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**EXTENT OF USE OF PICTURE BOOKS IN TEACHING PRE-SCHOOL PUPILS ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS IN KENYA; A CASE OF TIGONI ZONE OF KIAMBU COUNTY**

Samwel Mwanda

Department of Educational Communication and Technology'  
University of Nairobi, Kenya

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent of use of picture books as instructional materials in teaching preschool pupils English oral skills in Tigoni Zone, Kiambu County. The study used descriptive survey design to get information from all the preschool teachers in the study area. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics which involved tabulation of data into frequencies and percentages. Analysis of the results revealed that picture books were poorly utilized for teaching oral skills. The study revealed a need to develop policy frameworks by Mo EST and KICD to ensure accurate planning for better remuneration, integration of instructional materials in the curriculum and availability of infrastructure conducive for better preschool education and other similar studies in different areas utilizing qualitative or mixed methods to delve into other underlying issues for poor utilization of picture books as instructional materials.

**INTRODUCTION**

Language teaching has been described as the foundation of all instructional process (Skinner, 2016). This has led to the changing of focus of language teaching to promotion of oral skills in order to respond to learner's needs for effective communication (Hinkel, 2017). One way through which learning of oral skills could be enhanced is through the use of instructional materials such as picture books. Use of picture books for training preschool pupils make learning interesting, interactive and relational. These picture books are available and can be used in areas with no electricity supply, are easy to assemble and use. All this could be made possible through the use of instructional materials such as picture books (Stone, 2016). A study conducted by Wambui (2013) investigated the effects of use of instructional material on participation of pre-school pupils in science classroom in Kirinyaga County and concluded that there was lack of effective use of instructional materials among preschool teachers due to large number of enrolment and lack of infrastructure to accommodate activities. Also noted were poor classroom arrangement and small space. The researcher further noted that although picture books provided ambient learning environment for preschool children, they were seldom used. He thus recommended increased use of picture books in preschools across the region.

This study will therefore fill the knowledge gaps exhibited above by investigating effectiveness of use of picture books in teaching pre-school pupils English oral skills in Tigoni Zone of Limuru Sub County Kiambu County.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Picture Books as Instructional Aid**

Studies on the use of picture books as instructional materials began to be taken seriously towards the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The classical works on picture books as instructional aids in English were done by two scholars; Joseph Schwartz and Perry Nodelmann in the 1980s (Newell, 2017). It was from these pioneer researchers that other scholars started coming up with studies on the same. The contribution of picture books in instruction is based on the combination of the visual and the verbal levels of communication, (Unsworth, 2017).

According to Fattal, (2017), picture books create a miniature ecosystem in for enhanced learning experience. This is brought about by the reciprocating actions of words and pictures in picture books where each one becomes a basis of existence of the other. Other scholars have described this interaction as creation of impressions of thrilling, inspiring and a lively branch of literature (Gilmore & Howard 2016; Unsworth, 2017). Picture books communicate to pupils of simple qualities, of youthful simplicity and cheerfulness; yet puzzlingly, they accomplish this in vast sophistication in visual and verbal codes (Cox, 2017).

Since most children are amazed by picture even at the age of two and continue to take pleasure in them for many more years in the learning cycle, use of picture books therefore is a fundamental instructional model that can work for many children across cultures in time and space (Pinter, 2017). Parents, as the first agents of socialization should therefore introduce picture books to their children at home. During such exercises, they should read texts aloud and point out interesting features to their children. In some cases, stories could be conveyed entirely through picture, with total disregard to texts while in other cases; they may be integrated in texts. In both cases, picture book is logically designed to introduce young children to use of books and reading for information gathering. (Livingston, Oswald & Skinner, 2016).

### **Pictures Books and Creativity**

Picture books create a way for pupils to interconnect and have a better understanding of the world. According to Nisbet and Shucksmith (2017), when children explore illustrations in picture books, they acquire abilities to read images and this helps them achieve deeper understanding of literature. This kind of understanding where learners are able to understand images in a confined space and context is very vital for the learning process. As such picture books bring into context shared messages define the schooling process (Pinter, 2017).

