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COHESION AND COHERENCE IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' WRITTEN WORK IN CHUKA DIVISION, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the adherence to cohesion and coherence as an aspect of textuality in high school students' written work. The study investigated the students' written texts to establish the extent to which they conformed to cohesion and coherence as a requirement to be fulfilled for a written text to be considered as communicative. Coherence is a network of relations, which organizes and creates a text. This network is of surface relations, which link words and expressions to other words and expressions in a text. This aspect is achieved when many different factors are brought together to make every paragraph, sentence, and phrase give meaning to a text. Communication is paramount in any written text. For dissemination of information to take place, the meaning of the writer must be clear and complete. Coherence is a channel through which this objective can be achieved. Coherence in writing is much more difficult to sustain than coherent speech. This is because when one is writing, there is no room for paralinguistic features to enhance message clarity. Therefore, patterns of coherence should be explicit and carefully planned. Cohesion on the other hand refers to the ways in which texts and sentences are linked or connected by various linguistic and semantic ties. Use of cohesion in writing ensures that the elements in a sentence fit perfectly together to form a united and complete communication instance. It is a semantic concept that is achieved when the understanding of a section in the text is reliant on that of another. The study further examined the structure of the students' written texts to find out whether they applied these two aspects as they indulged in writing exercises. Experimental research design was used. Thus there was an experimental and a control group. These two were subjected to pre-test and post-test. The experimental class was exposed to the aspects of cohesion and coherence and thereafter the two groups did a post-test. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. It established the effects that the use of these two aspects had on the performance of the students in writing.

Key words: Performance, Competence, Written discourse, Acquisition, Textuality, Cohesion (Cs), Coherence (Cc), Pedagogy in writing, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

English is the most widely spoken language world over (Bennett, 1974). The language is largely used in Europe, the North American Continent, Australia, Central Asia, including the Indian Sub-Continent, and in many countries of Africa. This language has the third largest number of speakers in the world; after Mandarin- Chinese and Spanish. About four hundred million people speak it as a first language and nearly the same number use it as a second language. Kenya like many other countries in the world uses English as the official language. This expansive use of the English language was a motivation in writing this text. Coherence is as a result of many different factors, that are brought together to make every paragraph, sentence, and phrase to give the meaning of a text. Coherence in writing is much more difficult to sustain than coherent speech because when one is writing, there is no room for paralinguistic features to enhance message clarity. But during speech the speaker has the use of gestures at their disposal. They can also employ facial expressions to aid in clarifying the message. General body movement and language can be used during utterances. On the other hand, when writing, the limitation is that the reader is not present during the text development. Therefore, patterns of coherence should be explicit and carefully planned, (Kies, 1995).

In cohesion, the writer should strive to use pronouns well, in-between words and phrases, joining sentences using the former, revision of paragraphs, recurrence of main arguments and structures (Clark, 2006). The writer should strive to use pronouns, connecting words and phrases well. Joining sentences using linking words and phrases, revision of paragraphs, recurrence of main arguments and structures help in making communication clear. It is a semantic concept that is got when the understanding of some section in the text is reliant on that of another. Cohesion refers to the ways in which texts and sentences are linked or connected by various linguistic and semantic ties (Kennedy, 1998).

In secondary school education in Kenya, English is a compulsory subject. It has been given this prominence because it influences many areas of life. Thus, considerable resource should be used fully in order to ensure that any written text in English is well organized. It is important to produce individuals who are competent in their performance in the written discourse. The English language that is taught in secondary schools is used to facilitate communication in school and in life after school (MOEST, 2005). As a result of this prominent use of the English language, there is need have some standards be adhered to. These standards include cohesion and coherence.

When these are not present, there is a gap in communication. Such a shortcoming is a motivation to carry out a research on the use of cohesion and coherence as standards of textuality as advanced by De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). Arguably, these standards are key to effective communication. Indeed, a text with all the standards of textuality is said to have proper communication. On the other hand, all the aspects are key to communication and if any aspect is missing, there is usually a communication breakdown (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981).

