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Influence of Available Instructional Resources on the Acquisition of Language Skills among Early-Year Learners in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Language entails the ability to communicate with other people with significant variations between understanding of speech and language. Although language acquisition largely depends on the learner's ability, the access and availability of instructional resources play a pivotal role in language acquisition among children in Early Childhood Education Centres. The main aim of this study was to assess the influence of available instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills among early-year learners, to determine the impact of teachers' competence on the use of instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills among early-year learners and to determine the influence of challenges in use of instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills among early year learners in Kiambaa sub-county, Kiambu County. The study was based on the constructivists and overlapping spheres of influence theory. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was 98 head teachers and 210 ECD teachers who were considered for the study. Purposive sampling was used to obtain 12 head teachers, and simple random sampling was used to obtain 44 teachers. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to analyse the quantitative data, while content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative information gathered using open-ended questions, where findings were reported in a narrative form under each theme. Descriptive analysis was done through frequencies and percentages. A multiple Linear Regression model was used to model the relationship between the independent variable and the response variable (Acquisition of language skills). The study concludes that the availability of Instructional resources has a significant positive effect on the acquisition of language skills as denoted by the p-value ($P < 0.05$). The study recommends that stakeholders, including head teachers, teachers, and parents, should understand the importance of having sufficient instructional resources. Efforts should be made to improve access and availability based on recommendations from ECD teachers, thereby fostering language acquisition among early learners.

Keywords: Instructional resource, language acquisition, learning outcome, teaching and learning materials, early childhood development

1. Introduction

Language refers to the ability to communicate with other people with significant variations between understanding of speech and language. Scholars define speech as a spoken language, classifying it as the most efficient form of communication that is widely used. For children, language development is a continuous process that advances with the growth of a child (Adamson et al., 2021). Parents, as the primary interactive agent, play a role in enhancing language acquisition by giving good illustrations and motivating children to learn more. Other scholars define language as any means of communication where the learner's feelings and thoughts are symbolised in a specified order to convey information to others (Baas et al., 2019). Different studies have linked language acquisition to that of an organ, postulating that there is a language acquisition device in the brain that grows, matures and withers at the age of 12, indicating a critical period (Fruner, 2019). Researchers, therefore, distinguish language acquisition and learning noting that the early years have a very determinant role in defining a learner's ability to attain high linguistic competence (Lohndal et al., 2019).

Gil and Marsen (2022) opine that children are physically immersed in a specific linguistic surrounding where they may persistently hear, communicate and interact in a specific language. Interaction, therefore, has a significant role in language acquisition. These scholars also note that when children are exposed to the language through audio and visual media, and there is no interaction and do not use the language to express themselves, such learners may not acquire that specific language (Surachmi, 2021). During the language acquisition process, the children are not offered any form of guidelines on how to speak. However, instead, they are actively engaged in defining possible ways of using the language they are learning, which enables them to test whether their constructed information makes sense (Moisander et al., 2020). Through this process, children build their own language, which matches the language of adults in the child's surroundings.

Research holds that as soon as children get to school, they become sophisticated language users, with their muscles articulated to function in a culturally particular way (Al-Harbi, 2020).

Although language acquisition largely depends on the learner's ability, the access and availability of instructional resources play a pivotal role in language acquisition among children in Early Childhood Education Centres. Instructional resources, which are termed educational inputs, are of great importance to teaching any subject in the curriculum. According to different authors, instructional resources enhance the memory level of learners (Lazarevic & Bentz, 2021). Other studies also agree that with the recent technological advancements and diversity in teaching, oral methods may not be the key to successful pedagogy, recommending that teachers use instructional resources to make the learning process interactive and inductive. Additionally, an imaginative and well-planned application of visual aids in lessons ought to supplement the inadequacy of books, banish apathy and arouse the learner's interests by providing them with practical tasks to see and engage in. Consequently, instructional resources train learners to do things and think on their own (Baas et al., 2019).

