



## **A Comparative Study of Listening Competencies in English of Teacher Trainees in Public and Private Teacher Training Colleges in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

English language in Kenya is important as it is the medium of instruction, among other things, from class four to higher institutions of learning. Listening on the other hand is a key factor in facilitating language learning because it is the foundation of the other language skills. It is also the skill that facilitates the interaction of the instructor and the learner in any learning situation. Lack of listening competence in English therefore means poor language skills and poor performance in all the subjects taught in English. This paper presents the findings of a comparative study conducted in Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) in Kenya. The study sought to compare the levels of listening competencies in English of primary school teacher trainees in public and private Teacher Training Colleges in Kenya. A sample of 30 male and 30 female trainees was used. Data were collected using three subtests namely dictation, cloze test and listening comprehension. Research findings showed that trainees in public colleges performed better than trainees in private colleges. Female trainees also performed better than their male counterparts in both colleges. The younger trainees in both colleges performed better than the older trainees in most of the tasks. Trainees with stronger entry points in both colleges performed better than those with weak entry points. Generally, the trainees lacked the desired competence levels in listening in English.

**Keywords:** Listening abilities in English, Primary school teacher trainees, Desired Competence Level (DCL), Minimum Competence Level (MCL)

### **INTRODUCTION: LISTENING COMPETENCES IN ENGLISH**

Most people sincerely believe that they listen effectively. Consequently, they do not see the need to develop their listening skills (Bwire, 2007). However, listening effectively is something that very few of us do. It is not that listening effectively is difficult, but rather, most of us just never develop the skill (Wilkinson, 1974). Effective listening is a process that involves actively absorbing the information given by a speaker, showing that you are attentive and providing feedback to the speaker so that he/she knows that the

message has been received. Effective listeners show speakers that they have been heard and understood by responding effectively (Barker, 1971).

There is a difference between listening and hearing. Whereas hearing is a physical activity, listening is a mental process (Adler & Brown, 2003). We do not learn how to hear but we must learn how to listen. As expressed by Wyatt and Roach (1999) "far from being a natural process, listening is a consciously purposive activity for which we need systematic training and supervision to learn to do well" (p. 197). This is because it involves psychological skills such as recognising words, parsing speech into constituent parts and processing the discourse in terms of cohesion, logic and relevant underlying skills. It also involves social skills such as giving back-channelling signals and making improvements when misunderstandings occur.

Gilman and Moody (1984) observe that adults spend 40 -50% of communication time listening but the importance of listening in language learning has only been recognised relatively recently as observed by Oxford (1993). Listening has been assuming greater and greater importance in language classrooms because of the development of second language acquisition research, which has given a major boost to listening by emphasising the role of comprehensible input (US-China Foreign Language, 1987). Krashen (1982) suggests that comprehensible input is an important factor in second language acquisition. Rost (1990) argues that unless listening is given priority at the right level, learning cannot begin because listening is the foundation of the other language skills. He further says one has to listen to be able to speak; one has to speak to be able to read, and one has to read to be able to write.

Apart from second language classroom contexts, the process of listening is of crucial importance in social interactions. Mark Twain observed, if we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear (Evans, 1999). Cheesebro, O'Connor, and Rios (2009) write in *Communication Skills*, "people are fired, customers are lost and working relations are strained because of ineffective listening. Likewise, friendships suffer; marriages fail and families grow apart when individuals fail to listen with genuine concern" (Cheesebro et al; 2009, p. 25). The above observations show that listening is a crucial communication skill. Communication cannot successfully take place until what is spoken is understood. Importance of listening skill is attached to both the classroom and social interactions.

Since 1974 Act of Parliament, English has been the official language in Kenya (The Kenya Constitution, 2010). The role of English in the Kenya school curriculum is of paramount importance. The acquisition of the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is a key to acquisition and total mastery of the second language. The student's performance in English and all other school subjects (except in Kiswahili and foreign languages) depends to a larger extent, on the efficiency of listening in English. Training both the learner and the instructor is needed to enhance the learning interactions especially in the Kenyan context where Mogaka (2001) reports that teachers dominated the interaction in Kenyan English language classroom with lecturing and question and answer methods dominating the lesson.

The revised Primary Teacher Education syllabus re-emphasises the importance of English as the official language of communication in Kenya as well as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities. It is also the pre-eminent language of interactional communication. The revised syllabus states consequently “those who master English reap many academic, social and professional benefits” (K.I.E, PTE Revised English Syllabus, 2006, p. 2). In a study, Groenwegen (2008) came up with English Literacy Norms (ELNs). These are the bench marks or levels of competence in listening skills that are expected in a learner at finishing teacher training in a teacher training college. Groenwegen (2008) defined the Desired Competence Level (DCL) as 75% and above and the Minimum Competence Level (MCL) as between 50% and 74%. With MCL, one has limited ability in the skill and therefore one is not able to use the skill effectively.

Listening has been assuming greater and greater importance in language classrooms because of development of second language acquisition research which has emphasised the role of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982). This is also evident in the new syllabus which has corrected the imbalance of emphasising reading and writing at the expense of listening and speaking by incorporating listening skills in the teaching and evaluation syllabus in national examinations. It is on this emphasis on listening skill in general and listening skill in English in particular that this paper was pegged with a view to comparing primary school teacher trainees in public and private teacher training colleges in Kenya.

Listening involves skills such as recognising words, parsing speech into constituent parts and processing the discourse in terms of cohesion, logic and back channelling signals. Listening competences include discriminating between sounds, recognising words, identifying stressed words, identifying functions in a conversation, connecting linguistic cues to non- linguistic cues in order to construct meaning, recalling important words, topics and ideas, giving appropriate feedback to the speaker and reformulating what the speaker has said. In this paper the researchers focused on discriminating between sounds through dictation, recalling important words through cloze test and connecting linguistic and non-linguistic cues to construct meaning as well as using background knowledge and context to predict and confirm meaning in the listening comprehension.

