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Graffiti Writing: Its Likely Influence on English Language Learning in Selected Secondary Schools in Laikipia East District, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Graffiti takes the form of written language whose authorship always remains anonymous. It precisely refers to any wall writing, pictures and symbols or markings of any kind on any surface anywhere no matter what motivates the writer. Most graffiti are viewed as illegal or vandalism of property by those in authority. Secondary school students use graffiti as a form of communication when they feel other channels to express themselves, have been blocked by those in authority. The study aimed at identifying the communicative strategies employed in graffiti writing and the influence of graffiti on learning of English language and classroom learning environment in our schools. Graffiti texts were collected in ten secondary schools purposively sampled in the Larger Laikipia East District in Laikipia County. Out of one thousand graffiti texts collected, two hundred were randomly sampled for analysis. Twenty English teachers were purposively sampled to take part in an interview. One hundred students were randomly sampled to fill in questionnaires. A Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was carried out with another group of five students randomly sampled across the classes in each school. The data collected from this exercise were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to arrive at inferences and conclusions. The study used a sociolinguistic approach to the study of graffiti. The study was guided by General System Theory. The findings of the study were that students used varied communicative strategies like humour, symbolism, irony, short forms, acronyms and abbreviations in their graffiti writings. It was also established that teachers expressed varied opinions that graffiti influenced learning of English language and classroom learning environment in secondary schools. The findings of this research may contribute to the study of sociolinguistics in general and communication in schools in particular. It has been established that students use graffiti to communicate a lot of information that would be beneficial to the head teachers, quality assurance officers, students' counsellors, policy makers and other stakeholders. Classroom teachers may also use graffiti to establish the unspoken students problems and behaviour and thus prevent entropy of the school system.

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Introduction

Graffiti (singular, graffito) are writings or drawings scribbled, scratched or sprayed on a wall or a public space. Graffiti are any type of public markings or written words that appear on walls of buildings. Graffiti have existed since ancient times, with examples dating back to ancient Greece and Roman Empire. In the modern era graffiti have been used as a mode to pass socio-political messages in an artistic form. Its growth into urban culture has been fuelled by the evolution of hip-hop and other urban cultures. Though celebrated by many, graffiti is a constant point of disagreement between the artists and law enforcement officers. Elsewhere in the world, graffiti have been used to pass radical political and social change messages. For instance, during the Arab Spring, Egyptian graffiti artists played a huge role in expressing the mood of the country through their caricature of former president Hosni Mubarak.

In most countries, defacing property with graffiti without the property owner's consent is considered vandalism and is punishable by law. Most times graffiti is employed as a medium of communication to communicate social, economic and political messages in society. The study of graffiti in secondary schools could help to establish the strategies students use to

communicate among themselves and with the administration. There are a lot of writings on the walls of most schools and there could be reasons why the students opt to write instead of communicating verbally. Graffiti in secondary schools could also help to explain some behaviour manifested by the students as they try to express their needs, wishes and grievances.

The study of graffiti in schools could also help to explain the influence of graffiti written in classrooms have on learning environment. Students could have unique ways that they use to summarize what teachers teach their classrooms in graffiti. Graffiti written by students in classrooms that depicts violence and use vulgar language could give a negative impression to the teachers about that particular class. This could affect teaching as the teacher would not feel safe and would have a very low opinion on the class. This may most probably affect his/her content delivery.

The population of secondary schools is made up of adolescents who crave for self-identity. They are people who are teenagers and rebellious to any form of system that is put in place for them to follow. To avoid falling victims to the system if they complained, they resort to writing graffiti to express their discontent with the system. They feel they have been oppressed

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and avenues for expressing their opinions blocked. The Larger Laikipia East District is in Laikipia County and is a semi-arid region. It is classified as an ASAL region. Due to this reason students undergo various hardships both at home and in schools which could be explained by the graffiti they write.

In most secondary schools in this region there had been persistent writing of graffiti on the walls of classrooms, toilets, libraries, dormitories and laboratories. Students sometimes used various coded and complex graffiti to communicate among themselves and understanding these codes could help to understand what transpires amongst them and also help in understanding them. The problems expressed through graffiti if not addressed could have an effect on learning in schools.

Graffiti is treated as a challenge to authority especially in contexts where one group exerts pressure or control on the other. Graffiti is also viewed as a form of informal communication that marginalized, oppressed or neglected groups resort to express their discontent, needs and grievances to those in authority.

This usually happens after they feel other channels of communication have been blocked or they are not involved in decision making on issues that affect them. People will always look for alternative ways of expressing their opinions on matters affecting them especially when they feel oppressed. They may write graffiti using pens, chalk, human faeces, can sprays or even blood. There has been existence of graffiti in churches, hospitals, prisons, schools and even in institutions of higher learning.

