

Early Childhood Education and Literacy Development: A Perspective of Kenyan Elementary Grades

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Abstract: - The study investigated on the influence of early childhood education on reading ability of grade one children from a Kenyan perspective. The study was guided by the following objectives; to establish the influence of early childhood education on reading ability of grade one children; to determine whether there is a difference between reading ability competence of children who had received early childhood education and those who had not. The study was guided by the innate theory. The following hypothesis was tested; there is no significant difference between mean reading ability scores of children who attended early childhood education development centres and those pupils who did not attend. Experimental design namely pre- test post-test guided the study. The target population was grade one children and grade one teachers of English. Sampling was through the use of simple random sampling .To collect data observation schedule and reading test was used. Data analysis was done by use of percentages, means and frequencies .To test hypothesis; independent samples t- test was used. To determine validity English experts were consulted and for reliability test retest technique was used. The result was that attendance of early childhood education development did not contribute to a child's reading ability. It was concluded that the preparation a child receives while at grade one was crucial to development of reading competencies.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education; Reading Ability; Grade One Children; Elementary Schools.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Education For All conference articulated the importance of early year in forming the foundation for the individual in life. Early childhood education development provide an array of educational and social services to children (Gronlund, 2014& Barnett, 1995)). The authors further asserted that the main objective of early childhood education is to prepare children for later formal schooling. Also at this level of learning children to develop skills that will enable them to cope with the demands of primary school and other levels of learning. The aim of early childhood education is to provide developmental support and care for children in their formative years so that they can acquire the skills necessary for future learning and success in school. This success is expected to benefit the social and economic development of society at large.

Although Africa has undergone remarkable transformations since its contact with Europeans and other foreign cultural

elements, the promotion of universal access to quality early childhood education and care remains a significant challenge for educators and policymakers in Africa Boakye-Boaten (2010).The promotion of quality early childhood education in Africa, particularly for children who are vulnerable, faces many complex cultural, political, and economic challenges. Negative experiences, such as the exposure to the violence of war, tribal and cultural attitudes, poor quality of teachers, and political instability are some of the persisting factors inhibiting the full realization of quality early childhood education on the continent.

Rationally for Investing in Early Childhood Education Development Centres

Investing in early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy that can mitigate childhood disadvantage, producing higher rates of economic return for the individual person, community, and country. Early childhood education leads to cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and moral developmental gains that carry over into later stages of development. Quality early childhood experiences contribute to more productive human resources because the children who are exposed to such experiences have better success in school and hence they get better paying jobs when they enter labour market.

Reduction of social inequalities. When children from disadvantaged backgrounds are exposed to stimulating early childhood experiences their chances of performing well in school are significantly improved which means that they are able to get better paying jobs on finishing school (Schwinhart and Weirlart, 1980).

Improved chances for the girl - child to enroll and continue with formal education. Girls who enrol in the early child-hood centres often proceed to primary school and higher levels of formal education. This is because their parents are sensitized on the importance of formal education during the period when their children are in the early child-hood centres.

A Nexus between Early Childhood Education and Literacy Development

Research has shown that instruction in phonological awareness should begin in preschool to enable children learn that written words represent spoken sounds, a process known

as decoding involving breaking a word into separate sounds (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). Early childhood development education is a critical level where children's development and learning is grounded. At this level, children learn important skills such as the alphabet principle, phonological awareness and memory, rapid automatized naming of letters and objects, and writing letters which form the cornerstone for development of reading (The National Early Literacy Panel, 2009). Even before children start school, they can become aware of systematic patterns of sounds in spoken language, manipulate sounds in words, recognize words and break them apart into smaller units, learn the relationship between sounds and letters, and build their oral language and vocabulary skills. These were the skills that the National Early Literacy Panel found to be precursors to children's later growth in the ability to decode and comprehend a text, to write, and to spell words.

Jean (2005) did a theoretical study on why letter-name knowledge was such a good predictor of learning to read. The study established that the knowledge of letter names measured just before children entered school had been known for a long time as one of the best longitudinal predictors of learning to read in an alphabetic writing system because of the development of first; the emergence of the phonological processing of print; then, the learning of letter-sound correspondences; finally, the development of phonemic sensitivity skills.

A study was conducted by Wildová and Kropáčková (2015) to establish the linkage between early childhood attendance and a child's literacy development. The study was carried out in the Czech Republic. The children who were targeted to take part in the study were aged five to six and half years. The finding was that at early childhood centres, children acquired pre-reading skills which boosted literacy levels of the same children later in their years of schooling.

