

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE (SMS) ON  
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS COMMUNICATION SKILLS  
IN NAIROBI COUNTY**

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**DECLARATION**

This project is my original work and to the best of my knowledge has never been presented for a degree award in any university.

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This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the appointed supervisor

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Date

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents who gave me wings to fly in this language, watch me as I fly.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to acknowledge the support and guidance of my project supervisor, Dr. Leah Muchemi. Her commitment and guidance led to the successful completion of my work. I sincerely thank Dr. Nyabuga for the insights and direction he offered when I fell short. Thanks for believing in my study and urging me to move on.

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To the Almighty, I am thankful for the strength, wisdom and determination to complete this work.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>CMC</b>	Computer Mediated Communication
<b>CMD</b>	Computer Mediated Discourse
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technologies
<b>KCSE</b>	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>TSC</b>	Teachers Service Commission



## **ABSTRACT**

The study was designed to investigate the contribution of Short Message Service to the writing skills of secondary school students. The main objective of the study was to examine the possible effects of use of language of texting on English language performance at the level of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. Specifically, the study sought to establish the influence of the spellings and punctuation habits of the language of SMS on Standard English, to determine if Secondary school students use SMS language when writing their examinations and an investigation on whether the poor performance in English is associated with language of texting. To achieve this, the research adopted a qualitative research approach drawing all respondents through purposive sampling. The theoretical foundation of the study is a Cognitive Process Theory of Writing. Data was collected through key informant interviews using open ended interview schedules as well as reviewing existing documentation in form of reports. The data collected was analysed according to the objectives of the study and the findings presented through thematic analysis. The themes around which data was discussed include spellings, punctuation, grammar and instance of jargon in formal writing. Document analysis corroborated the findings of the study. The study found out that there was an insignificant relationship between language of texting and Standard English that should warrant for conclusions by policy makers that the poor grades on English language was as a result of influence from language of texting. The study concludes that the influence of language on Standard English is insignificant and policy makers should look at the pertinent issues that have led to students performing dismally in English at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education level. The study recommends that a study should be carried out on the cause of poor grades amongst students in English and a local study should be carried on pre-teenage students to justify the analogy that exposure to language of texting at early levels improves the literacy levels of students.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Overview**

This chapter offers a background discussion of language used in writing the Short Message Service (SMS) as well as Standard English language in Kenya. An overview of the problem statement of the study is presented. The chapter also presents the objectives on which this study lies followed by research questions. It further discusses the significance of the study, the scope and its limitations.

### **1.1 Background Information**

The study seeks to investigate the contribution of language used in mobile phone texting on the secondary school students writing skills in Standard English within Nairobi County. According to the Daily Nation (2014), there is an overarching view among policy makers that many students particularly in urban areas have access to mobile phones and that they are increasingly using them to communicate using SMS. This has rendered their communication skills in examination situations mutually unintelligible to the examiners. As a result they end up being penalized and scoring poorly in English language.

While there is no empirical evidence to show a link between language of texting and performance of students in English, reports from Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) show that English has recorded poor grades especially in 2013 (see table one)

There has been a growing concern amongst educators, researchers, the government and the general public that the increased use of text messaging in communication among the youths is influencing the teenagers in writing and likely to influence the standard forms of languages when used for long (Koross, 2016). Students are compelled in exam situations to write grammatically so that they can communicate their ideas effectively and failure to do so attracts a penalty resulting to poor grades.

For Chomsky (2005), English, like any other language, has a complex sound system and when the sounds are organized following general rules called grammatical rules then a particular meaning is brought out of ordering particular sounds grammatically. Should the sounds be ordered in any other way that is not in line with the convention rules, the sentence construction will fail to communicate.

The most common way of examining students in Kenya is through presentation of written work. Students are supposed to adhere to conventions of English writing and failure to do the same they are normally penalized. However one of the characteristics of language is that it is very dynamic and will adopt its social relevance from the environment that it is under use (Crystal, 2007). Language can be said to be of value if an individual has the ability to use specific sounds in a given environment to be understood by the recipient of the message.

When students fail to communicate because they have written in a language that flouts grammatical rules they are supposed to be penalized. The curriculum that is used in instructing students of secondary schools does not allow for flouting of rules of grammar neither is any teacher supposed to give instructions that will seem like its flouting the rules.

Language is a system composed of symbols, signs and vocal acts arbitrary created and conventionally used in communication (McQuail, 2003). According to McQuail (2003), communication is a rule based mental system of language codes for expressing and understanding thought, feelings and ideas. It is evident that communication is a two way process and it can be said to fail only when the sender or receiver fails to do what people use language to do. For communication to be effective, its required that the sender and receiver can be able to connect with the arbitrary symbols that are used to convey information. It is important also that the participants adhere to the context in which the communication is taking place.

Writing is a symbolic representation of language in a storable graphic form (McQuail (2003). The communicators are normally separated in time and space which renders written communication monologic. By nature writing is a mono-modal form of communication because the communicators send information through a single channel or medium. Writing is also characterized as a permanent form of communication as it can be reread and even stored for future use and due to in-absence of immediate context; it needs to be more explicit since obscurities and misunderstandings cannot be removed immediately (Crystal (2008).

The performance of English language at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) level, according to the Ministry of Education is at an average of 30% for the past 10 years. The same has been attributed to poor spellings and punctuation as a result of influence from language used in writing SMS by the policy makers. This study seeks to find whether Language of writing SMS has any contribution to the poor grades that are posed by secondary school students in English because of failing to communicate.

## **1.2 Linguistic Features of SMS Language**

Baron (2008), notes that Language used in writing SMS has distinguishing features which can be grouped into four categories; spelling, grammar, punctuation and graphics as discussed below.

### **1.2.1 Spelling**

The language of writing SMS is characterized by a distinctive pattern of spelling which is decidedly phonetic. Words are oftenly written the way they sound and sometimes numeric graphemes are employed for example 2 is used for to or too and at times there is use of emoticons. Some arguments have been advanced to explain the unique spelling pattern that it is aimed at reducing the number of keystrokes. However, in some cases some words have the same number of spellings as the conventional word or more. For example most texters use the sound s and z interchangeably (girls will be written as galz or girlz) and this shows the freedom of creativity provided by the language of texting.

Spelling in language of texting involves shortening words by ensuring that long words that can be shortened are or end up being abbreviated and according to Baron (2005), there are three types of lexical shortenings adopted by the users of this language. They include acronyms, abbreviations and contractions. According Ling (2005), acronyms resemble a word in the language and as such changes the pragmatic meaning of that word. A good example that is common is LOL which means to laugh out loud and it is used when a person is happy. The acronym has been very common in speech that at the moment it is at times used as an oral response. To an outsider who has never seen the expression, it might be incomprehensible. However, to those who are used with the language, in accordance with the context the communication is deciphered well.

Abbreviations on the other hand are shortened forms of words or phrases and they have existed for centuries and they are even part of the conventional English. However abbreviations employed by language of texting are different in structure and derivation from those of conventional English. Conventional abbreviations normally pay attention to case and punctuation and this is not the case with language of texting. For example Dr. is an abbreviation that has been in use for long and conventionally accepted, however in SMS language it can be written as dr or DR and still carry the meaning for Dr.

Language of SMS is also characterized by vowel deletion; this normally happens to those vowels that are in middle of a word and it is done in such a way that it will not interfere with the phonological make up of a word (Baron, 2005). Normally the vowels that are deleted are those that are not likely to change the phonology of English, however the silent 'e' at the end of words is normally deleted changing the spelling patterns of words. The reason behind this according to Baron, (2005) is character saving. Examples here include dn-done, gd-good.

### **1.2.2 Punctuation**

According to Crystal (2008) text messages sometimes are characterized by lack of or overuse of punctuation marks. They are normally avoided as they add the number of characters hence attracting a charge. In taking care of the number of characters that form

one SMS, texters usually omit punctuation marks. Capitalization is normally ignored where it is supposed to be included and at times either written entirely in uppercase or lowercase without attention to proper nouns and adjectives. Use of uppercase letters only sometimes is used to show that one is stressing a particular issue. Also it can be a style of writing of an individual.

Spacing sometimes is ignored or done poorly and some punctuation marks are normally ignored because for the old phones one has to keep on tapping one and for the mark to appear. For the modern phones that have a QWERTY keyboard one has to tap on the shift tap before choosing the appropriate punctuation mark.

This is not the first time that communication through technology flouts the rules of punctuation. Communication through telegram championed this and the reason behind it is that every character was charged and most communication through telegram lacked punctuation marks completely but still the communication process wasn't hampered.

### **1.2.3 Grammar**

There is a difference in conventional grammar and grammar of language used by texters in four ways which includes omission of the subject pronoun, omission of the verbs and prepositional phrases, omission of articles and reduction of inflectional endings (Thurlow, 2003). The explanation given behind the omission of the pronoun is that the receivers name appears on the screen of the phone therefore the subject and the subject pronoun are implied. Inflectional endings are reduced and the verb or prepositional phrases omitted to save on space and time.

### **1.2.4 Graphics**

Language of SMS is characterized by a variety of graphical symbolisms and according to Crystal (2008) it is done through use of emoticons, asterisks and by use graphical symbols. Emoticons normally represent facial expressions and due to the innovative nature of teenagers and the context of what the texters are communicating about, one whole SMS may be composed of emoticons only. Sometimes teenagers employ asterisks in their

communication as a way of stressing whatever they want to communicate. Inculcation of asterisks sometimes adds to the number of characters that an SMS has.

### **1.3 Standard English in Kenya**

Standard English can be defined as that variety of English that is widely and most accepted by a particular group of people who use English. According to Thurlow (2003) the standard is most easily identified in print, whose conventions are more or less uniform throughout the world. Kenya is among the countries that after the Berlin conference between 1884 and 1885 came under the British colonial rule that lasted till 1963 and throughout this period Kenyans cultural spheres such as language and religion had a profound and seemingly permanent impact (Tollefson, 2013). English language is one of the most enduring legacies of Kenya's experience with colonialists.

