

Research Article

## A Comparative Analysis of Boys' and Girls' Spelling Errors in Kiswahili Functional Writing in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish whether or not there were gender specific spelling errors committed by boys and girls in Kiswahili functional writing. The study adopted a triangulation approach in its theoretical framework. As a result, three theories were used: Error Analysis by Corder, (1976), Interlanguage by Selinker, (1972) and Gender Social Role by Eagly, (1987). The study was carried out in Nyamira County, Kenya. The sample comprised 326 Form Four participants of equal gender distribution drawn from eight public secondary schools. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the study participants. The participants wrote a Kiswahili functional essay whereby spelling errors were identified and typified for comparison guided by proportion study criterion. The data for this study were analyzed qualitatively using measures of central tendencies that involved use of means, frequencies and percentages. The study revealed that there were no gender specific spelling errors. The finding would be central to curriculum developers in underscoring teaching of phonological awareness phonemic understanding, and phonics to both genders. The finding also necessitates mounting of remedial phonological information, phonemic awareness, and phonics for the boys using information and communication technology systems and appropriate gender destereotyping instructional methods to bridge gender spelling gaps. Finally, boys should be taught nonsense words with a view to improving their spelling ability.

### Introduction

Writing is one of the critical skills of literacy without which one is considered illiterate. It is an indispensable life-long skill as it is required in many life situations. Moqimi-pour and Shahrokhi (2015, p. 122) have rightly averred that 'the writing skill is required in a lot of situations including conveying a message in the form of a letter, taking exams and maintaining knowledge.' This dictates that both boys and girls are adequately prepared to be skilled writers as they complete a particular education system cycle and proceed to the next. Mastery of the key mechanical writing skills determines and demonstrates a writer's competence. Researches on the writing skill have revealed that this skill has remained the most difficult of the four language skills. According to Andrews and Smith (2011, p. 2), 'whereas more than 80 percent achieve national standards in reading', only 67 percent do so in writing; the figure is worse for boys than girls'. This trend is dangerous to the 'individual fulfillment, to the development of societies .... (Bokova, 2013, p. 24) and the *endangered species* in this context is the boy child who is seen as a *poor speller* and as a *result a poor writer*.

It is high time the boy child's underachievement in the writing skill is addressed by impartial genders researchers to guard against feminizing achievement in this skill and subsequently languages [Kiswahili]. This trend is likely to make girls to continue outscoring their male counterparts in languages hence disadvantaging them since they will not pursue glamorous careers that require language as a requisite for being admitted to them. It is important to say that competence in the writing

skill should not be a prerogative of girls. The existence of this trend remains an impediment to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals - goal 3 and Education For All - goal 5 that underline eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education in the commonwealth countries such as Kenya.

There is urgent need to research into the writing skill with a view to unearthing what ails the boy's ability in it. Trembley (1993), sees and reports that the writing skill is a hardy and risk language skill. It is against this background that Moqimi-pour and Shahrokhi (2015, p. 122) say that it is 'one of the most complex and complicated skills among the skills that every second language learner is expected to master.' It is compelling to zero in on one of the mechanical skills of the writing skill that may make one to be considered as either *literate* or *illiterate* and this is the spelling skill. Any learner who lacks the spelling ability is bound to be a poor writer.

On underlining its importance in writing, Henderson (1985) cited by Nassaji (2015, p. 229) writes 'that the developmental continuum of spelling development takes up to age 100; that is, we continue to learn about new words and their spelling throughout our *literate* lives'. This requires that both boys and girls acquire spelling competence for them to remain skilled writers as they age since competence in writing is required at their work places and in everyday life events.

Studies that have been done on the global and local levels indicate that girls are significantly ahead of boys in spelling in English (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1975; Mwamwenda, 1986 & Whyte, 1986). Researches that have been undertaken on both creative and functional writing in Kenya have unearthed spelling as the second problematic facet in which most learners commit errors (Waititu, 1995; Mochi, 1999). Mochi (ibid) also revealed that girls significantly outperform boys in the spelling dimension hence making girls to be better writers and subsequently achieving better grades in Kiswahili as one of the compulsory examinable subjects in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. This spells disaster to the boys for they fail to meet the requisite grade for admission into elite programmes (professions) such as law, journalism, medicine, information science inter alia where Kiswahili is considered as a requisite subject beside English.

The big and unanswered question is, *are there boys' distinct spelling errors that make them to be outscored by their female counterparts?* Researching into Kiswahili spelling errors is inevitable if the boys' spelling inability (underachievement) is to be addressed. As Jha and Kelleher (2006, p. 8) have averred, 'it's important to understand the nature and causes of the problem and look at the possible ways in which it could be addressed'. The problem is misspellings in both creative and functional writing where boys are poor spellers and the matter in hand is whether or not there are sex distinct spelling errors and their gravity vis-à-vis boys' underachievement in Kiswahili composition (Kiswahili 101 A) and subject in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education hitherto. Failure to research into the Kiswahili spelling errors will continue to impinge upon boys' achievement in Kiswahili compositions hence resulting in poor performance in Kiswahili as a subject and barring them from pursuing careers highly valued in the job market. It is on this premise Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E.) (2006, P.78) says 'incorrect spelling hinders effective communication and sometimes it may change the meaning of the text. This is detrimental particularly in examinations.'

