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Effects of Reading Literacy Resources on Acquisition of English Language Skills among Grade One to Three Learners with Hearing Impairment in Western Kenya

Christine Luvai Ludenyi

Tutor, Department of Education Planning and Management,
Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Dr. Christopher Omusula

Senior Lecturer, Department of Education Planning and Management
Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Abstract:

Since the year 2016, the results of Kenya Certificate of Primary Education have shown that learners with hearing impairment in Western Kenya perform poorly in English Language. The results for 2016 showed that these learners scored a mean of 26.78 in 2016 and a mean of 25.98 in 2017. Scholars correlate under performance in languages with unavailability of early reading literacy resources. Children with hearing impairment need linguistically rich environments in order to acquire sign language. Acquisition of their first and second language affects their literacy development. This study was guided by the Krashen's theory of second language acquisition developed. He postulates that the acquisition of a given language has to occur within some environment setting and in consonant with the social aspects of the human existence. The study sought to determine the effect of available professionally trained personnel on acquisition of English language skills among learners with hearing impairment in Western Kenya. The researcher used a mixed methods approach and Stratification to randomly sample 63 teachers of English language, 100 learners with HI, 9 head teachers, 4 county education officials and 24 non-teaching staff. Split-half split testing was used to test reliability while face and content validity of the research instruments was ensured by the supervisors. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation and interview schedules. It was analyzed both descriptively and inferentially and reports presented in narrative form. Results showed that over 53.3% (32 out of 60) respondents contended that teachers have not been effectively helping grade one to three learners with hearing impairment to develop English language skills reading using available literacy resources in western Kenya. The teaching staff had significant positive linear relationship of 18.9% ($r = 0.189^{**}$, $P < 0.01$) with acquisition of English language skills therefore significant low influence led to a conclusion that most teachers were not fully utilizing their acquired skills in instructing learners in schools for hearing impaired in special schools in Western Kenya. The researcher recommended that teachers in special schools in western Kenya should be encouraged to fully utilize their acquired skills to improve the learners' literacy skills.

Keywords: Literacy resources, English language skills, hearing impairment learners

1. Introduction

Deaf learners have for a long time experienced significant difficulties in developing literacy skills especially in their early levels of their learning. Clark, Gilbert & Anderson, (2011) in Burman, Nunes & Evans, (2006) writes that these learners are supposed to read and write in English at the same time establishing a language for communicative purposes. According to Badger & White, (2000) congenitally profound hearing impaired children who use British Sign Language as a first language have to be literate to communicate effectively in a hearing society. They hold that both spelling and writing skills of such children can be limited to an extent that no assessment method can adequately appraise their competence.

Research has shown that language development is important when considering factors that are significant in teaching children with hearing impairment because language development plays an important role in a child's literacy learning (Sandra, 2005). Children with hearing impairment acquire language in different ways depending on the home environment. Children with hearing impairment need environments rich in linguistics in order to acquire language skills such as writing, reading signing and observing language symbols. In US, most deaf learners are placed in a mainstream public environment with hearing peers (Petty, 2004). The policy ensures integration of the main stream scholars with the counter parts in normal schooling system. Salend argues that learners' acquisition of first and second language and literacy development affect their educational success. Although some progress has been made in improving the literacy achievement of learners in American schools during the last twenty years, majority of the learners still do not write well enough to meet grade-level demands (Lee, Grigg & Donahue, 2007). Among those who graduate, many will not be ready for college or a career where reading and writing are required. In Uganda, English Language is the only official language. At School, the learners who are deaf are instructed through use of Signed English. Sheilla, (2011) in a study on teaching of

reading to deaf learners in primary schools in Uganda, it was established that learners who are deaf make the same kind of mistakes in writing as those made by learners learning English as a second language. Spoken and correctly written English language is an important part of the English curriculum in Primary Schools in Kenya (Sheilla, 2011).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Reports from four County Education Offices in Western Kenya indicate that many hearing impaired learners are faced with numerous challenges in acquiring English language skills in their early stages of learning (Vihiga, Bungoma, Kakamega and Busia Education Reports, 2017). Some of these literacy Challenges are thought to arise from unavailability of; professionally trained personnel, Print, Non Print and Electronic instructional materials among others. The four reports from the county offices explain how from 333 hearing impaired learners in grades one, two and three only 67 (20%) can read, write, sign and recognize correct shapes of letters in English language. The majority 266 (80%) can neither read, write, sign nor recognize correct shapes of letters in English language yet acquisition of Literacy Skills lays a firm foundation in development of spoken and written English language of learners in their adulthood. This study therefore sets to find out the extent to which the availability of Reading Literacy Resources has affected the acquisition of English language skill among grades one, two and three learners with hearing impairments in Western Kenya. The Purpose of this Study was to establish the effect of available professionally trained manpower on acquisition of English language skills among grade one to three learners with hearing impairments in Western Kenya

