

Enhancing English Oracy Skills in Brikama, The Gambia: The Role of Teacher Curriculum-Awareness in Students' Achievement

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ABSTRACT: English oracy skills are vital for communication, critical thinking, and social interaction, particularly in regions like Brikama, The Gambia, where English is an official language and medium of instruction. This paper investigates the impact of teacher curriculum-awareness on students' achievement in English oracy skills, utilising a mixed-methods approach to explore the relationship. Findings indicate a positive correlation between teachers' understanding of curriculum standards and students' oracy proficiency. The study underscores the importance of targeted teacher training and curriculum alignment to enhance language education in Brikama.

KEYWORDS: Language Proficiency, Oral Communication. English Language Learning, Socio-Cultural Theory, Pedagogical Practices, Language Assessment

INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency is central to academic achievement and social mobility in Brikama, The Gambia, where it functions as the medium of instruction. Despite its importance, many learners struggle with English oracy skills such as fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in spoken communication.

This study examines the relationship between teacher curriculum-awareness and students' achievement in English oracy skills. It is grounded in socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction, and curriculum theory, which stresses alignment between instructional goals and classroom practices. Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding further informs the role of teacher support in language learning.

Oracy refers to the ability to communicate effectively through spoken language, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Alexander, 2008). In multilingual contexts such as The Gambia, oracy is critical for classroom participation and academic success (Harmer, 2007).

Teacher curriculum-awareness refers to teachers' understanding of curriculum goals and their ability to implement them effectively in classroom instruction (Shulman, 1987). However, limited training opportunities in The Gambia affect effective curriculum implementation (MoBSE, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

English oracy skills are essential for academic and professional success in Brikama, yet many students demonstrate low proficiency in spoken English. This challenge is linked to gaps in teacher curriculum-awareness and instructional practices.

Teachers face challenges such as large class sizes, lack of instructional resources, limited training, and inconsistent assessment practices. These factors reduce opportunities for effective oral language development.

This study investigates how teacher curriculum-awareness influences students' English oracy achievement and identifies strategies for improvement.

The study provided answers to three research questions

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Research Questions

1. What is the level of teacher curriculum-awareness regarding English oracy skills, and how does it influence their instructional strategies?
2. What challenges do teachers face in implementing the curriculum to enhance students' English oracy skills?

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3. How does teacher curriculum-awareness impact students' achievement in English oral proficiency, and what strategies can improve both teaching and learning outcomes?

Scope of the Study

This study examines teacher curriculum-awareness and its impact on students' achievement in English oracy skills in Brikama, The Gambia. It focuses on 30 English teachers and 300 students from primary and secondary schools. The study explores teachers' understanding of the English curriculum, their instructional strategies, and challenges in implementing oracy-focused teaching. It assesses students' pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar through oral assessments. Conducted over one academic year, the study identifies effective methods for improving English oracy skills. While limited to Brikama, the findings provide insights into enhancing teacher training, resource allocation, and curriculum alignment. The study excludes other language skills (reading and writing) and acknowledges potential biases in self-reported teacher data.

Significance of the Study

This study enhances teacher curriculum-awareness and its role in improving students' English oracy skills in Brikama, The Gambia. It identifies gaps in curriculum implementation, suggests effective instructional strategies, and highlights challenges such as large class sizes and resource limitations. The findings guide teacher training, curriculum development, and education policy to improve English language instruction. By recommending interactive teaching methods and professional development programs, the study supports better student performance, communication skills, and career readiness. Additionally, it provides a foundation for future research on oracy skill development and language education in The Gambia and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to investigate the relationship between teacher curriculum-awareness and students' achievement in English oracy skills in Brikama, The Gambia. The combination of survey data, interviews, and student assessments ensures a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

A descriptive survey design was chosen to systematically collect data on teachers' curriculum-awareness, instructional strategies, and students' proficiency in spoken English. The study targeted English language teachers and students in primary and secondary schools in Brikama. A sample of 30 teachers was selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of diverse levels of experience, while 300 students were chosen through stratified random sampling to include learners from various grade levels.

Data collection involved three key instruments. First, a teacher survey questionnaire assessed teachers' knowledge of the curriculum, their teaching methods, and the challenges they face in implementing oracy-focused instruction. The survey included Likert scale questions to measure levels of curriculum-awareness and instructional practices. Second, teacher interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences, instructional strategies, and perceived barriers to teaching English oracy skills. Third, a student English oral assessment was used to evaluate students' pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and content relevance. The assessment followed a standardized oral proficiency rubric, with scores ranging from 1 to 4 across key linguistic competencies.