## **METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS<sup>1</sup>**

This study was conducted as a descriptive survey of listening competences of teacher trainees in teacher training colleges in Kenya. The study comprised of 60 teacher trainees in the second year of their training. 30 female trainees and 30 male trainees

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<sup>1</sup> The literature and materials in this paper borrows heavily from Dr. Lydia W. Wangungu's Phd Thesis 'Listening Competencies In English: A Descriptive Study of Primary School Teacher Trainees In Kenya, 2015, Kenyatta University

were sample for the study. Simple random sampling was used to sample the trainees since it gives unbiased representation of a group. The study used a listening test comprising three subtests namely: listening comprehension, cloze test and dictation (see appendix i). The test was used to determine the listening levels of the trainees. Listening comprehension tested the ability to: pick main ideas, follow topic development, guess meaning of words, predict outcomes and recall from spoken discourse. Cloze test on the other hand tested the ability to use: context to construct meaning, vocabulary, critical thinking, semantic and syntactic cues to construct meaning. Dictation comprised of ten minimal pairs; five pairs of consonants, three pairs of vowels and two pairs of both vowels and consonants. The choice of the sounds was guided by Brown (1995) who recommends use of sounds with high functional load.

The test was administered at 8 A.M. This was deemed good time as the trainees would not be fatigued by the day's activities. The classrooms were used for the exercise. Physical conditions such as good ventilation and comfortable sitting were ensured. The trainees were briefed on the purpose of the study. The different listening tasks and their formats were explained to the trainees and the pre-taped verbal instructions repeated for clarity. Trainees' hearing ability was ensured before the exercise began by asking questions from different locations of the classroom. The volume of recording was tested to ensure it was well balanced and loud enough for all to hear. The answer sheets were provided before trainees listened to the taped scripts. The question and answer sheets were collected from the trainees at the end of each subtest.

## FINDINGS

The study wanted to establish whether teacher trainees in public teacher training colleges performed the same as the trainees in private teacher training colleges. As a result, respondents were drawn from both a public TTC and a private TTC. The performance of the trainees drawn from the two colleges was analysed and descriptive statistics tabulated in the table below.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics per College in Subtests and in the Test Total

College Type		Subtest1	Subtest2	Subtest3	Test total
Public	Mean	71.0000	37.6667	72.2667	60.3111
	N	30	30	30	30
	Std. Deviation	29.86752	18.87953	15.73911	15.88414
Private	Mean	60.0000	30.3333	57.5000	49.2778
	N	30	30	30	30
	Std. Deviation	26.26129	18.28573	14.12689	14.02436
Total	Mean	65.5000	34.0000	64.8833	54.7944
	N	60	60	60	60
	Std. Deviation	28.42922	18.79416	16.59190	15.86313

In all the subtests and in the test total as indicated in table 1 the trainees in the public TTC performed better than the trainees in the private TTC. In subtest 1, the trainees in the public TTC recorded a mean score of 71% while trainees in the private college attained a mean score of 60%. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to attain the

DCL. In subtest 2, trainees in the two colleges performed dismally. Though, the trainees in the public TTC performed better than their counterparts in the private TTC, the two groups failed to attain both the DCL and the MCL. Their mean scores were 37.7% and 30.3% respectively. Subtest 2 required trainees to: be able to use context to interpret meaning, have the knowledge on vocabulary, use semantic and syntactic cues and use critical thinking. This task unlike the other two did not rely much on recall. The teaching in teacher training colleges is mainly by lecture method and notes are dictated to the trainees. The lessons are concluded through oral questions which rely on recall. Recall is a key in listening comprehension exercises unlike in cloze test exercises. This helps explain the poor performance in subtest 2.

In subtest 3, the trainees in the public TTC registered a mean score of 72.3% while the trainees in the private TTC registered a mean score of 67.5%. Though the two groups attained the MCL, they failed to attain the DCL in subtest 3. Trainees in the public TTC recorded a mean score of 60.3% in the test total while the trainees in the private TTC recorded a mean score of 49.3 %. The trainees in the public TTC achieved the MCL but failed to attain the DCL in the test total while the trainees in the private TTC failed to attain both the DCL and the MCL.

The findings in the table 1 show that trainees in both public and private teacher training colleges did not attain the DCL in all the listening tasks. As noted earlier on in the study the performance in subtest 2 which was in form of a cloze test was dismally performed by the two groups as none of them attained neither the DCL nor the MCL. However, generally, the trainees in the public TTC performed better than the trainees in the private TTC as they attained the MCL in the other tasks except in subtest 2. The poor performance by trainees in the private teacher training college may be attributed to the weak entry behavior of the teacher trainees. The study established that 30% of the trainees in the private teacher training college had an entry behavior of below C with one having an entry behavior as low as D. With the lowest entry grade for primary teacher training at C plain, D plain is a weak entry behaviour. The study also noted that the private teacher training college was situated few metres from the Nairobi- Garissa highway and therefore there was possibility of physical noise during the everyday learning processes in the college.

The study recommends that the policy makers should raise the entry behavior of teacher trainees to C+ and above for all the teacher trainees whether they are joining public or private teacher training colleges. The Ministry of Education should also give guidelines on where learning institutions should be located to minimise distracters such as physical noise from the moving vehicles during the learning process.

The study sought to establish the percentages of the trainees in the two colleges who attained the DCL and the MCL. The findings are tabulated in the table below.