Azabdaftari (1981) compiled studies that looked at qualitative verses quantitative approach to the teaching of English composition. These studies further aroused the interest in carrying out this study. He (Azabdaftari) raises the question of whether students' problems in communication should be attributed to the quantity or the quality of their compositions. Proponents of the qualitative approach of teaching English composition writing insist that quality should be placed before quantity (Gurrey, in Azabdaftari, 1981). But Rivers (1964) treats the issue of learning communication skills not as one of either or, but as a communication of both 'quality' and 'quantity'. The argument is that merely increasing the number of assignments will not improve the quality of writing. Instead, a rather systematic approach in teaching writing should be applied. Thus, in order that a composition is judged to be good, the writer should adhere to the use of cohesion and coherence.

Research Objective

The display of aspects of cohesion and coherence in the textual organization of the written works by students in Chuka Division.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohesion

This is the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations that provide links between various parts of a text. It is the grammatical unity of text. Cohesion deals with surface text. In a text, cohesion provides continuity at grammatical level. Moreover cohesion is seen as a non- structural semantic relation. Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue that the suprasentential (the level above the sentence) patterning of language is an important aspect of grammar. They therefore advance the notion of cohesion in text and define it as development ability in writing. Cohesion and register contribute to textuality. (McCarthy and McArthur, 1992). In reference to cohesion one looks at the following indicators:

Recurrence: This refers to something happening again and again particularly, the repeated words in the same text. Further, there is partial recurrence, which is the repetition of words but within different word classes.

Parallelism: This is another item in cohesion. It is the state of being similar. It deals with the tenses and the way they are used.

Paraphrase: This is a further indicator of cohesion. This expresses what somebody has said, or written using different words so that they could be understood easily. Paraphrase also uses certain surface formats with different expressions, to minimize repetition (Tas, 2008).

Synonyms; these are words with the same or nearly the same meaning as others in the same language.

Cohesion is also marked by grammatical and semantic features that determine the level of coherence achieved in a text (Thiga, 1997).

Coherence

The use of related words and utterances is what makes a text coherent. It is the continuity of senses in a text. Coherence deals with the underlying text. It also deals with conceptual relations, which underlie the surface text (Tas, 2008). It is concerned with the way stretches of language are connected to each other. Stretches of language are connected by virtue of conceptual or meaning dependencies as perceived by language users. Coherence as an aspect of textuality deals with; concept, decomposition, spreading activation, use of global patterns, procedural attachment, discovery and control centers. In a coherent piece of writing, there should be causality, reason, purpose, time and enablement in the text. This aims to relate sentences to each other in a meaningful way. Thus, when a reader reads a coherent text they find a meaningfully united set of expressions in that particular text (Tas, 2008).

Paragraph Concord

Coherence is the product of paragraph unity and sentence cohesion. To achieve paragraph harmony, a writer must ensure that it has a single overview that serves as the emphasis of attention, that is, a topic sentence. It should also depict control of the content of every other sentence in the paragraph. It needs to comprise more specific information than the topic sentence. Paragraph unity strives to maintain the focus of attention on the topic sentence. This broad view about paragraph structure is right for the essay in particular. The other way of achieving coherence is the use of sentence *cohesion*. This is achieved by linking one sentence to the next, through the following linguistic feature: repetition, synonymy, antonymy, pro-forms, connection, details, parallelism, shifts, individuality, disagreement, addition, cause and effect, indefinites, concession and exemplification,(Kies, 1995). Cohesion is the use of the cohesive devices mentioned to direct readers and show how the parts of a text relate to one other.

Writing

Writing is an art. It involves various skills which a learner has to master if they are to produce quality writing. Good writing begins with a captivating title (Mifflin, 1990). Such a title catches the interest of the reader and makes them yearn for more. It becomes a motivating force for the reader to want to find out

what happens next. The writer ought to have chosen their topic carefully. Mifflin (1990) further says that before the actual writing begins, the writer should explore their topic. Good writing is natural and organized. It is a process that has an introduction, a body and then a conclusion (Day and McMahan, 1980; Glatthorn et al, 1971; McDougal, 1989). Good writers are broad-minded. It is therefore important that when a student writes, they should make themselves clear. For a text to communicate clearly, it should have cohesion and coherence. The student should give people reason to help them see that what they (student) are writing is reasonable (Day and McMahan, 1980).

