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PUPILS IN KENYA**

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# SCHOOLS' STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PUPILS' ACQUISITION OF READING SKILLS AMONG GRADE III PUPILS IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

Reading is a basic life skill that can be used throughout one's life. It is a cornerstone for a pupils' accomplishment in school and thereafter. Learning how to read is the utmost essential skill a pupil needs to acquire in the lower grades. However, in Kenyena Sub-county, grade III pupils reading level are below average. This study employed descriptive survey research design to establish the schools' strategies used in promoting pupils' acquisition of reading skills among Grade III pupils in Kenyena Sub-County in Kenya while a mixed method approach was applied in data collection. The target population for this study comprised of 77 head teachers and 77 class III teachers and 3080 grade III pupils from all the 77 public primary schools out of which a sample size of 30% was selected to participate in the study. The grade III pupils reading skills were assessed through the use of a sample test while a questionnaire was administered to the Grade III teachers and the head teachers interviewed. The study outcomes revealed most of grade III teachers commonly use look and say and whole word method as compared to the phonic approach and the direct instruction model.

**Key words:** Reading, reading skills, school strategies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a basic life skill that can be used throughout one's life. It is a cornerstone for a pupils' accomplishment in school and thereafter. Learning how to read is the utmost essential skill a pupil needs to acquire in the lower grades (Cicerchia, 2017). The ability to read is a fundamental skill to be learned in the early years of primary instruction for early and continuous accomplishment in school (Gove and Cvelich, 2011). This is due to the fact that everything from vocabulary growth to performance across all major subjects at school is linked to reading ability (Cicerchia, 2017). Improving pupils reading competence may lessen reading spell and make it possible for them to read in a more focused and careful way. This will lead to **enhancing pupils' levels of understanding and concentration of other subject matter**. Research demonstrates that various strategies can be used in promoting reading skills. Therefore, the need to developing a plan for incorporating various reading promotion strategies into a reading literacy programme to enhance the acquisition of reading skills among pupils (Lau & Warning, 2007).

Regardless of its importance, studies around the world indicate that reading problems exist in all countries. Globally, around 10% of the youth still come out of education systems with no basic reading skills (World Bank, 2013). Sanford (2015) indicates that approximately 30 million Americans grownup have reading difficulties and the origin of this can be traced to low levels of reading at the elementary school grades. In Europe, 20% of children aged 11 years are not confident readers of the English language (Davis and Braun, 2011). Gove and Cvelich (2011) stated that in developing nations, most of the school going children failure to obtaining reading skills while in lower grades of primary education. NASMLA (2011) and UWEZO (2011) established that in Africa about 8% of the pupils can reading at their grade levels. Further, Uwezo (2011) revealed that in East African, nearly 30% of the Grade III scholars were able to read a grade 2 level passage both in English or Kiswahili. In Kenya, most of the primary school pupils have difficulties in reading (Fernald, Jakiela, Ozier, 2016). Likewise, (Uwezo, 2013) indicated that in Kenya, approximately 50% of the learners are not able to read at their grade level.

Research shows that teaching reading strategies is paramount to developing learners' comprehension. Fruitful efforts to improve reading success emphasize on identification and application of evidence-based practices that encourage high levels of accomplishment. Calderon Slavin and Sanchez (2011) and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2014) indicate that explicit instructions and teacher modelling promotes learners' reading skills. Further, Kremer, Brannen and Glennerster (2013) indicated that adapting various teaching techniques to reach the diverse learning levels is exceedingly effective in advancing pupils intellectual realization.

Successful efforts to improve reading achievement emphasize identification and implementation of evidence-based practices that promote high rates of achievement. When used in classrooms by teachers with diverse instructional styles with children who have diverse instructional needs and interests (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989).

The teaching of the basic reading skills will enhance the acquisition of reading skills among pupils. Pressley, (2001) and Goldenberg, (2011) indicated that early reading skills are promoted by coaching in phonemic awareness,

phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) and the National Reading Panel (2009) also demonstrated that effective reading teaching addresses five significant areas. These areas comprise of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The above reading sub-skills are interrelated in terms of development, teaching, and evaluation.