After Kenya became independent in 1963, the Ministry of Education appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Professor S.H. Ominde to advise the government on issues of educational policy and subsequently to recommend reforms that would select a language to be used in fostering cultural values of an independent country and bring the nation together through a common language (Tollefson, 2013). The commission found out that majority of those that appeared before it recommended that English be used as a medium of instruction from first grade of primary. The report gave further impetus to the national momentum to introduce an English-medium instruction and English was introduced into the school system as early as nursery which is the situation to date.

Kenya's language policy has put a high premium on English as the language of national and individual economic and social economic advancement. As a result English has dominated the entire educational structure and use in official functions. In spite of the extensive spread of English to the earliest possible levels of learning and tremendous investments made to ensure that the language remains with its prestigious status; there have been, reports from KNEC showing the performance of English, indicating that the standards of the language are not up to speed with the kind of infrastructure that has been put in place since the language was inculcated.

In releasing the 2013 KCSE examination results, the Ministry of Education through its Cabinet Secretary at that time gave the following statement while explaining as to why students performed poorly in the language in that year. “The consistent use of electronic communication devices such as mobile phones and computers that have done away with the need to know how to construct sentences and spell words correctly due to spell checking and predictive text capabilities is to blame for the drop in KCSE English performance” (The Daily Nation, 2014). He attributed his claims to the addictive nature of the SMS language and the predictive software in some phones which impact on the linguistic competence of the users as it autocorrects the way words are written. The argument that is presented here is that students may be reluctant in mastering how sounds are combined to form words because of overdependence on the predictive software. The following table is representation of how students have scored in English in a period of ten years, between 2004 and 2014

**Table 1**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Mean score (%)</b>	<b>Mean grade</b>
2004	33.56	D
2005	38.35	D+
2006	35.75	D+
2007	34.48	D
2008	33.78	D
2009	39.21	D+
2010	38.68	D+
2011	36.42	D+
2012	34.2	D
2013	29.35	D-
2014	33.57	D

Source: KNEC 2017

The performance is below average considering that grade D in any grading system is not even a pass but a failure. Though the language has posed poor grades for years, in 2013 the trend was worse. Most of the subjects in the curriculum are thought in English and in every examination situation in all subjects there is an essay to be written. Therefore if students perform dismally in English language there is a likelihood that the same will replicate in



other languages because they would have failed to communicate altogether despite the fact that they have the facts right.

#### **1.4 Statement of Problem**

Humphreys (2007) argues that texters are vandals who are destroying English language, pillaging its punctuation, savaging the sentences, raping the vocabulary and SMS language is a digital virus. This appeared as a newspaper article when the writer was commenting about how Standard English has been butchered by SMS language. In the same breath in releasing the 2013 KCSE results the then Education Cabinet Secretary, released a report that was in line with the sentiments of John Humphreys while explaining to the nation and the world on why English language had recorded poor grades.

However, other arguments point out that texting in fact helps improve English language literacy levels. Crystal (2008), for example, argues that texting improves students' literacy levels and writing skills. He backs up his claim with findings of a study from Coventry University which identified that there is a positive relationship between language of texting and literacy levels when children are exposed very early to communication through SMS. The argument behind this is that language is creative and when a student uses language creatively such as when writing SMS then there is a possibility that a child will be subjected to many forms of grammar. When children are able to use language creatively and interact with other SMS that have been written creatively, then their literacy levels will be higher.

Developments in the telecommunications industry have made it possible for new communication modalities that blend both the characteristics of written and spoken language (Crystal, 2006). Written language has standard spellings and follows grammatical rules of word formation and even sentence formation and SMS typically relies on written communication. According to Crystal (2008), when using speech-like spellings, the texters write as if they are speaking and this in turn helps to obtain a kind of small talk and solidarity bonding.

It is evident that a new form of lexical items has evolved due to the use of SMS in communication interfering with the morphemic make up of Standard English (Baron, 2008; Crystal 2008; Russel 2010). Their arguments do not, however, establish whether this new genre of language is normally reflected in the use of English in class work and, if that is true whether it affects communication between students and those who supervise their work. What is significantly more problematic is that the Ministry of Education made a statement that students performed dismally in English language at KCSE level because of influence from SMS language. This study thus seeks to establish the accuracy of the statement by researching on the relationship between the use of SMS and student performance in English at KCSE level.

## **1.5 Objectives**

### **1.5.1 Main Objective**

The main objective of the study is to examine the possible effects of use of SMS language on English language performance at KCSE level.

### **1.5.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To assess the influence of SMS language on the spelling and punctuation habits in communication through Standard English.
- ii. To determine if students use SMS language in writing their KCSE English language examination.
- iii. To investigate whether the poor performance of English language in KCSE is associated with the influence of SMS language.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

- i. Are the spelling and punctuation habits of students in Standard English as a result of influence from SMS language?
- ii. Do students use SMS language when writing their English language exams?
- iii. Is the poor performance in English Language at KCSE level associated with influence from SMS language?

### **1.7 Rationale and Justification**

The use of mobile telephony among the youth has grown exponentially. This has engendered several issues, among them their effects on the punctuation and grammatical skills in English language. Given the importance of mobile telephony, and its increasing appropriation communication purposes, it is imperative to study their possible consequences on student performance.

### **1.8 Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the corpus examining the effects of mobile telephony and associated technologies in society. It may contribute to policy on the use of mobile telephony among the youth. English is the language of instruction in most sectors of education as well as the official language in Kenya. Findings of the study will guide policy makers in making sure that the language regains its status considering whatever that has been invested in the language.

### **1.9 Scope of the Study**

This study was carried out in Westlands sub-county in Nairobi County. Respondents of this study were English language teachers, quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education and research and quality officials from Kenya National Examinations Council.

### **1.10 Limitations of the Study**

This study involves looking at the performance of students. However, the inability to get their views somewhat impacts this research. Nonetheless, most information will be generated from government officials, teachers and reports examining poor performance in English at the KCSE level. The study will take place in an urban set up where students have more exposure to mobile telephony as compared to those in rural areas.

### **1.11 Definition of terms**

Text messages	written messages transmitted through the mobile phone
Texters	users of the mobile phone text messaging service

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Overview**

This chapter delves in to better understand the research component of the study by undertaking literature review that explains the causal action and reactions, and theoretical anchoring. Scholarly works of other researchers form a core component of the reviewed literature. The study starts by a review of Standard English in Kenya as well use of SMS in communication among students. The study further undertakes a theoretical framework in order to anchor the assumptions, findings and recommendations on existing communication theories. A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory form the foundation of the theoretical review in this chapter.

#### **2.1 Standard English**

English has a complex system of rules in which the sound structure and meaning are integrated for the purpose of communication (Chomsky, 2005). It follows principles called grammatical rules which guide the way sounds are organized to have words and words are put together still following the rules to bring out meaning. The aim of any language is to communicate effectively and ensure that the recipients of the message get whatever the initiator of the communication wants.

English language though standardized, it has variations. This is due to the fact that languages are supposed to be creative and language grows to accommodate words and things that never existed before. At the same time, teenagers sometimes play around with the language so that they can keep their conversations out of bounds at the same time being close to one another.

English language comes in contact with people from various backgrounds daily and it is learnt from a perspective of a first language. Therefore it is likely to be defiled because characteristics of the first language are likely to be carried to English and if the rules of the two languages are not the same then there is a likelihood that the language is defiled. That

is the main reason why we have lingua francas. New technologies also are likely to interfere with the language set up as seen when telegram was invented and every character had to count. To be economical in terms of communication, telegram communicators had to be very brief and at times ignoring rules of punctuation.

## **2.2 The Short Message Service**

The Short Message Service (SMS) is a technology that enables the transmission of typed text messages from a mobile device to another. According to Crystal (2006), text messaging was never envisioned as a means of communication between people but conceived for commercial purposes or possibly to signal the arrival of a voice message. The first message was sent in 1992 and it read as “Merry Christmas” and this opened doors for commercial purposes before the service was attacked by the youths who use it lively and in a controversial manner (Crystal, 2011).

Text messages can be composed of words, numbers, emoticons or a combination of the three. SMS can broadly be described as a synchronous text based technologically mediated discourse and is normally up to 160 characters in length when using Latin alphabet and 70 characters in length when using non-Latin alphabets such as Arabic and Chinese (Crystal 2006). With modern mobile devices one SMS can be more than 160 characters but after every 160<sup>th</sup> character it is charged.

Responses to the use of SMS have been mixed ranging from those who have embraced its use to those who regard it as a step towards destruction of human civilization. According to Crystal (2012) the production of SMS requires the disruption and manipulation of conventions of grammar and syntax and is regarded by critics as a contributing factor in the debasement of text and of the social and cultural importance of text associated with information and communication technology.

It is perceived that the sense of texting has both an interpersonal as well as a textual function. Crystal (2008) contends that numerous distinguishing features give novelty to the written texts. However, none of them is linguistically novel. Many of them were being used

in chat rooms before the invention of mobile phones and almost all forms of communication is context bound and the persons in communications sometimes understand the texting habits as well as abbreviations used by every person that they communicate to.

Slater and Lydia (2003), in an article 'the Mobile Phone Whispers' which appeared in the Sunday Times on 30<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2003 show interest on how SMS language has had an impact on Standard English. They comment that students who are admitted to higher institutions of learning to all intents are functionally illiterate in so far as Standard English grammar is concerned as they are unable to neither speak nor write with the competence of a high school student leave alone a budding university scholar.

The same sentiments were made by Professor Japheth Kiptoon who was the vice chancellor of Egerton University that students in Kenya are functionally illiterate in English and unable to write even a simple application for a job and a good number of employees had confided in him that university graduates are the worst communicators in English (The Daily Nation June 5<sup>th</sup> 1993). By this time students and even newly employed graduates didn't have or even have access to mobile phones because the first phones in Kenya started streaming in by the year 2000.

Crystal (2008) argues that the creative potential of a language has been ignored a feature which is being brought out strongly through the use of SMS language. He claims that the habit does not have negative impacts to a person's mind, rather is an incentive to creativity when one is expressing self in the language. He made this claims following results obtained from Coventry University which assert that those pre-teenage students who are actively engaged in using language of SMS have exposure to many lexical items hence increasing their literacy levels.

