

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Teacher factors in language curriculum material selection, development and use in early childhood education Programme

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The teacher is an important factor in teaching and learning of language in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) programme. A well prepared teacher could be very effective in the selection, development and use of materials. However, in Gem District in the Republic of Kenya, concerns have been raised regarding the preparedness of the ECDE teachers in language material selection, development and use. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of influence of teacher factors in selection, development and use of language materials. The study involved 68 teachers (representing 33% of the population) selected by simple random sampling from 115 ECDE centers in Gem District, Kenya. The study was based on descriptive survey design. Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire. The study found that teachers were academically and professionally ill equipped to effectively select, develop and use materials in the language classroom. The study recommends that the Government should harmonize ECDE teacher training program and widen the scope of the curriculum to include practical aspects to enhance sufficient and effective selection, development and use of language materials in the Early Childhood Development and Education Programme.

**Key words:** Teacher factors, language curriculum materials, selection, development, use

## INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) require the efforts of all the stakeholders to provide integrated development for children from birth to the age of entry into primary school (Republic of Kenya, 1999; Republic of Kenya, 2006b). The emphasis on ECDE has been on provision of institutionalized education to children in the 3-6 years age group. This is because it is the stage where so many attributes and personalities are formed (Farrant, 1986). Kyriacou (2001) suggest that teachers are central to the process and that a well implemented teacher training programme is crucial for the process. This means that a well trained teacher can play a very active role to influence the change in the learning process through the acquired knowledge.

There is need for teachers to have sufficient knowledge and skills to facilitate efficient and effective development, selection and utilization of language materials for quality language teaching and learning. There have been suggestions for training institutions to provide programs for the replacement of equipment, tools and machinery to ensure continuity and relevance of training programmes. This is supported by Brown and co-workers (2006) who point out that interpretation and utilization of resources require training and practice.

Riley (2005) asserts that there is recognition of the need for teachers to be well equipped with a sound understanding of the curriculum. A strong academic and professional qualification enables a teacher to select content and identify key points appropriately. Such a practitioner is more accurate in assessing the extent of the child's understanding. Research (Riley, 2005) shows that this type of teacher is able, also to interest the children more and more and to teach in a more engaging

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fashion. Teachers with strong subject knowledge ask more appropriate questions and are able to incorporate the pupils' contribution to the lessons. Mayer and Moore (2000) stressed that there is need for teachers to acquire high academic skills. In addition, teachers should teach in the field in which they specialize and was trained. They further observed that there is need for academic preparation and certification as a way of ensuring competence among teachers.

Aubrey (cited in Riley, 2005) made a strong case that educators supporting the earliest years of school need to be equally well informed. Brown and co-workers (2006) concur that no matter how kind, amiable and well meaning a teacher is, s/he cannot possibly succeed unless s/he has thorough knowledge of the subject s/he is teaching and a good general knowledge of his/her learners. This means that the teacher in question must have the content and be able to interpret what is expected to be taught. They go further to suggest that the selection, interpretation, utilization and evaluation of the teaching and learning resources require professional skills which can only be acquired through training and practice.

Margolin (2002) observed that an ECDE teacher occupies an important place in the educational growth of a child. S/he serves as a role model in a child's life. Brown and co-workers (2006) stress that the teacher has a major role to play in the teaching process and no technique, no method, no device, no gadget can guarantee success except the teacher.

From a study by UNESCO (1984), many teachers feel that inadequate preparation during training period is the cause of their difficulties in their work. Professional preparation enables the teacher to interpret and apply the language materials and thus they are able to impart knowledge more efficiently than teachers who have not received any training. International reviews (UNESCO, 1984) of studies dealing with effectiveness of teachers indicate that selection and training of teachers are important means of improving performance and learning. The UNESCO (1984) study also found out that the mere use of the materials or resources however, does not guarantee effective communication, or effective teaching. It is their careful provision, selection and skilful handling that renders them useful in facilitating learning.

Quist (2005) says that teachers have a great variety of tasks which include classroom organization, planning activities, selecting and preparation of teaching aids among others. This means that they need to manage personal time and the management of lesson times.

Kenya recognizes the importance of ECDE as the most important lever for accelerating the attainment of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Republic of Kenya, 2006a). Despite all the efforts and commitment made by the government of Kenya to achieve Basic Education for All (BEFA) through ECDE, there is still poor performance in the sub sector

particularly in language development. The ECDE teacher is very vital in the selection, development and use of language materials as the introduction of the language curriculum in the ECDE system cannot achieve desired results without serious efforts to ensure its implementation. Therefore, the government has stepped up teacher training for ECDE teachers which are coordinated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) through the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) (Republic of Kenya, 2006c).

