



## Assessment of English Grammar Functioning Level of Class Three Prelingually Deaf Learners in Kenya

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### Abstract

Learners in different countries are currently being taught language at their functioning level irrespective of grade levels. District Evaluation Tests in Kenya indicate that Class Three prelingually deaf learners are not being taught English at their functioning level. During the period 2010 - 2012, the learners obtained mean scores of 19.1-29.9%. However, the results did not show their functioning level in grammar to facilitate suitable intervention. The purpose of the study was to assess the learners' functioning level in English grammar. Theory of Syntax by Noam Chomsky was adapted and used. The study employed qualitative and evaluative research designs. Study population consisted of 337 prelingually deaf learners and 65 English teachers. Multi-Stage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 178 learners and 16 teachers respectively for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire and a test. The instruments were verified for validity, and tested for reliability. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and error analysis. None (0.0%) of the 178 learners obtained the criterion pass mark of 50%. The learners' functioning level in English grammar was found to be at Class One level at the beginning of the school year. It was recommended that the learners be taught English grammar from Class One level at the beginning of the school year. The findings may be used by schools and the Ministry of Education for intervention.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Class Three, functioning level, prelingually deaf learner, Kenya.

### 1. Background to the Study

Learners are, currently being taught language at their functioning levels with improved performance in several countries including USA, Britain, Cuba, Canada, India, Singapore and Zambia (Learning Metrics Taskforce, 2003; Migaard and Mingat, 2012; UNESCO, 2014).

Prelingually deaf (PRE-LD) learners in Kenya are expected to master sufficient command of English by the end of Class III to enable them use the language as a compulsory medium of instruction and examination as from Class IV. Although the learners are taught English at Class III LEVEL, District Evaluation Tests indicate they are not functioning at the level. During the period 2010-2012, the learners obtained mean scores of 19.1% to 29.9% in English with no learner getting the criterion pass mark of 50% compared to their hearing peers who had mean scores of 55.6% to 68.9% in the same tests (DEO Bungoma, 2013; DEO Kericho, 2013; DEO Kilifi, 2013; DEO Machakos, 2013; DEO Muranga, 2013; DEO Nakuru, 2013; DEO Nandi, 2013). However, the results did not show the learners' functioning level in grammar, the main component of language. Information that can be used to teach the learners grammar at their functioning level and to inform policy is, therefore, currently lacking.

English grammar functioning levels of Prelingually Deaf Learners (PRE-LD) have been established in different countries to facilitate teaching at functioning levels. The English grammar functioning level of Elementary PRE-LD learners in USA is at Grade I level or (Traxler, 2000). The level is also at Class I or below in Britain (Powers, 2002). The

studies showed that the learners were deficient in English vocabulary and mastery of English grammatical structure. The learners' English sentences tended towards the sentence structure of American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL) respectively.

The two studies were consistent with other studies which also showed that Elementary school PRE-LD learners lacked mastery of English vocabulary and sentence structure (Berent, 1993; Ivimey, 1976; Lederberg, Schick and Spencer, 2012; Marschark and Knoors, 2012; Miller, 2000, 2004; Moeller et al., 2007; Quigley and King 1980; Quigley, Power and Steinkaamp, 1977; Weizerman and Snow, 2001; Wilbur and Quigley, 1975; William, 2012).

However, the studies were related to PRE-LD learners who had been exposed to the target language during the Critical Language Acquisition Period (CLAP) of 0–3 years of age and who had also acquired the language in an environment where it was the home and majority language. PRE-LD learners in Kenya start acquiring English at the age of 3-6 years or later without any prior exposure to language during CLAP. They also acquire the language in an environment where it is not a home or majority language (KIE, 2004b).

Studies have shown that learners who are not exposed to language during CLAP tend to lag behind peers in language acquisition (Emmorey, 2001; Leigh and Newall, 2010; Marschark & Knoors, 2012; Mayberry & Lock, 2003). Studies have also shown that language is best acquired through interaction with its users in a rich language environment. When the input is comprehensible and adequate, grammar is naturally acquired (Chomsky, 1965; Krashen, 1985). The findings by Traxler (2000) and Powers (2002) are not, therefore, applicable to PRE-LD learners in Kenya due to differences in language backgrounds.

