

# Influence of Teachers' Demographic Characteristics on Acquisition of Reading Skills Among Grade III Pupils In Kisii County, Kenya

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**Abstract**— Reading is a fundamental skill in pupils' education and development.. The development of reading skills is a complex intellectual process that requires skilled instructions in learning to read and to developing strong reading skills. Teachers are well-known as the backbone of the educational process and also as the major determining school factor of excellence and efficiency of its outcome. The purpose of this study was to find out the influence of teachers' demographic characteristics on the acquisition of reading skills among Standard three pupils in Kisii County. Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory of Human Learning guided this study. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design targeting all the Grade III pupils, their class teachers and head teachers of all primary schools in Kenyena Sub-County. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were employed to select the study sample of 30%. The data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedule and observation schedule. A pupils test was used to ascertain the reading levels among the Class three Pupils. This study found out that teachers' characteristics had influence on the acquisition of reading skills. The study further established that most of the class III teachers had limited training on teaching reading skills. The study thus recommends that the Ministry of Education should train and retrain teachers on teaching reading skills through regular teacher professional training, in-service courses, workshops and seminars to ensure that teachers have the necessary skills to teach reading at lower levels.

**Index Terms**— Teachers' characteristics, teacher's experience, teachers' gender, teaching approaches, reading skills.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in pupils' education and development. Early acquisition of reading skills is a vital part of a child's academic development as it forms the cornerstone upon which all learning at all levels and other academic subjects is based (Kuculoglu, 2012; Mwoma, 2017). Globally, reading has been recognized as a fundamental skill contributing to academic success in the formal education system. Failure to acquire reading skills early affects the learners greatly. Calderon, Slavin and Sanchez (2011) indicated that when pupils fail to acquire reading skills early, their academic achievement and lives after school also get affected. Consistent with the assertions of Calderon et al. (2011), Shapiro (2011) reported that learners with low reading levels usually have difficulties in the acquisition of several other concepts leading to low academic outcomes. Development of reading skills is a vital part of a child's overall development.

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Globally, developing children's reading skills is a great challenge and concern for both developed and developing nations in spite of incredible improvements achieved over the past 55 years (Wagner, 2015). According to Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006), literacy is at the center of the public policy debate all over the world. Most current reading initiatives emphasize more on supporting reading skills in the early primary levels for instance, promoting reading skills for a 100 million primary school pupils has been given the first priority among the recently established goals of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Literacy was a top priority on the development agenda among the six goals of Education for All World Conference of 1990 and is still top among the Sustainable Development Goals Vision 2030 (goal No. 4). Therefore, this means that reading is considered as the most fundamental component of basic education that is linked to academic success of learners.

The acquisition of reading skills is a complex intellectual process. Unlike language which seems automatic, children required skilled instructions in learning to read and to developing strong reading skills. Research studies have shown that early literacy instructions in oral language can improve young children's oral language proficiency such as vocabulary development, syntactic sophistication and listening comprehension as well as aspects of reading literacy, that is, phonemic awareness and print knowledge (Baker & Brown, 2004). Bates (2011) and Bainbridge (2016) report that before a child acquires reading and writing skills, they need to gain the sub-skills for reading, that is, the ability to speak, listen, understand, watch and draw. Armbruster (2010) and Bainbridge (2016) assert that as the child gets older, he/she also needs to learn about the connection between letters on a page and speech sounds. For this to happen, the child needs to know how to blend different sounds and syllables into words and vice versa. Kail and Cavanaugh (2016) indicates that components of reading includes phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension

A number of school factors determine the acquisition of reading skills among pupils. However, teachers play a vital role in ensuring quality instruction delivery. Teachers are well-known as the backbone of the educational process and also as the major determining school factor of excellence and efficiency of its outcome. (Fehintola, 2014 & Adeyemi (2010) also point out that teachers play a fundamental part in influencing the learners' academic performance. For example, in the US, the government provides teachers the necessary infrastructure for the implementation of programmes designed for the development of early literacy skills amongst pre-primary school children (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2006).

All educational system at all levels relies on teachers for

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the implementation of their programmes. Teachers are a key component of the education system who play significant role in the quality of education and influence the learning process greatly. Hanushek and Rivkin, (2012) showed that teachers are significant for the development and success of any education system. Adeogun (2001) reports that the quality of any education system depends on the quality of its teachers.

