# Utilisation of Child-Centered Approaches in Teaching and Learning of Language Activities in Pre-School Centres in Kenya

**By**

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**Abstract**

*This study investigates how utilisation of child-centred approaches influenced teaching and learning activities in Early Childhood Education Development (ECDE). The reason for looking at how teachers approach to teaching influenced learners' development of language skills was due to the importance in helping them acquire foundation literacy skills. The head teachers and teachers of sampled public pre-schools in West Pokot County were selected. The study result showed that there was moderate application of child-centred approaches in teaching and learning of language activities in pre-schools. Out of the four child-centered approaches, activity based approach and child discovery approach (r=0.343) had higher correlation (r=0.375) on acquisition of language competencies by ECDE pupils. The study concluded that teachers continuous utilisation of child-centred approaches had significant influence on teaching and learning of language activities in ECDE centres in West Pokot County. The study recommends that language policy should be fully implemented in schools and teachers should be offered in-service training programmes to their pedagogical skills in teaching approaches.*
**Key words:** child interest, child needs, child discovery, activity bases language activities

**Introduction**

The United Nations through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified ECDE as a key educational goal (United Nations, 2015). Early childhood development education has the potential to benefit learners as well as society (Moyo, Wadesango & Kurebwa, 2012). In Kenya, the Basic Education Act, 2013 and Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 on reforming education and training sectors in Kenya acknowledge holistic needs of young children should be maximise to ensure the realisation of their full potential (Republic of Kenya [RoK, 2012, 2013). Murunga (2015) argued that a child who goes through ECDE learning successfully has higher chances of transiting to primary and secondary education. Therefore, ECDE is critical for learners' development of cognitive skills and competencies at an early age. The quality of early childhood development education (ECDE) is important, and child-centered education can improve this teaching and learning in early childhood education (Hoppenbrouwer, 2011). ECDE is the foundation of all learning in any life of a child.

For many years, child-centeredness has dominated discourse about best practice in ECDE teaching (Collins & O'Brien, 2003; Madlela, 2014). Child-centred approaches have been supported by philosophers like John Dewey, Rousseau and Pestalozzi (Morrison, Ponitz, & McClelland, 2010). This shows the benefit of teachers utilising child-centred approaches in improving quality teaching and learning in ECDE centres in contrast to traditional didactic approaches (teacher centred) to pedagogy. According to Morrison, Ponitz and McClelland (2010), in a child-centred approach a child is able to construct knowledge by her/himself without having to impart knowledge, hence stressing child's autonomy in teacher-centred classrooms. The philosophy of education by John

Dewey shows that child-centred approach emphasizes on progressive forms of education (Robert, 2014; Pollanen, 2011). Early childhood education in Rome had child-centred approach where learners engaged with their own learning and discovery (Anne & Noa, 2013). In addition, the child's first language, official language and culture should be used for the cognitive, creative and emotional development of the child. Such an approach acts against the negative impact of cultural assimilation (UNESCO, 2012). From the above information, child-centred approaches are diverse and they affect learners' achievement in the curriculum of mathematics, languages, science and creative courses. Research show mixed reaction on the teaching approaches used by teachers and acquisition of competency skills for reading, writing and counting by researchers. For instance, Camilli, Vargas, Ryan and Barnet (2010) established that direct teacher instruction correlated strongly with cognitive child outcomes, more than child-oriented instruction in United Kingdom. Camilli *et al.*, (2010) stressed that in the past many studies in ECDE have been characterized by direct teaching, while research on child-oriented practices have been less prominent.

Vavrus, Thomas and Bartlett (2011) reviewed use of child-centred approaches in several Sub Saharan African countries and found out that, some schools do not consider teachers' useful concerns on child-centred method, professional support and favourable conditions of teaching. They found that teachers often did not have adequate linguistic skills in the medium of instruction to express complex ideas and to ask critical questions in classrooms. Moreover, they observed that the examination system is aligned less with active learning and learner-centred pedagogy and more with direct instruction, pushing the teaching practices to be more teacher-centred. This shows that teacher centred instruction is a common practice in Sub Saharan countries. In Kenya there is concern on the quality of early childhood education which is still considered critical to the achievement of Vision 2030 through the national goals of education (Uwezo, 2014). Hence, interventions should be made to overcome the challenges that would affect the attainment of quality education for all (Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012; Obuchere, Okello & Odongo, 2014). There is need for Kenyan government to equip pre-education with adequate life skills similar to what is being done in Western countries thus helping learners to lead meaningful lives after school. This is because in Kenya pre-educators are mostly concerned in preparing the learners for primary school (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2008). Consequently, those who drop out after primary school level may not have gainful life skills and this is partly contributed by inadequacy of teaching resources in pre-schools and the teaching approaches used.

**Statement of the Problem**
Teachers are central to curriculum implementation in schools. Using a pragmatist approach to education, teaching and learning activities in classroom have to be interactive where learners and teachers are active participants. Active participation of learners during instruction ensures that learners acquire the necessary competencies related to language skills. Uwezo (2014) report on West Pokot county shows that, learners in ECDE are not able to acquire good background on skills of literacy which are in line with curricular requirements in their countries. Research by Jerop *et al.,* (2009) revealed that learners joining class one experience competency challenges in reading, writing and speaking in pre-schools. It is not known whether teachers' use of teaching approaches is the reason for poor competencies of learners in reading and writing in West Pokot. The ultimate competence of learners is expected to be realized through the use of child-centred learning methodologies by teachers. It is against this that the study investigated the utilisation child-centered approaches on teaching and learning language activities in public ECDE Centres in West Pokot County.