Traxler (2000) and Powers (2002) used norm-referenced assessment where the learners' functioning level in grammar was determined relative to the functioning level of hearing peers. In the current study, criterion-referenced assessment where the learners' functioning level was determined against stated curriculum objectives was used. The study is, therefore, different from Traxler (2000) and Powers (2002) due to differences in methodology.

Studies in Africa focusing on functioning levels of prelingually deaf learners in English grammar are limited. However, available research findings indicate that prelingually deaf learners lack the necessary skills in English grammar. Learners with hearing impairment in Nigeria have been found to be deficient in vocabulary and sentence structure at Primary and Secondary School levels (Adamokoya, 2007; Ikonta & Maduekwe, 2005). Similarly, Primary and Secondary school PRE-LD learners in Kenya are deficient in English vocabulary and sentence structure (Maina, 2009, Ogada, 2012). However, the studies did not show the learners' functioning levels in grammar.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Class Three PRE-LD learners in Kenya are expected to master sufficient command of English by the end of Class III to enable them use the language as a compulsory medium of instruction and examination as from Class IV. Although the learners are being taught English at Class III level, District Evaluation Tests for period 2010-2012 indicate that they are not functioning at the level (DEO Bungoma, 2013; DEO Kericho, 2013; DEO Kilifi, 2013; DEO Machakos, 2013; DEO, Mombasa, 2013; DEO Muranga, 2013; DEO Nakuru, 2013; DEO, Nandi, 2013). However, the results did not show the learners' functioning level in grammar, the main component of language.

PRE-LD learners' functioning levels in English grammar have been established in different countries to facilitate teaching at suitable levels. The English grammar functioning level of Elementary School PRE-LD learners in USA is at Grade I level (Traxler, 2000). The functioning level is also at Grade I in Britain (Powers, 2002). However, the findings related to PRE-LD learners who had been exposed to language during CLAP and who had acquired English in an environment where it was a home and majority language. PRE-LD learners in Kenya start learning English upon joining school at the age of 3-6 years of age without prior exposure to any language during CLAP. They also learn English in an environment where it is not a home or majority language.

Studies in Africa also show that PRE-LD learners are deficient in English vocabulary and mastery of sentence structure (Ademokoye, 2007; Ikonta & Maduekwe, 2005; Maina, 2009, 2015; Ogada, 2012). However, the studies did not show the learners' functioning levels in grammar.

The English grammar functioning level of PRE-LD learners in Kenya is, therefore, currently unknown. Consequently, information that can be used to teach the learners English grammar at their functioning level is lacking and there was need to fill this knowledge gap to facilitate suitable intervention.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the English grammar functioning level of Class III prelingually deaf learners in Kenya.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

Qualitative and evaluative research designs were used. Qualitative research design enabled the researcher to analyze Class III PRE-LD learners' mastery of vocabulary, morphological structure and syntactic structure as reflected in their language use and grammatical errors in the English test.

Model II Evaluation design was used. The design relates to evaluation of performance of users or learners as per the expected outcomes (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2004). In the current study, the design was used in the assessment of Class III PRE-LD learners' functioning levels in grammar

### 2.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in thirteen Primary Schools for the Deaf in Kenya. Three other schools were used during the pilot study but were not included in the main study to avoid any bias.

Kenya is in East Africa situated latitude 4.5°N and 4.5°S, and longitude 34.5°E and 42°E occupying an area of 590,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 38,610,097. Administratively, the country is divided into 47 counties with a school for the deaf in nearly every county (KNBS, 2010). The country is a multilingual society with 43 ethnic languages. English is the official language and the medium of instruction in school as from Class IV while Kiswahili is the national language. Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) is the language of the deaf community in the country.

### 2.3 Study Population

The population consisted of 337 Class Prelingually Deaf (PRE-LD) learners and 65 Class III English teachers from the 49 Primary Schools for the Deaf in Kenya.

### 2.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Fischer' formula for determining size for populations of less than 10,000 (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2004) was used. The sample size was 179. However, one learner did not participate in the study due to sickness reducing the actual sample to 178.