In the US, poor levels of language learning are linked to inadequate instructional aids, inadequate teaching methods, ineffective instructional practices, and inept assessment strategies (Ishaq et al., 2020). Research proves that instructional resources improve learning in that they draw the learner's attention to the target language (Chen et al., 2020). The resources have a significant influence on foreign language students since they play an influential role in the classes. In support of this view, other scholars assert that instructional materials serve as the basis of much of the language input where the learning practice occurs in the classroom (Lee et al., 2019).

In a study carried out in China, language was found to be inseparable from one's cultural background, communication skills and language application ability. This study found that allowing learners to understand the cultural-linguistic connotations helped learners pique their desire for language acquisition. The research notes that Chinese language instruction is enough for students to grasp the literal meaning of the material. However, it is also vital for learners to understand the implicit meaning. In situations where learners fail to understand the cultural-linguistic connotations, it may be difficult for them to understand the content, which results in communication breakdown (Ahmad Baaqeel, 2020). For instance, among the Chinese, there are appellations such as "Zhao lao shi", meaning teacher Zhao, and "lao tong xue", meaning old classmate, which requires one to clearly understand some cultural context (Zhang, 2021). This study concluded that it is of great importance to raise the quality of instruction, which may be achieved through human instructional resources by blending cultural information into communication skills.

In Ghana, early learning years are regarded as the most determinant part of an individual's life with regard to recognition and thinking (McDonald et al., 2018). Some studies postulate that learners develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially through experiences that lead to optimal development. Researchers also assert that enough instructional resources provide students with the chance to use their senses, such as feeling, hearing, seeing, tasting and smelling (Quansah et al., 2019). On the contrary, if instructional resources are lacking, students are made to read textbooks as teachers explain concepts to them at the expense of carrying out activities indicated in the learning curriculum. This thus deprives learners of their chance to learn through active construction and reconstruction of their explanations of phenomena and concepts (Nadelson et al., 2018).

The success of instructional resources depends on the availability of instructors who are the determinant actors in the effective implementation of the school curriculum. These findings are in harmony with those of a study carried out in Nigeria, which revealed that scarcity of instructional resources such as textbooks and teachers constrains the education system from responding to current curriculum demands (Enyiazu, 2022). Research also points out that the diversity in the learning modes and range of available instructional resources places great pressure on educators who must maintain pace with innovative technology techniques and teaching methods (Pichardo et al., 2021). Instructional resources in language learning content assist students in sufficiently learning the targeted language through increased access to the language.

A study carried out in Kenya on the availability of instructional materials to facilitate the learning process noted that only a few instructional resources were provided in ECD centers; worse off, the ECD teachers had not received adequate training on how to use the resources (Mwarania, 2022). Kenya has recently made curriculum reforms with the introduction of Competency-Based Curriculum which is aimed at increasing the learner's work-competency skills other than the basic learning curriculum-focused skills. The curriculum calls for intense parent and child involvement, and the government also needs to avail adequate resources for use in the curriculum (Musenyente et al., 2022). The curriculum has gained a lot of attention from the different actors involved in the learning process, such as parents, teachers and school administrations.

The curriculum requires increased use of instructional resources, which are either provided by the learning institution or the parents. Such use of resources may have a significant role in easing language acquisition among early learners. The majority of the studies conducted in Kiambu have focused on the impact of instructional resources on curriculum implementation, with a few addressing the determinant role the instructional resources have on the learning process. Kiambu County is characterised by an ever-rising population, which consequently raises the number of students without a commensurate rise in ECD infrastructures and instructional resources in the area. This study thus seeks to assess the influence of available instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills among early-year learners in Kiambaa Sub County, Kiambu County.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Language acquisition refers to the process by which learners acquire the ability to understand language, use words, and construct sentences to communicate and express themselves. The usability of these resources relies on

accessibility, participation, efficiency, quality, state of the resource allocation or use, and pupil-to-resource ratio. Studies opine that the positive combined inputs of these resources impact language acquisition. Kiambu County continues to encounter challenges, with the ECD teachers recording a teacher-student ratio of 1:40, which is quite high, compared to the recommended ratio of 1:25 per learner (County Government of Kiambu, 2022). Lack of one or a number of these factors undermines the role of the resources in Language acquisition (Havron et al., 2021). Kiambu County is characterised by an ever-rising population with an ever-rising number of students without a commensurate rise in ECD infrastructures and instructional resources in the area. This, therefore, necessitates carrying out a study to assess the influence of available instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills among early-year learners in Kiambaa Sub County, Kiambu County.

