

# Influence of Teachers' Subject Competence and Teaching Experience on Use of Instructional Strategies to Enhance Pupils Literacy Skills in Busia County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Language skills in young children provides a foundation to a better acquisition of cognitive, social, physical and emotional skills useful in the later years of life for children. It also enhances smooth transition, performance, and retention and completion rate in school for children. The paper presents findings from a study conducted to establish the influence of teacher's subject competence and teaching experience on use of instructional strategies to enhance development of literacy skills in children in lower grade in Nambale Sub-county, Busia County Kenya. It is paramount to generate evidence based understanding of the primary role of teachers for language in enhancing children's literacy skills to improve their chances of acquiring quality and inclusive education later in life. Researchers aimed to establish the influence of teacher's subject competence and teaching experience during foundation level at which children should primarily acquire basic literacy skills to facilitate a smooth transition to later grades.

## KEYWORDS

teachers' subject competence; teaching experience; instructional strategies to enhance literacy skills; Busia County; Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

Young children require basic language skills to be able to communicate and develop cognitively as well acquire social skills necessary for academic and social life (Ngaka & Masaazi, 2015). This is contrary to the children who might struggle in acquisition of literacy skills which may lead to school drop-out due to lack of sufficient communication skills. The instructional strategies teachers use during instruction play significant role to provide children adequate literacy skill to be able to adapt well in society.

The term instructional strategies refers to the integrated techniques used during teaching and learning. They include directed reading thinking activity, question answer, read aloud, use of visualization texts, and story maps among many others (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Quinan, Anderson, and Mundy (2014) observed that teachers who often used these instructional strategies sufficiently enhanced development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in learners. Teachers who successfully used varied teaching strategies recorded higher performance index on learners during post-assessment evaluation. Realizing the importance of teacher's role, Funsho et. al (in Ezenekwe & U, 2019) in Azizah (2020) argue a great teacher can be seen as one who by his knowledge, character, and everyday life, leaves the most significant effect on the intellectual and moral character of his students. They also improved in socialisation, speech production, and

comprehension skills. Therefore, adequate acquisition and development of literacy skills helps learners cope easily with education and life at school and out of school respectively.

Clark (2014) recognized that teachers with above average mastery in English language skills and possess adequate teaching experience understand effectively the use of varied instructional strategies to enhance pupils' literacy skills. This would enhance school adjustment, smooth transition and children's effective communicate skills necessary for social life.

A study conducted in Uganda to understand the influence of teacher's mastery of English language showed that children taught by teachers of low mastery in English were still struggling to read, write and communicate well (Ngaka & Masaazi, 2015). Miller and Elman (2013) argued that competent teachers are effective in using varied teaching strategies. To teach language skills effectively, teachers were required to possess good mastery skills in language skills (Ngaka & Masaazi, 2015). Therefore, it was important to establish the influence of teacher factors on the use of teaching strategies to enhance literacy pupils' skills.

Globally, the National Reading Panel (NRP), a literacy body in the U.S.A revealed low performance in reading and vocabulary skills for grade three children taught by inadequately trained teachers (UNESCO, 2007). Duke and Block (2012) reported that more than 63% certified teachers in the U.S. used only 5% of their lesson coverage to teach vocabulary grade three learners. The observations implied that these learners could not have fully developed communication skills, which are foundational pillars for quality learning. The findings presented by Luckin, (2008) and Zhao and Frank, (2003) in England reveal that 10% of the six-year old learners taught by teachers with low mastery of language skills could not read on well.

Globally and Kenya included, studies done on causes for dismal pupils' literacy performance in lower primary posit inconclusive findings (Pfof, Artelet & Weinert, 2013). Experienced, well trained and teachers with high mastery of English subject were motivated to use variety of instructional strategies to meet diverse needs of learners (Lapp, Flood & Farnan, 2011). A study conducted by Uwezo (2012) had reported that 30% of the grade three pupils in Busia County could not successfully manage standard two reading tasks. Majority of the schools were from Nambale sub-county. The above studies did not adequately research on determinants of teachers' use of instructional strategies to enhance literacy skills in lower primary schools in Kenya, thus a need for this study.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Sufficient literacy skills provides children with adequate self-esteem to express their needs and develop effective communications skills. The skills are vital to enhance smooth transition from one grade to another and provide children with swift adaptive and coping skills in upper grades and future life. On the other hand, it is unlikely that teachers for language with low mastery skills and more so possessing little experience, will foster mastery of adequate literacy skills to children. Furthermore, findings from studies conducted on literacy allude existing declining performance in pupils' literacy skills in lower primary schools in Nambale Sub-county in Kenya. This would negatively impact on country's Sustainable Development Goal number 4 on providing quality and inclusive education. Therefore, researchers found out necessary to conduct the study in Nambale sub-county with a close view on teachers' competence on English language and teaching experience to enhance literacy skills for pupils.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- (i) To find out the influence of teachers' score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education and the use of instructional strategies to enhance literacy skills among grade one pupils in lower primary schools.
- (ii) To determine how teachers' levels of teaching experience influence the use of instructional strategies to enhance literacy development among grade one pupils in lower primary schools.