Teachers possess a number of characteristics that influence the pupils' achievement at school. Danielson (2011) indicated that the teachers' behavioral traits are traits related to and impact on the way teachers exercise their profession. Teacher quality is widely thought of as an essential determinant of academic performance (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2012). Better and improved learners' academic performance depends on the recruitment of good and quality teachers. The teacher's academics, leadership, experience, commitment and resilience are directly or indirectly associated with the learners' behaviour. According to Wanjiko (2013) teachers' characteristics such as gender, training and instructional approaches are critical in children's acquisition of reading skills.

The teaching and learning of reading is a complex and highly skilled professional activity that demands high quality literacy teachers. Professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' overall academic achievement including reading skills (Sebruck, 2015). The level of education and the teacher's training improves the quality of teachers. Similarly, Akinsolu (2010) and Richardson (2008) concluded that the availability of skilled teachers influences the success of pupils in schools. Further, Fisher, Nancy, Douglas, & Williams (2002) also indicated that teachers need continuous professional development for growth in expertise. Harris and Sass (2011) found out that teachers undergoing in-service courses were highly efficient in classrooms when compared to teachers who had no further training. Lai, Sadoulet & De Janvr (2011) reported a significant positive association between teacher's qualification and pupil performance. They equally attributed the good performance to the excellent instructions given by qualified teachers together with other inputs.

Teacher experience also has a momentous influence on pupil's academic achievement. Experienced teachers have a lot of knowledge on the subject matter. This helps them to give insight and ideas to pupils on the subject learned. Rivers and Sanders (2002) reported that learners taught by more experienced teachers scored highly. They also indicate that these teachers had mastery of subject content and had gained classroom management skills which helped them handle learners with care. Experienced teachers are able to apply different teaching approaches to teach different topics to suit different learners (Heacox, 2012).

Teacher's gender is another quality that plays a major role in shaping pupils ability of self-concepts (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). In primary education, pupils instructed by women teachers tend to perform better (Neugebauer, Helbig & Landmann, 2011). Women teachers are more supportive, offer a more positive classroom environment, and are more likely to use pupil-oriented methods of instruction emphasizing the significance of stimulation. Antecol, Eren, & Ozbeklik (2012) reported that female teachers have a positive effect on female pupils' performance. Teachers play

a critical role on pupils' acquisition of reading skills. However, in Kisii County, reading levels among Grade III pupils is less than 30% of the national standards. Recent studies conducted in Kenya acvre consistently showing poor reading skills among pupils in primary schools. For instance, Gove and Cvelich (2011) reported that a bigger number of pupils are not able even to read a word in agiven paragraph by the time they are graduating from grade 8.

A study by Uwezo (2011) across the three East African countries revealed that about 70% of the standard three pupils were not able to read a grade 2 level narrative both in English or Kiswahili. Piper (2010) also noted that reading literacy was low in Nyanza province. Further, Ouko (2015) in Gucha Sub-County in Kisii County revealed that pupils did better in numeracy as compared to literacy.

Most of the studies done in Kenya focused on literacy and levels of reading. However, little is known about the influence of teachers' demographic characteristics on acquisition of reading skills amongst class III pupils. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to establish the influence of teachers' demographic characteristics on acquisition of reading skills among grade III pupils in Kenyeny County, Kenya.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory of Human Learning (1978). Vygotsky believed that "learning" is an essential and common aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function. Vygotsky states that cognitive development stems from social interactions from guided learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as children and their partners co-construct knowledge. He lays more emphasis on the primary function of social interaction in the development of cognition. He further believed that the community plays a fundamental role in the process of "making meaning."

According to Vygotsky (1978), much of what the child learns occurs through social interaction with a skillful facilitator. The facilitator may model behaviors or give verbal instructions for the child. Therefore, guided learning within the ZPD leads to greater understanding as compared to discovery learning. This theory was found relevant to this study due to the fact that acquisition of reading skills is a complex cognitive process that requires the guidance of skilled teacher. This implies that pupils need to be taught by teachers who have knowledge and experience on teaching the various components of reading such a phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle among others.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate when collecting extensive and intensive data and its in-depth examination (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Kenyeny sub-County was purposely sampled out of the nine sub-counties in Kisii County. This study target

population was all the Standard three pupils, their class teachers and head teachers of all the 77 primary schools in Kenyenyasub-County. Thus, the target population for this study comprised of 77 head teachers and 77 class III teachers and 3080 class III pupils all totaling to 3234. Data collected was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitatively 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.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

*This section comprises of data analysis, presentation and its interpretation.* This study sought to find out how Standard III teachers' characteristics influence the acquisition of reading skills amongst Standard III pupils. This was measured in terms of teachers' professional qualifications, gender and experience on teaching reading skills.

