

THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN OPENING UP EDUCATION OF AN AFRICAN CHILD: A CASE OF KENYA

ABSTRACT

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training and directed research. Language is a structured and conventional way of human communication, either spoken or written while literacy is the ability to read and write. The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of language and literacy in opening up education of an African child. The study sought to determine the effects of reading, writing and communication on creativity, innovative skills, knowledge acquisition, values and norms of an African child. The study was guided by diffusion of innovation theory and theory of learning. This research adopted a participatory action research (PAR) design, which came up with innovations in pedagogical practices right from kindergarten up to college or university. The study employed simple random sampling for selection of the sample. Anonymous and self-administered questionnaires and interview guides were distributed to 10,000 respondents to collect Primary data. Secondary data was collected through review of records, reports, journals and books. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results for objectives 1-4 were based on qualitative data analysis showing that language and literacy significantly affect education through creativity, innovation, knowledge acquisition, values and norms. For example the study found that good writing, reading and communication skills significantly led to creativity. When children were given opportunity to freely express their thoughts, language and literacy fluency they became significantly creative. Reading story books during early childhood have the capability to help build children's knowledge base and support their early language and literacy development. It revealed that children provide greater details and become more innovative when discussions are done in their ethnic languages or languages that they are comfortable with most and we recommend that this should be encouraged.

Keywords: *Language, Literacy, Education, Communication, Creativity, Writing, Reading, Innovation, Collaboration and Partnership*

1.0 Background of the study

Bernard et al (1942) say, "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates." Literacy is the ability to read and write. It is tied to everything we do and that connection in social situations and practices are very important in developing literacy skills in children. Language is the major vehicle for the transmission of culture from one generation to another. It is through language that we learn the values and norms of our society and all the elements of culture. Basically all human thought is done within the scope of language. The Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report for 2006 shows that literacy is still 'a right denied to nearly a fifth of the world's adult population' (UNESCO, 2006a). The report reveals that currently, 40 out of every 100 Africans are still unable to read and write, against 25 of every 100 in developing countries. It further reveals that the problem of illiteracy is highly pronounced in West Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa. In spite of all their resources, Nigeria merely manages a 66.8% literacy rate, Kenya (73%), Tanzania (69.4%), Lesotho (81.4%), Zambia (67.9%), Botswana (78.9%) and Swaziland (79.2%). Population experts have said that the increase in illiteracy is a function of rapid population increases, lack of universal primary education, inadequate literacy follow-up and relapses into illiteracy (Kassam & Healey, 1984). The UIS tracks the extent to which schools lack basic amenities, such as access to electricity and potable water, lack of textbooks or reading materials, low child-teacher ratio and lack of classrooms or small class sizes. With seven out of ten countries facing an acute shortage of teachers, there is need for teacher training, recruitment and improvement in working conditions. Across the region, 9 million and 6 million girls and boys respectively between the ages of about 6 and 11 will never go to school at all, according to UIS data (2019). 23% and 19% of girls and boys respectively are out of primary school. The magnitude of the problem of language and illiteracy has become so big that a number of countries in Africa such as Botswana, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Somalia as well as India and Vietnam in Asia have in recent years launched mass literacy campaigns. Kassam and Healey (1984) contend that these campaigns attempt to match the magnitude of the problem of illiteracy with corresponding massive literacy efforts.

1.1 Problem Statement

In Kenya, lack of clear guidelines on language, literacy policy and intervention measures put in place have not opened up education for the youth in large sections of the society. Real class room examples exist where people go through entire education process and still remain unable to: communicate in proper English, write proper job application letter, and/or acquire skills and values. Poor language or lack of it destroys education and to be educated is not synonymous with being literate. Lack of language and illiteracy amongst the youth in any nation thwarts social fabrics, destroys identity, limits communication and destroys education. This results in less effective and inefficient socio-economic support from the youth who are most vibrant members of the community. Disappointingly there is still a disjuncture between policies and their implementation especially the Language Education policies and the e-Education legislation framework in particular (Heugh, 2006). Experience has demonstrated that only educational campaigns with clearly defined goals can create a sense of urgency, mobilize popular support and participation, and harness all possible resources to sustain mass action, continuity and follow-up. Therefore the purpose of the study was to determine the influence of language and literacy in opening up education of an African child. A case of Kenya.

