

Usage of Oral Skills Approaches on Attainment of Reading Abilities of Grade One Learners in Public Primary Schools in Eldoret Town, Kenya: Gender Perspective

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Abstract

The study investigated on usage of oral skills approaches on attainment of reading abilities of grade one learners. This was due to the fact that early grade learners lack proficiency in the reading skill. The specific objective of the study was to establish whether the reading abilities differed by gender. The study was guided by Communication teaching language theory. Pre-test post-test design was used and the target population were grade one learners and teachers of English. Data were collected by the use of a reading test and a lesson observation schedule. Expert judgement was used to determine validity of the instruments. To determine reliability, test-retest was used. To determine the sample size simple random and stratified methods were employed. Data were analyzed by the use of frequencies, mean scores, and percentages. ANOVA was used to test hypothesis.

Keywords: Oral Skills Approaches; Reading Abilities, Grade One Learners

Introduction

The ability to read is an essential key for successful learning and academic careers as it enables students to comprehend written language and acquire knowledge in school and private life (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017; OECD, 2019). Acquisition of literacy skills during early years of a child is crucial and major concern for his or her overall academic development and future success. Without literacy skills acquisition at the younger age, many menaces may spring up with undesirable results in future which range from low self-esteem, academic struggle and even drop out of school. Low literacy skills can also cause the society long lasting problems such as poverty and crimes. Elementary years provide students with an essential foundation for acquiring

reading skills. Particularly in kindergarten through second grade, students work closely

with phonics and learning how to read (Egan, 2014). Males and females use learning strategies in different ways. Catalán (2003) contended that the two genders perceived information differently and concluded that males and females learn and use strategies differently. In particular, the author found a significant difference between males and females and how they used learning strategies, noting that females used a significantly higher amount of vocabulary strategies. Gambrell and Hunter (2000) added that males decrease in desire and time spent on reading independently as they become adolescents. Data from international assessments indicate that in most countries, by grade 5 or 6, girls are doing equally well or even better than boys with regard to reading acquisition (although girls remain at a disadvantage in mathematics and science results). Reading results from African and Latin American countries participating in the francophone Program for Analysis of Education Systems, or PASEC (2004); the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, SAQMEC (2007); and the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study, SERCE (2006) either show no significant gender differences or indicate that girls outperform boys in reading in 37 out of 39 participating countries. A similar trend was established by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in developed countries.

National and international studies have repeatedly shown significant gender gaps in favor of girls regarding reading motivation, interest in texts, and reading competence across elementary and secondary schools (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson, & Wright, 2012; Mullis et al., 2017).

Learners who do not develop the ability to read proficiently in early grades are less likely to complete compulsory education than those who do. Learners who have acquired reading skills in grade two are expected to read 100 correct letter sounds per minute as well as 50 correct words per minute. The learners are also expected to read a simple paragraph of approximately 60 words in a minute. According to a report by Brown Center Report on American Education of 2015, boys' reading achievement lags that of girls in every country in the world on international assessments. Further, reading tests of the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that girls outscored boys at every grade level and age examined. Gender differences in reading were not confined to the United States. Among younger children age nine to ten, or about fourth grade girls consistently outscored boys on international assessments, according to a study conducted in forty-nine nations and nine benchmarking entities in 2011 on Program in International Reading Literacy Study. The same was true for students in high school. On the 2012 reading literacy test of the Program for International Student Assessment, worldwide gender gaps were evident between fifteen-year-old males and females. The researcher of the reviewed study did not specify the country where the study was conducted and, therefore, the reason why the current study was conducted in Kenya. The research design used in the reviewed study was not specified. Equally the researcher did not explain how validity and reliability were determined.

Research has shown that girls not only enjoy reading more than boys but also do it more often. More girls than boys read for longer periods of time and that girls and boys read different materials outside class (Clark, 2012; Clark & Douglass, 2011). Corpus Arellano (2013) noted that gender differences exist among secondary school students, where girls spend more time reading books and magazines in many countries while boys spend more time reading on the Internet. He further reported that “girls read diverse materials and use libraries more often than males”. He argued that “girls prefer more demanding texts such as fiction while males are more likely to read comics and newspapers” (Corpus, 2013).

Yankelovich (2006) did a study and the findings indicated that girls were more likely than boys to have positive attitudes about reading and to regularly engage in reading for fun. The benefits of reading were evidenced by the attitudes of the girls’ high frequency readers. When the author compared the girls to boys, it was found out that the girls were more likely to have positive self-perceptions and to associate strong reading skills with future success.

A report by the PISA (2009) showed that lower reading proficiency among boys had become a major concern in many education systems. Suggestion from the report was that closing the gender gap would help to improve reading performance overall. Girls outperform boys in reading in every PISA country. In OECD countries, the average gender gap was 39 score points, or over half a proficiency level. The widest gender gaps, seen in Albania, Bulgaria and Lithuania, were well over twice the size of the smallest gaps, seen in the OECD country Chile and the partner countries Colombia and Peru. Wide gender gaps were seen in Nordic countries, including the highest-scoring OECD country, Finland, and in some other high-performing countries, such as New Zealand. In Finland, boys scored one-fifth of a proficiency level above the OECD average whereas girls scored close to one proficiency level higher. In Korea and Hong Kong, China and Shanghai, all high-scoring countries with gender gaps close to the average, boys perform better than they do in other countries, scoring well above the OECD average for both genders by 24 to 43 points. Gender differences were most stark when comparing the proportion of boys and girls who performed at the lowest reading proficiency levels.