**Aim of the study**
The purpose of the study was to investigate utilisation of child-centred approaches in teaching and learning language activities in public ECDE Centres in West Pokot County.

**Literature Review**
Early childhood teachers play a critical role in early language development (Davidson, Walters & Elizabeth, 2015). As pre-school teachers gain knowledge on how language develops in young children, they can become more equipped to facilitate its development in class (Tinajero *et al.,* l998 in Davidson, Walters & Elizabeth, 2015). Under the interactions view of learning, language is developed in the child through interactions with others in school including their teachers. Vygotsky (1986) stresses that the importance of social interactions with competent language users enhance the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is critical for learners' cognitive development. McLeod (2007) referred this space (ZPD) as difference between what learners can gain independently and what a child can realise with guidance and encouragement from a teacher (a skilled partner). Within this zone of instruction and learning, rich verbal exchanges accompanied by strengthening environmental signs are known to improve language development (Pence & Justice, 2008; Bouchard, Bigras, Cantin, CoutuBlain-Brière, Eryasa & Brunson, 2010). Constructivists define learning as the construction of meaning related to what the learner already knows, in order to build and integrate new ideas (Davidson, Walters & Elizabeth, 2015). From this perspective, learning and development are both social and cognitive processes (Menyuk, 2003). Learners are actively involved and participate in tasks and they are led to discover meaning through activities that simultaneously extend their facility with language as well as their understanding of the world (Newman, 1985 in Mmela, 2010). Constructivist-based second language acquisition theories are based on communicative approaches rather than grammar-based approaches. This shows that teachers have to develop constructivist teaching approaches in their classroom for learners to acquire language competencies.

In Finland, Hyvonena Kronqvist, Jarvela, Maattaₐ, Mykkanen and Kurki (2014) argued that children need support to strengthen their efficacious agency, which, in turn, increases their wellbeing and inherent learning capabilities. The efficacious agency embraces the idea of children's active participation in learning. They argue that efficacious agency implicitly includes the idea of children participating in various activities which allow them to have choices and to express opinions. Focusing on children's participation, agency, and thoughts is a desirable re-search initiative, but it is challenging to achieve. Hyvonena *et al.,* (2014) found out those interactive and child-centred methods in authentic classroom environment can produce deeper knowledge about children's efficacious agency in learning contexts. The ultimate goal of ECDE is to create skilful readers and writers (Mmela, 2010). In second language classrooms, reading and writing provide a wide opportunity in which learners can interact with the target language, hence providing for active engagement. Reading and writing also provide learners with opportunities to get involved with language that is somewhat more mature than what they currently use (Farris, 2001). It is believed that learners learn more words quickly and incidentally through repeated exposure during reading and writing than through direct instruction. Creative writing naturally extends the concepts underlying the new words that ultimately become a permanent part of reading and writing (Heller, 1995 in Mmela, 2010).

Mmela (2010) reported a synthesis of research on reading and writing relationships, finding that reading has influence on writing and vice versa; hence, they concluded that the two are cyclical and

equally facilitative units that support one another. Flood and Lapp found that better writers tended to be better readers; better writers tended to read more than poor writers, and better writers tended to produce more syntactically mature writing than poor readers. Both reading and writing are manifestations of cognitive and linguistic development. Readers and writers create meaning by building the relationship between the text and what they know and believe. Schema theory holds that prior knowledge of the planet enables students to put up meaning from print media resources by reconstructing the author's message and connecting with schemata present in memory. Writers, on the other hand, compose and construct meaningful information from schemata and other information into communicative ideas through text.

Learners learn to read and write by engaging in reading and writing. Through wide reading experiences, most learners become good readers in the same way they master oral language (Mmela, 2010). Learning to read and write should come as naturally as language learning. Learners write more and think at deeper levels when they are engaged in low-stakes writing assignments, because the focus is on exploration of ideas rather than clarity of presentation. It allows learners to connect what they know to what they are studying, and move beyond low-level recall level of information. Low-stakes writing also allows learners to interact personally with information and ideas without the demand of creating well-polished finished work. Examples of low stake writing are informal writings such as journals, and other non-graded and non-threatening writing activities, including unfinished writings (Mmela, 2010). Allowing learners to choose what they want to read or write about boosts their interest and allows them to construct new knowledge upon what they already know. Constructing new knowledge upon what the learner already knows is a constructivist-based philosophy that is founded on the new science of learning. When the learners construct knowledge from their previous knowledge, they involved in an active learning process and this is referred to as learner-centred learning (Bransford & Brown, 2000). Therefore, reading and writing are closely related cognitive activities that are best taught using active or learner-centred processes. Learners should participate actively in language literacy skills of reading and writing (Dipardo, 2003). Reading and writing are vehicles for learning English as a second language. For this reason, active engagement is an essential component of learner-cantered, integrated approaches to literacy learning. Teachers are therefore, challenged to engage learners actively as they attempt to learn English (Mmela, 2010).