According to Nwoye (1993), wall writings and drawings have been used for a long time by various groups of people in the society who in one way or another feel oppressed. Such groups of people who are prohibited from, or denied avenues of public space for expression seek other avenues and often graffiti on the walls of public places becomes a favoured option. Nwoye (1993) points out that student population in most parts of the world is one such group that feels it does not enjoy the privilege of public self-expression.

Many students opposing the school system may not come out openly but may express their anger in graffiti for fear of the consequences. In writing graffiti students may use codes that are uniquely understood by the writer and the targeted audience. (Ferrell 1993) claims that Graffiti can naturally be viewed as a contemporary type of expressive opposition to authority; though each graffiti contains a complex message of its own, there is the simple implicit assumption that every graffiti opposes authority.

According to Rothman (2002) adolescence is the stage of growth and development that most of the secondary schools students are in, and is mostly a time of resistance to authority. In their effort to express their wishes the students are generally misunderstood and dismissed. The adults dominate the scene and the adolescents feel oppressed when they lack chances to express their opinion.

This brings discontent to the adolescents who try to look for other ways to make themselves be heard. Phillips (1999) claims that graffiti is viewed traditionally as the product of people who have little representation within the traditional mass media. This is also supported by Nwoye (1993) who says that graffiti is perceived as sheer expression of youthful exuberance, a manifestation of vandalism. Most students use their energies to make sure that they are heard through the use of graffiti because of hidden identity of the graffiti author.

Purpose and objectives of the Study

The study leaned on sociolinguistic approach to the study of graffiti whose purpose was to investigate and analyze writing of graffiti and how it influences Learning of English language in

secondary schools in the Larger Laikipia East District in Laikipia County.

The study was guided by the following objectives.

- a) To identify the graffiti communicative strategies used by students.
- b) To speculate on how graffiti is likely to affect learning of English language and classroom learning environment.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research question:

- a) What specific communicative strategies are employed in graffiti writing?
- b) What is the likely influence of graffiti on learning of English language and classroom learning environment?

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the General System Theory as the theoretical framework. General Systems Theory (GST hereafter) was originally proposed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1950's. According to Ayot & Patel (1987), a system could be broken down into its individual components so that each component could be analyzed as an independent entity, and the components could be added in a linear fashion to describe the totality of the system.

The premise of the GST is to fully understand the operations of an entity; it must be viewed as a system. A system is defined as a number of interdependent parts functioning as a whole for some purpose. In case of our graffiti study, the school as a whole was viewed as a system which has resources, teachers, workers and students. According to Ayot & Patel (1987), schools are essentially living systems and that without people they are nothing but concrete and paper. As living systems, they are in constant process of interaction with their communities and other institutions in them.

The school system can be viewed as a living and dynamic organization and for it to function properly there must be communication among the interacting elements who are the students, teachers, parents and the administration. It is this reason that makes it important for graffiti writings written by students be decoded and understood so as to create harmony in the system and avoid entropy of the system.

A perspective informed by GST embraces the uncertainty of predicting behaviour and recognizes that behaviour is always determined by multiple influences. In light of graffiti writing by students in schools, it could be caused by multiple factors that could be indicators of appraisal or decay in the system. Relationships between students and teachers are systems and are in turn part of larger systems (classrooms).

This perspective was helpful in understanding how graffiti writing as a channel of communication could have an effect on classroom learning environment if both the teachers and students did not understand each other's' needs. The GST also operates on the premise that components or elements that make up a system are closely interdependent and actions or conditions that affect any one element will affect all others within the system (Powers, Hoffman, 1996).

If the students messages communicated in graffiti are not interpreted and addressed then no matter what environment is provided in school for learning still the expected outcome will not be realized.

The above framework shows the independent variables in this case the normal or ordinary communication strategies used by school administrators and teachers while dealing with issues that affect the students. These variables were communication strategies like letters, posters, verbal, and suggestion boxes that

are legitimate avenues presented to the students for communicating with the school management.

