



**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CHILDREN'S EARLY LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES AND
PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN
PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BUSIA COUNTY, KENYA**

Consolata Nabwire Onyango¹ⁱ,

Nyakwara Begi²,

Juliet W. Mugo²

¹PhD Student,

Department of Early Childhood and Special Needs Education,

Kenyatta University,

P.O Box 43844-10100, Nairobi,

Kenya

²PhD, Lecturer,

Department of Early Childhood and Special Needs Education,

Kenyatta University,

P.O Box 43844-10100, Nairobi,

Kenya

Abstract:

This study aimed to explore the relationship between children's early language competencies and parental engagement in learning activities in pre-primary schools in Busia County, Kenya. This study used Joyce Epstein's parental involvement model to inform the study, while correlation design was used to guide the study. The target population was pre-primary school children plus their teachers and parents in 67 public schools and 40 private schools. Out of these schools, 7 public schools and 4 private schools were sampled. Early language skills checklist, questionnaire and interview schedules were used for data collection. A pilot study was conducted in two primary schools. Content validity was used to determine the research tools' validity, whereas the reliability of the instruments was established using the test-retest method. When analysing qualitative data, thematic analysis was used, while quantitative data was analysed using inferential statistics, where frequencies, percentages, and means were generated. A t-test and correlation were used to test null hypotheses. Results revealed that average language competencies had a mean score of 2.32 (M=2.32) to average parental engagement, which had a mean score of 2.20 (M=2.20) with a mean difference of 0.12 (M=0.12). The mean difference is 0.12, which indicates that parental engagement had a very small influence on the acquisition of early language competencies. The correlation coefficient between parental engagement with (M=2.20; SD=.874) and language competencies with (M=2.32;

ⁱ Correspondence: email connie.onyango@yahoo.com

SD=.817; $t(254) = .832$ $p = .000$ two-tailed) indicated that the relationship between parental engagement and language competencies was positive and had high significance. Averagely, the mean score for parental engagement in private schools was 3.49 ($M = 3.49$), and the mean score for public schools was 1.91 ($M = 1.91$) with a mean difference of 1.58 ($M = 1.58$). It was concluded that the majority of parents did not participate in their children's early language acquisition activities. However, parents of children from private schools participated more in their children's language acquisition than parents of children from public schools. This research recommended that public school parents encourage each other to be actively involved in their children's language activities at home. Parents from public schools should inspire each other to collaboratively work together to support the provision of language teaching and learning resources. Public school administrators and managers should organize workshops for parents to educate them on how they can guide their children on where, when and how to do language activities, how to access educative language resources from the internet, and how to find developmentally appropriate language programs on television.

Keywords: early language competencies, parental engagement, learning activities, pre-primary school

1. Introduction

Language can be defined as a mechanism of correspondence and the basic part of socialization as it furnishes learners with abilities that are vital for listening and talking and in particular, creating, perusing and composing preparation (Maaleki, 2018). Early language skills, in addition, play an important role in developing children's ability to learn and read (Hulme *et al.*, 2015). Early language skills, especially reading skills, play an important role in enhancing learners' academic achievement in later school years (Mkandawire, 2022). Language typically has four basic skills (Aydogan & Akbarov (2014). These are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Sadiku, 2015). Children who fail to acquire appropriate language competencies in their early years are at risk of developing low academic outcomes, behavioural problems and social and emotional problems, which are likely to persist to maturity (Winstanley *et al.*, 2018). Children with persistent language problems in kindergarten will have a low level of continuous reading by the time they begin formal schooling. Similarly, learners with weak language skills will have difficulty understanding the learning process (Rintaningrum *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the importance of early language competencies cannot be underrated. Globally, millions of learners are not achieving the expected language competence level despite the significance placed on the acquisition of early language competencies. Research has shown that 250 million learners have not acquired basic language competencies (UNESCO, 2017a). For example, in Iran, only 65% of grade four learners were able to read for understanding (Mullis, *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, in India, pupils in grades four and five were not able to tell stories in English (Trefters-Daller *et al.*, 2022). In Pakistan, Shakil,

(2020) reported that primary school learners have inadequate competencies in reading English. Adelaide *et al.* (2022) ascertained that the reading skills of grade two Filipino school children were very disappointing, raising concerns about the quality of preschool language acquisition, which is the foundation for learning.

In Africa, among the 387 million illiterate children worldwide, the majority of the pupils live in Sub-Saharan Africa (RTI, 2015). In the Gweru region, Precious and Lettiah (2020) found out that the majority of Form 4 Zimbabwean learners scored low on writing competencies. This raises concerns over the strength of early language competencies laid in pre-primary school years. In Lusaka, Zambia, Zulu (2019) found that on selective reading tests in grades one to five, 55.6% of fifth graders performed below average, and only 44.4% scored average or higher, while in writing, it was found that 94.9% scored below average and only 5% scored above average. In South Africa, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results (2019) indicated that only 22% of grade four pupils could read and understand (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2020). In rural areas of eastern Congo, reading and learning outcomes were very low an indication that these learners were lacking foundational language skills (USAID, 2020). In Uganda, Ssentanda *et al.* (2020) revealed that many learners demonstrated low literacy competencies. The low language performance in later years of schooling could be linked to the inadequate language competencies acquired in pre-primary school years, which are the foundational stages of language development.

In Kenya, low language proficiency was evident in results from various studies. In Vihiga County, Anyiendah *et al.* (2020) found that elementary school learners performed worse in English tests than their peers in neighbouring counties over time. In Kisii District, Obunga (2016) found that 3rd graders read below their grade level. Ondimu (2018) reported that the implementation of a competency-based curriculum in preschools was not good which lays the foundation for the acquisition of early language skills. Still, in Kenya, Karanja found that the majority of grade seven learners in Bungoma County were experiencing reading difficulties (Karanja, 2021). The low language performance witnessed in later levels of schooling could be attributed to inadequate early language competencies at pre-primary school levels, which was the focus of this study.