**Table 2.** Percentage of Trainees in Public and Private TTCs who attained the DCL and the MCL

Task	Public		Private	
	% of trainees who attained the DCL	% of trainees who attained the MCL	% of trainees who attained the DCL	% of the trainees who attained the MCL
Subtest 1	67	80	33	57
Subtest 2	0	40	3	13
Subtest 3	53	90	17	80
Test total	20	73	0	43
n = 60				

From table 2, it is evident that in subtest 1, 67% of trainees in the public TTC achieved the DCL while only 33% of the trainees in the private TTC achieved the DCL in subtest 1. 80% of trainees in the public TTC attained the MCL in subtest 1. On the other hand, 57% of the trainees in the private TTC attained the MCL in subtest 1. In subtest 2, none of the trainees in the public TTC managed to attain the DCL while only 3% of the trainees in the private TTC attained the DCL. However, 40% of the trainees in the public TTC attained the MCL but only 13% of the trainees in the private TTC attained the MCL in subtest 2. In subtest 3, 53% of the trainees in the public TTC attained the DCL while only 17% of the trainees in the private TTC attained the DCL in subtest 3. In the test total, none of the trainees in the private TTC managed to achieve the DCL while only 20% of the trainees in the public TTC achieved the DCL. While 73% of the trainees in the public TTC achieved the MCL in the test total, 43% of the trainees in the private TTC achieved the MCL in the test total.

From the above findings, more than half of the teacher trainees in the public TTC attained the DCL in the listening comprehension and in the dictation but not in the cloze test and in the test total. However, this was not the case with trainees in the private TTC where the percentages were quite low. Majority of teacher trainees in the public TTC attained the MCL in all the listening tasks except in subtest 2. The trainees in the private TTC on the other hand had a majority attain MCL in subtest 3 only. This furthers the evidence that trainees performed extremely poorly in the cloze test and the trainees in the public TTC performed better than the trainees in the private TTC. The tutors of English in teacher training colleges should expose the trainees to tasks that need reordering and relating ideas to enhance their listening skills which as indicated by performance in cloze test seem quite poor. Majority of the teacher trainees in both colleges and especially in the public college attained the MCL in the listening comprehension and in dictation. This may be attributed to the fact that most of the learning in teacher training colleges is done through lecture method where trainees listen to the tutor and answer questions. The tutors also dictate notes to the trainees. This may help to explain the good performance in the two tasks and the need to expose the trainees to cloze test and other teaching methods that will promote the other listening skills.

The researcher wanted to further measure whether these differences in performances of the two groups were statistically significant or they occurred by chance. The researcher carried out ANOVA on the different performances. The findings are indicated in table 3 below.

**Table 3.** ANOVA on Performance in the Subtests and in the Test Total by College Type

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Score for subtest 1	Between Groups	1815.000	1	1815.000	2.295	.135
	Within Groups	45870.000	58	790.862		
	Total	47685.000	59			
Score for subtest 2	Between Groups	806.667	1	806.667	2.335	.132
	Within Groups	20033.333	58	345.402		
	Total	20840.000	59			
Score for subtest3	Between Groups	3270.817	1	3270.817	14.625	.000
	Within Groups	12971.367	58	223.644		
	Total	16242.183	59			
Test total score	Between Groups	1749.600	1	1749.600	7.940	.007
	Within Groups	12779.733	58	220.340		
	Total	14529.333	59			

The findings in table 3 show that the performance in subtest 1 by college type was not significant at 0.135 statistical significance level. The performance in subtest 2 by college type was also not significant at 0.132. However, performance in subtest 3 and in the test total by college type was significant at 0.000 and 0.007 significance levels. This means that the variable of college type influenced the performance of trainees in subtest 3 and in the test total and not the trainees' performance in subtest 1 and subtest 2.

Spearman's correlation test was conducted to establish whether there was a relationship in trainees' performance scores on the different sub skills represented by the different subtests and the social variable of college type. The test yielded the following findings.

**Table 4.** Correlation Test by College Type

			Score for subtest 1	Score for subtest 2	Score for subtest3	Test total score	Type of college attended
Spearman's rho	Score for subtest 1	Correlation coefficient	1.000	-.426**	.612**	-.590**	-.066
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001	.000	.000	.618
		N	60	60	60	60	60
	Score for subtest 2	Correlation coefficient	-.426**	1.000	-.669**	.711**	-.006

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.	.000	.000	.965
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Score for subtest3	Correlation coefficient	.612**	-.669**	1.000	-.895**	-.140
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.286
	N	60	60	60	60	60
	Correlation coefficient	-.590**	.711**	-.895**	1.000	.031
Test total score	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.811
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Type of college attended	Correlation coefficient	-.066	-.006	-.140	.031	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.618	.965	.286	.811	.
	N	60	60	60	60	60

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There was no correlation between college type and the performance of teacher trainees as indicated in Table 4. Performances in the different listening tasks were also correlated. Performance in subtest 1 correlated with performances in subtests 2 and 3 as well as performance in the test total at 0.01 statistical significance level. The findings imply that if a trainee in the private TTC or in the public TTC performed well in subtest 1, he or she also performed well in all the other subtests as well as in the test total. We can therefore conclude that listening skills needed to perform subtest 1 depended on skills needed to perform subtest 2, subtest 3 and the test total. Subtest 1 required the listening sub skills of recalling main idea, inferring meaning and predicting outcomes. Subtest 2 also required the sub skill of recall and use of context, knowledge of vocabulary and knowledge of the language. Subtest 3 needed the sub skills of discriminating sounds, recognising word segments and grammatical knowledge of the language. All these listening subskills built on each other.

