

ABSTRACT

Learners acquire language when they are taught at their functioning levels. Class III Prelingually Deaf learners in Kenya are taught English at Class III level. Evaluation tests have indicated they are not functioning at the level. The tests, however, did not show the actual functioning level. The purpose of the study was to assess the learners' English functioning level. Objectives were to: find out the learners' functioning level in grammar; find out functioning level in reading comprehension; find out functioning level in expressive written English; determine the relationship between the learners' performance in grammar and reading comprehension; determine the relationship between performance in grammar and expressive written English. Conceptual framework showing independent and dependent variables was used. Mixed research designs were employed. Study population consisted of 337 Class III prelingually deaf learners and 65 Class III English teachers. Multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 178 learners and 16 teachers. Data was collected using a test, interview schedule and document analysis schedules. The instruments were verified for validity and tested for reliability. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. None (0.0%) of the learners obtained the criterion pass mark of 50%. Grammar, reading comprehension and expressive written English skills the learners mastered were those they were expected to acquire in Class I. The learners lacked mastery of expected grammatical categories, morphological and syntactic structures, reading comprehension and expressive written English skills the learners' English functioning level was at Class I level at the beginning of the school year. Positive relationship was found between performance in grammar and reading comprehension ($r = 0.265$, $n = 178$, $p < 0.05$); and between grammar and expressive written English ($r = 0.302$, $n = 178$, $p < 0.05$). Increase in performance in grammar resulted in corresponding increase in performance in reading comprehension and expressive written English.. Grammar accounted for 7% of the learners' functioning level in reading comprehension ($r = 0.265$, $r^2 = 0.07 = 7\%$) and 9% in expressive written English ($r = 0.302$, $r^2 = 0.09 = 9\%$). Mastery of grammar was a principal determinant in mastery of reading comprehension and expressive written English. It was recommended that prelingually deaf learners in Kenya be taught English at their functioning levels irrespective of grade levels. The findings may be used to teach Class III prelingually deaf learners in Kenya English at their functioning level and by the Ministry of Education to inform policy.