Richard and Jaan (2009) did a study on gender differences in reading achievement. The aim of the study was to find the gender effect size and variances in reading achievement in international studies. The analysis of Pisa 2000, 2003, and 2006 data revealed that the advantages in reading achievement of ten-year old boys were 0.23d and that of 15 year old girls was 0.42d. One explanation of girls’ higher achievement in reading was in their deeper engagement in language related activities.

Marks (2008) did a study on underachieving of boys in reading. The study established that higher achievement of girls in reading and mathematics is associated with the school system factors and macro-societal factors. Further research was carried by the author on the living conditions and activities of girls and boys to find some explanation to the higher test scores of girls. Female students used language learning strategies more frequently than males (Teh, 2007). Besides, females were reported to be more socially interactive than males.

As for communication, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) reported that girls possess a greater level of willingness to communicate inside the classroom, whereas boys are more willing to use their second language outside the school context.

Bahareh, Saeed and Zohreh (2011) carried out a study on the effects of self-esteem, age and gender on the speaking skills of intermediate University learners. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, age and gender on one hand and speaking skills on the other hand. Twenty intermediate Persian learners of English were selected from among Bachelor of Arts undergraduate English foreign students studying English as a foreign language at Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch. The result showed a significant relationship between self-esteem and speaking skill with fluency exerting the most influence. There was also a reverse relationship between age and speaking skills.

Findings

The learners of either gender were subjected to a reading test at a pre-test and the post-test levels. Results of the reading mean scores obtained were presented according to the groups of the learners. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1

Mean Scores of Reading Ability by Gender of pupils in Different School Locations

Gender of pupil		Comparison		Intervention	
		Pre-test score (%)	Post-test score (%)	Pre-test score (%)	Post-test score (%)
Male	Mean	32.89	38.14	32.25	49.73
	n	23	23	20	20
Female	Mean	35.73	43.13	37.10	53.74
	n	25	25	36	36
Total	Mean	34.37	40.74	35.37	52.31
	n	48	48	56	56

Data presented in Table 1 show that during pre-test the male pupils in the comparison group scored a mean score of 32.89 and the female pupils in the same group scored a mean of 35.77. The finding showed that the female pupils posted a slightly better score compared to their male counterparts. The implication of the finding was that female students use language learning strategies more frequently than males (Teh, 2009). The other meaning of the finding was that females are reported to be more socially interactive than males. And since language where reading is embedded is a social activity, it provides girls a better chance to do well in reading than boys.

When the learners of either gender at the comparison group were post tested, they scored a mean of 38.14 for males and 43.13 for females. The difference between the mean scores was at the margin and, therefore, the pupils of either gender had abilities to develop

reading skills at the same time. The finding concurred with Yücel (2005) who reported that gender of a child did not influence his or her reading attitude. The other interpretation of the finding was that since the pupils learnt under the same classroom environment much difference in reading abilities was not expected.

As shown in Table 1, when the male learners in the intervention group were pre-tested they scored a mean of 32.25 but when they were post tested, they scored a mean of 49.73. Whereas the female learners in the same group scored a mean of 37.10 when they were pre-tested and a score of 53.74 after they were post tested. The finding meant that the treatment which learners of either gender received had an effect on their reading abilities. The implication of the finding is that oral skills interactive approaches contribute to learners of either gender's reading ability on equal measure. The other interpretation of the finding is that although all the learners in the intervention group improved after the treatment, the females performed slightly better than their male counterparts. The implication of the finding is that, females dominate in speech as asserted by (Lado, 1995).

A null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between means of oral skills interactive approaches and reading ability of boys and girls was tested using ANOVA. The results were displayed in Table 2

Table 2: ANOVA for Difference in Mean Score in Reading Ability for Boys and Girls

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
between groups	70.042	1	70.042	.360	.551
within groups	8950.438	46	194.575		
Total	9020.479	47			

The results obtained in Table 2 show that, after testing the hypothesis, the F value of 0.390 and the p- value of 0.551 were obtained. The p-value is greater than the significance value $\alpha = 0.05$. The finding implied that there is no statistically significant difference between means of oral skills instruction and reading ability of boys and girls. According to this finding it is evident that reading ability is not dependent on whether a learner is a boy or a girl because they both learn under the same environment and therefore great variance in the way they performed in the reading test was not expected. The finding is in line with (Bahareh; Saeed & Zohreh, 2011) who established that there was no statistically significant association between gender and speaking skills. The other meaning which could be deduced from the finding is that both boys and girls are exposed to the same learning opportunities and hence development of reading abilities is expected to be the same. The finding agrees with that of Piper and Mugenda (2013) who established that for both boys and girls to learn foundational reading skills, they should be provided with equal opportunities to access quality education.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that gender differences among learners in elementary grades were not very significant as far as reading were abilities were concerned. Further research can be conducted to establish whether the type of school, a child's socio –economic factors, teacher's experience and training influenced acquisition of reading skills.

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