### **Research Hypotheses**

**Ha1:** There is a difference in teachers' score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education on the use of instructional strategies in enhancing literacy skills among grade one pupils in lower primary schools.

**Ha2:** There is a difference in how teachers' levels of teaching experience influence the use of instructional strategies to enhance development of literacy skills among grade one pupils in lower primary schools

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study was anchored on Paulo Freire's (1972) theory of Participatory Learning Approach (PLA) to establish the appropriateness use of instructional strategies by teachers to enhance grade one pupils' literacy skills (Freire's, 1972). The theory postulated that teaching language skills to children prepares them to solve education and social problems in a society. Freire recognized that a critical role for a teacher during language instruction is to provide pupils with relevant learner-based interactive and meaningful literacy experiences (Freire, 1972). Therefore, researchers study sought to establish ways teachers' professional training impacted teaching using appropriate instructional strategies such as group teaching, use of well-constructed content-rich questions, direct instructional model and inquiry to promote dialogue and create very interactive teaching sessions (Guo et al. 2012). The theory was selected because teachers' professional training level becomes critical when effectively used to develop learners' literacy skills during early years.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research Design**

Researchers employed a descriptive survey design in the study. In social sciences and educational research, a descriptive survey design is preferred because it provides actual current facts of a phenomenon. Descriptive survey design was employed specifically in this study to provide a description on the actual situation about teacher factors influencing their use of instructional strategies to enhance pupils' literacy skills in Nambale Sub-county. The use of a descriptive survey design in research enables a researcher to obtain up-to date findings of the study population without manipulating independent variables. Collectively, Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) cited that descriptive survey design helps a researcher to gather, organize, process, analyse and present data from a sample population systematically to make informed generalizations and conclusions acceptable in social sciences.

### **Variables**

The independent variables of the study was teachers' competence in English measured by stating teachers' score in English in KCSE examinations and teachers' levels of teaching

experience measured by establishing the number of years a teacher has taught. The dependent variable was strategies teachers use to enhance pupils' literacy skills.

### ***Research Methodology***

The researchers adopted a quantitative research method. Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) acknowledged the use of a descriptive survey design when conducting a quantitative research, hence the preference for the methodology in the study.

### ***Location of the Study***

The study was conducted in Nambale, Busia County because lower primary grades within Nambale recorded low literacy performance in a survey conducted by (Uwezo 2012).

### ***Target Population***

The target population for the study comprised of lower primary teachers for language in grade one. Grade one was preferred because it is a foundation class which children's early development of literacy skills determines the transition to next grades and levels of education.

### ***Sampling Technique and Sample Size***

Purposive sampling method was adopted to select Nambale Sub-county and a stratified random sampling technique in selecting teachers for English language from public and private primary schools within the sub-county. A total sample of 55 primary schools were randomly selected and 20 teachers from lower primary level stratified to take part in the study.

### ***Research Instruments***

Researchers used questionnaires for teachers and observational checklists to collect data. The instruments were used to collect background data for teachers and instructional strategies used. The instruments were piloted in two school; one public and one private to establish and mitigate biasness and ambiguity prior to performance of a re-test and content validity.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

During the study, researchers used observational checklist and questionnaires for teachers of language. An observation checklist was administered during a classroom lesson followed by a questionnaire. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures such as measures of central tendencies and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) respectively. Results were presented using tables and texts.