To date, no known study has been done in Kenya with a view to comparing the type of Kiswahili spelling errors committed by boys and girls in Kiswahili functional writing and the gravity of each of them on the two genders. This information is critical to guarding against feminizing achievement in Kiswahili national examinations and Kiswahili as a compulsory examinable discipline. Indeed, it is critical and necessary to identify the nature of the discrepancy and give an informed delineation of the spelling ability between boys and girls discrepancies in order to bridge them. The delineation of the spelling errors based on the proportion study provides sufficient error analysis gravity for each sex hence laying a firm foundation for aiding the boy child to be a skilled speller to ensure he ably competes with his female counterparts.

### Literature Review

Acquisition of literacy skills is critical to self-fulfillment and societal development. Indeed, 'being able to read and write is viewed as central to increasing or enhancing individuals' life chances' (Rassol, 2009, p. 9). It follows that both boys and girls need to possess basic literacy skills such as the necessary mechanical skills of the writing skill. Given that the writing skill is a necessary life-long skill, deliberate effort should be made with a view to ensuring that both boys and girls are skilled writers as they climb each of the rungs of the various education cycles.

Some of the studies that have been done globally have revealed a worrying trend whereby significant achievements in favour of girls have been unearthed in languages. Specifically, there have been gender differences in favour of girls in the two literacy skills. Andrews and Smith (2011, p. 2) have highlighted this saying, 'whereas more than 80 percent achieve national standards in reading, only 67 percent do so in writing; the figure is worse for boys than for girls'. The same worrisome trend has been underlined by Reilly, Neumann and Andrews (2018, p.6) who have cited Camarata and Woodcock (2006) whose

study revealed that 'a large representative sample of males and females aged 5 through to 79 scored significantly higher in writing achievement'. The latter quotation implies that the males are poor writers and this in turn is detrimental to their achievement in cases where the writing skill is measured such as in language examinations (both creative and functional compositions). Various components constitute the writing skill hence the quality and productivity of the written text are determined by being skillful in those components. In the context of writing they are referred to as the technical aspects of writing. These technical aspects of writing include spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviation.

Spelling is an indispensable technical aspect of the writing skill that underpins the learner's literacy level as well as communicative competence. According to Abell (1994), it is regarded as an indication of status as well as education. Failure to have a mastery of this mechanical skill results in one being seen as 'illiterate'. Smedley (1983, p. 7) has indicated what an unskilled speller is saying that "a person who is prone to error may be regarded as uneducated or ignorant." Being a skilled speller is life-affirming since it makes one to be a valued member of society. According to Nassaji (2015, p. 28) "learning to spell words accurately is a complex developmental skill". It is understanding its complexities and adherence to them that make competent spellers be considered literate. Abell (1994, p. 9) has averred that "those who are not good at spelling often feel embarrassed about their lack of skill and are unhappy about allowing others to see what they have written". *Which sex is embarrassed about lacking this skill and unhappy about allowing others to see what they have written?*

Literature available indicates that girls are superior to boys in spelling ability. Rios (2000) has cited various studies to justify the stance that there are gender differences in spelling ability. Clarke cited by Rios (2000) whose study involved grades 3, 5 and 8 revealed that girl's outscored boys at all grades. Consequently, this confirms Rios (2000) stance that there exist significant differences in language area [spelling]. As a result, it was necessary to delve into the type of spelling errors committed in written tasks using proportion study to provide a delineation and explication for the superiority and inferiority of gender performance divide in spelling ability. The justification for researching on spelling is based on its underpinning perspective in the context of the writing skill.

Nassaji (2015, p. 229) has rightly averred that 'spelling development is related not only to the learner's phonological, orthographic and morphological knowledge but also to the learner's overall reading and decoding strategies.' This implies that learners who lack phonological, orthographic, morphological knowledge, and appropriate reading and decoding strategies are poor spellers. They will commit spelling errors originating from their limitations in phonological, orthographic, morphological information as well as their poor reading and decoding strategies. On underlining how to correct errors, Corder (1981, p. 52) says that "only when we know why an error has been produced can we set about correcting it in a systematic way". For instance, committing phonological spelling related errors permits concluding that the learner lacks phonological information, phonemic knowledge and phonics hence systematic correction has to centre on phonological awareness, phonemic understanding and phonics.

Waititu's (1995) study revealed that spelling is the second worst challenging facet amongst those rated in Kiswahili compositions in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. This was based on his empirical study whereby five elements – content, grammar, spelling, vocabulary and style were rated guided by error-count and analytical rubric approaches. The study demonstrated that spelling is hard to comprehend. Mochi's (1999) study established that girls significantly outperformed their male counterparts in the spelling dimension and that still this was the second most difficult facet of the five rated dimensions in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Kiswahili compositions (paper 101, A). Use of a two-tailed t-test demonstrated that girls are significantly better spellers as compared to their male counterparts though this skill is difficult to assimilate.