The Conceptual Framework

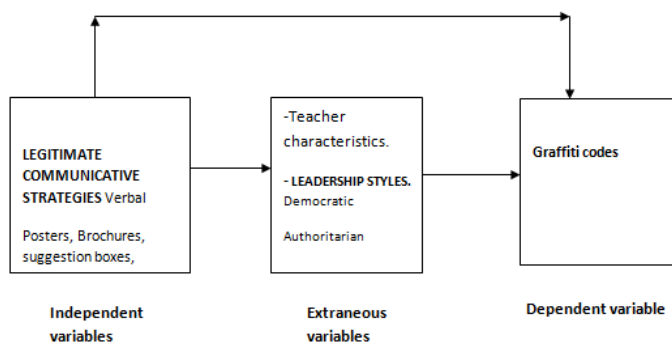


Figure 1. The Diagrammatic Representation of the Relationship Between the independent, extraneous and dependent variables of the Study derived from GST

These independent variables were investigated to establish whether they cause students to communicate using graffiti. The dependent variable was the graffiti codes written in various areas by the students for communication purposes. Extraneous variables included: teacher characteristics, leadership styles (democratic, authoritarian) and Counselling services offered in the school.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory survey research design. Surveys are used systematically to gather factual information necessary for decision making. They are an efficient method of collecting descriptive data regarding the characteristics of the population and the current practices, conditions and needs. Any study that deals with how people feel or how they behave is considered a survey study. It is one type of descriptive research in which researchers commonly use questionnaires and interviews to gather information of some phenomena. It allows for generalization (Sherman et al, 1988). A descriptive research using both quantitative and qualitative data analyses was adopted in this study. This is because qualitative research helps the educational researcher to obtain in-depth data on the study problem. Qualitative research enables one to study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Human behavior is also explained best using this approach (Mugenda & Mugenda 1999).

Target Population

The target population for this research was the graffiti texts, students and teachers in all secondary schools in The Larger Laikipia East District. This is the population to which a researcher wanted to generalize the results of the study. The total target population was about ten thousand eight hundred secondary students.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Ten secondary schools were purposively sampled from across the four divisions namely Lamuria, Central, Daiga and Mukogodo division. The research specifically targeted ten schools that had experienced unrests, go-slows or other forms of students' disturbances both internally and externally in the last three years. The sample size was 150 out of 3931 secondary school students in the district.

Sample of Respondents

A major assumption of the study was that students are the authors of the graffiti and that they and their teachers constituted the larger number of consumers of graffiti. Consequently,

teachers were identified by the researcher so as to assist in randomly sampling ten students in each of the schools that was visited. The ten students in each of the ten schools sampled were used to fill in the questionnaires and assisted the researcher in interpretation of graffiti writings in their individual school after collection of the graffiti texts by the researcher. The researcher collected one hundred graffiti texts in each school and randomly sampled twenty which was 20% of the graffiti collected. Another five students were randomly sampled in each of the ten school sampled to be involved in a focus group discussion on graffiti in their school with the researcher acting as the facilitator. Twenty English language teachers in ten schools were also purposively sampled to take part in an interview because they had the knowledge on English second language teaching and learning and thus could give opinions on how graffiti writing influenced teaching and learning in their schools.

Sampling Graffiti Texts

Though the actual graffiti writers are not known, students were assumed to be the authors as graffiti were found in places where they reside or frequent most of the time in school. As such the students were in a better position to give first-hand information about what they communicate in graffiti and the reasons behind it. The researcher collected the graffiti texts from different locations and entered them in a graffiti collection guide prepared by the researcher. The student assisted the researcher in graffiti interpretation and decoding the messages contained in the graffiti writings. From these graffiti texts collected the researcher sorted out and randomly selected 20% of graffiti texts collected in each school for analysis. Care was taken to ensure that tagging, scribbles, symbols and drawings were written down or photographed in their original form. Writing the data was to help in preserving it for later coding and analysis.

The data elicited from graffiti text assisted the researcher to establish the types of graffiti and messages students communicated through writing of graffiti. This data also assisted the researcher to identify the graffiti communicative strategies or codes used by students and gender differences in graffiti writing. A camera was used to record graffiti which the researcher found a bit challenging to sketch due to the nature of their location. So in total two hundred graffiti texts were analyzed for the purpose of this study. The texts sampled were treated as being representative of graffiti texts in the whole Laikipia County..

Research Instruments

In this section, the tools used for the collection of data are analyzed and the data elicited by each instrument discussed.

Questionnaires for Students

A questionnaire is a tool that gathers data over a large sample. It enables the researcher to preserve respondents' anonymity and also make it possible to elicit their responses. It also saves time and allows greater uniformity in the way questions are asked and thus greater compatibility in the responses (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The researcher with the assistance of teachers briefed the one hundred sampled students to ease tension before administering questionnaires.

The questionnaires administered to students attempted to gather data on the type of graffiti they wrote in order to communicate and their views on how the administration responded to graffiti writing. Data elicited from these students questionnaires helped to estimate the extent of graffiti writing in these schools and motives for writing the graffiti texts. The data elicited by this research instrument also helped the researcher to get insights on the nature of problems and needs the students were facing in schools.

