

KABARAK UNIVERSITY

6TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

The link between English Language Proficiency and Academic Literacy: A scientific explanation

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Introduction / Background

- ▶ language competence in the medium of instruction impacts on academic achievement.
- ▶ Language can either promote or impede the acquisition of knowledge and hence impact on scholastic success
- ▶ Language: crucial means of gaining access to knowledge (Ramapela, 2014)
- ▶ Language for soliciting help, constructing, reformulating and paraphrasing knowledge to one's own understanding

Place of English in Kenya's education system

- ▶ Compulsory subject throughout schooling
- ▶ Taught in lower primary alongside mother tongue and Swahili (ages 6-8)
- ▶ Medium of instruction in upper primary (ages 9-13) and secondary (ages 14-17)
- ▶ By end of standard 8, most learners are unable to communicate effectively (Sure and Ogechi, 2009)
- ▶ Standard four learners are not proficient sufficiently proficient in English affecting learning in content classes (Bunyi, 2008)
- ▶ Core subject in clusters to join university programmes

Statement of the problem

The performance of English has been on the decline over the years.

Researchers have dedicated a substantial amount of time to causes and possible remedies to poor performance in English and other subjects.

All subjects recorded mean scores lower than 50% (KNEC, 2014)

Evidently missing in the literature is studies on the link between language proficiency and academic literacy

Study objectives

To present a scientific explanation for the impact of language proficiency in the medium of instruction on academic literacy

Brief literature review

Wanjiru and Miheso(2015), language proficiency does play a role in the understanding of vocabulary related to mathematics

It is important for learners to understand terms and phrases to communicate ideas and concepts in content classes(Sanders, 2007)

Responsibility of language development is left to teachers in most schools(Thurmann, 2013)

Methodology

A decorative banner at the top of the slide features a solid red background. On the right side, there are two overlapping light blue circles. The bottom edge of the red banner is wavy and partially overlaps a light blue circular shape that extends from the right edge of the slide.

Desk research which primary entails consulting secondary data

Language acquisition theories

- . Researchers, linguists and experts in cognitive development concur on multi-stage processes involved in L2 acquisition
- . Vygotsky (1978) views cognitive development as a dialectical process
- . Jean Piaget's theory divides language acquisition into four stages
- . Cummins(1980) distinguishes two types of proficiencies that a learner

Cummins' theories of bilingualism and cognition

- ▶ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills(BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency(CALP)
- ▶ BICS :
- ▶ - skills a learner acquires first and quickly
- ▶ Entails surface skills of speaking and listening- from TV, Radio
- ▶ Skills for day to day communication- playing with friend or at home
- ▶ Acquired within 5-7 years for L2 while it takes 2 years for natives

Cummins' theories of bilingualism and cognition

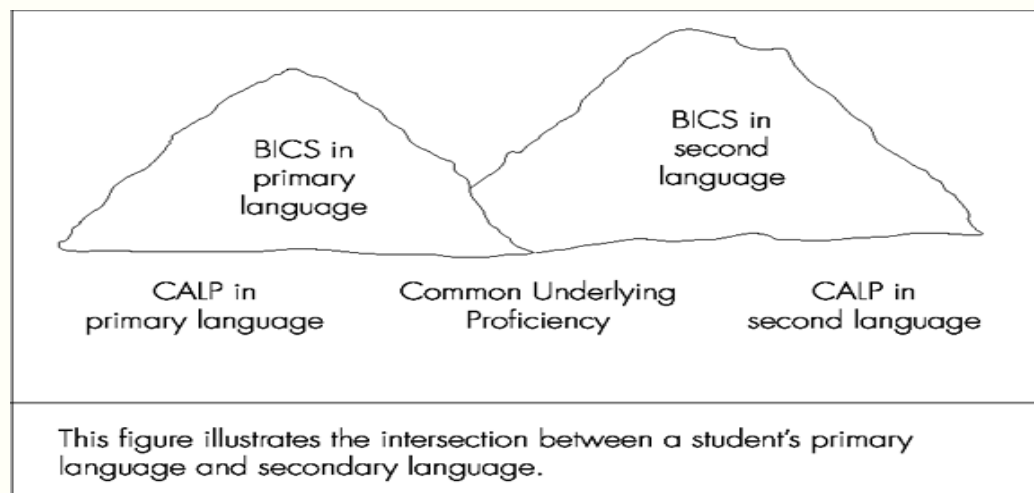
- ▶ BICS – acquired in primary school
- ▶ For learners to acquire BICS- expose them to situations drawn from day to day life
- ▶ Goes beyond words- encompasses kinesics
- ▶ In L2 social cues cannot be acquired in social interaction but through teaching- content of syllabus?

Cummins' theories of bilingualism and cognition

- ▶ CALP- proficiency necessary for formal academic learning encompassing reading and writing and thinking about subject areas content material
- ▶ Cummins – in the course of learning one language a learner acquires a set of skills and implicitly metalinguistic knowledge that can be drawn from another language.

Cummins' theories of bilingualism and cognition

Cummin's theory of common underlying proficiency
the iceberg model



Cummins's theory of common underlying proficiency

- ▶ Cummins -need to use the learner's primary language, L1 as a base for further learning in the second language.
- ▶ students who have strong literacy skills in their first language will learn English faster (Cummins, 1984, Baker, 1993).
- ▶ Freeman & Freeman (2001), most concepts are readily available in the learner's first language and once developed are accessible through the second language. For example, if a learner understands the rain cycle in his L1, that learner can easily explain the same in the L2.

Conclusions

- . Language proficiency does have an impact on academic literacy
- . Listening and speaking are acquired first then reading and writing
- . A learner can have difference in proficiency levels of for the four skills
- . Importance of L1 should not be underestimated in the acquisition of L2 – forms a basis for the transfer of knowledge
- . Language teaching has been solely left to language teachers

Recommendations

- - involvement of non-language teachers in improving learners' competency in medium of instruction
- - integration of language skills in content classes – meaning of words like explain, illustrate, describe
- Use of L1 in initial years of schooling(UNESCO,2003)
- Consideration of years taken to acquire BICS when revising the curriculum from 8-4-4(or change to any other system)

Areas for further study

. The curriculum for Lower primary classes (the phase for acquisition of BICS) , does it give learners exposure to authentic material of the target language? For example, the acquisition of social cues and kinesics. This could be done by analysing books used to teach English in Lower Primary level



THANK YOU