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Strategies used in teaching English language oral skills and effects on primary school learner participation in Embu County, Kenya

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Article Info

Abstract
English language learning is pegged on four core skills namely writing, reading, listening and speaking. Acquisition of language springs from the latter; verbal skills (listening & speaking) and ignite the learning process in totality. Teaching of oral skills is barred by hurdles like ineffective delivery strategies. This study investigates instructional strategies utilized in development of oral skills. Descriptive survey, as a research design, was adopted. The study was grounded on Constructivism Learning Theory. The target population consisted of 37 public primary schools in Embu-West, 37 language panel chairpersons, 67 grade 3 classes and 67 grade 3 teachers of English. The study sample was chosen using stratified and simple random sampling methods. The sample consisted of 10 schools, 10 grade 3 classes, 10 language panel chairpersons and 10 grade 3 teachers. For data collection, teacher questionnaires, language panel chairpersons interview schedule, classroom observation guide and focus group discussion for learners were used. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using SPSS version 25.0 and presented in form of tables and percentages whereas qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented narratively. Results revealed that storytelling, pair work, communication games, group work, role-play and songs among others form the major strategies in the teaching of oral skills. The results led to the conclusion that storytelling, pair work, songs and role-play form the common strategies used in development of oral skills. The study recommends that teachers adopt use of these interactive strategies and motivate learners to practice and develop interest in learning of oral skills among others. These findings may be beneficial to both curriculum developers and implementers for effective teaching and learning.

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Introduction
The value of language in human communication is indispensable. English, as a language, is among the common languages used universally for global utility in communication. It is a language of the United Nations and a means of communication in many countries, including the third world countries. English is the most spoken language in the world and the third-most spoken native language, after Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. It is also the most widely learned second language in the world, with more second-language speakers than native speakers. The widespread use and exponential rise of English in status from its Anglo-Saxon roots to that of a native, foreign and global language are major factors that make English a global phenomenon (Tom-Lawyer & Thomas, 2020) [29].

In Africa, English is the medium of instruction and research in higher learning institutions as a means to internationalize education (Yallew, 2021) [32]. In Kenya, English lies under a Second Language classification. Tom - Lawyer & Oris (2020) [29] enlighten that as a second language, English is attached to nations where it serves official purposes. Utility of English is felt in

sectors like law, the constitution and education (Kimemia, 2001) [21]. Focusing on education, English language is regarded the lone language of instruction from the fourth grade upward. Implementation of this policy is blocked by mother tongue interference, lack of English's community utility and resources limitations (Ching-Ni, Marcel & Tsung-Han, 2018) [4].

English as a language constitutes four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Under optimal environment in new language acquisition, people hear the language being spoken (listening) and attempt to imitate what they hear spoken (speaking). Subsequently, people are able to see the verbal language symbolically depicted in in print (reading) and they recreate these symbols on paper (writing). The foundational skills, listening and speaking, also known as oral skills manifest incredibly in language learning warranting great worth. They develop first thus level the ground for learning of other language skills and anchors the learning process as a whole. Language learning is at its optimum during the early stages of child development thus oral skills and providing anchorage development should be optimised during this stage (Lenneberg, 1967). Contrastingly, language teachers of young novices lack proficiency and knowledge in English language which affects their content delivery (Hussein &Katy, 2019) [14].

Oral skills are compounded of two major basic language skills, listening and speaking. Listening is a receptive language skill that enhance comprehension of information passed in various ways such as movement, gestures, sounds, words, signs and symbols. In regular verbal exchanges and academics, listening contributes greatly. Focusing on speaking, it is a major form of expressive language that helps learners express their feelings and thoughts enhancing fluency in the target language. Basically, oral skills are means of social and classroom interactions that enhance understanding and exchange of ideas and feelings. Teaching of oral skills is blurred when more focus is put on written language than oral language, when assessment of oral aspects of language are ignored, where teachers lack knowledge to teach oral skills and where teaching materials and methods produced focus more on grammatical correctness and written language as major goals. (Fisher & Frey, 2017; Pakula, 2019; Vani & Naiki, 2023) [10, 28, 30].