1.2. Research Objective

The main objective of the study was to assess the influence of available instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills among early-year learners in Kiambaa Sub County, Kiambu County.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design since it assessed the Language acquisition skills in ECD centres in Kiambaa Sub-County.

2.2. Target Population

The study population was 98 schools in Kiambaa Sub County with a population of 98 head teachers, 210 ECD teachers and 7136 students

2.3. Sample Size Determination

Sampling refers to the selection of subjects from a group of interests where output can be generalised back to the group they were selected from (Kalton et al., 2021). The researcher used purposive sampling to select ECD teachers since they categorically fit the researcher's area of interest. Purposive sampling was also used to select grade one and grade two teachers. The researcher considered 21% of the total number of teachers to obtain a sample size of 44 respondents who were sampled using simple random sampling. 12 head teachers were purposively selected from the top ten and bottom ten performing schools by picking the Fth ECD center from the performance list. Out of the sampled schools, six head teachers from the top-performing schools and the bottom six performing-schools were purposively selected for the study. This constituted 66 participants.

This arrived at the sample size below:

Category	Total Population	Sample	Sample Size %
Head Teachers	98	12	12%
Teachers	210	44	21%
Total	308	66	

Table 1: Sample Size
Source: Researcher (2022)

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments employed in this study were questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis to gather data.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Data gathered was entered in SPSS, coded and analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics were then used to interpret quantitative data in terms of means, frequencies, and percentages. The relationship between the influence of available instructional resources and language acquisition was drawn through a simple linear regression model:

$$\text{Acquisition of Language Skills} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Available Instructional Resources} + \varepsilon$$

Where: β_0 is the regression constant, β_1 is the regression coefficient and ε is the error term

While carrying out the study, the researcher ensured that all the ethical issues were considered.

3. Results

3.1. Response Rate

A total of 44 questionnaires were administered to the participants, and all the questionnaires were duly filled, which indicates a 100% response rate. The study administered 120 questionnaires to teachers and 6 interview guides to school principals. All the head teachers responded positively to the interviews conducted in selected schools.

3.2. Demographic Characteristics

Most of the respondents interviewed were females (n=44 56.8%), with 43.2% accounting for male participants. The majority of the respondents had attained a Bachelor's degree, 72.7%; this was followed by those who had attained a master's degree (15.9%) and then those who had attained a diploma course (11.4%). With regards to teaching experience, most of the participants had an ECD teaching experience of 6-10 years (43.2%), 29.5% had a teaching experience of less than five years, 22.7% had 11-15 years' experience, while 4.5% had more than 16 years teaching experience.

Category		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	19	43.2
	Female	25	56.8
	Total	44	100
Education Qualification	Diploma	5	11.4
	Bachelors	32	72.7
	Masters	7	15.9
	Total	44	100.0
ECD Teaching Experience	< 5 Years	13	29.5
	6 -10 Years	19	43.2
	11 - 15 Years	10	22.7
	>16 Years	2	4.5
	Total	44	100

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents

Source: Research Data (2024)

3.3. GPA Aggregate

		Frequency	Percent	\bar{X}
Overall Language means	Below Expectation	10	22.7	
	Approaching Expectation	22	50.0	2.159
	Meeting Expectation	7	15.9	
	Exceeding Expectation	5	11.4	
	Total	44	100.0	

Table 3: Language Learning Outcomes

Source: Field Data (2024)

The majority of the teachers indicated that their learners were approaching expectations with regard to language acquisition (50%), 22.7% had attained below expectations (22.7%), 15.9% were meeting expectations, and a few indicated that their learners had exceeded expectations (11.4%). The overall mean of Language learning outcome was 2.159, regarded as approaching expectation.

3.4. Influence of Available Instructional Resources on the Acquisition of Language Skills

Using the table containing an array of statements, the researcher sought to find out the relationship between available instructional resources and the acquisition of language skills. The table below illustrates the responses.