A three stage multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 178 Class III PRE-LD learners for the study. The 337 Class III PRE-LD learners in Kenya were randomly grouped into three regions: Western Kenya, Central Kenya and Eastern Kenya. The distribution of the learners was as follows: Western Kenya; 218 learners; Central Kenya; 79 learners and Eastern Kenya; 40 learners.

The sample for the regions was proportionately calculated using percentages as follows:

Sample for a region =  $\frac{PR}{P} \times S \times 100$ ;

Where:

PR=population of PRE-LD learners in the region;;

P=Study population

S=Study Sample.

Samples for the regions were; Western Kenya:  $\frac{218}{337} \times 179 \times 100 = 116$ ; Central Kenya:  $\frac{79}{337} \times 179 \times 100 = 42$ ; Eastern Kenya:  $\frac{40}{337} \times 179 \times 100 = 21$

The Schools for the Deaf in each region were then randomly selected and all the Class III PRE-LD learners in each selected school were included in the sample until the sample size for the region was reached. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 16 teachers who were the Class III English teachers in the thirteen schools.

### 2.5 Instruments for Data Collection

Data was collected using a researcher-made English Grammar Test for Class III PRE-LD learners and a questionnaire for Class III English teachers.

## 2.6 The Researcher-made English Grammar Test for Class III PRE-LD Learners

The test which was based on the Primary School English Curriculum (KIE, 2004a) consisted of the following three sub-tests; Class I Grammar Sub-test, Class II Grammar Sub-test and Class III Grammar Sub-test. The criterion pass mark was 50% (KIE, 2006).

### i) **Class I Grammar Sub-test**

The Sub-test was used to collect data relating to the learners' mastery of Class I level English grammar as specified in Class I English syllabus.

### ii) **Class II Grammar Sub-test**

The Sub-test was used to collect data relating to the learners' mastery of Class II level English grammar as specified in Class II English syllabus.

### iii) **Class III Grammar Sub-test**

The Sub-test was used to collect data relating to the learners' mastery of Class III English grammar. as specified in Class III English syllabus.

## 2.7 Questionnaire for Class III English Teachers

The questionnaire was used to collect data relating to the learners' demographic background information including chronological age, age at onset of deafness, age at the time of joining school, age at the time of data collection, class joined upon first admission, mode of communication known at the time of joining school, languages known at the time of the study, language used as First Language (L1), English curriculum being used; and parents' knowledge of English and KSL, language used at home and school language.

## 2.8 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

### 2.8.1 Validity of the Instruments

Face and content validity was verified by Class I-III English teachers of the deaf. The teachers were to verify whether or not each sub-test covered 80% of the curriculum content and whether the proportion of the test items devoted to each skill was proportionate to the coverage of the skill in the syllabus. They were also to verify the suitability of language used and the duration of each sub-test. The teachers were provided with copies of Class I, II and III English syllabi and content verification guides for this purpose. Feedback received was used to improve the instruments.

### 2.8.2 Reliability of the Instruments

The reliability of each sub-test was established using test-retest with 34 (10%) learners. The reliability coefficient of each sub-test was accepted at 0.70 or above and was determined using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) at  $p < 0.05$ . The correlation coefficient for Class I Grammar Test was 0.90, Class II Grammar was 0.89, Class III Grammar was 0.83.

## 2.9 Methods of Data Analysis

Data relating to the learners functioning level in grammar was analyzed using a language rating scale with a criterion pass mark pre-set at 50%, frequency counts and means. The rating scale was used as follows: 0-24: Very Weak; 25-49%: Weak; 50% or above: Grade Functioning Level Attained. The learners were considered to be functioning at a given grade level when at least 50% (89) of them obtained the criterion pass mark.