Evidence of the boy child trailing the girl child in spelling ability jeopardizes the boy child's writing ability since being a poor *speller equals a poor writer*. Andrews and Smith (2011, p. 38) have correctly averred that "writing is used by schools to assess progression. It is the principal mode and medium used in the examination system." This statement underlines the fact that writing is highly prized for it evidences one's academic ability in national examinations. The boy child is bound to continue underachieving in Kiswahili compositions and Kiswahili as a subject in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education if this underachievement is not researched into and viable recommendations instituted to enhance the boy child's achievement. The boy child's underachievement will remain an impediment to pursuing careers where Kiswahili is considered as one of the requisite subjects (besides or instead of English) for admission to courses such as law medicine, journalism, inter alia if he is not helped to be a competent speller. Andrews and Smith (Ibid: p. 40) further say that "school is where you go to write. The same is true of higher education". Researching into the types of Kiswahili spelling errors committed by both boys and girls in Kiswahili functional writing is a remedy for assisting the boy child to be on "par" with the girl child in spelling ability as they climb rungs of education systems targeting the apex. To date, there is scant literature on Kiswahili spelling errors committed in written tasks vis-à-vis gender. As a result, it was critical to undertake the present study with a view to unearthing and

comparing all Kiswahili spelling errors in Kiswahili functional writing in relation to gender and laying plans for aiding the weaker speller – the boy child.

The theoretical framework for this study employed a triangulation approach whereby three theories informed the study. The three theories were: Error Analysis Theory (Corder 1967), Interlanguage Theory (Selinker 1972) and the Social Role Theory (Eagly 1987). Each of these theories was considered critical and pertinent to the study as evidenced by each of the explication provided below. The Error Analysis Theory (EAT) was important since the study focused on identifying spelling errors committed by both boys and girls, delineating them, outlining their origins and classifying them. It has been realized that for the teaching of a second language to be successful, it is significant to know the errors the learner is likely to make (Corder, 1978, & Norrish, 1987). This theory is comparative since it permits providing a delineation of spelling errors on the basis of comparing the native language with the target language [Kiswahili]. Errors are important as a source of information about the linguistic development of second language acquisition [Kiswahili] and can account for spelling errors traceable to L1. Richards (1992) refers to this type of errors as interlingual errors. For instance, a learner whose first language is EkeGusii may misspell Kiswahili words as a result of transferring some sounds from his/her native tongue to Kiswahili. In a nutshell, EAT, is critical to identifying misspellings originating from L1 and this is significant for systematic instruction aimed at correcting them.

Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory (ILT) was appropriate to this study. It underlines second language learners' application of a separate linguistic system in learning the target language [Kiswahili]. This linguistic system is intermediate between that of the native tongue and the target language. Selinker identified five central cognitive processes involved in second language learning. These five central processes are: *language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and overgeneralization of the target language linguistic material*. Each of these five processes contribute to committing Kiswahili spelling errors and points to the origin of the error committed. As a result, it was logical to employ this theory in undertaking this study with a view to tracing some of the spelling errors in the context of each of the five cognitive processes involved in learning L2 [Kiswahili].

The Social Role Theory (SRT) was put forward by Eagly (1987). The theory explains that man (boys) and women (girls) conduct themselves differently in social situations and take different roles due to the societal expectations put upon them: This theory is embedded in socialization process whereby gender stereotypes are passed on to children and cemented. It posits that the sex division of labour and social expectations on stereotypes produces inaccurate beliefs about males' and females' abilities which in turn produce gender development. Gender stereotyping has culminated in masculinisation and feminization of subjects and performance hence occasioning gender achievement gaps even in spelling.

As rightly said by Jha and Kelleher (2006, p. 43), "every society has its own notions of feminine and masculine qualities, behaviour patterns and roles and responsibilities." The socialization process perpetuates the stereotypes hence influencing the boys' and girls' performance in language skills and in particular in spelling as one of the mechanical sub-skills of the writing skill. The impact of socialization on boys' and girls' achievement has also been echoed by Burns and Bracey (2009, p. 106) saying 'each enforced stereotyping of behaviour in a child's informative years might reasonably be construed as a factor in boys' rejection of "feminine" qualities such as achievement, later in life'. This implies that boys are reluctant to working hard in subjects such as languages that are believed to be for girls (woman). Boys' believe that language are female domain is detrimental to their achievement given that they will continue regarding them as girlish.

Considering some subjects as feminine and others as masculine has resulted in sex-stereotyped attitudes towards occupation and roles and this has made both boys girls to be motivated differently. Whitehead's (1996) study delved into sex stereotypes gender identity and subject choice at A-level towards subjects and revealed that modern languages are considered as feminine. The same study indicated that male counterparts were heavily concentrated in the stereotypically masculine subjects. Research has revealed that there are two types of motivation in language learning – integrative and instrumental (Norrish, 1987). Integrative motivation influences the learner to put more effort in the process of learning the target language [Kiswahili] to achieve more satisfactory performance. Instrumental motivation does not make the learner to target satisfactory performance and this results in poor performance.

Using the SRT was necessary since it permits role switching via socialization process to change boys' and girls' perceptions that influence gender gaps in academic achievement. In other words, the theory allows manipulation of the socialization agents such as parents, teachers, religions groups etc. to bring about 'parity' in academic achievement such as in spelling.

### Research Design

This study was done using the qualitative paradigm. Creswell (1994, p. 8) says 'the qualitative approach incorporates much more of literary form of writing than the quantitative approach. This study required delving into the Kiswahili spelling errors committed in functional writing vis-à-vis gender and providing adequate literature. This necessitated identifying spelling errors, tracing their sources, categorizing them, and comparing them in the context of gender. Smith (1987), cited in Creswell (Ibid) has identified four main strands of this paradigm: interpretative, artistic, systematic and theory-driven. This study required systematic interpretation of the spelling errors in the context of the three theories that informed this study.