School Administrators' Interview Guides

Reliability of the information gathered is high when a researcher uses interview guides to collect data since they provide in-depth information about particular cases of interest to the researcher and data collected is quantifiable (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Interview guides were mainly used to counter-check the information collected through questionnaires and FGDs. Head teachers were interviewed by the researcher individually to assess the opinion of the school administration on the role of graffiti writing in schools. Data elicited from these interviews helped the researcher to assess the role played by graffiti as a form of communication and whether the administrators viewed graffiti by students as a positive or negative undertaking.

Interview Schedule for Teachers

Two language teachers in each school were purposively sampled so as to participate in an interview with the researcher. The questions posed to English language teachers during the interview were meant to establish whether graffiti writing in schools had any influence English language in schools. The interview with the English language teachers was also expected to elicit data on whether graffiti writing by students had an influence on classroom learning environment.

Respondents for Focus Group Discussion

The researcher carried out a Focus Group Discussion after randomly sampling five students across the forms and because each form had unique characteristics. All the students were interviewed collectively. The purpose of keeping the number of discussant small was to ensure that all members participated actively in the discussion. After reading through the graffiti texts collected, permission was sought from the students and the school heads to record the students assuring them that the recording was purposely for research only. The interview was more like a guided discussion among participating members with the researcher acting as the facilitator. Focus Group Discussion is best suited for obtaining data on group attitudes and perceptions (Mwiria & Wamahiu 1995). Focused Group Discussion is used to assess needs, develop interventions, test new ideas or programmes as it produces a lot of information quickly (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

Graffiti Texts

The discussion was based on the graffiti texts collected in each school. This instrument was used so as to confirm the information the researcher had gotten from graffiti texts in each school. The purpose for tape recording the FGD was to enable the researcher to replay the tape later during data analysis to confirm opinions of the students.

Piloting of the Study Instruments

The researcher wrote a letter to the principal of a mixed day secondary school in a neighbouring district requesting permission to be allowed to carry out piloting in the school. This school was not used in the actual study. A mixed day secondary school was used for pilot study because in it graffiti content written by both boys and girls could be gathered with ease. After permission was granted and a day agreed upon, the researcher visited the school and developed rapport with students and teachers. The researcher then administered questionnaires to the students and teachers. An interview was also carried out with the school principal. Graffiti texts were collected in areas frequented by students. The data collected were preserved in their original form. According to Coolican (1994), there is a significant need for a researcher to carry out a pilot study before the actual field work so as to discover the flaws in research instrument and hence permit their necessary refinement.

Determining the Validity of the Instruments

Validity is the accuracy, meaningfulness of inferences, which are based on the research results. It is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represent the phenomenon under study (Mugenda & Mugenda 1999). Validity also means that the findings are based on research evidence that does not fluctuate (Niemann et al 2002). The adapted instruments were modified to answer the set objectives of the study. The instruments were validated by four experts in education research from Faculty of Education, Kenyatta University, to assess the content, construct and face validity. Their comments were incorporated into the instruments before being taken to the field. This showed that the items in the instruments were precise and comprehensive enough to provide to the anticipated type of data and also determined that the research objective was achieved.

Determining the Reliability of the Instruments

According to Day (2003), the more reliable a text is, the more confidence we can have that scores obtained from the administration of the test are essentially the same scores that would be obtained if the test were re-administered. Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials. Reliability of research instruments was carried out before use.

The main statistical measure to determine reliability of one of the gathering tools, the questionnaire, was the use of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach alpha coefficient was used because the items in the research instruments were not dichotomous. The researcher with the help of an expert made an SPSS generated Cronbach alpha coefficient calculation for all sections of the questionnaires for students used to collect data in this study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient average for the students' questionnaire was 0.87 since 0.7 and higher indicates an acceptable reliability coefficient, (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Mugenda & Mugenda 1999).

Results and Discussion

Graffiti Communicative Strategies used by Students

This section deals with the communicative strategies used by the graffiti authors in secondary schools to pass their messages across.

Humour

This communicative strategy was used by students in graffiti writing to elicit laughter. Some students just wanted to make fun and make others laugh.

Warning

Lack of sex leads to

Blurred vision.

The above graffiti was collected from the laboratory of a boys' secondary school. Though it is a misconception, the writer is aware that what he stated was not true but wanted to make fun that if one failed to engage in sex he would have blurred vision.

We mend broken love.

Pliz try us

NEVER

The writer of this graffiti above that was collected from a mixed secondary school claimed that he/she was able to reconcile two lovers whose love has gone sour. The writer wanted to be humorous that he/she did the work of repairing broken relationships yet it may be something the writer may not have been able to do. It brings out the issue of students intimate relationships especially in mixed schools. The word "NEVER" written by a different writer in capital letters appears to emphasize what the first writer had claimed to able to do was impossible.