Learning through play is a group activity that involves many learners at ago both males and females. There have been studies on the influence of gender on learners' performances. Babalola and Oyinloye (2012) in a study titled gender distinctions found that male and female could perform well in language tasks not on the ground of gender but on the pedestal of individual ability. There are a variety of games which can be used by both teachers and learners to emphasise certain issues such as guessing games, memory games, putting things in order, comparing and finding differences, word games, simulations and icebreakers. All these types of games can be used to provide motivation in language learning and teaching. They can either be used collectively or individually depending on the aspect of language being taught (Matsau, 2007). Kumar (2014) informs that conveying ideas skilfully to children is another important task for the teacher of preschool and learners. Educational audio-visual resources in various forms are of immerse help to the teacher in this task. A chart or a picture or even an easy sketch on the blackboard can provide the child an entirely new experience in understanding a concept more than words. Texts have different connotations to different people but a picture or a drawing can to a much greater extent convey what we have in our mind. Ideas that often seem quite simple to adults (teachers included) may not be so

simple and clear to the child. However, if the children could see what teachers and other adults are talking about, it helps them to understand what teachers exactly mean in our words: seeing believes.

Moreover, RIC Publications (2004) adds to this observation that learning is effective and occurs in activities involving visualisation, noting that such activities include watching movies, interpreting images, visuals, puzzles or games. Further, bodily kinaesthetic intelligence (body wise) is employed in games which require learners to use their bodies to express emotions and to play games (Matsau, 2007). The use of these intelligences in a learner-centred approach is achieved by the use of drama and role-play, games, songs and dances. Various intelligences are present when using songs, music and dance. Musical and rhythmic intelligence (music wise) connects well here as this can be observed in songs, music, poems and dances and helps in the understanding and communicating of ideas and meanings (Matsau, 2007). The different tones, tunes, sounds from the environment, human voice and musical instruments can also promote this intelligence. Also connected with music and songs is bodily kinaesthetic intelligence (body wise), when learners use their bodies to express emotions in music and dances, and to play games (Gardner, 2000).

In United States, Davidson Walters and Elizabeth (2015) argued that strategies that promote the development of language skills are renowned in early childhood education. Davidson *et al.,* (2015) investigated the influence of indirect language stimulation (ILS) methods on receptive and expressive oral language of 4 year-olds learners using techniques that could be easily taught to teachers and implemented in the classroom. Results indicate that learners in classrooms where teachers received the professional development, they had significantly higher growth in expressive language scores than learners in comparison classrooms. They study opined that a low-cost 2-day training intervention can be beneficial for ECDE teachers and their 4-year-old learners' language acquisition. Davidson and authors research focused on the influence of teacher training on pre-school learners' language development while this study focused on how child-centred approaches were utilized in the teaching and learning activities in language activities in West Pokot County, Kenya. A study carried out in Britain by Sarah (2013) on teachers' roles in promoting literacy in the context of play, assessed the role of pre-school teachers in promoting literacy during children's play. The study revealed that teachers acted as discussion leaders, examiners, storytellers and decision makers in classroom. While the study used observation only as a method of data collection, the current study utilized various methods of data collection e.g. questionnaire, interviews, to add on lesson observation schedule. This study was also meant to find out the role of teachers in integration of play activities in the entire ECDE curriculum other than looking at integration of play in a specific aspect of curriculum like literacy only.

Kumar (2014) study was to determine the effectiveness of the audio-visual intervention program on the language development of preschool children in relation to their socio economic status. The researcher employed experimental research method to conduct the study. The sample size comprised 100 learners from preschool of Rohini, Delhi India. They found out that audio-visual intervention program had positively affected the overall language development of the preschool children. They also established that audio-visual intervention program was not differently affecting the language development of the preschool children at different SES levels. The difference between the current study and Kumar is due to the approach (experimental) research involving learners while this study involved teachers. In their study, Ahmad and Aziz (2009) noted that some teachers believed that classes should be teacher centred. This is where the teacher is the expert and the authority in presenting information. Ndirangu (2004) observed that that inappropriate classroom

skill such as the use of teacher centred methods sabotaged the achievements and goals of even the ECDE curriculum. Eken (2000) cited by Towett, Indoshi and Okwach (2013) noted that in a student centred class, teachers were more of facilitators and students take on the discussion role, students were seen as being able to assume a more active and participatory role compared to traditional approaches. This teaching method promoted active participation of students in classroom activities. However, in a classroom setting a teacher should be well equipped with different methods of teaching English.