Error analysis was used to qualitatively analyze data relating to the learners' mastery of English according to emerging themes and reported as follows: grammatical categories, morphological structure and syntactic structure. Where a skill was tested with one or two test items a learner was considered to have the skill when he or she got the test items correct. Where a skill was tested by three or more test items a learner was considered to have mastery of the skill when he or she got at least a half of the test items correct. The learners were considered to have mastery of a given skill when at least 50% of them (89) had the skill.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 Demographic background information about the sample

All the 178 PRE-LD learners had been assessed and referred to the schools for placement by the Ministry of Education's Educational Assessment & Resource Services (EARS) program and were either born deaf or became deaf before acquiring spoken language. The hearing loss was 90 decibels or above in the better ear measured at 500 Hertz (Hz) 1000 Hz. 2000 Hz. and 4000 Hz. They started acquiring English upon joining school at the age of 3-6 years of age and had no exposure to language during CLAP. They were using gestures, pointing and other forms of body language for communication at the time of joining school except one (0.6%) learner who was a deaf child of a deaf parent. The learners' primary mode of communication in school at the time of data collection was Kenyan Sign Language (KSL). All the learners grew up in homes where English was neither a home language nor a majority language in the community.

#### 3.2 Class III PRE-LD Learners' Functioning Level in English Grammar

The learners' functioning level in grammar was determined using a language rating scale with the criterion pass mark set at 50%. The scale was used as follows: 0-24%: Very Weak; 25-49%: Weak; 50% or above: Grade Functioning Level Attained. The learners were considered to have attained a given grade level when at least 50% (89) of learners obtained the criterion pass mark.

At Class III level 177 (99.4%) learners were very weak with scores ranging from 0-24%. The remaining one (0.6%) learner scored between 25-49%. None of the learners obtained the criterion pass mark of 50%. From the results the learners' functioning level in English grammar was below Class III level.

At Class II level, 144(80.9%) were very weak recording 0-24 marks. The remaining 34(19.1%) scored 25-49%. None of the learners obtained the criterion pass mark. From the results the learners' functioning level in English grammar was below Class II level.

At Class I level, 135(75.8) learners were very weak obtaining 0-24%. The remaining 43(24.2%) obtained 25-49%. None of the learners obtained the criterion pass mark. From the results, the learners had not attained Class I level grammar. The results meant that the learners' functioning level in grammar was at Class I level which is the beginning grade in Primary School in Kenya which is equivalent to the English grade level of a pre-school graduate.

The finding concurred with Traxler (2000) who found that the functioning level of Elementary School PRE-LD learners in USA was at Grade I level or below. It is also consistent with findings by Powers (2000) which also showed that the English grammar functioning of Elementary School PRE-LD learners in Britain was at Grade 1 level or below. However, the findings by Traxler (2000) and Powers (2002) related to PRE-LD learners who had been exposed to language during CLAP and who had acquired English as the target language in an environment where it was the home and majority language. The finding of the current study related to PRE-LD learners who were not exposed to any language during CLAP and who had been taught English in an environment where it was not a home or majority language.

#### 3.3 Mastery of English Grammar Skills

The learners' mastery of grammar skills was determined by qualitatively analyzing grammatical errors reflected in the test scripts according to the following emerging themes: grammatical categories, morphological structure and syntactic structure. The analysis was based on the expected curriculum outcomes as stipulated in the curriculum Class I-III English syllabi using grammar analysis guides.

#### 3.4 Mastery of Grammatical Categories

##### 3.4.1 Mastery of Articles

The learners were tested on mastery of the use of the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' as determiners in simple sentences. The learners were asked to observe a picture then complete a simple sentence taking the pattern: **This/That is a/an....** Only 35 (19.7%) used the indefinite article 'a' correctly and 23(12.9%) learners used 'an' correctly. From the results, the learners lacked mastery of indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'.

### 3.4.2 *Mastery of Adjectives*

Mastery of adjectives entailed use of the possessive adjective first person singular,; quantitative adjectives; base form, comparative and superlative adjectives; relative adjective **'who'**; and indefinite adjectives. The learners were asked to fill blanks in simple sentences using suitable adjectives selected from four choices in each case.

The results showed that 65 (36.5%) learners used the possessive adjective first person singular 'mine' correctly, 47 (26.4%) used the quantitative adjective 'many' correctly, 36 (21.3%) learners used the qualitative pronoun 'much' correctly, 103 (57.9%) and 162 (90.4%) learners used the descriptive adjectives 'small' and 'big' correctly respectively, 26 (14.6%) learners used the comparative adjective 'bigger' and 17(9.6%) learners used the superlative adjective 'biggest' correctly respectively, 59 (33.4%) learners used the relative adjective 'who' correctly, 14(7.9%) used the indefinite adjective 'any' and 39 (21.9%) learners used 'some' used correctly respectively.