For data analysis, quantitative data from surveys and oral assessments were processed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, to identify trends in teacher curriculum-awareness and student performance. Additionally, correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teachers' curriculum-awareness and students' oracy scores. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews were analysed through thematic analysis, categorizing responses based on emerging themes such as curriculum implementation, instructional strategies, and challenges in teaching oracy skills.

Ethical considerations were central to this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that teachers and students voluntarily took part in the research. To protect privacy, all responses were anonymised, and data were used strictly for academic purposes. The study also received official approval from relevant educational authorities in The Gambia to ensure compliance with research and ethical standards.

By employing this methodological framework, the study provides reliable and actionable insights into how teacher curriculum-awareness influences students' achievement in English oracy skills, offering valuable recommendations for improving language education in Brikama.

Preliminary findings suggest a positive correlation between teacher curriculum-awareness and students' achievement in English oracy skills. Teachers who demonstrate a strong understanding of curriculum standards and employ interactive pedagogical strategies tend to facilitate greater language learning outcomes among students. Challenges such as limited resources and large class sizes hinder effective language instruction but can be mitigated through targeted interventions.

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Surveys and interviews with teachers are conducted to assess their awareness of curriculum standards, instructional practices, and perceived challenges in teaching oracy skills. Additionally, student performance in English oral assessments serves as quantitative data to analyse the impact of teacher curriculum-awareness on achievement.

RESULTS:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents Teachers' Demographic Profile (n = 30)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	60%
	Female	12	40%
Age	20–29	4	13%
	30–39	10	33%
	40–49	9	30%
	50+	7	24%
Experience	1–5 years	5	17%
	6–10 years	9	30%
	11–15 years	8	27%
	16+ years	8	26%

Interpretation:

The data show a balanced distribution of teaching experience, indicating that both novice and experienced teachers participated in the study.

Table 2: Students' Demographic Profile (n = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	155	52%
	Female	145	48%
Age	10–12	95	32%
	13–15	120	40%
	16–18	85	28%
Level	Upper Primary	120	40%
	JSS	110	37%
	SSS	70	23%

Interpretation:

The sample reflects a balanced representation across gender, age, and educational levels.

Table 3: Teacher Curriculum-Awareness Levels

Curriculum-Awareness	Level	Percentage of Teachers (%)
Not familiar at all	5%	
Somewhat familiar	15%	
Moderately familiar	25%	
Very familiar	35%	
Extremely familiar	20%	

Interpretation of Results for Research Question 1

35% of teachers reported being very familiar with the English oracy curriculum, while 25% were moderately familiar. However, 15% had only some awareness, and 5% had little to no understanding, indicating a need for targeted curriculum training.

Table 4: Effectiveness of Instructional Strategies

Instructional Strategy	Not Effective (%)	Moderately Effective (%)	Highly Effective (%)
Pair Work	5%	30%	65%
Group Discussions	5%	20%	75%
Role-Plays	8%	25%	67%
Debates	7%	20%	73%
Oral Presentations	6%	25%	69%
Storytelling	4%	20%	76%
Pronunciation Drills	8%	47%	45%

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Teachers who were highly familiar with the curriculum were more likely to use student-centered strategies such as group discussions, storytelling, and debates, which were rated as highly effective by over 70% of teachers.

Pronunciation drills received the lowest rating, with only 45% considering them highly effective, suggesting challenges in phonetics instruction and pronunciation teaching techniques.

Table 5: Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching Oracy Skills

Challenge	Not a Challenge (%)	Moderate Challenge (%)	Significant Challenge (%)
Large Class Sizes	10%	30%	60%
Lack of Teaching Resources	12%	35%	53%
Time Constraints	15%	40%	45%
Inconsistent Assessments	20%	38%	42%

Interpretation of Results for Research Question 2

Large class sizes were identified as the biggest challenge, with 60% of teachers reporting it as a significant issue. This limits opportunities for individual speaking practice and teacher feedback. 53% of teachers cited a lack of teaching resources, particularly audio-visual aids and oral assessment tools, as a major barrier to improving oracy instruction. Time constraints were also a concern, with 45% of teachers reporting that limited class time prevents effective oral skill development. 42% of teachers found that inconsistent assessment methods hinder progress, as oracy skills are often overlooked in standardized evaluations.

