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The Influence of Pupils' Attitudes Towards Learning English as a Subject and Their Performance in English Suject in Public Primary Schools in Dar Es Salaam City Council, Tanzania

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Abstract : *The study examined the influence of pupils' attitudes towards learning English on their performance in the English subject in public primary schools in Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC), Tanzania. The study is important because English is an important subject for pupils' participation in learning activities and access to educational materials, while interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety may shape pupils' engagement and performance. The study was guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which explains how attitudes can be translated into behavioural intentions and observable behaviour. The study employed a mixed-methods approach and a descriptive research design. The target population comprised 4,476 individuals: 4,170 pupils, 299 teachers, four head teachers, two Ward Education Officers (WEOs) and one Municipal Primary Education Officer. The planned sample was 453, comprising 417 pupils, 29 teachers, four head teachers, two WEOs and one MPEO. Actual usable data comprised 312 observed pupils, 24 teachers, four head teachers, two WEOs and one education officer. Quantitative data were collected from teachers through a structured questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained from head teachers, WEOs and the education officer through semi-structured interviews; classroom observation also provided behavioural evidence from pupils. Instrument validity was addressed through face and content review by supervisors and research experts and through piloting. Questionnaire reliability was assessed using test-retest over a two-week interval, with 0.70 or above identified as the acceptable coefficient. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and mean scores in SPSS Version 26, while qualitative data were analysed thematically and triangulated with quantitative and observational evidence. The study found that interest and motivation were associated with participation, persistence and completion of learning activities; confidence was associated with oral participation, independent task completion and academic performance; and anxiety was associated with reduced participation, especially where pupils feared mistakes, ridicule or examination pressure. The study concludes that pupils' attitudes are important factors associated with English performance and recommends strengthening interest and motivation, developing confidence through supportive participatory activities, and reducing anxiety through safe and supportive learning environments.*

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Conceptualization: all authors
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Writing review and editing : all authors
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INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in education because pupils need English skills to participate effectively in learning activities and access educational materials. The dissertation identifies pupils' interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety as key attitudinal dimensions related to learning English. Interest and motivation can encourage participation and persistence, confidence can support willingness to use English, while anxiety may reduce participation because of fear of mistakes or negative evaluation Twikiriize, 2024; Nyamubi, 2016).

The literature reviewed in the dissertation indicates that pupils' perceptions of the value of English and the conditions in which learning occurs can shape attitudes. Interactive teaching, teacher support, peer relationships and learning resources may also influence engagement. Evidence reviewed from the United States, China, Cameroon and Kenya generally linked interest, motivation and confidence with greater engagement and achievement, while anxiety was linked with reduced participation and poorer outcomes. In Tanzania, Nyamubi (2016) found a relationship between students' attitudes towards English and English performance, but the study focused on secondary school learners rather than pupils in Standards I–VII.

The dissertation identifies concerns about English performance in some public primary schools and notes challenges such as inadequate teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms and teacher related factors. Alongside these conditions, pupils' attitudes may affect their participation and performance. Positive interest, motivation and confidence may encourage active participation and persistence, whereas anxiety and low confidence may discourage pupils from speaking, answering questions and attempting learning tasks.

The identified gap is educational, variable and contextual: limited evidence examines interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety together among primary school pupils in public schools in Dar es Salaam City Council. The study therefore examined these four dimensions and their association with English performance.

Literature Review

1. Theory Used in the Study

The study was guided by Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). TPB explains how attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influence behavioural intentions and subsequent behaviour. In this study, interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety were linked to learning behaviour or engagement, which was then related to English performance. The dissertation expresses the central relationship as: interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety → learning behaviour/engagement → performance in English.

The theory provides a framework for explaining how positive attitudes can be reflected in participation, practice, persistence and completion of learning activities. Confidence is particularly relevant to perceived behavioural control because pupils' beliefs about their ability may affect their willingness to undertake learning activities. The theory also has limitations: it may give insufficient attention to emotional factors such as anxiety and to classroom conditions, teacher quality, learning materials and socio cultural influences.