1.2 Objectives of the study:

The main objective of the study was to determine the influence of language and literacy in opening up education of an African child. A case of Kenya.

1.2.1 Specific objective of the study

- 1) To determine the effects of reading, writing and communication on the creativity of an African Child
- 2) To Establish the effects of reading, writing and communication on the innovative skills of an African child
- 3) To assess the extent to which reading, writing and communication affect knowledge acquisition of an African Child
- 4) To examine the effects of reading, writing and communication on the values and norms of an African child

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in Kenya. A projection of 10,000 school going population from kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary level of education in Kenya was randomly selected from amongst 10 million school going population and focused on the influence of language and literacy in opening up education of an African child.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research project addressed the importance of an understanding of language and literacy on education of an African child. It nurtured creativity and innovation of an African child through integrated training, teaching, reading, writing, research and community outreach. The findings of this research will be of use to scholars, educationists, governments, NGOs and policy makers.

1.5 Research Gaps

The proposed project intervention is designed to mitigate the depriving factors that have continued to impact negatively on future of an African child as a result of language and literacy. The research identified the prevailing gaps as poor reading and writing skills, perceptions and cultural issues, permissive atmosphere, social environment and interactions.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and theory of learning. According to Diffusion of Innovation Theory, people as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, or product while Learning Theory describes how students absorb, process, and retain knowledge during learning. Language and Literacy was the independent variable, education of an African child, the dependent variable with intervening variable being government policy.

