



English Language Attitude as a Predictor of Reading Comprehension Performance Among Form Two Students in Serowe Sub Region Botswana

Violet Mmoloke

Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education, Botswana

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension has been an issue of concern worldwide as most students around the world cannot comprehend texts. This poor reading comprehension has been reflected in the students' academic outcomes, an issue that is worrying. The current study therefore aimed at finding out whether English language attitude is related to reading comprehension performance. The study utilized Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory to explain Language attitude. Correlational design was used in the study. The target population was 1350 form two students. A sample of 230 students was chosen from seven junior secondary schools from Serowe Sub region in Botswana. The study utilized purposive sampling technique to select Serowe sub region and simple random sampling techniques to select the seven schools from Serowe sub-region. Lastly, it made use of stratified sampling to select boys and girls and ensure equal representation. The students were provided with an English comprehension that tested their reading performance. Additionally, a questionnaire was used to obtain students information on their language attitude. A Pilot study involving 30 students (15 boys, 15 girls) from one school was conducted to pretest the instruments and establish their psychometric properties. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used in data analysis. The findings provide valuable insights to educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers on enhancing reading comprehension through targeted interventions that foster positive language attitudes in learning environments.

Keywords: Attitude, relationship, English language, performance.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that holds immense importance in people lives as it serves as a gateway to knowledge acquisition. It enables individuals to extract knowledge and meaning from written texts, facilitating their engagement with the world around them. In academic contexts, proficient reading comprehension is indispensable, serving as the foundation for higher-order cognitive processes and academic achievement (Van, 2019). It enables students to access and understand essential information, grasp complex concepts, and articulate their understanding effectively. Inability to read fluently often orients readers towards having a negative attitude towards reading which may affect their grades and interfere with academic progress.

According to the OECD (2018), reading comprehension form the basis of several cognitive processes like pursuing, understanding, reflecting, and evaluation of information. Reading comprehension is widely deemed as a crucial component of student's academic success, however, numerous studies have consistently reported low levels of comprehension, with evidence pointing at a possible global crisis (Gottardo, 2018). Different assessments have been done on reading literacy and reports reveal inability of students to read. Poor reading literacy is directly related to poor reading comprehension.

Poor reading comprehension has been reported in different countries worldwide. For example, in the United States of America (USA), reading comprehension has been a subject of extensive research and educational initiatives. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) regularly assesses students' reading comprehension skills across different grade levels. Basically, 41 % of grade 12 learners reading proficiency was



below the basics (Reilly et al., 2019). Despite efforts to improve literacy rates, a considerable number of students in the U.S. continue to struggle with reading comprehension. This global concern underscores the importance of investigating reading comprehension within specific local contexts

In Netherlands, several studies have highlighted the concerning prevalence of poor reading literacy among secondary school students. For instance, a study conducted by Groen et al. (2019) revealed that approximately 20% of secondary school students demonstrate below-average proficiency in reading comprehension. In addition, students with inadequate reading skills seem to encounter difficulties in comprehending complex texts across various subjects, such as science, mathematics, and social studies (Muijselaar et al., 2017). Consequently, they consistently exhibit lower performance in tests, receive lower grades, and demonstrate diminished overall achievement levels compared to their peers with proficient reading abilities. These findings from the Netherlands reflect a broader concern about reading comprehension across different educational systems. They also emphasize the importance of examining reading comprehension within specific national and regional contexts.

According to the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) statistics, the problem persists in South Asia as well. In Philippines pupils scored poorly academically relative to the nation's Global Competitive Index. This poor academic performance has been associated with poor reading comprehension which has had a negative impact on science and math as well as other subjects (De, 2015). A study done by Nanda and Azmy (2020) in Indonesia revealed that poor reading comprehension had extended up to secondary levels with 32% of students having reading difficulties.

In Africa, similar challenges persist, with several countries recording suboptimal reading comprehension performance across educational levels. Findings from international and regional assessments confirm these concerns. According to UNESCO (2022), fewer than half of children in sub-Saharan Africa achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading by the age of 14 where a large proportion of learners fail to attain basic reading comprehension proficiency, which limits their ability to progress in other subjects and overall academic achievement. The 2019 PISA results revealed that African countries such as Morocco and South Africa scored significantly below the OECD average in reading, with many learners struggling to interpret and analyze moderately complex texts (OECD, 2020). Complementary evidence from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) also paints a concerning picture: in South Africa, over 78% of Grade 4 learners were unable to read for meaning in any language (Howie et al., 2022). Similarly, SACMEQ studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa report that a large proportion of Grade 6 learners in countries like Kenya, Malawi, and Namibia perform below basic competency levels in reading, raising concerns about long-term educational attainment (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019).