Symbolism

Symbolism is also a communicative strategy that graffiti writer use to communicate their message. Symbols are used to express deep concepts and ideas by graffiti writers.



The sketch or drawing of a heart is generally used to symbolize love the first writer uses the drawing to declare his love for Nimo which is the short form for a kikuyu girl's name (Wairimu). The second writer understands what the symbol means and below it scribbles "me Christine" meaning he loves Christine.

Irony

Grffiti writers in schools also use irony to communicate their messages five STAR HOTEL. This graffiti was found on the wall of a dining hall in a girls' school. The writer ironically tried to contrast the food that was being served in the school dining to those that were served in a five star hotel.

156. White house

This graffiti was written on the wall of a dormitory that was somehow neglected for along time without paint and the floor was bad shape. The writer tried to contrast this dormitory with the white house that housed the sitting president of the United States of America. In this case the writer appeared to complain to the school administration to improve the condition of this dormitory.

Imagery

Grffiti writers also used imagery to pass their messages by comparing what they communicate with known images. Mostly students appeared to use metaphors to communicate their thoughts

WELCOME TO HELL 2W

MONO ni ngui (Kikuyu language meaning: A mono is a dog) In the graffiti: "WELCOME TO HELL 2W" found on a wall in a class in a mixed secondary school likened class 2W to hell due to noise making that originated from that class. The last one MONO ni ngui (mono is a dog) was an insult towards form ones, the writer likened the form ones to a dog which eats dirt and could be bitten at will. This out rightly showed that students in upper classes hated form ones and this hatred sometimes led to their molestation.

Taboo words

Students used taboo words to communicate in graffiti. Taboo words are words that have restrictions in their usage and as such they are not supposed to be used in public. These are words that refer to sexual organs or actions. They could simply pass as obscenities.

During night preps I read and erect like hell.

Please advice!

Fuck your bukz

This graffiti was found in a toilet in a boys' school. It was written by two writers one seeking advice concerning a problem he was having during night preps. The second writer advises the other to fuck his books. The word, *fuck* which refers to a sexual act is a taboo word. The graffiti takes the form of conversation or dialogue.

Matejo NI kihii (matejo is uncircumcised lad)

Matejo is the nickname given to the deputy principal of a boys' school because of his long hair. The writer claims that he is uncircumcised. This word *kihii* is a Kikuyu derogatory word for an uncircumcised lad and is a taboo word especially when it

is directed to an adult. In most cases deputy principals are fully responsible for disciplining students and this could be the reason why the student had probably been punished by him had decided to hit back by insulting him.

Short forms, Acronyms and Abbreviations

Students also use short forms, acronyms and abbreviations as a communicative strategy in graffiti writing. These short forms, acronyms and abbreviations are used in graffiti writing because the graffiti writers are in a hurry to communicate for fear of being noted.

Enjoy luv Hear! love base -use luv instead of love

Aspire 2B morrows' Ocampo—use 2B instead of to be

Am proud of my virginity

Who asked U?

What a mile!

I HATE ALL FORM 3

Why?

Coz of their things – used coz instead of because.

VOTE POISON 4 DH—used 4 DH instead of Dining Hall.

Clipping

Clipping of words is also a form of short form used by students in writing of graffiti. This term refers to words that are shortened with no loss in their original semantic value. However, clippings give a colloquial or familiar flavour to one's speech, something that appeared common with graffiti written by students.

SUE is a hoe that can never say no.

This graffiti was found in a toilet in a mixed secondary school. There is some form of clipping as the writer had intended to write the word whore which pronounced almost the same as the hoe. (Ho) hoe has lost the initial w and the vowel /o/ is realized as [ow].

CHEM my subject

The above graffiti was found on a desk top in class in a boys' secondary school. The graffiti writer declares his love for chemistry which could be his favourite subject. The word chem is a clipping of the word chemistry because -istry which is the second part of the word is left out. This form of writing was common with graffiti writing by students.

Acronyms

These formations are made up of the initial letter or letters of successive terms. Acronyms abound in English since speakers of that language are fond of their use. The graffiti below acronym FBI was found in the library in a girls' secondary school and it appears to encourage students to be focused in their studies so that they can achieve more than they can imagine.

Focus

Beyond

Imagination

Don't

Eat

And

Rest

Graffito acronym DEAR was found in class in a boys' school written to encourage students to eat and work hard in their studies.

Abbreviation

Students also wrote graffiti in form of abbreviations. These abbreviations appeared in the form of symbols, letters, and pictures which represented whole words. Pictures and numerals as representations for words were also observable in graffiti writing by students.