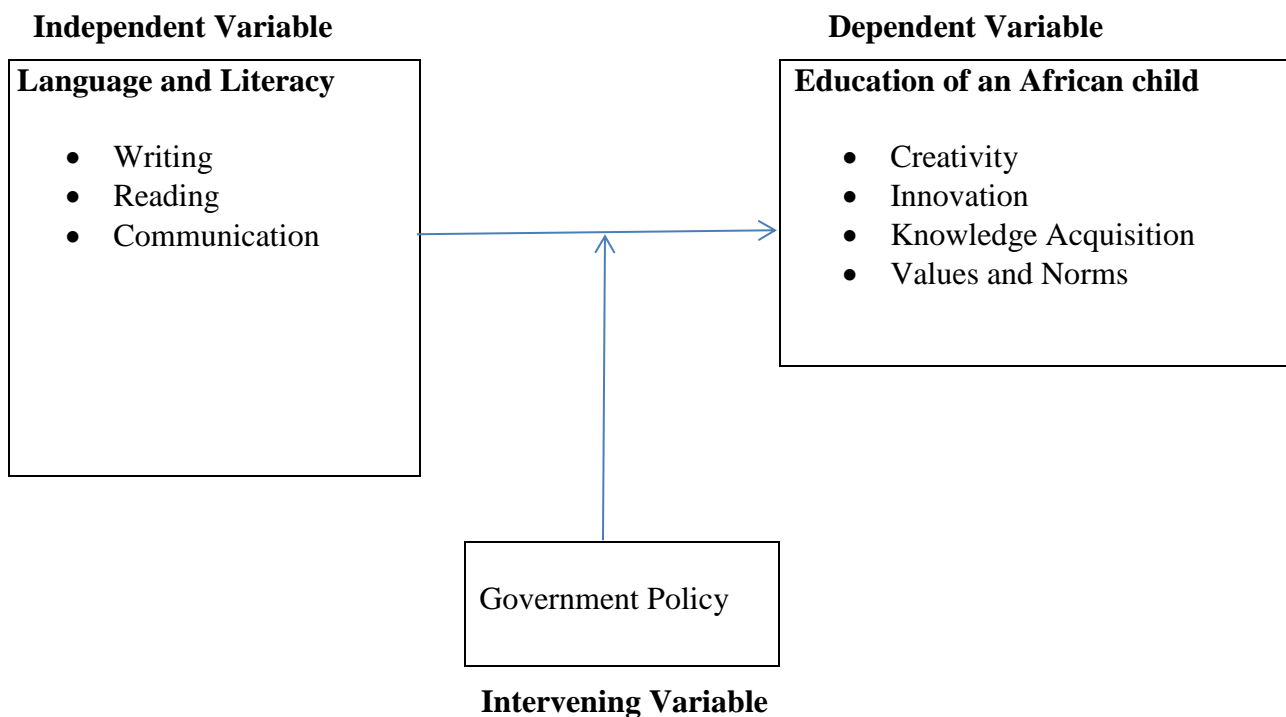


Figure 1.1 Relationship between Language and Literacy and Education of an African child

Source: Self conceptualization (2019)

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviewed theoretical literature and empirical studies. It focused on the foundation on which the study was built.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Theory of Learning.

2.1.1 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962 explains how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The end result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, or product. Adoption of a new idea, behavior, or product (i.e., "innovation") does not happen simultaneously in a social system; rather it is a process whereby some people are more apt to adopt the innovation than others. These people are classified as: Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, Laggards. This research classified various students according to their ability to quickly master knowledge, ideas and skills.

2.1.2 Theory of Learning

Learning Theory describes how students absorb, process, and retain knowledge during learning. Cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences, as well as prior experience, all play a part in how understanding, or a world view, is acquired or changed and knowledge and skills retained. Behaviorists, John Watson (1959) look at learning as an aspect of conditioning and advocate a system of rewards and targets in education. Educators who embrace cognitive theory Bredo (1994) believe that the definition of learning as a change in behavior is too narrow, and study the learner rather than their environment—and in particular the complexities of human memory. Those who advocate constructivism believe that a learner's ability to learn relies largely on what they already know and understand, and the acquisition of knowledge should be an individually tailored process of construction. This research further classified students on the basis of behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism.

2.2 The concept of language

Language is connected with the mental process of understanding. Speaking, listening, writing and reading are the four language skills. The first two skills are the most basic skills in every language. Speaking and listening are the first two linguistic skills that humans acquire in learning a language. According to Oyetunde (1999), "Reading is a process of obtaining information from print. It is a complex process that involves interaction between the reader and the author." Writing, according to Oyetunde (1999), is "The act of making graphic symbols from oral symbols." It is the most complex of all the language skills. It requires organization, expression and selection of content appropriate to a particular context, Adaji and Ugwuanyi (2005). This research shared reading experiences, books to provide parents and teachers with the language and literacy information that was not otherwise available to them.

2.3 The concept of literacy

Literacy is the ability to read and write. Today, literacy has evolved. For many teachers and students, it is also about being intellectually, culturally, and electronically capable. In the workplace, it is about proficiency in several computer programs, research and complex problem solving, or handling multiple projects. From navigating the Internet to making health care-related decisions, literacy is evolving. Children who have developed strong reading skills perform better in school and have a healthier self-image. Two-thirds of Africa's children living in poverty have no books at home, and their number continue to rise. According to Angela Oswald (2011) on an overview of child development theories, children who do not have access to books or read regularly are vulnerable to falling behind in school. Children who received more attention and nurturing at home tended to have higher IQs. While the amount of talking parents did with their children made a difference, language delivered by television, audio book, Internet, or smartphone didn't produce the same results as personal interaction, no matter how educational the content. Reading aloud to children at an early age is the most effective way to help them expand their vocabulary and recognize written words. Reading also stimulates a child's imagination and expands his or her understanding of the world. Literacy counts from day one and lays the foundation for a child's success in school and in life (Angela Oswald 2011). The study demonstrated that focusing on book features provided children with opportunity to gain the knowledge for language and literacy development throughout the school years.

