

English Language as the Medium of Communication and Students' Academic Performance in Selected Universal Secondary Schools in Mayuge District

Kyemwa Hanifa¹; Nabukeera Madinah²; Matovu Musa³;
Ssali Muhammadi Bisaso⁴

¹Post Graduate Student, Department of Education Management and Administration,
Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda.

²Associate Professor, Dr., Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Management Studies, Islamic University in Uganda.

³Associate Professor, Dr., Department of Educational Psychology,
Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda.

⁴Senior Lecturer, Department of Education Management and Administration,
Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda.

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Abstract: The study objective was to examine the influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District. A cross-sectional survey design coupled with a quantitative approach was adopted. A sample of 50 teachers was considered selected from three universal secondary schools in Mayuge District. Descriptive analysis and simple linear regression analysis were adopted to answer study objectives. It was revealed that English language as a medium of communication has a positively strong significant influence on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District. It was concluded that English language as a medium of communication has a momentous influence on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District such that an enhancement in English language as a medium of communication would yield an advance in students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District. This survey recommends that school administrators should encourage the use of English language across the curriculum not just in English classes but across all subjects to build familiarity as well as use subject-specific vocabulary and reinforce it regularly in classroom activities as this would influence a development in students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

Keywords: *English Language as a Medium of Communication, Students' Academic Performance, and Universal Secondary Schools.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims at examining the influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

➤ Historical Perspective

Globally, during the colonial period, many countries were introduced to English as the language of administration,

education, and governance. In countries such as India, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, English became the primary language of instruction. As a result, students in these regions were expected to learn and perform academically in English, despite it not being their native language. This shift led to the dominance of English in scholarly communication, publications, and academic conferences, further influencing students' academic performance and career trajectories (Bernhofer & Tonin, 2022). In Africa, English was often not the first language of African students, and many students

struggled with learning academic content in a second language. This language barrier posed significant challenges, disturbing the speculative performance of students who were not proficient in English. The emphasis on English often led to gaps in understanding and cognitive overload, as students had to simultaneously learn complex academic subjects while grappling with a foreign language, which resultantly affected their academic performance (Hakorimana & Opiyo, 2023).

➤ *Theoretical Perspective*

This was guided by Language Proficiency Theory formulated by Cummins in 1979. This theory distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to everyday language used in social interactions, while CALP involves specialized language used in academic contexts. The theory suggests that acquiring CALP takes much longer than BICS and requires exposure to academic content in the language of instruction (Kandagor & Rotumoi, 2018). According to Bhatti and Alzahrani (2024) for learners which English is not their first language, it takes time to develop CALP. If students are not proficient in English, their ability to understand and perform in academic subjects is significantly compromised. The time it takes to acquire the language skills necessary for academic tasks can result in lower academic performance in the early stages of education. This theory provided a link on English language as a medium of communication and students' academic performance.

➤ *Contextual Perspective*

This was steered among selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District examining the influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance. This was selected due to lack of studies on English language as the medium of communication and students' academic performance. Additionally, Mayuge district was well-thought-out because of increased poor students' performance in academics among government secondary schools shown by a deterioration in student final exam grades, low achievement across subjects, among others (Mayuge District Local Government, 2022).

➤ *Conceptual Perspective*

English language as a medium of communication refers to use of English language as a primary tool for conveying information, ideas, and knowledge in various settings, particularly in educational, professional, and social contexts. In educational settings, it implies that English is a language used for instruction, and interaction in classrooms, whether it is a student's first language or a second language. By way of communication, English facilitates the exchange of ideas, discussion, and the transmission of academic content across different subjects and disciplines, and is often used in countries where it may not be the native language but is the official or dominant language of instruction (Robinson & Mpalanzi, 2023). Conversely, Students' academic performance denotes the quantifiable results of students' learning course, classically evaluated through marks, test scores, assignments, and overall achievements in their

academic studies (Bernhofer & Tonin, 2022). For the case of this study, English language as a medium of communication was conceptualized in terms of language for examination and assessment, language used in lesson delivery, language used to give orders and instructions, and language used for communication at school, while students' academic performance was conceptualized in terms of cognitive performance, grades and scores, topic mastery and expertise, academic retention, communication abilities, and classroom participation.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

