

EFFECTS OF TELEVISION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND LANGUAGES ACQUISITION OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Pre-school children come into daily contact with various forms of mass media which influence their academic and social behaviour. Though television has been used to play a monumental role in promotion of education and entertainment, children with full exposure to television have been found to perform poorly in class and fail to speak languages fluently. Public confidence in it is in question as many stakeholders have expressed concern about the amount of television and the type of programming to which children are being exposed to. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of television on academic performance and languages acquisition of pre-school children in Tiriki East Division, Hamisi Sub-County, Vihiga County, Kenya. The study involved 40 teachers and 132 parents drawn from 20 pre-schools selected by simple random technique. It employed descriptive survey design and an ex-post facto research design. Data was collected by questionnaires. The study found out that; Television watching has a negative effect on both academic achievement and languages acquisition of pre-school children. The study recommends that; both parents and teachers should be involved in the choice and selection of appropriate and educative Television programs for pre-school children.

Key Words: Pre-School Children, Effect, Television, Academic Performance, Language Acquisition

Introduction

Mass media includes newspapers, magazines, books, television, radio, films and other forms of communication that reach large audiences with no personal contact between the individuals sending the information and those receiving it (Thomas, 2000). It is essential to the social, political and economic development of society and has promoted various segments. Mass media plays a leading role in promoting education (Burchfield, 1993). According to Clifford (1995) cable

communications, digital television, video games, internet, newspapers and magazines are changing patterns of behavior and models of accessing knowledge, entertainment and ways of seeing and interacting with one another.

Pre-school children all over the world come into daily contact with various forms of mass media (Clifford, 1995). Such media have a lot of influence on their academic and social behaviour. Of all the channels of mass media, television plays a monumental and leading role in promotion of education (Less, 1988). In Kenya, television technology development has been dynamic in many aspects. In 1980s, there was only one television channel in Kenya, that is, Voice of Kenya (VoK) which was state owned. However, in 1990s, a number of television stations were licensed to operate in the country. There are over nine (9) television stations operating in Kenya with others under process of being licensed (Ahinda, 2010). These stations come with catchy programs to attract targeted audience (Landry, Smith & Swank, 2008). Some of these programs are not fit for children undergoing their formative period. They have effects on their academic performance and social behavior (Wanjohi, 2012). Television is a common means of communication that reach large audience with no personal contact between individuals sending the information and those receiving it (Thomas, 2000). This means the audience targeted by television is enormous with its tentacles extending themselves to homes and social places (Nganda, 2007). Tiriki East Division of Hamisi Sub-County is located in a relatively rural area. However, the state of television coverage in the area is equally as good as the one in urban area (Ahinda, 2010). Access to television therefore is bound to rise regardless of the stiff competition that exists among other media businesses that are also expanding (Wanjohi, 2012).

Austin (1992) points out that; Television watching can have positive effects on pre-school children if well guided by parents and guardians. Television watching as a learning process can promote general learning as well as pre-school children's academic performance either negatively or positively (Nganda, 2007). Some scholars support this when they state that; although excessive television watching may impair school performance, limited amount of television watching may be beneficial (Morgan, 1993 & Williams, 1986). A negative association between television watching and measures of school achievement became significant after studying the influence of Television watching on academic performance as researched in USA on 200 pre-school children using observations (Gaddy, 1986 & Richie, 1987). Watching educational television programs may enhance school readiness and academic performance (Anderson & Wright, 2001). These benefits appear to be related to pre-school children watching specific educational programs. In a study entitled "Impact of television on performance of pre-school children conducted in Lang'ata Division – Nairobi, Kenya," by Nganda (2007) found that; television watching by pre-school children can be beneficial to them as long as the programs' content are appropriate.

Many parents, education providers, and other education stakeholders worldwide have expressed concern about the amount of television and the type of programming to which children are being exposed to (Zevenbergen, 2007). Morgan (1993) asserts that despite several decades of research in

the United States of America there is little consensus on whether childhood television watching has beneficial, harmful or negligible effects on educational achievement. According to Hancox (2004), this uncertainty is due to lack of long term follow up data particularly for pre-school children.