2.4 Education of an African child

Of all regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14 according to UIS data (2019). Almost 60% of youth between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in school. Without urgent action, the situation will likely get worse as the region faces a rising demand for education due to a still-growing school-age population. The study found that the main focus of educational innovations should be on teaching, learning theory, practice, the learner, parents, community, society and its culture.

2.5 The effects of reading, writing and communication on the creativity of an African Child

According to Arthur Smith (1954), hardly any foundations exist to boost the creativity of African writers. Good children's literature arouses a child's imagination and extends his horizon giving him knowledge of the past in relation to the present and imbuing him ideals and values necessary for national development. Work ethics, selflessness, loving relationships, acceptance of responsibility are amongst the values which can be taught, not in a didactic, off-putting manner but with subtlety so that children can be mobilized towards national and international development. Good children's literature develops a child's creativity and inventiveness without which a people cannot hope to move into the technological age. Therefore, this research tried to stimulate a learning environment that captures and nurtures the African child's inherent qualities of imagination, curiosity and creativity through a variety of activities such as art, toys, fun with science, debates, quizzes, creative writing, story-telling, and reading aloud.

2.6 The effects of reading, writing and communication on the innovative skills of an African child

Innovation in education support traditional lecture-style teaching, but through convenient information gathering and sharing it can also promote innovative teaching methods such as cooperative learning (Lan et al., 2007), exploratory learning outside the classroom (Liu et al 2012), and game-based learning (Klopfer et al 2012). Innovative methods and patterns in education will likely help facilitate the development of communication, problem-solving, creativity, and other high-level skills among students (Warschauer, 2007). Long-term interventions need logistical support to integrate advanced technologies with innovative and elaborate educational methods. Information technology applications in the classroom must first go through adoption and adaptation before they can proceed to innovation. This study focused on increasing content learning and designing educational activities involving explorative, communication, and cooperative skills.

2.7 The extent to which reading, writing and communication affect knowledge acquisition of an African Child

Knowledge is passed on through language. Language is used for instruction both in formal and informal educational situations. It is used in both schools and homes to spread knowledge. Language enables us to express our ideas, feelings and desires in such a way that is easily understood by others. Founded by Jean Piaget (2018), constructivism emphasizes the importance of the active involvement of learners in constructing knowledge for themselves. The research encouraged the students to use background knowledge and concepts to assist them in their acquisition of novel information.

2.8 The effects of reading, writing and communication on the values and norms of an African child

Working mothers and housewives; in as much as there is so much to be done at home and also at the workplace, hardly endeavor to make time for the children. Some parents have so much to do that during vacations and weekends when the children are supposed to spend time with them, they allow these children to go for extra tuition which sometimes is unnecessary. These busy schedules of parents have influenced private schools to organize so many activities for the children that they are not able to socialize properly and also stay home and learn at the feet of their parents. African culture is rich and it should not be neglected out rightly because it is that which makes Africa. This research embraced good parenting practices to nurture responsible youth for the African continent.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by Participatory Action Research (PAR) design which is a qualitative research method to conduct a baseline survey in the target area to establish the influence of language and literacy in opening up education of an African child in order to identify the bottlenecks to creativity, innovation, knowledge acquisition and values amongst the children. Qualitative features of individuals' views, feelings, patterns, culture, history, local context and social relationships were freely examined and the researchers worked with communities to create change.

The study area was Kenya. Cluster and simple random sampling were used to select 10,000 school going children in Kenya which is a country in East Africa lying in the latitudes and longitudes of 4°N and 4°S and 34°E and 42°E respectively. These sampling techniques were considered as suitable because they gave all the youth a chance to be selected for this study.