Oral skills enhance classroom participation of learners since they can interact with their peers freely. These social interactions lead to conversational fluency of learners as perfection comes through practice, in this regard, of English language. A learner should have both conversational fluency and academic language proficiency. The learning institutions should provide learners with practical language for academic excellence. Notably, learners may attain the target language's fluency but still experience academic challenges. This occurs when learning environment doesn't offer necessary support to help learners fathom instruction which affects academic success. Therefore, appropriate oral skills teaching strategies - heuristic - alongside other supportive learning resources and materials comes into play to enable development of oral skills which improves classroom participation thus leading to increased room for academic excellence. (Cummins, 1980; 1981a; 1981b; 2000).

Foundational or oral skills, are highly pivotal in almost every aspect of a child's life. They are utilizable in peer socialisation, comprehending instructions from the instructor, classroom interactions and enhancing the sense of self-importance. Success in learning is largely dependent on oral skills because every learning interaction circumnavigates them. These skills wear the label 'icon of students' success' in language learning as they not only cement the ground for learning of other language skills but also other learning areas. They captivate learner's self- belief and sense of well-being but also trigger growth in communication and reading (Grapeseed blog, 2020) [11]. Cautioningly, development of learner's conversational skills is a challenging activity which requires a lot of effort. It encounters hurdles related to methods of instruction, educational model and learning experiences (Ibna et al, 2019)

Diverse linguistic abilities are utilised in daily interactions where oral skills are significant due to their contribution to communication. In the society, oral skills are an asset to bestow as it is mostly thought to be a child's first, vital and structured form of communication. To each individual child, it helps structure, evaluate, describe and control their experiences. Ibna et al, (2021) [15] is concerned that passivity of learners, unfavourable oral practice environment, large classes and utilisation of inappropriate instructional methods demean teacher's endeavours to develop oral skills

Review of Related Literature

There is a diversity of definition of teaching strategies. A teaching strategy refers to outlined actions or methods which help attain specific lesson outcomes in a classroom; It refers to a general lesson sketch with structure, instructional goals and outline of planned action to implement the strategy; It is a method used across the curriculum to support student learning overarching pedagogical principles and management techniques employed in classroom instruction (Ayua, 2017; Stone and Morris in Issac, 2010; Jordan & Herell, 2004 and Hoque, 2016) [2, 18, 13]. Krashen (1982:125), cited in Ugwu (2015) [20] and Jebahi (2022) [19] discuss the most popular techniques for teaching languages.

The Grammar Translation Method: It is a means of learning the target language through in-depth study of its grammar. It strongly emphasises grammatical knowledge, error correction, memorization, and literary text translation. The Direct Method which uses the target language as a teaching tool. It disregards use of mother tongue in the classroom and emphasizes linking meaning to the target language. Audio-Lingual Method imitates behaviorist theories of conditioning and habit formation where correct behaviour receives positive reinforcement while errors receive negative reinforcement. Natural Approach Method emphasizes the silent phase where learners are given enough time until they feel comfortable using the target language.

Communicative Language Teaching is a method for teaching language that strongly emphasize interaction, authenticity, heuristic learning, activities based on tasks and communication for real -world purposes (Brown, 2007) [3]. It focuses on improvement of communicative competence where accuracy and fluency in the use of the target language are key. Learners are also engaged in meaningful and functional use of the target language. There is also Communicative Language Learning which takes learners collectively as a group and clients while the teacher is a counsellor. It takes interactions between learners weightily as they help reduce anxiety and lower instinctive defenses among adult learners. It also teaches grammar and vocabulary inductively. Finally, Suggestopedia Method which is based on the belief that most learners have innately created

psychological barriers out of concern so they have finite learning capacity but they can utilize their mental learning capacity fully under optimal conditions. Optimal learning occurs when these mental barriers are de-suggested thus relaxation of the learner's brain for optimal learning.

Anil (2017) [1] recommends that teaching methods and resources be regularly reviewed in the interest of second language learners in a research paper focusing on creative teaching in second language classrooms. This shows the need for constant improvement of teaching methods to cater to increasing learner demands.