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
TLMs, such as plays, create a lasting image of the language acquisition process	1	2.3%	3	6.8%	10	22.7%	21	47.7%	9	20.5%
My school has adequate instructional resources which directly improve the quality of language acquisition	9	20.5%	21	52.3%	1	2.3%	5	11.4%	6	13.6%
Appropriate instructional resources facilitate understanding among early learners since they feel that real objects	7	15.9%	1	2.3%	3	6.8%	24	54.5%	9	20.5%
I have easy access to instructional resources, which allows me to prepare for lessons in advance	11	25.0%	21	47.7%	5	11.4%	6	13.6%	1	2.3%
TLMs facilitate interaction, giving learners an opportunity to feel and manipulate resources, fostering the language-learning process	7	15.9%	4	9.1%	1	2.3%	10	22.7%	22	50.0%

Table 4: Likert Scale on the Influence of Available Instructional Resources on the Acquisition of Language Skills

Source: Field Data (2024)

From the table above, most of the respondents agreed that TLMs, such as plays, create a lasting image of the language acquisition process (68.2%), while 9.1% disagreed with the notion that TLMs, such as plays, create a lasting image of the language acquisition process. For the adequacy of Instructional resources and language acquisition, most of the teachers disagreed that they did not have adequate instructional resources for improving language acquisition (72.8%), while 25% agreed that they did have sufficient instructional resources which directly improved the quality of language acquisition. The majority of the respondents agreed that appropriate instructional resources facilitate understanding among early learners since they feel the real objects (75%), with 18.2% disagreeing that appropriate instructional resources help understanding among early learners since they feel the real objects. With respect to access to Instructional Resources, most of the teachers disagreed that they had easy access to instructional resources which allowed them to prepare for lessons in advance (72.7%), while 15.9% did agree that they had unlimited access to instructional resources which allowed them to sufficiently prepare for their lessons in advance. Most of the teachers also agreed that TLMs facilitate interaction, giving learners an opportunity to feel and manipulate resources, fostering language learning (72.7%), while 25% disagreed with the perception that TLMs facilitate interaction, giving learners an opportunity to feel and alter resources, which enhance language learning.

3.5. Thematic Analysis

In relation to the availability of instructional resources, most of the head teachers indicated that the availability of instructional resources influences language acquisition skills among early learners. They were of the opinion that IR serves as an essential tool that introduces and reinforces language symbols, concepts, and vocabulary. When learners have access to a variety of instructional materials, such as picture books, flashcards, and interactive digital tools, they are exposed to diverse language inputs that enhance their understanding and retention of new words and phrases. For instance, one of the head teachers stated:

I believe that materials like storybooks with follow-up activities, word games, and role-playing kits encourage active participation from learners. This interactive approach not only enhances language acquisition but also builds confidence in using the language at different stages in the learning process (Head Teacher 1).

The sentiments were also echoed by another headteacher who indicated:

Consistent access to a variety of instructional resources helps to create a rich language-learning environment. Such an environment is critical for the development of both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) language skills. Learners benefit from repeated exposure to language through different mediums, which reinforces learning and aids in the internalisation of language structures and vocabulary (Head Teacher 9).

The above findings are in line with those of Padakis (2020), who noted that Teaching and Learning Materials facilitate interaction, which grants the children the opportunity to feel and manipulate these resources, hence fostering the language learning process. To corroborate this, Oppong Frimpong (2021) found out that Teaching and Learning Materials are indispensable in the provision of quality learning among early learners, but the output relies greatly on the availability, access and the manner in which the teacher uses the resource in teaching. Similarly, another study carried out in the US revealed that adequate access to instructional resources equips learners with hands-on experience, which raises and improves their language knowledge levels (Karanja, 2022).

The findings are also in line with those of a study carried out in Ghana, which revealed that although a teacher may be professionally trained in ECE studies, the output has always been constrained by resources availed to enhance an interactive learning environment (Oppong Frimpong, 2021). In a similar view, another research carried out to assess the implications of instructional materials on oral literacy skills on a sample population of 42 head teachers, 126 teachers, and 3180 learners indicated that incorporating instructional materials raised the performance of various learning activities such as the ability to dictate words, repeat letters and words (Ondieki et al., 2020).