Ahmad and Aziz (2009) concurs that learners in most cases have poor grasp of a language and part of the problem lies with the conventional teaching methods employed by their teachers in classroom. A research carried out by Ng'ong'a (2002) revealed that Kenyan school leavers continued to perform poorly due to poor teaching methods used by their teachers in schools. This is because (Alexander, 2000) most teachers developed a teaching style that was based on their beliefs about what constituted good teaching, their abilities,  personal preferences and names of their particular subjects. This was done by teachers in disregard of their learners instructional needs. Pre-school children early literacy, development and readiness are recognized to be important in preparing learners to accomplish their academic success. The significance of ECDE in learning and development of the child establishes a need to evaluate the curriculum implemented. ECDE commonly implement different teaching instructions and provide different materials to be used by teachers without gauging whether the utilisation of these methods will address the individual needs of learners. The inability of ECDE learners to acquire the necessary literacy skills in reading will prevent them to achieve academic success in primary and secondary schools. This is brought about by inappropriate teaching methods in the ECDE classrooms (Mmela, 2010) employed by their teachers. The learner-centred integrated literacy approach is a constructivism-based idea that emphasizes active learning (Mmela, 2010). Bransford Brown and Cocking (2000) indicates that active learning is in keeping with the principles of language learning indicating that language learning is an on-going active process. Additionally, integrated literacy instruction has been shown to have positive influences in learning a language in a classroom (Mmela, 2010). These approaches exceed traditional teacher-centred approaches with regard to effective language learning. Traditional approaches puts a pupil in a more passive role and unreceptive language teaching is fruitless e in terms of the learners' ability to make productive use of the new language in speech and writing.

Mmela (2010) indicates that the learner-centred integrated literacy approaches is an idea derived from constructivist philosophy of teaching. English is an important language in Malawi because it is the official language. For that reason learners are motivated to learn it as a second language. However, their achievement in English was critically low. According to Ministry of Education and UNICEF (1998) and Williams (1993), teachers' complete reliance on traditional teacher-centred approaches was believed to be one of the major causes of school learners' inability to acquire English as a second language for their literacy development in Malawi. The assumption was that, improving teacher teaching practices through introducing constructivists-based and learner-centred which were believed to be more effective for second language learning would show how teachers learn and eventually improve teacher education practices and therefore English teaching in their classes. Mmela (2010) found out that teacher learning was a gradual developmental process that depended very much on other interlaced processes of inquiry, collaboration and reflective practices. The research result also showed that child-centred integrated literacy approaches of the constructivism-based were still a challenge in the primary classes despite them being included in the

curriculum. Mmela (2010) attributed that many learners in Malawi did not achieve English language competencies as expected. Several reasons contribute to this lack of achievement. They were: most teachers were not competent in English, classrooms are overcrowded, lack of reading materials and English-speaking models were inadequate (Banda *et al.,* 2001), and the teaching approaches.

Sonia (2006) study examined literacy instruction in kindergarten classrooms and relationship between teaching practices and kindergarten learners literacy outcomes in United States, North Carolina. Quantitative measures of classroom practices and quantitative child literacy outcomes were used to examine this relationship. Data analysis suggested that classroom instructional practices were not related to student literacy achievement. Learners demographic characteristics of socio-economic profile and home literacy environment appeared to be the most significant predictors of student literacy achievement. Matsau (2007) investigated the use of learner-centred approach in the teaching of English and Sesotho languages in Lesotho secondary schools. The findings, based on learners' and teachers' questionnaires, observations and focus group discussions, indicated that certain learner-centred strategies suggested in the syllabus as well as other methods were used; and certain skills and content knowledge were acquired from each learner-centred strategy simultaneously. Past experience was crucial in assisting learners to form and build new knowledge. Moreover, it was apparent that learners and teachers considered working alone (not always considered a learner-centred strategy) to be important in building confidence and independence skills. This showed underutilisation of CCA approach in teaching language activities in Lesotho. This study determined the degree to which CCA was used to teach language activities in pre-schools in Kenya.

Tarimo (2013) study sought to establish the determinants of ECDE teachers' use of play as a teaching strategy in Mwanga District, in Tanzania. This was due to the fact that Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme in Tanzania was a relatively young discipline as compared to other East Africa countries. A descriptive survey design was employed with independent variables being type of school, teachers experience, teachers' motivation, teachers' training status, and the availability of play materials while dependent variable was pre-primary school teachers' utilisation of play as a teaching approach. The study findings showed that more than half (57.5%) of teachers used play as a teaching strategy while less than half (42.5) of teachers did not use play as a teaching strategy. This indicated that close to half of pre-school teachers did not use play as a teaching strategy. The study found out that availability of play materials and teachers' levels of motivation were probable factors which influenced teachers' use of play as a teaching strategy. In another study by Wangui (2011) investigated the influence of learning environment on reading comprehension among pre-unit learners in Kikuyu Division, Kiambu County. The objectives that the study sought to achieve were to investigate whether the ECDE learning environment facilitated learning activities, determine types of instructional materials used and find out how teachers used learning environment to facilitate reading comprehension among learners. Analysis of the results revealed that: lack of adequate facilities, failure to use appropriate teaching methods were the factors that affected reading comprehension. They found out that implementation of child-centred approaches was hindered by the above named factors. However, this study did not evaluate child-centred approaches and their influence on learning and teaching activities in ECDE.