Julie (2012) did a study on learning to read and write. The study was a longitudinal one and 54 children from first through fourth grades were sampled. Of particular concern were these questions: Do the same children remain poor readers year after year? What skills do the poor readers lack? What factors seem to keep poor readers from improving? The finding of the study was that early writing skill did not predict later writing skill as early reading ability predicted later reading. Children who become poor readers entered 1st grade with little phonemic awareness. By the end of 4th grade, the poor readers had still not achieved the level of decoding skill that the good readers had achieved at the beginning of 2nd grade. Good readers read considerably more than the poor readers both in and out of school, which appeared to contribute to the good readers' growth in some reading and writing skills. Poor readers tended to become poor writers.

Ulla; Pekka; Kaisa and Jari (2009) investigated on development of reading and spelling Finnish from preschool to grade one and grade two. The purpose of the study was first

to investigate how emerging reading and spelling were interlinked when children moved up from preschool to primary school and, second, to examine the antecedents of these skills. The study was part of the Jyväskylä Entrance into Primary School Study in which 196 children five to six years of age were followed up every half a year during their transition from preschool to grade one and grade two. The results showed, first, that reading skills at the end of preschool and grade one predicted subsequent spelling skills and, second, that the level of spelling skills at the beginning of preschool predicted the level of reading skills at the end of the preschool year and at the end of grade one. The results suggested that emerging reading and spelling formed a recursive developmental pattern. The results showed further that phonological awareness, predicted reading and spelling in preschool, whereas letter knowledge contributed to both skills during grade one.

In Singapore Quentin (2006) carried out an investigation the main aim of the investigation was to establish if there was a relationship between English oral skills and Kindergarten Children's early literacy development. The study's findings revealed that a child who was competent in speaking and listening skills developed early literacy skills.

McTaggart (2003) conducted a study on the contribution of kindergarten children's interest in reading on subsequent reading achievement. The study revealed that a child's initial reading interest was a determiner of third-grade children's reading interests.

Haslip (2018) did an investigation to establish the effect of pre-school attendance on first-grade learners' literacy achievement in public centres in The United States. The targeted population was 1056 first grade children drawn from mixed-urban city in Virginia. This population was composed of children who had attended pre-school and those who had not. The study established that there was no significant relationship between preschool attendance and reading achievement.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives;

- a. To establish the influence of early childhood education on reading ability of grade one children.
- b. To determine whether there is a difference between reading ability competence of children who had received early childhood education and those who had not.

Innate Theory

Noam Chomsky's innateness or nativist theory (1977) proposed that children have an inborn or innate capacity for language acquisition that is biologically determined. According to Goodluck (1991), to the nativists, language is a fundamental part of the human genome; it is a trait that makes humans human. Consequently, its acquisition is a natural part

of maturation. It seems that the brain of the human species has so developed as to have neural circuits that contain linguistic information at birth. Hearing speech triggers this natural predilection to learn language. The child's brain is then able to interpret what has been heard as per the underlying principles or structures it already contains (Linden, 2007). Chomsky had determined that this biological preparedness to acquire language irrespective of setting is due to the child's language acquisition device, which is used as a mechanism for working out the rules of language.

II. METHODOLOGY

Experimental design namely pre- test post-test guided the study. The target population was grade one children and grade

one teachers of English. Sampling was through the use of simple random sampling .To collect data observation schedule and reading test was used. Data analysis was done by use of percentages, means and frequencies. To test hypothesis; independent samples t- test was used. To determine validity English experts were consulted and for reliability test retest technique was used.

III. RESULTS ON ECDE ATTENDANCE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

To find out whether ECDE was a factor affecting a child's reading ability in Kenya, the researcher compared reading scores of pupils who had attended ECDE and those who had not attended. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Distribution Frequency of Pupils' ECDE Attendance and Reading Ability

		Attended		Not attended		Total	
		N	%	N	%	n	%
Demonstrated awareness of silent letters	Average	36	81.8	12	100.0	48	85.7
	Good	8	18.2	0	0.0	8	14.3
Articulated each phoneme	Average	35	79.5	12	100.0	47	83.9
	Good	9	20.5	0	0.0	9	16.1
Has understanding of vowel principle	Average	18	40.9	10	83.3	28	50.0
	Good	26	59.1	2	16.7	28	50.0
Able to blend parts of a word	Average	42	95.5	12	100.0	54	96.4
	Good	2	4.5	0	0.0	2	3.6
Can delete phoneme to make new word	Poor	40	90.9	10	83.3	50	89.3
	Average	4	9.1	2	16.7	6	10.7
Used knowledge of letter sounds to decode sounds	Average	31	70.5	11	91.7	42	75.0
	Good	13	29.5	1	8.3	14	25.0
Used intonation stress, pitch, juncture appropriately	Poor	3	6.8	1	8.3	4	7.1
	Average	40	90.9	11	91.7	51	91.1
	Good	1	2.3	0	0.0	1	1.8
Has ability to associate sounds with letters	Average	34	77.3	12	100.0	46	82.1
	Good	10	22.7	0	0.0	10	17.9
Able to separate and categorise letters by cases	Average	25	56.8	10	83.3	35	62.5
	Good	19	43.2	2	16.7	21	37.5
Skipped some words in a sentence	Poor	41	93.2	8	66.7	49	87.5
	Average	2	4.5	4	33.3	6	10.7
	Good	1	2.3	0	0.0	1	1.8
Pronounced all words correctly	Average	25	56.8	12	100.0	37	66.1
	Good	19	43.2	0	0.0	19	33.9
Substituted some words	Poor	41	93.2	9	75.0	50	89.3
	Average	3	6.8	3	25.0	6	10.7
Recognizes progression from right to left	Average	5	11.4	8	66.7	13	23.2
	Good	39	88.6	4	33.3	43	76.8