In countries such as Nigeria and Uganda, poor reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge among students. Studies indicate that a significant number of learners struggle to interpret and understand texts, resulting in lower academic performance across subjects and suboptimal outcomes in national assessments (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2019; Piper et al., 2020; RTI International, 2018; Uwezo, 2021). These findings highlight that reading comprehension difficulties are widespread and continue to affect students' overall learning achievement in these educational contexts.

Poor reading attainment in Botswana has been reported by Dipetso and Moahi (2019). According to these researchers more than 50% of students attained below half the score in reading comprehension test, with 29% of students scoring as low as 0 to 5 out of 25 in the reading comprehension test in the national examination. Of interest, is Serowe Sub-region which, has performed worst compared to Gaborone and South East sub regions.

A study done in Serowe sub-region by Nevo et al. (2020) reported that students in junior secondary schools experienced difficulties comprehending texts. More specifically, Buckingham and colleagues pointed out that 39% of students who completed their junior secondary school were unable to read. This study corroborates findings by Ministry of Basic education in Botswana (MBEB, 2022). Reports from Ministry of Basic education Botswana reveals that 20 students in every 100 senior students in Serowe sub region had difficulties in reading a junior secondary school text. In those 20 students, 6 were completely unable to read. The poor reading comprehensions skills were reflected in their academic results as they are reported to have scored very poorly.

According to Cayubit (2019), students in Serowe Sub region who can read well enough to acquire sufficient reading abilities and functional literacy levels will have a better chance of succeeding in school. This underscores



the need to study variables related to reading comprehension performance and more specifically, in Serowe sub region.

Several factors have been associated with low reading comprehension attainment. Some of these include socioeconomic disparities and motivational factors. (Buckingham et al., 2023; Nevo et al., 2020). However, few studies (Gustanti and Ayu 2021; Žolgar-Jerkovic 2018) seem to focus on the role of affective and cognitive variables that may influence student's reading comprehension. Among these variables are but not limited to English language attitude.

English language attitude refers to individuals' beliefs, feelings, and opinions about a particular language or linguistic variety (Getie, 2020). It encompasses attitudes towards one's native language, second language, or any other language encountered in academic or social contexts. These attitudes can be positive or negative.

A positive language attitude can enhance a learner's ability to connect new information with prior knowledge. This connection is crucial for understanding and retaining new information from texts. Further, learners with positive attitudes towards a language are more likely to develop and use effective reading strategies, such as summarizing, predicting, and questioning, which can enhance comprehension. More focused studies have examined the specific impact of language attitudes on reading comprehension. Yamashita (2019) explored this relationship among Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and found that students with positive attitudes towards English were more likely to engage in extensive reading. This engagement, in turn, improved their reading comprehension skills. Building on this, Baker (2021) highlighted how positive attitudes towards a language can enhance cognitive engagement and overall language proficiency. According to Baker, these attitudes influence learners' willingness to practice and use the language in various contexts, which is crucial for developing language skills.

Understanding how language attitudes influence reading comprehension outcomes among Form two students in the Serowe-Sub Region is imperative. With this knowledge, it will be possible to provide timely and suitable interventions to support challenged students, such as those in Serowe sub-region, in reaching their learning objectives. Thus, this study examined the relationship between language attitude and reading comprehension performance among form two students in Serowe sub region.

Statement of the problem

Poor reading comprehension performance has been one of the major concerns in academia, and more specifically in Serowe Sub region, Botswana. However, recent trends indicate a concerning decline in reading comprehension performance among these students over the past five years. In recent years, only 29.80% of Serowe candidates achieved A to C grades in 2019, 28.20% in 2020, 28.60% in 2021, 25.40% in 2022, and 24.50% in 2023 (Botswana Examination Council Annual Report, 2022). This decline raises serious concerns about the quality of education and the future prospects of the learners, as reading comprehension is a cornerstone for success across various subjects and academic levels.

