

An Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Facilities on Acquisition of Language Skills by Pre-School Learners in Kenya

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Abstract: *Learning facilities are immensely crucial and important to both the learners and the teachers. The presence of learning facilities may have positive influence in acquisition of language skills whereas their absence may hinder acquisition of language skills by ECDE learners. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the availability of teaching and learning facilities and its influence in acquisition of language skills among ECDE learners in Kabianga division, Kericho County. This study was guided by the following objectives: To find out the availability of learning facilities within ECD centres in Kabianga Division; to find out the role of learning and teaching resources in acquisition of language skills among ECDE learners. The target population comprised of 53 ECDE teachers and 482 ECDE pupils from the selected schools. Stratified random sampling was used to select public and private pre-school centres. The instruments of data collection were questionnaires to which the respondents had to respond to in writing. The findings further revealed that lack of teaching and learning resources in ECDE centers hinders acquisition of language skills among ECDE learners. This study concluded that teaching and learning facilities should be adequately provided to ECDE centers to promote language development among learners. It is recommended that the school should purchase learning materials while on the other hand teachers should also improvise teaching aids during classroom teaching.*

Keywords: acquisition, skills, teaching, learning facilities

1. Background of the Study

Learning facilities in schools are established for the purpose of teaching and learning. Alimi (2004) stated that school facilities are the space interpretation and physical expression of the school curriculum. According to Sussman and Gillman (2007), nations are increasingly taking responsibility for addressing the need for high-quality early education programs. Nations are engineering policies for blending funding streams, standardizing reimbursement policies, designing professional development systems, and setting quality standards. Facilities, the physical places that house early care and education programs, are key issues that states either have begun to address or will need to address as they build an early care and education system.

Cash (1993) studied the relationship between classroom conditions and the school building and pupil achievement in rural schools of Virginia. The study examined the relationship between pupil achievement and the overall, structural, and cosmetic building conditions. Cash suggested that school administrators must be concerned with the structural and cosmetic conditions of school facilities as well as pupil achievement. The combination of existing school learning facilities, leadership decisions, and the financial ability of the local school districts accounts for the condition of the classrooms in which pupils received instruction on a daily basis (Bullock, 2007). Worldwide childhood is considered as a key period in one's lifetime. It is a period when the foundation of responsible and productive adulthood is laid. This is the period between infancy and adolescence. During this period physical growth, mental, and social development is both rapid and highly impressionable. Therefore, what happens during this early years will have significant influence on the later development of the child. Parents need to be deeply involved in the education of their children in ECDE programs; for instance, they should provide most of the learning materials

for their children. Therefore, the need to invest heavily in ECDE seems almost inevitable in the world today (Kabiru, 1974).

Gambia in West Africa has developed programs geared toward improvement of ECD. According to their report known as Banjul (2001) on household, poverty survey, a significant proportion of persons living with children are extremely poor. This means that they lack the minimum amount of income required to sustain minimum standards of living, therefore they are not able to provide adequate learning facilities. In Kenya, an ECD program provides a strong rallying for parents and community (Karibe, 1994). From the report, it was revealed that 70% of the pre-school were run and managed by the community and parents. However, the government through the ministry of education has put in place strategies for addressing the issues that affect ECDE and gender. The recommendations made by education commission influenced development of education in that, primary education was made free from January 2003 and that enhances access to education for majority of school age. Gender policy 2007 states that the pre-school learning facilities must meet the basic standard required for the comfort, safety and acquisition of skills for the total development of young children. The pre-school therefore should have their own separate learning facilities such as classrooms, indoor and outdoor playing equipments, chairs, tables and mats that are adequate and safe for use. The presentences of these facilities will fasten interaction between the learners and enhance good use of the learning facilities since children learn better without disturbing or being disturbed by others.

In today's society, specifically Kabianga division, many public schools are facing various challenges of out-of-date classrooms design, deteriorating conditions and pressures such as overcrowding. Congestion in classroom has come up because of introduction of Free Primary Education. Despite

the increase in textbooks and adequate exercise books for the pupils, classrooms and other physical facilities such as desks are far from adequate, as they are not catered for in the FPE. According to (Filardo, 2011) lack of facilities impairs the quality of teaching and learning that contributes to health and safety problems for the pupils. He continues to say building design had been associated with teacher motivation and pupil achievement. If this problem of unsafe and inadequate learning facilities is not addressed, it will affect children postures and cause physical and mental deformities. Therefore it was imperative that the researcher investigated how teaching and learning facilities enhances acquisition of language skills among the ECD learners.