Towett, Indoshi and Okwach (2013) study determine the perceptions of teachers and learners on the methods used in teaching and learning of English writing skills in secondary schools in West Pokot
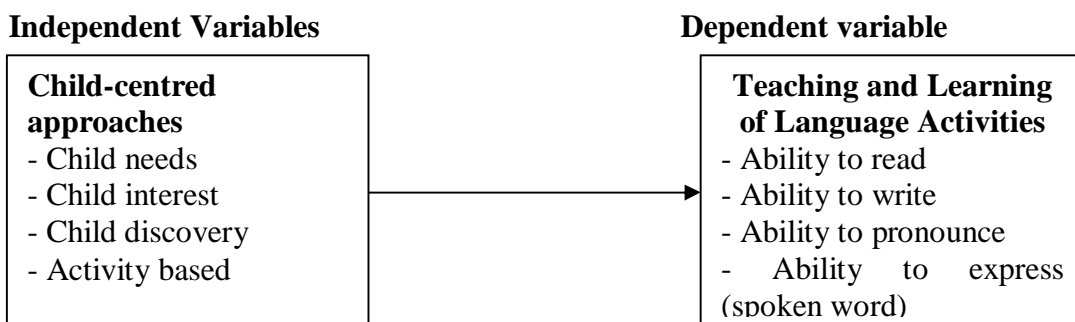
County of Kenya. The study used a descriptive survey methodology with English teachers and 2580 form four learners forming the study population. The study revealed that both teachers and students had negative perception on teaching approaches used in teaching and learning of English writing skills. Negative attitudes were found to be the cause for learners' poor performance in national examinations in English. Towett, Indoshi and Okwach (2013) conducted their study in secondary schools while the current study focuses on pre-school stage. Moreover, the authors used simple random sampling selection method rather than stratified random sampling bearing in mind that they were selecting form four students only in schools. Moreover, the authors used questionnaire as a data-collecting instrument rather than using interviews and tests to tests learners' competencies in writing skills. Ogott *et al.,* (2011) carried out another study on teachers' attitudes on selection, development and use of language instructional materials with regards to: human, administrative, target task and physical factors. Though the study was based on descriptive survey design similar to this study, the study employed attitude test questionnaires only as sole instrument of data collection. The current study employed interview schedule, lesson observation schedule and questionnaires to collect data. Ogott *et al.,* (2011) study found out that most teachers had positive attitude on physical factors, target task human factors and administrative factors with regard to language material selection, development and use. This study on the other hand examined the role of teachers in integration of play activities in ECDE curriculum. From the above review, learners' competencies in language activities seem to be promoted through teaching approaches that teachers use. Therefore the current study investigated the influence of child-centred approaches on pre-school children acquisition of language skills in West Pokot County ECDE centres.

Ogott (2011) whose study on factors influencing use of language materials in early childhood development and education centre in Gem Sub-County, Kenya established that, the use of relevant language material influence positively the learning of language in Early Childhood Development and Education centres. While Ogott's (2011) study had a sample size of 38 teachers and focused on factors influencing the use of language materials in Early Childhood Development and Education centres, the present study had a study sample size of 157 teachers, and 35 head focused on the relevance of child-centred approach use and pre-school learners development of language skills in West Pokot County. Moraa (2014) study sought to establish the influences of teacher related factors on implementation of IEC in public secondary schools in Ekerenyo Division, Kisii County. The objectives of the study were to determine extent to which teaching experience and age, academic and professional qualifications, teaching styles and how English teachers' attitude affected implementation of integrated English curriculum in schools (English and Literature). The study found out that most English teachers would appreciate if integrated English was to be incorporated in their pre-service training while at the same time in-service programs to be extended to those already in service during school holidays. There were adequate English teachers in the Division with the required academic and professional qualifications to handle the integration. However, research recommended that attitude among teachers needed to be addressed adequately for better KCSE results. The researcher concluded that for effective implementation of integrated English: teachers' teaching experience, professional qualification, attitude of teachers' of English on implementation of IEC, academic qualifications and teaching styles of integrated English needed to be adhered by all teachers as they influenced learners performance in English which is a core subject in Kenya education system. The researcher noted that despite in service training been organized frequently, most of the teachers still found a challenge in implementing IEC. This shows that there exist gaps in which child-centred approaches affect the implementation of English language curriculum in secondary schools. This study determined the extent to which teachers used child-centred approaches in implementing language activities in pre-schools in West Pokot County.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework below shows the relationship between the independent variables on dependent variable.

**Independent Variables**

**Dependent variable**

| **Child-centred approaches** - Child needs - Child interest - Child discovery - Activity based |
|---|

| **Teaching and Learning of Language Activities** - Ability to read - Ability to write - Ability to pronounce - Ability to express (spoken word) |
|---|

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

**Research Methods**

The study was conducted in West Pokot County Public ECDE centres attached to primary schools. the research area was chosen because Elimu Yetu Coalition (2015) report, majority of public ECDE centres are understaffed and their low number may affect effective curriculum delivery. The study collected qualitative and quantitative data. A survey research design was used. The target respondents were; 1677 teachers and 417 head teachers drawn from 417 ECDE in West Pokot County (West Pokot County Education Office, 2015). A sample size of 41 head teachers and 209 teachers were selected as the study sample. Questionnaires, interview and observation checklist were used to collect data. Data collected was analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data was analysed using content analysis.