Wabwoba (2019) [31] used a cross-sectional survey research design to examine how teaching strategies affected students' performance in the English language course for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in non-formal schools in Korogocho, Nairobi City, Kenya. The study revealed a positive relationship between teaching methods and pupils' performance. The study investigated instructional methods like discussion, demonstration, lecture and note-taking. It revealed that teacher-centred methods dominated English language teaching where the lecture method is in the lead (55%) though not suitable for young learners. The study recommended using learner-centred methods to improve teachers' and directors' performance and training on modern strategies in non-formal schools.

A study by Nabwire, Orago, and Nthiga (2021) [26] aimed to examine the measures used promote development of speaking skills in English language in both self and public institutions in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya, revealed that there are more speaking activities (debates, speaking competitions, and class presentations) in private institutions than in government schools, which results in more speaking skill mastery in private schools.

Research design and methods
The descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The study locale was Embu-West Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya. The study sampled 10 primary schools including Embu County, Embu Urban, DEB Kamiu, DEB Kangaru, DEB Iveche among others, 10 grade 3 classes, 10 Language Panel Chairpersons and 10 grade 3 teachers of English. In the field, data was obtained using Learners' Focused Group Schedules, Questionnaires for grade 3 teachers of English, Interview Guide Schedule for Language Panel Chairpersons and Lesson Observation checklists. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Analysis of quantitative data was performed aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 and results displayed using frequency tables and percentages. For qualitative data, thematic analysis based on the study objective was applied and findings presented in narrative form.

Research findings and Discussion
Data on strategies teachers use to teach oral skills in English language was obtained using English language teachers' questionnaires, learners' focus group discussion schedules, language panel chairpersons' interview guides and classroom observation guide. The results from teachers where a five-point Likert scale was used such that; 1=Always, 2= Frequently, 3= Occasionally, 4= Rarely, 5= Never are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.1: Strategies Teachers Use to Teach Oral Skills in English Language

Strategy	Always F (%)	Frequently F (%)	Occasionally F (%)	Rarely F (%)	Never F (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Communication games	3(30.0%)	2(20.0%)	5(50.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2.20	0.919
Group work or Discussion	3(30.0%)	4(40.0%)	3(30.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2.00	0.816
Role play	0(0.0%)	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2.30	0.483
Songs	5(55.6%)	3(33.3%)	1(11.1%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1.56	0.726
Debate	1(10.0%)	1(10.0%)	1(10.0%)	6(60.0%)	1(10.0%)	3.50	1.179
Pair work	4(40.0%)	5(50.0%)	1(10.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1.70	0.675
Storytelling	2(22.2%)	4(44.4%)	3(33.3%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2.11	0.782
Tongue twisters	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2(25.0%)	6(75.0%)	0(0.0%)	3.75	0.463
Jokes	1(11.1%)	4(44.4%)	4(44.4%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2.33	0.707
Audio-visuals	0(0.0%)	1(11.1%)	3(33.3%)	4(44.4%)	1(11.1%)	3.56	0.882
Riddles	0(0.0%)	1(10.0%)	3(30.0%)	2(20.0%)	4(40.0%)	3.90	1.101
Drama	0(0.0%)	1(12.5%)	5(62.5%)	2(25.0%)	0(0.0%)	3.13	0.641

With respect to the scale used, a mean of more than 3.00 would imply that the corresponding strategy is used less often while a mean score of less than 3.00 would imply a tendency to use the corresponding strategy in teaching English oral skills more often (Latunde, 2017) [22]. On the other hand, a standard deviation of more than 1.000 would imply lack of consensus among the respondents in the use of the corresponding strategy while a standard deviation of less than 1.000 imply a consensus among the respondents in the use of the corresponding strategy in teaching English oral skills (Morgan, 2017) [25]. The results revealed that songs and pair work were the most used strategies of teaching oral skills as evidenced by a mean score of 1.56 and 1.70. The results imply that songs and pair work are the most common strategies used in teaching English language oral skills in Embu West sub county by teachers.