The teaching of writing skills is a major component in the Kenyan secondary school curriculum (KIE, 2007). This importance is enhanced by the fact that most examinations are answered in writing. Indeed most of the assignments done at school are in written form. Moreover, writing skills go further than the school, even after graduating from school; a person still needs to write. The Kenyan system of education aims at producing school leavers equipped with the basics for life (MOE, 1992). Good writing skill is one of these requirements. It is important that students are able to handle all types of writing. The skills of writing are complex and they can be grouped into three main areas: grammatical skills, stylistic skills and judgment skills (Heaton, 1975). The process of writing involves a sequence of time and action, which should be easy to follow. But Nyarige (2002) suggests that the problems that students experience in writing are related to unfamiliarity with the language organization, use of punctuation, paragraph structure, cohesive devices, vocabulary and form. She further argues that teachers of English contribute to these difficulties by focusing on vocabulary and grammar at the expense of other aspects of writing such as organization and use of cohesive devices, yet the latter are very crucial in writing.

Students' writing also needs vocabulary. If, for example, in driving one keeps referring to "the round thing in front of the dashboard", instead of a "steering wheel" one cannot communicate well (McDougal, 1989). Proper vocabulary contributes greatly to understanding of a text. Cahill, Hemphill, and Radford (1969) state that the approach to written work has two basic ideas: language teaching which involves the development of skills, and learning to speak which comes before learning to read and write. This paper was interested in the latter - learning to read and write. Consequently, if the learners are exposed to the forms of cohesion and coherence early, they improve in their communication skills. But if the undesirable habits are addressed early, and the students exposed to the aspects of textuality such as cohesion and coherence in their writing, it can be expected, justifiably, that the students would write better texts as time goes by (Nyamasyo, 1994).

To be competent in a language, one does not just speak. A person needs to write the language. Whiteley (1974) believes that because of diversity in many aspects of language, there is need to use a standard form of analyzing students' performance in written text. But there are people who believe that in form one and two, 'free' composition should be encouraged because 'controlled' work does not get the children anywhere (Cahill et al, 1969).

There are still others who feel that strict control for a period of time should be used to start with (Azabdaftari, 1981). Still, others say that the most appropriate thing would be to draw a line between the two extremes (Rivers, 1964). The pupils should be given adequate practice in writing. In the study, the pre-test, a narrative writing, was termed as 'free' composition. Students had freedom to stretch their imagination. The posttest was a story based on a proverb. It had an aspect of 'free' composition because it was an imaginative composition. Besides, it was also controlled because it was, limitedly, based on a particular proverb.

Writing demands the production of grammatically correct sentences, creativity and originality. It provides the writer with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize language materials using their own words and ideas to communicate (Heaton, 1975). Students in the study were expected to display their originality and use of their imagination to express their ideas. The ability to write well is essential for success in any academic discipline. Composition writing skills train the learner to think critically, creatively

and to respond to situations in an organized manner. The learner was further expected to practice in many exercises in English composition writing to develop their ability to write. Holden (1964) says that one's present ability, conscious study and constant practices, using the methods and guidance, should improve performance in composition writing. It was expected that the findings of the proposed study would show that those students that were exposed to standards of textuality such as coherence, and were engaged in constant practice of composition would necessarily perform better than the students who were not exposed to the same. What is written must be done well because it is permanent. Ragan (1966) believes that the written word is important in influencing the social behaviour of people, improving human relations in living and working together. Therefore, there is need to produce school leavers who go out into the world with the basics of communication, where writing takes priority.

If anything, there is demand for people with the ability to write plainly, clearly and correctly. Therefore composition writing which aims at training and testing people for practical purposes (Holden, 1964) should be given the attention it deserves. The paper also aimed to find out whether the students in the study knew the different formats of written compositions. It is argued that students should be encouraged to write freely about experiences in daily living (Ragan, 1966). Creative writing emphasized along with the formal procedures for developing language skills includes certain aspects of textuality, which were used to judge the two compositions of the students in this study. Thiga (1997) observes that the field of writing has developed tremendously and writing is no longer restricted to the study of syntax.