Performance in subtest 2 correlated with performances in subtests 1 and 3 and performance in the test total at 0.01 statistical significance level. The implication of these findings is that if a trainee in the public TTC performed poorly in subtest 2, the same trainee also performed poorly in subtest 1, subtest 3 and in the test total. If a trainee in the private TTC performed well in subtest 2, the same trainee performed well in subtest 1, 3 and in the test score. This implies that listening skills needed to perform subtest 2 were dependent on listening skills needed to perform subtest 1, subtest 3 and the test total. For trainees to use context and explore their vocabulary in doing subtest 2, they needed to recall the main idea, discriminate sounds, identify word segments and explore the grammatical knowledge of the language.

According to the findings in the table above, performance in subtest 3 correlated with performance in all the other listening tasks at 0.01 statistical significance level. This means that performance in subtest 3 of a trainee in the private TTC or in the public TTC



was also reflected in his or her performance in subtest 1, 2 and in the test total. The same was observed in the performance of the test total. The performance in the test total of a trainee in any of the two colleges reflected the performance of the same trainee in all the subtests. This implies that the listening skills needed to perform all the listening tasks were dependent on each other or built on each other. These skills were recall, use of context, knowledge of vocabulary, discrimination of sounds, recognising word segments and grammatical semantic and syntactic knowledge of the language.

We conclude then that performance within the listening tasks was correlated. For instance the trainees in the public TTC who performed well did so in all the listening tasks while the trainees who performed poorly in the public TTC did the same in all the listening tasks. The same applies to the private TTC. We conclude therefore that the skills needed to perform one subtest depended on the skills needed to perform all the other subtests and the test total. This seems to suggest that the listening sub skills represented by the subtests are dependent on each other or build on each other. The trainees need to be equipped in all the skills as lack of one affects the acquisition of the other.

### **Comparison of performances of different groups within the two college types**

The researcher further compared the performances of the different groups in the two TTCs. The comparison was based on social variables of sex, age, entry behaviour and performance in the Mid-course examination.

#### ***Comparison of the performance in both TTCs by sex***

The first comparison was between the trainees in the public college and the trainees in the private college using the social variable of sex. The performances in the subtests and in the test total of the male and the female trainees in both the public college and the private college were compared and the results tabulated in the table below.

**Table 5.** Comparison of Means by Sex

Task	Public		Private	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Subtest 1	68	71	53	67
Subtest 2	38	37	25	25
Subtest 3	66	69	55	60
Test total	51	59	48	51
n= 60				

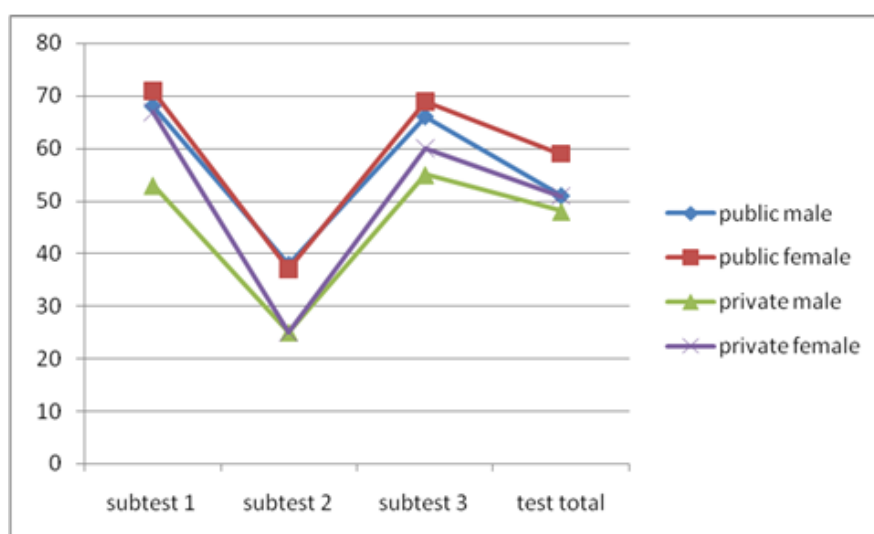
As indicated in table 5 among all the four groups compared the female trainees in the public college performed the best in all the tasks except in the cloze test while the male trainees in the private college performed the poorest in all the listening tasks. In subtest 1, the male trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 68% while their counterparts in the private college recorded a lower mean score of 53%. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to attain the DCL. The performance of the female

trainees was also compared. The female trainees in the public college performed better than the female trainees in the private college. In subtest 1 the female trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 71% while the female trainees in the private college attained a mean score of 67%. The two groups achieved the MCL but did not achieve the DCL.

In subtest 2, the male trainees in the public college managed a mean score of 38% while those in the private college achieved a poor mean score of 25%. The two groups neither attained the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2. The female trainees in the two colleges performed poorly too. They neither achieved the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2. While the female trainees in the public college had a mean score of 37%, those in the private college had a mean score of 25% just like their male counterparts in the private college.

In subtest 3, the male trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 66% while those in the private college attained a lower mean score of 55%. The two groups attained the MCL but did not attain the DCL in subtest 3. The female trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 69% while the female trainees in the private college attained a mean score of 60% in subtest 3. Though the two female groups attained the MCL, they did not attain the DCL in subtest 3.

The male trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 51% in the test total while the male trainees in the private college attained a mean score of 48% in the test total. The male trainees in the public college attained the MCL but did not attain the DCL in the test total. On the other hand, the male trainees in the private college neither attained the DCL nor the MCL in the test total. The female trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 59% in the test total while the female trainees in the private college attained a mean score of 51% in the test total. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to achieve the DCL. The results are presented in figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of Performance by Sex

The results from the analysis in figure 1 indicate that the female trainees in the public TTC performed better than the female trainees in the private TTC in all the listening

tasks. The same was observed among the male trainees where male trainees in the public TTC performed better than their male counterparts in the private TTC. However, the female trainees in both TTCs performed better than the male trainees in both TTCs.