Baron (2008) contends that SMS has overcome the requirement of language in versatility and it is increasingly being used in social communication, business transactions and even in advertisements. Technology plays an important role in communication and SMS language is common more especially among the teens as it cuts on time and renders

communication intimate. Students have a tendency to use it in communication amongst themselves and the language does not have any respect for errors in spellings, grammatical rules or syntactic rules.

When technology comes up in any field, the users will have to find convenience from the way they will be using that technology in their day to day experiences. Most of the conversations that are held by teenagers, are supposed to be intimate to themselves and out of bounds from those who are not supposed to be part of the conversation. According to Coulthard (2011), teenagers want to keep conversations to themselves and the orthography that they use when expressing self is distinct and does not exaggerate Standard English.

### **2.3 Texting and Literacy**

Researchers Lesley McWilliam, Astrid Schepman and Paul Rodway have showed concern in finding out if there are observable characteristics of SMS language in use of language officially. After research they found out that normally some features of SMS language may find their way to official writing of students. However, they pointed out that the same features of SMS language points out use of language creatively and points out that the students know what how they are supposed to write but want to appear as creative as possible.

They pointed out that one characteristic of language is that it is creative and one way of keeping communication to only the audience that is meant for the communication is to be creative in the use of language. Language use for them acts as a gatekeeper to ensure that only the intended get to access the information being conveyed.

This was still re-affirmed by Dr. Beveny Plester, who studied preteenager texting habits and literacy levels at the Coventry University. The study was carried on pre-teenage students to measure if really texting has a negative effect on the literacy levels of the students. The research findings showed that students who were involved in regular texting used language in a more creative manner and in the long run it increased their literacy levels (Plester & Bell, 2008). This was attributed to constant exercising new ideas and

being exposed to a number of texts improved their literacy levels. A key conclusion from the study is that there was no negative association to be found between textism use in preteens and their competence in written language.

There is a belief that linguistic competence is largely driven by innate factors and develops spontaneously on the basis of exposure to a particular language during childhood with a little variation as a result of intelligence or experience. This has been refuted by Chomsky (2006) who asserts that for English communicators, educational factors (exposure to the standard orthography and the norms of the written language) have a profound effect on many aspects of linguistic competence in areas as diverse as syntax and the segmentation of speech.

Linguistic competence fosters communication competence but it is not all people who are endowed with linguistic competence are endowed with communication competence. For Chomsky (2006) communication competence is the communicator's ability to control or manipulate language to meet the expectations of the audience. The writer must have mastered the expectations of the audience so that from their linguistic competence they meet the demands of the audience through communication competence.

## **2.4 Research Gaps**

The issue of language of texting butchering the writing skills of students in schools and colleges has received a lot of criticism from the society. It has evolved to a debate with various scholars having various views over the issue however no one has attempted to subject the criticism to a rigorous research process. Out of the debate, some scholars argue that texting has positive effects to writing skills, others argue it has negative impacts and there are others who argue that language of texting doesn't have an effect to writing skills in any other language.

Three major arguments emerge from an examination of the literature on language of writing SMS. One is the explanation behind why mobile phone users have adopted text messaging. Second is literature on the effects of using SMS when communication and its



effectiveness among the teenagers and thirdly is the issue whether or not language used to write SMS influences formal writing and its implication on official communication.

From the presented discussion, it is evident that the area of morphological differences between SMS language and Standard English language has elicited many discussions that are not founded on any research findings. The discussions do not reach any consensus as the well-established linguists and communication experts who have voiced their concerns on this subject only base their arguments on various theories. Various learning as well as government institutions have been blaming SMS language as eroding the ability of students to communicate well while linguists such as David Crystal have been praising it and calling it the language of evolution.

Ever since the Ministry of Education made a statement that SMS language was to blame for the poor performance in English Examinations, it has led to a lot of positive and negative criticism. Some researchers like Koross (2016) are of the view that regular use of the language has had a negative impact on writing skills of students in examination situations. Others have refuted the stand citing that SMS language is a Language on its own and since it borrows most of its words from English it has improved the way that students use Standard English creatively for example Crystal (2011). Other findings show a third school of thought headed by Coulthard (2011) who contends that language of texting has no effect to the writing skills of students in Standard English.

Similarly, one attribute of language is that it is dynamic and it has variations. We have seen standard Kenyan English grow through addition of new lexical items and the most recent word to make it to the oxford advanced learners dictionary is *bodaboda*. There is a noticeable gap between change being brought about by developments in technology, language being dynamic and the whole debate of an established language, SMS language, affecting performance in another well-established language, Standard English. Crystal has presented findings from pre-teenage students and the statement that this study is exploring is on secondary school student's performance in a well-established language being affected by another language. The literature reviewed by this study does not address the issue of the

Language used in writing SMS affecting the way students perform in English language at school in any level.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

Researchers have for a long time shown interest on how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have interwoven themselves in society. As early as 1943, researchers had started to show concerns on how technologies affect a people's way of life. Both industry and the academia are after understanding the track patterns of ICT adoption for purposes of developing their products to meet market demands and for the academia it is for purposes of explaining how the technologies affect the way of life of people (Ling, 2003). This section will examine theories that tend to explain why teenagers have adopted text messaging and how they have done it against a backdrop of empirical evidence.

### **2.5.1 Everett Rogers-Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

Developed by Everett Rogers in 1963, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory examines the social processes that occur when innovations or new ideas, are dispersed throughout a community, organization or institution. In explaining how the diffusion of innovation occurs, Rogers (1963) states

Information about an innovation is often sought from peers, especially information about their subjective evaluations of the innovation. This information exchange about a new idea occurs through a convergence process involving interpersonal networks. The diffusion of information is essentially a social process in which subjectivity perceived information about a new idea is communicated from person to person. The meaning of an innovation is thus worked out through a process of social construction (Rogers, 1963).

Diffusion is described by Rogers as a social exchange of communication dispersed through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers 1983). Innovation on the other hand is defined as an object, idea or practice that is viewed by a person or unit of adoption as new. Technology is a design that serves as a means with which the likelihood of various alternatives is achieved and it can be either hardware or software.

Diffusion has three elements; innovation, communication channels and time.

An innovation is an idea or project that is perceived as new by an individual or the unit of adoption. SMS language is among the youngest languages that has evolved from use of SMS which is an application found in mobile phones. The language basically has characteristics of both written language and speech. SMS language is characterized by distinctive graphology whose chief feature is rebus abbreviations which is of ergonomic value given that the number of keystrokes saved bears a direct relationship of time and energy (Crystal, 2008).

Youths want to be as trendy as possible and normally will tend to be very creative when responding to texts that they receive from their friends and as the cycle continues, SMS language is the most dynamic language today. It has been found to use as many languages as possible and even numbers so as to ensure that the channel they choose is suitable for their actions.

Time is an important aspect in SMS language; the more an adolescent is exposed to a number of texts from various people whom the relationship is varied the more the language develops with new lexical items coming up each day. An innovation is characterized by three factors; relative advantage (the level to which an idea is considered superior to its predecessor), compatibility (the level to which an idea is seen to be at par with culture of the recipients) and trialability (the level to which an idea is experimented by the users). Mobile telephony fits into the explanation, by replacing communication through telephone booths it has enabled people to communicate visually as well as asynchronous communication. It is very compatible with cultures of recipients and students who would want to keep their conversations secretive and out of bounds have really embraced texting. Mobile telephony has been experimented and it's very hard for a person used to a phone to be minus one and for the students texting has been found out to be addictive.

The rate of adoption is the speed by which an innovation is embraced and normally measured by the time the audience takes to use a particular innovation. The rate of adoption is influenced by behavior, opinion leaders, change agents who might include experts and

the prevailing social norms and attitudes. The mobile phone is small and can be carried around affording the users an unobtrusive and relatively inexpensive mode of communication. The unobtrusive nature of mobile phones enables a user to send or receive messages without attracting attention of other people. If for example one can put his/her phone on silent mode, communication can still take place. Mobile phones are portable making accessibility easier.

Bandura (1977) commenced an argument that attitudes and behaviors are shaped by external factors, stimuli which act as reinforcements with regards to whether a particular act will be adopted or abandoned. The rate of adoption of an innovation is influenced on the other hand by opinion leaders and change experts who include agents among other factors. The statement made by Professor Kaimenyi is likely to influence the rate of adoption of the technology bearing in mind that he is a policy maker. On the other hand some experts also do affect the rate of adoption of an innovation and in this discussion the experts' voices are varied in this case having an influence on the rate of adoption of the innovation depending on the school of thought that a particular individual will subscribe to. Following the discussion presented above, this theory will aid the study to determine whether the language used in writing SMS has an impact when students write English grammar in KCSE.

### **2.5.2 A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing by Linda Flower and John Hayes**

Flower and Hayes have explained how multiple sources of knowledge are constrained to adhere to context and choose wisely from what they call long term memory. They explain the theory using the example of a switch board operator who is able to juggle between multiple calls and in the event makes connections to relevant extensions. The metaphor of a telephone operator is used to illustrate that the mind of a human being can multitask between different languages to fit to the context and at no time will the mind be confused. Flower and Hayes consider the composing process as a series of decisions and choices and in responding to a question that what then is the criterion that governs choice they said noted that choices are determined by the relationship to the audience and the subject under discussion (Hayes & Flower, 1980).

Therefore a writer in any occasion must have studied the context under which a particular text is based and the recipient of the message. The SMS will be drafted to fit the context and the recipient and in examinations situations, students are likely to compose their discussions based on the subject under discussion, then the context (personal notes or an examination situation) and who is going to read the work.

They (Flower and Hayes) further argue that speech always occurs as a response to a rhetorical situation, which they succinctly define as containing an exigency- which demands a response-, an audience and the imagination as well as the art of the speaker. In other words the style and substance of ones writing is a matter of context that will vary from situation to situation. This theory supports the idea that students may write one way when sending text messages to friends and an entirely different way when writing formal papers.