In developed countries like Britain and United State of America, children watch an average of five to eight hours of television while in developing countries they watch an average of three to five hours of television everyday (Hancox, 2004). Too much television watching can have adverse affects, such as aggressive behavior, poor school academic performance, early sexual activity, and drug or alcohol use among other effects (Austin, 1992). By the end of preschool, the average child in the United State and other developed countries will have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 other violent acts on television (Hancox, 2004). The world being a global village, children in Kenya could equally have access to the same programs. Children's cartoons and action programs lead to more than 20 acts of violence per hour, compared to 5 acts per hour during prime-time hours in developed countries (Hancox, 2004). Given that these programs are aired in local television channels in Kenya, there is a possibility of Kenyan children to be exposed to the same. More than \$3 billion of products related to war movies have been sold worldwide (Huston, 1983). Technological advancement in terms of television spreading rapidly to most parts of the world Kenya included. The spread of DSTV television channel and other television channels in Kenya have exposed children to foreign programs. This has made the world a global village where what is watched on television in the developed countries is equally watched in developing countries hence the proliferation of negative effects like poor pre-school performance, aggressive behavior, and English, Kiswahili and Mother tongue languages impediment among others (Zevenbergen, 2007).. It is therefore true to assert that Tiriki East Division has not been spared either by these effects of television watching on pre-school children. Pre-school children watch anything that is flushed on the screens of their televisions (Landry, Smith & Swank, 2008). In the year 2012 a pre-school child was treated at a Health Centre and discharged after being injured by a classmate who was displaying and practicing a wrestling contest style as he had watched it being done on a fellow wrestler on the WWF wrestling program on television in Tiriki East Division (Ahinda, 2010). Some pre-school children use abusive languages as heard on some television programs while playing with others in the fields. During a graduation ceremony for top class pre-school children to join standard one last year at a pre-school in Tiriki East Division, Hamisi Sub-County, a serving DICECE officer highlighted that unlimited watching of television programs by pre-school children affects their academic performance at the end of the term (Ahinda, 2010). Parents and guests present concurred with the officer. Similarly the officer alleged that television watching by pre-school children had negative effects on their acquisition of English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue languages. To her, this was manifested in the way they verbalize words and in their written work (Ahinda, 2010). Poor academic performance and impediment of development of English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue languages as a result of television watching by pre-school children needed to be investigated. Hence the need to study effects of television on academic achievement and languages: - English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition to pre-school children in Tiriki East Division of Hamisi Sub-County, Vihiga County, Kenya. The study therefore aimed at examining effects of television on academic

achievement and languages: - English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition to pre-school children.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design and an ex-post facto research design. Ader, Van Marwijk, Deltaan and Beekman (2008) describe descriptive survey as collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study. Descriptive survey design was chosen because it is appropriate for educational fact-finding as it yields a great deal of information, which is accurate. It also enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2000). An ex-post facto research design is the one in which causes are studied after they presumably have exerted their effect on another variable (Borg, Gall & Gall, 2007). Cohen et al., (2000) argues that, this design can be administered at a moment in time, over a cross section or over a length of time with the same population. This research aimed at gathering accurate information and characteristics that were observable in the assessment of effects of television on academic achievement and languages: - English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition to pre-school children in Tiriki East Division of Hamisi District, Vihiga County, Kenya.

Methodology

As Chambers and Skinner (2003) note that the primary issue in choosing a sample size is to ensure that the sample size is sufficient to act as a representation of the population from which it is drawn. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 40 teachers and 132 parents drawn from 20 pre-schools representing a third (33%) of the study population as a third of the study population is the convenient sample size for a survey study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Simple random sampling technique was used because it is a technique in which every member has an equal chance of being selected (Bartlett, Kotrlik and Higgs, 2001).

