English language learning among EFL learners at UMSKAL. Results of the qualitative analysis show that the perceptions towards English language learning and using the language in various domains of usage is extremely positive. The data also revealed that most of the students had negative feelings or fear regarding classroom instructions in their learning experience. Students of different fields varied in perceptions towards English language learning in terms of domains of usage and focus of learning skills, which shows that a single curriculum or teaching methodology is not adequate. From the above literature review, the findings revealed that girls perform better than boys in the English language, but they do not clearly show the reasons for the low performance in the English language, which the study addressed.

The English language is a very important subject in Uganda, mostly because of its wide usage in all sectors and its value in Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) (Główka, 2014). At UCE, it's one of the compulsory subjects that a candidate has to pass with at least a credit six if he/she is to have a first grade and join any school of his choice for advanced level education or any course of his/her choice. Due to its importance, many stakeholders, like the government through the Ministry of Education and Sports and teachers have put a lot of

effort into ensuring that students pass the English language. Despite all the efforts, boys' performance has remained poor and worrying to all stakeholders (Chege et al., 2013). The most interesting fact is that boys perform better in all other compulsory subjects at O' level according apart from English language (UNEB, 2020). Even in continuous assessments, boys' performance in the English language subject has been lower compared to other compulsory subjects (Muyaka et al., 2021). Therefore, without doubt, boys' poor academic performance in the English language is a major issue among students, teachers, parents, school administrators and the community at large, which has to be investigated. If there is no serious action taken to help boys improve in the English language subject, these boys will continue to miss out on diploma courses in nursing, teaching, among other educational and employment opportunities. Besides, the question as to why boys' performance in the English language is lower will still remain unanswered and many boys will continue to miss a first grade in their ordinary level final exams, miss joining Advanced schools of their own choice, fail to pursue their dream combinations, courses and therefore miss out on their career aspirations. Thus, a study of perceptions of secondary school boys towards the English language subject can shed more light on this contentious subject. The study was guided by the following research question;

How do boys perceive the English language subject in secondary schools in Uganda?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An explanatory case study research design was adopted for the study. This design was appropriate to explain the factors for boys' poor academic performance in the English language. It helped answer the 'why'. Specifically, boys were performing poorly in the English language subject. This case study design also gave the researcher an

opportunity to collect different kinds of data, such as from interviews, documents and observations.

Population and Sampling

The target population were students, teachers and head teachers from seventy-eight secondary schools in Mukono district, that is, fifty-five mixed boarding private secondary schools and twenty-three day government secondary schools in Mukono district. The accessible population were English language subject teachers, head teachers, director of studies and students in two secondary schools, one mixed boarding private secondary school and one mixed day government secondary school. A double case study was preferred because the two schools represented two distinct cases, where data analysis within one school and across the two schools made the findings firmly grounded in empirical evidence. It was hoped that this would provide background information as a basis for discussion of policy and interventions to address the challenge of poor boys' performance in the English language subject (Gustafsson, 2017). The sample size included 02 head teachers, 02 directors of studies, 06 subject teachers and 10 students. The sample size for students was based on the inductive thematic saturation principle (Sharma et al., 2024). After the 10th respondent, no new themes emerged from the data.

Research Tools

An interview guide was used to collect data from teachers, head teachers, the director of studies and students. The interview guides were constructed, each consisting of eight investigative questions. This guide allowed respondents to answer in open text format so that they answered based on their complete knowledge, feelings and understanding (Roller, 2015). An observation checklist was used to collect data during the process of teaching the English language lesson by the teachers to both boys and girls in the classroom. This helped the researcher to evaluate the performance and

behaviour of each student during English language lessons.

Validity and Reliability

Reliability was ensured by checking transcripts thoroughly many times to ensure they did not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription. The researcher also constantly compared data with the codes developed to ensure there was no shift in the meaning of the codes during the coding process. Triangulation was also used where the researcher used different tools, such as an interview guide and observation checklist, to collect the same data. The study also adopted theoretical triangulation, where other research works in the same arena were analysed and presented as a literature review to support the results claims of the data collection and analysis process. Validity in a qualitative study is determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of an account. The validity of this research was established using member checking, where the researcher took back some themes to the study participants to determine whether they felt they were accurate. Peer debrief was also used to enhance the accuracy of the account. Here, the researcher gave the findings to another person who reviewed them and asked questions that resonated with people other than the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

The current study adhered to research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality, privacy and plagiarism as articulated in literature (Creswell, 2014). Confidentiality was observed in handling documents and reports from the different schools. The respondents' identity was also kept anonymous so that the teachers' and schools' names were not included anywhere in the report. More so, Informed consent was observed by informing the participants in advance of their role during the data collection process and expectations of the researcher and also ensuring there was agreement between the

respondents and the researcher. Contributions from other studies have been duly acknowledged.