**Results**

**Distribution of Teachers by Gender**

Data was sought on the gender of the respondents. This was done to ascertain that respondents were normally distributed between the two genders because in this study, none of the gender was given preferential consideration in the selection of respondents. Taking this into consideration, the study deemed it important to establish the gender of the respondents. Table 1 illustrates the study results.

**Table 1 Distribution of Teachers by Gender**

| Type | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 37 | 23.6 |
| Female | 120 | 76.4 |
| **Total** | **157** | **100.0** |

Based on the results on Table 1, most of the ECDE teachers 120 (76.4%) were females and 37 (23.6%) were male. The findings coincide with Nguku's (2015) study in Yatta Sub County in Machakos that showed that 62.5% of the teachers were female while 37.5% were male. The findings are an indication that females have a higher preference to teach in ECDE than male

teachers. Also in a research conducted in Nyamira County by Moraa (2014) found out that 65.5 % of English teachers were females and 35.5% were males. This shows that most schools are dominated by teachers of one gender. However, achieving equal representation was not considered to be critical in this situation. The results also are similar to Nyangeri's (2014) study in Kitale town who found out that all the pre-primary school teachers were females. This could be because of ECDE is considered a domain for women and due to cultural beliefs that child care is a responsibility of women. From the above findings it can be inferred that female teachers get attracted to the ECDE profession more than male teachers.

**Utilisation of Child-Centred Approaches in ECDE Centres**
The most convenient way of assessing whether teaching in ECDE is friendly and relevant to the child is through the teaching and learning approaches. Techniques and methods used by teachers in teaching and learning are vital in promotion of self-mastery of skills and concepts especially at this tender age (Sonia, 2006). The study summed up the average score of each child-centred approach through descriptive statistics to check the most preferred and the least preferred based on a Likert scale responses (1-Never to 5-Always). The results of the analysis are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2 Descriptive statistics on Utilisation of child-centred approaches**

|   |                          | N   | M      | Std. D  | Skewness    |               |
|---|--------------------------|-----|--------|---------|-------------|---------------|
|   |                          |     |        |         | Statistic   | Std. Error    |
| a | Child discovery approach | 157 | 3.7325 | .53568  | -.130       | .194          |
| b | Child interest approach  | 157 | 3.5414 | .71154  | .826        | .194          |
| d | Child needs approach     | 157 | 3.2739 | .62646  | -.595       | .194          |
| e | Activity  based approach | 157 | 3.0892 | .67345  | -.872       | .194          |
|   | **Valid N (Listwise)**   | **157** | **3.4093** | **0.63678** |       |               |

The descriptive statistics on Table 2 show that most teachers in West Pokot public ECDE centres preferred to use the child discovery approach (M=3.73 and SD=0.53) more as compared to other child-centred approaches. The second most utilised teaching approach was the child interest approach (M=3.54 and SD=0.71). However, the results show that the third most preferred method of instruction by teachers was the child needs approach and it was sometimes or occasionally used (M=3.27 and SD=0.62). The last teaching method used occasionally (M=3.08 and SD=0.67) was the activity based approach. Child discovery and child needs approach had positive skewness as opposed to child interest approach and activity based approach. Normally was observed in the two that had negative Skewness ± 1.96 as opposed to discovery and needs approach whose Skewness was greater than ± 1.96. From the results, it is evident that most of ECDE teachers in West Pokot County occasionally used child-centred approaches in teaching and learning activities in ECDE centers. The information is related to what some head teachers attested during the interviews in response to questions asked on the degree to which child-centred approaches were used by their teachers. One head teacher indicated that:

> *"Child-centred is often used. However, most of teachers in my school use teacher centred and thematic approaches."*

Another head teacher also noted that:

> *"The teachers teach using thematic approach and Montessori methodology for reading."*

Another head teacher said that:

> *I usually ask my teachers to desist using teaching methods where learners copy notes from the chalkboard, read their notes and test them.*

From the above responses from the head teachers, it's clear that different teachers apply different methods of teaching due to the nature of training they received in the teacher training colleges. It is also clear that most of the teachers often use child-centred approach and inadequate learning materials appear to be the major reason for non-use.   In the lessons observed by the researcher, most learners worked together in pairs, groups or individually. In most cases, learners had to apply certain skills, which fostered relations in working together, either as a team or a group. The research findings are consistent with Chepkemoi *et al.,* (2013) research in teacher training colleges in Kenya that found out that trainers mainly used teacher-centred approaches during class instruction. The use of this pedagogy was meant to help teachers complete the syllabus before national examinations although many would fail to. The research findings are inconsistent with UNICEF (2012) research in Myanmar that found out that there was very little use of pair or group work to promote problem solving activities except when learners, on rare occasions, voluntarily helped each other. Breaks in this pattern occurred when children were called to the front of the classroom to work at the blackboard, although this teaching strategy was not common. From the above findings, it has been seen that child-centred approaches are moderately applied in teaching and learning. This is explained by UNESCO's report that found out that the teaching conditions in many schools in Sub-Saharan Africa posed serious practical concerns for teachers seeking to implement learner-centered methods (Vavrus *et al.,* 2011).