Other teaching strategies used by the teachers to teach oral skills are communication games, group work or discussion, role play, storytelling and jokes with a mean score of less than 3.00. It was however noted that debate, tongue twisters, audio-visuals, riddles and drama were on average rarely used in teaching oral skills as revealed by the mean score of more than 3.00. The study revealed that debates are deemed hard for third graders as they have not fully grown to express themselves in English and tongue -twisters as being outdated according to teachers. Lack of internet connectivity and appropriate devices handicapped use of audio-visuals as the study revealed. The study further revealed lack of consensus among the teachers in their responses on the use of debate and

riddles with a standard deviation of 1.179 and 1.101 respectively. It can be concluded that songs, pair work, group work, role-play, communication games and storytelling are widely utilized in teaching oral skills. With respect to this, Gill (2018) [12] in Australia found that most of the strategies used by the teachers to teach English oral skills were mostly songs, pair work and role play which is congruent to the findings of this study. These findings indicate that teachers in Embu-West sub county: (1) develop the learner's oral skills using strategies like songs, pair work, group work and role play among others. (2) Believe that debate is age inappropriate strategy for grade 3 learners, (3), purport that

riddles are outdated in learning oral skills and (4) they have divergent thoughts and opinions on the use of debates and riddles to develop oral skills as they lacked consensus which demands for a comparative study to clear the mishap. The results also point that lack of internet connectivity and appropriate devices suppress use of audio - visuals in learning oral skills.

For data triangulation, the study sought to find out the learners' response of the strategies used by their teachers to teach oral skills. The Table 1.2 below shows the learners' response rate.

Table 1.2: Grade 3 Learners' Responses on the Teacher's Use of Teaching Strategies through Focus group discussions, the data below was obtained with regard to use of specified strategies by teachers while teaching oral skills from grade 3 learners

Strategy	Used		Not Used	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Question and answer	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Reading aloud	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Role play	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Dictation	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Dialogue	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Audio - visuals	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Language games	19	100.0%	0	0.0%
Songs/oral poems	17	89.5%	2	10.5%
Group / pair work	17	89.5%	2	10.5%
Storytelling	16	84.2%	3	15.8%
Debate	11	57.9%	8	42.1%
Tongue twisters	10	52.6%	9	47.4%

The study revealed that all 19 (100%) learners in all focus group discussions indicated that their teachers used question and answer strategy, reading aloud, role play, dictation, dialogue, audio – visuals and language games strategy. It was also noted that songs/oral poems, group or pair work, storytelling, debate and tongue twisters were used in a decreasing measure ranging from 89.5% to 52.6%. There was therefore both convergence and divergence of opinions between the teachers and learners. From the learners' dimensions, it can be concluded that teachers use strategies such as question and answer, reading aloud, role-play, dictation, songs, language games, pair work and storytelling to develop oral skills. The results imply that learners are taught oral skills mainly through question and answer, reading aloud, role play, dictation, songs, pair work and storytelling and teachers are therefore teachers are implored to use them because they create room for increased learner engagement, (2) Debate and tongue twisters are minimally used to develop oral skills , and the divergence on both teachers' and learners' response on the use of audio - visuals need to be investigated further which is in line with Morgan (2019) that results in data during triangulation may converge, diverge or complement and that when there is divergence of data, dialogue around the controversies is required.

Language panel chairpersons were also interviewed on the commonly used methods and strategies in teaching English oral skills and whose results are portrayed in Table 4.6.

Table 1.3: Methods Commonly Used While Teaching English Language Oral Skills (Language Panel Chairpersons)

Strategy/Method	Language Panel Chairpersons	
	Frequency	Percentage
Story Telling	9	90.0%
Songs	8	80.0%
Role play	4	40.0%
Discussions	4	40.0%
Group Work	4	40.0%
Question and Answer	2	20.0%
Naming pictures	2	20.0%
Communication Games	1	10.0%
Drama	1	10.0%
Jokes	1	10.0%