### ***Logistical and Ethical Considerations***

First, researchers sought a research clearance to collect data from the Graduate School at Kenyatta University followed by permission sought from relevant authorities such as the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The identity of study participants was kept confidential throughout the duration for the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Teachers' Score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education on use of Instructional Strategies to Enhance Pupils' Literacy Skills*

In this objective, researchers sought to explore the difference in use of instructional strategies to enhance pupils' literacy skills across teachers' score in English in KCSE examination. The study objective was measured through enlisting items on questionnaires for teachers to underscore on individual score in English and simple arithmetic mean was computed as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Average use of Instructional Strategies across Teachers' Score in English in KCSE Examinations

| KSCE Score | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|------------|----|--------|----------------|
| D          | 3  | 1.9333 | .19999         |
| D+         | 4  | 2.5778 | .26664         |
| C          | 5  | 3.2222 | .33332         |
| C+         | 4  | 2.5778 | .26664         |
| B          | 2  | 1.2888 | .13332         |
| B+         | 2  | 1.2888 | .13332         |
| Total      | 20 | 2.1478 | .30674         |

As depicted in the results shown above, researchers established most teacher scored a C (plain) IN English examinations with a mean of 3.2 and a deviation of .33. The highest score attained by minority teachers was B+ and a score of D comprising of 3 teachers.

To explore the difference in use of instructional strategies across teachers' score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination researchers generated and tested the following null hypothesis.

***H01: There is no difference in teachers' score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education on the use of instructional strategies to enhance literacy skills among grade one pupils***

Researchers used analysis of variance (ANOVA), was used to determine the significant difference and results presented in table 2.

**Table 2.** Analysis of Variance on use of Instructional Strategies across Teachers' Score in English in KCSE Examination

|                | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F    | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|------|
| Between Groups | .219           | 3  | .073        | .745 | .541 |
| Within Groups  | 1.568          | 16 | .098        |      |      |
| Total          | 1.788          | 19 |             |      |      |

Table 2 shows the difference in use of instructional strategies across teachers' score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination had a significant level of p value=0.541. Hence, the results imply that there was dismal difference in use of instructional strategies across teachers' score in English in KCSE Examinations. This is because p (value) >0.05. Hence, null hypothesis was retained while its alternate hypothesis, which states that there was a difference in use of instructional

strategies to enhance pupils' literacy skills across teachers' score in English in KCSE examination, was rejected.

Researchers found out the findings of the study concurred with a study conducted in the U.S. upper grade primary schools to determine the relationship between teachers score in national certified examinations and use of teaching and learning strategies (Duke & Block, 2012). The findings revealed that all fourth and fifth grade learners taught by average teachers on nationally certified examinations showed an improvement in pronunciation, word mastery and comprehension abilities (Penuel & Shepard, 2016).

Similarly, the findings of this study concur with a research conducted in Botswana, South Africa, and Kenyan primary schools respectively. The study aimed to determine the influence of teachers' mean grade in English language on use of appropriate strategies to enhance a declining mathematical and language skills in pupils. The results of a study done by Carnoy, Ngware and Oketch, (2015) revealed that teachers' with average scores and high mean grade in mathematics and English in combination with regular refresher capacity building on instructional strategies largely influenced high academic performance among learners. Nyakwara (2014) emphasised teacher should embrace use of culturally relevant language during instruction to help children connect concepts on literacy with ease of mastery.

Researchers established collectively that a competent teacher requires positive mindset and perception on learners' different needs during instruction (Cook & Dinkins, 2015). In addition, De Mesmaeker (2014) observed that teachers with average score could match the competences of those with higher grades upon a successful exposure to regular capacity building and conferences on literacy enhancement among young children. This would position teachers to meet diverse changing learning needs of contemporary generation.

### ***Teachers' Teaching Experience and use of Instructional Strategies to enhance Pupil's Literacy Skills***

Researchers sought to determine the influence of teachers' teaching experience on use of instructional strategies in the development of literacy skills among grade one pupils.

To achieve this objective, researchers used an observation checklist to score types instructional strategies used by teachers during lesson delivery. This was followed by teachers rating on questionnaires about extent of use of different instructional strategies and results on mean difference computed and presented in table 3.

**Table 3.** Teachers' Teaching Experience and Average use of Instructional Strategies

|                  | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|------------------|----|--------|----------------|
| 1-4 years        | 6  | 3.4074 | .40164         |
| 5-9 years        | 6  | 3.0926 | .27592         |
| 10-14 years      | 2  | 3.2222 | .15713         |
| 15 years or more | 6  | 3.3148 | .22680         |
| Total            | 20 | 3.2667 | .30674         |

The results in table 3 above reveal an overall mean of 3.0 on use of teaching strategies among all teachers' based on years of teaching. Reference to the study instrument score rate, the results implied that teachers did score 'sometimes' on extent of use of instructional strategies, meaning majority of the teachers were found using instructional strategies.