I ♥ NIMO

The shape of the heart in the graffiti found above symbolizes love. The graffiti was found in a class in a mixed secondary school. It was a declaration of love one had for Nimo. Appreciate what u have & what u are made of. BY D.T

The above was collected from a wall of a library in a mixed boarding secondary school. The symbol & has been used instead of 'and' and it is one of the peculiarities of graffiti writing used by students.

These short forms, acronyms and abbreviations are indication of the limited time the writers have to communicate and secrecy involved in graffiti writing for fear of being punished. The students applied the above communication strategies to communicate their thoughts.

Speculation on influence of Graffiti on the Learning of English Language in Schools

Several ways were identified in which graffiti was noted to influenced teaching and learning of English in schools. To be precise 12 out of 20 (60%) of the teachers interviewed indicated that learning of English in schools was influenced by graffiti writing. Though there could be other causes of poor English mastery in class like use of Sheng (colloquial) and SMS texting, graffiti writing was said to be one of the causes.

Most of the responses from the teachers of English showed that they concurred that influence of graffiti writing was evident in composition writing. Most of grammatical mistakes written in graffiti in classes were reflected in composition writing. For example,

enjoy luv Hear! love base.
The words luv should have been written as love and hear should be here. This clearly shows that some students confuse the homophones hear and here.
lyfe ni hard (life is hard)
continue with the struggle
Hold it tight (because it is full of obstacles)
Is full of obstacles

This graffiti writer has a misspelt word lyfe instead of life. This is a common peculiarity in graffiti writing styles (sociolinguistic mode of communication) where letters are deliberately omitted, interchanged or mixed (small and capital letters) in order to attract the attention of the graffiti readers. This over use of graffiti writing styles through deliberate or erroneous omission of letters in words was reflected in writing of composition as errors according to 12 out of 20 (60%) of the English teacher respondents..

Students also wrote graffiti in Sheng (colloquial) that affect their composition writing and language mastery. About 10 out of 20 (50%) of respondents agreed that graffiti affected composition writing.

Tusome tuwe sonko (lets us learn we become rich). Sonko is the sheng word referring being rich. Use of words written in sheng was a common feature in composition writing.

Graffiti writing has also influence on learning of English language in that students' weaknesses in spelling and usage of words are revealed.

About 10 out of 20 (50%) of the teacher respondents were of the opinion that students level of mastery of language spelling vocabulary and sentence construction could be established through observation and analysis of graffiti written in their schools. The graffiti that follows collected from a class in a boys' school is an example of such graffiti.

Danger Trudgedy

Memo 24th octomber sato strike. (The word October is misspelt – caused by inter-language influences)

The graffiti above was picked from a class in a mixed secondary school. Through this graffiti students' mother tongue interference could be easily noted through misspelling of the word October by adding bilabial nasal /m/ before bilabial plosive /b/ sound.

“DISPLINE THE GREAT WEAPON”

PLAY UNTIL SOME THING HAPPENS

by 607

There are errors of omission in the words: DISPLINE and UNTILL. There is also confusion in the use of homophones in English amongst students that is also captured in Graffiti writing.

I HAVE A RITE TO WALK NAKED.

The correct word should be RIGHT and not RITE though they are homophones. Mother tongue interference was also captured in Graffiti writing which affected the learning and teaching of English in schools. This mostly happened in spoken and written English in school.

IDLE mind is THE DEVILS WORKERSHOP.

The word workshop is misspelt through addition of -er to form a compound noun workshop. Use of short forms and ampersands (&) appeared common in graffiti and that this affected writing in English compositions. The grammar is mostly affected when students resort to use of short forms in composition writing.

TRUST IN JEHOVAH & U WILL BE A WINNER.

Appreciate what U have and what u are made of BY DJ

U is used instead of you and & instead of and.

During preps I read and erect like hell

Please adduce!

Fuck your BUKZ

The word BUKZ is used instead of BOOK.

Students' weaknesses in pronunciation of English in words are also captured in graffiti. Take for example:

Mavocabulary (Plural of “vocabulary” suffixed with “Ma-”)

Chow (Show)

Nyama shoma (Kiswahili for “Nyama choma” – roast meat)

Cugar chame on u (Shame on you)

Fiching (Fishing)

The above graffiti was collected from the laboratory in girls' secondary school. The writer appeared to make fun of some students or even teachers with difficulties in pronunciation of /s/, /sh/ and /ch/ sound.

Some student pronounce the words, CHOW INSTEAD OF SHOW, CUGAR INSTEAD OF SUGAR, FICHING INSTEAD OF FISHING, NYAMA SHOMA INSTEAD OF NYAMA CHOMA,(ROAST MEAT),CHAME ON U INSTEAD OF SHAME ON YOU.

Once these students are mocked on the word and their weaknesses exposed they shy away from speaking English in school.