Flower and Hayes' cognitive development theory rests on the following four points

1. The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking process which writers orchestrate to organize during the act of composing. Writing is a cognitive process and writers normally choose wisely from the long-term memory on what to write and how to write. Also as writers often plan and revise as they write rather than compose in segmented stages.
2. The processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other. The writer has to rapidly and carefully retrieve what to write about a particular topic from the domain-specific knowledge and the way to craft the information so that it is understood by the recipients.
3. The act of composing itself is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer's own growing network of goals. The writer's main goal is to communicate and is always conscious of the context under which the context is taking place and even the audience that will consume the information. Writers have two types of goals i.e. process goals and content goals. The process goals includes instructions for example when a student is writing a thesis, the student should be looking at the

instructions given on a particular question that is under review. The content goals are in reference with what the writer wants the audience to get.

4. Writers craft their own goals in two ways: one is through considering the purpose of the communication and two is through whatever they have learnt through the communication process. If by using the language of SMS they will considered trendy by their peers they will use the language and if they engage the same language in class work and it is normally punished then they are likely to refrain from using the language in classwork.

By placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer, who is able to explore ideas, to develop, act on, test and regenerate his or her own goals then the theory is putting an important part of creativity where it belongs- in the hands of the working and thinking writer. When the writer is doing all this, the purpose of communication and the audience being addressed is very important. The theory emphasizes on the power of invention of a writer and being conscious of the context of the choice of syntactic structures to fit in the context of communication. Therefore writers have a number of mental dictionaries and every discourse that a student is engaged in is entrenched on some hierarchy and rooted on some goal (Hayes & Flower, 1980). When students communicate through SMS they have a goal which they want to achieve and in their mental dictionaries they have lots of syntactic features to choose from and depending with the relationship between the communicators they choose what fits best. In examination situations the same replicates and to Flower and Hayes, they do not see an instance where a communicator may confuse language used in writing SMS and Standard English.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Overview**

The chapter describes the steps, processes and rationale applied to the study. It discusses in detail how research was conducted from identification of respondents to actual data collection, analysis and presentation. It is a step by step procedural map that ensured the study topic was subjected to academically set standards and norms that govern social science research. In itself, the chapter is an independent indicator of the study's overall validity and reliability.

The methodology approach adopted was qualitative research. The study explains why the research approach was preferred and the unique characteristics inherent in qualitative research are defined. The research questions are reiterated, data sources explained and the data collection tools and processes. The chapter also singles out data analysis and the presentation method i.e. thematic analysis and narrative presentation of findings.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

Dornyei (2007) defines qualitative research as involving data collection procedures that result primarily in open ended non-numerical data which is then analyzed using non-statistical methods-qualitative content analysis. Content analysis in this study has been done through textual labelling and coding variables.

One advantage for studies that take the qualitative approach is that it does not concentrate on generalizations and reductions but concentrates on achieving an in-depth understanding of meaning. According to Dornyei (2007), qualitative research in the 1930s was mainly for exploratory, preliminary purposes, serving as a basis for more serious quantitative research. However since then the definition has evolved to suite the phenomenon under study. In this study it was preferred due to two reasons. One is the ethical considerations that are involved when collecting information from minors and two it is the respondents who are involved in the study.

The research design in qualitative studies is not pre-figured; it is normally prone to changes and depends on the respondent being interviewed. The study uses an open mind frame in that the analytical categories are refined during the process of interviewing and even other questions emerge as the interview goes on to get a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. This study inculcated reports from the media, reports on how quality assurance personnel have been giving explanations on the factors that lead to poor performance in English, field notes and documents that offer insights to the area of study. The primary data obtained has been used in making conclusions for the study in corroboration with literature review and theoretical framework.

Due to the non-predictable nature of data collection outcome, qualitative research tends to be intensive and due to that it is to be limited to a small sample size but purposely chosen to ensure that a phenomenon is looked at from various angles (Mugenda & Mugenda (2003). It's interpretative and eventual outcome is as a result of the analysis and deductions of the researcher. The outcome of a study therefore depends on the inclinations of the informants. The researcher decided to have an interview with the quality control and assurance officers from the Ministry of Education and KNEC as they are the ones who monitor the quality of education and quality of results respectively.

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding, where the researcher develops a complex holistic picture, analyses reports and words to get detailed views of the informants. This is aimed at producing an understanding of the study based on multiple contextual factors. This study obtained detailed views of those who prepare students for examinations, those who mark those exams and those who monitor the quality of work given by students and even how the marking was done.

This is a qualitative research as it intends to establish if there is a causal relationship between the language of SMS and the poor grades scored by students in English language. The study takes a case study approach and the researcher has opted to use the same because through the same the researcher can get a real and enlightened record of personal experiences of the people who supervise students work and those that monitor the quality



of work posed by students at KCSE level; which might reveal why students have been performing dismally in a subject that the country has invested a lot in.

### **3.2 Research site**

The study was carried out in Westlands Sub-County, Nairobi County. The sample was drawn from secondary schools in Westlands Sub-County which was selected through convenience sampling which is a form of non-probability sampling.

### **3.3 Research Population**

Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) define a research population as an entire group of individuals, events or objects having common observable characteristics. For them, target population is a universal set of the study of all members of real or hypothetical set of people, events or objects to which an investigator wishes to generalize the study. Westlands Sub County has a total of 26 secondary schools and each school has approximately 400 students. Therefore this study will generalize its findings to a total of 10,400 students.

### **3.4 Sampling Size and Procedure**

The aim of sampling is to find respondents who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize on the amount of data obtained from them. This has been achieved through purposive sampling. The researcher sampled all quality assurance reports from the year 2004 through to 2014. Samples of published articles by scholars reacting to the statements by policy makers on how SMS language was affecting Standard English were also sampled. Further, the researcher interviewed experts from the Ministry of Education, The Kenya National Examinations Council and English Language teachers.

#### **3.4.1 Sample Size**

Sample size is a set of respondents drawn from a population by a defined procedure (Creswell, 2003). This study is a qualitative inquiry and according to Patton (2002) there are no rules when it comes to samples for qualitative studies however the sample size depends on what the researcher wants, the purpose of the study, what is at stake and what

will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done within the available time and resources. The ultimate test for a sample design is how well it represents the characteristics of the population that it purports to represent.

Potter and Wetherill (1987) are in agreement with the sentiments and they say that because no one is interested in language use rather than the people generating the language and because a large number of linguistic patterns are likely to emerge from a few people, small samples or a few interviews are generally quite adequate for investigating an interesting or practically important range of phenomena.

The researcher interviewed two representatives from the Ministry of Education, quality assurance officers from the Teachers Service Commission, both from the sub county level. Others include two research and quality assurance officers from KNEC, one from head office and another one from the sub county level. Lastly is an interview with six English Language teachers from six different schools within Westlands Sub-County. The total number of respondents is ten.

### **3.4.2 Sampling Procedure**

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting two officials from KNEC and from a preliminary visit to the office it is only officials in the research and quality assurance department who are supposed to comment on the kind of information the researcher is looking for. Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) note that purposive sampling allows the researcher to use cases that have required information and this involves choosing the best and most optimal examples of the phenomenon. Crouch (2006) contends that a small number of cases will facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth enquiry in naturalistic settings. Purposive sampling was employed when interviewing officials from the Ministry as well as teachers. In putting in place control measures for the information the researcher got, it was preferable that half of them are those that have been instructing before mobile phones were in use in Kenya and those that were posted in the recent past when mobile texting was common.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

They are important as they helped the researcher to collect data for analysis. The study employed interview guides as well analysis of documents.

#### **3.5.1 Document Analysis**

The researcher had access to media reports on the performance of English from the year 2004 to 2014 and concentrated on documents from mainstream media. The researcher had a privilege to access reports of KNEC on the performance of English on the performance of English from 2004 to 2014. Information obtained from the reports was tabulated in a table (appendix IV)

#### **3.5.2 Interview Guide**

They were employed to solicit for in-depth information from respondents who comprised English language teachers, quality assurance officers and research and quality assurance officers. It comprised of semi-structured interviews which were based on the objectives of the study. Administration of the interview schedules makes possible to obtain required data to meet specific objectives of the study, standardize the interview situation so that the interviewers can ask the same question in the same manner and allow for clarifications and the elimination of ambiguity in answers (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003).

While conducting the interviews, the researcher combined various styles to ask the questions. This included asking provocative questions and interpretative questions. The focus of the interview relied on the respondents' experiences, opinions and knowledge of the subject matter. They were two sets depending on the informants appendix I for teachers and Appendix II for quality assurance officers and Research and Quality Officers.

### **3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation**

Data collected was subjected to qualitative content analysis. It is a form of textual analysis that is not limited to predetermined categories. The categories of textual analysis have been derived inductively from the data and put in line with the objectives of the study.

Qualitative content analysis has been defined as latent level analysis because it is an interpretative analysis that seeks to understand the deeper meaning in the data (Dornyei, 2007).

Textual analysis was employed and it tried to understand the possible interpretations from a cognitive perspective. Document analysis focused on the documents that quality and assurance officers produce as reports in explanation of the performance of examinations from the year 2013. The data collected is presented in a thematic manner, modeled along the research questions parameters and using a deductive approach based on the literature review. The findings from the analysis are presented along standard themes that were identified as cross cutting during the coding process. This implied identifying broader patterns of meaning within the data collected. Each theme was defined in respect to the theoretical perspective. The research findings, analysis and interpretations are presented using the narrative method of presentation. This includes direct quotes as obtained from the respondents as well as paraphrasing the responses into findings.

### **3.7 Reliability and Validity**

Reliability is the extent to which the measurement instruments and procedures produce consistent reports in different circumstances (Dornyei, 2007). It can be ascertained from his presentation that consistency and neutrality of findings are both subsets of reliability and to get to that then the researcher has to be trustworthy with the study being undertaken. Dornyei further identifies credibility as an incentive to internal validity as well as applicability of the results as an incentive to external validity.