In Uganda, several policies have been implemented over the years by the Ministry of Education and Sports to expand students' academic performance in relation to use of English as a medium of communication. These policies have sought to address the challenges modelled by the language barrier, where English is not the first language for many students, but they are required to learn in English. The goal of these policies has been to improve English language mastery, improve performance, and link the linguistic gap amid students' native languages and language of instruction. For instance, the Education Policy Review and Curriculum Reforms were introduced which aimed at making English as the medium of instruction, focusing more on improving language mastery, intended to enhance students' understanding and academic performance in schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018).

However, no matter the outstanding policies, students' academic performance in Mayuge District amongst government secondary schools is still unworthy pigeonholed by a fall in student final exam grades, low achievement across subjects, student increased absenteeism rates, and low involvement in class activities (Mayuge District Local Government, 2022). Evidence indicates a fall in students' performance in UCE examinations from 43.6% in 2019 to 38.9% in 2021 among students in first and second grades in Mayuge district amongst government secondary schools (Mayuge District Local Government, 2022). Subsequently, this has given rise to increased students' dropout unable to transition to next levels and also a deterioration in schools' reputation. Therefore, it's through this that the researcher examined the influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

➤ *Objective of Study*

The main objective of study was to examine the influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

➤ *Study Hypothesis*

- Ha1: English language as the medium of communication has a significant influence on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