The female trainees performed better than the male trainees. These findings disagree with the findings of a study on verbal communication skills. Hamidi (2011) reports that verbal communication skills were higher in males than in females. A research conducted by Tendero (2000) may help explain the differences in performances in the different listening tasks between the sexes. The study was on left/right brain hemisphere dominance and language proficiency. The study sought to establish the relationship between hemisphere dominance and English proficiency scores in four macro skills (listening speaking, writing and reading). The study found the male respondents left brained and so were good in speaking and fair in listening. The female respondents were found to use both the right and the left hemispheres and so good in both speaking and listening.

### ***Comparison of the performance in both TTCs by age***

The trainees in the two colleges were compared using the social variable of age. The comparison yielded findings presented in table 6

**Table 6.** Comparison by Age

Task	Public		Private	
	25 Years and above (%)	Below 25 years (%)	25 Years and above (%)	Below 25 years (%)
Subtest 1	64.2	75.6	57.1	62.5
Subtest 2	40.8	35.6	23.6	36.3
Subtest 3	71.7	72.7	58.9	56.3
Test total	59.8	60.8	46.5	52.3
n=60				

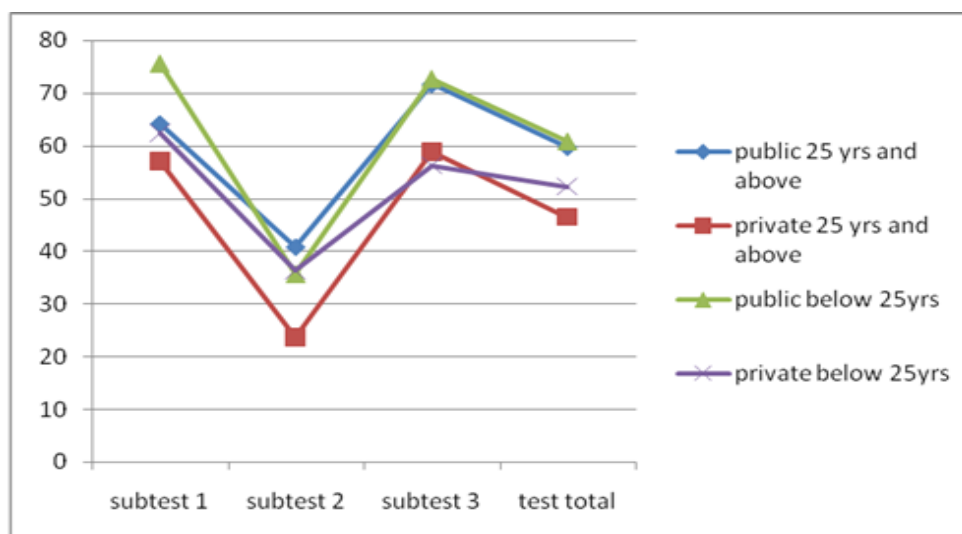
The trainees below the age of 25 years in the two TTCs performed better than the trainees aged 25 years and above in most of the listening tasks as indicated in table 6. However the groups in the public TTC performed better than the groups in the private TTC. In the category of the trainees aged 25 years and above, the trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 64.2% while those in the private college attained a mean score of 57.1%. The two groups failed to achieve the DCL in subtest 1 but attained the MCL. In the category of trainees aged below 25 years, the trainees in the public college attained a better mean score than the trainees in the private TTC. The trainees in the public TTC achieved a mean score of 75.6% in subtest 1 while those in the private college attained a mean score of 62.5%. The trainees in the public college attained both the DCL and the MCL while those in the private college attained the MCL but failed to achieve the DCL

In subtest 2, the trainees in the public college aged 25 years and above managed a mean score of 40.8% while those in the private college managed a poor mean score of 23.6%. The two groups did not attain either the DCL or the MCL in subtest 2. The trainees aged

below 25 years in the public college attained a mean score of 40.8% in subtest 2. Those in the private college attained a mean score of 36.3% in subtest 2. The two groups neither achieved the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2.

In subtest 3, the trainees in the public college aged 25 years and above managed a mean score of 71.7% while those in the private college managed a mean score of 58.9%. The two groups attained the MCL in subtest 3 but failed to attain the DCL. The trainees aged below 25 years in the public college attained a mean score of 72.7% while those in the private college attained a mean score of 56.3%. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to achieve the DCL in subtest 3.

The trainees aged 25 years and above in the public college attained a mean score of 59.8% in the test total while their counterparts in the private college attained a mean score of 46.5%. While the trainees in the public college attained the MCL but failed to achieve the DCL, the trainees in the private college achieved neither the DCL nor the MCL. The trainees aged below 25 years in the public college got a mean score of 60.8% in the test total while their counterparts in the private college attained a mean score of 52.3%. Both groups attained the MCL but failed to attain the DCL in the test total. The results are summarised in figure 2 below.



**Figure 2.** Comparison by Age

The trainees in the public college performed better than the trainees in the private college. The trainees aged below 25 years in both the public and the private colleges generally performed better than their counterparts aged 25 years and above as indicated in figure 2. The findings of the present study show that age influenced the performance of the trainees in favour of the younger trainees. These findings disagree with findings on whether listening comprehension exists as a separate trait among EFL/ESL speakers. Buck-Gary (1991) asserts that diversity between listeners' mental ages gave different interpretation of the text. Remark (1990) conducted an experimental study to determine whether or not listening skills training improved university residents assistants' ability to actively listen. He further used age as a social

variable in this study. He found that age had no significant effect on ability to actively listen.