The 9 out of 10 (90%) and 8 out of 10 (80%) language panel chairpersons noted that storytelling and songs respectively were the most commonly used strategies to teach oral skills by teachers. Role play, discussions and group work on the other hand were moderately used at a frequency of 4 out of 10 (40.0%). Contrastingly, the teacher results indicate that role play and group discussion are often used in teaching oral skills. The revelation implies there is need for language panel chairpersons to be vigilant on what is happening during language lessons especially in development of oral skills. However, the language panel chairpersons revealed that question and answer, naming pictures, communication

games, drama and jokes were rarely used. Across all the respondents (teachers, learners and language panel chairpersons) of the study, it was noted that songs, pair work, role play, and storytelling were used in teaching English oral skills in public primary schools in Embu West Sub-county. The results imply that songs, role play, storytelling and pairwork are strategies teachers readily use to enhance acquisition of oral skills. Teachers should there continue using them among others to increase classroom interactions which lead to better chances of success in academics. ,Namaziandost *et al*., (2020) [27] revealed that the use of songs, storytelling and pair work are crucial in the teaching and development of oral skills in English language as above.

Conclusions

Literature has it that language is a need for any human communication. English is among the many languages that facilitate human communication. English language constitutes four major basic skills among which are oral skills - listening and speaking. Development of oral aspects of language enhances social and classroom interactions. When learners interact both socially and in class, there is improved understanding and expression of ideas, opinions and feelings. To develop oral skills, suitable teaching strategies are needed as some may limit or increase room for learner participation. The study therefore investigated teaching strategies and their effects on learner participation.

From the teachers' revelations, the study concludes that songs, pair work, group work, role-play, communication games and storytelling are widely used techniques to develop oral skills. Contrastingly, the study revealed that debates, tongue-twisters, audio-visuals, riddles and drama are strategies rarely used in teaching oral skills with a mean of more than 3.00 each. The study further concludes that teachers lack consensus on the use of debate and riddles with a standard deviation of 1.1179 and 1.101 respectively.

The results obtained from learners through use of focus group discussion schedules, the study concludes that teachers use question and answer, reading aloud, role-play, dictation, songs, language games, pair work and storytelling to develop oral skills in learners.

Additionally, from the information provided by language panel chairpersons via interviews, the study concludes that storytelling and songs are most popular strategies in teaching oral skills among teachers.

Convergence of results from across all the study respondents (teachers, learners and language panel chairpersons) lead to the conclusion that songs, pair work, role-play and storytelling are commonly used strategies to develop oral skills in learners. The study further concludes that the strategies used are learner centred thus encourage learner's classroom participation.

Recommendations

The study established less use of audio-visuals attributed to lack of appropriate ICT devices and Internet connectivity. The study therefore recommends that the government through the ministry of education to equip primary schools with appropriate ICT devices and connect schools to power and internet for diversity of teaching language teaching and learning strategies this improved learner participation. This is achievable by reviving government projects such as Laptop project, providing funds for construction of computer laboratories and employment of ICT technicians in public

primary schools. The study also recommends proper pre-service and in-service training of teachers through workshops, seminars and teacher professional development programmes that ensure teachers are updated on the current teaching and learning techniques especially in the area of ICT integration for effective teaching and learning thus increasing their potential to diversify their teaching skills and match the requirements of a 21st century teacher. This leads to ICT integrated lessons that cause improved instructional interactions that in turn increase academic success not only in oral skills but also in other learning areas. This is attainable by reviewing the teacher training curriculum to include content related to ICT and its integration in learning, a task mandated to Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. The government through the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission should allocate funds for regular TPDs, Seminars and workshops with an aim of increasing teacher relevance and productivity for quality education. The study further recommends use of interactive strategies like songs, role-play, pair work and storytelling to develop oral skills in learners. These strategies are highly beneficial to both the teacher and learner as they ease teaching and learning of oral skills in terms of improved classroom interaction and academic excellence thus they should be adopted. This study was worthy because if these endorsements are executed, they may inform both curriculum developers and implementers: The Ministry of Education (MOE), Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Teachers Service Commission (TSC), teacher trainers, teachers and learners thus improved quality of education as discussed above. The study also adds to the existing dearth on teaching of oral skills.

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