Maxwell (1992), proposes a number of indicators that will help point out issues of validity in a qualitative research. He discusses descriptive validity as factual accuracy that is indicated by experience of the respondents chosen by the observer. The second one is interpretative validity which he defines as the quality of portrayal of events by participants and the last one is theoretical validity which he points out as the quality of the researcher's collected data and its analysis. To ensure that the same is obeyed the researcher had to put aside all the personal biases held about the subject of discussion and further sampled all

the data that was collected in an objective manner and the analysis was done minus any personal biases.

In ensuring that reliability and validity was maintained the researcher ensured that records of data collected were kept safely and referred to them from time to time. Further when doing analysis and interpreting the data, the researcher consulted the data collected from interviews as well as what was documented from document analysis. During data collection, analysis and subsequent interpretations, similarities and differences and the varying perspectives brought from different respondents were specifically considered. To ensure that the findings were comprehensive and representative, triangulation was adopted. This was achieved through asking the same question to different respondents and they would respond to the question from where they stand as professionals and depending on what they have seen in their careers as teachers or quality assurance officers.

The findings have also been rendered valid through a triangulation process of document analysis in order to corroborate the findings collected from in-depth interviews. The documents analyzed were from mainstream media and because of operation within the ideals of the media council of Kenya and are subjected to scrutiny as well as editing then they are valid. Other documents are reports of the performance of students done by the M Ministry and since this is the governing body mandated to scrutinize the performance of students in exams, then they can be declared valid for a research. To validate the data obtained from document analysis, the researcher used interviews.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Neuman (2011) defines ethical issues as concerns, dilemmas and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research. This basically entails the integrity of a researcher in conducting a study and this revolves around issues to do with academic background of the researcher and the exposure that the person has to pursue research using qualitative methods. Dornyei (2007) points out that the skills of a researcher are responsible for ensuring quality and scope of data, as well as its interpretation.

The study upheld the ethic of scientific conduct by not falsifying or distorting any data and prior to going for field work; the researcher defended this work before an academic panel and was cleared whence issued with a field work certificate. The study maintained all the principles of research by ensuring that the rights of the respondents were adhered to. Consent of each participant was sought and; confidentiality and privacy of the participants has been maintained to ensure no leak to any person or authority but used for purposes of research only. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and the researcher had sought for clearance to do research from the National Commission for Science and Technology and Innovation to carry out research. All sources of information have been accurately reported and quoted in ensuring that no known misrepresentation or plagiarism.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.0 Overview**

The chapter presents findings, analyses and interprets the fieldwork in line with the design that was introduced in chapter three. The study set out to understand if really the language used in writing SMS is to blame on the poor performance of secondary school students in KCSE in English Language. This was dictated by varied opinions on giving an explanation on why students performed dismally in the 2013 KCSE examinations between opinion leaders and the trend setters in society. The findings are presented in line with the research questions that the study is hinged on. During the analysis of the data collected from the interviews as well as document analysis, it was clustered around the recurring themes and the findings presented use the same themes as a guide. The chapter further presents the analysis of the findings using theoretical underpinnings of the study and presenting excerpts from the interview data collected. Finally the researcher presents his personal opinion through the interpretation of the findings and all is contextualized within the ambit of the study findings.

#### **4.1 Presentation of Findings**

The interviews with the respondents as well as document analysis sought to answer the three research questions set out in chapter one of the study. The research questions include; an assessment of the effects of SMS language on the spelling and punctuation habits in communication through standard English, to determine if students use SMS language when writing their English language exams and to investigate whether the poor performance in English is associated with influence from SMS. The interview responses were clustered into four recurring themes which were in line with the objectives of the study and they include spellings, punctuation, grammar and instance of jargon in formal writing.

##### **4.1.1 Spelling**

From the data that was presented it is clear that text messaging has its own unique spelling pattern and sometimes it is not uniform. Standard English has also its own unique spelling

pattern. The spelling of SMS language varies from person to person as respondent six claimed that he has never written an SMS in any other language other than in Standard English, Swahili or his first language. He said that there are students that may be doing the same and per se to him Language of SMS depends on the people who are involved in the conversation.

There are instances however when some sounds are dropped and replaced with numbers. Respondent eight pointed an example where she received the following SMS from a friend in Uganda (*Mu7 hs dn it agn*) which means 'Museveni has done it again'. It took the respondent long to understand because the person was not used to that form of spellings. It was evident that some SMS would cause communication breakdown more so if the communicators are not frequent users of the language. According to the respondent, the main reason why most youths prefer to use different spellings when communicating through SMS is to be as trendy as possible as well as to keep the conversation to a cliché of people who understand the language. That confirms the fear by John Humphreys that texting is wrecking Standard English Language by destroying the language through pillaging its spellings and raping the vocabulary.

The respondents claimed that texters normally drop out either inflections at the end of some words which may considered as adjuncts on the word and vowels as opposed to consonants. This means that texters seem to be aware of the high information value of consonants as opposed to vowels.

When I posed the question if shortened words get the original spellings of the word skipped from the mind of a student majority of the respondents indicated that it did not. Respondent nine said that some of the students who normally use unconventional spellings normally know the way a particular word is spelt, just that they would want to sound trendy. An example that the respondent pointed out is the word *girls*, some of them write it as *galz* which means that they know how the word sounds and to a large extent know how word is written in Standard English.



*'Respondent one claimed that, if a student has a good foundation of a language and knows how words are spelt, that child cannot forget. She however, pointed out that it becomes a problem when the child is not taught the proper way from primary school and sees the word the first time on SMS. The student may believe that the word is written the way it is in SMS language and those instances are very minimal' (25<sup>th</sup> October, 2017).*

On the issue of if a student is very much immersed in SMS language, is the child unable to improve in English writing skills. The respondents ruled out such a scenario in the Kenyan schools and the explanation they gave is that students spend most of their time in school and they are not allowed to have access to mobile phones when in school. They are taught in Standard English and Swahili and it is hard for them to follow the habits of a language which they get in contact with within a short period of time. Respondent eight said that she encouraged her students to write in shorthand when taking class notes because she believed that the same makes the students creative and she said that it is only a few students who normally carry this habit to formal writing. She testified that some of the best students in writing in shorthand are the ones that perform well in class and the habit is not transferred to written work. This resonates well with the findings at the Coventry which proved that students normally who are exposed to texting at early ages tend to have skills associated with greater literacy and vocabulary awareness. This can be attributed to texting giving students a platform to practice language skills.

On pausing the question if students are encouraged to write in full hand would it improve their literacy levels in English? 40 % of the respondents agreed while the remaining 60 percent disagreed. The explanation behind those who agreed was hinged behind behaviorism theory; they claimed that in school good habits are rewarded while bad ones are punished. So when a teacher allows students to write in shorthand they are likely to overuse the same to an extent they will believe that a particular word is spelt in shorthand. For those who disagreed they said that writing in appropriate shorthand makes a student creative and gave a scenario of scientific expressions. For example in chemistry water is written as H<sub>2</sub>O. This normally is context specific and when students write in other languages they are aware of the way the word is written.

According to Plester, Wood & Bell (2008), texting has been found to be heavily linked to phonological awareness in students therefore if students are encouraged to write in short hand they are likely to develop their skills.

The statement by professor Kaimenyi that read partly... 'due to the spell checking and predictive text capabilities which makes students not to internalize the spellings of words was to blame for a drop in performance' was met with mixed reactions. 50% of the respondents believed that the statement was true. Respondent ten said that students no longer have to internalize the way sounds are organized to form words but just scribble something close to whatever they are looking for and they are able to get spell check. This she said has made students lazy because they already know there is a dictionary somewhere. When it comes to exams situations, they do not get that predictive feature when writing their examination papers. Therefore they end up miscommunicating with their examiners because they are unable to write in Standard English and to earn any marks, the student should convince the examiner that the concept is understood and express self well. According to this group of respondents, the student may be having an idea which is right but because of the way that it is expressed which is wrong, the student ends up scoring low marks.

The other remaining half claimed that the predictive software in some phones acts as a pathway through which frequent mobile users will learn. One respondent said that some students may be having an idea but stuck when it comes to expressing the same, the software will give the student options and after a student uses it, there is a likelihood that the student will know how the word is written. Respondent two did not agree with the statement and pointed out an example of writing the word 'girl', the texter will move forward and write the same word as 'gal'. Some phones will highlight that the name is wrongly written but the texter would rather remain with the spelling mistake but keep the communication within the needs of the audience. Respondent five said that there is no likelihood that when a student comes to an official set up the student will be unable to write in the right spellings, he said,

*'there are two choices, either a student knows the spellings of a word or not there is no way the predictive software will change whatever is in the mental dictionary of a student or hinder a student from knowing the right spellings of a particular English word' (23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017).*

On the issue of Language of SMS affecting the literacy levels of students; the question was also received with mixed reactions. It is only 20 percent of the respondents who agreed with the statement by giving an explanation that when a student is immersed in communicating in the language of texting then it will not give a chance to the other mental dictionaries to develop Standard English. The remaining percentage said that these are two languages, where one is developing and the other is fully developed though sometimes it has variations. Respondent five for example said,

*'I wonder why they have to demonize these languages that are coming up, why hasn't Kiswahili had an effect in communication in Standard English or the other way round. When it is not sheng then it is textese language' (23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017).*

Respondent eight said

*'English is an already established language, it is textese language that is developing and it should be given an opportunity. If a student is functionally illiterate in English, there is no way textese language will affect the student. The same happens for those students who are brilliant, infact brilliant students normally are more creative and use the language creatively and score well in examinations' (24<sup>th</sup> October, 2017).*

From document analysis on issues to do with spelling there were varying sentiments as well. On one hand reports from KNEC showed that the spelling orthography of SMS language had an effect on Standard English. There was no explanation given on the same. However this received a lot of criticism from a publication on the Standard 8<sup>th</sup> March 2014, which showed that they had studied the issue and seen that the trend points out to the problem emanating from primary school when the language is being. Essentially this shows that textese language is not to blame and the unique spelling pattern associated with texting is not carried to writing examinations.