STUDY FINDINGS

This section presents the perceptions of the boys towards learning the English language and how the perceptions affect their performance in the English language. The research question was: How do boys perceive the English language subject in secondary schools in Uganda?

Boys Think the English Language Subject is Simple.

During the interview with the secondary school boys about their perception towards learning the English subject, most of the boys said that their performance in the English language has been fair and average over the years they have been in school. In fact, one of the boys revealed that; *"My performance generally has not been too bad but not too good, which means average performance but for lower education (primary) it was good"* Another boy said; *"My performance in English has been gradually fair though it has been decreasing over the years in school. In other words, it varies from one exam or test to another"*.

Some boys said that its lack of concentration in class, sleeping or dozing in class especially after lunch English lessons, playing in class due to peer influence from bad friends, incomplete assignments, lack of notes due to thefts as some students tend to steal their friend's books and lack of concentration due to poor dressing of some female teachers of English. One of the boys said that;

Initially, when I had just joined secondary school, I was performing well in the language, having scored a distinction two in PLE. However, over the years, I have despised the English language subject in a way that I constantly take it as a mere language which never requires any practice. This makes me go in for exams or tests without reading anything,

thus my poor performance. Also, the constant interactions between students of higher levels reveal to me that it is a subject not to be passed; however, I am wrong. With reference to UCE results over the years, English language has always been the worst done so it has never come to my mind that I have to score a distinction one in the subject.

English Language is a Feminine Subject: Boys.

Still another boy said that for him, he offers literature in English as one of the optional subjects but his friends keep laughing and making fun of him that he does a subject for girls. He revises the English language only when there's a test or an exam. Based on the information provided above from the boys that were interviewed, it's clearly observed that boys perform poorly in the English language, not because they are dull, but just taking the subject is meant for girls, thus they end up giving it little attention and concentration. This is supported by the teachers, who said that lessons that involve boys are a little challenging since boys always show no interest in the subject. They are passive and not forthcoming. You call them to read a story and they refuse. You select them to analyse a comprehension and they show no interest. They don't want to do class work and when they do it, they write in very poor handwriting to confuse the teacher. When a teacher enters the class, they start dosing. Even when you tell them to stand up, they don't look jolly. Boys look at the study of English as of less value to them. They prefer science subjects, which are also set in English. In addition to that, one of the administrators said that since he joined the school, he has been trying to find out why the boys in the school don't perform well in the English language. This was based on the UCE results of 2020, where out of 100 boys who sat for the English language, only 30 boys were able to score a credit in English language and the rest scored a pass. He still added on that boys in the school spend a lot of time concentrating on science subjects rather than the English language. This is

because boys have a negative attitude towards teachers of the English language.

In relation to the common feelings boys have towards the English language as a subject. Some boys feel that they are not ready to read all these textbooks. This is what some boys had to say; one student was quoted emphasising that;

Since primary one up to now, I have never been taught by a male English language teacher, though in my current school, I have two out of the many English language teachers, but even the two teach other streams.

No Hope of Passing the Subject

More so, students remarked that they have little attention for the English language subject because even when they try, there are things which keep pulling them down to low grades in the English language subject. One boy said, *"Most of us boys, it's hard to write descriptive and narrative in paper 2, unlike girls who are very good at that"*. During the study, boys also revealed that the English language is a monotonous and boring subject. English is different from two perspectives. There's spoken and written. So, if someone knows spoken English, it's enough. One student stressed that;

From baby class, I have been learning and speaking English to the extent that I don't know my mother tongue well. I don't think I need to revise the language I know when there are other subjects I don't know.