Botswana consistently invests a significant portion of its annual budget in the education sector, reflecting the nation's commitment to providing quality education. English serves as one of the official languages in Botswana and is the primary medium of instruction in schools. It is imperative to ensure that learners possess the necessary skills to comprehend English texts effectively. This issue becomes more pressing when considering the implications of a similar study conducted in countries like China, Asia, and the Philippines, suggesting that the findings from such research are not necessarily applicable to the unique cultural and linguistic contexts of Botswana.

The consequences of poor reading comprehension skills among students in the Serowe-Sub Region are farreaching. Learners who struggle with reading comprehension often face stigmatization from peers and teachers, leading to a decline in self-esteem. Such negative experiences may even lead to truancy and, in extreme cases, drop out of school, perpetuating a cycle of limited opportunities and reduced quality of life. Furthermore, students who do not receive a solid education may enter the job market with limited skills, contributing to job insecurity and an overall reduction in the quality of the workforce.

To address this concerning trend and its implications, it is essential to conduct a systematic research study that delves into the key variables influencing reading comprehension. This research aims to shed light on the



relationship between language attitudes and comprehension performance among Form Two students in the Serowe-Sub Region. Through this study, insights will be gained into the strategies and interventions that can improve the quality of education and enhance the reading comprehension skills of the learners. By identifying effective measures to bolster reading comprehension, this research endeavours to reverse the current decline and ultimately empower students to attain a higher level of academic success, enabling them to secure a brighter future.

METHODS

Research design

The study adopted a correlational research design. According to Seeram (2021) a correlational research design is appropriate where a study seeks to establish relationship between variables without having to manipulate the independent variables or drawing causal inferences. This design was considered suitable for this study as it seeks to determine the relationship between English language attitude and reading comprehension performance.

Research Setting

The current research was conducted in the Serowe Sub-region, chosen due to its consistently lower performance in national examinations compared to the North-East Sub-region and Gaborone. In recent years, only 29.80% of Serowe candidates achieved A to C grades in 2019, 28.20% in 2020, 28.60% in 2021, 25.40% in 2022, and 24.50% in 2023(Botswana Examination Council Annual Report, 2022). These results suggest an underlying issue in academic achievement, potentially linked to reading comprehension skills, which are foundational to success in multiple subjects.

However, a review of existing literature reveals a dearth of specific studies examining reading comprehension in this region, highlighting a gap that this research aimed fill. By focusing on reading comprehension, this study provided empirical data on a skill area that may be contributing to the overall performance trends in Serowe.

Table 3.1 JCE Performance 2019 to 2023

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gaborone Sub-region	36.3%	40.72%	40.21%	45.6%	48.3%
Serowe Sub-region	29.8%	28.2%	28.6%	25.4%	24.5%
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Northeast Sub-region	38.43%	39.32%	37.21%	41.5%	43.2%

(Source: BEC, 2023)

This data shows that Serowe consistently performs the poorest among the other sub regions or the last five years, the sub-region has not been doing well in languages (South East Regional Office reports, 2022). Several factors were associated with the poor performance in the sub-region. This involves high student-teacher ratios, lack of skilled teachers, insufficient materials and inadequate facilities. Learners cannot control many of these factors, which are primarily physical and administrative. Poor academic achievement in this sub-region may be due to lack of reading comprehension, resulting to inaccurate exam answers over time. To better understand the learner's language attitude, it's important to look beyond the traditional causes linked poor reading comprehension performance. Local research has not fully addressed these aspects.

Furthermore, the Serowe-Sub region in Botswana offers a unique multilingual environment where students predominantly use Setswana and English. This bilingual setting provides an ideal context to explore how language attitudes influence reading comprehension and educational outcomes. This makes Serowe-Sub region a particularly relevant locale for studying how language attitudes relate to reading comprehension. It would hence be necessary to study the role of language attitudes as it was anticipated that this variable would enhance students reading comprehension performance and improve educational outcomes of the students in Serowe Sub-region.



Participants

The study targeted all form two students enrolled in the 11 junior secondary schools in Serowe Sub region in the year 2024. Statistics by Ministry of education Botswana reveal that there were 1350 form two students in Serowe Sub region. The accessible population involved form twos from 7 public junior secondary schools.

Form two students were selected for participation as they were believed to have developed attitude towards English language. Their reading comprehension skills are also believed to have developed. Further, being in junior secondary schools, form two students are believed to be familiar with passage comprehension used in this study (Gumede & Boakye, 2020).