### Study Area

This study was done in Nyamira County, Kenya, situated at GPS of 0.5210° S, 34.9140° E. The reasons for carrying out the study in this locale were occasioned by three main reasons. Firstly, the researcher had done another study that focused on the performance of boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing and revealed that girls significantly outscored boys in spelling ability. This necessitated researching into Kiswahili spelling errors with a view to establishing whether or not there were gender distinct spelling errors done by each gender. Secondly, the researcher had discovered that most of the teachers of Kiswahili were not aware of the gender spelling disparities and their impact on the boy's achievement in Kiswahili compositions in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (national examination) and Kiswahili as a subject finally, the performance of Kiswahili in Kenya Certificate of secondary Education has been below average implying that it is important for the teachers of Kiswahili to have adequate knowledge of the spelling errors to ensure spelling as a mechanical skill is systematically taught.

### Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The study comprised 326 form four participants drawn from 8 secondary schools. The county had a total of 80 secondary schools comprising single sex and co-educational, boarding and day schools with an enrolment of about 16,000 learners. Form four provided the study population. These were boys and girls who were divided into two strata based on sex. It was believed that as a candidate class they had adequate Kiswahili phonological awareness, phonemic understanding and phonics hence able to correctly spell words in Kiswahili functional writing.

Lists of all secondary schools in each administrative division in the County were obtained from the statistics department of the County Director of Education's office. The lists were used to generate four other lists that were used in sampling the eight schools that were used in the study. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 8 secondary schools used in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the only two boys' schools in the county and simple random sampling technique – lottery design was employed to select two girls' schools, two mixed boarding secondary schools, and two mixed day secondary schools, totaling 8 secondary schools. The simple random sampling technique (lottery approach) was also used to select 27 participants from each of the 7 schools for each of the two sexes except for the mixed day where it was used to select 28 participants for each sex. The Table 1 below shows how the sampling was done.

**Table 1: Sampling of Schools and Participants**

School Type/ Sex and Quantity	Number of Participants Selected	
	Boys	Girls
Single sex	54	54
Mixed Boarding	54	54
Mixed day	55	55
Sub-total	<b>163</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Grand-total</b>	<b>326</b>	

### Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was a Kiswahili functional writing task. The task was a letter to the editor of an imaginary daily newspaper called *Yamaizi Leo*. It required the participants to write a letter to the editor explicating the reasons for the increase of rape incidents and suggesting measures to be instituted to combat it. Prior to developing the research tool, the researcher who was the Kenya National Examination Council, Kiswahili Compositions examiner, had

consulted subject experts at Moi University as well as Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Kiswahili Paper 1 – Composition examiners and team leaders with over ten years of experience. The instrument was piloted whereby appropriate corrections were made to realize full validity. A test-retest was undertaken to test the reliability of the research task whereby it administered twice to the same group of participant not included in the study. A computation of the correlation co-efficient using Pearson Product Moment Co-efficient formula indicated that the correlation co-efficient was 0.88. This was a sufficient pointer to the task reliability.

#### ***Data Collection Procedures***

The source of data for this study was the seventeen Kiswahili spelling errors originating from the Kiswahili functional writing task written by the 326 participants of the 8 secondary schools. The researcher and his research assistants went to each of the sampled schools and administered the research task. The duration for writing the task was two hours. The participants were required to write a draft and fair copy for rating the two hours' duration included time for self-editing before submitting the fair (final) essay for marking. This was followed by the error identification and categorization training session to prepare the researcher and his research assistants to embark on identifying and categorizing Kiswahili spelling errors emanating from the Kiswahili functional writing task. The error identification process employed the error – count and technique whereby all the spelling errors of each participant were count and computed.

The researcher and his research assistants adhered to Corder (1972) five stages for analyzing errors: Identifying the corpus of the language, identification of errors in the corpus, classification of errors, and the explanation of the errors and evaluation of the spelling error in preparation for data analysis.

#### ***Data Analysis***

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics since this study was qualitative paradigm based. This enabled the researcher to tabulate data and provide response to the research objective and question. Techniques used were means, frequencies and percentages. These means of central tendencies permitted the researcher to reduce the voluminous information of the spelling errors categorize them and present them in line with the dictates of the research objective.

#### **Results**

The findings of this study show the total number of spelling errors committed by the two genders in Kiswahili functional writing in all the seventeen types of spelling errors. Being a proportion study, it necessitated counting of all the spelling errors using the error count and analytic rubrics and classifying them. In turn, this enabled the researcher to state in quantitative terms the relative proportion of each error. An examination of Table 1 and 2 shows that a total of 5684 spelling errors were committed by both male and female participants drawn from form four class. The misspellings involved both consonants and digraphs on average, each of the 326 participants committed 17.4 spelling errors. This implies that learners complete the secondary school cycle inadequate spelling ability making them poor writers.

It was evident from the counting of the research linguistic corpora that there was a disparity between boys and girls and it was in favour of girls. Boys made 3087 (54%) out of 5684 spelling errors whereas their female counterparts committed a total of 2597 (46%) spelling errors. Boys committed 490 (eight percent) spelling errors- more than those done by girls. Spelling errors committed by each gender were analyzed and presented separately as shown by Tables 2 and 3 below with a view to finding out whether or not there were gender distinct (specific) spelling errors in Kiswahili functional writing.