Other factors have been investigated with regard to writing and the findings have made the field of writing development especially in language two learning become advanced (Marthew, 1983). Peters (1986) as quoted in Nyarige (2002) investigated the correlation between the success of students' writing as judged by a teacher and the balance among ideational, interpersonal and textual macro functions in it. Students who receive low grades make dominant use of either interpersonal or textual verbal strategies in the first task while in the second; few students seem to make salient use of textual devices. In the third task, more students make significant use of textual strategies than in the second assignment. Significant use of textual features at all levels appears but do not correlate with better writing.

A composition as a short piece of non-fictional writing done as a school or college exercise. This definition is not clear. The term "short" is relative. A 300-word essay may be short for one person whereas it could be very long for another person. For the purpose of this research, the standard size of a composition was 400 words, which for form two students, was long and not short. Longman Dictionary defines a composition as "an old fashioned short piece of writing about a particular subject that is done, especially at school." This definition is, arguably, even more limiting than the one found in the Advanced Learners Dictionary. In addition to mentioning the contentious terminology, "short", the Longman Dictionary also defines a composition as an old fashioned piece of writing. It is not clear whether the "old fashioned" refers to the art of composition writing, which has been there for ages, or the content, which in this case should be found in the stories that begin with, "Long, long ago..." At school, functional and creative writing is taught. A student may therefore find it confusing if they were to be guided by the dictionary definitions referred to, above.

In composition writing, words must be organized well to give the intended meaning. Holden (1964) says that writing a composition is putting together a number of words in order to convey a meaning, while Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E.) (2006) defines composition writing as an advanced language skill that requires the learner to communicate ideas effectively. The Kenya National Examinations Council (1992) looks at a composition as a continuous piece of writing developed in a logical sequence. Accordingly, the Council has designed the composition section of English exam to test the candidates' ability to express ideas and opinions (K.N.E.C., 2007). This paper looked at a composition as organized text writing aimed at communicating an idea or ideas in a systematic way.

Cohesion and Coherence as Standards

These two aspects of writing are necessary in any written text. It is common to see people using cohesion and coherence interchangeably, both discussing some source of wholeness or a relationship that is syntactic and etymological. Cohesion is therefore a textual quality, achieved through application of grammatical and lexical features that allow readers to distinguish semantic connections within and between sentences. Coherence on the other hand refers to the overall consistency of a text. This refers to its purpose, voice, content, style, form, and is determined by readers' observations of texts, based on language and contextual information in the texts. It is also got from the ability of a reader to draw upon other kinds of information, for instance, cultural and intertextual knowledge, (Weiser,1996). A communicative text must have coherence and cohesion. Coherence is the kind of 'holding together' that a good design will give any discourse. This can be both in written and spoken form. Cohesion is the result of giving readers the right kind of explicit assistance; it gives readers the clues for discovering coherence, (Booth and Gregory, 1987).

English is a language whose uses students and others have to learn for effective communication. Masterly of thinking skills is a prerequisite to good writing. In writing there is creative and critical thinking. Creativity involves the ability to rearrange ideas in new and different ways. Critical thinking involves examining new ideas and deciding on whether they have merit. In critical thinking there are tasks involved. These include: judgment, evolution, analysis, classification and synthesis of ideas. Another aspect of writing that is rarely taken into account is the variety of registers (Cahill et al, 1969). Due to the many aspects of written language that count in a good piece of writing, there is need for a set standard along which writing could be evaluated. A writer must know the rubrics and conventions of all writing.

Peter (1994:1) observes, “The techniques of the art of writing are many and diverse”. He argues that the urge and need to write is in itself inevitable. Of late, writing has become part and parcel of human existence. This is a major aspect of communication. Students are all the time involved in different types of writing of texts. For this reason, writing is an indispensable means of communications (Ong’ondo, 2001). He further says that most exams are answered in writing and, most times, in English. Indeed, in Kenya, all exams are written in English except exams that test proficiency in other languages such as Kiswahili or French. This also includes assignments and term papers. Writing skills go further than the school. There is need to have school leavers who are armed with the ability to write aptly and suitably. There is great need to adhere to the standards of textuality in all writing. The standards encompass most of what is needed to write a text well. Several research endeavours in the past hold a similar view; Witte and Faigley (1981), in an examination of the relationship between patterns of cohesiveness and quality of writing, report a significant relationship between the two indices.