##### A.THE LEVELS OF READING SKILLS AMONG THE CLASS III PUPILS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

*First the study sought to the establish the levels of reading skills among the class III pupils in public primary schools. These reading Skill included decoding, dictation, fluency and comprehension.*Data was collected from Standard III teachers and the results are shown in Table1;

**Table 1: Class III Teachers Ratings of Reading Skills amongst Class III Pupils**

Reading Skills	Good		Fair		Below Average	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Fluency	11	39.3	3	10.7	14	50.0
Vocabulary/ Dictation	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
Letter and sound recognition	8	28.6	3	10.7	17	60.7

Table .1 indicates that slightly more than a third (39.3%) of the class III pupils teachers admitted that most class III pupils were good in fluent and fast reading of words, 10.7% indicated that the class III pupils were fairly good in decoding, that is, fluent and fast reading of words whereas half (50.0%) of the teachers noted that class III pupils' fluent and fast reading is below average. Similar assertions were also made by the headteachers during the interviews. One of the interviewees noted, "Most of class III pupils in my school manifest good, fluent and fast reading of words".

*On the same breath, the researcher also observed that most class III pupils are good in fluent and fast reading. The*

*researcher further observed, "Most class III pupils are able to read letters and sounds. However, they took a longer time*

*when figuring out the sounds and letters nor were they able to differentiate between letters and sounds". This was evidenced by the sample pupils' test where most learners were able to read the letters (A, B, C, D etc), but could not differentiate the letters (A, B, C, D, etc) and sounds (/a/, /b/, /c/, /d/etc).*

These findings corroborate the assertions of Wolf (2016), that early teaching of decoding skills lays a firm foundation for the acquisition of reading skills. In other words, successful acquisition of decoding skills during the lower primary levels is a good indicator of later literacy achievement. This, further, points to the fact that the coaching of phonics in the early grades, helps the pupils to be able to link sounds and letters and letters in words (Bainbridgeke, 2016 & Brown, 2014).

The results in Table 5.1 also shows that slightly more than half (53.6%) of the Standard III teachers indicated that Standard III pupils had competence in dictation and vocabulary skills. About 7.1% of the Standard III teachers observed that their Standard III pupils' dictation and vocabulary skills are fairly good, whereas slightly more than a third (39.6%) of the teachers indicated their Standard III pupils' dictation and vocabulary skills are below average. During the interviews, head teachers also alluded to the view that most of Standard III pupils in their schools were good in dictation, though not good in comprehending vocabularies. One head teacher noted,

*"Most of Standard III pupils in my school can write the words, such as girl, house, umbrella, baby, school, blackboard and pencil amongst others. However, they find it difficult to explain the functions of items such as umbrella, bicycle and house amongst others".*

This was corroborated by a sample Standard III test where most Standard III learners could write dictated words such as girl, house, baby, teacher, school, umbrella, blackboard, woman, pencil and bicycle without any difficulty, but surprisingly could not explain the meaning of the terms. In the same breath, the researcher also observed that majority of Standard III learners were able to write the words fast, but could not spell the words correctly. Some were not able to write the words at all.

These findings are consistent with the assertions of Hanson and Padua (2014) that vocabulary plays a crucial role in reading process and that, in reading, vocabulary knowledge is necessary to understand text. These findings also lend credence to the viewpoints held by The NICHD (2000) and NRP (2000) that vocabulary training leads to gains in



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comprehension skills. Further, (Glende, 2013) confirms that pupils with less vocabulary are likely to experience reading. Hence, these findings affirm the fact that the vocabulary is imperative to children's acquisition of reading skills. In other words, Standard III learners with less vocabularies need early intervention to enable them to become good readers.

The researcher also administered sample test and noted that most of the class III pupils in both public primary school's manifest lots of difficulty in pronouncing words fluently. The researcher also observed that majority had problems with their fluent pronunciation of words. Worse still, majority found it difficult to fluently pronouncing phrases like, "*the cat is under the table, the baby is crying, my mother is washing clothes, the teacher is writing on the blackboard or the cow is eating grass*". It was further observed that most of the class III learners read words faster without spending so much time figuring out words, were unable to recognize letters when reading words, had a high degree of difficulty with phonics patterns and activities and stumbled a lot and loses their places when reading aloud.