In Busia County, achievement in language competencies was unsatisfactory. For instance, Karogo *et al.* (2020) found that learners' performance in English was 475.3 while that of Kiswahili was 493.1, which was below the national standardized mean of 500. The low performance in language competencies at higher levels of education raised concerns over children's early language competencies in pre-primary schools in Busia County. In addition, studies on language conducted in Busia County had mainly focused on teaching approaches in primary and secondary schools (Wakasiaka, 2022), language use (Oliwa, 2022) and literacy environment (Mugambi, *et al.*, 2021). Even though language is one of the learning areas in the competency-based curriculum which was adopted to replace the 8-4-4 curriculum in Kenya, studies have shown that low acquisition of early language competencies has adverse effects on children's performance. The low performance in language competencies at higher levels of education raised concerns over

children's early language competencies in pre-primary schools in Busia County. The studies conducted in Busia County to investigate the factors contributing to low language competencies had mainly focused on teaching approaches in primary and secondary schools and literacy environments and not on parental engagement. There was, therefore, a need to establish children's early language competencies in pre-primary schools in Busia County with a focus on parental engagement.

1.1 Objective of the Study

To explore the relationship between children's early language competencies and parental engagement in learning activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement model developed by Joyce Epstein (2009). The model checks out the interrelationship between the parent, school, family, local area, and children's learning results. Identifying the interdependency of the critical conditions, the model has six levels of parental commitment, specifically positive or nurturing home conditions, imparting or communicating information, chipping in or partnering in home learning activities, dynamic or assertive shared decision-making actions within the school and teaming up with the local area or community partnerships. This model involves parents' input in providing family support, considering the child's behaviour, family dynamics, and environmental factors to help development, advancement, and education in all its forms, at all ages and grades. Communication, as envisaged by Epstein, entails two-way correspondence channels between home and school. Volunteering is geared towards family engagement as volunteers or willing partners in school matters.

Parents and caregivers actively participate in their children's academic development through activities like goal-setting, reading, and completing school assignments. Dynamic or assertive shared decision-making actions within the school, she views schools, families and community sharing responsibilities as significant in terms of the advancement of the children and acquisition of early language competencies. It involves activities such as participating in parent associations. Community collaboration involves identifying and matching resources to help schools and families in the community support learning. In Epstein's view, schools, families and community sharing responsibilities are crucial to the progress of the children and the acquisition of early language competencies. This model is relevant to this present study as children's learning is heavily influenced by their home and school settings.

2.2 Empirical Studies and Knowledge Gaps

To be "actively involved," parents must have a two-way dialogue with teachers on their children's education and other school activities. Learners who have guardians who care

about their education are more likely to be successful academically, socially, and behaviourally. In the United States, Gay *et al.* (2020) investigated the impact of poverty and parental engagement on learners' reading competencies. The study analysed secondary data from an early childhood longitudinal study from 2010 to 2011. This longitudinal study employed direct learner assessments, teacher questionnaires, as well as parent interviews to collect data. The learners were predominantly Black or African American (17%), Hispanic (40%) and White (32%). Lewis *et al.* (2023) looked into how parents and educators interact to determine a child's engagement in preschool. Respondents were selected using a random sampling method. According to the findings, students benefited more from parent-child interaction when teachers actively sought out and responded to family comments and cultural values.

In Hong Kong, Lau and Richards (2021) investigated how children's exposure to a literate home environment affected their language and reading development and the findings showed that students' letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and word comprehension improved significantly when they were actively supported by their families. In Malaysia, Wong and Tan (2021) looked at how parents might help their children in many different ways as they read. The scope-reviewed method was used for this investigation. The results of the articles suggested that parental engagement facilitated children's reading comprehension, fluency and interest.

In Indonesia, Sumanti and Muljani (2021) carried out research on the impact of parental involvement among grade three learners' English self-efficacy. The results showed that parents' involvement at home encouraged their children to learn English. The reviewed study was conducted in a foreign country, lacking a picture of the local context, unlike the current study, which was conducted in Kenya, which was conducted in a local context, thereby bridging the gap in the literature. In China, Feng and Tan (2022) conducted a study to explore the understanding of the impact of the influence of parents on their children's linguistic development in preschool learners. After controlling for the learners' ages, genders, financial backgrounds, and levels of education, it was found that communication between home and school hurt learning methods and language skills. The current research filled in this gap by performing a similar study in the Kenyan context, thereby filling the gap in the literature.

In Nigeria, Iroegbu and Igweike (2020) investigated the influence of parental engagement on lower primary school learners' acquisition of reading competencies in Ondo State, Nigeria. A positive correlation between parental participation and reading proficiency was found in the studies conducted. In Rwanda, Friedland (2019) investigated the impact of household literacy practices on the early-grade reading of learners from rural Rwanda using a randomized control trial. Results showed that early reading achievement might be predicted by a child's level of curiosity, the amount of education their family received, and the level of parental competence. In Zambia, Simweleba and Serpell (2020) studied the impact of parental participation on fourth-grade pupils' mathematics and Chitonga performance. The study found that having involved parents boosted students' academic outcomes. In Tanzania, Nyang'anyi and

Bhalalusa (2023) carried out a study on parental participatory approaches to primary school students' reading and writing skills. The study reviewed above used a purely qualitative approach without a quantitative aspect, which would make it easier to generalize the results. Geraldina *et al.* (2022) studied the effect of parental involvement on students' development of Kiswahili pre-reading skills. The findings showed no statistically significant variance in parental involvement in educational activities between high- and low-performing schools.