**Utilisation of Child-centred Approaches in Teaching and Learning Language Activities**
The main objective of the study was to investigate the utilisation of child-centred approaches in teaching and learning of language activities in public ECDE centres in West Pokot County. Wangui (2011) said that reading is a language and language is made up of words. Words reflect experiences because readers visualize objects and events thus forming images of the real world. Hence the more experiences readers have the more words they will have and they are likely to become proficient readers. At first, the study sought to find out teachers' utilisation of language activities if learners were able to write their name correctly, identify alphabetical order, speak in English and Kiswahili and pronounce simple words correctly. These statements were measured on a Likert scale of five; poor (P), Below Average (BA), Average (A), High (H) and Very High (VH). The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3 Teaching and Learning of Language Activities**

|   | Response |   | P | BA | A | H | VH | M | SD |
|---|----------|---|---|----|---|---|----|---|----|
| a | Learners ability to write their names correctly | f | 3 | 12 | 84 | 56 | 2 | 3.27 | .701 |
|   |  | % | 1.9 | 7.6 | 53.5 | 35.7 | 1.3 |  |  |
| b | Learners ability to identification of alphabets (order) | f | 20 | 5 | 74 | 42 | 16 | 3.18 | 1.091 |
|   |  | % | 12.7 | 3.2 | 47.1 | 26.8 | 10.2 |  |  |
| c | Learners ability to speak in English and Kiswahili | f | 7 | 14 | 82 | 47 | 7 | 3.21 | .840 |
|   |  | % | 4.5 | 8.9 | 52.2 | 29.9 | 4.5 |  |  |
| d | Learners ability to pronounce words | f | 24 | 13 | 63 | 43 | 14 | 3.06 | 1.153 |
|   |  | % | 15.3 | 8.3 | 40.1 | 27.4 | 8.9 |  |  |
| e | Learners ability to spell correctly | f | 17 | 36 | 59 | 41 | 4 | 2.87 | 1.007 |
|   |  | % | 10.8 | 22.9 | 37.6 | 26.1 | 2.5 |  |  |

Key: *P-Poor, BA-Below Average, A-Average, H-High, VH-Very High, M=Mean and SD-Standard deviation*

Table 3 shows that 3 teachers (1.9%) said that their learners ability to write their names correctly level seemed poor, 12 (7.6%) believed it was below average, 84 (53.5%) indicated said it was average, 56 (35.7%) said it was high and 2 (1.3%) said it was very high. This shows that ECDE learners competency in writing their names was average (M = 3.27, SD = 0.701). A lot needs to be done to raise this trend by teachers, parents and other stakeholders. When teachers were asked whether learners have the ability to identify and arrange alphabets in order, 20 (12.7%) said their learners' ability was poor, 5 (3.2%) said was below average, 74 (47.1%) indicated that it was average, 42 (26.8%) indicated their ability was high while 16 (10.2%) said it was very high. The findings imply that ECDE learners ability to identify alphabets and arrange in order was moderate (M = 3.18, SD = 1.091). A lot needs to be done by ECDE teachers in West Pokot County to raise the trend. This was noted to be as a result of non-regular use of child-centred teaching approaches. The findings are different from Matsau's (2007) research in Lesotho that showed that frequent use of CCA helped learners acquire the knowledge of word order, phrasing and punctuation that contribute to the meaning of a written sentence.

With regard to ECDE learners proficiency to speak in the official languages; English and Kiswahili, the results showed that 7 (4.5%) rated learners' communication competency as poor, 14 (8.9%) said it was below average, 82 (52.2%) pointed out that it was on average, 47 (29.9%) indicated that it was high and only 7 (4.5%) rated learners ability to speak in English and Kiswahili as very high. From the above findings, it is clear that learners ability to communicate in English and Kiswahili was low in most public ECDE in West Pokot County (M = 3.21, SD = 0.84). ECDE learners' inability to communicate in English and Kiswahili could be due to the influence on mother tongue language that government recommends to be the language of instruction in ECDEs. With reference to respondents' ability to pronounce words correctly, 24 (15.3%) rated their learners ability to be poor, 13 (8.3%) said it was below average, 63 (40.1%) indicated their level to be on average, 43 (27.4%) rated their competency as high while 14 (8.9%) said it was high. From these results, it is clear that learners ability to pronounce words correctly was average (M = 3.06 and SD = 1.153) as perceived by most ECDE teachers in the study area. Finally, (10.8%) of teachers indicated that their learners ability to spell correctly was poor, 22.9% rated them (learners) as below average, 37.6% said it was average, 26.1% said it was high and 2.5% indicated their ability to be high. The response had a mean of 2.87 with standard deviation score of 1.007 suggesting learners' average competency in spelling words correctly. Their inability to spell words correctly is basically affected by teaching methods that their teachers use in classroom instruction. The researcher also made observations during classroom teaching and determined the following ratings for pre-school learners' language activities. Table 4 presents the results.

