

Pre-Primary School Experiences and Lower Primary Pupils' Reading Literacy Competencies: A Case of Laikipia, Kenya

Ong'ang'a H.M. Ouko, Nderitu N. Elizabeth

Abstract— Reading skills is one of the basic requirements which enable people engage themselves in their daily activities. Reading achievement determines the child's success in school and eventual career development. School age children are not learning core skills expected at age level. Despite significant gains in expanding access to primary school education literacy outcomes remains significantly deficient. The study focused on influence of pre-primary school experience on pupils' reading achievement in Laikipia West Sub-county. Ex post facto research design was employed. The target population were grade two pupils in both public and private schools in the sub-county. Quantitative data was tabulated and analyzed by descriptive statistic including frequency and percentages presented through tables and figures. Results revealed that levels of competency in story-reading, word recognition and letter, sound recognition were below average at 60%, 57%, and 50% respectively. From the results, pre-primary experience in key in pupils' reading achievement, where pupils who attended pre-primary school registering good grades in letter and sound recognition, word recognition and paragraph reading. Recommendations were made that parents be educated on the importance of early year's education and teachers to design appropriate tasks in order to enhance and boost reading literacy among pupils.

Index Terms— Pre-Primary, Reading, Achievement, Experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Education is one of the major motivating factors behind national economic growth and reading is one of the crucial skill for a child to start education.

Globally, around 20% of English speaking children reach age 11 years unable to read confidently. About 10% of the pupils every year not attaining average reading levels (Rosebrock 2006). A report by NAEP(2013) indicate that 66% of US fourth graders scored below proficient on reading test, meaning they were not reading at grade level. The report also indicated that 22% of eighth graders scored below the basic level and only 36% of the eighth were at grade level.

In Africa more than 90% of school-age children are not learning core skills expected at the age and grade level (Uwezo, 2010). Uwezo (2012) indicate that, despite significant gains in expanding access to primary education,

literacy outcomes remain significantly deficient across the region. Uwezo (2013) East Africa report show that children in higher primary classes in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania failed to perform reading test of grade two levels.

Kenya government has invested so much into education system, in an effort to realize educational needs and achieve education related Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030. Government initiatives has been through introduction of free and compulsory basic education. Otieno (2003) reveals that, although free primary education program has increased access to primary education especially among the poor, quality of the education provided remains a challenge. Since the introduction of FPE, many pupils join primary school without necessarily going through pre-primary school. A study Magnuson (2004) suggests that early childhood education significantly raises Mathematics and reading performance at school entry.

Towa School Board Foundation (2007) suggests that pre-primary attendance is associated with short and long term effect on school performance. A report by Uwezo 2013 indicated that Laikipia County had an average score of 39%. Although the score was above the national average which was 32%, the score was low compared to the leading county which had an average score of 58%. Data at the District Education Office also show that Laikipia West Sub-county posted poor results in KCPE in the year 2014 and 2014 with a mean score of 242.55 and 244.09 respectively.

A report by EFA (2011) reveals that there is an increase of illiterate adults, therefore this calls for need to secure reading ability in young children which is a core skill to determine the child's success in school and eventual career development.

Purpose of the Study

The study investigated school contextual factors including pre-primary school experience affecting pupils' reading achievement in Laikipia West Sub-county, Laikipia County.

Related Literature

In the past years many countries have questioned the value of early childhood education and what role this early education plays in subsequent academic achievement in the primary level.

A study by Magnuson (2004) suggests that ECE significantly raises mathematics and reading performance at school entry. It also found that early childhood education attendance increased self-control and had a positive effect on academic outcomes.

According to LeFevre, Smith-Chant, Skwarchuk, Fast,

Ong'ang'a H.M. Ouko, lecturer at department of Early Childhood Studies and special needs education, Kenyatta University, Kenya
Nderitu N. Elizabeth, trained teacher primary school, Nairobi.

KamawarandBisanz (2009) high quality intensive early childhood programs have positive effect on cognitive development and academic achievement. It was also noted that children who had attended pre-primary school have higher literacy and subject achievement scores in primary school and had better attitude towards learning than peers who did not attend pre-primary prior to primary school entry (Ramey et al, 2002). Blau and Currie (2004) reveal that attending pre-primary school increases average grades, class participation and self-control in primary school which are important for future success in life. An early introduction of reading before the elementary school can greatly increase literacy development and reading comprehension. Literacy scholars argue that reading to preschoolers helps prepare them for greater success in school (Anderson & Cheung, 2003). Also an early introduction to reading fosters development of positive attitude towards reading (Lawson, 2012) therefore, early childhood education is crucial for a child's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. Literacy development during early years has important implications for children later literacy achievement (Roberts, 2005).