In fact, one of the teachers and administrators claimed that during the English lessons, boys kept on moving up and down outside the school compound. Furthermore, students commented that the English language subject does not have notes in O-level different from those of the primary level. Learning of English language should have stopped in primary because there's nothing new being added to the subject, but only repeating primary work. At secondary level, we should be studying subjects that build our career rather than wasting time on the

language we know we can speak. Another student stressed that, *“English language subject is boring since the same questions are asked from primary level to O-level, and it’s only the format that changes”*.

This, therefore, implies that boys performed poorly in the English language simply because they set low expectations for it. They don’t expect anything better than a credit six and are comfortable when they find out that they have earned it. The student clearly indicated that it is sometimes even difficult to practice it because it lacks clear notes like other subjects, which would help them to practice it through talking and writing, though they say it needs practice. This, therefore, means, boys’ poor performance in the English language is because they don’t give it enough time to revise it seriously, as it bores them. This data is also in relation to the observation checklist, where boys were observed being more active in Kiswahili language lessons, which they feel is harder than it was in the English language.

Poor Teacher–Student Rapport

Students remarked that they have little attention for the English language subject because even when they try, there are things which keep pulling them down to low grades in the English language subject. In fact, the teachers said that they always find it hard to make boys get interested in learning the English language because most of the time in class, if they are not dozing, they are either moving up and down or disturbing others. They hardly practice the assignments given in class or consult the English teachers. The deputy head teacher of one of the schools said that boys in his school show a lack of interest in the subject, which has continually led to their poor performance in the tests and examinations set by the school (Academic report, 2022). Still, boys stressed that it’s easier to perform well in the English language than in other subjects and therefore no need to concentrate on the subject. They further said that, *“We use English frequently*

in many places like school, we understand the subject, sir”.

During the interview with the students, about their teachers’ role towards helping them understand the subject. One student wondered why English language teachers are always harsh on boys and he had this to say:

Do you know that since primary school, English language teachers have been harsh on me and my friends? They tend to always criticise our handwriting, even when we try to write so well, poor organisation of work, untidy books and so on. So, for me, my interest is in sciences now, ‘kasita’, I know how to speak it.

This means, therefore, that some boys think teachers hold girls special and take boys to be stubborn, disobedient, lazy in doing their assignments and rebellious. This bias discourages some of them from taking the English subject seriously. Another student remarked that when the teacher enters class, she puts more attention on girls, especially when it comes to questions and answers. Another student added that when it comes to marking, the teacher tells boys to put their books on one side and girls’ books on the other side and she marks them separately. Boys feel some teachers are biased because, after marking the books, many boys have lower marks. Some boys revealed that when they go to the staffroom, teachers start complaining about their handwriting, lack of neatness, poor organisation of work and always dozing and playing in class. Still, another student was quoted with emotions.

I went to consult a teacher last term on how to write an article in newspapers because we were about to do examinations and I expected it to be set. I found her at the English table with other teachers. She complained that I always sleep in class and other teachers complimented. What made me angry is that even Madam W, who doesn’t teach me, complimented. They said that I’m scared of exams, that’s why I’m consulting

now. When they opened my book, they complained that it was dirty and disorganised. The teacher threw the book at me and told me to first go and organise my work, then go back to her later. I felt ashamed. When I told two of my friends what had happened, they laughed at me and told other boys the embarrassment I faced in the staffroom. I regret going there and will never consult any teacher in my life.

This agreed with observation checklist data, where a teacher sent a class monitor to pick books from the staffroom but informed students that she had not yet marked the previous week's work. Therefore, it's very clear that boys have a conclusion that English is for girls and science subjects are for them. They see no reason to 'waste' time on the subject where the best they can score is a credit four. More so, peer influence can discourage boys from reading the English language subject. This means that boys fail English not because of personal factors but because of peer influence, as it has been indicated above. Further still, during the interview about the thoughts boys have towards studying the English language, they disclosed that the English language subject calls for a lot of time to read and practice, which they don't have time for. One student said that;

English needs a lot of time to go through summary writing, functional writing, descriptive work, grammar, narrative, comprehension and rewrite work, which is too much, yet the subject is taking him nowhere. It's a tricky subject that if you don't practice it, you can't pass it. Even when we are talking in our dormitories and on the compound, we do it in our Luganda, so when are we going to practice the written and spoken English so that we perform well? Our teacher does not mark books on time, so we know whether we are improving or not.