It has been noted that currently in Kenya, over half of the ECDE teachers are untrained (Republic of Kenya, 2006c) thus creating a worrying scenario. The Kenya Education Commission report recommended in-service training of teachers in teaching methods and child psychology as one of the ways of improving the quality of education in post-independence Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1964). The Kamunge Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1988) noted that majority of the teachers in Kenya end up in ECDE teaching profession simply because they have no other alternative jobs. In Gem District, about 65% of the ECDE teachers are untrained. This scenario is compounded by the fact that it is the responsibility of parents to pay the teachers. Concerns have been raised over the poor state of the ECDE programmes and especially teachers' preparedness with regard to material selection, development and use of language materials (District Education Officer, 2009). However, there is lack of information on teacher factors with regard to the selection, development and use of language materials. Without this information, it would be difficult to implement appropriate strategies to address the problem. Therefore, this study intended to determine the teacher factors with regard to language material selection, development and use.

Given the nature of the problem under examination, that is, an assessment of teacher factor in language material selection, development and use in ECDE centers, the study opted to use teachers as they are very important and influential in raising standards whatever the existing situation (Fullan, 2001).

Specific objectives of the study were to determine extent of influence of:

- (i) Teacher knowledge on selection, development and use of language materials.
- (ii) Teacher skills on selection, development and use of language materials.
- (iii) Teacher attitude on selection, development and use of language materials.
- (iv) Teacher preferences on selection, development and use of language materials.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design. Orodho (2003) describes a descriptive survey as collecting data in order to get a detailed description of current practices, status of the subject or situation required. It can be used when collecting information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education or social issues (Orodho and Kombo, 2002). Descriptive survey design was chosen because it is appropriate for educational fact finding and yields a great deal of information, which is accurate. The research aimed at gathering accurate information on the teacher factor with regard to language material selection, development and use.

### Sample and Venue

Akpa and Angahar (1999) define sampling as the act of selecting a portion of a population for investigation. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 68 teachers drawn from 115 ECDE centers in Gem District, Kenya, representing 33.3% of the study population. Simple random sampling technique was used because it reduces the chance variation between a sample and the population it represents (Grinnel, 1993; Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999).

### Data Collection Instruments

Teachers' Questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers regarding the teacher factors in influencing selection, development and use of language materials. It had both open-ended and closed-ended items. Open-ended questions gathered in-depth information and were used so as to enable the researcher gather data from a large number of respondents at a particular time (Ngumbo, 2006) while closed ended questions gave out structured responses, which facilitated the ease of tabulation and analysis.

### Pilot Study

To establish reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was carried out in 6 ECDE centers involving 12 teachers (6% of the study population). This was done to guard against the response set, distortion of data and subjectivity of responses. Teachers who participated in the pilot study were not involved in the final study. For validity of the instrument to be ensured, three experts on the topic from Maseno University examined the content of the instrument and advised the researchers on the face validity. Their feedback was used to revise the instrument.

### Data Collection Procedures

The researcher sought for a research permit and research authorization letter from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology before embarking on the process of data collection in the field. The instruments were administered through personal visits on appointment with teachers. The questionnaires were filled by the teachers and collected by the researcher after a fortnight. The researcher observed the general status of the centers and held discussions with the respective teachers during the collection of the questionnaires.

### Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics, namely frequencies, percentages and chi-square test of goodness of fit. Qualitative data was categorized and reported in emergent themes. Watson (1994) defines qualitative data analysis as a systematic procedure followed in order to identify essential features, themes and categories. Data was then presented in frequencies, percentages, verbatim quotations and tables.

## RESULTS

### Teacher Knowledge

Based on the responses of 68 teachers 41.2% ranked teacher knowledge 2<sup>nd</sup>, 29.4% of the respondents ranked it 1<sup>st</sup>, 14 (20.6%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6(8.8%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup> with regard to how it influences the selection, development and use of ECDE language materials. The findings above reveal that over 70% of the respondents ranked teachers' knowledge as either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Teachers were also asked to rank their knowledge of learner characteristics on how they influenced them in the selection, development and use of the ECDE language materials.