The above findings show that the availability and access of instructional resources significantly influence language acquisition among early learners. If head teachers and parents understand the importance of the availability of ECD centres, they may improve the access and availability of IR upon recommendation by the ECD teachers, thereby improving language acquisition among the early learners.

3.6. Regression Modelling

Coefficients a						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.607	.079		20.446	.000
	Influence of Available Instructional Resources	.466	.148	.419	3.157	.003

Table 5: Regression Coefficient between Available Instructional Resources and Acquisition of Language Skills: A Dependent Variable: Learning Outcomes Mean Average
Source: Field Data (2024)

The findings above show that there is a positive association between available instructional resources and the acquisition of language skills ($P < 0.05$). The above findings corroborate with those of a study carried out in the US, which revealed that access to instructional resources allows early learners to have hands-on experience, which raises and improves their language knowledge levels (Karanja, 2022). The findings agree with those of a study carried out to assess the implications of instructional materials on oral literacy skills on a sample population of 42 head teachers, 126 teachers, and 3180 learners indicated that incorporating instructional materials raised the performance of various learning activities such as the ability to dictate words, repeat letters and words (Ondieki et al., 2020).

The p-values in table 5, and the coefficients of the regression are both constant with the values being less than 0.05. This indicates that the regression coefficient and the constant are all significant. As such, available instructional resources are a significant predictor of the acquisition of language skills among early-year learners in Kiambaa Sub County, Kiambu County. A positive regression coefficient indicates that available instructional resources improve the acquisition of language skills. The regression coefficient is positive. This means that mentoring programs among students improve academic performance. The regression model for available instructional resources on the acquisition of language skills is: Acquisition of Language Skills = $1.607 + 0.466$ available instructional resources

4. Discussion

The above findings show a positive association between available instructional resources and the acquisition of language skills. It is evident that teaching and learning materials facilitate interaction, which grants the children the opportunity to feel and manipulate these resources, hence fostering the language learning process (Padakis, 2020). Studies agree that teaching and learning materials are indispensable in the provision of quality learning among early learners. However, the output relies greatly on the availability, access, and manner in which the teacher uses the resources in teaching. For children, the opportunities the learners get to interact with teaching and learning materials, such as plays, create a lasting image of the language acquisition process of the learner (Oppong Frimpong, 2021).

The findings are also in line with those of a study carried out in Ghana, which revealed that although a teacher may be professionally trained in ECE studies, the output has always been constrained by resources availed to enhance an interactive learning environment (Oppong Frimpong, 2021). Previous studies also argue that enough instructional resources provide students with the chance to use their senses, such as feeling, hearing, seeing, tasting and smelling (Quansah et al., 2019). On the contrary, if instructional resources are lacking, students are made to read textbooks as teachers explain concepts to them at the expense of carrying out activities indicated in the learning curriculum. This thus deprives learners of their chance to learn through active construction and reconstruction of their explanations of phenomena and concepts (Nadelson et al., 2018). This is consistent with the findings of the study carried out in Ghana among the head teachers of six schools, which noted that most of the students who passed science obtained grades 5 and 6, with a small number meeting grades 1 and 2 cutoffs in languages (Quansah et al., 2019). The variation in grades was due to the continued use of instructional resources in science, leaving out such resources for language learning.

The above findings show that the availability and access of instructional resources significantly influence language acquisition among early learners. If Head Teachers and parents understand the importance of the availability of ECD centres, they may improve the access and availability of IR upon recommendation by the ECD teachers, thereby improving language acquisition among the early learners.

5. Conclusion

The research found a positive association between available instructional resources and the acquisition of language skills. ECD centres that had sufficient instructional resources recorded significantly higher language learning outcomes than schools that lacked or had insufficient instructional resources. Various stakeholders need to understand the importance of the availability of ECD centres, where they may improve the access and availability of IR upon recommendation by the ECD teachers, thereby improving language acquisition among early learners.

6. Recommendation

It is crucial for various stakeholders to prioritise the provision and accessibility of resources in ECD centers. Stakeholders, including head teachers, teachers, and parents, should understand the importance of having sufficient instructional resources. Efforts should be made to improve access and availability based on recommendations from ECD teachers, thereby fostering language acquisition among early learners.

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