Schools employ diverse strategies and skills to develop reading skills. Lau and Warning (2007) indicate that integrating various reading promotion strategies into a reading literacy programme through engaging pupils with what they read is one of the most effective ways of helping pupils think about and make sense of what they read. Offering excellent classroom reading guidelines coupled with positive research-authenticated methods may result in an enormous transformation for pupils with reading difficulties. Paris, Wasik, and Turner (1991) also report that explicit instructions, teacher modelling and regular monitoring improve learners reading skills. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2014) reported that improved instruction, strong teacher training, in-school mentoring and community engagement in learning improve reading achievement among pupils. Mc Ewan (2013) also noted that interventions with teacher in-service training are consistently correlated with better pupil learning. Further, Kremer, Brannen, and Glennerster (2013) indicated that adapting a variety of teaching techniques to reach the diverse learning levels is exceedingly effective in advancing pupils intellectual realization.

Many of the reading problems that students have can be prevented when they are in the lower primary school grades. Pupils need to be provided with quality classroom reading instructions in addition to early interventions. Offering excellent classroom reading instructions with definite research-validated features can create a huge difference for struggling readers. Denton et al (2007) indicates that providing quality Classroom reading instruction can improve the acquisition of reading skills among struggling readers. Daly, Neugebauer, Chafoulea and Skinner (2015) noted that pupils who do not receive high-quality instructions and early interventions, their early reading problems usually develop into serious reading difficulties later on. Similarly, Denton et al (2007) reported that learners with severe reading problems can improve in a short period when guided with focused and excellent reading teachings. Further, Kremer, Brannen, & Glennerster (2013) indicated that adapting a variety of teaching techniques to reach the diverse learning levels is exceedingly effective in advancing pupils intellectual realization. Estyn (2007) accentuated on helpful learning and instruction of early reading skills in many childcare centres and primary schools.

The teaching and learning of reading is a multifaceted and exceedingly skilled professional action that requires excellent literacy instructors. Teachers require ongoing professional progress and years of teaching experience to enhance growth in expertise. Professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' overall academic achievement including reading skills (Seebruck, 2015). Lai, Sadoulet and De Janvr (2011) recounted a substantial positive relationship between teacher's qualification and pupil performance. (Mc Ewan (2013) noted that interventions with teacher in-service training are consistently correlated with better pupil learning. Akinsolu (2010) and Richardson (2008) also concluded that the availability of skilled teachers influences the success of pupils in schools. Fisher, Nancy, Douglas and Williams (2002) indicated that teachers need continuous professional development for growth in expertise.

Quality early childhood programs foster early acquisition of reading skills. The quality of care given to children at ECDE also influences how children develop. Cunningham (2008) contends that quality early childhood programs significantly promotes the development early language and literacy skills. Burchinal et al (2000) established that the quality of center-based child care programs relates to early cognitive and language development among 6 to 36 months of age in a sample of 89 African American children. Additionally, Burchinal et al (2000) note that classrooms that have the recommended child- adult ratios tend to have learners with improved language skills and healthier intellectual and receptive language abilities. Estyn (2007) noted that the growth of better quality pre-school provision, early intervention and broader support to families enhances the academic success among pupils.

The use of teaching and learning materials enhances the acquisition of reading skills. The use of real objects is best placed in teaching of young children. This is because children learn best through hands on experiences with materials. Teachers should provide real objects in all reading activities when teaching. Danielson (2011) and Karuoya, (2015). postulates that real objects enhance the use of all senses, which is recommended in teaching young children as it provides holistic growth and development. They also motivate the pupils and makes them more actively engaging during the learning process. Further, (Kimberly, 2013) reports that poorly designed classrooms with empty walls and few text books and other materials contribute to less pupil interactions and engagement with one another and text.

Other essential strategies include sufficient time dedicated to reading each day and to developing the strategies that build oral language, fluency, comprehension, and motivation (Rasinski, 2003).