Studies generally indicate that interest is associated with participation, persistence and achievement. Li et al. (2021) found that strong intrinsic interest was associated with

persistence and higher English examination scores among primary pupils in China, while Nguimkeu *et al,.(*2022) reported a positive relationship in Cameroon. Mwangi et al., (2020) reported similar evidence in Kenya. For motivation, Nguyen (2020) found that motivated primary pupils in Vietnam showed sustained engagement and better test scores, while Tchombe (2024) reported a positive relationship in Cameroon.

For confidence, Zhang et al. (2026) reported greater participation and achievement among confident primary pupils in China, and Wanjiru (2022) found a positive relationship in Kenya. For anxiety, Chen et al. (2020), Tchombe and Fomunyam (2022) and Kamau (2021) associated higher anxiety with avoidance, lower participation and poorer performance. These international and African studies do not fully match the present study because they were conducted in different countries, educational settings or age groups.

Tanzanian evidence in the dissertation is represented especially by Nyamubi (2016), which examined attitudes and English performance among secondary school students. The present study differs by focusing on Standards I–VII in public primary schools and by examining four dimensions together in Dar es Salaam City Council. This establishes the study's educational level, variable and contextual gap.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research approach and a descriptive research design. Quantitative methods provided measurable information on pupils' interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety in relation to English learning and performance. Qualitative methods provided explanations of participants' experiences and perceptions. The descriptive design examined existing attitudes and learning conditions without manipulating the variables

The study was conducted in public primary schools within Dar es Salaam City Council. The target population was 4,476: 4,170 pupils, 299 teachers, four head teachers, two WEOs and one MPEO. The planned sample was 453. Actual usable data comprised 312 observed pupils, 24 teachers, four head teachers, two WEOs and one education officer, giving an overall participation figure of 343 data sources/participants as reported in Chapter Four.

Category	Population	Planned sample	Actual data	Rate
Pupils	4,170	417	312 observed	74.8%
Teachers	299	29	24	82.8%
Head teachers	4	4	4	100%
WEOs	2	2	2	100%
Education officer	1	1	1	100%
Total	4,476	453	343	75.7%

***Source**: Field Data (2026).*

Sampling and Data Collection

Stratified and simple random sampling were used for teachers and pupils, while purposive sampling was used for head teachers, WEOs and the MPEO. Data collection instruments comprised a structured teacher questionnaire, semi-structured interview guide

and classroom observation checklist. Triangulation was achieved by comparing questionnaire, interview and observation evidence.

Validity, Reliability, Analysis and Ethics

Face and content validity were addressed through review by supervisors and research experts and piloting. Test-retest reliability was conducted over a two week interval, with 0.70 or above treated as acceptable; The Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS Version 26 using frequencies, percentages and mean scores; qualitative data were analysed thematically. Ethical procedures included permission, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organised according to the four stated objectives. Quantitative evidence came principally from 24 teacher questionnaires and was summarised using frequencies, percentages and mean scores. Qualitative evidence came from interviews with four head teachers, two WEOs and the education officer, while classroom observations covered 312 pupils. The combination of sources strengthened the interpretation through triangulation.

Pupils' Interest and English Performance

Teachers generally perceived interest as an important factor in English performance. The dissertation reports a highest mean of 4.21 for the statement that pupils with high interest tended to perform better academically. Lack of interest negatively affecting classroom participation recorded a mean of 4.08; activities that captured interest and improved understanding/performance recorded 4.17; and low interest being associated with difficulty achieving passing grades recorded 4.04. Pupils' enthusiasm reflected in homework and classwork recorded 3.92.

Interest indicator	Mean
High interest associated with better academic performance	4.21
Lack of interest negatively affects participation	4.08
Interest-capturing activities improve understanding/performance	4.17
Low interest associated with difficulty achieving passing grades	4.04
Interest reflected in homework/classwork completion	3.92

***Source**: Field Data (2026), Table 4.5*

Qualitative themes

Three prominent themes were reported: active classroom participation; completion of classwork and homework; and engagement through learner centred and interactive activities. The qualitative evidence indicated that interested pupils were more willing to answer questions, read aloud, join group discussions and attempt to communicate in English.