Thier (2012) gives interesting findings on a comparative study on age differences. The study reveals that older age groups are not only good listeners and good in body language but also have longer attention span, are more likely to hear a person out and less likely to get distracted. The study continues to say that a listener may very well “grow with age” and greater experience and sensitivity so as to achieve effective listening. Thier however, says that a person’s sensory mechanisms, particularly hearing, will deteriorate with advanced age and increase one’s difficulty in receiving messages. This study together with the present study suggests that age influence listening whether in favour of the younger or older respondents.

The differences in performances realised in the present study can be explained by a research on relationship between age and accuracy of foreign language pronunciation by Nation Centre for Education Statistics. Nation Centre for Education Statistics (2003) reports that as one matures the organisation of the cerebral receptivity of the brain or lack of cortical specialisation becomes more specialised until speech is completely lateralised in the left cerebral hemisphere. As the organisation of the brain becomes more specialised, the individual’s capacity to learn a language tends to decrease. This explains the poorer listening competence levels by the older trainees in this study

### ***Comparison of the performance in both TTCs by entry behaviour***

The trainees in both public and private colleges were compared in terms of their entry behaviour. The table below displays the findings of the comparison.

**Table 7.** Comparison by Entry Behaviour

Task	Public		Private	
	K.C.S.E. English score of C+ and below (%)	K.C.S.E English score above C+ (%)	K.C.S.E English score of C+ and below (%)	K.C.S.E English score above C+ (%)
Subtest 1	64.7	81.8	57.5	68.6
Subtest 2	34.7	42.7	29.9	32.9
Subtest 3	72.8	71.4	56.3	61.4
Test total	57.4	65.5	48.2	54.1
n=60				

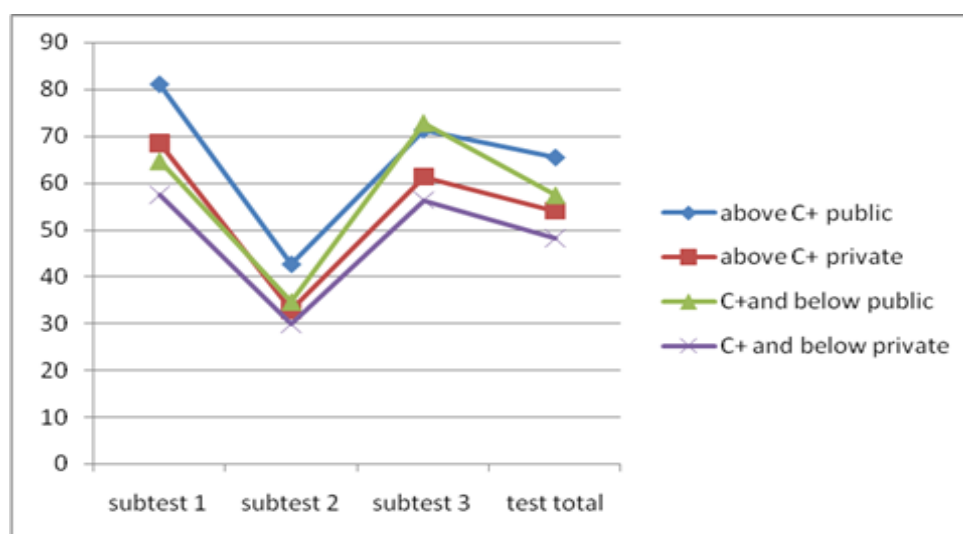
Table 7 shows that the trainees in the public TTC who had English scores above C+ in K.C.S.E performed the best while trainees with K.C.S.E English scores below C+ in the private college performed the poorest in all the listening tasks. Trainees with K.C.S.E English scores above C+ in the public TTC managed a mean score of 81.8% while those in the private college managed a mean score of 68.6% in subtest 1. While the trainees in the public college attained both the DCL and the MCL in subtest 1, the trainees in the private college attained the MCL but failed to attain the DCL in subtest 1. The performance of the trainees with K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below in both the public and private colleges was also compared. In this category, the trainees in the

public college managed an average score of 64.7% in subtest 1. Their counterparts in the private college managed an average score of 57.5%. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to attain the DCL in subtest 1.

In subtest 2, the trainees in the public college who had K.C.S.E English scores above C+ registered a slightly better mean score than those in the private college who had K.C.S.E English scores above C+. Those in the public college achieved a mean score of 42.7% while those in the private college managed a mean score of 32.9%. The two groups attained neither the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2. The trainees with K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below in the public college attained a mean score of 34.7% while the trainees with K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below got a mean score of 29.9%. Both groups neither attained the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2.

While the trainees in the private TTC with English scores above C+ attained a mean score of 61.4% in subtest 3, the trainees in the public TTC with K.C.S.E. English score above C+ attained a mean score of 71.4%. Both groups attained the MCL but failed to attain the DCL in subtest 3. Trainees in the public TTC who had K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below attained a mean score of 72.8% in subtest 3 while the trainees in the private TTC who had K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below attained a mean score of 56.3%. Both groups attained the MCL but failed to attain the DCL.