**Table 2: Boys' spelling errors in Kiswahili functional writing**

<b>Error Type committed</b>	<b>% of errors committed by boys</b>	<b>No. of errors committed by boys</b>	<b>% of boys who committed errors</b>	<b>% of boys who did not commit the errors</b>
Interchanging correct Phonemes with wrong ones	59	973/1640	93	07
Adding wrong letter in a word	51	536/1043	81	19
Omitting a letter in a word	54	307/570	68	32
Splitting a word	53	271/516	61	39
Abbreviating a word	*47	190/403	82	18
Omitting first letter in a word	54	163/304	39	61
Omitting required mark on a letter	53	159/298	66	34
Joining two or more different words	58	126/219	39	61
Failing to hyphenate a word	*36	58/160	23	77
Misuse of diacritic mark	53	82/154	30	70
Omitting the last letter in a word	62	84/135	34	66
Writing a wrong mark (dot) on a letter	55	42/77	22	78
Transposing letters to other positions	66	37/56	17	83
Wrong adaptation of English words	54	26/48	14	86
Wrongly hyphenation of words	54	17/31	09	91
Misplacing an apostrophe	48	12/25	07	93
Omitting an apostrophe	48	04/05	02	98
<b>Grand Total</b>	-	<b>3087/5684</b>		

**Table 3: Girls' spelling errors in Kiswahili functional writing**

<b>Error Type</b>	<b>% of girls' error</b>	<b>No. of girls' error</b>	<b>% of girls who committed the error</b>	<b>% of girls who did not commit the error</b>
Interchanging correct phonemes with wrong ones	41	667/1640	84	16
Adding a wrong letter(s) to a word	49	507/1043	80	20
Omitting a letter(s) in a word	46	263/570	66	34
Splitting a word	47	245/516	63	37
Abbreviating words	*53	213/403	85	15
Omitting the first letter in a word	46	141/304	37	63
Omitting a required mark (dot) in a word	47	139/298	64	36
Joining two or more different words	42	93/219	36	64
Failing to hyphenate a word	*64	102/160	26	74
Misuse of diacritical mark	47	72/154	33	67
Omitting the last letter(s) in a word	46	51/135	25	75
Writing a wrong mark on a letter	45	35/77	19	81
Wrong adaptation of English	46	22/48	11	89
Jumbling/transposing letters in a word	34	19/56	10	90
Wrong hyphenation of words	45	14/31	07	93
Misplacing of an apostrophe	52	13/25	07	93
Omitting of an apostrophe	20	01/05	01	99
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>2597/5684</b>		

Examination of both boys' and girls' spelling errors clearly demonstrates that the two sexes committed all the seventeen spelling errors except for the disparities in all of them. They are as follows:

### **1. Interchanging correct phonemes with wrong ones.**

The study revealed that both boys and girls interchanged correct phonemes with wrong ones boys wrongly interchanged 973 (59 percent) phonemes whereas girls 667 (41 percent). Both boys and girls wrongly interchanged consonants with



consonants, digraphs with consonants, consonants with digraphs, digraphs with digraphs and vowels with consonants. For instance, both boys and girls wrongly substituted consonants /r/ for /l/, /s/ for /z/, /f/ for /v/, /b/ for /p/ etc. Example of wrong interchange of digraphs with consonants was evident where /ts/ was substituted for (dʒ). Wrong interchange of consonant with digraphs was evidenced by substituting /ʒ/ for /z/ /θ/ for /dʒ/ etc. Substituting /ð/ for /θ/ evidenced wrong interchange of digraphs with digraphs. Both boys and girls misspelled the word *swara* (issue) as *suala* (gazelle) whereby there was wrong interchange of consonants with a vowel. Both boys and girls used /w/ instead of /u/.

## 2. Addition of wrong letters to words

Boys and girls added vowels, consonants, and even syllables in words resulting in misspelling. Boys added 536 (51 percent) out of the 1043 vowels, consonants and syllables wrong additions. For instance, the word *ilhali* (whereas) was written as "ilihali," "uchi" (naked/nakedness) as "huchi," "vichochoroni" (bad locations) as "vichorochoroni" among others.

## 3. Omission of middle letters in words

The present study has revealed that both boys and girls omitted letters in Kiswahili words. Boys omitted 307 (54 percent) whereas girls 264 (46 percent). The two genders omitted vowels, semi-vowels, consonants (mostly /h/), and syllables or part of a word. For instance, in omitting vowels, the word "mwanamume" (male) was mostly misspelled as "mwanamme" by the two sexes. In the omission of the semi-vowels, they omitted /w/ as in the word "siwezi" (I cannot) writing it as "siezi" and "umekuwa" (you have been) being written as "umekua" (you have grown). The omission of consonants was illustrated by omitting /h/ and other letters. As a result, the word "hajawahi" (has never) was misspelled as "hajawai," "korti" (court) as "koti" (coat) etc. The study also revealed that both boys and girls omitted syllables in words, like [na] in "wananchi" (citizens) misspelling it as "wanchi", "ubakaji" (rape) misspelling it as "ubaji" whereby [ka] was omitted.