Methodology

Ex post facto research design was used in determining how the independent variables present prior the study affect the dependent variable (Best 1992). The study was carried in Laikipia West Sub-county targeting 80 public and 22 private schools in the sub-county. The choices of schools selected were both purposively and representative. Stratified random sampling was used to select schools included in the study. The researcher used 15% of the target population as proposed by Babbie (1992) who stated that a sample size of at least 15% of accessible population is considered adequate in descriptive studies.

Out of 102 schools in the sub-county, 16 were randomly selected and purposive sampling selected 16 grade two teachers, one teacher from each selected school. The researcher used questionnaires and checklists to collect data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data. The data was tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency and percentages presented through tables and figures.

Results of the Study

Response Rates

The researcher administered 16 questionnaires to grade two teachers and 15 questionnaires were filled and returned. Grade two teachers administered a reading test among grade two pupils. This yielded response rate as shown in table 1.1 below.

Table 1: Response Rates

Respondents	Sampled Respondents	N	Return Rate (%)
Grade Two Teachers	16	15	93.8
Grade Two Pupils	120	100	83.3
Total	136	115	84.6

From Table 1, grade two teachers and grade two pupils registered a response rate of 84.6%. The research considered the response rate of 84.6% as adequate and suitable as attested to by Creswell (2009) where he asserts that a response rate 75.0% and above is adequate for generalization of the outcomes to the target population.

II. GRADE TWO PUPILS' READING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

The researcher investigated the extent to which grade two pupils in both public and private primary schools manifest reading skills such as letter and sound recognition, word recognition and sentence reading and reading achievement checklists were used. Marks were awarded in every level of reading skills out of 100%. Any mark above 70% was rated good, 50 -70 percent was rated fair and below 50% was rated below average. Data were collected and the results presented in table 1.2 below

Table 2 Ratings of Reading Skills amongst Grade Two Pupils

Reading Skills	Good	%	Fair	%	Below Average %
Letter name recognition	54	54.0	7	7.0	39
Letter sound recognition	11	11.0	39	39.0	50
Word recognition	32	32.0	33	11.0	57
Story reading	29	29.0	11	11.0	60
Paragraph and sentence reading	32	32.0	54	54.0	34
Comprehension skills	30	30.0	10	10.0	60

Results in Table 2 showed that slightly more than half 54.0% of the grade two pupils were competent in word recognition. About 7.0% of the grade two pupils recorded fairly good result in word recognition, whereas 39.0% were below average in word recognition.

Key: L/S- Letter and Sound recognition; W-Word recognition; S/P –Sentence and paragraph reading; S – story reading and C - Comprehension

Table 3: Frequency of pre-primary school attendance and Grade Two Pupils' Performance in Reading Skills

Frequency of Pre-primary School Attendance	L/S (25)	W (25)	S/P(25)	S (25)	C(25)
Never attended	17	15	13	12	10
Attended	36	35	31	30	27

The results in Table 3 indicate that pupils who attended pre-primary school registered good grades in letter and sound recognition, word recognition, sentence and paragraph -reading, story reading and comprehension skill. These findings were subjected to ANOVA and results are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA Analysis between Attendance and Grade Two Pupils' Performance in Reading Skills
Dependent Variables: ¹W-Word recognition; ²S/P-Sentence and paragraph reading; ³S- Story reading and ⁴C - Comprehension

	\sum Square s	D f	π Square	F	Sig
Attendance	1209.4	5	241.9		
Performance in reading skills	¹ W, ² S/P, ³ S and ⁴ C Residual	7	1433.7	15.0	.001
Total	Total	20	477.0	23.9	
	Total	24	1911.0	79.6	
	Total	29	3120.2	107.6	
Grand Mean = 15.17					

From the ANOVA statistics in Table 1.5, the processed data, which is the population parameters, had a significance level of 5% 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. The finding also indicates that the results were statistically significant and that pre-primary attendance enhanced grade two pupils' skills in reading, dictation, comprehension and letter naming. These findings mean that pre-primary school experience influence children's reading ability.

III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study established that most of Grade Two pupils in public primary schools manifest relatively low skills in word recognition. Majority of the pupils had difficult time figuring out the sounds and letters. They were unable to differentiate between letters and sounds. Basic reading skill is a major predictor of pupils' academic success or failure. This means, successful acquisition of decoding skills during the lower primary levels is a good indicator of later literacy achievement. This suggests that the teaching of letter sounds helps the pupils to link sound and letter. Reading words leads to better reading of sentences and paragraphs hence improve story reading skills and eventually improve comprehension skills. These findings affirm that skills such as letter sound recognition, word recognition need to be acquired first before the reader can read more complicated comprehension tasks.