These findings corroborate the assertions of Samuels (1985) that fluency is usually measured through oral readings, although good readers also demonstrate this skill when reading silently. Fluency develops from reading practice. Frequent oral reading is the best way for children to improve their fluency. These findings affirm the fact that skills such as letter-sound, letter combinations and the making of sense and association of words need to be acquired first before the reader can read more complicated comprehension skills.

The findings affirm the fact that early acquisition of reading skills lays a firm foundation for future success in reading and other subjects which are linked with later school achievement. In other words, successful acquisition of reading skills during the lower primary levels is a good indicator of later literacy achievement; skills which most class III pupils in both public and private primary schools in Kenya Sub-county lack. Furthermore, in acquiring reading skills, knowledge of phonological structure is the central enabling condition of reading in an alphabetical writing system.

Likewise, only 32.1% of the Standard III teachers indicated the comprehension skills of their Standard III pupils are good, 14.3% indicated fair whereas slightly more than half (53.6%) admitted that comprehension skills of their Standard III pupils are below average. However, 57.1% of the Standard III teachers noted that their Standard III pupils are good at letter naming, 10.7% indicated fair while 32.2% indicated that their Standard III pupils' ability to name letters was below average. Head teachers also responded in favour

of the view that Standard III pupils in their schools' manifested dismal comprehension skills. One head teacher remarked,

*"Most of the Standard III pupils in my school face numerous challenges answering comprehension questions"*.

This was evidenced from a sample test for Standard III administered by the researcher which revealed that majority of Standard III pupils did not perform well in the comprehension. For example, most of the learners could not recall what the doctor used to clean Mr. Kusahau's wounds nor could they recall what Mr. Kusahau wrote down when he got home. These findings were in agreement with what the researcher observed. At the same time, the researcher also observed that quite a number of Standard III learners were not able to answer comprehension questions well and also took more time answering comprehension questions.

These findings were consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Kim, Petscher and Foorman (2015) which examined the variance in reading comprehension scores that existed between learners, classes, schools and districts for children in grades 3–10. Kim, Petscher and Foorman (2015) affirms that many factors such as the cognitive factors, fluency and semantic, spelling and a motivational factor, reading and self-concept knowledge matter in influencing comprehension.

These findings affirm the fact that skills such as letter-sound, letter combinations and the making of sense and association of words need to be acquired first before the reader can read more complicated comprehension skills. The findings affirm the fact that early acquisition of reading skills lays a firm foundation for future success in reading and other subjects which are linked to later school achievement. In other words, successful acquisition of reading skills during the lower primary levels is a good indicator of later literacy achievement; skills which most Standard III pupils in Kenya Sub-county, Kisii County lack. Furthermore, in acquiring reading skills, knowledge of phonological structure is the central enabling condition of reading in an alphabetical writing system.

### **B. THE TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' CHARACTERISTICS ON ACQUISITION OF READING SKILLS AMONGST CLASS III PUPILS**

*Secondary, the teachers' views on the influence of teachers' characteristics on acquisition of reading skills amongst class III pupils was sought and results are indicated in Table 2.*

Table 2: Grade III Teachers' Views on the Influence of Teachers' Characteristics on Acquisition of Reading Skills

Summary of Test Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
	%	%	%	%	%
Improved learners' performance on reading skills depends on the recruitment of quality teachers	80.5	8.5	1.5	5.5	4.0
Teacher behavioral traits are relatively stable traits that are related to, and influence, the way teachers practice their profession	78.5	14.5	2.5	3.0	1.5
Professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' acquisition of reading skills	69.5	12.0	2.0	10.0	6.5
Experienced teacher has a lot of knowledge on the subject matter which helps in giving insight and ideas to pupils on the subject learned	74.5	17.0	2.5	3.5	2.5
Experienced teachers apply different teaching approaches to teach different topics in reading	67.0	11.5	5.5	8.5	7.0
Pupils taught by female teachers tend to perform better as they tend to be more supportive and provide a more positive classroom atmosphere	88.5	2.5	1.5	4.5	3.0
Traditional male teachers are believed to be good at math and females are good at reading	70.0	10.0	3.5	14.5	12.0