In the test total, the trainees with K.C.S.E English scores above C+ in the public college attained a mean score of 65.5 %, a score below the DCL but above the MCL. The trainees with K.C.S.E English scores above C+ in the private college attained a mean score of 54.1%, a score above the MCL but below the DCL. The trainees in the public college with K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below attained a mean score of 57.4%. Although they attained the MCL, they failed to achieve the DCL in the test total. The trainees in the private college with K.C.S.E English scores of C+ and below attained a mean score of 48.2%. They neither attained the MCL nor the DCL in the test total. The findings are in figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Comparison by Entry Behaviour

The findings in figure 4.3 indicate that the trainees in both colleges who had entry behaviour of above C+ performed better in most of the listening tasks than the trainees who had entry behaviour of C+ and below. The trainees in the public college performed better than the trainees in the private college too. As noted earlier, the good performance noted in the public college may be attributed to the fact that trainees in the public college had a stronger entry point than those in the private college. While 80% of the trainees in the public college had a K.C.S.E English score of C+ and above, only 36.7% of the trainees in the private college had a K.C.S.E English score of C+ and above. The trainees with strong entry behaviour also performed better than the trainees with weak entry behaviour. These findings agree with the findings of a study by Feast (2000). Feast (2000) sought to establish the impact of English for International Opportunity (IELTS) scores on performance at the university. The study findings were that there is significant and positive relationship between English language proficiency and the performance of international students at the university as measured by GPA.

### Comparison of the performance in both TTCs by performance in Mid-course examination

Based on their performance in the mid- course exam, trainees were classified into three categories: above average, average and below average. The researcher used the three categories to compare the performance of the trainees in the public college and the trainees in the private college and came up with the findings in the table below.

**Table 8.** Comparison by Performance in the Mid-course Examination

Task	Public			Private		
	Above average (%)	Average (%)	Below average (%)	Above average (%)	Average (%)	Below average (%)
Subtest 1	78	74	35	59	69	60
Subtest 2	45	45	13	25	42	31
Subtest 3	73	77	71	62	60	64
Test total	65	65	40	49	57	52

Table 8 shows that in the above average category, the trainees in the public college performed better than those in the private college in subtest 1. Their average marks were 78% and 59% respectively. The trainees in the public college attained both the DCL and the MCL in subtest 1. On the other hand the trainees in the private college only attained the MCL in subtest 1. In the average category, the same trend was observed. The trainees in the public college performed better than the trainees in the private college. While the trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 74% those in the private college attained a mean score of 69%. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to achieve the DCL in subtest 1. However, this was not the case with the below average category. In this category the trainees in the private college attained a better mean score than those in the public college. The trainees in the public college attained a poor mean score of 35% while those in the private college attained a mean score of 60%. While the trainees in private college attained the MCL but failed to achieve the

DCL, The trainees in the public college neither achieved the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 1.

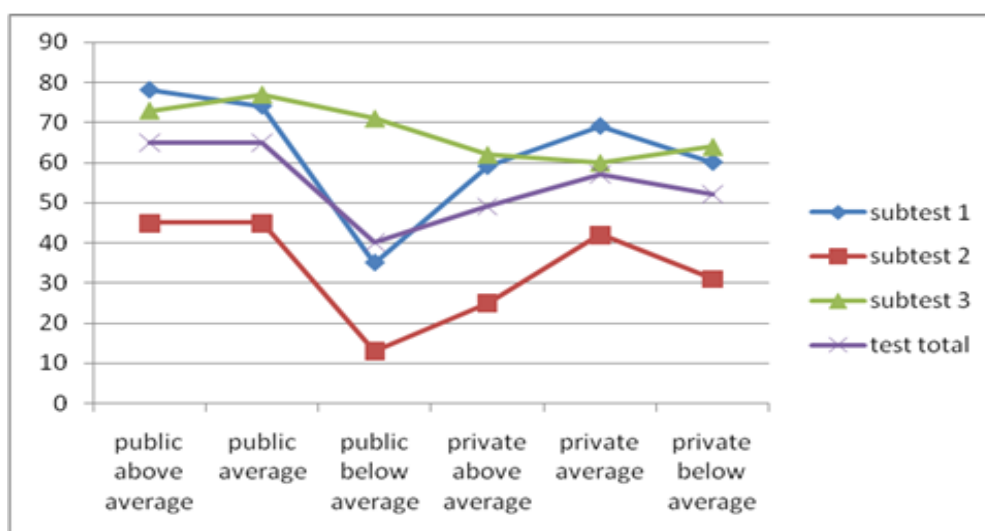
In subtest 2, the trainees in the above average category of the public college achieved a mean score of 45% while those in the private college registered a poor score of 25%. The two groups failed to achieve both the DCL and the MCL in subtest 2. The trainees in the average category of the public college also achieved a mean score of 45% while those in the private college scored a mean score of 42%. The two groups neither attained the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2 just like the trainees in the above average category. As observed in the performance of subtest1, trainees in the below average category of the private college performed better than the trainees in the below average category of the public college. While the trainees in the private college attained a mean score of 31%, the trainees in the public college attained a very poor mean score of 13%. Yet again the two groups neither attained the DCL nor the MCL in subtest 2.

In subtest 3, the trainees in the above average category of the public college attained an average score of 73% with those in the private college attained a mean score of 62%. The two groups attained the MCL but failed to achieve the DCL in subtest 3. The trainees in the average category of the public college performed better than the trainees in the private college. The trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 77% while those in the private college attained a mean score of 60%. Though the trainees in average category of the private college attained only the MCL in subtest 3, the trainees in the average category of the public college attained both the DCL and the MCL. However, unlike in the other two subtests where the trainees in the below average category of the private college performed better than the trainees in the below average category of the public college, this was not the case with subtest 3. The trainees in the below average of the public college performed better than their counterparts in the private college. Their respective mean scores were 71% and 64%. Though the two groups attained the MCL in subtest 3, they both did not attain the DCL in subtest 3.