Table 6: Student English Oral Assessment Scores

Score Range	Interpretation	Percentage of Students (%)
0 - 10	Low proficiency	18%
11 - 15	Basic proficiency	35%
16 - 20	Adequate proficiency	32%
21 - 25	Good proficiency	12%
26 - 30	Excellent proficiency	3%

Interpretation of Results for Research Question 3

The majority of students (67%) scored between 11–20, indicating basic to adequate proficiency in English oracy skills. Only 15% of students scored above 20, demonstrating good to excellent fluency, suggesting that oracy instruction requires significant improvement. Students whose teachers had higher curriculum-awareness and used interactive strategies performed better in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use compared to those exposed to traditional lecture-based methods. Students with lower scores (18%) struggled with pronunciation, fluency, and confidence, reinforcing the need for more structured oral practice and pronunciation drills.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that teacher curriculum-awareness has a direct impact on student achievement in English oracy skills. Teachers with strong curriculum knowledge were more likely to use highly effective instructional strategies, leading to better student performance. However, several challenges hinder effective oracy instruction, including large class sizes, lack of resources, and inconsistent assessments.

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are made enhance Teacher Training, Professional development programs should focus on curriculum implementation and interactive teaching techniques. Improve Resource Allocation, Schools should be provided with audio-visual materials, pronunciation guides, and structured oral assessment tools. Increase Oral Practice Opportunities, Teachers should integrate more storytelling, debates, and role-plays into lesson plans, Standardise Oral Assessments, A consistent grading rubric should be introduced to evaluate students' pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary use. Address Classroom Challenges, Policymakers should consider reducing class sizes and allocating more time for spoken English practice in the curriculum, By implementing these strategies, students' English oracy skills can be significantly improved, ensuring better communication skills, academic success, and future career opportunities in The Gambia.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study and the reviewed literature, the following recommendations are made to enhance teacher curriculum-awareness and improve students' achievement in English oracy skills in Brikama, The Gambia:

1. Strengthen Teacher Training Programs

- Curriculum-Oriented Training: The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) should provide comprehensive teacher training programs focused on the English curriculum, with a specific emphasis on oracy skills. Training should highlight effective instructional strategies such as group discussions, debates, role-plays, and storytelling.
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Regular CPD workshops and seminars should be organised to ensure teachers stay updated on curriculum changes and innovative teaching methods for promoting oracy skills.

2. Provide Adequate Teaching Resources

- Teaching Aids: Schools should be equipped with audio-visual aids, digital tools, and printed resources to facilitate interactive learning experiences for students.
- Locally Relevant Materials: Develop and distribute teaching materials that are culturally and contextually appropriate to The Gambia, enabling teachers to relate lessons to students' experiences.

3. Promote Interactive Teaching Methods

- Activity-Based Learning: Teachers should prioritise interactive and student-centered approaches, such as debates, oral presentations, and peer discussions, to enhance engagement and practice in spoken English.
- Integrating Technology: Encourage the use of technology, such as language learning apps and multimedia tools, to support students' speaking and listening practice both in and outside the classroom.

4. Enhance Assessment Practices

- Practical Oracy Assessments: Develop clear rubrics for assessing students' speaking and listening skills, ensuring assessments focus on key areas such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and relevance.
- Feedback Mechanisms: Teachers should provide constructive feedback to students on their oracy performance and suggest areas for improvement.

5. Address Contextual Challenges

- Reducing Class Sizes: Efforts should be made to address the issue of large class sizes by recruiting more teachers or introducing smaller group teaching sessions to allow for individualised attention.
- Language Exposure: Schools should create opportunities for students to practice English in real-world contexts, such as organizing public speaking events, storytelling competitions, and English clubs.

6. Leverage Community Support

- Parental Involvement: Encourage parents to support their children's English learning by promoting the use of English at home and providing access to books and other language materials.
- Community-Based Programs: Collaborate with local communities to organise language enrichment programs, such as radio programs or community storytelling sessions, that encourage English usage outside of the classroom.

7. Foster Collaboration Among Educators

- Teacher Networks: Establish networks or communities of practice among teachers to share best practices, challenges, and solutions for teaching oracy skills.
- Mentorship Programs: Pair less experienced teachers with mentors who can guide them in implementing curriculum standards and adopting effective oracy teaching methods.

8. Conduct Further Research

- Localised Studies: Undertake further research to explore the specific challenges faced by teachers and students in different regions of The Gambia.
- Longitudinal Studies: Investigate the long-term impact of teacher curriculum-awareness and instructional strategies on students' English proficiency to inform policy and practice.

These recommendations aim to enhance teacher curriculum-awareness and address the barriers to effective teaching and learning of English oracy skills. By implementing these strategies, stakeholders in the education sector can improve students' language proficiency and overall academic outcomes in The Gambia.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teacher curriculum-awareness plays a crucial role in shaping students' achievement in English oracy skills in Brikama, The Gambia. By addressing the identified challenges and investing in teacher training initiatives, educational stakeholders can foster a conducive learning environment conducive to language acquisition and proficiency. Ultimately, a

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comprehensive approach that integrates curriculum reform, teacher professional development, and pedagogical innovation is essential for advancing English language education in Brikama and empowering students to succeed in a globalized world.

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