## 4. Splitting up words into two or more

An examination of Tables 1 and 2 illustrates that both boys and girls split up words into two or more whereby 516 errors were committed. Boys split up 271 (53 percent) words whereas girls 245 (47 percent). They split up compound words, bound morphemes and independent words. Examples of compound words split up into two were: *changamoto* (challenge) resulting in "changa" (contribute/young), and "moto" (fire), "mjamzito" culminating in "mja" (mankind) and *mzito* (heavy). This kind of split altered the intended meaning. Bound morphemes split up were: "wanapochelewa" (when they are late) written as "wanapo" (no meaning since it is an incomplete word) and "chelewa", (be late) "wanaouza" (those who sell) as "wanao" (their children) and "uza" (sell) among others. This split resulted in misspelling of bound morphemes since prefixes have been split (separated) from the base words (roots). Lastly, the two genders split up independent words such as "sababu" (reason) as "sa" "babu". The syllable "sa" has no meaning but the word "babu" in English means grandfather.

## 5. Abbreviation of words

Table 1 and 2 above have illustrated that the two sexes abbreviated (shortened) words as a result of acronymizing them as well as clipping them. Boys abbreviated 190 (47 percent) words whereas girls 213 (53 percent). Interestingly, girls committed more spelling errors of abbreviation compared to their male counterparts. This is strange since boys have been committing more errors in each type of spelling error. Acronymizing words was evidenced by the conjunction "na" (and) and "kadhalika" (others) abbreviated as "n.k.". Abbreviating the words "bwana" (sir) as "bw" and "bibi" (madam) as "bi" shows that the two genders clipped words. The study has revealed that "bwana", "bibi" na kadhalika" and "Sanduku La Posta" (Post Office Box) as "S.L.P." were the most abbreviated words by boys and girls alike.

## 6. Omission of first letters in words

With reference to Table 1 and 2 above, both boys and girls omitted first (starting) letters in words. Boys committed 163 (54 percent) omission of first letters spelling errors whereas girls 141 (46 percent). They omitted [h] in words starting with [h] such as prefixes (hu/ and /ha/ which denote meanings like signifiers, negators, and as a period identifier. They mostly omitted [h] in words that required /hu/ as a prefix and those that start with [h] such as "hamu" (appetite).

## 7. Omission of a required mark on a letter

Table 1 and 2 above have illustrated that both boys and girls committed the error of omission of a required mark on a letter. They both failed to dot [i] and [j]. This culminated in making 159 (53 percent) out of 298 undotting of [i] and [j]. It follows that girls committed 139 errors of omission of a required mark on a letter. The undotting of [i] and [j] made the two genders to commit a grammatical error of wrongly mixing upper and lower cases.

### 8. Joining two or more words

Looking carefully at Table 1 and 2 has demonstrated that both boys and girls wrongly joined two or more words. This is evidenced by wrong spacing of words. Boys wrongly joined 126 words (58 percent) as girls wrongly joined 93 (42 percent) words. For example, “*akina/kina mama*” (mothers) was misspelled as “*akinamama/kinamama*,” “*kwa sababu*” (because of) was misspelled as “*kwasababu*,” “*mbele zetu*” (before us/in front of us) as “*mbelezetu*” etc.

### 9. Failing to hyphenate words

Examination of the boys’ and girls’ tables has illustrated that they both failed to hyphenate words as dictated by spelling convention. They failed to draw a dash (-) to indicate that a word has been broken at the end of the line due to lack of space. Interestingly, this is another type of spelling error whereby girls committed more errors than their male counterparts. Girls committed 102 (64 percent) as boys committed 58 (36 percent) spelling error of failing to hyphenate words at the ends of lines as a result of lack of space. This implies that the two had a poor mastery of hyphenation conventions and poor mastery of punctuation and those girls are more lacking in the hyphenation knowledge than boys. Examples of words broken at the end of lines due to lack of space are as shown below:

Unhyphenated	Hyphenated	Gloss
vinaend elea	vina- endelea	they are going on
waz azi	waza- zi	parents

### 10. Misuse of Diacritic Mark

This kind of spelling error was committed by boys and girls alike. Tables 1 and 2 above show that boys committed 82 (53 percent) whereas girls 72 (47 percent) totaling 154 diacritic errors. They diacriticalized [i] and [j] instead of dotting them. Examples are:

Error Example	Correct Mark	Gloss
<i>Utumízi</i>	<i>utumizi</i>	usage
<i>Víjána</i>	<i>vijana</i>	youth
<i>Njía</i>	<i>njia</i>	way/path

This wrong diacriticalization points to poor grounding in punctuation, and spelling.

### 11. Omission of last letters in words

It is evident from Tables 1 and 2 that both boys and girls omitted ending letters in words such as vowels /a/ and /i/. The following examples illustrate omission of last letters (vowels) and syllables in words.

Type Sound Omitted	Error Example	Correct Spelling	Gloss
Vowel /a/	<i>Pazi</i>	<i>pazia</i>	curtain
	<i>Hatu</i>	<i>hatua</i>	steps/measure
	<i>Sa</i>	<i>saa</i>	time
	<i>Kuju</i>	<i>kujua</i>	to know
Syllable/part of a word /i/	<i>Inakulazi</i>	<i>inakulazimu</i>	you must
	<i>Kuwaba</i>	<i>kuwabaka</i>	to rape
	<i>Pamo</i>	<i>pamoja</i>	together
	<i>Wasicha</i>	<i>wasichana</i>	girls

Some of the words misspelled as a result of omitting last letters (vowels) and syllables were ‘simple’. It is not clear whether they were misspelled due of lack of time for self-editing or failure to remember or master their correct spellings.