It has been found that graffiti writing in school by students has both positive negative effects on learning of English language in school. The figure below shows the extent of negative influence of graffiti on learning English in secondary school.

From above pie chart 12 out of 20 (60%) of the English teacher respondents interviewed agreed that graffiti influence learning of English language while 8 out 20 (40%) of the respondents disagreed that graffiti writing in schools had any effect on learning of English in schools. About 7 out of 20 (35%) of the English teachers interviewed confirmed that some graffiti text affected classroom learning environment.

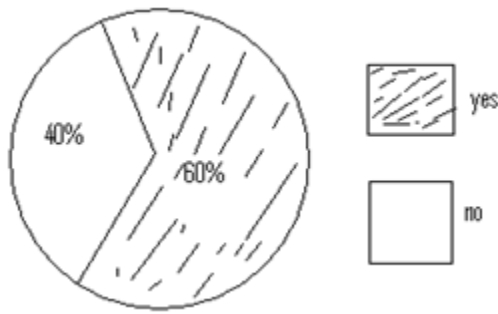


Figure 2. Influence of graffiti on learning of English language in Schools

Only 1 out of 20 (5%) of the respondents were of the opinion that graffiti did not affect classroom learning environment at all. About 12 out of 20 (60%) of the English teacher respondents did not respond to the question. Of those English teacher respondents who were of opinion that graffiti writing affected classroom learning environment, about 4 out of 7 (57%) of them said that graffiti writing affected classroom learning environment both positively and negatively. Most English teacher respondents were of the opinion that positive graffiti on wall like those that encouraged other student to work harder reinforced learning.

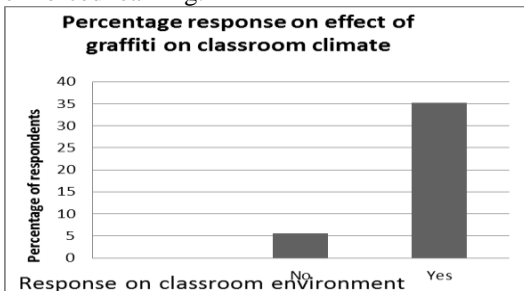
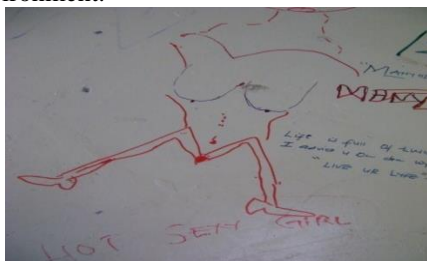


Figure 3. Effect of graffiti on classroom climate

The graffiti below are examples of graffiti that were said to have positive effect on classroom learning environment. These graffiti were 15 out of 200 (7.5%) graffiti sampled for the study.

REJOICE comes after suffering

The above graffiti REJOICE comes after suffering was picked from a class in a girls' secondary school and it served as a reminder to students in this particular class to concentrate in their studies so that they can rejoice once they succeed in their academics. There was general consensus among English teacher respondents that the presence of graffiti writing in the classroom written in vulgar language created an atmosphere of an indisciplined class and this affected the morale of teachers hence delivery of content. Most of the teacher respondents were of the opinion that graffiti referring to sex, drugs, hate, conflict and insults had a negative influence on classroom learning environment. The graffiti below was collected from a form two class in a mixed secondary school. 2 out of 2 (100%) of English teachers interviewed in this school cited this graffiti as one of the types of graffiti writing that irritated them and made them have very low opinion about the class thus affecting classroom learning environment.



The above graffiti were found in classes in mixed secondary schools and they contained obscene drawings and writing.

The graffiti below were also found in classes and according to 16 of 20 (80%) of English teacher respondents agreed had a negative effect on classroom learning environment. Apart from giving the classes negative publicity and impression they also reflected cases of sexual harassment and bullying in these classes.

You mono you are HOT SEXY GIRL
 For more information contact 0752311626
 Sex usually succeed at night
 MONO ni Ngui (Form ones are dogs)



2010 MONO WAFALA (Form ones are fools)

The graffiti below were found in a class in a mixed secondary school. The first graffiti WELCOME TO HELL 2W metaphorically refers to a class 2W as hell due to the noise, chaos and trouble that originate from that class. This out rightly shows that the said class could be problematic. This assertion is reinforced by graffiti GANJA (Cannabis Sativa) FOR SURVIVAL that suggests that cases of drug abuse could be rampant in the same class. The use of the word SURVIVAL is an indication that use of bhang could be continuous.