2. Statement of the Problem

The last two decades has seen a number of international events taking place that have influenced Kenya in the direction of implementing early childhood education programmes. The international policy frameworks such as United Nations Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1989) and Salamanca Statement of 1994, encouraged provision of quality education to ECD learners regardless of gender. The convention also sets out the basic human rights that children everywhere have the right to develop to the fullest and a right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. On the other hand recommendation made on education reforms by the task force on realignment of education sector to vision 2030 and the constitution of Kenya 2010 have provided for free and compulsory basic education as a human right to every Kenyan child. The recommendations made by the commission of education on introduction and establishment of free education in Kenya, has resulted to higher number of pupils calling for quality and effective education while on the other hand the provision of learning facilities do not correspond with the high number of pupils. Despite the high enrolment of pupils in pre-schools in Kabianga division, it has been noted that most preschool learners are not able to read or write when joining class one. This problem came because of sharing limited facilities and if not addressed, it will affect language acquisition among learners. On the private sector, some individuals have started their private schools not considering the space available for putting up physical facilities.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives

1. To find out the availability of learning facilities within ECD centres in Kabianga Division
2. To find out the role of teaching and learning resources in acquisition of language skills on ECDE learners

3. Empirical Literature

Availability of Learning Facilities in ECDE centres

Earthman (2002) described the environment of an organization as all elements relevant to its operation and they include direct and indirect action elements. Trudeau and Shepherd (2008) indicated that learning facilities improve the ability to learn, the ability to concentrate, memory and intellectual performance the availability of learning facilities in a learning environment therefore have an adverse effects on acquisition of language skills among learners. School

facilities such as classrooms, libraries, play-ground constitute the major components of both direct and indirect action elements in the environment of learning. It is noted that close relationship exists between the physical environment and acquisition of skills among learners.

Nwagwu (1978) and Ogunsaju (1980) maintained that the quality of education that children receive bears direct relevance to the availability or lack thereof of learning facilities and overall atmosphere in which learning takes place. The school facilities consisted of all types of buildings for academic and non-academic activities, equipment for academic and non-academic activities, areas for sports and games, landscape, farms and gardens including trees, roads and paths. Others included furniture and toilet facilities, lighting, acoustics, storage facilities and packing lot, security, transportation, ICT, cleaning materials, food services, and special facilities for the physically challenged persons. The learner therefore was being provided with adequate learning facilities in order to enjoy learning.

In this study, the most important aspects were the infrastructure and the availability and accessibility to learning materials. It was noted that apart from those sponsored by Non-governmental Organizations, most early childhood education centres lacked adequate furniture. While some centres had no furniture at all, many more did not have enough for the number of enrolled pupils. Often times, the furniture does not match the physical size and stature of children, i.e. in most cases, ECDE learners were given furniture meant for older pupils.

The furniture that was ill- adapted to the physical size of children was uncomfortable and could cause postural discomfort and pain. Another case was that some centres had benches that were fixed too far from the table used by the children. This strained the child's arm when writing. Typically, children bent over the writing table and this undesirable practice was due to a combination of poor seeing conditions and furniture misfits. More so, this habit deformed the child physically and hindered acquisition of writing skills. This was because the child was supposed to co-ordinate the eye and hand in relation to what was going on in the brain (Githinji & Wanjohi, 2009).

Another important and often overlooked aspect was relevance of the materials used and subsequently, the content learnt. The work of researchers indicated that the availability of good quality instructional material was an important factor on pupil acquisition of skills. Thus, well-produced and easily available reference material is an important asset. However, the contents that were irrelevant to the experiences of pupils, denigrate their culture or ignore their language, and were unlikely to stimulate interest or assist the learners in achieving language skills (Ngaroga, 2007).

The designers of learning environment often debate whether the learner should adapt the learning environment. However the question is, how does the environment shape the learner and, in turn how does the learners influences the learning environment? This involves understanding the motivation of the learner with respect to time and place in which he acquires knowledge (Woodward-Lopez, 2000; Bunting,

2004). The learning environment in this context was composed of the learner, other pupils and teachers as well as the physical environment. Adequate learning facilities should be provided to the learners since it plays a major role in enhancing acquisition of language skills (Barros, Silver & Stein, 2009). This study investigated the degree to which learning facilities in schools affected pre-school children acquisition of language skills in Kabianga Division.

Teaching and Learning Resources and Acquisition of Language skills

Most children develop speech and language skills effortlessly, acquiring this basic human skill with relatively little instruction. However, there is considerable variation in the rate at which children acquire language. For example, Roulstone, Loader, Northstone and Beveridge (2002) found that, in a population sample of 1127 children aged 25 months, nearly 55% were using three to four word sentences; a further 27% were using two-word utterances and the remaining were at or below the single word level showing a wide spread of achievement in these two year olds. Studies of the prevalence of speech and language impairments suggest that around 7% of children in primary schools will exhibit difficulties (Law *et al.*, 2000; Tomblin *et al.*, 1996).