### 12. Writing of wrong punctuation marks on letters

This study also established that boys and girls alike used wrong punctuation marks on [i] and [j]. They used accents (-) diagonal/slash (/) zero (o) caret (^) and some did not put any mark on [i] and [j]. Failing to put relevant mark (dot) resulted in making them uppercases and this occasioned a grammatical error.

### 13. Transposition (jumbling up letters in words)

Transposition of letters as one of the spelling errors was committed by boys and girls alike. As illustrated by Tables 1 and 2 above. They jumbled up letters in words and this resulted in misspelling whereby boys' errors were 37 (66 percent) whereas girls 19 (34 percent) totaling 56 errors of transposition of letters in words. This implies that the two sexes did not adhere to the correct order of letters in words. Examples of words evidencing jumbling up of letters are as shown below:

Transposed letters	correct order	gloss
Noa	nao	they
Lininge	lingine	another one
Ukabaji	ubakaji	rape
Didhi	dhidi	among
Wanataharisha	wanahatarisha	are jeopardizing

### 14. Misspelling of Swahilized English vocabulary/wrong adaption of English vocabulary

This study revealed that both boys and girls either misspelled swahilized English words or wrongly adapted English loanwords. Tables 1 and 2 above have indicated that boys communicated 26 (54 percent) errors as girls made 22 (46 percent). Loanwords are adopted whereby they reflect Kiswahili pronunciation and orthography. Some words retain their original spelling but adopt Kiswahili Pronunciation. For example, the English word video has retained its original spelling but adopted Kiswahili pronunciation. They misspelled *swahilized* English words such as "televisheni" and television, "skirt" (skirt) as "siketi," "sikarti." This misspelling points to poor grounding in adaptation and adoption processes of foreign (English) vocabulary.

### 15. Wrong hyphenation of Kiswahili words

Examination of Tables 1 and 2 has illustrated that boys committed 17 (54 percent) wrong hyphenation errors whereas girls 16 (46 percent). The two sexes wrongly hyphenated Kiswahili words at the end of lines. It is a spelling error to divide a syllable. The hyphen must be placed between syllables for correct hyphenation of the word. The two sexes split up syllables and even wrote single letters in the next lines. Committing this error reflected limited knowledge in punctuation and spelling rules.

### 16. Misuse of an apostrophe

Table 1 and 2 above have illustrated that both boys and girls misused the apostrophe as a result of not knowing that it is used where there is a ligature - /ŋ/ (<ng'>) such as in the word *ng'ang'ana* (scramble) . Boys committed 12 (48 percent) errors of misuse of the apostrophe and girls 13 (52 percent). Below are examples of the misuse of apostrophe errors.

Error example	Correct Spelling	Gloss
Bang'i	bangi	bhang
Chang'aa	changaa	moonshine alcohol

The above examples demonstrate that some of the students across the sex divide did not know the function of the apostrophe vis-à-vis spelling.

### 17. Omission of an Apostrophe

This study also revealed that boys and girls alike omitted an apostrophe in words whose spelling involved ligatures such as /ŋ/ (<ng'>). Table 1 above indicates that two boys committed the omission of the apostrophe error whereby they committed 4 errors (80 percent) as Table 2 illustrates that one girl committed 1 (20 percent) error. These results have illustrated that both boys and girls alike committed the seventeen spelling errors and that boys trailed girls except for errors of abbreviation of words and failing to hyphenate words. Girls committed more errors than boys in abbreviation of words and failing to hyphenate words.

## Discussion

This study sought to establish whether or not there were gender specific (distinct) spelling errors vis-à-vis the seventeen spelling errors rated in Kiswahili functional writing. To achieve this objective, boys and girls from the sampled schools wrote a Kiswahili functional writing task that was rated and coded in the context a proportion study guided by criterion. This research revealed that boys and girls alike committed the seventeen spelling errors and that boys trailed girls in all errors except for the abbreviation of words and failing to hyphenate words. An examination of Tables 2 and 3 above indicate that

boys committed 54 percent (N=3087 out of 5684) spelling errors whereas their female counterparts 46 percent (N = 2597 out of 5684).

This study has confirmed Taha's (2006) study that had revealed that females are better phonological processors than males. This implies that females (girls) have phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics. Given that both boys and girls committed all the seventeen spelling errors illustrates that both employed Selinker's (1972) five cognitive processes that operate in the Interlanguage Theory (ILT) to learn Kiswahili. This theory would be used to explicate why the two genders committed each of the seventeen spelling errors. However, the same theory (ILT) does not account for the gender gaps in the seventeen spelling errors that is in favour of girls are superior to boys in fifteen types of spelling errors and overall performance.

The SRT advanced by Eagly (1987) would explain why there are gender disparities in spelling although there is no gender distinct spelling errors in Kiswahili functional writing. This places the origin of the spelling gaps in relation to gender in socialization process. On underscoring how Socialization determines performance, Jha and Kelleher (2006, p. 44) 'avers that the socialization of boys also affects their personalities, perceptions and performance in education' socialization process allows gender stereotypes that perpetuate subject predilection hence resulting in each gender predilection for specific academic subjects and their skills. The gender subject "appropriateness" would be explained by the Gender Schema theory whereby both boys and girls pursue various careers based on what the culture of their society expects them to perform as their roles. Both boys and girls pursue various careers based on cultural and societal expectations. They go to school with gender stereotypes hence performance is determined by what they know as their masculinity and femininity roles in relation to appropriateness of subjects.