On the same breath another commentary on the article said that,

*‘Strict English teachers who demonize sheng and other local languages are pessimists who do not recognize that English and the other local languages share history hence the latter should be recognized when it is still early’*  
(8<sup>th</sup> March, 2014).

Hence the syntactic make up of textese language and that of Standard English have shared history therefore one does not have an effect to the other. The commentator proceeds by offering a challenge to the policy makers that the early they stop demonizing the language and give it the status of a local language then it will develop like any other language.

There is another form of spelling that involves use of emoticons, it was found out that all participants involved said that it was a positive way of making communication and did not have an impact on Standard English. Respondents claimed use of emoticons shows that a student is creative and they equated the same to facial expressions when a person is using oral communication.

Use of abbreviations also was a pertinent issue that appeared under spellings as a theme of analysis. Standard English has its own abbreviations and language of SMS has its own abbreviations. For example OMG (oh my God) was first used in 1917 according to respondent six and has not been very common when it comes to Standard English. However, ever since SMS language sprung up it is a very common expression. On asking the respondents if use of the same has an impact on Standard English, there was a 30 % that said yes. They cited some abbreviations which have different meanings. A good example is LOL (laugh out loud or lots of laughs). Nowadays it is used as an exclamation mark, therefore a disconnect in communication. However the abbreviations that is used in communication using English for example Dr. still remain with their meanings in the two languages just that in the language of texting sometimes case is not adhered to.

Abbreviations and other short forms have existed for centuries and some of them are part of conventional English. English has had abbreviated words ever since it began to be written. Words such as exam, vet, fridge, cox and bus are so familiar that they have just

become new words. When some of these abbreviated forms first came to use they encountered a lot of criticism. Also the issue of vowel deletion, where medial vowels are deleted oscillates to Baron's (2005) assertion that the medial vowels are normally deleted in an artistic way and creative so that it doesn't interfere with the phonology of the word. This on the other hand shows that the texter knows how the word is written but attempts another style of writing to fit to the context.

Linguistic competence as defined by Chomsky is determined by exposure to standard orthography and the norms of written language. For students, they are normally exposed to standard spellings at their early ages in life before they start interacting with mobile phones. On the same breath, communication competence is normally dependent on audience analysis to choose which are the best spellings for the audience in question.

#### **4.1.2 Punctuation**

According to the Oxford dictionary punctuation is the sum of all marks such as full stop, comma, spacing and other elements which are used to clarify meaning. The respondents were in agreement that Language of SMS flouted most rules of punctuation that are used in Standard English. However one respondent said that the peculiar characteristics of lacking punctuation marks makes it original and renders it a language on its own.

Then on the first question if use of SMS language makes a student also forget about the punctuation marks in the mind of a student. There was a resounding no from all the respondents and the explanation that seemed to be echoed by most of the respondents is that the two languages have different patterns of communication. One of the respondents said that SMS language has an advantage in that a user of the language can use upper case to show stress to the message or use of asterisks or many question marks after a question. If the same is applied however in Written Standard language, it would appear as ungrammatical and it will surely be punished. Therefore the language has a way of expressing tonal variation as well as facial expressions and to some that is why the youth like it because they want something that combines both written and oral characteristics as they want to keep their conversation to written.

Another question that raised issues of punctuation marks is if the system of SMS language hampers the punctuation of Standard English. 60% of the respondents said that overuse of SMS language would affect a student from using punctuation marks. Respondent two affirmed that,

*'The punctuation marks are used to draw emoticons for facial expression or to show stress. Their role has changed and it will be hard for one to allocate a single unit of grammar to more than one use. There is a likelihood of confusion in writing' (25<sup>th</sup> October, 2017).*

The respondent cited evidence from the reports that they make and one of the reasons why students perform dismally in composition writing is because of misuse, underuse or lacking punctuation marks. This contradicted with the remaining 40 percent who cited that sometimes the students fail to include or rather use wrong punctuation marks leading to poor performances in the language. The respondents asked if really there is a connection between lack of punctuation marks in examinations situations and overuse or flouting the rules of their usage in the language of writing SMS. They pointed out that if a student is poor in punctuation in classwork, the same student would perform poorly when it comes to language of SMS if it were to be evaluated. The reports cited by the research and quality assessment division of KNEC would not be related directly to the language of SMS.

Punctuation also as a theme appeared on the question if really the punctuation habits of SMS commentators has pointed out that local languages are very useful in giving instructions more especially when students are leaning a second language. When I enquired about the statement some of the respondents said that indeed when a student is able to use the punctuation marks to show tonal variations, it proves out that students have knowledge of the punctuation marks and using them in a creative manner. Therefore if they have knowledge of that and the language of SMS is used as a mode of instruction in learning English as a second language it will be an added advantage as the teacher will be instructing from a point of known.

This concedes with the arguments by Bodomo (2009) that new communication technologies do not only endanger new ways of using language, but also new forms of literacy associated with the introduction and uses of new technologies. English cannot remain undefiled as it comes in contact with different people daily and every language has to grow in terms of coming up with new lexical items which did not exist there before and have come up due to new technologies.

According to Crystal (2011) Language of SMS is characterized by its distinctive graphology and punctuation marks and letters are adapted to express attitudes. Therefore language of SMS combines features of both written and spoken language delivering the message at hand in the best way possible. The choices are made in conformity with the cognitive theory of writing which is goal oriented and more specifically aimed at satisfying the content goals which aim at satisfying the needs of the audience.

#### **4.1.3 Grammar**

In grammar, the researcher dealt on issues of inflections and also the rules that guide when words are put together to form phrases and sentences. Standard English demands that any inflection on verbs and nouns should be indicated and be done properly. Also there is a generally agreed format that words are normally arranged in a phrase and flouting the arrangement normally is penalized. Language of SMS on another hand has a different arrangement on this issue, it normally leaves the inflections out or amends them to suite the occasion. When it comes to the way words are arranged to come up with a phrase, there is no adherence to any specific rules and in some instances there is omission of articles and the subject pronoun.

On the first question on the respondent's views about if the overuse of SMS language will not pave way for students to internalize the writing skills in English. 70% of the respondents had a no and 30% a yes. For those who said no they claimed that if the student is ignoring inflections on a name it means the student knows how the word is written but gets an inflection for the same to suite the occasion. Respondent seven argued that,

*'If the student was clueless about the way a word is written then the predictive software will guide, but this student chooses to write minus the inflection ignoring rules of Standard English and even the predictive software options. It means the student has knowledge on how the word is written but wants to write it the SMS language way' (23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017).*

For those who cited no they claimed that sometimes the words minus inflection find their way to compositions and since they were unable to explain that they attributed the same to their being an effect. They also claimed that Standard English obeys the arrangement of subject, verb Object agreement and SMS language flouts the same. So if they are unable to follow that it means they have copied from SMS language. The same issue received criticism from those who were for a no in this question. They claimed that English is a second language in Kenya and learners learn a second language from what they know in a first language. There are first languages in Kenya which do not follow that rule therefore it would be that a student has picked the rules of first language to a second language. Therefore SMS language shouldn't be blamed because it is also a second language and even learnt after one has acquired other second languages like English.

On the second question I asked if skipping inflections as well as not arranging words according to the grammatical requirements of English will make those rules to be skipped or forgotten from the mind of a student. It is only 10 percent of the respondents who agreed with the question citing issues of confusion due to use and disuse. The majority claimed that the mental dictionaries operate in a way that is systematic and orderly and context conscious. Respondent five presented the following

**Table 2**

<b>Standard English</b>	<b>SMS language</b>
Coming	comin
Swimming	swimin
Whining	whinin
Tapping	tapin

Source, Researcher 2017



She claimed that there is no much difference between the Standard form of the words and what she calls language of the SMS. From whatever that is presented it is clear that the student has knowledge of the word, it is presented in the right tense and no meaning is lost. She came up with an explanation that if a student knows how to write a particular word, there is no way the same student can confuse the mind that the word now exists minus the inflection at the end. The student will be having the two registers according to the respondent and they are independent. She pointed out the theory of reasoned action by Ajzen in (1975) that when students are executing any action at the back of their minds they think about the outcomes of those actions. Therefore they cannot choose whatever that will lead them to be penalized.

Then on the question of if use of SMS language grammar will have an effect on sentence construction of Standard English grammar, 30% of the respondents agreed with the sentiment while the remaining percentage disagreed. For the ones who agreed with the statement they claimed that attitudes and behaviors are shaped by external factors stimuli which act as reinforcements for particular behavior. They said that if a particular student is used to writing and omitting articles in SMS language and that qualifies to be trendy, then there is a likelihood that the behavior may find its way to classwork. On the other hand the respondents who did not agree with the sentiments again cited that students have two mental dictionaries and will not confuse the two.

Then when I enquired on the thoughts of the respondents if writing a full worded language can improve language skills in Standard English, 60 % said yes while a 40% disagreed. Respondent eight agreed by arguing that

*'When a student engages in the right grammar it will make the words stay longer and in the end can play with it. Why shouldn't the same student write the SMS in full grammar'* (24<sup>th</sup> October, 2017).

For those who had a contrary opinion they said that inflections showed that students were creative and when students do not indicate the subject pronoun it means that they have personalized the communication and the number or name of the person they are

communicating with is at the top of the screen, therefore repeating the subject pronoun is like tautology.

#### **4.1.4 Instance of SMS Jargon in Formal Writing**

On this thematic area the researcher first consulted with the documents from the quality assessment department with KNEC. The reports indicated that some students had some jargon transferred to their writing when doing their literature and composition papers. More especially the reports of 2012 and 2013 showed that a good number of students were writing in short forms, spelling mistakes was also an issue as well as rules of grammar were flouted. The reports indicated that this was as result of influence from SMS language which had similar features.

I had to ask the personnel in that office how they drew a conclusion that all the issues noted were as a result of influence from SMS language. Then the answer was,.

*'Studies before this have showed that sheng has been the one behind the poor grades posed by students. During that time we used to find sheng words in compositions and their literature examinations. So when mobile phones became very common, the trend changed now to having jargon used in writing SMS present in work presented for marking. We made that conclusion based on that'*(25<sup>th</sup> October, 2017).