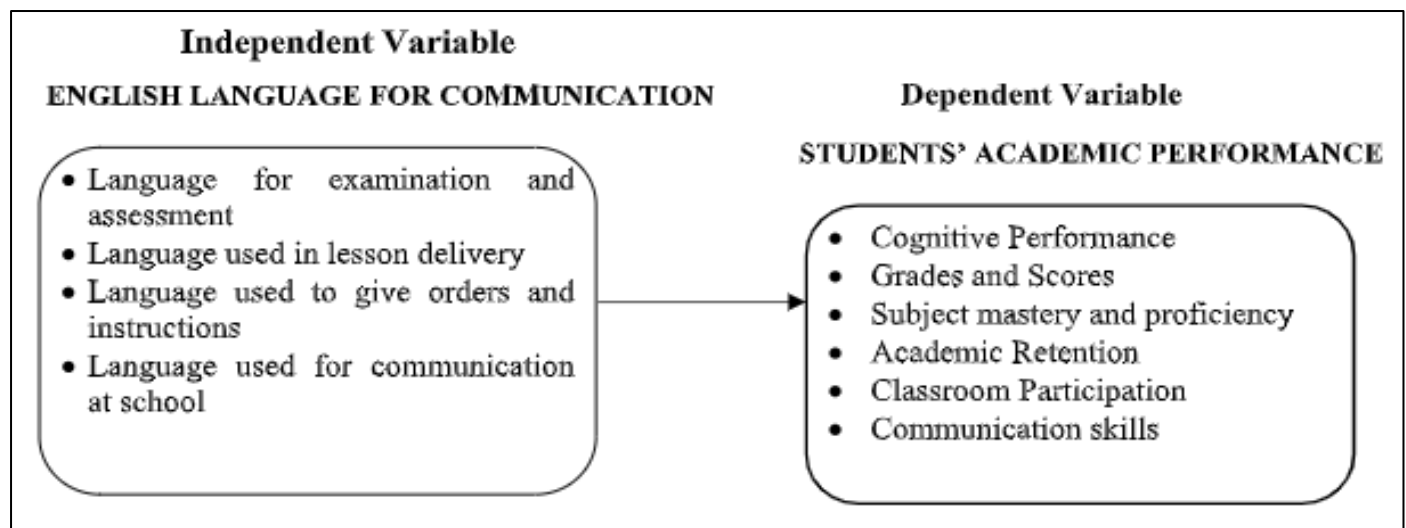
➤ *Conceptual Framework*

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

II. LITERATURE REVIEW➤ *English Language as a Medium of Communication and Students' Academic Performance*

The use of English as a medium of communication has a substantial influence on students' academic performance, with both positive and negative effects. While it can open doors to a wide array of knowledge and learning resources, it can also create barriers for students who are not conversant with the language (Bernhofer & Tonin, 2022). According to Robinson and Mpalandzi (2023) Proficiency in English allows students to access a vast amount of educational resources, research, and academic materials, which are often available in English. This access enhances their learning opportunities and academic performance. Conversely, the authors assert that for students who are not capable in English, using it as the primary language of instruction can add an additional cognitive load. Students have to simultaneously absorb the subject matter and understand the language, which can divide their focus and reduce their ability to comprehend the academic content, leading to lower performance (Robinson & Mpalandzi, 2023).

According to Hakorimana and Opiyo (2023) English being a global language, helps students develop better communication skills, which are vital for academic success. Effective communication allows students to express their thoughts clearly, participate in discussions, and collaborate in group work, which all contribute to higher academic achievement. The authors assert that however, students who are not fluent in English may struggle to fully understand lessons, instructions, and reading materials. This language barrier can lead to misunderstandings, difficulty completing assignments, and poor performance in exams, all of which negatively impact students' academic success (Hakorimana & Opiyo, 2023). Additionally, Tang (2023) argues that English as medium of instruction often leads to standardized assessment methods, which can offer a fairer and more uniform way of measuring students' academic abilities. This standardization can provide clearer expectations and better

opportunities for all students to perform equally in an academic setting.

Struggling with English in instruction can affect students' self-esteem and motivation. When students feel inadequate due to language difficulties, they may disengage from their studies, leading to reduced academic effort and consequently lower academic performance (Macaro, Rose, Sahan, Aizawa, Zhou & Wei, 2021). The authors also argue that for students whom English isn't their first language, the challenge of understanding academic content in English can lead to misunderstanding and confusion, which directly affects academic performance. English use as a mode of instruction can result in lower comprehension levels in subjects that require specialized vocabulary and complex explanations (Macaro et al., 2021).

English is the main language of academic publications, research, textbooks, and online educational resources. Proficiency in English gives students access to a broader range of information and resources that can significantly enhance their learning and academic performance (Yuksel, Adem, Mehmet & Samantha, 2023). The authors assert that a student who is proficient in English has the ability to access a wealth of online resources such as research papers, journals, and e-learning platforms like Coursera, or YouTube educational channels. This exposure to a wide array of learning materials can significantly improve their academic performance, as they can supplement what is taught in class with additional, high-quality resources (Yuksel et al., 2023).

According to Qiu and Fang (2019) English proficiency enhances students' ability to communicate their ideas clearly and engage with peers and teachers in academic discussions. Students who are fluent in English can better articulate their thoughts in writing and speaking, which plays a crucial role in academic success. The authors argued that in a classroom discussion, an English-proficient student may be able to engage actively by presenting ideas, asking questions, or debating points, contributing to their understanding of the

topic. In contrast, a student who struggles with English may feel reluctant to speak or participate, reducing their academic engagement and performance (Qiu & Fang, 2019).

According to Kinyaduka, Bryson and Joyce (2023) when students feel confident in their ability to engage English as a mode of instruction, their motivation to succeed academically increases. On the other hand, students who are not confident in their English skills may experience frustration, anxiety, or a lack of motivation to engage with academic content, leading to poorer performance. The authors argue that a student in a school might feel demotivated if they constantly struggle with understanding lesson content in English. The constant fear of making mistakes or not being able to participate in discussions may lead to disengagement, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance. Conversely, a student who is confident in their English skills will likely engage more in the learning process and achieve better academic results (Kinyaduka et al., 2023).