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher acquired a clearance letter from the Graduate School of Kenyatta University, Kenya. The researcher obtained authorization from Botswana's Ministry of Educational Serowe sub-region. After approvals, the visited the sampled schools for data collection and went ahead to collect data.

Materials

The researcher made use of one questionnaire with 2 subscales; Language attitude scale student form. The English reading comprehension test consisted of 7 item multiple tests. This comprehension passage was used because Botswana uses English in most academic learning. All subjects in Botswana are taught and tested in English except Setswana language. It was hence very important for students to learn English.

English Reading Comprehension test

The comprehension test was derived from English Action 2 form two textbook. The textbook is approved by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development in Botswana. The text was followed by a 7 multiple choice test items. Two marks were awarded for every correct answer. The highest score was 14 while the lowest score was 0. A score below 7 indicated a lower reading comprehension performance while a score above 7 indicated a higher reading comprehension performance.

Language Attitude Scale Student Form (LASS, Li and Wei., 2022).

Language attitude was measured using LASS scale adapted from Li and Wei, (2022). The scale consists of 10 items, scored on a five-point likert scale ranging from 5 = *Strongly Agree*, 1=*Strongly Disagree*, The maximum score was 50, while the minimum score was 10. A score of 25 or higher indicated strong positive attitude towards the language. Sample items include; 'I am willing to learn English'. The scale was available for use in the public domain, so the researcher did not have to seek permission to use it.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained informed consent from parents or guardians of the students participating in the research. Since the participants were minors (aged 15–18), consent was sought through the school administration. A detailed consent form was distributed to parents via the students, outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the activities involved, and assurances of confidentiality and safety.

Parents were given one week to review the consent forms and were required to sign and return them to the school administration to confirm their approval. In addition to parental consent, student assent was also obtained. Students were provided with an age-appropriate explanation of the study and signed assent forms to confirm their voluntary participation. The students were required to append a signature in acceptance of the participation to the data collection. Further, the researcher informed the learners that they were free to cease participation any time they feel uncomfortable and that participation to the study was to expose them to no harm. The researcher also ensured the participants of confidentiality of their responses and that their responses were to be used solely for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents results and discussions of the results.

The researcher cross-tabulated the participant’s age and sex as summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Description of participant’s Age Category and Sex

Age Category (Years)	Male(F)	%	Female(F)	%	Total	%
12–13	6	2.2	7	2.6	13	4.9
14–15	101	37.7	110	41.0	211	78.7
15–17	28	10.5	16	6.0	44	16.4
Total	135	50.4	133	49.6	268	100.0

Note. N = 268;

According to the findings in Table 2.1, only a small number of students were between the ages of 12 and 13, making up 4.9% of the total sample.

The majority of the respondents, (78.7%) were aged between 14 and 15 years. In this group 37.7% were male and 41.0% were female. This age distribution aligned well with the typical age for Form Two students in Botswana. A smaller segment of students fell within the 15 to 17 age group, comprising 10.5% of male and 6.0% of female. Overall, the results indicate that most learners were within the expected school-age range, with a fairly even distribution between male and female students across all age categories.

RESULTS

This section presents the study’s findings in line with its specific objectives. It begins with descriptive statistics to give a general overview of the data, followed by inferential statistics used to test the study’s null hypotheses. The section then concludes with a discussion of the results, highlighting how the findings relate to existing research.

Relationship Between English Language Attitude and Reading Comprehension Performance

The objective of the study was to examine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between students’ language attitude and their reading comprehension performance. Language attitude was measured using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. Reading comprehension performance was determined using students’ scores on a standardized reading comprehension test administered during the second term of the 2025 academic year.

The analysis began with descriptive statistics to provide an overview of students’ language attitude and Reading comprehension scores. These results are summarized in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Descriptive Analysis of Language Attitude and Reading Comprehension Scores

Variable	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Sk	Kur
TRCS	268	10.00	2.00	12.00	7.84	2.24	-0.09	-
TLAS	268	25.00	22.00	47.00	33.13	4.48	0.02	0.26 0.19

Note: N =268, SD = Standard Deviation; Max = Maximum; Min = Minimum; Sk = Skewness; Kur =Kurtosis; TLAS= Total Language Attitude Scores

The analysis of students’ English language attitude and reading comprehension scores provides insights into their overall engagement with the language and proficiency in comprehension. As shown in Table 2.3, the total language attitude scores (TLAS) ranged from 22 to 47, with a mean score of 33.13 (SD = 4.48). The near-zero



skewness (-0.02) and low kurtosis (0.19) indicate a fairly symmetrical distribution, suggesting that most students held moderately positive attitudes toward the English language and that extreme attitudes were rare.