Researchers have demonstrated that both boys and girls are treated differently by the society as a result of cultural expectation (stereotypes). "Gender appropriate treatment" impacts either positively or negatively on either gender's achievement. It is on this strength that Christie, Enz and Vukelich (2007, p. 58) underline the role of socialization saying, 'it is also important to consider how powerful a role nurture plays.'" This implies that how boys and girls are nurtured determines their academic performance. For instance, if in the process of nurturing, a girl is made to believe that reading is 'feminine', she will definitely stick to this gender stereotype and purpose to excel in it. Somewhat, she is bound to be a skilled reader and this will in turn contribute to her being a competent speller. Jha and Kelleher (2006, p. 78) have pointed to the impact of nurture on academic achievement saying '... art and reading are labelled as feminine making it difficult for boys to accept that they like these subjects which often lead to poor performance.' Reading is one of the precursors to skilled spelling. As a result, boys are likely to perform poorly in this mechanical skill (spelling) since reading has been feminized making them 'believe' it is not their domain. This will occasion demoralization that will deny the boys the will to read and be competent spellers.

Burns and Bracey (2009, p. 106) are right in saying that 'enforced stereotyping behaviour in a child's informative years might reasonably be construed as a factor in boys' rejection of "feminine" qualities such as academic achievement later on in life.' The two scholars are hitherto pointing to the risk of masculinity and femininity perceptions and how they impact academic achievement in various subjects and their skills such writing and its mechanical skills i.e., spelling. Socialization provides a window for gender defeminizing and destereotyping via the school and in particular instruction. Gender defeminization and destereotyping are a remedy to ensuring that boys are on par with the girls in spelling ability. Instructional media (ICTs) and instructional methods selected should be those geared towards ensuring that the boys have adequate phonological awareness, phonemic knowledge and phonics; as their female counterparts. In other words, they should not make boys to trail girls in phonological awareness, phonemic information and phonics. The school remains critical to *defeminization* and *destereotyping* achievement in writing mechanical skills such as spelling to bridge the gender spelling gap. It is critical to underscore that teaching of the spelling technical aspects should be driven by the gravity of spelling errors originating from the two sexes' written tasks. This requires all the Kiswahili language instructors to influence and motivate learners to regularly write Kiswahili compositions for them to mark, identify spelling errors and give feedback aimed at empowering learners' spelling ability. This should be done logically and systematically adhering to the phonological awareness, phonemic knowledge and phonics of both boys and girls.

## Conclusion

This study has four major findings as derived from its research objective. The research objective was to establish whether or not there were gender specific spelling errors committed by boys and girls in Kiswahili functional writing. The study found out that there are no gender distinct spelling errors in Kiswahili functional writing since both boys and girls committed all the seventeen spelling errors. Consequently, no spelling error is attributable to one sex. The study has also found out that boys trail girls in all the seventeen misspellings except for abbreviation and hyphenation where they are 'superior' to girls. This points to the fact that the misspellings originate from similar sources. An examination of all the seventeen spelling errors found out that most of the spelling errors are phonological since for every six interlingual errors there was one intralingual error. This implies that most of the Kiswahili spelling errors originate from the learners' phonological awareness, phonemic understanding and phonics limitations. Finally, the study did find out that both boys' and girls' spelling ability is wanting hence calling for urgent instructional intervention to enable them be skilled spellers.

Based on the above findings, this study is significant as follows. First, it has pointed out most of the major Kiswahili spelling errors in the order of their gravity. This information is useful to the Kiswahili language instructors since it forms the basis for focusing on the type of spelling errors that call for urgent instructional and remedial attention. Second, this study has enriched Kiswahili spelling errors literature for researchers interested in researching on systemic gender gaps in spelling. In other words, it provides the foundation for further research into spelling vis-à-vis gender. Third, this study is useful to Kiswahili textbook authors for it has provided spelling errors content for their books. This study has analyzed most of the Kiswahili spelling errors committed by learners as they write Kiswahili functional tasks hence they would find this research relevant to them. Lastly, this study is useful to the Kiswahili curriculum developers given that it has identified the type of Kiswahili spelling errors committed by learners. They need this information for developing appropriate Kiswahili spelling content, however, it is important to say that the study had the following two limitations. Firstly, the corpora that formed data for this study were derived from one Kiswahili functional writing and this was a limitation. It is necessary to derive data from various creative and functional writing tasks so to have adequate data for exhaustive spelling error analyses. The second limitation was that this study was carried out in one county in Kenya hence it is not reflective of the whole nation. This requires it to be replicated in all the 47 counties of Kenya. This will permit generalizability of the findings in the entire country and lead to making informed instructional interventions to guard against the systemic gender gaps in spelling as well as institute pedagogical measures to enhance learners' spelling ability.

This study gives suggestions for future research on the following areas:

1. Why boys do trail girls in the major phonological (interlingual) spelling errors.
2. A longitudinal study be conducted to track the most persistent Kiswahili spelling errors from form one through form and
3. Pedagogical approaches for teaching Kiswahili spelling and the ICTs used to teach it and their appropriateness.

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