Table 5.2 reveals that the majority (80.5%) of the Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that improved learners' performance in reading skills depends on the recruitment of quality teachers as did 8.5% who agreed. However, only a paltry 1.5% of the Standard III teachers were undecided, 5.5% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 4.0% of the Standard III teachers strongly disagreed. The head teachers also echoed similar views. The head teachers noted,

*“Quality teachers are important if any, meaningful acquisition of reading skills amongst Standard III pupils is to be realized”.*

These findings corroborate the assertions of Harris and Sass (2011) that teachers on in-service courses were highly efficient in classrooms when compared to teachers who had no further training. These findings also support the assertions of (Akinsolu, 2010;& Richardson, 2008) who reported a significant positive correlation between teacher's qualification and pupil performance. These findings are indicative of the fact that the teaching and learning of reading is a complex and highly skilled professional activity that demands high quality literacy teachers. This further means that professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' overall academic achievement including reading

skills. Besides, the teaching and learning of reading is a complex and highly skilled professional activity that demands high quality literacy teachers. In other words, professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' overall academic achievement including reading skills.

The study also found out that majority (78.5%) of the Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that teacher behavioural traits are relatively stable traits that are related to, and influence, the way teachers practice their profession. At the same time, 14.5% of the Standard III teachers agreed. However, 2.5% of Standard III teachers were undecided, 3.0% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 1.5% of the Standard III teachers strongly disagreed. Head teachers also supported the view that teacher's behavioural traits are relatively stable traits that are related to and influence the way teachers practice their profession. The head teachers noted,

*“Teachers' attitudes, conduct and communicative competency serve to enhance learners' acquisition of reading skills”.*

These findings are consistent with a report by UNESCO (2004) which indicated that the teachers' behavioural traits are relatively stable traits that are related to and influence the way teachers practice their profession.

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The study also revealed that the majority (69.5%) of the Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' acquisition of reading skills. On the same breath, 12.0% of the Standard III teachers agreed. However, 2.0% of the Standard III teachers were undecided, 10.0% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 6.5% of the Standard III teachers strongly disagreed. Head teachers also expressed similar views during the interviews.

These findings lend credence to the assertions of Rockoff, 2004; Rivkin et al, 2005; Aaronson et al, 2007) Aaronson et al (2007) who noted that the most essential school-based factor that determines learners' accomplishment is the quality teachers. Therefore, these findings are in agreement with the fact that the quality of any education system relies on the quality of its teachers. In addition, teachers are significant for the development and success of any education system.

The majority (74.5%) of the sampled Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that experienced teacher has a lot of knowledge on the subject matter which helps in giving insight and ideas to pupils on the subject learned. 17.0% of the Standard III teachers agreed. At the same time, 2.5% of the Standard III teachers were undecided, 3.5% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 2.5% of the Standard III teachers strongly disagreed.

In the same breath, majority (67.0%) of the Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that experienced teachers apply different teaching approaches to teach different topics in reading. 11.5% of the Standard III teachers agreed. At the same time, 5.5% of the Standard III teachers were undecided, 8.5% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 7.0% of the Standard III teachers strongly disagreed. During the interviews, head teachers also responded in favour of the view that an experienced teacher has a lot of knowledge on the subject matter which helps in giving insight and ideas to pupils on the subject learned. One head teacher from a private primary school remarked,

*“Teachers with long experience in teaching reading skills have their learners manifesting excellent reading skills. For example, in my school, Standard III teachers who have taught reading skills for over 5 years have their learners perform well in reading test scores compared with their counterparts with little experience”.*

These findings corroborate the assertions of Rivers and Sanders (2002) and Ferguson (1991) reported that learners taught by more experienced teachers score highly. They also

indicate that these teachers had mastery of subject content and had gained classroom management skills which helped them handle students with care. These findings affirm the fact that experienced teachers have a lot of knowledge on reading skills and are thus able to apply different teaching approaches to teach different topics also to suit different learners.

The majority (88.5%) of the Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that pupils taught by female teachers tend to perform better as they tend to be more supportive and provide a more positive classroom atmosphere. A paltry 2.5% of the Standard III teachers agreed. At the same time, 1.5% of the Standard III teachers were undecided, 4.5% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 3.0% of the Standard III teachers strongly disagreed.