English is often the language in which students are assessed in many academic systems. Therefore, a student's proficiency in English directly impacts how well they perform on written exams, essays, and oral presentations. Poor English skills can result in students not being able to express their knowledge effectively, even if they understand the content well (Abdulkadir & Coskun, 2016). The authors assert that a student who understands a historical concept but cannot express their understanding clearly in English may struggle to perform well on an essay or written exam. In contrast, a student proficient in English can articulate their knowledge effectively and may score higher, despite having similar content knowledge (Abdulkadir & Coskun, 2016). Additionally, the authors postulate that English proficiency affects students' ability to interact with their peers and form academic or social networks. Strong social integration can contribute to a positive learning environment, while language barriers can result in isolation and disengagement from school life, ultimately affecting students' academic performance (Abdulkadir & Coskun, 2016).

According to Mutimukwe, Balter, Kann and Malmstrom (2023) English proficiency enables students to actively ask questions, and direct their understanding of the material. Active participation is often linked to better academic outcomes because it promotes deeper understanding and critical thinking. The authors argue that a student who struggles with English may be hesitant to participate in class, ask questions, or contribute to discussions, which can hinder their learning and reduce their academic performance. On the other hand, students who are flowing in English are most likely to engage actively in class and demonstrate better academic results (Mutimukwe et al., 2023).

III. METHODOLOGY

➤ Research Design

This survey adopted a cross-sectional research design with a quantitative approach. A cross-sectional research design concerns with assessing the prevalence of certain variables in a population at a given time period (Kassu, 2019).

Therefore, this was vital in examining the influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District at a given point in time.

➤ Target Population and Sample Size

A population is a group of entities with the characteristics of interest out of which a sample is selected (Majid, 2018). A study population included teachers from various selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District. The sample consisted of 50 teachers from three selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

➤ Sampling Procedure

This is defined as a systematic process of choosing a representative sample of individuals from a target population (Singh & Masuku, 2017). The survey employed simple random sampling to select respondents who participated in the study which constituted of teachers. This gives equal selection probability to every individual in a population into a sample (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

➤ Data Collection Methods

• Questionnaire Survey Method

This refers to a mode of obtaining info by a set of questions with the objective of gathering info from responders (Anokye, 2020). This method aided in generating uniform info to ensure comparability using structured questions that are easily understandable.

➤ Data Collection Instruments

• Structured Questionnaire

This refers to a tool utilized to gather info from responders comprising of closed-ended replies to questions that they are supposed to pick from (Kuphanga, 2024). These were utilized to collect data quantitative in nature from responders that constituted of closed-ended queries and encoded replies and these were administered to teachers.

➤ Data Analysis

This survey engaged both descriptive and linear regression analysis approaches in evaluating the data. Descriptive analysis was employed in investigating responders' demographics. Linear regression analysis was utilized to assess the influence of the predictor variable on the problem variable and to give empirical evidence on study hypotheses at a given level of significance. This was important in examining the association strength on outcome variable and predictor variable (Maulud & Abdulazeez, 2020).

➤ Ethical Consideration

The researcher acquired an introductory letter from Islamic University in Uganda before undertaking the study as a prerequisite to obtain permission to gather the required data for research in the different schools.

The researcher also asked for respondents' agreement to take part in the study and they were fully informed about the

purpose, procedures, and benefits and involvement was out of will without any intimidation.

The researcher ensured confidentiality through safeguarding personal information and ensuring that data is kept anonymous where possible.

IV. STUDY FINDINGS

➤ Findings on the Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The survey tried to assess the demographic characteristics of the respondents from selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District and results presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristics			
Category	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	23	46.0
	Male	27	54.0
	Total	50	100.0
Age Groups	25-30 years	9	18.0
	31-35 years	10	20.0
	36-40 years	12	24.0
	Above 40 years	19	38.0
	Total	50	100.0
Education Level	Diploma	4	8.0
	Degree	39	78.0
	Masters	7	14.0
	Total	50	100.0
Marital Status	Single	14	28.0
	Married	36	72.0
	Total	50	100.0
Duration of Work at the School	1-2 years	7	14.0
	3-5 years	10	20.0
	6-10 years	12	24.0
	Above 10 years	21	42.0
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results in Table 1 revealed that out of 50 respondents, majority 27 (54.0%) were males and 23 (46.0%) were females. The survey also revealed that 19 (38.0%) were above 40 years, 12 (24.0%) were 36-40 years, 10 (20.0%) were 31-35 years, and 9 (18.0%) were 25-30 years. The survey also revealed that out of 50 respondents, majority 39 (78.0%) had got a bachelors, 7 (14.0%) had got a masters, and 4 (8.0%) had got a diploma.