In Kenya, Mwangi (2018) conducted a study to investigate whether parental involvement affects the reading comprehension of Kiswahili among 5–6-year-old students in Machakos County using an experimental research design. The results demonstrated a statistically significant variance comparing the control group and the experimental group, suggesting that parental participation in children's reading at home was significantly correlated with students' levels of comprehending what they read. Amunga *et al.* (2020) studied the impact of the parent-teacher connection on the achievement of the competency-based curriculum. Evidence suggests that parents should take an active role in their children's education. The examined research did not establish the strength or direction of a connection between parental participation and children's early linguistic development. Gichana *et al.* (2021) researched to examine the connection between school communication and literacy acquisition of preschool learners in the Manga sub-district, Nyamira County, using a participatory model of Joyce Epstein's parents. The results showed a statistically significant beneficial correlation between student-parent contact and the development of early readers and writers in elementary school. The reviewed study focused on only one aspect of parental involvement, lacking knowledge on the other levels of parental engagement as described by Joyce Epstein's model, unlike the current study, which looked at different levels of parental involvement, bridging this gap in the literature.

Osabinyi and Ouko (2023) designed a study to investigate the effect of parents' involvement in their children's education on the development of their children's early reading skills in Kiambu County, Kenya, employing a descriptive survey design. The outcomes of learners' preliminary literacy abilities in elementary school were found to be affected by parental involvement. In Kenya, Ngangi *et al.* (2023) reviewed the literature to learn more about how parental involvement in their children's education affected their performance in public high schools in Kenya's Kangundo sub-district. The findings showed a moderately positive correlation between parental involvement in tracking educational achievement and pupil achievement. The study reviewed above was conducted at the high school level and used only inferential statistics for data analysis. Therefore, there is a lack of information on early childhood qualifications and also a lack of insights from qualitative data. The current research addresses this void in the literature by combining quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

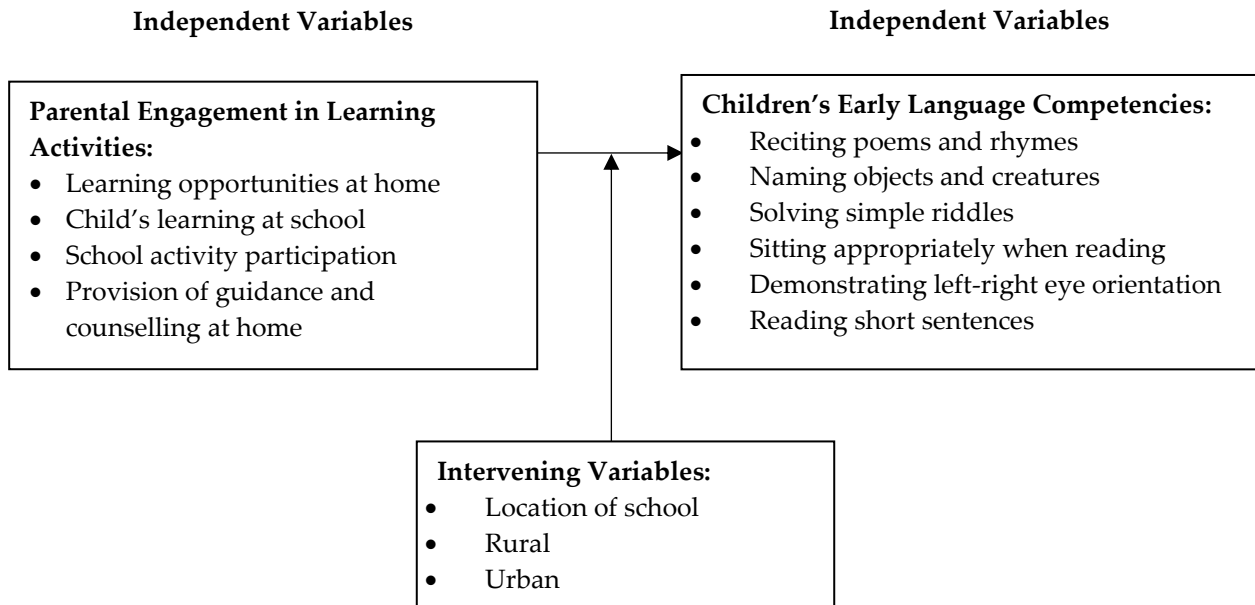


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Locale

The study was carried out in Samia Sub-county, Busia County. In the sub-county, children's ability to acquire early language skills in the early years of schooling was reported to be below the national standard average of 500 (Karogo *et al.*, 2020). Based on this available information, the site was selected for this study. Currently, the teacher: pupil ratio stands at 1:100. Although by the year 2018, the county had 71,519 pre-primary populations, only 51,160 attended pre-primary schools (Busia County, 2023). Samia Sub-County has a total of 50,821 males, 56,341 females and 14 intersex individuals, totalling 107,176 persons (Rok, 2019).

3.2 Research Design and Target Population

The current study utilized a correlational explorative design to investigate the relationship between parental engagement and early language competencies. The correlational explorative design was utilized for fundamental and exploratory examinations to allow for gathering, summing up, presenting, and deciphering information with the end goal of explanation. The study used a correlational explorative approach to show the relationship between school type, learners' gender, parental engagement and learners' acquisition of language competencies. The target population for the study incorporated all 67 public and 40 private pre-primary II units, all pre-primary II teachers, parents and pre-primary II pupils, as per Busia County Director of Education Office (2020) records.