2. Literature Review

Several theories could be engaged in an attempt to explain and understand the roots that the teaching of reading and writing is based on. For this study Krashen's (2003) theory of second language acquisition shall be preferred. Krashen explains that the acquisition of a given language occurs within some given environmental set up. He postulates that the acquisition of the language has to resonate with the social aspects of the cultural practice of the human in existence. This study preferred this theory because it allows for a more relaxed and friendly mode of learning. It allows the learner to learn at his/her pace and content that he/she would like to hear/know around him or her. A teacher may not necessarily be an expert in the language for the hearing impaired learner. There could be other hearing impaired peers who know Kenyan Sign Language much better than the teacher, or even hearing impaired persons in the community who could be engaged as resource persons. This implies that they can supplement in the teaching. Professionally trained personnel remain at the fore front of ensuring that the teaching of the learners with hearing impairment remains effective (Enns, 2006).

English literacy involves being able to observe and receive signed information, produce the signs, read write and understand the signed words (Luckner, & Handley, 2008). Scholar's report that it has never been easy for learners with hearing impairment to receive also documented this challenge. Further, a research conducted by Lo's (2012) indicates that learners with hearing impairments find it difficult to understand language skills because of their diverse culture and language backgrounds. The authors continue to say that hearing impaired learners have always found the acquisition of English language skills very challenging. Learners with hearing impairment generally lag behind their hearing peers (Gathumbi, & Masembe, 2005).

Farooq, Ul-Hassan & Wahid, (2012) found that more teacher education in multiliteracies could engender gains for learners in social and linguistic skills, particularly effecting reading with diverse language forms such as Sign Exact English. They recommended a study to establish the competence of professional trained personnel in Signing Exact English. Kenya national Bureau of statistics (2003) came up with at least 380 different languages spoken in the United States. It is easy to understand how professionals can promote the value of resources by using signs, gestures and expressions in advancing socialization, language skills and communication in a class with learning impaired learners of diverse cultural and language background.

Brereton's (2008) study affirmed that learners can become empowered when they see that reading does not have to exist only in spoken words. Professional who can always blend visual, auditory and kinetic interaction with letters, words, concepts and sentences will reinforce multiple learning modalities and provide more complete opportunities in using resources to help learners to grasp knowledge and advance in English language skills. Lee (2007), found a blend of delivery methodologies and promotion of learner self-efficacy in choices for learning links the possibilities for mastery and lifelong learning. He recommended a study to find out the possible intervention strategies on the effects of early reading literacy resources in primary and special schools. The ability to access and understand English language skills is essential for this development of age appropriate reaching for all learners. Reading literacy resources provide this access.

Farooq, Ul-Hassan & Wahid, (2012) advocated the use of Acquired Sign Language in hearing impaired classrooms as a natural aid to grab the attention of learners and help them focus on the teacher who is the professional. Teachers using sign language in predominantly learning elementary classrooms find effective possibilities for reading with signing in circle time, centers, collaborative learning groups and content area instruction. Using sign language provides instructional opportunities to support topics, skills and illustrated instructions in accordance with benchmarks, frameworks and standards.

Reading ability has been noted for reliance on English language skills and is suspected to be the most affected aspect of literacy when learning impairment occurs. This is because hearing impairment mostly affects reading abilities of those learners who are affected by it. Shirfin & Polania, (2007) contends that reading ability is described as a show frustrating and torturous process. According to Hernandez; and Harrison & Warnke, (2004)) learners with hearing

impairment have difficulties in reading as compared to primary counterparts of similar levels. Nearly 25% of them graduate from primary school while they are semi-literate (Brown, 2000)

According to Wolbers, (2008) successful acquisition of literacy and reading depend on an established language further the authors argue that familiarity with language and understanding the mapping between the two are two related but separate capabilities that are required in the activity of reading (Williams, 2004). To understand the process of doing mapping, one needs to understand what must be done between the first language and the second language under study (Goldin and Mayberry, 2010). For further process of hearing impaired learners, the language is usually sign language.