The findings reveal that majority, 34(50.0%) ranked learner abilities 2<sup>nd</sup>, 27(39.8%) of the respondents ranked learner ability as 1<sup>st</sup>, 3(4.4%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4(5.9%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup>. The findings reveal that almost 90% of the respondents ranked learner ability as 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>. This implies that during the selection, development and use of materials teachers tend to pay greater attention to the learner abilities.

Table 2 indicates that 8 (11.8%) respondents ranked learner preferences 1<sup>st</sup>, 10 (14.7%) ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup>, 16 (23.5%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup> and 34 (50%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup>. The findings indicate that less than 30% of the respondents considered learner preferences as influential to the selection, development and use of language materials. This implies that majority of the teachers do not consider learner preferences as a factor to be taken seriously.

Table 2 also reveals that 14 (20.6%) respondents ranked learners individual differences as 1<sup>st</sup>, 12 (17.6%) ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup>, 23 (33.8%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup> and 19 (27.9%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup>. The findings reveal that less than about 40% of the respondents ranked learner individual differences either as 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in influencing the selection, development and use of language materials. This means that only minority of the teachers consider the learners individual differences as a factor to consider in the course of selection, development and use of language materials.

*"We do not pay much attention to individual differences because the population of children in classes is too big for us to pay attention to each child"*

Based on the findings as shown in Table 2, 16 (23.5%)

**Table 1.** Ranking of Teacher Factors

Factors	Ranking in order of priority							
	1		2		3		4	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Skills	28	41.2	24	35.3	7	10.3	9	13.2
Knowledge	20	29.4	28	41.2	14	20.6	6	8.8
Attitude	15	22.1	9	13.2	33	48.5	11	16.1
Preference	5	7.4	4	5.9	13	19.1	46	67.6

**Table 2.** Teachers perception on how learner characteristics influence them in language selection, development and use

Factors	Ranking in order of priority							
	1		2		3		4	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Learner ability	27	39.5	34	50	3	4.4	4	5.9
Learner preferences	8	11.8	10	14.7	16	23.5	34	50
Individual differences	14	20.6	12	17.6	23	33.8	19	27.9
Learner experiences	16	23.5	14	20.6	22	32.4	16	23.5

ranked learners experience 1<sup>st</sup>, 14(20.6%) ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup>, 22 (32.4%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup> and 16(23.5%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup>. The findings above reveal that less than half (45%) of the respondents ranked learner experiences as either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>. The above implies that less than half of the teachers take seriously learners experiences as a factor to consider in the selection, development and use of language materials.

Table 3 and 4 shows data and results for chi-squared test for goodness fit

Frequency of first ranking as Table 3 shows totals to 65.

The expected number of first ranking for each factor if there were no real preference can be worked out as: Expected frequency ( $F_E$ ) and Observed frequency ( $F_O$ )

$F_E = 65 \div 4 = 16.25$ , that is 16 teachers would rank each factor first.

Calculation of degree of freedom (df), df = number of alternatives-1, df = 4 - 1 = 3

Applying the formula for  $\chi^2$  (Chi-square)

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(F_O - F_E)^2}{F_E}$$

Based on calculations as shown in Tables 5 and 6, our calculated value of  $\chi^2$  (chi-square) of 11.86, is higher than the critical values for 0.05, 0.02 and 0.01. It is, however, not higher than the critical value for 0.001. Our result is therefore significant at 0.01 levels. Our conclusion here is that the distribution we have found does not fit that ranking of learner abilities as first would have occurred by chance. There is a significant relationship between teacher knowledge on pupils' abilities and selection, development and use of language

materials therefore the above findings reveal that knowledge of learner abilities is vital.

Teachers who participated in the study had the following general responses on this subject: *"We have to be knowledgeable about the needs of the learners since many still cannot communicate well"*

*"We got to have the relevant knowledge of the learners to facilitate efficient selection, development and use of language materials because this is the foundation of education"*

### Teacher Skills

Based on the responses of 68 teachers, teachers' skills were ranked in order of priority in relation to how they influence the selection, development and use of language materials in ECDE centers. The study findings are summarized in Table 1. According to the teachers, 28 (41.2%) of the respondents ranked teacher skills 1<sup>st</sup>, 24 (35.3%) ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7 (10.3%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9 (13.2%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup>. The findings above indicate that over 76% of the respondents ranked teacher skills as either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in influencing selection, development and use of language materials.

Table 5 and 6 shows data and results for chi-squared test for goodness fit

Frequency of first ranking as table 5 reveals totals to 68.