From the results, the learners had mastery of the base form of the descriptive adjectives but lacked mastery of comparative, superlative, possessive , quantitative, qualitative, relative and indefinite adjectives. Descriptive adjectives are acquired in Class One at the beginning of the school year (KIE, 2004a).

### 3.4.3 *Mastery of Adverbials*

Mastery of adverbials entailed the use of adverbs of time, manner and reason. The learners were asked to fill blanks in simple sentences using suitable adverbs selected from four options.

The results showed that 114 (64.0%) and 123 (69.1%) learners used the adverbials of time 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' correctly respectively, 100 (56.2) learners used the adverbial of manner 'slowly' correctly and 23 (12.9%) learners used the adverbial of reason 'because' correctly.

From the results, the learners had mastery of the use of adverbials of time and manner but lacked mastery of adverbial of reason. Adverbials of manner and time are acquired in Class One at the beginning of the school year. (KIE, 2004a).

### 3.4.4 *Mastery of Prepositions*

Mastery of prepositions entailed the use of the prepositions **'on, in, and under'** indicating location of objects. The learners were asked to observe pictures in various locations then fill blank in simple sentences using own words. The results showed that 110 (61.8) used the preposition 'in' correctly, 142 (79.8%) used 'on' correctly and 107 (60.1%) used 'under' correctly. From the results, the learners had mastery of the use of prepositions indicating location. The prepositions are mastered in Class One at the beginning of the school year (2004a).

### 3.4.5 *Mastery of Pronouns*

Mastery of pronouns entailed use of the personal pronoun first person subject singular; personal pronoun first person object singular; reflexive pronoun first person singular; indefinite pronouns; and possessive pronoun first person singular. The learners were asked to fill blanks in simple sentences using suitable pronouns selected from four options in each case,

The results showed that 14 (7.9%) learners used the personal pronoun first person subject 'I' correctly, none of the learners (0.0%) used the indefinite pronouns 'nobody', 'anything' and 'nothing' and the reflexive pronoun first person singular 'myself' correctly. A total of 98 (55,1%) learners used the possessive pronoun first person singular correctly. From the results, the learners had mastery of possessive pronoun first person singular but lacked mastery of indefinite and reflexive pronouns. The possessive pronoun first person singular is acquired in Class One at the beginning of the school year (KIE, 2004a).

### 3.4.6 *Mastery of Verbs*

Mastery of verbs involved the use of action verbs relating to everyday life at home and school; primary auxiliary verbs and modal verbs.

The results showed that 142 (79.8%) learners used the action verb 'running' correctly and 164 (92.1) used 'siting' correctly, 18(10.1%) learners used the modal verb 'may' correctly, 172 (97.86%) learners omitted the auxiliary verbs 'is'

and 177 (99.4%) omitted the auxiliary verb 'are' in their sentences. From the results, the learners had mastery of action verbs relating to everyday life at home and school but lacked mastery of modal and auxiliary verbs. Action verbs relating to home and school are acquired in Class One at the beginning of the school year (KIE,2004a).

### 3.4.7 *Mastery of Conjunctions*

Mastery of the following conjunctions was tested: connecting, coordinating and concession conjunctions. The learners were asked to complete sentences using suitable conjunctions chosen from four options in each case..

A total of 122 (68.5%) learners used the connecting conjunction 'and' correctly, 43 (24.2%) learners used the coordinating conjunction 'but' correctly, 30 (16.9) learners used the concession conjunction 'although' correctly, 37(20.8%) learners used the conditional conjunction 'if' correctly and 24(13.5%) learners used 'unless' correctly respectively. From the results, the learners had mastery of connecting conjunctions but lacked mastery of concession and conditional conjunctions. Connecting conjunctions are acquired in Class II while concessional and conditional conjunctions are acquired in Class III.