Increasingly it is recognized that children with identified language difficulties achieve less academic success than their peers at both primary and secondary school age (Stothard *et al.*, 2004; ContiRamsden *et al.*, 2001; ContiRamsden *et al.*, 2009). There are now clear causal associations between a child's level of language and communication development at school entry age and how this impacts on their literacy learning and attainment (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Nathan *et al.*, 2004). However, as with typical development, there is variation in how children with speech and language impairment progress. For example, a high percentage of toddlers who present as late talkers go on to resemble their typically developing peers before they reach school (Catts & Kamhi, 2005). Other activities promoted communication, language, and writing skills

through drawings, written stories, pictures of solutions, and play-acting (Thungu *et al.*, 2011). All lessons have opportunities to promote effective learning behaviours, such as verbal and nonverbal communication skills, that include collaborating, cooperating, listening, attending, speaking up, and asking questions. These are key foundational skills in order for a child to learn language skills and be successful in the classroom environment.

4. Materials and Methods

The study utilised mixed method approaches since the study collected quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires and qualitative information from observation schedule. The researcher adopted descriptive survey design for the study. The study was carried out in Kabianga division, Kericho County. The target population in this study comprised 53 ECDE teachers and 482 learners in the selected ECDE centres in Kabianga division. The study used stratified random and purposive sampling techniques to select the respondents to participate in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select both private and private preschool centres. Stratified random sampling was therefore used to select 20 ECD teachers and 50 ECDE learners from public and private schools. The study used questionnaires and observation schedule to collect. The researcher used descriptive statistics to analyse data. The researcher used statistical package for social sciences to analyze interrelated information.

5. Research Results

Teaching and Learning Facilities Available in ECDE Centers

The researcher was able to find out teaching and learning facilities available in the ECDE centers. This was done by visiting all the selected ECDE centers. By observing them, it was found out that some of the facilities were unavailable while those available were either adequate or inadequate. Table 1 shows the responses on learning facilities available in ECDE centres.

Table 1: Learning facilities available in the ECDE

Facilities	Adequate		Inadequate		Unavailable	
	Absolute freq	Relative freq (%)	Absolute freq	Relative freq (%)	Absolute freq	Relative freq (%)
Classroom	8	80	2	20	0	0
Library	2	20	4	40	4	40
Children's resting	2	20	2	20	6	60
Desks	9	90	1	10	0	0
Chairs	7	70	2	20	1	10
Tables	5	50	4	40	1	10
Drawers/cabinets	1	10	5	50	4	40
Activity areas	3	30	4	40	3	30
Shelves for keeping children's items	6	60	4	40	0	40
Dramatic play areas	3	30	4	40	3	30
Mattresses	3	30	0	0	7	70
Mats	1	10	2	20	7	70

Source: Field data (2014)

From Table 1 it was clear that most of the learning facilities were available in schools, 8 (80%) of the schools had adequate classrooms, 9 (90%) had adequate desks, 7 (70 %) had adequate toilets and chairs, 6 (60%) had adequate

shelves for keeping children's items among others. From the observation, the researcher found that the few schools that had inadequate classrooms combine learners in one class; that is the baby class and the introductory class. This affects

learning since learners gets mixed up when using learning materials and when carrying out pre-reading activities. The researcher found out that 7 (70%) ECDE centers did not have mats, mattresses and children resting rooms which were very necessary for the young learners. As explained by Maria Montessori (1870-1952), children like playing while sitting on the floor therefore they should be left to work and play on the mats. The few schools that had mats demonstrated a child friendly environment. Higgins (2005) explained that the physical structure of a school building and interaction between learners and teachers defined the characteristic of learning that takes place. Adequate

classrooms enhance learning among learners. It was also found out that facilities like library and tables were inadequate, hence hindering acquisition of reading and writing skills respectively.

Teaching and Learning Resources Available in ECDE Centres

The study also sought respondents' opinion on the adequacy of teaching and learning resources in ECDE centres. The responses of the analysis are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Teaching and learning resources available in ECDE centers

Teaching and learning resources	Adequate		Inadequate		Unavailable	
	Absolute freq	Relative freq (%)	Absolute freq	Relative freq (%)	Absolute freq	Relative freq (%)
Writing materials	10	50	10	50	0	0
Picture books	12	60	8	40	0	0
Shapes	10	50	8	40	2	10
Models	10	50	10	50	0	0
Instruction books	6	30	8	40	6	30
Video electronic	2	10	2	10	16	80
Story books	4	20	14	70	2	10
Posters & reading tools	2	10	12	60	6	30
Writing materials	10	50	8	40	2	10
Writing implements	16	80	4	20	0	0
Reference materials	10	50	10	50	0	0

Source: Field data, (2014)