**Table 4 Rating of Learners Competencies in Language Activities**

|   |   | Low | Below average | Average | High | Very high |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | Learners ability to write their names correctly | 2 | 8 | 9 | 17 | 5 |
| b | Learners ability to identification of alphabets (order) | 0 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 11 |
| c | Learners ability to speak in English and Kiswahili | 0 | 13 | 14 | 4 | 10 |
| d | Learners ability to pronounce words | 8 | 14 | 11 | 5 | 3 |
| e | Learners ability to match words | 5 | 6 | 14 | 16 | 0 |

Results of the study in Table 4 revealed that most of learners had higher abilities to write their names correctly and identification of alphabets. However, the researcher observed that learners' ability to pronounce words, speak in official (English and Kiswahili) and match words in language learning was low. This could be due to the interference of mother tongue (Pokot) and also lack of regular practices using learner centred approaches. In light of the above mentioned findings, ECDE goal of creating skilful readers and writers has not been achieved (Mmela, 2010). It can therefore be deduced that learners are not actively involved in language activities hence they find it challenging to speak in English and Kiswahili. This could be due to moderate use of child-centred approaches in teaching and learning in the schools. Different from the study findings, Mmela (2010) established that the traditional teaching approaches to English subjects were still dominant in Malawian classrooms. This was due to the fact that teacher training colleges in the country used direct teacher methods (teacher centred. To answer the research question, a Karl Pearson correlation statistic was computed. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5 Correlations on the CCA on Teaching and Learning Languages Activities**

| Child-centred teaching approaches | | Language activities |
|---|---|---|
| a. Child Needs Approach | Pearson Correlation | .198[*] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .013 |
| | N | 157 |
| b. Child Interest Approach | Pearson Correlation | .199[*] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .012 |
| | N | 157 |
| c. Child Discovery Approach | Pearson Correlation | .343[**] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 157 |
| d. Activity Based Approach | Pearson Correlation | .375[**] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 157 |

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
[*]. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows that there exist a positive correlation between ECDE teachers utilisation of child-centred approaches on learners teaching and learning of language activities in West Pokot County.

For instance, results show that activity based approach (r=0.375 and p=0.001) was found to have a stronger positive influence as compared to other teaching methods that teachers were using in classroom. This could be due to the involvement of music instruments and resources that aid learners' audibility and ability to communicate with their fellow learners and teachers in schools. The study coincides with Nguku (2015) study which showed that that when pre-school children were exposed to different play materials, there was varied improvement in the performance mean score in Machakos County. In addition, to the study results in Tanzania by Tarimo (2013) found evidence that children's use of songs and a wide range of playing materials in pre-primary settings builds and develops remarkable abilities in perceiving various concepts about different objects, situations, relationships and environment. Since play dominates any interactive teaching, the purpose of this study was to establish the use of play as a teaching strategy. Similarly in Lesotho, Matsau (2007) indicated that the use of activity based approach provided learners with a meaningful environment for practising oral reading repeatedly in order to develop fluency.

Secondly, discovery approach also had significant influence (r=0.343 and p=0.001) on learners learning of language activities. This shows that teachers' continuous usage of this approach would positively impact on learners' language development. Despite scoring a low positive correlation (r=0.199 and p=0.012), it was revealed that child interest approach use in classroom had positive impact on children learning of language activities. The results are also significant at 0.05 levels which suggest that increase in use of child interest approach would improve learners' acquisition of language skills. Lastly, child needs approach usage was also found to have positive influence (r=0.198 and p=0.013) on pre-school learners language development. This meant that the use of this method in classroom teaching and learning raised learners' language skills. In general, teachers' continuous usage of CCA approaches, teaching and learning of language activities improves. The study findings correspond to Kumar's (2014) study in India that showed that the audio-visual intervention program of experimental group between post-test and pre-test is found a positive influence on the language development total scores of preschool children. The audio-visual intervention program has a positive influence on the listening comprehension of the preschool children. The audio-visual intervention program has also positively affected the overall language development of the preschool children. This is because the use of audio-visual educational media is one of the child-centred teaching approaches.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**
Teaching and learning of language activities was on moderate level with more than (54.1%) of teachers indicating that learners were able to write their names correctly with less difficulty. This must have been contributed partly by teachers' utilisation of child-centred approaches. To confirm the assertion made, computed Karl Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics revealed that there existed a positive degree of association which was significant (p<0.01) between ECDE teachers Utilisation of child-centred approaches in teaching and learning of language activities. This implied that for the teachers who regularly used child-centred approaches, their learners were able to develop language competencies in writing, spelling, speaking and even in pronunciation. The study findings showed that songs and poetry were used by teachers to teach language skills in pre-schools in the study area. This implies that by use of songs, music and dances, learners are introduced to cultural information and characteristics; and helps learners to develop and strengthen oral and reading skills by learning new vocabulary. There is need for schools to fully implement the language policy as per the Ministry of Educational guidelines at all public ECDE in West Pokot County. Thematic instruction, graphic designs and other established pupil-centred strategies could

be used in an integrated manner if regular inspection will be on learning in ECDE centres. Teachers also need to be re-trained through in-service courses to improve their pedagogical skills in teaching approaches. The support may come from parents, school management, national or even county government. It is evident that teacher training will develop and equip teacher trainees with a variety of skills on the use of child-centred approaches. The methods suggested in the current ECDE syllabus are not exhaustive; there can be additional ones. This provides room for further consideration, and also rings a warning bell on the need to review the curriculum for teacher education, so that teachers are fully equipped with necessary child–centred learning approaches.

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