

Learning English Language by Radio in Primary Schools in Kenya

Florence Y. Odera

Abstract

Radio is one of the most affordable educational technologies available for the use in education and development in developing countries. This article explores the use of school radio broadcast to assist teachers and pupils to learn and improve English language both written and spoken in Kenyan primary schools. English language occupies a central place in formal education in Kenya. It is one of the compulsory subjects in both primary (aged six to 13 years) and secondary education (aged 14 to 18 years). It is also a medium of instruction in upper primary from standard four to university education in Kenya. However, teaching and learning English remains one of the most difficult and taxing assignment to primary schoolteachers, because when children join class one they go to the classroom with pre-set language skills. They have developed skills in their vernacular which is the language of instruction in most of rural schools or Kiswahili in urban schools. Sometimes, they mix vernacular, Kiswahili and English and come up with another language called “Sheng”. This makes it very difficult for them to learn English language. Research from developed and developing countries indicates that the use of school radio programmes assist pupils and teachers to learn foreign language like English faster and help them to improve pronunciation of difficult words. School radio broadcast was introduced in Kenya in 1961. One of the reasons was to help improve the standard of spoken and written English language and set the standard for the spoken English in the country. Radio was chosen, because it is affordable and simple to maintain. Despite of the existence of the program in Kenya for many years, there has been an outcry over falling standard in English language evidenced by poor performance in national examinations. The purpose of this study was to find out if teachers in primary schools use broadcasts to schools radio programmes to assist them in teaching and learning the language. The study was based on a descriptive survey. The area of study was Kisumu district and saturated sampling technique was used to select a sample of participants. Data were collected by use of questionnaire for pupils and teachers, while semi-structured interview was used to collect information from head teachers. The main findings indicated that most teachers’ were not listening to the school radio broadcasts. Very few of them used radio lessons citing various problems, such as lack of resources, broadcast time tables and teachers guide notes, negative attitudes and large number of pupils’ in the class. Those, who listened to English radio lessons, valued them very much and noted how it has helped to improve the pupils spoken English and performance in Kenya certificate of primary education examination. In view of the findings, the paper recommends that head teachers should provide teachers with radio sets and support materials encourage and assist them to use English radio lessons.

Keywords: radio technology, affordable, English language, use, primary schools, Kenya

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