In addition, the research revealed that out of 50 respondents, majority 36 (72.0%) were married and 14 (28.0%) were single. The research also further revealed that out of 50 respondents, a bigger proportion 21 (42.0%) had worked for a duration of over 10 years with the respective schools, 12 (24.0%) had worked for a duration of 6-10 years

with the respective schools, 10 (20.0%) had worked for a duration of 3-5 years with the respective schools, and 7 (14.0%) had worked for a duration of 1-2 years with the respective schools.

➤ Findings about Study Objectives

Influence of English Language as the Medium of Communication on Students' Academic Performance in Selected Universal Secondary Schools in Mayuge District.

The influence of English language as the medium of communication on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District was addressed using regression analysis and results presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Regression Analysis on the Influence of English Language as the Medium of Communication on Students' Academic Performance in Selected Universal Secondary Schools in Mayuge District

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.553	.319		7.996
	English Language as the Medium of Communication	.370	.083	.541	4.456

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Academic Performance

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 2 revealed that English language as a medium of communication has a positively strong significant influence on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District ($\beta=0.541$, $P\text{-value}=0.000$) at 95% level of confidence. This indicate that a unit increase in English language as a medium of communication profoundly results in an upgrade in students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District by 54.1%. This implies that as English language as a medium of communication improves, it leads to an enhancement in students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

V. CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that English language as a medium of communication has a statistically profound influence on students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District such that an enhancement in English language as a medium of communication would lead to a development in students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends school administrators to encourage the use of English language across the curriculum not just in English classes but across all subjects to build familiarity as well as use subject-specific vocabulary and reinforce it regularly in classroom activities as this would influence an enhancement in students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

The researcher also recommends school administrators and teachers to offer intensive English language support programs, especially for students struggling with comprehension as well as include remedial and after-school language support where needed and this plays a crucial role in improving students' academic performance in selected universal secondary schools in Mayuge District.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear responder,

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to exit at any time.

Do you consent to partake in the research? I Do or I Don't

A. Please Tick which is Most Suitable

➤ *Section A: Responders' Demographics*

• *Gender*

1. Female ☐ 2. Male ☐

• *Age*

1. 25-30 years ☐ 2. 31-35 years ☐ 3. 36-40 years ☐ 4. Above 40 years ☐

• *Education*

1. Diploma ☐ 2. Degree ☐ 3. Masters ☐

• *Marital*

1. Single ☐ 2. Married ☐

• *Duration Worked*

1. 1-2 years ☐ 2. 3-5 years ☐ 3. 6-10 years ☐ 4. Above 10 years ☐

➤ *Section B: English Language as a Medium of Communication*

Using SD as Strongly Disagree, D as Disagree, NS as Not Sure, A as Agree, and SA as Strongly Agree.

• *Please Tick the Most Appropriate Response;*

No.	English Language as a Medium of Communication	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1.	English language is generally used for setting examination, tests, and assessment of students at the school					
2.	English language is proficiently used by teachers in lesson delivery at the school					
3.	English language is effectively used by teachers when conveying orders and instructions to students at the school					
4.	English language is efficiently used by students and teachers in interactive communication in classrooms and outside at the school					
5.	English language is profoundly used by students in classroom discussions and presentations at the school					

➤ *Section C: Academic Performance*

No.	Students' Academic Performance	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1.	There is an improvement in students' mastery and proficiency in specific academic subjects at the school					
2.	There is an improvement in the participation of students in classroom activities and group discussions at the school					
3.	There is an improvement in the students' grades and examination/test scores at the school					
4.	There is an increase in students' completion of assignments and tasks at the school					
5.	There is an improvement in student cognitive performance and communication skills at the school					