The majority (70.0%) of the Standard III teachers strongly agreed with the view that traditional male teachers are believed to be good at math and females are good at reading. 10.0% of the Standard III teachers agreed. At the same time, 3.5% of the Standard III teachers were undecided, 14.5% of the Standard III teachers disagreed whereas 12.0% of Standard III teachers strongly disagreed. During interviews, Head teachers also responded in favour of the view that gender of Standard III pupils plays a critical role in enhancing the acquisition of reading skills amongst Standard III pupils. One head teacher observed,

*“In my school, learners taught by female teachers manifest a good grasp of concepts in reading skills than their male counterparts”.*

These findings lend credence to the views held by assertions of Eccles and Wigfield (2002) that the teacher's gender plays a major role in shaping pupils' ability of self-concepts. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) assert that, in primary education, pupils instructed by women teachers tend to perform better. This was also consistent with the assertions of Laird (2011) that women teachers are more supportive, offer a more positive classroom environment, and are more likely to use pupil-oriented methods of instruction emphasizing the significance of stimulation. These findings thus attest to the fact that the presence of female teachers in primary schools will enhance both girls'

enrollment and educational success. These findings further affirm the fact that there is a positive association between teacher's gender and enrollment and success of learners, particularly for female learners.

### C. EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS' CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCE THE ACQUISITION OF READING SKILLS AMONGST STANDARD III PUPILS

*This study also sought to find out how Standard III teachers' characteristics influence the acquisition of reading skills amongst Standard III pupils. This was measured in terms of teachers' professional qualifications, gender and experience*

on teaching reading skills. Data was collected from Standard III teachers and the results are shown in Table3.

Table 3: Extent to which Teachers' Characteristics Influence Standard III Pupils' Reading Skills

Teachers' Characteristics	VO		O		S		N	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Gender	11	39.3	4	14.3	12	42.9	1	3.5
Professional qualification for teaching reading skills	16	57.1	8	28.6	3	10.7	1	3.5
Teaching Experience	15	53.6	4	14.3	8	28.6	1	3.5

**Key: VO-Very Often; O-Often; S-Sometimes, N-Never; f-Frequency**

Table 3. indicates that slightly more than a third (39.3%) of the Standard III teachers noted that gender traits very often influence their learners' acquisition of reading skills, 14.3% indicated that gender characteristics often influence their learners' reading skills, 42.9%, however, indicated that it sometimes influences whereas a paltry 3.5% indicated gender trait never influences acquisition of reading amongst Standard III pupils. During interviews, head teachers also indicated,

*“The gender of Standard III teachers has a way of influencing learners' acquisition of reading skills”.*

These findings lend credence to the assertions of Dee (2007) that same-gender teachers had a positive influence on students' academic success. Dee (2007) further established that the influence of teacher-gender was different on the different subject. These findings are indicative of the fact that the teacher's gender plays a major role in shaping pupils' ability of self-concepts.

On the contrary, slightly more than half (57.1%) of the Standard III teachers noted their level of education very often influences their learners' acquisition of reading skills, 28.6% said it often influences, 10.7% indicated sometimes whereas 3.5% indicated that level of education never influences acquisition of reading skills amongst Standard III pupils.

Head teachers also expressed similar views. They noted,

*“My teachers' level of education has really influenced their learners' ability to acquire reading skills. Teachers with higher levels of education inspire their learners since they have the ability to apply different teaching techniques to improve learners' reading skills”.*

These findings corroborate the assertions of (Akinsolu, 2010;& Richardson, 2008) that availability of competent teachers influences the success of learners in schools. These findings also lend credence to the views expressed by Fisher, Nancy, Douglas, and Williams (2002) who indicated that teachers need continuous professional development for growth in expertise. These findings attest to the fact that teaching and learning of reading is a complex and highly skilled professional activity that demands high quality literacy teachers. This points to the fact that professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' overall academic achievement including reading skills. The teaching and learning of reading is a complex and highly skilled professional activity that demands high quality literacy teachers.

The study also revealed that slightly more than half (53.6%) of the Standard III teachers believed that their teaching experience very often influence their learners' acquisition of reading skills, 14.3% indicated experience often influences their learners' acquisition of reading skills, 28.6% indicated sometimes whereas a paltry 3.5% indicated never. During interviews, head teachers also noted that teaching experience influence Standard III pupils' ability to acquire reading skills.