n=56

According to data presented in Table 1 it is evidenced that 35 (79.5%) of the pupils who had attended ECDE were awarded an average grade in the aspect of articulation of each phoneme in the words that they read. However, 9 (20.5%) of pupils who attended ECDE were awarded a good grade on the same aspect. But, 12 (100%) of the pupils who did not attend ECDE were awarded a poor. The finding meant that the pupils who had attended ECDE had developed phonemic awareness which aided early reading. The finding was in line with (Julie, 2012) who established that early reading predicted later reading.

Data presented in Table 1 shows that majority of the pupils 26 (59.1%) showed understanding of vowel principle and were given a good grade were those who had attended ECDE. However, only 2 (16.7%) of pupils who had not attended ECDE were awarded the same grade. The reason why the great disparity was realized was because early childhood development Education enabled children learn important skills such as alphabet principle (The National Early Literacy Panel, 2009). According to information presented in Table 16, 40 (90.9%) of pupils who had attended ECDE did not delete a phoneme to make a new word while 2 (16.7%) of pupils who had not attended ECDE were awarded average mark on the same aspect. The reason such a finding was established might be that the pupils had developed reading readiness which resulted to the noticeable reading abilities (Kinsella, 2006). It was established that 13 (29.5%) of pupils who had attended ECDE and 1 (8.3%) of pupils who had not attended ECDE were able to use knowledge of letter sounds to decode words. The finding was in keeping with (Hogan & Adlof, 2005) who

established that attendance of ECDE enabled a child to decode and sound out words.

It was established that 19 (43.2%) of pupils who had attended ECDE and 2 (16.7%) of pupils who had not were awarded a good grade because they were able to separate letters by cases. The finding implied that ECDE played an important role in enabling a child learn the skill of rapid atomized naming of letters (The National Early Literacy Panel, 2009). Data presented in Table 16 show that 19 (43.2%) of pupils who attended ECDE got a good grade on pronunciation as they read while 12 (100%) of those who had not attended ECDE got an average mark. The finding implied that the pupils who had attended ECDE had developed reading skills and thus they participated during oral lessons instruction.

As shown in Table 1, 41 (93.2%) of pupils who had attended ECDE got a poor grade regarding the substitution of words in a sentence while 9 (75.0%) of pupils who had not attended ECDE scored the same grade on the same aspect. The finding meant that those pupils who had attended ECDE did not substitute many words in comparison with those who had not attended ECDE.

There is no Significant Difference between Mean Reading Ability Scores of Pupils who Attended ECDE and those Pupils who did not Attend.

The hypothesis that there is no significant difference between reading ability scores of pupils who attended ECDE and those who did not attend was tested using independent samples t-test. The t- value and the p-value computed are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2:- Independent Samples T-Test for Differences between Mean Reading Ability Scores of Pupils who Attended ECDE and those who did not Attend

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Reading ability pre-test score	7.576	.007	.859	102	.392	4.28	4.98	-5.59	14.14
Reading ability post-test score	.720	.398	.135	102	.893	.75	5.56	-10.28	11.78

The results shown in Table 2 revealed that, after testing the hypothesis there is no significant difference in reading ability of pupils who attended ECDE and those who did not using independent samples t-test, the p-value obtained when the pupils were post tested was 0.893. It was observed that the p-value was greater than the set significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between mean reading ability score of pupils who attended ECDE and those who did not attend. The implication of the finding is that attendance to ECDE did not affect development of reading abilities of pupils. Perhaps language acquisition is natural. The finding contradicts that of Haslip (2018) who had established that children who had not attended preschools achieved low marks

when tested for reading achievement when they were followed up to first grade level of learning. The finding also disagrees with that of (The National Panel, 2009 & KIE, 2006) who asserted that at ECDE children learnt important skills such as the alphabet principle, phonological awareness and memory which formed the cornerstone for later reading achievement. This finding was anchored on the innate theory which is described as follows;

IV. CONCLUSIONS

- The study concluded that a child’s attendance to ECDE is helpful in preparing children to reading readiness

- It was concluded that teachers of English at the grade one primary section should not concentrate on teaching English language so as to improve the pupils' reading competencies.
- It was concluded that a child's literacy skills are developed at an early age of a child's development

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