Picture books help learners to develop not only technical skills but also imaginative, constructive, and practical skills. (Wilhelm, 2016; Pinter, 2017). Pictures also assist young learners to develop capacities to understand stylistic devices in language use. Bang (2000)

explored emotion and how picture content influence affects emotional response through picture stories. Her study revealed that children start conceptualizing language of illustration when basic shapes are associated in the story line. Sound pedagogical approaches require learner creativity as it stimulate permanent learning through participation in the creation of knowledge (Hop f, 2016)

### **Extent of use of Picture Books for Teaching English**

Instructional materials are important components of language teaching. Picture books have can be used to spur successful learning. In most teacher training colleges, students are advised to form a habit of applying instructional aids in ensuring learner participation in constructive learning process. Teachers should therefore be able to explore various ways of utilizing such learning aids at their disposal. Teachers during the previous times, while in training had far less practical experience of technology and communication, were mostly theoretically trained in the traditional methods with less learner involvement (Mw and a G, Mw and an S, Midigo & Maundu, 2017). However, recent developments and especially in the constructivist pedagogy have revealed value of instructional media. Proponents of constructivist pedagogy thus encourage use of instructional aides for maximum learner achievement (Teo, Milutinović & Zhou, 2016).

The teacher of English language should seek to avail and frequently visual aid as this would greatly improve the learning outcome. English being one of the fundamental learning subjects in Kenya those learners have to continue with through to secondary schools, there is need to enhance its delivery to pupils. Picture books as instructional media can be successfully used reflect what learners have learnt. When learners are given opportunity to portray their ideas and skills during the instructional process, they profit more. Such learners become more creative and are able to accurately unlearn wrong concepts prior developed (Teo, Milutinović & Zhou, 2016).

At the training colleges, trainee teachers are taken through use of instructional materials in teaching. It is in such trainings that teachers are expected to develop skills which will enable them adequately cover the syllabus while using instructional media. They are also adequately exposed the said aids. For practice, teachers ought to employ all possible techniques for adequate learning. It is only when appropriate skills as developed during the training are put into practice that teachers are able to provide the intended learning objectives.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized descriptive study design. Quantitative data were collected from the respondents who were ECDE teachers. Target population comprised of all preschools teachers in Tigoni Zone. There are 60 teachers in all public pre-schools centers in Tigoni zone. Purposive sampling was used to sample all teachers in different levels of professional qualifications. Data was collected using structured questionnaire. Using descriptive statistics, data from the

questionnaires were summarized using percentages and mean. The analysis was assisted by computer software, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0.

**FINDINGS**

***Return Rate***

A total of 60 respondents were sampled. Among them, only 51 completed the questionnaires. Return rate was thus computed at 85% percent. Table 1 indicates the number of respondents who filled the questionnaires and returned.

**Table 1 . Return rate**

Category	Sampled	Returned	Percentage
Diploma Holder	20	17	85
Certificate holders	30	27	90
Untrained	10	7	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>85</b>

From the table, 85% of diploma holders, 70% of the untrained teachers and 90% of the certificate holder returned the filled questionnaires. This shows that those who returned questionnaires were certificate holder.

**Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Participants were asked to indicate their demographic information including age, levels of education, gender and experience teaching preschool pupils. Table 2 represents the findings.

**Table 2. Demographic information of the respondents**

	Category	Returned	%
Age	Below 25 years	16	31.4
	25-35	26	51.0
	36-55	7	13.7
	Above 55	2	3.9
Level of education	Diploma Holder	17	33.3
	Certificate holders	27	52.9
	Untrained	7	13.7
Gender	Male	11	21.6
	Female	40	78.4
Experience	0-5 years	13	25.5
	6-10 years	31	60.8
	More than 10 years	7	13.7

About 3.9% were aged above 55 years. Those who were below 25 years were 31.4%. The results shows that majority of the preschool teachers were aged between 25-35 years.

About 13.7% were untrained teachers. The finding shows that most preschool teachers are certificate holders and a few untrained teachers. This finding indicates that majority of preschool teachers are female. Male teachers only comprised a small percentage of 21.6%. The study also found that 60.8% of the preschool teachers who participated in the study had 6-10 years of experience, 24.4% had between 0-5 years of experience while 13.7% had more than 10 years. This reveals that most preschool teachers who participated in the study had between 6-10 years of experience.

**Extent of use of Picture Books as Instructional Materials**

In order to find out the extent to which teachers made use of picture books while teaching English, a question “how often do you use picture books for teaching English oral skills?” was posed. The respondents were required to indicate whether they did so once in a while, always or hardly. The responses were cross tabulated across the demographics for deeper understanding. Table 3 shows the responses.