3.3 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The multi-stage sampling (multi-stage cluster sampling) method was employed to generate an appropriate sample size in three stages. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to choose Busia County and Samia Sub County. A stratified random sampling technique was used to group schools into public and private schools. The sub-county has 107 preschools affiliated with primary schools, including 67 public schools and 40 private schools. Public schools had a population of 2,540 PP II learners. Using a random sample method, the Samia Sub-County was chosen from sub-counties found in Busia County. Also, a random selection of the required number of pre-primary II teachers, pre-primary II pupils and their parents in each school was done. Since there were 67 public and 40 private pre-primary schools in Samia Sub County, a simple random sampling technique was used to pick 7 schools based on their category (public or private). Seven public schools and four private were then picked on a random basis with eyes closed.

The study involved a sample size of 7 (10%) out of 67 public-sponsored pre-primary school II (PP2) teachers domiciled in primary schools as well as parents of PP2 pupils and 4 (10%) out of the 40 private ones in the four wards in Samia Sub-county in primary schools. For pre-primary II school pupils, 172 (10%) out of 1,720 from pre-primary public schools and 82 (10%) out of 820 privately sponsored ones formed the sample size. According to Gay and Airasian (2000), a minimum of a 10% sample size is acceptable for descriptive research. For pre-primary II school teachers, one (1) respondent was sampled from every school (Table 1).

Table 1: Sampling Frame

Participants	Categories of Sponsorship	Populace (n)	Sample size	% Sample Size
PP II Teachers	Public	67	7	10%
	Private	40	4	10%
Parents of PP II Children	Public	1,720	172	10%
	Private	820	82	10%
PP II Children	Public	1,720	172	10%
	Private	820	82	10%
Total		5187	519	60%

3.4 Research Instruments

A questionnaire for parents of PP II learners, an interview schedule for PP11 teachers and an early language competency assessment checklist for children were used to collect data. The questionnaires were appropriate for providing cheap, quick, efficient and large amounts of information from a large sample and also allowed for standardization. The research used an early language competencies assessment checklist to ascertain whether some language competencies were attained during class activities. To get more in-depth information, an interview was conducted with pre-primary II teachers using a semi-structured interview.

3.4 Pilot Study

Before actual data collection, questionnaires, an interview schedule guide, and an early language assessment checklist were piloted in two schools that were randomly sampled from the sub-county. One was public, and the other was private. Two preschool teachers, six parents, and six learners who were not involved in the main study were used to prevent too much familiarity with the final data. The questionnaire, interview schedule, and observation checklist were all evaluated for their "face validity" or whether or not they measure what they claim to measure. All of the incorrect materials were revised or discarded (Bui, 2009). After the piloting phase, adjustments were made to ensure the face's authenticity.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher first visited the sampled schools for familiarity and the issuing of consent forms to the head teachers, pre-primary II teachers and parents through teachers for signing. The researcher, in collaboration with a pre-primary II teacher, set a date for carrying out the research. Data was collected in three stages within three weeks. During stage 1, the questionnaires were administered to preschool parents in their children's schools by the researcher during the morning hours. Before filling out the questionnaire, their informed consent was obtained, and an appropriate time to fill out the questionnaire was agreed upon. Rapport was also established with the respondents before administering the questionnaire by clarifying the intentions of the study and how to fill out the questionnaire. The confidentiality of their identity and the anonymity of the information given were assured by the researcher. Thereafter, the questionnaires were administered to the parents. The researcher waited for them to fill the instruments and ensured that every item was filled before collecting them on the same day. With the help of the teacher, fill out a language competencies checklist to establish the language competence levels each sampled learner achieved in each identified and specified learning experience. After the administration of the questionnaires and language competence assessment checklist, selected pre-primary II teachers were interviewed after their informed consent was obtained. The interviewees were asked questions as per the interview schedule, maintaining the order and manner of asking questions among all the interviewees. Meanwhile, the researcher took notes on the responses for later analysis. Each respondent took approximately 12 minutes.

3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

Subjective and quantitative information was used to break down information. Data was summarized using descriptive statistics, such as counts, averages, and percentages, and displayed in tables and figures within the text. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Interview data was evaluated for recurring themes. The following 0.05 significance level null hypotheses were developed and tested.

H01: There is no significant correlation between parental engagement and children's early language competencies

Pearson's Product Moment Connection Coefficient was utilized to test null hypothesis H01.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Bio-Data of the Respondents

Bio-data of the respondents were analysed descriptively using frequency and percentage as shown under the following sub-sections:

4.1.1 Distributions of Parents by Type of School

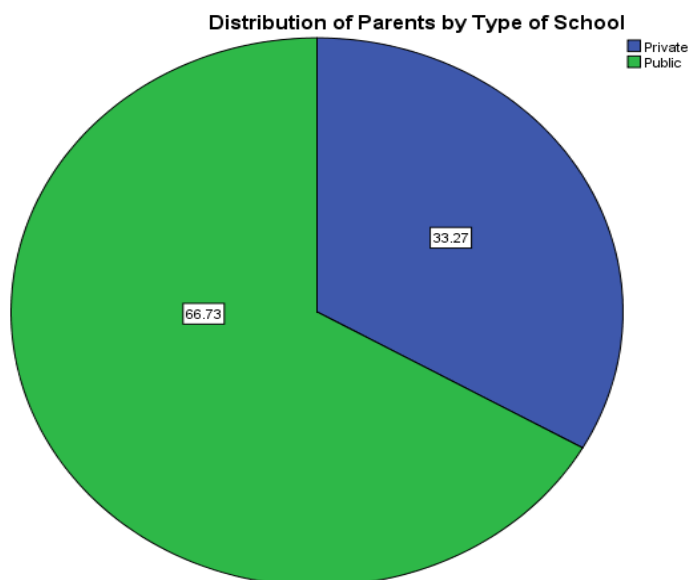


Figure 2: Distributions of Parents by Type of School

Figure 2 indicates that 66.73% of the parents were from public primary schools, while 33.27% of the remaining parents were from private primary schools. This is because public primary schools were many in the study area compared to private schools. Hence, many public schools were selected to provide a fair data representation of the sampled schools.