Researchers were also interested to determine the significant difference between teachers' teaching experience and use of instructional strategies. The following null hypothesis was generated and tested.

***H02: There is no difference in how teachers' levels of teaching experience influence the use of instructional strategies in the development of literacy skills among grade one pupils***

Researcher used an Analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the existing difference between teachers' teaching experience and use of instructional strategies. The results are presented in table 4.

**Table 4.** Analysis of Variance on Teachers' use of Instructional Strategies across Teachers' Levels of Teaching Experience

|                | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Between Groups | .319           | 3  | .106        | 1.156 | .357 |
| Within Groups  | 1.469          | 16 | .092        |       |      |
| Total          | 1.788          | 19 |             |       |      |

Table 4 shows that the ANOVA associated statistic value on use of instructional strategies across teachers' levels of teaching experience had a significance level P-value=.357. The results imply that use of instructional strategies across teachers' levels of teaching experience was not significant. This is because P-value (0.357) is,  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained, that is, there is no significant difference in use of instructional strategies across teachers' teaching experience. Similarly, the alternate is rejected.

The findings correlates with a study in England primary schools, which revealed learners who were taught by cooperative(long serving) and new teachers from college for English language equally scored 67% more on comprehension skills, observation and critical problem solving skills (Penuel & Shepard, 2016). This implies teachers with a certain level of teaching experience have similar potentials and abilities to use variety of strategies to meet diverse learning needs of learners. Therefore, researchers observed pairing old and new teachers in a school and at subject competence provides richer teaching experiences to enhance literacy development in children.

The results of the study also corroborates with that conducted by Hamre et al. (2012). They acknowledged that highly experienced teachers and those who had one year to teach English language did use variety of instructional strategies that matched different language needs of learners in paired classroom setting (Hamre et al., 2012). These teachers managed to integrate a variety of instructional strategies to develop fluency, reading and writing and comprehension skills of learners simultaneously. Penuel and Shepard (2016) cited that teaching literacy skills to school beginners is a very vital component to align learners with expectations of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. However, there is need for a close mentorship and continuous support to new teachers.

Above all, more experienced teachers have the responsibility to mentor less experienced teachers to adjust faster and sustain the use of variety instructional strategies during instruction (Megan, 2016). Most importantly, there is need for government through Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology to collaborate with education agencies to increase the number of refresher training programs on literacy instruction to all teachers. Through such interventions, Kenyan primary schools would be able to achieve equal and inclusive education for all children.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the first objective aimed to explore on use of instructional strategies across teachers' score in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations, there was minimal use of varied instructional strategies by all teachers. Although the score in English language had dismal significant on use of strategies, researcher observed that use of variety strategies was lacking across the teachers interviewed. In this regard, professional in-service and pre-service training and conferences on instruction would provide sufficient exposure to teachers alongside academic scores in English.

Second objective sought to determine the influence of teachers' levels of teaching experience on use of instructional strategies to enhance literacy skills among grade one pupils. The results revealed that all teachers across different groups in teaching service have sometimes used instructional strategies. There was no significant difference. However, there would be need for all teachers in spite of the teaching experience they possess, to attend to professional regular capacity building workshops on instructional strategies meeting the contemporary educational demands for children during formative years.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations have been made for policy, practice and to inform further areas of research as follows:

### **School Management**

Concerning the findings of this study, school management should support teachers through provision of adequate and variety of English language learning resources and literacy training. This will motivate and challenge teachers to adopt and sustain use of variety instructional strategies. As a result, learners' diverse learning needs will be accommodated translating to smooth transition. The study had revealed that majority of the teachers with both low and high scores in English still did not use direct instructional model considered as one of the best appropriate teaching strategies.

### **Lower Grade Primary Teachers**

All teachers in lower grade primary schools should start embracing use of variety instructional strategies. In addition, teachers should be willing to advance in their levels of professional training without compromising the curiosity for attending regular refresher and capacity building seminars, workshops and training on instructional strategies for contemporary learners. This is because the study had established that majority of teachers did not use variety instructional strategies despite their different levels of teaching experience.

### **Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)**

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should closely collaborate with Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to develop college training curriculum content which responds to and integrate regular capacity building conferences on utilization of varied instructional strategies to enhance children's literacy skills. This is because the results had established that most teachers, despite the levels of teaching experience and scores in English did not adequately use direct instructional model and cooperative learning strategies

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