Both Teachers' Questionnaires (TQs) and Parents' Questionnaires (PQs) were used to collect data regarding: effects of Television on academic achievement and language: English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition to pre-school children. Both Teachers' Questionnaire (TQ) and Parents' questionnaire (PQ) had open – ended and closed ended items which enabled him to gather data from a large number of respondents at a particular time (Ngumbo, 2006). Open – ended questions gathered in – depth information while closed – ended questions gave rise to structured responses which facilitated the ease of tabulation and analysis (Joppe, 2000).

To establish reliability of research instruments, a pilot study was carried out using test and re-test method on 2 teachers and 5 parents drawn from 1 pre-school randomly selected from Tiriki East Division of Hamisi Sub-County, Vihiga County, Kenya, representing 4% of the study sample (Chambers & Skinner, 2003). The two tests were administered on the same respondents at an

interval of two (2) weeks (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). For quantitative data, Pearson's (r) was used for the pilot study to determine correlation of instruments which were judged reliable at 0.7. The research instruments were proved to be reliable because the values of magnitude of relationship of the grand mean scores obtained from the two tests was 0.5 which lies between 0 and 0.7 (Borg et al., 2007). Results from the two tests were also used to revise instruments before they were used in the actual study (Borg & Gall, 2007). For qualitative data, the pilot study was carried out to find out whether the terms used resonate with the terms used by both ECDE teachers and parents in the district. The researcher also verified their content for; accuracy, consistency, and ensured that ambiguous information was removed while deficiencies were noted and corrected in the final study (Joppe, 2000; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Respondents who participated in the pilot study did not participate in the main study.

For validity of the instruments to be ensured three experts from the School of Education of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology examined the content of the instruments and advised on the face validity. Improvements were made according to the recommendations suggested by the experts before the instruments were finally taken into the field.

Quantitative data which was gathered by responses to closed ended questions from both Teachers' questionnaires (TQs) and Parents' questionnaires (PQs) were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and presented in tables (Chambers & Skinner, 2003). Qualitative data which was gathered by responses to open – ended questions from; Teachers' questionnaires (TQs) and Parents' questionnaires (PQs) was organized, categorized and presented in narratives according to various emergent themes. Qualitative data analysis is a systematic procedure followed in order to identify essential features, themes and categories (Borg & Gall, 2007). The researcher finally reviewed the data again to locate additional evidence backing up each theme as he compared general themes across all data sources while creating broader consistent themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Effects of Television on Academic Achievement of Pre-school Children

The study sought to find out the effects of Television on academic achievement of pre-school children. The study findings were summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Effects of Television on Academic Achievement of Pre-school Children

Effects of Television on Academic Achievement	<u>Teachers' Responses</u>		<u>Parents' Responses</u>	
	Frequency	Percentages	Frequency	Percentages
Has No Effect on Academic Achievement	08	20.00%	30	23.00%
Has a Negative Effect on Academic Achievement	30	75.00%	95	72.00%
Has a Positive Effect on Academic Achievement	02	05.00%	05	04.00%
Not Sure	00	00.00%	02	01.00%
Total	40	100.00%	132	100.00%

Data analysis in Table 1 reveals that; Majority, 30 teachers (75%) and 95 parents (72%) reported that, television watching has a negative effect on academic achievement of pre school children while Minority, 2 teachers (5%) and 5 parents (4%) reported that; television has a positive effect on academic achievement of pre school children. This inhibits implementation of pre school curriculum. These findings concur with Swanson (1994) who points out that; only a handful of television programs teach pre-school children important skills such as Reading, Science or Problem Solving. Most shows on television including cartoons are non educational. More time spent watching these shows are linked with poor school performance. Late night television watching tires children out so much that they can't pay much attention in schools as researched in 1990 by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Ozmert and Toyran, 2002).

Butterfield (1990) asserts that today's kids are exposed to more information than any other generation in history. She discussed differences in academic achievement between American and Asian pre-school children and referred to a study prepared for the US Department of Education that compared Mathematics and Science achievements of children in USA. One of the findings was that, the more times children spend watching television, the poorer their performance. To her the mean time spent watching television during childhood is significantly associated with leaving school without qualifications and also negatively associated with attaining higher education. Television watching during childhood has adverse effects associated with later educational achievements. It has long lasting adverse consequences for educational achievement and subsequent social economic status and well being (Butterfield, 1990).