4.1.2 Distributions of Children by Type of School

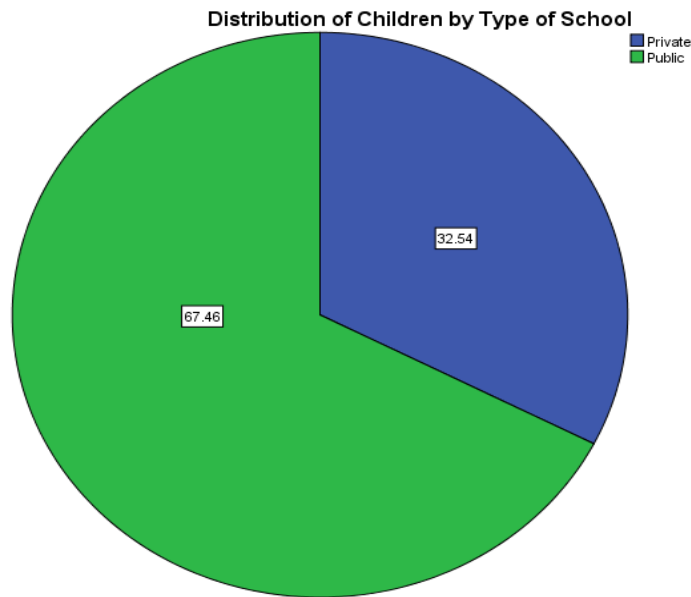


Figure 3: Distributions of Children by Type of School

Figure 3 shows that the majority of the children were in public primary schools (67.46%), while (32.54%) were in private primary schools. This is because public schools were the majority of the sampled schools. Free education requires minimal financial support like buying uniforms and providing few academic requirements, unlike private where fees and facilities are bought by the parents.

4.1.3 Distribution of Parents by Age

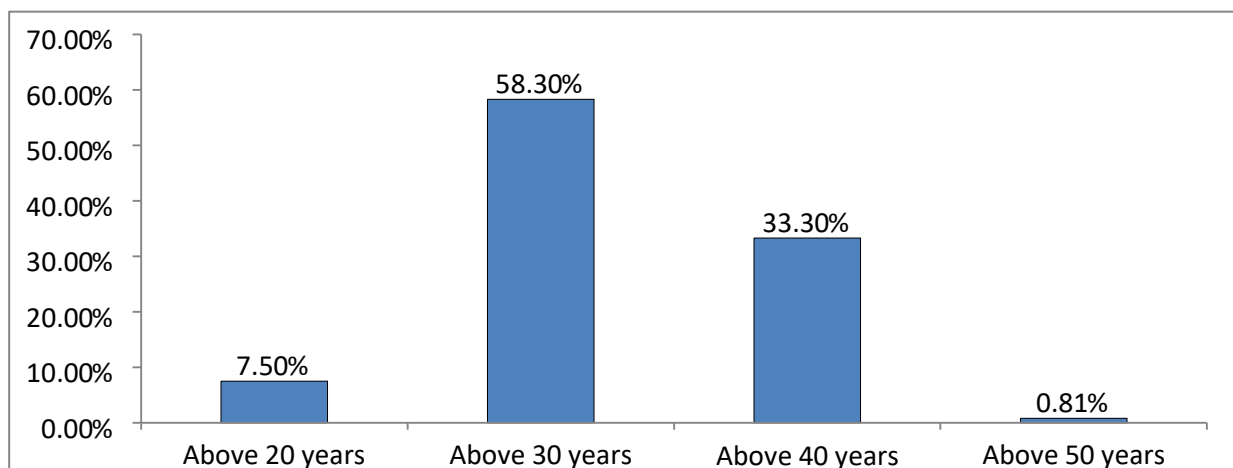


Figure 4: Distribution of Parents by Age

Figure 4 shows that the majority of the parents (58.30%) were aged above 30 years, 33.30% above 40 years and the minority aged above 50 years (0.81%) and 7.60% above 20 years. This implies that at the age of 30 years and above, many young parents have started

taking their children to lower primary school, including PP1, PP II and grades 1 to 3. At the age of 40 years and above, the majority of the parents were parents in upper grades and secondary schools (UNESCO, 2020).