More so, some teachers, out of a hurry to go out of class, mark front seaters and students with good handwritings and many boys tend to miss out because they sit behind and their handwritings are

not the best. This was clearly observed during the lesson when the teacher, out of a hurry, refused to mark a student's book, claiming that marking his book calls for some more time, yet the lesson was over. The student was disappointed that he even showed the researcher some of these long ticks, especially on compositions. Another boy showed concern for the long stories given to them by the teacher that they had to keep reading. He quoted, *"In one of the lessons, a teacher gave us a six-page story to read and answer some questions in only ten minutes. I don't have the concentration to read all those pages in a few minutes"*

Poor Pedagogical Methods

The students said that according to the way English questions are set, they require reading, understanding and interpreting. To learn such things, you must have practised by reading novels, discussing with teachers and friends, speaking in English, which we don't do. This, therefore, means that a lack of enough time for practice makes boys go for exams without prior preparation, which leads to their poor performance. The study also found that many boys believe some of their teachers are not qualified to teach them. Students revealed that there are some teachers who give them wrong information and therefore, they are either not qualified to teach their class or don't prepare well for the lessons. Another student was quoted;

When the teacher of stream x comes to teach us when ours is absent, we understand better. Last week, he trained us on how to write a good report. All that our teacher had given us was wrong when we compared it. We had to learn new ways of writing a report.

To emphasise this, data collected from Head teachers, Directors of studies and teachers themselves revealed some teachers don't possess the required qualifications to teach secondary school students. From the records of one of the schools, out of the 10 teachers, 4 of them did not have the required qualifications (school data, 2022).

Students also emphasised that some teachers lack the competence to handle certain topics. This data is supported by observation checklist data that indicated teachers of English writing wrong spellings of English words on the blackboard, whereas some other teachers were observed just dictating notes to the learners. Some teachers took a lot of time engaging learners in stories which were out of the subject content as a way of wasting time. In addition to the above, another student remarked that when he shares with students from other streams, he finds a lot of differences between his work and their work.

Still, boys have low esteem in reading, discussing, consulting teachers, participating in English lessons and revising the English language subject since it is not passable by boys at UNEB, as it is indicated by UNEB's statistical data, where every year, boys perform poorly. It also agreed with observation checklist data, where after some lessons, many girls were seen following the teacher for some more corrections and explanations, but only one boy was observed in that group. A student told the researcher how in their school, many boys have missed getting maximum aggregates (ten in ten) because of just English. He brought out a calendar he had used to cover his book, showing how a bright boy got first distinction in all subjects but failed to score it in English, thus getting eleven in ten. He further revealed other boys who had distinctions in all other subjects but had poor grades in English. He said, *"In this school, boys always perform like that in English, I can never be better"*. This data agreed with observation checklist data that showed some boys revising other subjects inside their desks as the teacher of English was in class. On top of that, another student had this to say;

If I can score my credit 6, I'm comfortable because I know it does not affect me anywhere in my career. If I can score my distinctions in Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics because I want to become a surgeon in future, even if I

score a credit 6 in English, I will be happy and contented.

This boy concurred with another one who said that it's easier to pass English with a credit than score a distinction in biology, which I love more. One student even said;

It's just an additional subject that does not need much time to read and prepare. It's an automatic pass, unlike biology, where you must settle down, read and discuss with teachers on one side and friends often.

Therefore, with morale being low, many boys don't struggle to improve their English language performance, hence remaining with low marks even when teachers try to help all students. In view of the above, very few boys raised their arms to contribute. Some boys were observed sleeping behind and when the teacher brought an ice breaker, some boys did not participate. Another student contended that even when they meet in their discussion group and have decided to discuss the subject, they end up discussing it in Luganda. For us, we prefer talking in Luganda because it's the one we understand better and above all, it's our mother tongue. One of the boys, however, said that he loves the English subject and feels good whenever the teacher of English teacher enters his class. He revealed that, *"despite UNEB's statistical records which indicate that boys perform poorly in English language, he is desperate to perform as he always wants to get himself better"*.