The study looked at all the other aspects of text production including cohesion and coherence. Crowhurst (1987) and Yde and Spoelder (1985) found a developmental trend in the cohesive patterning of third and sixth grade children. On the other hand Onditi (1994) argues that learners do better in oral than in written tasks and also better in reception than in production tasks. However, it the contention of this study that the written text is by far more important than the oral as far as communication is concerned. According to Jafarpur (1991) and Scinto (1986) there are quantitative and qualitative changes in children’s ability to produce narrative and expository texts as measured by the indices of cohesion and compactness. It is further argued that evaluating compositions by cohesive elements was more meaningful with the essays of more proficient examinees. Nevertheless, this paper was interested in the application of the cohesion and coherence as standards of textuality by the form two students on whatever magnitude.

Theoretical Framework

Every research problem is said to be conceived within a specific theoretical framework (Peter, 1994: 212). This study was quantitative and informed by Beaugrande and Dressler’s Theory of Text Linguistics.

De Beaugrande and Dressler’s Theory of Text Linguistics

The theory of text linguistics proposes that a text should be viewed as a system; a set of elements functioning together. The argument goes further; Whereas a language is a virtual system of available options not yet in use, a text is an actual system in which options have been taken from their repertoires and utilized in a particular structure (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981: 315). For a text to be viewed as complete, it should have the seven standards of textuality. These include: cohesion, coherence, informativity, intertextuality, situationality, acceptability and intentionality. The students' texts (compositions) were marked against the use of cohesion and coherence. De Beaugrande and Dressler studied the past rhetorics and thought that rhetorics shared several concerns with the type of text linguistics that they were developing. The following assumptions were observed:

- a) The accessing and arranging of ideas is open to systematic control.
- b) The transition between ideas and expressions can be subjected to conscious training.
- c) Among the texts which express a given configuration of ideas, some are of higher quality than others.
- d) Judgement of texts can be made in terms of their effects upon their audiences or receivers.
- e) Texts are vehicles of purposeful interaction. Thus De Beaugrande and Dressler set the seven standards of textuality which are relational in character. The standards as earlier mentioned included cohesion and coherence.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data was analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. To begin with, it was necessary to establish that the research was reliable by subjecting the students' results to the Pearson's Product formula for test – retest to compute the correlation coefficient. Orodho (2004) says that a correlation coefficient of about 0.8 is high enough to judge the instrument as reliable for the study. The following two tables show a summary of the usage of cohesion and coherence in the pretest and posttest.

Table 1: The Pretest Results of the Three Schools; (A), (B) and (C)

Experimental				Control			
	A %	B %	C %		A %	B %	C %
Cs	96	90	94	Cs	96	82	73
Cc	84	46	84	Cc	94	63	85

Source: The Researcher

Table 2: The Posttest Results of the Three Schools

Experimental				Control			
	A %	B %	C %		A %	B %	C %
Cs	100	73	88	Cs	96	76	70
Cc	84	63	84	Cc	79	74	75

Source: The Researcher

Coherence

Coherence was the next most preferred aspect of textuality by the students. It was used by 77% of them. Some students used 'long time ago...' and 'Once upon a time...' These are aspects of global and classical patterns, which fall under coherence. Other examples include; 'Lastly they ended...'; '... the boy was punished and suspended because of bad habits.'; 'He married and they lived a life of joy with his wife because the neighbours were united with him...'; 'People in the village started complaining because of his behaviour'. The use of 'because' in the last sentence gives the link to the reason for the complaints.

Some students use present instead of past tense. They use: 'build' for 'built', 'come' for 'came', request for 'requested', 'want' for 'wanted', 'look' for 'looked'. Incorrect use of continuous forms is also common. For example; '... it was containing' is used for '... it contained'. The use of the past tense form 'have' instead of the past perfect form 'had' and the use of the present tense 'would buy' instead of present perfect 'would have bought' was also evident. Such errors are common in the compositions of form two students.