Similarly, the total reading comprehension scores (TRCS) ranged from 2 to 12, with a mean of 7.84 (SD = 2.24). The skewness (-0.09) and kurtosis (-0.26) values indicate an approximately normal distribution, implying that student performance was fairly balanced, with no extreme deviations in reading comprehension scores.

Further analysis was conducted to examine Relationship between Students’ English Language Attitude and their Reading Comprehension Performance and results presented in Table 4.1.

Relationship between Students’ English Language Attitude and their Reading Comprehension Performance

	TLAS	TRCS
TLAS	1	.60**
		.00
N	268	268

* $p < .05$

Note: TLAS =Total Language Attitude Scores; TRCS=Total Reading Comprehension Score,

The results show a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between students’ language attitude and their reading comprehension performance, ($r = .60, p < .005$). This implies that scores language attitude increase with scores in reading comprehension.

From the above findings, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) stating that there is no significant relationship between English language attitude and reading comprehension performance was rejected. It was thus concluded that the English attitude positively correlated with reading comprehension performance.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study indicated that high language attitude scores went with high scores in reading comprehension, while those with low language attitude had the lowest mean scores. As language attitude increased, so did reading comprehension performance. The analysis also showed that male students recorded a slightly higher mean score in reading comprehension compared to their female counterparts. Furthermore, students in urban schools generally outperformed those in rural schools, albeit with minor differences. These results suggest that students with more favorable attitudes toward language are more likely to excel in reading comprehension tasks, reinforcing the role of affective factors in literacy development.

These results are consistent with prior findings from international studies. For instance, the study by Riyanto et al. (2015), which examined primary school students in Sumberejo, Indonesia, found a significant positive correlation between language attitude and reading comprehension. Although that study involved a younger population in a different context, the alignment of its findings with the present study reinforces the broader applicability of the relationship between attitude and reading performance.

Further support is provided by Sukarni (2019), whose study on university students at Muhammadiyah Purworejo in Indonesia also confirmed a significant influence of English language reading attitude on reading comprehension. Despite being conducted in a university setting and focusing on English as a foreign language, the core conclusion remains relevant; students’ attitudes toward language strongly impact their ability to comprehend reading material.

In the African context, the present findings complement those of Nyati-Ramahobo (2020), who studied upper primary school students in Botswana and observed that language familiarity influenced academic performance, especially in reading comprehension. Although Nyati-Ramahobo's work focused on younger learners, the results highlighted that students with higher language proficiency performed better academically, a conclusion that is



conceptually aligned with the current study's findings. However, the present study contributes further by focusing on form two students in the Serowe Sub-Region, thereby filling the methodological and contextual gaps in prior research.

In summary, this study affirms and extends previous work by demonstrating that language attitude is a significant predictor of reading comprehension performance even within the context of junior secondary education in Botswana. The findings confirm that students who value language learning and hold positive beliefs about language are more likely to engage meaningfully with reading tasks and consequently perform better. These insights contribute to the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of affective and motivational factors in literacy education, particularly in multilingual and diverse educational settings such as Botswana.

CONCLUSION

This study provides evidence that language attitude play a significant role in enhancing reading comprehension among secondary school students. Students who exhibited a more positive attitude toward language learning were found to perform better in reading comprehension. This implies that cultivating a favorable language learning environment where students value and appreciate the language can contribute meaningfully to literacy development and academic success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. This study focused on Form Two students in the Serowe Sub-region. Further research is needed to investigate whether the relationships among language attitude and reading comprehension hold true across other regions in Botswana, especially considering the diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students.
- ii. The current study employed self-report questionnaires to assess language attitude and metacognitive reading strategies. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or classroom observations to validate and complement self-reported data, as students may have over- or under-reported their attitudes and use of strategies.
- iii. Given the correlational nature of this study, experimental or longitudinal designs are recommended for future research to explore causal relationships and developmental changes in language attitude and reading comprehension over time.

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