Too much television has adverse effects on school performance and the more television a child watches the greater the negative impact on his or her learning (Chaot, 2004). Paul, a scholar of Thomas Jefferson University, has studied childhood television watching habits and concludes that those obsessed by television are less creative and more passive (Hancox, 2004).

Effects of Television on Languages:- English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue Acquisition to Pre-school Children

Children between the ages of 3-6 are at a critical stage in brain development for the development of language and other cognitive skills (Morgan, 2003). The study sought to find out the effects of television on languages:- English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition to Pre-school Children. The study findings were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Effects of Television on Languages:- English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue Acquisition to Pre-School Children

Effects of Television on Languages:-English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue Acquisition	Teachers' Responses		Parents' Responses	
	Frequency	Percentages	Frequency	Percentages
Has No Effect on Academic Achievement	01	02.00%	13	10.00%
Has a Negative Effect on Academic Achievement	34	85.00%	90	68.00%
Has a Positive Effect on Academic Achievement	04	10.00%	26	20.00%
Not Sure	01	03.00%	03	02.00%
Total	40	100.00%	132	100.00%

Data analysis in Table 2 reveals that; Majority, 34 teachers (85%) and 90 parents (68%) reported that television has a negative effect on languages: - English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition of pre-school children while Minority, 4 teachers (10%) and 26 parents (20%) reported that; television has a positive effect on languages: - English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition of pre-school children. This inhibits implementation of pre-school curriculum. These findings concur with Morgan (2003) who points out that; there is an extent to which heavy television watching can influence development of the brain's neural networks. It displaces the time which the preschool child would spend in other activities while verbal interactions influence early cognitive development basing on a study carried out in 2001 by American Academy Pediatrics.

According to Healy (1995) watching by children of television programs aimed at a general audience which resulted to poor language development in pre-school children. In his study involving twenty children using observation method by trained research assistants, Singer (1983) concurs with these findings when he says that, children who were frequently exposed to such programs tended to have lower vocabulary in their languages of daily communication, poorer expressive languages and engaged less in television talk (that is talking about television) with adults. This was attributed to both quality of the content on offer and the quantity of exposure to television (Zevenbergen, 2007).

In Kenya, Ndungu (2007) studied pre-school children in Thogoto Location using questionnaires, interview guides, an observation guide and found out that; children watched local popular television programs like 'Vihoja Mahakamani' and 'Vitimbi' aired by Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) Television Channel and after few days, they were heard trying to ape or imitated idiosyncrasies and lexical pronunciations of those popular television program artists who included: - Ojwang Hatari, Mama Kayai, Ondiek, Mogaka, Nyasukuta, Makokha Dot Com, Alexander and Mise. Those artists are experienced and talented home-grown actors who imitate vernacular pronunciations of a variety of Kenyan communities notably; Luo, Kisii, Maasai, Luhya and Kamba. In Tiriki East Division pre-school children have been seen and heard imitating pronunciations from artists from various television programs which they liked and watched. They also nicknamed their friends who were their peers the names of popular actors like Ondiek, Mogaka, Makokha and Nyasukuta of Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's (KBC) 'Vitimbi' program that was quite popular among them (Ahinda, 2010). This proves that television watching influences language development of children negatively, hence inhibiting implementation of pre-school curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

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

- (i) Television watching has a negative effect on academic achievement of pre-school children.
- (ii) Television has a negative effect on languages:- English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue acquisition of pre-school children.

5.4 Recommendations of the study

Based on the above conclusions, the study recommends that:

- (i) The Ministry of Education should be involved in vetting of appropriate Television programs relevant for watching by pre-school children.
- (ii) Both parents and teachers should be involved in the choice and selection of appropriate and educative Television programs for pre-school children.
- (iii) Both parents and teachers should discourage pre-school children from watching Television programs that interfere with acquisition of English, Kiswahili and Mother Tongue.

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