The expected number of first ranking for each factor if there were no real preference can be worked out as: Expected frequency ( $F_E$ ) and Observed frequency ( $F_O$ )

$F_E = 68 \div 4 = 17$ , that is 17 teachers would rank each factor first

**Table 3.** Data for chi-squared test of goodness of Fit: 1st position learner characteristics ranking among the teachers

	Abilities	Experiences	Differences	Preferences
Number of times each factor was ranked first	27	16	14	8

**Table 4.** Chi Square Calculations for learners abilities

Factor	$F_O$	$F_E$	$(F_O - F_E)$	$(F_O - F_E)^2$	$\frac{(F_O - F_E)^2}{F_E}$
Learner abilities	27	16	11	121	7.56
Learner experiences	16	16	0	0	0
Individual differences	14	16	-2	4	0.25
Learner preferences	8	16	-8	64	4
					$\chi^2 = 11.81$

**Table 5.** Data for chi-squared test of goodness of fit: 1st position teacher factor ranking among the teachers

	Knowledge	Skills	Attitude	Preferences
Number of times each factor was ranked first	20	28	15	5

**Table 6.** Chi Square Calculations for teacher characteristics

Factor	$F_O$	$F_E$	$(F_O - F_E)$	$(F_O - F_E)^2$	$\frac{(F_O - F_E)^2}{F_E}$
Knowledge	20	17	3	9	0.53
Skills	28	17	11	121	7.12
Attitude	15	17	-2	4	0.24
Preference	5	17	-12	144	8.47
					$\chi^2 = 16.36$

Calculation of degree of freedom (df), df = number of alternatives - 1, df = 4 - 1 = 3

Applying the formula for  $\chi^2$  (Chi-square)

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(F_O - F_E)^2}{F_E}$$

Based on calculations as shown in table 5 and 6, our calculated value of  $\chi^2$  (chi-square) of 16.36, is higher than the critical values for 0.05, 0.02, 0.01 and 0.001. Our result is therefore significant at 0.001 levels. Our conclusion here is that the distribution we have found does not fit that would have occurred by chance. There is a significant relationship between teacher skills and selection, development and use of language materials.

The above findings reveal that teacher skills are very vital in the process of selection, development and use of language materials.

Teachers who participated in the study had the following responses: *"Early childhood teaching needs improvisation of materials, therefore one needs to have the basic skills to select, develop and use materials"*

*"We need to have the skills because to come up with a conducive environment, many at times language materials have to be improvised for effective learning to take place."*

*"We have to be creative and this means skills."*

## Teacher Attitude

Table 1 indicates that majority 33(48.5%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup>, 15(22.1%) respondents ranked teachers attitude as 1<sup>st</sup>, 9(13.2%) ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup>, 11(16.1%) ranked it 4<sup>th</sup>. From the findings as shown above, about 35% of the respondents ranked teachers' attitude as either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in influencing the selection, development and use of language materials. Teacher attitude scores lowly, an indicator that it is not a major factor to be regarded highly in the process of selection, development and use of language materials. The respondents had the following responses on teacher attitude, *"We don't involve our feelings or beliefs when we select, develop or use materials as these might bring about biasness with regard to what we are supposed to teach."*

*"Our feelings cannot dictate us, we have to consider the child when selecting, developing and using materials."*

## Teacher Preferences

The study found the majority of teachers in ECDE centers 46 (67.6%) ranked teacher preferences 4<sup>th</sup>, 13 (19.1%) ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5 (7.4%) respondents ranked teachers preferences 1<sup>st</sup> and 4 (5.9%) ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup>. The findings reveal that less than 15% of the respondents ranked teachers preferences as 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in influencing the selection, development and use of language materials. As one respondent remarked, *"Selection, development and use of materials cannot be based on our liking or dislike as this would be biasness."* This implies that it is not a major factor to be taken seriously in the selection, development and use of language materials. The study findings were summarized in Table 1.

## DISCUSSION

This study found that teacher factors such as teacher knowledge of the learners' individual differences, experiences, ability and preferences: teacher attitude: teacher skills and teacher preferences influenced the selection, development and use of language materials in the ECDE programmes. Romiszowski (1988) says that special characteristics of some students will directly influence the type of materials to be chosen. . For instance it would be unrealistic to use some kind of materials for the slow learners. This is in line with the findings with teachers taking into consideration learner characteristics in selecting, developing and using language materials.