On the question of how common this character was, I was given the following response,

*'It is common to a few students and really costs them because the ones who have the habit score low marks. The respondent confided that it was limited to a few students especially from urban centers'* (25<sup>th</sup>, October, 2017).

Dr. Mugo in an article that appeared in Standard on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2014 claims that

*'our research has continuously pointed that the problem starts at primary school because the subject is poorly introduced at the stage. Secondary school teachers do not acknowledge the problem and they have failed to embrace a culture that fosters proper learning of the subject'* (8<sup>th</sup> March, 2014).

Within the same article Dr. Oriaso said that

*'The use of sheng can never destroy the use of English because like any other first language (dholuo or kikuyu) does not stop people from learning the second language. In any case, these second languages like Kiswahili, English have some of their words borrowed to make sheng'* (8<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

On enquiry from respondent six who was the most experienced in his category, he claimed that sometimes they do get SMS jargon in Standard English texts and said that it is very common to students who perform dismally. For those students who perform well they are context specific and are able to differentiate between the language used for writing SMS and that of writing exams. He said,

*'It is only a few elements whom I believe had a bad foundation that are unable to differentiate the two but for bright students we absolutely have no problem with them'* (25<sup>th</sup>, October 2017).

Respondent five who is the youngest in the field of teaching said that she is also a victim of using SMS language but said she is context conscious. She claimed,

*'I personally use the language when engaging my friends and people whom I know they understand. I do communicate with many people through SMS and the way I will write to my mother is different from the way I will write to my boss and different from the way I write to my hubby and girlfriends. I have been here and seen those students who are bright they are conscious of what they write but for the lazy ones they just want to throw their work at you and walk away'* (25<sup>th</sup>, October 2017).

It was evident that for the serious students the problem of transferring the characteristics of one language to another was not there. Most respondents claimed that serious students normally proof-read their work before handing it in so if they make a mistake subconsciously, they are able to correct it when proof reading their work. However for those who are weak, some SMS jargon may get its way to their examinations and when they are asked of the reason behind that they will say that they were limited with time so to finish they had to write in short form. The findings under this theme tend to concur with Crystals assertion that if students are unaware of the difference between Standard English and language of texting then it is the responsibility of teachers to bring them to speed. This

is giving teachers the responsibility that they are paid for in raising awareness of the appropriate and non-appropriate language behavior.

This theme oscillates well to the Cognitive Process of theory which states that, by placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer, who is able to explore ideas, to develop and act on, test and regenerate his or her own goals (Hayes & Flower, 1980). This is also reiterated by Crystal (2007) that one characteristic of language is that it is very dynamic and will adopt its social relevance from the environment that it is under use. Therefore students are not just passive when they get information, to just pass the same to anyone. They are creative and explore ideas as well as test them consciously before they write the same down. Hence they are able to tell a difference between how they should write to their friends on phone and to their teachers when writing examinations.

#### **4.2 Summary of Findings**

The results from the study show that though students involve themselves in text messaging and there is presence of the SMS jargon in the written examinations of some students, there is no any direct correlation between the two. The amount of jargon that was found is small to grant a conclusion that it is because of influence form mobile phones that students are performing dismally in Standard English.

It was evident from the results that some students use SMS language in their communication but it is very few characters that carry this habit to class work and eventually to examination work. Most students are context specific and would choose a language that befits the context that they get to communicate. Knowledge of the language of SMS of students doesn't get the original spellings skipped from the mind of a student. Further having knowledge SMS language does not hamper any student in any way from developing Standard English grammar.

It is also evident that for the few students who transfer some of their texting habits to written work are heavily penalized. This is reiterated by Herring (2001) that even though computer mediated language occasionally is ungrammatical, it's only a small percentage

of those features which appear as errors caused by inattention or lack of knowledge of the standard form. Therefore for those few cases that transfer this habit it can be attributed to examination jitters that make render the student not attentive or rather the student knows the right lexical item but doesn't know the standard form of that word. This can also be attributed to poor foundations when the student was being introduced to the language or laxity in part of the teachers as pointed out by some of the respondents.

The poor performance of students would partially be attributed to influence from the language of texting however this is not among the major reasons. Its fact that some texting jargon can have its way to class work and eventually to work presented for marking in examinations. When this happens it is penalized therefore it would be one of the minor contributing factors to poor performance in English Language at KCSE level.

Communication competence in English depends on audience analysis at the same time linguistic competence of the communicator. At the level of doing KCSE examinations, students would have interacted with a lot of literature in Standard English. As a result of that, their linguistic competence in Standard English is expected to be better off than that of SMS language, considering also that those who perform well in Standard English are rewarded and those who perform poorly are encouraged to improve. Therefore it will be hard for one to be influenced with a language that one has lesser linguistic competence to a language that one has been exposed to for the last 13 years that one has been formally in pre-primary school, primary school and secondary school. This is line with Chomsky's assertion that linguistic competence is the mastery of an abstract system of rules, based on an innate language apparatus.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **5.0 Overview**

The chapter summarizes the findings of the study, presents theoretical conclusions and makes recommendations. The discussion presented is in line with the study objectives and the discussions presented in this chapter are based on the theoretical underpinnings of the study. From the conclusions the study contributes to the existing body of by advancing two theories of communication.

#### **5.1 General Summary**

The study investigated the contribution of SMS language on the poor performance of students in Standard English though interfering with their writing skills. The study is unique in that it sought to get the perspective of those who monitor students work and those that monitor their performance on how text messaging affects their writing. From the researcher's knowledge, no other studies sought to ascertain the opinion of teachers and quality and assurance officers on how text messaging affects the writing habits of students. Further to the claim by the Ministry of Education that students in 2013 performed dismally in English Language due to influence from the language of texting, no other person or organization has proved this either wrong or right by empirical research.

The results generally showed that though there was slight influence of performance in English Language from the language of texting, this was not among the major reasons that made students perform dismally. There are other issues that were not within the jurisdiction of this paper. Influence from SMS language is very small and it is exacerbated by the other issues which have not been addressed.

The results also proved that mobile telephony has accelerated issues innovativeness in students and the language has been adopted for communication amongst communicators. It proved Flower and Hoyes assertion that speech always occurs as a response of a

rhetorical situation and it demands a response and the response is normally generated following the imagination power of the audience.

This proves the findings of the study right that the style and substance of ones writing is a matter of context and normally varies from situation to situation. That is why Kiswahili as a language has not had an effect on the way that English language is learnt.

It therefore conforms and adds more muscle to Flower and Hayes cognitive theory which explains how multiple sources of knowledge are constrained to adhere to context and choose wisely from what they call long term memory. Students are able to choose wisely on which language they should use following the context. Choice of the language to use is determined by ones sense of the relation of the speaker, subject and audience.

Therefore when students are composing anything, they are guided by a distinctive thinking process which filters which type of language should be used in which set up. Students have the power to invent and when writing they are always conscious of the context which they are communicating and the choice of syntactic structures is guided by the context which they are communicating. Students are endowed with a number of mental dictionaries for example English, Kiswahili, Sheng, Vernacular language and language of SMS and their mind operates like that of a switch board operator.

When students communicate using SMS they choose their audience wisely and they have mental dictionaries and choose the best language to fit the audience that will consume the information. In examination situations the same replicates and from the findings that the researcher has presented, the researcher is convinced that Language of texting doesn't have an impact on the performance of students in Standard English.

## **5.2 Limitations of the Study**

There were general limitations indicative of correlational studies and limitations specific to this particular study. First, the study was limited in that it would not determine cause and effect. Although a relationship between the language of texting and Standard English

was established, the research failed to determine what were the underlying factors that triggered some students to be able to separate formal and informal writing situations and why some were not able to do so.

The study was limited in that it was hard to speak to students and get their views firsthand about what they thought of the study. This is due to ethical issues which have legal implications if the researcher was to speak to the students and it would have a major cost on time and money. However the views obtained belong to those entrusted to teach students and it was assumed that caretakers normally will know the issues faced by whatever they are taking care of. Two, the researcher had an opportunity to interview officials from the examining body as well as well as officials from the body that hires and takes care of teachers issues and whatever that they presented on the subject matter is representative of what the researcher would have obtained from the students themselves.

The research could not establish if the scores posed by students is a true reflection of their language ability. This is because in some cases examination jitters and a multitude of other factors, students with great communication competence perform poorly in examinations. Therefore using examination scores as the single measure of communication competence was defective. It would have been helpful if there were other ways of determining the students' language ability. However, because of the nature and constraints of the research, using examination scores was the best, though limited, option.

Another limitation is that it was carried in Westlands Sub County in Nairobi County which is an urban Centre with an assumption that students in urban settings had better access to mobile telephony as compared to their counterparts in rural areas. Therefore the results cannot be used for those who come from rural areas and access to mobile telephony is not the same. However, the sample reflected what triggered the research as the statement from the Ministry pointed out urban centers as more affected with the issue as compared to rural areas.



### **5.3 Conclusion**

Teenagers frequently engage in text messaging and the world has recognized this (Crystal, 2011). Texting at the moment is employed in doing so many things from payment of bills to the entertainment industry from the comfort of the seat of the texter. For example one can use texting to vote for a favourite show or personality in a field in the entertainment industry. One can also send a text message to order for food and have the same delivered to the door step, register for updates in news or sports through SMS. Further at the moment we have sports betting whereby participants normally place bets for their favourite teams and it has been an industry that most youths have received financial support through and at the same time it has disappointed some. The area of text messaging qualifies as an area of research because many people engage in the process of texting on a daily basis.

The study explored the relationship between language of texting and the poor grades scored by students in English language putting in context claims by policy makers that it was to blame for the poor performance posed by students. Through evaluation of documents as well as in-depth interviews substantive data was obtained. The data showed that there was trivial relationship that should not warrant for conclusions by policy makers that language of writing SMS has an impact on how students write their examinations. This resonates very well to sentiments by Coulthard (2011) that the concerns about the impacts of SMS language on communication through Standard English appear exaggerated and it's only a small part of it which uses a distinct orthography. Real reasons for the poor performance should be researched and better conclusions drawn. Generally, the study provided great insight and definitely pioneering in nature.