Several studies have been done on strategies that enhance reading skills. Kuciikoglu (2013) looked at enhancing reading skills through effective reading strategies. Kissau and Hiller (2013) did a comparative study of teacher preferences on reading comprehension strategies. Marloes et al (2017) examined the developmental relations between reading comprehension and reading strategies. Blickenstaff and Kopel (2013) sought to evaluate the effects of reading strategies in comprehension for elementary age learners Yen-Hui Wang (2016) looked at reading strategy use and comprehension performance of more successful and less successful readers. However, this study sought to

establish the different strategies used to enhance the acquisition of reading skills among grade III pupils in Kenya sub-county in Kenya

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the mixed methods research design. The study was done in Kenya sub-County which was deliberately sampled from among the nine sub-counties in Kisii County. This study targeted 3080 grade three pupils, 77 grade III teachers and 77 head teachers of all the primary schools in Kenya Sub-county. The study sample comprised of 30% of the target population. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires, interview guide and pupils reading test. In analysing information, both qualitatively and quantitatively approaches were employed.

The study applied mixed methods approach, that is, quantitative and qualitative methods. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design allowed collection of extensive and intensive data and its in-depth examination (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The acquisition of reading skills is a multifaceted process that involves interaction of many factors that can easily be understood when such a design is in use. This study target population was all the standard three pupils, their class teachers and head teachers of all primary schools in Kenya Sub-County. Standard three pupils were targeted in this study since at this level pupils were expected to have gained the basic reading and writing skills. Thus, the target population for this study comprised of 77 headteachers and 77 class III teachers and 3080 class III pupils all totaling to 3234.

Data analysis began by identifying common themes from the respondents' description of their experiences. The relevant information was broken into phrases or sentences, which reflected a single, specific thought. The responses to the close-ended items were assigned codes and labels. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the study objectives and presented in narrative forms whereas the quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially using ANOVA Test Analysis in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 23) and quantitative findings presented using tables.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This paper envisioned to establish the different strategies that the grade III teachers in public primary schools adopt to promote reading skills among their pupils. The objectives of the study were:

- i. to establish the reading levels among the grade III pupils,
- ii. to examine the various strategies used to enhance acquisition of reading skills among Grade III pupils in public primary schools and
- iii. gather teachers' views on the effectiveness of various strategies used to promote acquisition of reading skills

### i. Levels of Reading Skills Acquisition among Grade III Pupils

This paper sought to establish the pupils' reading levels such as letter naming and sound identification, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency in public primary schools. First, the grade III teachers were asked to rate their pupils on the various reading sub-skills and secondary, the researcher also administered a sample reading test to grade III pupils in order to establish their reading levels. Data was collected and the results were as shown in Table 1 and 2:

**Table 1: Teachers' Ratings of Reading Skills among Grade III Pupils**

Reading Skills	Good		Fair		Below Average	
	F	%	f	%	F	%
Sounds (phonemes)	11	39.3	3	10.7	14	50.0
Vocabulary	15	53.6	2	7.1	11	39.6
Comprehension	9	32.1	4	14.3	15	53.6
Letter naming	16	57.1	3	10.7	9	32.2
Fluency	8	28.6	3	10.7	17	60.7



**Table2: Performance of Grade III Pupils in Reading Skills**

Grading	Very Good	Average	Below Average
Letter Naming	75.0	15.0	10.0
Reading of Sounds	10.0	30.0	60.0
Vocabulary	20.0	10.0	70.0
Fluency	15	20.0	65.0
Comprehension	25.0	20.0	55.0

As indicated in table 1, most of the grade III pupils were rated averagely by their teachers in almost all the reading sub-skills. However, when the researcher administered the reading test, most of the pupils scored fairly well in letter naming and majority of them scored below average in reading of sounds, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The researcher also observed that the majority of the pupils had problems with their fluent pronunciation of words

### ii. Frequency of Using the various Strategies for Promoting Reading Skills

The second objective of this paper was to establish the different reading strategies that the grade III teachers employ in the teaching of reading skills. Data was collected from teachers on how often they employ the different strategies and results are shown in Table 3.