From the above Table 2 10 (50%) respondents indicated that writing materials were adequate, while the other 10 (50%) said that they were inadequate. On the side of the picture books 12 (60%) argued that they were adequate while 8 (40%) said that they were inadequate. Shapes and models as indicated by 10 (50%) were adequate and while 8 (40%) said that they were inadequate. In most ECDE centers, Instruction books were very few as only 6 (30%) said that they were adequate, 8 (40%) argued that the books were inadequate and 6 (30%) stated that the books were unavailable. Most of the ECDE centres do not have video electronic as indicated by 16 (80%). From the response of the respondents and observation made by the researcher, it was clear that materials for teaching language, such as a story books, posters and general reading tools were very inadequate as indicated by 14 (70%) and 12 (60%) of respectively. While in some schools, teaching and learning facilities were not available at all. Lack of these materials affects, reading readiness skills negatively. Dehaven (2010), indicates that earlier exposure to graphics play an important role reading among ECDE learners. The respondents also indicated other learning resources found in ECDE centers are charts, picture cut-outs, photographs, drawings on the walls, flowers, songbooks among others. By evaluating the learners, the researcher found out that availability of teaching and learning resources broadens language in child's general knowledge because a child uses language to learn all manner of things in the learning environment. Bullock (2007) explained that exposing learners to learning resources enables them to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Role of Teaching and Learning Resources in Acquisition of Language Skills

This was the second objective of the study that investigated the role of teaching and learning resources towards acquisition of language skills by pre-school children in Kabianga division, Kericho County. Through several statements on Likert scale, the teachers were asked to indicate their opinion. The results are presented in Table 3. From the information gathered from various schools presented in Table 3, most of the respondents (53%) strongly agree that teaching and learning resources plays a big role on acquisition of language skills among the ECDE learners, while 20% agree, 12% undecided, 8% disagree and 7% strongly disagree on the statements. From the findings, it was clear that providing teaching and learning resources to the learners and stimulating environment with learning materials promotes interaction among children allow them to learn through play, observation, manipulation, exploration and experimentation; thus promotes acquisition of language skills (Kabiru & Njenga, 2009).

Table 3: Role of teaching and learning resources in acquisition of language skills

How resources influence acquisition of language skills	SA	A	U	D	SD
Drawings and painting on the walls helps children to recall and speak out what they have learnt hence developing oral skills.	7	2	0	1	0
Use of crayons to draw and painting objects helps learners to develop their fine muscles that enhance writing readiness skills.	5	3	1	1	0
Looking at the photographs and picture cut-outs enhances interaction among learners and discussing about the pictures influence development of oral skills.	8	1	1	0	0
Matching pictures with letter sounds helps the learners to learn vocabularies hence influence reading readiness skills.	6	2	0	1	1
Modelling shapes help in development of fine motor skills that enhances writing readiness skills.	7	1	2	0	0
Development of oral skills is greatly influenced as the learners uses the letter charts, flash cards and also song books	3	3	2	1	1
Children learn how to speak fluently as they watch, imitate and say after the teacher or a resource person.	4	2	0	1	3
Use of electronic video helps the learners to develop oral skills, retain what they have learnt and later expressed through reading and writing.	2	1	4	2	1
Use of colourful and attractive learning materials make children enjoy learning hence influence reading and writing readiness skills.	6	2	1	0	1
Through interaction, entertaining and sharing ideas as they handle teaching and learning materials, the learners gain oral and reading readiness skills.	5	3	1	1	0
Absolute frequencies	53	20	12	8	7
Relative Frequencies (%)	53	20	12	8	7

Source: Field data (2014)

From the observation made in various schools, it was concluded that lack of teaching and learning resources has negative impact on acquisition of language skills. For instance, the learners found it difficult to read letter sounds alone unlike when it was matched with pictures. Generally, it was further discovered that most of the learners who were not exposed to teaching and learning resources were unable to write even symbol letters or words. As explained by Ronald (2010), exposing teaching and learning materials to the learners helps in the development of listening and speaking skills to effectively and rightly copy what they observed. Therefore, providing teaching and learning materials for the learners promotes acquisition of language skills. Picture reading promotes oral, reading and writing readiness skills.

6. Conclusions

The results of the study showed teaching and learning materials were available in majority of schools. These revealed that learners who were exposed to adequate materials involved themselves in various language activities, hence promotes development of oral, reading readiness and writing reading skills. While in schools where these learning materials were inadequate, learners were not able to neither read nor write simple words, therefore acquisition of language skills were hindered. Providing play equipments to learners and an opportunity to play enhances creativity and alertness among learners. It was also observed that children interact a lot during play hence improving communication skills.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made;

- 1) The stakeholders of the school should support preschool in purchase of teaching and learning resources to facilitate acquisition of language skills by learners.
- 2) Teachers should be encouraged to involve themselves in the children activities to help them acquire language skills.

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