4.1.4 Distribution of Parents by Level of Education

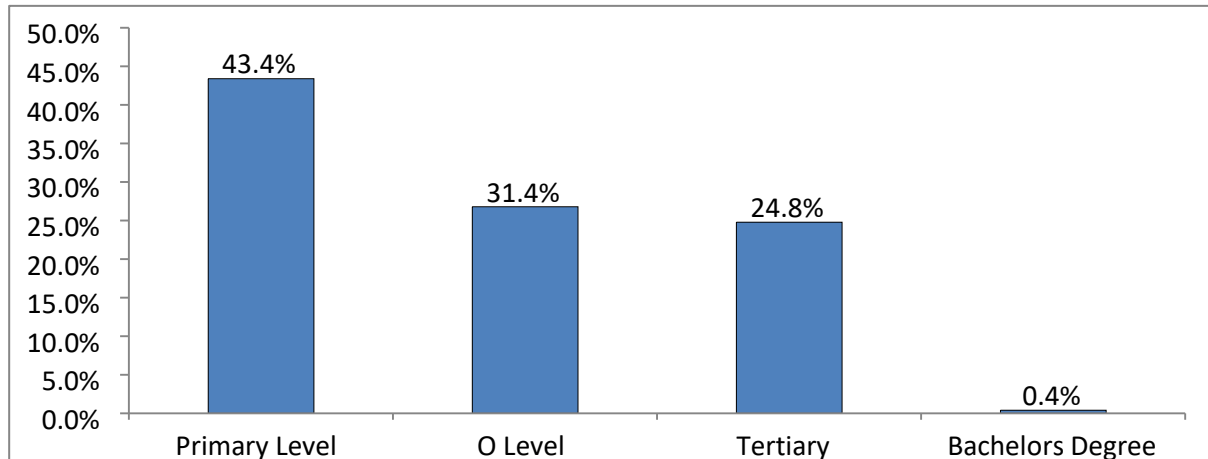


Figure 5: Distributions of Parents by Level of Education

The majority of parents (43.4%) had a primary level of education, as indicated in Figure 5. Secondary level (O level) was 31.4%, 24.8% had diplomas or certificates from tertiary institutions and only 0.4% were university graduates. This implies that most parents with low education levels either dropped out of school or did not continue due to the poverty observed in most parts of Busia County.

4.1.5 Distributions of Parents by Occupation

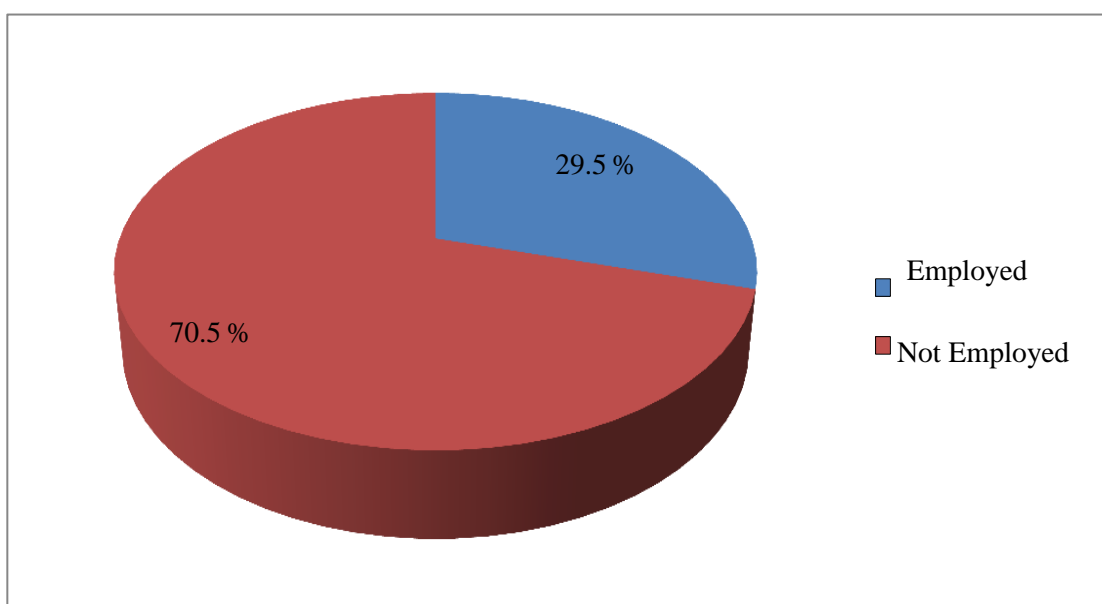


Figure 7: Distributions of Parents by Occupation

Figure 4.5 indicates that the majority of the parents (70.5%) were not employed while the minority who were 29.5% were employed.

4.1.6 Distributions of Parents by Gender

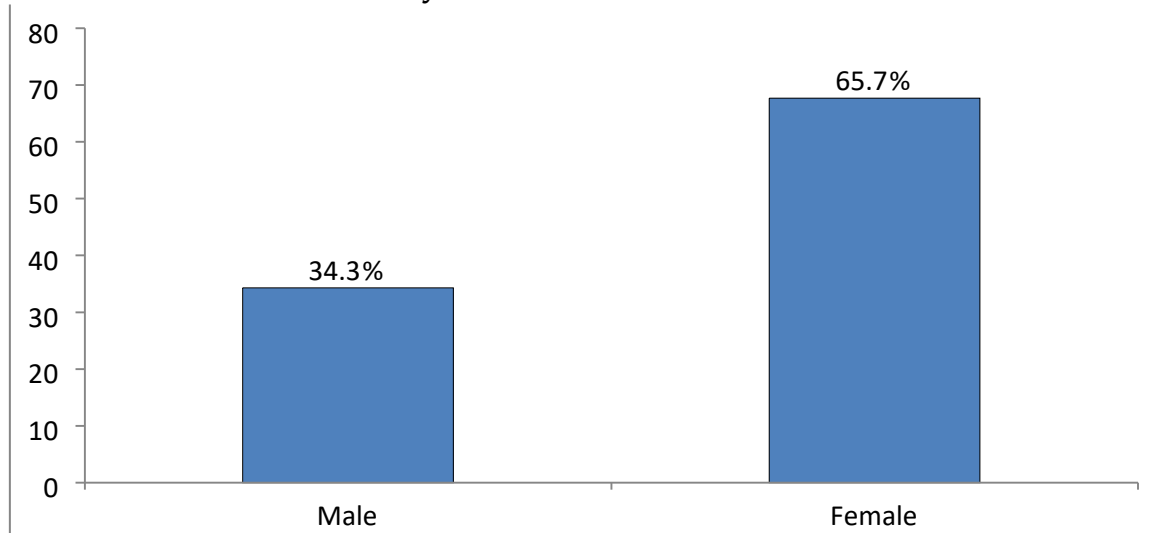


Figure 8: Distributions of Parents by Parents by Gender

From Figure 4.5, the majority of the parents (65.7%) were female compared to (34.3%) who were male.

