ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is widely considered as one of the most essential elements of a language. It plays a pivotal role in determining whether or not learners will communicate in a language they have learnt successfully. Extensive knowledge of English vocabulary is believed to be important for the four macro skills thus; reading, listening, speaking and writing. In fact, our lack of English vocabulary knowledge is more likely to result in great difficulty in expressing ourselves both in speaking and writing. Because of the significance of vocabulary knowledge in effective language learning, vocabulary learning and instruction are attracting considerable attention from researchers and practitioners. The current study posits that learners" English vocabulary development may be influenced by school, home and family environment. The Kenyan secondary school curriculum advocates for an integrated approach in teaching of English language. The integrated approach together with socio-cultural contexts where learners come from should provide sufficient contact with English language vocabularies. The paradox is regardless of such exposures, learners still indicate deficiency in expression skills in their speech and written work. The main objective of the study was to investigate the socio-cultural influences on learners" English vocabulary development in selected secondary schools in Homa-Bay Town Sub- County. The objectives of the study were to: establish sources of English vocabularies and their influences on secondary school learners" vocabulary development and investigate vocabulary teaching methods used by Lower Nyokal Division teachers of English. The study was guided by a conceptual framework drawn from Celce Murcia (2001) which contains 9 trends of language teaching. From these trends, the research draws concepts of Explicit Instruction, Incidental Learning and Strategy Training as a means of vocabulary development. The study employed descriptive survey design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The total population for the study was thirteen teachers of English, 50 English composition scripts, 500 form four learners from 10 schools and 10 accessible parents residing in Lower Nyokal Division in Homa- Bay Town Sub- County, Kenya. Multi-stage sampling was used to obtain various units in the study. Form four learners were purposively sampled. Stratified sampling was used to group the 10 schools into sub-groups of: Mixed, Boys" and Girls" secondary schools. Quota sampling was used to select three schools (A, B and C) from each of the sub-groups. Purposive sampling was used to obtain 3 accessible parents and 3 teachers of English from the selected schools. Data was collected from learners through questionnaires, content analysis of the 50 composition scripts and 3 interview schedules for the teachers and parents. Data from completed questionnaires were scrutinized then coded for computer analysis using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The collected data from questionnaires, interviews and composition scripts were organized into themes which included; sources of English vocabularies and their influences on learners" vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction. The findings on sources and influence on vocabulary development indicate that learners obtain English vocabularies mostly from school and sparingly from home and family. Vocabulary instruction indicates that most Lower Nyokal teachers preferred using dictionaries as opposed to context when it comes to finding the meaning of unfamiliar word. The study recommends frequent utilization of English language in all the suggested environments; it also suggests a combinational approach towards vocabulary teaching. The findings have pedagogical as well as theoretical implications for Applied Linguists and educators in ESL.