One headteacher remarked,

*“Standard III teachers with teaching experience well over 10 years have their learners score impressively in different concepts in reading skills”.*

These findings are consistent with the assertions of Gibbons et al (1997) that experienced teachers are able to apply different teaching approaches to teach different topics also to suit different learners. This was also consistent with the views expressed by Kemper, Stringfield and Teddlie(2003) that focus should be put on the most appropriate approaches used in teaching specific topics to learners with different abilities, prior knowledge and backgrounds. These findings affirm the fact that teachers' experience has an influence on



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pupil’s achievement in reading skills. Experienced teachers have a lot of knowledge on the reading skills which helps them to give insight to pupils on subjects.

**D. INFERENTIAL FINDINGS ON THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ CHARACTERISTICS ON ACQUISITION OF READING SKILLS AMONGST CLASS III PUPILS**

To verify the possibility of variance between teachers’ characteristics and Standard III pupils’ acquisition of reading skills, data was collected on how many times teachers have undergone professional training on how to teach reading skills, their teaching experience and Standard III pupils’ performance in reading skills from the sample pupils’ test. The results are shown in Table 4:

**Table 4: Teachers’ Characteristics and Standard III Pupils’ Performance in Reading Skills**

Frequency of Training	Experience in Years	Reading Skills				
		FR (25)	DCT (10)	COM (5)	LN (25)	MLS (36)
1	1	4	1	1	14	3
2	3	9	2	1	20	7
3	5	11	4	2	22	11
4	7	15	5	3	24	19
5	9	20	7	4	25	22
6	11	23	9	4	25	28

Table 4. indicates that teachers’ professional training as does their teaching in enhancing pupils’ acquisition of reading skills. It is evident that the more the teacher is professionally trained and experienced, the fairer the performance of their Standard III learners in reading skills. These results further corroborate the findings of Coonen (1987) that teachers on in-service courses and with enough teaching experience were highly efficient in Classrooms when compared to teachers who had no further training. These findings also are in agreement with Kirembu (2012) that learners taught by teachers with high academic and professional training qualifications performed better than those taught by teacher with lower qualifications. These results were subjected to ANOVA to analyze such variance and results are in Table 5:

**Table 5: ANOVA Analysis of the Difference between the Means of the Teachers’ Characteristics and Standard III Pupils’ Performance in Reading Skills**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Teachers' Characteristics	660.000	5	132.000		
Fluent Reading Dictation	1897.286	6	316.214	33.760	.001
Comprehension Letter Naming Mixing of Letters and Sounds	281.000	30	9.367		
Total	2178.286	36	60.508		
Total	2838.286	41	69.226		

Grand Mean = 9.57

From the ANOVA Statistics in Table 5: the processed data, which is the population parameters, had a significance level of 0.001 which shows that the data is ideal for making a conclusion on the population’s parameter as the value of significance (p-value of 0.001) is less than 5%, that is, p-value=0.001<0.05. It also indicates that the results were statistically significant and that there is a significant difference between the frequency of teachers’ professional training and experience and Standard III pupils’ acquisition of reading skills. In other words, despite significant relationship between training, experience and reading skill acquisition, this is not the case in the Kenya Sub - county. These results were consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Krueger (2003) which generated a p-value of 0.013<0.05. Thus, the Null Hypothesis,  $H_0$ : “There is no significant influence of teachers’ characteristics on acquisition of reading skills among Standard III pupils” is rejected.

**V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The study established that most of Standard III pupils in public primary schools manifest good, fluent and fast reading of words. However, the majority of the pupils had a difficult time when figuring out the sounds and letters nor were they able to differentiate between letters and sounds. It was also evident that most of Standard III pupils in primary schools could write the words though with a lot of spelling mistakes and at the same time found it difficult to explain the functions of most items written.

The study also revealed that Standard III pupils in primary schools’ manifest dismal compression skills as does majority who mix letters and sounds. These findings affirm the fact



that skills such as letter-sound, Blending (letter combinations) and the making of sense and association of words need to be acquired first before the reader can read more complicated comprehension skills.

From the study findings, it is evident that class III teachers have numerous characteristics which impact on acquisition of reading skills amongst class III pupils. These characteristics include the level of education, gender, behavior and experience. It is evident that the gender, level of education and teaching experience of class III teachers has a way of influencing learners' acquisition of reading skills. Teaching and learning of reading is a complex and highly skilled professional activity that demands high quality literacy teachers. In other words, professionally qualified teachers are likely to foster high pupils' overall academic achievement including reading skills.

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