From the results relating to mastery of grammatical categories, the vocabulary the learners had mastered were those they were expected to acquire in Class One but lacked Class II and III vocabulary. The results are consistent with earlier findings ( Miller, 2004; Ogada, 2012; Maina,2009; Weizerman and Snow, 2001; Williams, 2012).which showed that PRE-LD learners lacked vocabulary at various stages of the curriculum. However, the findings related to PRE-LD learners who had been exposed to language during the CLAP and who had acquired the target language in an environment where it was the home language .

The results of the current study showed mastery of English grammatical categories by Class III prelingually deaf learners who started acquiring the language at the age of 3-6 years of age without prior exposure to language during CLAP. The learners were also taught English in an environment where it was not a home or majority language. From the results, lack of vocabulary is a contributing factor to the learners' low functioning level in English grammar. The implication is that the teaching of grammar to PRE-LD learners in Kenya should aim at ensuring that the learners acquire the expected grammatical categories at every grade level from Class I-III.

## 3.5 *Mastery of Morphological Structure*

Mastery of the following skills was investigated: mastery of regular plural markers and irregular plural, regular tense markers and irregular tense.

### 3.5.1 *Mastery of regular and irregular plural*

Mastery of regular plural entailed use of the regular plural markers '-s', '-es', '-ies' and '-ves' while mastery of irregular plural forms involved mastery of irregular plural of nouns relating to everyday life at home and school.

A total of 106 (59.6%) learners wrote the plural of 'cat' correctly using the regular plural marker '-s', 52 (29.2%) wrote the plural of 'mango' correctly using the plural marker '-es', 18 (10.1%) learners wrote the plural of 'knife' correctly using the plural marker '-ves', 27(15.2%) learners wrote the plural of 'family' correctly by using the plural marker '-ies'. The results also showed that 15(8.4%) wrote the plural of 'man' correctly, 3(1.7%) wrote the plural of 'ox' correctly, 13(7.3%) wrote the plural of 'sheep' correctly and 17 (9.6%) learners wrote the plural of 'tooth' correctly. From the results, the learners had mastery of the regular plural marker '-s' but lacked mastery of regular plural markers '-es', '-ves', '-ies' and the irregular plural.

Error analysis of the learners responses showed that the learners who did not write the correct plural forms generalized the use of the plural marker '-s' and used it to form both regular and irregular plural. The finding concurred with other findings by Weizerman and Snow (2001); and, William (2012) who found that Elementary and High School PRE-LD learners lacked mastery of vocabulary. The finding of the current study, however, specifically showed the specific plural markers PRE-LD learners lacked by the end of Class III. From the results, lack of mastery of regular and irregular plural is a contributing factor to the learners' low functioning level in English grammar.

### 3.5.2 *Mastery of Tense Markers*

Mastery of the following tense markers was tested: simple past tense marker '-ed', third person singular tense marker '-s'



and present continuous tense marker '-ing'. To test mastery of the plural marker '-ed' the learners were asked to change words from simple present to simple past tense. To test mastery of the tense markers '-s' and '-ing', the learners' use of the two markers in context was analyzed

A total of 166 (93.3%) learners wrote the past tense of 'push' and 169 (94.9%) learners wrote the past tense of 'play' correctly respectively, none (0.0%) of the learners used the tense mark '-ing' correctly. The learners omitted the tense marker their sentences. Similarly, none (0.0%) of the learners used the tense marker '-s' correctly omitting the marker in the sentences.

From the results, the learners had mastery of the simple past tense marker '-ed' but lacked mastery of the present continuous tense marker '-ing' and the simple present third person tense marker '-s'.

The results were consistent with earlier findings which also showed that Elementary and High School PRE-LD learners lacked mastery of tenses (Ivimey, 1976; Quigley and Snow, 1980; Quigley, Powers and Steinkamp, 1977; William, 2012). However, the current study, however, showed the specific tense markers that PRE-LD learners lacked by Class III. From the results, lack of mastery of tense markers is a contributing factor to the learners' low functioning level in English grammar.

### 3.6 Mastery of English Syntactic Structure

To establish mastery of English syntactic structure, the following skills were tested: mastery of plural forms of simple sentences, construction of sentences in different tenses, construction of simple sentences using given sentence patterns, construction of compound sentences, word-order in sentences, use of clauses, verb and adjectival phrases.