A numbers of material selection models and approaches have stressed the importance of teachers' knowledge on learners' characteristics (Romiszowski, 1988; Katz, 1994).

From the findings as shown in Tables 1 and 2 on the ranking of teacher factors and teachers' knowledge on learners' predisposition reveal that learner ability and teacher skills are ranked highly in relation to how they influence the selection, development and use of language materials in ECDE language teaching.

Similarly, the assumption that child development knowledge is essential for early childhood teachers emerged in a survey conducted in England (Early Childhood Education Research Project, 1994). The majority of head teachers (principals) representing every type of early childhood setting ranked " Knowledge Of Child Development" as the single most influential contributor to the professional development of practitioners who work with children under 8 years of age.

On the other hand learner and teacher preferences are lowly ranked when it comes to the influence they have in the selection, development and use of language materials. This implies that during the selection, development and use of materials teachers pay much attention to the learner abilities and their own skills as teachers and to a larger extent ignore the learners' preferences and their own preferences as teachers. Knowledge is of importance as it enables the teacher to apply what they have learned in the context of existing practices. Putting knowledge into practice entails both knowledge-constructive and knowledge internalization processes. As teachers implement new practices, they deepen their understanding through active processes elaborating and integrating knowledge (Rubagumya, 1990).

From the findings as shown in Table 1 about 35% of the respondents considered attitude to have much influence in the selection, development and use of language materials in the early childhood programmes. This shows that teacher attitude does not have much influence in the selection, development and use of language materials. This is contrary to Orodho (1990) who found that teacher attitudes either negative or positive had a role to play in the teaching and learning of early childhood science. This is also contrary to Margolin (2002) who says that the attitude of the teacher is critical in laying the foundation of the learners. Numerous other studies indicate that teachers' attitudes are associated with their sense of self-efficacy. Positive attitudes are strongly correlated with positive mindsets. Attitudes influence teachers' thinking, behavior, and motivation (Berk, 1985; Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese and Russell, 1995; Pajares, 1996). The strength of teachers' attitudes helps determine "how much effort they will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronted with obstacles, and how resilient they will be when faced with adversity" (Vartuli, 2005, p. 76).

There were 52 teachers (76.5%) who reported that teacher skills were very influential in the selection, development and use of language materials. This is an indicator that teacher skills are very vital in ECDE

language learning since it enables the teacher to come up with the right materials for teaching and learning. Whatever the theoretical benefits of the material, they are likely to be wiped out if the skills to select, develop and use the material are lacking (Romiszowski, 1988). The ultimate goal of focusing on teacher skills is to improve on classroom practice which includes selection, development and use of language materials.

Oxford (2001) posits that for learning of language to take place then many factors have to come to play and they include characteristics of the teacher, the learner and the setting.

She goes on to say that the teacher's style must address the learning style of the learner, the learner must be motivated and the setting must provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of the language. This means that learner characteristics such as abilities, experiences come into play. Only nine teachers (13.2%) said that teacher preferences are influential in the selection, development and use of language materials. This implies that teacher preferences do not impact heavily on the process.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following are the conclusions of the study:

- (i) Majority of the teachers (80%) perceived teacher knowledge as of importance in the selection, development and use of ECDE language materials.
- (ii) Majority of the respondents (89.5%) perceived that teachers' knowledge of the learner's characteristics such as learner ability was vital in the selection, development and use of ECDE language materials.
- (iii) Majority of the teachers (76%) perceived that teacher skills were of importance in the selection, development and use of ECDE language materials.
- (iv) Majority of the teachers (65%) perceived that teacher attitude were of less importance in the selection, development and use of ECDE language materials.
- (v) Majority of the teachers (86.8%) who participated in the study perceived that teacher preferences had very little to play in the selection, development and use of language materials.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions, the study recommends that:

- (i) There is need to harmonize ECDE training programmes so as to have a uniform system to empower the ECDE teachers with adequate knowledge on the selection, development and use of language materials.
- (ii) The entry training grade for ECDE teachers should be raised or standardized for the certificate and

diploma courses so as to have a cadre of teachers who are well equipped in terms of teacher knowledge.

(iii) Courses on learner characteristics such as child psychology should be given more emphasis in the ECDE teacher training program so as to empower the ECDE teachers with knowledge of learner characteristics in order to handle the selection, development and use of language materials and the ECDE curriculum in general.

(iv) More practical courses to empower the teachers with skills on selection, development and use of language materials should be introduced in the ECDE teacher training program and further in-service courses for the serving teachers.

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