**Table3: Frequency Use of Different Strategies grade III teachers use in Promoting Reading Skills among Grade III Pupils**

Reading Strategies	Frequently		Rarely		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Direct instruction method	3	10.7	5	17.9	3	71.3
Using the phonics method	10	35.7	17	60.7	1	3.6
Look and say teaching method	19	67.9	7	25.0	2	7.1
The whole word teaching method	16	57.1	10	35.8	2	7.1
Language experience teaching approach	9	32.1	18	64.3	1	3.6
School culture of reading	8	28.6	14	50.0	6	21.4
Teacher training on reading skills	6	21.4	16	57.1	6	21.4
Provisions of extra time for slow readers	5	17.9	11	39.3	12	42.8
Involvement of parents in helping pupils in reading	7	25.0	17	60.7	4	14.3

The results from table 3. indicates that most of the grade III teachers use the Look and Say teaching method (67.9%) and the whole word teaching method (57.1%). Seventy-one point three percent of the teacher reported of never employing the Direct Instruction Method while (60.7%) rarely use the phonic method and the Language experience teaching approach (64.3%). The results also indicate that (28.6%) of the teachers acknowledged having a reading culture in their schools, (21.4%) had training on reading skills, (17.9%) provided of extra time for slow readers while (60.7%) do not involve parents in helping pupils in reading. The Researcher also observed that in most of the public primary schools did not have library nor did they have classroom libraries. She further observed that even those schools with library facilities they lacked enough and age related materials.

These findings are in agreement with the assertions of Estyn (2007) that direct instruction of early reading skills during the early years of schooling is essential. Foorman et al (1998) also poised that offering quality classroom reading instruction promotes pupils reading skills. Rasinski (2003) asserted that amid the indispensable reading strategies, adequate time devoted to reading each day is important. Similarly, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2014) noted that in-school mentoring and community engagement in learning improve reading achievement among pupils. Further, Estyn (2007) asserts that the growth of better quality pre-school provision, timely intervention and extensive family support, school reading culture and societal inclusion all contribute to the development of reading skills among learners.

### iii. The Effectiveness of various Strategies used for Promoting Reading Skills amongst grade III Pupils

The thirdly objective of the study was to establish the grade III teachers' views on the effectiveness of the different strategies employed by schools in promoting the acquisition of reading skills among Grade three pupils. The researcher listed twelve statements in line with strategies employed by schools in promoting the acquisition of reading skills and asked the teachers to rate the statements. The outcomes are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Teachers' views on the Effectiveness of the different Strategies for Promoting Reading Skills acquisition among Grade III Pupils**

Summary of Test Items	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
Explicit instructions improve learners' reading skills	59.5	15.5	4.5	11.5	9.0
Community engagement in learning improves reading achievement among Grade III pupils.	56.5	23.5	2.5	9.5	8.0
Acquisition of reading skills is fostered by instruction in the components of reading	51.5	8.5	7.0	22.5	10.5
Teachers' training on how to teaching reading enhances pupils' acquisition of reading skills	68.5	15.5	3.5	8.5	4.0
Teacher modelling and regular monitoring improve learners' reading skills	78.5	14.5	2.5	3.0	1.5
The use of evidence-based practices enhance acquisition of reading skills among pupils	60.5	16.5	4.0	12.0	9.0
Sufficient time dedicated to reading improves reading skills	57.5	21.5	6.5	9.5	7.0
The use of teaching and learning resources enhances the acquisition of reading skills	59.5	8.5	7.0	16.5	8.5

The results from Table 3. reveal the most of the grade III teachers strongly agreed that different strategies contribute to the acquisition of reading skills among grade III pupils. The same sentiments were echoed by the head teachers when interviewed. This implies that all the activities listed in the table have influence on the reading skills acquisition among pupils of grade three to a large extent and the responses that the teachers gave were moderately distributed. These findings are in agreement with other scholars' sentiments that schools need to employ diverse strategies and skills to develop pupils' reading skills. For example, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2014) reported that improved instruction, strong teacher training and in-school mentoring and community engagement in learning improve reading achievement among pupils. Paris, Wasik and Turner (1991) indicated that explicit instructions, teacher modelling and regular monitoring improve learners reading skills. This results show that the schools need to employ a variety of strategies to enhance the acquisition of reading skills among pupils.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from the above outcomes, it is apparent that different strategies contribute to the attainment of reading skills amongst the grade III pupils. Consequently, it is evident that most strategies adopted by class III teachers are not effective in enhancing reading skills. Most of the class III teachers commonly use look and say and whole word method without any special consideration. Similarly, the class III teachers rarely use methods such as phonics approach and the direct instruction model. Further, most primary schools have no classroom libraries nor do they have resource centres in their schools.

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