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from original sources while secondary data was obtained through documentary review. Questionnaires, interview schedule, group discussions, surveys and observation methods were used to collect data from the respondents.

Pretesting was conducted for reliability. Reliability of data collection instrument was assured using the Cronbach's alpha formula. Pilot test was conducted on 100 youth from Kenya that was not included in the main study. Validity was conducted by exposing the data collection instruments to research experts to critique for clarity and ability to collect intended data.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study found the following results in line with the objectives:

4.1: Effects of Language and Literacy on the creativity of an African Child

The study found that good writing, reading and communication skills significantly led to creativity. When children were given opportunity to freely express their thoughts, language and literacy fluency they became significantly creative. Children became significantly creative when teachers adopted new methods of teaching. Children reacted creatively when the teachers or

parents created curiosity and inventiveness in their mind. Through reading books, newspapers and playing word games, the students improved their vocabulary. To improve creative thinking, the children were subjected to constant performance and result assessments (Table 1).

4.2: Effects of Language and Literacy on the innovative skills of an African child

This research discovered that the focus of reading instruction for improving adolescent literacy is different from that required for earlier grades. The research found that Kenyan education system seriously needs effective innovations to produce the required high quality learning outcomes across the system. The main focus of educational innovations should be on teaching, learning theory and practice, the learner, parents, community, society and culture. It was observed that, technological applications need a solid theoretical foundation based on purposeful, systemic research and a sound pedagogy. One of the critical areas of research and innovation was found to be cost and time efficiency of learning (Table 1).

4.3: Extent to which Language and Literacy affect knowledge acquisition of an African Child

This research discovered that reading story books during early childhood have the capability to help build children's knowledge base and support their early language and literacy development. That story books have the unique potential to facilitate children's knowledge acquisition through which their prior knowledge can be organized and integrated with new information. During shared reading experiences such books may help provide parents and teachers with the language and literacy information that may not otherwise be available to them. This study clearly demonstrates the importance of focusing on book features to provide children with every opportunity to gain the knowledge for language and literacy development throughout the school years.

4.4: Effects of Language and Literacy on the values and norms of an African child

The research results revealed that children provide greater details when discussions are done in their ethnic languages or languages that they are comfortable with most. At the same time Kenya's children's accent and language proficiency significantly identified ethnic formation which in turn positively exposed the level of Kenya's literacy. The results identified the complexities of ethnic composition during children's early years and established a path for socio-emotional health and academic achievement. Local language-literacy acquisition provides educational advantages to bilingual children such as fostering the development of linguistic skills in the home language to high levels of proficiency, supporting the acquisition of literacy in the majority language, easing the transition into the school environment and enhancing the child's general academic achievement.

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APPENDIX I:**Table 1: Actions and decisions revolving around language, literacy and education of an African child**

Sr. No	Action/Decision	School/Institution /Government	Role of the Teacher/Lecturers	Role of the Parent/Guardian	Role of the Society/Community
i	Curriculum	Specifications, Prescription	Initiation, Teaching, Mentorship and Couching	Initiation, Mentorship and Couching	Initiation, Mentorship and Couching
ii	Choice of Language	Definition of language	Execution and Teaching	Provisions to choose	Provisions to choose
iii	Time	Allocation, Distribution, Age	Execution	Execution	Execution
iv	Content	Definition of contents, nature of language	Execution, Teaching, Mentorship and Couching	Intercultural competencies	Intercultural competencies
v	Provision of Teachers/Lecturers	Methods of recruitment, demand and supply	Mentorship, , Teaching, Couching, Training	Watchdog	Watchdog
vi	Other resources	Course books, computers	Recommendation, guidance, maintenance	Assessment	Assessment
vii	Allocation	Budgeting	Management, Teaching methods	Watchdog	Watchdog
viii	Evaluation	Target outcome	Performance, Teaching methods	Assessment	Assessment
vix	Quality assurance	Control, assessment	Performance, Teaching methods	Assessment	Assessment