#### 3.6.1 Mastery of plural forms of simple sentences

Mastery of plural forms of the following sentence patterns was tested: a simple sentence taking the pattern: **Demonstrative Pronoun+Verb-to-be+Article+Object; Pronoun+Verb-to-be+Article+ noun (This/That is a/an.....)**.

The learners were asked to change a sentence from singular to plural.

The results showed that 159 (89.33%) learners wrote wrong sentences which either had no 'subject-verb agreement'; 158(88.76%) learners used **'these'** instead of **'those'** in their sentences while the remaining 20 (11.24%) learners either used sequences of words that did not make sense. From the results the learners had no mastery of the plural form of a simple sentence taking the pattern: **Demonstrative Pronoun+Verb-to-be+Article+Object**.

The finding is consistent with earlier findings which also showed that the Elementary and High school learners were lagging behind the curriculum in the mastery of sentences (Miller, 2000; Quigley, 1980; Quigley Powers and Steinkamp, 1977; Shagga, 2012; Wilbur and Quigley, 1975)). However, the finding of the current study specifically showed lack of mastery of plural form by PRE-LD learners who were not exposed to language during CLAP. The finding indicated that lack of mastery of plural forms of sentences is a contributing factor to the learners functioning level in English grammar.

#### 3.6.2 Mastery of Use of Tenses in Simple Sentences

Mastery of the use of the following tenses in simple sentences was tested: present continuous, simple present, future, simple perfect, past perfect continuous and simple past perfect tense. The learners were asked to complete simple sentences using own words. Each sentence contained an adverbial of time to signal time of action

A total of 172 (96.6%) learners used wrong words to complete the given sentence in present continuous tense omitting the tense marker '-ing' and the auxiliary verb; 105 (59.0%) learners omitted the tense marker '-s' while completing sentences in simple present tense third person singular; 175 (98.3%) wrote wrong sentences in future tense omitting modal verbs.

None (0.0%) of the learners completed sentences correctly using the simple perfect tense and past perfect continuous tense. However 36 (20.2%) learners completed the sentence correctly in simple past tense.. From the results, the learners lacked mastery of simple past tense, present continuous tense, simple present tense third person singular, future tense, past perfect continuous tense and past perfect tense continuous. The results showed that lack of mastery of tenses is a contributing factor to the learners low functioning level in grammar.

This finding concurred with Berent (2001, 1993), Lerderberg, Schick & Spencer (2012), Qi and Mitchell (2012) who found that PRE-LD learners were deficient in the syntactic structure of written language. However, the finding in the current study specifically showed the tenses that PRE-LD learners lacked by Class III.



### 3.6.3 Mastery of Construction of Simple Sentences

Construction of the following simple sentences was tested: construction of a grammatically correct sentences using the pattern: **'Demonstrative pronoun + verb- to be + (article) + noun'**; construction of simple sentences containing transitive and intransitive verbs; construction of a simple sentence showing the location of an object. The learners were asked to observe given pictures then describe then in simple sentences using own words.

A total of 139 (78.1%) learners constructed grammatically incorrect sentences that took the sentence structure of Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) instead of the expected sentence taking the pattern 'Demonstrative pronoun+auxiliary verb+(article)+noun).

None (0.0%) of the learners constructed grammatically correct sentences in English containing a intransitive and intransitive verbs. The learners also omitted auxiliary verbs in their sentences. From the results, the learners lacked mastery of construction of grammatically correct simple sentences in English. The results showed that lack of mastery of sentence construction is a contributing factor to the learners' low functioning level in English.

The finding is consistent with earlier findings which showed that PRE-LD learners' English sentences tended towards the grammatical structure of sign language (Bernet, 2001; Marschark and Knoors,2012; Marschark, O'Neill & Arendt, 2014;Qi & Mitchell,2012; Shagga, 2001). However, these findings related to PRE-LD learners who had acquired English with Sign Language as L1. The current study related to PRE-LD learners who began to acquire English at the age of 3-6 years without any exposure to language.