The trend of the trainees in the above average category of the public college performing better than the trainees in the above average category of the private college was maintained in the test total. While the trainees in the public college attained a mean score of 65%, those in the private college attained a mean score of 49%. The trainees in the public college attained the MCL in the test total but failed to attain the DCL. The trainees in the private college on the other hand failed to attain both the DCL and the MCL. The trainees in the average category of the public college achieved a mean score of 65%, a score below the DCL but above the MCL, while the trainees in the average category of the private college attained a mean score of 57%, a score above the MCL but below the DCL. The trainees in the average category of the public college therefore performed better than the trainees in the average category of the private college. However, this trend changed in the below average category where the trainees in the private college performed better than the trainees in the public college. The trainees in the private college managed a mean score of 52%. They attained the MCL in the test total though they failed to attain the DCL. The trainees in the public college attained a



poor mean score of 40%. They did not attain both the DCL and the MCL in the test total. The results are tabulated in figure 4 below.



**Figure 4.** Comparison by Performance in the Mid-Course Examination

The findings in figure 4.4 are also in favour of the public TTC. The general performance show that most categories of trainees in the public college performed better than the categories of trainees in the private college. These findings disagree with the findings of a study on students' assessment in writing skills of the English language. Javed et al (2013) reports that t-test was applied to make comparison on bases of public and private sector. The analysis revealed no significant difference between the students of public and private schools.

From the raw data (see appendix iii), it is evident that the trainees in the public TTC had a better entry behaviour than those in the private TTC. While the least entry grade for trainees in the public TTC was C plain, the least entry grade for the trainees in the private TTC was D plain. We may therefore conclude that the poor performance recorded by trainees in the private TTC was as a result of poor entry behaviour recorded in the private TTC.

The study came up with strategies which if put in place would help improve the listening abilities of teacher trainees in teacher training colleges in Kenya in particular and the listening abilities of all people in general. The strategies were put into three categories: strategies by trainees, strategies by instructors and strategies by curriculum developers.

### Strategies by Teacher Trainees

Among the strategies recommended for learners were right attitude, eye contact, awareness of instructor's mannerisms, tone of voice and other body language, do creative listening, avoid intellectual despair, use memorising words, repeat what the instructor says, do a lot of practice, avoid translating what you hear, be patient and use varieties of knowledge to process information.

## Strategies by Instructors

The instructors should give learners confidence, tell learners the purpose for listening, teach intelligent guess work, divide a listening task into three stages: pre-listening stage, actual listening and post telling, keep sentences short and grammatically simple, use exaggerated intonation, emphasise key words, show empathy, minimise both internal and external distractions, choose familiar and interesting topics and frequently repeat and paraphrase.

## Strategies by Curriculum Developers

In supporting trainees' and instructor's efforts, the curriculum developers should: involve instructors in syllabus design and examination preparation, come up with learning materials that attract trainees, vary teaching methods, organise pre-service and in-service training for instructors and promote the spirit of integration of all language skills.

## CONCLUSION

Trainees in the public TTC performed better than the trainees in private TTC. Female trainees also performed better than their male counterparts in both colleges. The younger trainees in both colleges performed better than the older trainees in most of the tasks. Trainees with stronger entry points in both colleges performed better than those with weak entry points. Generally, the trainees lacked the desired competence levels in listening in English. This calls for all the stakeholders to implement the suggested strategies to enhance these abilities.

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**APPENDIX I: LISTENING TEST**

Name:

Sex:

Age:

KCSE English Grade:

KCSE Mean Grade:

**Sub-test I: Listening Comprehension**

**a. Listen to the following passage which will be read to you twice and answer the questions that follow:**

Being an only child Nyakio knew no lack. She had grown in plenty. Her parents worked very hard to ensure that their daughter had the very best. However, Nyakio seemed not to reciprocate her parents' kindness. This was especially so after she joined secondary school. She got into a gang of drug abusers.

The principal of the school being a mother herself decided to help Nyakio by talking to her on the dangers of drug abuse. When she could not give an ear to her advice she enlisted the help of the school counselor. Though the school counselor devoted her time in helping Nyakio, her efforts were not rewarded as Nyakio kept the vice.

When the school principal could not take it anymore, Nyakio was sent home with all her belongings. Out of fear, Nyakio decided not to go back home but rather to look for some casual employment in the nearby town. It was while looking for employment that Nyakio met this young man who made her believe that he was desperately looking for a young woman like Nyakio to marry. Nyakio gave in to the offer.

No sooner had Nyakio started living with this man than she realized how brutal he was. She could always have him hit her, bang her head against the wall or even threaten to cut her into pieces. To make matters worse her health started to deteriorate. Being left with few options, Nyakio decided to go back home and seek forgiveness as the prodigal son of the Bible.

Though her parents accepted her back, it was too late to salvage everything as she had already contracted HIV/AIDS. It was then that Nyakio confirmed that bad company ruins good morals.

**Questions**

- 1) Give a possible title to the passage that you have just listened to. (2 mks)
- 2) What is the meaning of the phrase "not to reciprocate her parents' kindness" (2 mks)
- 3) What other measure would the school principal have taken to help Nyakio out of her problem? (2 mks)
- 4) Which offer did Nyakio give in to? (2 mks)
- 5) What is the meaning of the word "deteriorate" as used in the passage? (2 mks)

**Sub-test II: Cloze Test**

**a) Listen carefully to this passage. It will be read twice. In the first reading, no word will be omitted but in the second reading, some words will be omitted. Supply the missing words to complete the passage:**

Growing up on the slopes of Aberdare Ranges was fun. The day began with being served with a cup of porridge. Breakfast had to be taken within a short time to give way to the daily chores. These ranged from grazing, fetching water and shamba work.

Although these were the assigned chores we had our crafty way of coming up with our own defined chores.

**Sub-test III: Dictation**

**Write the following pairs of words. Each pair will be read to you twice.**

- a) fine, vine
- b) root, loot
- c) bush, push
- d) hall, all
- e) lose, loose
- f) pale, bale
- g) very, ferry
- h) cot, court
- i) ear, hear
- j) keen, kin