> *"Pupils who have a strong interest in learning English normally participate more actively during lessons... They are willing to answer questions, read passages aloud, take part in group discussions and try to speak English."(*teacher B)

The interest findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in the dissertation. Nguimkeu and Fomunyam (2022) reported that pupils with greater interest demonstrated greater participation, homework engagement and language practice, while Mwangi (2020) linked interest with better English test performance and interactive teaching. The finding also agrees with Nyamubi (2016), whose Tanzanian study found that positive attitudes towards English could be utilised to enhance language learning. In relation to TPB, interest can be understood as an attitudinal factor translated into participation and other observable learning behaviours.

Pupils' Motivation and English Performance

Teachers showed strong agreement that motivation was associated with English performance. The highest mean, 4.38, was recorded for the statement that motivated pupils were more likely to achieve higher English grades. Teacher encouragement affecting motivation recorded 4.33; intrinsic motivation and active class participation recorded 4.29; willingness to learn affecting assignment consistency recorded 4.08; and lack of motivation contributing to failure to meet learning objectives recorded 4.04.

Motivation indicator	**Mean**
Motivated pupils more likely to achieve higher grades	4.38
Willingness to learn influences assignment consistency	4.08
Intrinsic motivation supports active participation	4.29
Teacher encouragement positively affects motivation	4.33
Low motivation contributes to failure to meet objectives	4.04

Source*: Field Data (2026), Table 4.6.*

Qualitative Themes

The qualitative findings identified greater effort and persistence, active classroom participation, consistent completion of learning activities, teacher encouragement and a supportive learning environment. Motivated pupils were described as more likely to continue practising when they encountered difficult vocabulary, grammar, reading or writing tasks.

> *"Motivated pupils normally put more effort into learning English. When they are given difficult exercises, they do not easily give up. They continue trying, ask the teacher for assistance and sometimes work together with their classmates.(*TEACHER A)"

The motivation findings correspond with Lee and Lin (2019), Nguyen (2020), Tchombe and Fokou (2021), Karanja and Wu (2025) and Nyamubi (2016), n. Across these studies,

motivation was associated with effort, persistence, participation and academic outcomes. Within TPB, the findings can be interpreted as motivation supporting intentions to engage, with those intentions becoming visible through persistent learning behaviour.

Pupils' Confidence and English Performance

Teachers generally strongly agreed that confidence was important for English performance. All five statements had means above 4.00. Building confidence to improve overall academic achievement recorded the highest mean of 4.38, followed by willingness to participate in oral activities at 4.33. High confidence being associated with better tests/exams and low confidence with hesitation both recorded 4.25, while confidence supporting independent task completion recorded 4.04.

Confidence indicator	Mean
High confidence associated with better tests/exams	4.25
Confidence supports willingness for oral activities	4.33
Confidence supports independent task completion	4.04
Low confidence associated with hesitation	4.25
Building confidence improves overall achievement	4.38

***Source**: Field Data (2026),*

Qualitative themes

The qualitative findings associated confidence with oral participation, independent learning, willingness to attempt challenging activities and constructive teacher feedback. Supportive teaching environments were presented as important because pupils who feared mistakes could avoid participation.

> *"Teachers need to recognise that pupils learn differently. A lesson becomes more effective when the teacher gives pupils an opportunity to participate instead of providing all the answers." (*MPEO, Interview, 2026).

The confidence findings are consistent with Rivera and Mazak (2019), Zhang et al. (2020), Fomunyam and Nguimkeu (2021), and Wanjiru (2022), which the dissertation reviewed as evidence that confidence can support participation and achievement. The present findings also fit TPB through the concept of perceived behavioural control: pupils who believe they can undertake learning activities may be more willing to participate and persist.