Learners with hearing impairment have problems in reading and writing due to the challenge they face during conversation either orally or manually (Adoyo 2002). Adoyo further suggests that majority of learners have hearing parents who cannot communicate to them using sign language. Also, the author contends that hearing impaired children are surrounded by friends and siblings who are not familiar with sign language, thus they are not exposed to conversational language.

Paulus, (2006) suggested that those learners born with hearing impairments have advantage over those who acquire it later. According to this author, learners born with hearing impairments are exposed early to sign language and more so those born to signing parents acquire language spontaneously through interaction with adults who serve as competent language models (Medwell Coates; Wray Griffiths & Minns, 2006). Exposure to their hearing impaired parents makes them converse in their natural setting and facilitates early and timely acquisition of sign language. According to Hedge, (2005), these learners do not have to learn a language, learn to communicate using the language and obtain content information from the language at the same time. Scholars argue that those hearing impaired children who are born to hearing parents do not acquire easily the spoken language.

Scholars also report that hearing impaired learners start school when they have no language at all, whether spoken or signed (Koustoubou, (2004). Having firm base in English language development is a prerequisite for learning to read (Andrew, Hushooley and Joanise, 2014. Reading is a language literacy activity which changes to a language learning process for hearing impaired learners (Luckner, Sebald, Cooney, Young & Muir, 2006).

3. Materials and Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used in this study. A sample of 63 teachers of English language, 100 learners with HI, 9 head teachers, 4 county education officials and 24 non-teaching staff participated in this study. The study was piloted by using a half - split- half testing technique to test reliability and validity of the research instruments at one of the school for the hearing impaired in the study area. Stratified and balloting sampling techniques were used to get the samples. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation and interview schedules. Data collected was analyzed both descriptively and inferentially and reports presented in narrative form

This study sought to establish the effect of available professionally trained personnel on acquisition of English language skills among grade one to three learners with hearing impairments in special schools in Western Kenya. To assess this effect the researcher used frequency tables and Pearson correlation analysis to establish the extent to which available professionally trained personnel had affected the acquisition of English language skills among grade one to three learners. This information was triangulated with the analysis from the qualitative responses from interviews done with the non teaching staff and the observation check list from the learners. The available professionally trained personnel in this study were both the teaching and non teaching staff. The teaching staff was required to respond to the constructs relating to trained personnel and acquisition of English language skills among grade one to three learners. according to their responses over 53.3% (32 out of 60) generally disagreed that teachers have been effectively helping grade one to three learners with hearing impairment to develop English language skills reading using available literacy resources in western Kenya. Table 1 shows the results of the effect of the teaching staff on acquisition of English language skills.

		Teaching Staff	Acquisition of English Language Skills
Teaching Staff	Pearson Correlation	1	.189**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		60
Acquisition of English Language Skills	Pearson Correlation	.189**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	

Table 1: Correlation Matrix on the Effect of the Teaching Staff on Acquisition of English Language Skills

From table 1, the teaching staff had significant positive linear relationship of 18.9% ($r = 0.189^{**}$, $P < 0.01$) with acquisition of English language skills. A relationship of 18.9% indicated that there was a low effect of teaching staff on acquisition of English language skills in schools for hearing impaired in Western Kenya. This can be further suggested that most teachers were not fully utilizing their acquired skills in instructing learners for hearing impaired to acquire literacy skills in special schools in Western Kenya. This model accounted for only 16.4% variations in Acquisition of English Language Skills. 83.6% variations that could be accounted for were the effect of other factors not under investigation.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Given that over 53.3% (32 out of 60) respondents generally disagreed that teachers have been effectively helping grade one to three learners with hearing impairment to develop English language skills reading using available literacy resources in western Kenya. The study concluded that most teachers were not fully utilizing their acquired skills in instructing learners in schools for hearing impaired in special schools in Western Kenya. Similarly, since the effect of professionally skilled personnel on acquisition of English literacy skills was low, the researcher recommended that teachers in special schools in western Kenya should be encouraged to fully utilize their acquired skills to improve the learners' literacy skills through enhanced Professional Development Programs.

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