4.2 Parental Engagement in Learning Activities and Children's Language Competencies

The key aim of this study was to explore the relationship between parental engagement in learning activities and children's early language competencies. The questionnaire had 11 items which were subjected to a four-point item Likert scale whereby pre-primary school parents from private and public schools agreed or disagreed with the indicators (Table 2).

Table 2: Individual mean scores in parental engagement in activities for developing children's language competencies by type of school

	Type of School	N	Mean	Std Dev.
Parents	Private	82	3.14	.650
	Public	172	1.76	.766
Total		254	2.45	.708

Table 2 shows individual mean scores in parental engagement by type of school. The results show that parents from private schools were better involved with a mean score of 3.14 (M=3.14) as compared to children from public schools who had a mean score of 1.76 (M=1.76) with a mean difference of 1.38 (M=1.38). This outcome implies that the mean performance for parents from private schools was higher than the mean for parents from public schools. To obtain a broad perspective regarding the influence of the type of school on

parental involvement in the acquisition of language competencies, interviews with some teachers were conducted where the following views were given:

".....parents who have money take their children to private schools because those centres are better equipped than public schools. We only enrol children from poor homes that cannot afford private schools." (Public School Pre-Primary Teacher 2)

".....Parent guide their pupils to do general homework not only in language but all subjects. As part of the team teaching parents are pillars in all learning activities of pre-school and the CBC in general." (Private School Pre-Primary Teacher 8)

".....Accessibility to the Internet to acquire educative materials is limited due to the low income of most parents in our school. Many parents do not have smartphones hence accessing the internet is difficult." (Public School Pre-Primary Teacher 4)

From interviews, it was revealed that families with high economic status enrolled their children in private schools where they get better educational services.

4.2.1 Parental Engagement in Learning Activities and Children's Early Language Competencies

Table 3 shows the results of Parental Engagement in Learning Activities.

Table 3: Frequencies in Parental Engagement in Learning Activities

Description	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Buy and read story books for my child	44.5%	20.9%	18.5%	16.1%
Tell stories to my child	30.3%	32.7%	29.5%	7.5%
Makes calls to inquire about the child's progress	30.3%	26.8%	31.9%	11.0%
Inquire about strengths and weaknesses	27.2%	31.1%	32.3%	9.4%
Attend school-organized functions	30.7%	28.7%	29.5%	11.0%
Offer donations	42.9%	27.6%	17.7%	11.8%
Offer voluntary services	40.9%	29.9%	20.1%	9.1%
Watch informative programs with my child	25.2%	33.1%	27.6%	14.2%
Guide how to do language activities	15.4%	40.2%	26.4%	18.1%
Guide on assessing educative Internet materials	25.6%	32.7%	24.4%	17.3%
Average parental engagement	31.3%	30.4%	27.7%	12.7%

The result from Table 3 above on the frequency at which parents participated in their children's language acquisition activities shows that 31.3% never engaged themselves in their children's activities 30.4% rarely engaged, 27.7% engaged sometimes and 12.7% always engaged. This shows that the majority of parents sampled did not participate in their child's early language acquisition activities.

Table 4: Parental engagement and development of early language competencies

Description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
I buy and read story books for my child	254	1	4	2.06	1.130
I tell stories to my child and ask him to retell after listening to it	254	1	4	2.14	.939
I frequently make calls to the teacher to inquire about the child's progress	254	1	4	2.24	1.006
Make inquiries about my child's strengths and weaknesses in language	254	1	4	2.24	.958
Attempt to meet my child's teacher to discuss language assessment tools and results	254	1	4	2.26	1.005
I attend organized functions of the school about language improvement	254	1	4	2.21	1.002
I offer donations to the school during prize-giving day	254	1	4	1.98	1.041
I offer voluntary services in my child's school to help out in activities that boost language acquisition	254	1	4	1.97	.988
I watch informative television programs with my child to improve language competencies	254	1	4	2.31	1.002
I guide my child on when, where and how to do his language activities	254	1	4	2.47	.960
I guide my child in accessing educative, age-appropriate material on the internet to improve language competencies	254	1	4	2.33	1.042
Average	254			2.20	1.007

Accumulative analysis that was aimed to evaluate the average mean and standard deviation was further performed and the result is displayed in Table 4. The mean score in parental engagement in activities for the development of language competencies was 2.20.

Table 5: Overall mean scores of parental engagement and learners' acquisition of language competencies

Description	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Average language competencies	2.32	.817	254
Average parental engagement	2.20	.874	254

Table 5 shows the results of the average language competencies and average parental engagement were compared. The result shows that average language competencies had a mean score of 2.32 compared to average parental engagement which had a mean score of 2.20. Data analysis from interviews indicated ways parents were involved in children's early language competencies including buying storybooks, telling children stories, collaborating with teachers in language activities, guiding children in language activities, guiding children to access educative language programs on television, assisting children to read at home and reading to children. To obtain a broad perspective regarding parental engagement in learning activities teachers were interviewed and they expressed the following:

".....As a class teacher, some of my parents rarely inquire about their children's academic progress and this has made their children not complete assignments and made them progress progressively in class activities like reading on their own and storytelling and poem recitation (Preschool teacher from public school." (Private School Pre-Primary Teacher 8)

".....Few parents in pre-primary school come to voluntarily help us organize language symposiums or even give us moral support during debate competitions. Sometimes parents voluntarily pay for symposium expenses for all children." (Private School Pre-Primary Teacher 9)

".....Parents in my schools fear to share their smartphones with their children since they feel that their child can get spoiled from programs such as inappropriate clips." (Public School Pre-Primary Teacher 4)

".....parents occasionally share their children's language acquisition competencies with me to forge a way forward. I usually guide them on how they can engage them at home" (Private School Pre-Primary Teacher 10)

".....most of the parents are cooperative in that they buy books for their children. Most of them have bought reading storybooks for their children. Sometimes these children bring them to school so that I can see their newly bought books." (Private School Pre-Primary Teacher 11)

Findings from interviews with teachers from both private and public schools indicated the different ways parents were engaged in activities on developing children's language competencies such as buying storybooks, telling children stories, collaborating with teachers in language activities, guiding children in language activities, guiding children to access educative language programmes on television, assisting children to read at home and reading to children. Lack of implementation of the above strategies can lead to inadequate acquisition of language competencies. Further, the study sought to establish whether there was a significant relationship between parental engagement and children's early language competencies.