Pupils' Anxiety and English Performance

Anxiety primarily through qualitative findings rather than a separate quantitative table. The main themes were fear of making mistakes, fear of being laughed at or ridiculed, examination pressure, hesitation to speak, reduced participation and avoidance of English learning tasks. The findings indicate that anxiety could interfere with pupils' willingness to answer questions, speak English and participate in classroom activities.

"Teachers should treat mistakes as part of the learning process, use constructive correction and provide pupils with gradual opportunities to participate in speaking and other English activities.(WEO A)"

Further reports that supportive classroom environments and constructive teacher feedback were important in reducing anxiety. The finding is consistent with Liu and Geng (2025). Chen et al. (2020), Tchombe and Fomunyam (2022) and Kamau (2021), which were reviewed as evidence that anxiety is associated with reduced participation and weaker English outcomes.

Integrated Discussion

Across the four objectives, the findings show a coherent pattern: interest, motivation and confidence were associated with active participation, persistence and performance, while anxiety was associated with hesitation and reduced engagement. Teaching approaches, teacher encouragement, peer interaction and learning resources appeared as contextual conditions that could strengthen or weaken pupils' engagement. The findings therefore support the study's TPB based interpretation that attitudes can be expressed through learning behaviour, while also showing that classroom conditions matter.

Summary Of Empirical Evidence

1. Evidence Matrix by Objective

Objective	Quantitative evidence	Qualitative themes	Interpretation
Interest	Means 3.92–4.21; highest 4.21	Participation; class/homework; interactive activities	Greater interest associated with engagement and performance
Motivation	Means 4.04–4.38; highest 4.38	Effort; persistence; participation; encouragement	Motivation associated with sustained learning behaviour
Confidence	Means 4.04–4.38; highest 4.38	Oral participation; independent tasks; supportive feedback	Confidence associated with participation and achievement
Anxiety	No separate quantitative table reported	Fear of mistakes/ridicule; examination pressure; hesitation	Anxiety associated with reduced participation and engagement

***Source**: Synthesised directly from the dissertation's Chapter Four findings.*

2. Methodological Strengths Relevant to Interpretation

The mixed-methods design enabled numerical teacher perceptions to be considered alongside interviews and classroom observations. The use of three data sources supported triangulation. Classroom observation was particularly relevant because it provided direct evidence of pupils' participation and behaviour rather than relying exclusively on adult reports.

The study nevertheless reports a difference between the planned and actual sample, and the reliability coefficient itself.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that pupils' attitudes towards learning English are important factors associated with academic performance in public primary schools in Dar es Salaam City Council. Interest was associated with active participation, completion of learning activities and willingness to learn English. Motivation was associated with persistence, participation and commitment to learning activities. Confidence was positively associated with oral participation, independent learning and academic performance. Anxiety was associated with reduced participation, communication and performance, particularly when pupils feared making mistakes, being laughed at or facing examination pressure.

The findings also indicate that pupils' attitudes should be understood within the classroom environment. Teacher encouragement, participatory teaching, peer interaction and access to learning resources can create conditions that support positive learning behaviour. In keeping with the descriptive design, these relationships as associations reported or observed in the study rather than claiming experimental causation.

Recommendations

English teachers should use storytelling, reading activities, language games, discussions, pictures and locally available materials to stimulate pupils' interest and participation.

Teachers should strengthen motivation through encouragement, positive reinforcement, constructive feedback and achievable learning activities. Schools can support debates, spelling competitions, storytelling and speaking exercises.

Teachers should develop confidence through pair work, group discussion, question and answer activities, presentations and regular opportunities to practise speaking, reading and writing without fear of embarrassment.

Teachers and school heads should reduce anxiety by treating mistakes as part of learning, using constructive correction and avoiding practices that expose pupils to ridicule. Pupils experiencing high anxiety should receive appropriate academic and psychosocial support.

Dar es Salaam City Council education authorities should support teacher professional development on interest, motivation, confidence and anxiety and ensure adequate English teaching and learning resources.

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