### 3.6.4 Mastery of Word-order in Simple Sentences

Mastery of word-order in sentences with the following patterns was analyzed: **'Noun Phrase + auxiliary verb + main verb + noun'** and **'Noun Phrase + auxiliary verb + verb phrase + noun'**.

The learners were asked to re-arrange words in given sentences to form grammatically correct simple sentences in English.

None (0%) of the learners re-arranged the words in the given sentences to form grammatically correct simple sentences in English. The learners either copied the words in the order they were presented or re-arranged them forming meaningless sequences. From the results, the learners lacked mastery of word-order in simple sentences in English. The results showed that lack of mastery of English sentence structure is a contributing factor to the learners' low functioning level in English grammar.

The finding concurred with earlier studies which also showed that Elementary and High school PRE-LD learners lacked mastery of English syntactic structure of ( Bernet, 2001; Quigley and King, 1980, Quigley, Powers and Stincamp, 1977; Shagga, 2012; Wilbur and Snow; 2001). The studies, however, related to PRE-LD learners who had been exposed to language during CLAP. The current study related to PRE-LD learners who had not been exposed to language during CLAP.

### 3.6.5 Mastery of Construction of Compound Sentences

Construction of a compound sentence joined by a relative pronoun and by a coordinating conjunction was tested The learners were asked to join two simple sentences in each case using own words.

A total of 159 (89.3%) learners wrote sequences of words which did not make sense in an attempt construct a compound sentence joined by a relative pronoun. The remaining 19 (10.7%) learners did not attempt the question. Similarly, 174 (97.8%) learners wrote a sequence of words which did make sense while constructing a compound sentence joined by a coordinating conjunction. From the results, the learners lacked mastery of construction compound sentences. The results showed that lack of mastery of construction of compound sentences is a contributing factor to the learners' low functioning level in English grammar.

The finding concurred with Berent (1993,2001), Lederberg,Schick & Spencer(2012, Marschark & Knorr (2012),Moeller, Tomblin,Yoshinaga-Itano, Conner & Jerger (2007; Quigley and King,1980; Wilbur and Quigley, 1975

)which also showed that Elementary school PRE-LD learners were deficient in sentence construction. The current study, however, specifically showed the compound sentences that PRE-LD learners who had not been exposed to language during CLAP. From the finding, lack of mastery of compound sentences is a contributor to the learners low functioning level in English grammar.

### 3.6.6 Construction of simple sentences using verb and adjectival phrases

Mastery of the following verb and adjectival phrases in simple sentences was tested: **used for, looks like, going to, want to, good at**. The learners were asked to complete simple sentences using words chosen from four options.

A total of 160 (89.9%) learners chose the wrong vocabulary to complete a sentence that required the use of the verb phrase '**looks like**'; 173 (97.2%) learners chose wrong vocabulary instead of the verb phrase, '**used for**'; 128 learners' chose a wrong vocabulary instead of the adjectival phrase '**good at**'. From the results, the learners lacked mastery of verb and adjectival phrases.

The findings concurred with Lederberg, Schick and Spencer (2012), Lederberg and Spencer (2001), Weizerman and Snow (2001), William, (2012) who found that Elementary School PRE-LD learners were limited in the use of vocabulary in written language. The current study, however, showed the specific verb and adjectival phrases that PRE-LD learners lacked by the end of Class III.

## 4. Conclusions

It was concluded that the functioning level of Class III PRE-LD learners in Kenya is at at Class I level at the beginning of the school year. The learners were, therefore, lagging behind the curriculum by three academic years and are, therefore, being taught English grammar at a level

above their functioning level. It was also concluded that the learners' low functioning in grammar was due to lack of mastery of grammatical categories, morphological and syntactic structures.

## 5. Recommendations

In light of the finding that the learners' functioning level in English grammar is at Class I level at the beginning of the school year, it was recommended that schools in Kenya should start teaching Class III PRE-LD learners in Kenya English grammar as from Class I level with focus on mastery of grammatical categories, morphological and syntactic structures. The Ministry of Education should also review the current policy requiring PRE-LD learners in the country to start using English as a compulsory medium of instruction and examination as from Class Four.

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