WELCOME TO HELL 2W
 GANJA FOR SURVIVAL

Discussion of the Results

Communicative Strategies used by Students in Graffiti Writing This study also sought to establish the communicative strategies used by students in graffiti writing. The study found humour, symbolism, irony imagery, short forms, acronyms and abbreviations as strategies used by students to communicate their feelings about themselves and the outside world. It was noted that some graffiti messages were written in these codes or in a cryptic manner and that they had to be read keenly to be understood. Students used these strategies to communicate messages on celebrities, food, drugs, television programmes, emerging issues, political philosophies, religion, sports, dissatisfaction with the authority, territorial markings sex, slogans and general comment.

Graffiti written by students is rich in information and depicts thoughts and feelings which may express group as well as individual identity. Alonso (1998) sums up this important role of graffiti. He asserts that graffiti analysis can serve as an excellent tool in understanding behavior, attitudes and social processes of certain segments of society.

Speculation on how Graffiti is likely to Influence the use of English Language in the Classroom and classroom environment The findings of the study were that graffiti texts influenced the learning of English language and classroom learning environment. It was established that graffiti writing affected the writing of compositions and also helped to identify students' weaknesses with regard to language use like pronunciation of words.

Table 1. Sampling grid

Zone	Schools	Sampled Secondary Schools	No of teachers	Sampled no of teachers	Total no of students	Sample students	Collected Graffiti per school	Sampled Graffiti
Lamuria	7	1.Ngobit	28	2	400	10	100	20
		2.Wiyumiririe	18	2	340	10	100	20
		3.St.Augustine	24	2	280	10	100	20
Central	11	1.Thingithu	23	2	386	10	100	20
		2.Inoro	34	2	642	10	100	20
		3.Nanyuki	42	2	578	10	100	20
Daiga	6	1.Ngenia	21	2	311	10	100	20
		2.St.Loise	19	2	341	10	100	20
Mukogodo	3	1.St.Francis	25	2	322	10	100	20
		2.Doldol	23	2	327	10	100	20
TOTALS	27	10	247	20	3921	100	1000	200

Influence of graffiti writing that was captured in composition writing was rampant errors of omission and commission, mistakes in the use of homophones, use of ampersands, short forms, abbreviations and mistakes in the use of possessives and contractions. Poor mastery of pronunciation of words was also reflected in the nature of graffiti writings that students wrote. The study also found that the presence of graffiti writing in the classroom written in vulgar language created an atmosphere of indiscipline in class and this was likely to affect the morale of teachers hence delivery of content.

This study attempted to speculate on the how graffiti writing was likely to affect learning of English language in the classroom. Graffiti studies done earlier, found graffiti to be a useful tool in the study of comprehensions and novels. The study dealt on application of graffiti text coding in classroom learning. According to (Buehl 2004), Graffiti Text coding involves highlighting or marking a spot in a paragraph and then jotting a symbol in the margin to indicate the kind of thinking that was elicited at that point of reading. It focused on thinking such as making connections to background knowledge and experiences, posing questions, identifying confusions, making inferences, determining importance, and summing up key ideas.

(Buehl 2004) found that graffiti text coding enabled students to become accustomed to listening to their inner dialogue about a text as they read and this made the students become involved in summarizing material in their own words thus helping them to remember as well as understand. Though both researchers went different ways in looking at the application of graffiti writing in learning of English language, there is no doubt that graffiti can be an important participatory strategy for enhancing learning.

Conclusions

The study revealed that students used varied communicative strategies in their graffiti writings. Further, it can be concluded that graffiti influenced learning of English language in secondary schools in terms of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and insertions. Mother-tongue interference and interlanguage issues heavily influenced students' spelling; evidenced seemingly in their over-reliance on their local language (Kikuyu) for out-of-class communication.

The major findings of this study indicate that learners write graffiti using various coded messages to communicate among themselves and with the school administration. This shows that they possess and display what Cummins (2000) calls, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). It would be prudent for the school administrators to take keen interest and try to decode this messages and address issues raised to avoid entropy of their school systems. English language teachers and

curriculum developers should also recognize graffiti written in the classrooms as an indicator of language competencies among students with regard to writing and as such teachers should use graffiti to identify learners' weaknesses and fallacies in language use. There is also a great sense of creativity seen in the authors of these materials – if the same energy spent in creating in this clandestine manner could also be spent in creative composition writing! What this means is that school needs to open up to the young minds and give them a free atmosphere of self-expression – in spoken and in written language.

Recommendations

- Issues raised by students in graffiti to do with hatred, conflict and dissatisfaction with the school administration be addressed to avoid strikes or unrests in schools.
- The English teachers should identify students' weaknesses in language use through observation and analysis of graffiti writings in their schools.
- It is important that the socio-linguistic implications of students' communication through graffiti be understood in order for schools to identify some of the determiners of secondary school students' language learning.

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