4.2.2 Hypothesis testing

The null hypothesis below was tested using the Pearson correlation moment coefficient.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between parental engagement in learning activities and children's early language competencies.

Table 6: Correlation between parental engagement and children's early language competencies

		Average language competencies	Average parental engagement
Average language competencies	Pearson Correlation	1	.832**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	254	254
Average parental engagement	Pearson Correlation	.832**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	254	254

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

Table 6 indicates that the coefficient correlation between parental engagement and children's early language competencies was $r = .832$ with a p -value of 0.000 . These results indicated that the relationship between parental engagement and language competencies was high and the relationship between parental engagement and children's language competencies was significant. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the assumption that there was a relationship between parental engagement in children's education and children's early language competencies was upheld. These results also denote that parental engagement influenced children's early language competencies language competencies.

The findings of this study are supported by Gay *et al.* (2020), who studied the effects of parental involvement on children's reading skills. Research shows that parental involvement has a positive and significant impact on learners' acquisition of language skills. Similarly, Lau and Richards (2021), who studied the effects of the home literacy environment on children's literacy and English skills using analytic design, found that engagement in the family background is strongly correlated with learners' acquisition and development of alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, and vocabulary. Furthermore, Iroegbu and Igweike (2020) studied the effect of parental involvement on the acquisition of reading skills of primary school students. Research results show that there was a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and the acquisition of reading skills. Gichana *et al.* (2021) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between home communication and literacy acquisition of preschool students. Research shows that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between home communication and the acquisition of reading and writing skills in preschool learners, results which are similar to the findings of this study.

These findings are supported by a study conducted in China by Yang and Chen (2023), who conducted a meta-analysis to determine the influence of parental involvement on students' writing ability. Research results show a positive and meaningful relationship between parental involvement and learners' writing ability. Also in Tanzania, Nyang'anyi and Bhalalusesa (2023) carried out a study on parental participatory approaches to primary school students' reading and writing skills. Research results showed that parental involvement affects learners' language ability. Furthermore, the results are supported by a study conducted in Tanzania, by Kigobe *et al.* (2021) who

conducted a study to investigate the impact of parental involvement interventions to promote literacy in second-grade students. Research results show that the intervention group has significantly improved in decoding skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension before and after the intervention.

In addition, in Kenya, Ngangi *et al.* (2023) conducted a review to investigate the influence of parents' role in academic supervision on student achievement in public high schools in the Kangundo sub-county. The results established a weak positive association between the role of parents in monitoring academic performance and student achievement, results which are contrary to the findings of this study. The results of this study also contradicted the conclusions of Geraldina *et al.* (2022), who studied the effect of parental involvement on the pre-reading skills of Kiswahili learners. The results showed no statistically significant difference in parental involvement in high-performing schools and parents in low-performing schools in educational activities.

Interview outcomes from the present study showed that, buying storybooks, telling children stories, collaborating with teachers in language activities, guiding children in language activities, guiding children to access educative language programs on television, assisting children to read at home and reading to children. This result is similar to that of Friedland (2019) investigated the influence of the home literacy environment on early-grade reading of learners from rural Rwanda using a randomized control trial. The study revealed that the parental role in reading to their children significantly predicts the acquisition of early language competencies. Similarly, Sumanti and Muljani (2021) conducted a study to investigate the effect of parental engagement on grade three learners' English self-efficacy. The results showed that parents' involvement at home encouraged their children to learn English.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings it was concluded that private school learners had acquired better language competencies than their counterparts from public schools. Indicating that private schools offered superior language acquisition experiences than public schools. It was concluded that the majority of parents did not participate in their children's early language acquisition activities. However, parents of children from private schools participated more in their children's language acquisition than parents of children from public schools.

6. Recommendations

- 1) The findings revealed low parental engagement in public schools. It is therefore recommended that public school parents encourage each other to be actively involved in their children's language activities at home.
- 2) Public school administrators and managers should organize workshops for parents to educate them on how they can guide their children on where, when and

how to do language activities, how to access educative language resources from the internet, where to buy language resources and how to find developmentally appropriate language programs on television.

- 3) The Ministry of Education needs to begin programs in schools where parents are encouraged to be actively involved in the acquisition of their children's language competencies.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Consolata Nabwire Onyango is an Educator. She is a PhD student in Early Childhood Education at the Department of Early Childhood and Special Needs Education in the School of Education Kenyatta University, Kenya. Her hobby is advancing in research in Child Growth and Development, Early Years Learning and Child Psychology.

Dr. Nyakwara Begi is lecturer in the School of Education at the Department of Early Childhood and Special Needs, Kenyatta University, Kenya. Area of specialization early childhood education. Research Interests: Economics of Early Care and Education; Educational Leadership and Management; Competency-Based Education, Competency-Based Curriculum; Competency-Based Assessment.

Dr. Juliet Mugo is lecturer in the School of Education at the Department of Early Childhood and Special Needs, Kenyatta University, Kenya. Her area of specialization is Human & Child Psychology. Research interests is Child Growth & Development, ECDE Curriculum Development & Implementation, Teaching Pedagogies in ECE.

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