**Table 3. Frequency of Picture Book use for Teaching\Learning oral skills**

Use of Picture books	Category	Once in a while	Always	Hardly	Total
Age	Below 25 years	56.3%	6.3%	37.5%	31.4%
	25-35	46.2%	26.9%	26.9%	51.0%
	36-55	57.1%	14.3%	28.6%	13.7%
	Above 55	0.0%	100%	0.0%	3.9%
Level of education	Diploma Holder	41.2%	11.8%	47.1%	33.3%
	Certificate holders	51.9%	25.9%	22.2%	52.9%
	Untrained	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%	13.7%
Gender	Male	45.5%	18.2%	36.4%	21.6
	Female	50.0%	22.5%	27.5%	78.4%
Experience	0-5 years	61.5%	15.4%	23.1%	25.5%
	6-10 years	51.6%	22.6%	25.8%	60.8%
	More than 10 yrs.	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%	13.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>49.0%</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>100%</b>

From table 3 above, teachers aged below 25 years (56.3%) used picture books for instructional purposes once in a while. About 46.2% and 57.1% of the teachers aged between 25-35 years and 36-55 years respectively also use picture books for instructional purposes once in a while. The entire teacher aged 55 years and above always used picture books for instructional purposes. About 26.9% of the teacher aged between 25-35 years indicated that they always used picture books for instructional purposes. Those who hardly used picture books for instruction were those aged below 25 years (37.5%), 36-55 years (28.6%) and those aged 25-35 years (26.95). The

above findings indicate that younger teachers use picture books less frequently. Frequent users of picture books were those aged between 25-35 years and those aged above 55 years. It is possible to conclude that elder teachers used picture books because they had collections and experience in use. Reviewed literature indicated that paper books once collected and compiled could be used over time (Arends, 2014).

Findings on the frequency of use of picture books among teachers of various levels of education revealed that picture books were mostly used by untrained teachers (57.1%, once in a while and 28.6%, always) and least used by diploma holders (41.2%, once in a while and 11.8% always). This finding could be explained by the fact that teachers who were had advance training could be knowledgeable of other instructional materials including use of computers and games for trained and possibly preferred them over picture books. It is also possible that teachers with advanced trainings were demotivated due to poor remuneration and working conditions. This position is supported by a study conducted by Juma (2016), which found out those teachers had negative attitude towards the use of instructional materials due to poor remuneration, inadequate time allocated for the lessons and poor working conditions. Moreover, Fattal, (2017) indicated that picture books are the most common and simple instructional mediums that could be used in areas without electricity. In addition, findings on the cross tabulations of teacher's experience and use of picture books indicates that many teachers with less experience (0-5 years) utilized picture books for instructional purposes (61.5% once in a while and 15.4%, always).

Across gender divide, 50.0% of the female teachers used picture books for teaching once in a while as compared to 45.5% of the male teachers. Similarly, 22.5% of the female teachers utilized picture books for training always as compared to 18.2% of the male teachers. The findings show that female teachers were more frequent users of picture books as compared to their male counterparts.

However, the study revealed that only 21.6% of the sampled teachers used picture books for teaching oral skills to preschool pupils, 29.4 % and 49% respectively hardly and used once in a while picture books for teaching oral skills to preschool pupils. The finding indicates low utilization of picture books among preschool teachers in the study area. It is possible, as indicated in the previous sections that challenges of large enrolment, time constraints and poor infrastructure hampered the use of picture books for training. Deesri (2002) suggests that teachers do not use picture books for instructional purposes because they are always in a hurry to cover syllabus content and are left with very short time to prepare picture books for instructional purposes.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study investigated extent of use of picture books while teaching oral skills among preschool teachers. It was apparent that there was low utilization of picture books for teaching oral skills to preschool pupils in the study area. The study established that younger teachers use picture books less frequently and that frequent users of picture books were those aged between 25-35 years and

those aged above 55 years leading to an understanding that elder teachers used picture books because they had collections and experience in use. This finding was supported by a study conducted by Arends (2014).

It was also apparent that picture books were mostly used by untrained teachers and its use reduced as teachers climbed the academic ladders. This was possibly so because teachers with higher training could be demotivated by poor remuneration scales and working conditions. Moreover, Teachers with few years of experience used picture books for teaching, a position supported by Fattal, (2017) who portended that picture books are the most common and simple instructional mediums that could be used in areas without electricity and therefore could easily be adopted by even the young and inexperienced teachers.

### **Conclusions**

Finally, the study concludes that there is low utilization of picture books for teaching oral skills to preschool pupils in the study area and that inexperienced, untrained and female teachers use picture books more frequently.

### **Recommendations**

The results of this study shows poor utilization of picture books as instructional material in teaching preschool pupils oral skills despite their knowledge of its pedagogical value. The study therefore recommends development of policy framework by the Ministry of education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to ensure accurate planning for better remuneration, integration of instructional materials in the curriculum and availability of infrastructure conducive for better preschool education.

The study recommends future studies in different areas covering both rural and urban set ups, larger populations. Such studies could also utilize qualitative or both qualitative and quantitative methods to delve into underlying issues in effective use of picture books for teaching preschool pupils which were beyond the scope of the current study.

Preschool management should also be sensitized on the importance of using instructional materials such as picture books to ensure their support for the teachers.

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