When boys were interviewed about how they felt during the English language lesson, they had this to say. Some boys concurred that their feelings depend on the nature of the teacher who has entered the lesson. When students have a bad history with a teacher, they don't give him attention. One student had this to say;

When Miss X is the one who has come, that one I just know it's wrong spellings throughout the lesson. 'Era oyo ssibonaabona kukoppa notes

kubanga zibeera nfu' (I don't trouble myself copying her notes because I know they are wrong. But when she's pregnant and Miss A is the one coming in, there I'm attentive because she is strict, organised, smart and lively.

From the above, therefore, students' common beliefs and feelings towards English lessons depend on the personality of the teacher. Teachers ought to be organised before the lessons so that they deliver to the expectations of their students, who are also their clients. Teachers tend to give learners theories, they encourage learners to cram them and thereafter they start their drills. One student noted that;

Those teachers will never give you tips on how to excel in English, as is with other subjects. They always come here, they give you theories and we end up cramming different formats of different questions, but once the question is twisted, many of us who cram end up getting off-topic and therefore fail. This is what makes me have low morale to attend English lessons.

This, therefore, means that teachers should put emphasis on students' mastery of content rather than just passing on to learners the knowledge they don't understand. Though students take English lessons as a chilling time, they noted that most English teachers don't know how to control classes. They don't care whether students are asleep or not. One student remarked that;

English lessons are good for chilling. Sometimes, I use them for sleeping because I know the teacher can't come to the back of the class to find out those students who are sleeping. The teacher doesn't care whether students are asleep, attentive or not. All they do is speak until the lesson is done. Madam X even makes it worse. She comes, gives work on the blackboard for us to do, and thereafter, she sits in her chair marking books or papers that she usually comes with. When students finish, she calls for the books and marks them from there on her chair. She doesn't make a follow-up on

those who have not handed in. So, for me, I just choose to sleep instead of wasting my time.

This, therefore, means that many students don't take the English language seriously because teachers are not serious. However, some students find the English language good and full of fun. Some boys appreciate some teachers who are serious. These teachers come with new words, they have good class management, they move around the class and they try to ensure that everyone is on board. One student remarked that;

During the lesson, I feel my teachers are trying to teach me everything I'm required to learn. When it's Mr. B coming in for the lesson, you expect many new words which widen your vocabulary. His stories are interesting to read and interpret. He tries to make his lessons jolly. He even keeps on repeating those concepts that he feels students didn't understand in the previous lessons. The guy puts us in the mood".

Students claim that they have on many occasions asked the administration to change this teacher but failed. From the above, therefore, it appears obvious that some teachers go with their problems to class, which disorganises lesson delivery and makes the whole lesson dull. When boys were also interviewed, whether the English language is so important for someone to study, they had this to say. All boys showed that English is very important for their grades. In all the interviews done, boys showed that they knew how English could affect their grades at UCE. They are interested in passing it so that they get good grades. One student remarked that;

I am aiming at getting a good second grade, but once I get an F9, that will be regrettably a third grade. Am sure all other subjects can't let me down, but when it comes to the English language, I'm sceptical. I am studying the English language to pass exams right now because I already know how to speak it fluently.

Another one emphasised that, “*English language is compulsory and once a student performs poorly in it, it’s a gone case*”.

In fact, 78% of the boys interviewed claimed that they are targeting first grade and therefore, they need at least a credit in English language to qualify for it. The fact that all papers are set and answered in English makes sense. From the above, therefore, boys attach mainly academic value to the English language. Their interest in studying the subject is mainly driven by the desire to either get a pass or a credit so that they get good grades, preferably first and second. This explains why these boys always get more interested in the subject towards the beginning of their final exams.

In addition to that, all boys stressed that English is very important for communication globally and they would like to learn it so that they can socialise with people from other countries. These boys said that local languages are good, but cannot take one beyond their tribal boundaries. They would therefore need this language to communicate with a wider community. One boy who desires to become a future pilot said;

I need the English language because, as a future pilot, I shall be interacting with various people of different backgrounds on different planes and flights. Besides, since it’s a language used widely, it will help me to communicate with my clients. Even in the countries that I will be going to, I will need this language to communicate with those people.

Another student remarked that;

It’s an international language which one has to learn by all means to fit in a global community. I have a dream of living in Canada at some point. How will I communicate with Canadians if my English is not good?