The students also misuse tenses, prepositions and have construction errors in their sentences. Further, within the division of the study many students have difficulty in pronouncing certain words. They say 'mboy,' for boy and 'ngirl' for girl. These affect their writing.

Cohesion

Cohesion was the most popularly used aspect. In the three schools, 94% of the students used it in the pretest and 88% used it in the posttest in the experimental group. In the control class, 85% of the students in the pretest used cohesion while 82% used the same aspect of textuality in the posttest. As discussed in chapter two, cohesion is a network of relations, which organises and creates a text. This network is of surface relations, which link words and expressions to other words and expressions in a text. Cohesion looks at among other things: recurrence, parallelism, paraphrase and synonyms. Evidence of the usage of cohesion by the students includes the following examples extracted from the students' compositions. One student wrote; 'There was a rich man called Gitonga; a very wealthy person.' The words 'rich' and 'wealthy' are synonyms. The words used mean the same thing. Synonyms fall under cohesion.

In the above example, the student showed lexical cohesion. In another composition, a student wrote, '...people lived to help each other....' Help was replaced with 'assistance' in a later statement which read; 'John was good hearted and helped his people whenever they went to him for assistance.' Under cohesion, there is conjunction. Students used this aptly in their writing. One wrote, 'She was poor *and* old.' Another student had; '...the boy was punished *and* suspended...because of bad habits.' Another one wrote; '...became sick and people got so worried...,' 'Baraka was boastful and proud not only to the villagers alone but also to...'. The use of 'not only... but also...' in the last statement is conjunction of addition, which was well used. Contrajunction is another item of cohesion that was evident in the students writing. For instance a student wrote; 'She was very poor *but* she ...this woman, *although* she was poor...' in these statements 'But' and 'although' bring out contrast. Such contrast was further displayed by a student who wrote '... despite all his wealth, no one...'

Tense falls under parallelism, which is an item of cohesion. In the following part of a sentence, parallelism was evident; 'He would start running after you...' Here the student has used the present continuous tense appropriately. In 'When he came...they knew when to show him their true colours...he decided not to...', the use of simple past tense implies parallelism. The students also used proforms in their writing. Examples of these were seen in the following illustrations; 'This old man was called Jeki...', 'This man was called Baraka. He had an only son, whose name was Mwambo.' The proform is cataphora. Proform is a sub item of cohesion. There are two types of proform, these are anaphora and cataphora. In the latter the explanation is given before the mention of a person or idea. The names Jeki, Baraka and Mwambo are referred to first and mentioned later. Recurrence too comes under cohesion and students were able to use this item well. For example, in the sentences; 'the goods... were hoarded. His goods...', recurrence was seen as the student went back to the same word 'goods.'

FINDINGS

This research found out that:

- (i) The students' texts were influenced by cohesion and coherence.
- (ii) There were other factors that affected performance of a student in composition writing. These were: Spelling, brevity and legibility, overgeneralization, wordiness, repetitiveness, joining words, separating words, use of double subjects, confusion of homophones and mixing gender.
- (iii) Most students used cohesion as an aspect of textuality effectively.
- (iv) There was some positive change in the marks in composition writing after the students in the experimental class were exposed to the standards of textuality. The control class also recorded some positive index between the pretest and posttest in some instances.

DEDUCTIONS FROM THE RESULTS

The students had varied results. There were students in the control class that exhibited improved performance even though they were not exposed to the standards. On the other hand, some students in the experimental class who were exposed to the standards registered a drop in the second exam, contrary to expectations. There were those students in the experimental class who recorded no improvement. Nevertheless, all the classes depicted some knowledge and application of the standards of textuality to varying levels.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use and the impact cohesion and coherence on the performance of high school students in writing exercises. Evidently, the students that were exposed to these two aspects of textuality had some change between the two tests that were given out during the study. On the other hand similar changes were also evident in the control class, though they were not exposed to the said standards. The study also found out that cohesion was the most commonly used aspect of textuality by the students. It was used by 87% of them. The other aspect was Coherence that was applied by 77% of the students. There are other aspects of textuality that are key to communication. There is need to focus on cohesion and coherence when teaching.

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