From the discussion presented above, there is no need to be worried about texting butchering the writing skills of students. The education sector should look for the real reason as to why students are not performing very well in the language. For those who inculcate SMS language in sports and even business should be encouraged so that Kenyan English also grows.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

This research involved the performance of students, but due to constraining legal reasons, the respondents were those who supervise their work. The researcher feels that the findings would have been validated if the students were given an opportunity to air their views and even some of their written work collected for documentation purposes. For those students whose work have traces of SMS language, sharing with them their experiences would have rendered this exercise more lively.

The study was carried on students that are doing KCSE who are normally between 17 and 22 years. There have been claims that language of texting improves literacy levels in pre-teenage (Plester & Bell, 2008). The reason they gave to justify their assertion is that children get exposure and get exercises on a number of grammars hence improving their literacy levels. A study should be carried locally to pre-teenage students and if the results are positive then inculcation of the language as a mode of instruction can be advocated for as pointed out by one of the respondents in the documents analyzed.

Now that there is digitization of education in Kenya and the government is rolling out a program for students to learn using tablets, there is need for the same government to advice if the tablets are likely to bring down the performance of English from where it is. Lexicographers need to accept and acknowledge the language that it's a language of variety. Since it has been adopted by some users of social sites, there is need to come up with a dictionary for the language.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix I: Interview schedule for teachers**

#### *Objective one*

**To assess the effects of SMS language on the spelling and punctuation habits in communication through Standard English.**

1. There have been debates that the language used for writing SMS has distinct orthography what is your take on that?
2. Following experience garnered in your career life, what are some of the features of this language, if you have had an opportunity to interrogate materials on the language of writing SMS?
3. Shortening of words is one feature of SMS language that has been prominently featured in articles analyzing SMS language. Do you think shortened words and phrases sometimes get the original spellings skipped from the mind of the student? Please give insights to your answer.
4. In your view, which other systems of Standard English are prone to ‘impact’ by overuse of SMS language (a part from the rules of orthography – this might include phrases and sentence construction).
5. What would be the impact of doing away with writing in short form of words and sentences to the writing skills of students in secondary schools in English?

#### *Objective two*

**To find out if students use SMS language in writing their KCSE English language examination?**

1. What are your thoughts about texting and writing skills of students’ in examination situations particularly in English Language as a subject
2. Students from secondary schools have been found to be heavy consumers of the language of SMS. In your view, following your work experience, do the texting habits have any impact on the development of writing skills of students in a second language such as English?

3. English has its own set of rules when it comes to sentence construction as well as language of texting. What are your thoughts of rules of sentence construction in language of texting impacting on the rules of sentence construction in Standard English?

***Objective three***

**To assess whether the poor performance of English language in KCSE is associated with the influence of SMS language.**

1. From your teaching experience what are some of the merits and demerits of students getting engaged in texting?
2. Professor Jacob Kaimenyi made the following statement when releasing 2013 KCSE results ‘the consistent use of electronic communication devices such as mobile phones and computers that have done away with the need to know how to construct sentences and spell words correctly due to spell checking and predictive text capabilities was to blame for the drop in KCSE English performance’ what is your take on the statement?
3. The statement was received with a lot of criticism from communication experts and some critics felt that if such influence existed then Kiswahili would have been the worst hit. What are your thoughts on that?
4. Is there anything you would want to add to this study about the ongoing debate of students performing dismally in languages as a result of overindulgence in SMS language?



## **Appendix II: Interview schedule for Quality Assurance Officers and Research & Quality Officers**

### ***Objective one***

**To assess the effects of SMS language on the spelling and punctuation habits in communication through Standard English.**

1. There have been debates about the language for writing SMS uses a different spellings structure that are neither English nor Swahili. What are your thoughts?
2. Shortening of words is one feature of SMS language that has been prominently featured in articles analyzing SMS language. Do you think shortened words and phrases sometimes get the original spellings skipped from the mind of the student? Please give insights to your answer.

### ***Objective two***

**To find out if students use SMS language in writing their KCSE English language examination?**

1. What are your thoughts about texting and writing skills of students' in examination situations particularly in English Language as a subject
2. Students from secondary schools have been found to be heavy consumers of the language of SMS. In your view, following your work experience, do the texting habits have any impact on the development of writing skills of students in a second language such as English?
3. Following your experience and interaction with different reports on the student performance and even research on the causes of poor performance in English, is there evidence of SMS language in students English Examination work?

*Objective three*

**To assess whether the poor performance of English language in KCSE is associated with the influence of SMS language.**

1. Your office normally conducts research on issues related to causes of poor performance in a certain subject in any particular year. English saw one of its worst performance in the year 2014, what are some of the issues that led to the poor grades posed by students?
2. Professor Jacob Kaimenyi made the following statement when releasing 2013 KCSE results ‘the consistent use of electronic communication devices such as mobile phones and computers that have done away with the need to know how to construct sentences and spell words correctly due to spell checking and predictive text capabilities was to blame for the drop in KCSE English performance’ what is your take on the statement?
3. The statement was received with a lot of criticism from communication experts and some critics felt that if such influence existed then Kiswahili would have been the worst hit. What are your thoughts on that?
4. Is there anything you would want to add to this study about the ongoing debate of students performing dismally in languages as a result of overindulgence in SMS language?

## Appendix III: Extracts of Media Reports

# Sheng not to blame for drop in KCSE English performance, scholars claim

By AUGUSTINE ODUOR | Published Sat, March 8th 2014 at 00:00, Updated March 8th 2014 at 12:45 GMT +3

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Education CS Prof Jacob Kaimenyi when he released the 2013 KCSE results. [PHOTO: STANDARD/FILE]  
By AUGUSTINE ODUOR



Education CS Prof Jacob Kaimenyi when he released the 2013 KCSE results. [PHOTO: STANDARD/FILE]  
By AUGUSTINE ODUOR

**NAIROBI, KENYA:** The use of 'Sheng' language may not be the main reason last year's form four candidates performed poorly in English subject after all.

Education stakeholders have differed with the ministry of education's claim that "sheng" is the cause of drop in English language performance by students in national examinations.

Regional education think tank Uwezo Kenya, Elimu Yetu Coalition and University of Nairobi lecturer have said reports by education cabinet secretary Jacob Kaimenyi on English performance may not be accurate.

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Uwezo Kenya's Country Coordinator, Dr John Mugo, said Kiswahili would have been affected more if that were the case.

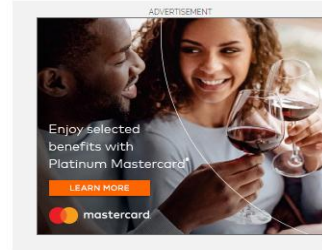
He said there are other factors that contribute to poor performance in the English subject that need to be interrogated.

Dr Mugo also ruled out assertion that the uses of computers that offer automatic spelling checks or mobile telephone short text messaging also contribute to dismal performance in English language.

Last year's KCSE results only Kiswahili, Biology, Physics, History & Government, CRE and Business Studies recorded major improvements.

English, Mathematics, Chemistry, Geography and Agriculture recorded a drop. Prof Kaimenyi attributed the drop to Sheng.

"... increased use of "Sheng" in our schools, the consistent use of electronic



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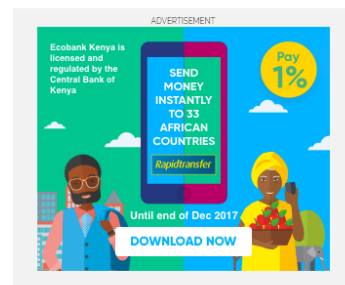
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Dr Oriaso observed that the term 'vernacular language' often used to describe local languages for instruction is a derogatory term borrowed from the west to depict local languages as primitive and subordinate to English language.

"Strict English teachers who demonise Sheng and other local languages are pessimists who do not recognize that English, Swahili and Sheng share history, hence the latter should be recognized when it is still early," he said.

He said the use of Sheng can never destroy the use of English because just like any other first language (Dholuo or Kikuyu) does not stop people from learning the second language.

"In any case, these second languages like Kiswahili, English, have some of their words borrowed to make the Sheng," he said.

Dr Oriaso and Mugo were responding to the ongoing debate surrounding the 1976 Gachathi report of the National Committee on Education Objectives and Policies.

The report recommended use of predominant language in a catchment area.

The report recommends use of the predominant language spoken in the catchment area of the schools for the first three years of primary education.

It further says that English as a subject should be introduced from standard one and be made to supersede the predominant local language as the medium of instruction in standard four.

Prof Kaimenyi on Monday reaffirmed recommendations of the report.

"Learning theories backed by research indicate that the use of local languages as a medium of instruction in the formative years offers many advantages because it ensures smooth transition from home to the school environment for first time school goers," said Kaimenyi.

On Thursday, EYC national director Janet Muthoni said fresh studies should be conducted to ascertain whether Sheng is a factor in diminishing performance in English.

#### Appendix IV: Document Analysis guide

<b>Text messaging jargon features</b>	<b>Spellings</b>	<b>Punctuation</b>	<b>Grammar</b>	<b>Presence of SMS Jargon in Writing</b>
Frequency				
Explanation				

**Appendix VI: CERTIFICATE OF FIELDWORK**



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This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2017 in respect of M.A/PhD. Project/Thesis Proposal defence have been effected to my/our satisfaction and the project can be allowed to proceed for fieldwork.

Reg. No: K50181296/2015

Name: FREDRICK OTDIEKI RATERIO

Title: THE EFFECTS OF SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE (SMS) COMMUNICATION

ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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SUPERVISOR

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

Dr Samuel Siringi  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

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Dr. Ndete Ndete  
DIRECTOR

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**APPENDIX V: CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTIONS**



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Name: RATATO OTHIEKI FREDRICK

Title: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE (SMS) OF  
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## Appendix VII: Turnitin Originality Report

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