Boys emphasised that English is important but hard to learn. As long as one can communicate, that’s enough. Even one boy with confidence asked that

“In this interview, I have disobeyed a lot of grammar rules, but haven’t we communicated, sir?” From the above, therefore, boys know that English is important today because it’s a global language. They therefore have an interest in learning it so that in future, they can easily fit in the global village, although they generally detest writing it down. More so, other boys view English as a subject that teaches them various skills that will help them in performing their duties in future.

Boys acknowledged that although English is not in line with their dream courses, such as medicine, engineering, pilots, architecture, pharmacy and business administration, among others, nevertheless, it teaches them various skills that they would need to perform their duties. One boy remarked that;

As a future doctor, I need English because it teaches me good communication skills, which I will use to communicate well with my clients. Before I even get my job, I have to write an application. That’s a skill taught in English alone.

Another boy remarked that;

My dad has a lot of businesses around Kampala. He wants me to do business administration so that I can help him supervise his businesses. As an administrator, I need to learn those office skills such as writing reports, memos and official letters to be effective at work.

Another one who wants to become an Engineer stressed the importance of learning the English language so that he can learn how to write application letters that he would use to search for jobs. He continued, “*It’s important because all job interviews that I will do are also done in English*”. Therefore, boys’ interest in the English language is motivated by the desire to learn those skills so that in future, they can perform their work effectively.

However, there are some boys who, although they know the importance of studying the English language, their interest is low, because they think they have mastered the language enough for their communication and that's good enough. One boy emphasised that no one will ask him questions in the English language so as to be given a job in his future career. He continued;

I don't think boys, including me, understand the value in studying the English language because someone who understands the importance of learning it would have given it more time, read novels, passages and try to perform better in it. Boys always read towards examinations. They read for the sake of passing the exam and that's all.

These boys emphasised that the value in studying English is to learn how to speak it. Now that they know how to speak it, they don't need extra lessons. One boy showed concern about how English is less important to him and the teachers of it make it harder for him to attend some of its lessons. He said;

DISCUSSION

Teachers and administrators interviewed in this study concurred that since boys believe English is for girls, they pay less attention towards its learning. This coincided with observation data because some of the boys' books checked had little work, were dirty and lacked neatness. Some boys write English at the back of other subjects' books, especially history and C.R.E. The revelation of this teacher concurred with the findings of Heinzmann (2009a), who found that girls enjoy English tasks and boys look at them as burdens. Some teachers also were not involved in innovative activity-based teaching and learning in the classroom, yet it is one of the most common pedagogies used by teachers of English to teach learners and understand them well. This is supported by Abd & Al Odwan (2012); Barahona et al. (2012); Kuyate (2020), who all assert that students learn the English language more easily when creative and activity-based learning is

used. These findings show that some boys fail English Exams because they have no confidence in their English teachers. This claim is supported by Sa'ad et al. (2014), who determined that students' failures in the English subject were due to the incompetence and irrelevancy of teachers in Malaysian schools. He was of the view that for successful language teaching, the teacher concerned should develop interesting and creative-based teaching. Such teaching should cater for improving language skills and grammar.

Findings revealed that boys have a bias towards the English language subject, which is a result of their continuous poor performance. This is in line with Sa'ad et al. (2014), whose studies revealed that boys' poor performance in the English language subject is related to their negative attitude towards the English subject. In addition to the above, teachers revealed that some boys go and hide in the library, toilets and other places to dodge English subject lessons. Teachers used to look for them, but because they believe the administration has not helped them and there are many other students in the classroom to attend to, they gave up on those who dodge and now concentrate on those who attend lessons. This finding is in line with Njuguna's (2012) findings in Bomet, Kenya, that teachers don't look for students dodging lessons because they have big classes that, even if about ten students dodge, the teacher feels he has more than enough to teach the lesson. Findings revealed that boys emphasised that the value in studying English is to learn how to speak it. Now that they know how to speak it, they don't need extra lessons. When they have no interest in the topic, they tend to develop aggressive-disruptive behaviour. This is supported by various scholars, such as Bolkan et al. (2011); Mills et al. (2004), who all argue that boys are hard to deal with if they have little or no interest in the activity going on in class. In addition to that, teachers generally revealed that boys don't like English language teachers. This is in line with the reporting of Ofori et al. (2020), who all reported that some boys tend to have a dislike for English

CONCLUSION.

RECOMMENDATION

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