Findings revealed that pupils who most frequently attended pre-primary school, which is an early stage of education, registered good grades in letter and sound recognition, word recognition, sentence and paragraph reading, story reading and comprehension skills. From the ANOVA statistics, the results were statistically significant and that frequency with which grade two pupils attended pre-primary school at early stages enhanced grade two pupils' skills to master fluent reading, dictation, comprehension and letter naming skills.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of the current study, the following conclusions have been drawn.

The study established that most of the Grade Two pupils manifested relatively good, fluent and fast reading of words. However, most of them were unable to differentiate between letters sounds. Similarly, the pupils performed below average in sentence and paragraph reading, story reading and in comprehension skills.

Findings revealed that pupils who attended pre-primary school, which is an early stage of education, registered good grades in letter and sound recognition, word recognition, sentence and paragraph reading, story reading and comprehension skills. There is a significant positive relationship between pre-primary school experience and Grade Two pupils' acquisition of reading skills.

The study revealed that the level of acquisition of readings skills among grade two pupils was still low since only one dimension of reading skills (letter name recognition) out of

six areas was well acquired.

The study therefore recommends that head teachers and teachers provide necessary materials and environment which can promote acquisition of reading skills among pupils.

It is evident that most pupils transit to the next levels without good mastery of reading skills as a result of weak foundation in early stages of education at pre-primary levels. The study recommends that Grade Two teachers should form small and convenient reading groups which provide every learner with an opportunity to actively participate in reading activities going on within such groups. This should go a long way in designing appropriate tasks with appropriate levels of difficulty in order to enhance and boost reading literacy among learners before transition.

The study further recommended that teachers embrace the use of technology (ICT) in teaching reading skills. This should go a long way in ensuring that English is made mandatory a language for communication within the school microsystem.

REFERENCES

- [1] Anderson & Cheung (2003). Family Resources and Educational Outcomes in Britain. Journal of comparative family studies, JSTOR
- [2] Blau, D. & Currie, J. (2004). Preschool Day Care and after school care: Who's minding the kids? NBER Working paper. Cambridge A
- [3] Babbie, E. (1992). The practice of social research. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- [4] Best, J. W. (1992). Pre-school education and its lasting effects: Research Journal Retrieved from: <http://www.google.com>
- [5] Casio, (2004). Regulation of standards in early childhood care and developmental services. Educational Act No 1 of 2004 of Montserrat
- [6] EFA; Global monitoring report (2011) the hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education 'Paris (2012); World Atlas of gender Equality in Education: Paris, UNESCO
- [7] Lawson, (2012). The real power of parental reading aloud. Australian Journal of Education 2012 – Journals. Sagepub.com
- [8] LeFevre, J., Smith-Chant, B. L., Skwarchuk, S., Fast, L., Kamawar, D. & Bisanz, J. (2009). Home numeracy experiences and children's math performance in early years. Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, 41(2), 55-56. Retrieved on 7th April, 2014 from DOI: 10.1037/a0014532
- [9] Magnuson, K. et al (2004). Inequality of preschool education and school readiness. American Education Journal
- [10] National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2013). Findings of the nation and the states: reading report card: Washington DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement
- [11] Otieno, M. (2003). The 'Curse' of Education: Standard Kenya
- [12] Ramey et al (2002). The effect of early childhood experiences on developmental competence
- [13] Roberts, (2005). The role of home literacy practices in preschool children's language and emergent of literacy skills. Journal of Speech, Language and hearing 48(2), 345 – 359
- [14] Rosebrock, V. (2006) Research indicates intergenerational interactions enhance young children's personal social skills. In Press
- [15] Uwezo, (2010). National Assessment of Kenyan Children's Reading, Numeracy and Literacy. From <http://www.uwezo.net/index>.
- [16] Uwezo, (2011). Are our children learning? Annual Learning Assessment Report Kenya.
- [17] Uwezo, (2012). Are our children learning? Literacy and numeracy across East Africa. Nairobi Kenya: Uwezo.



Ong'ang'ais is a lecturer at the department of Early Childhood Studies and special needs education, Kenyatta University, Kenya. He has a Ph.D. and a Master of Education (Early Years Education) degrees from Kenyatta University. Besides, the author studied early childhood education in under graduate.

He has a lot of experience in teaching and training teachers and ToTs for basic and middle level Education. His experience is mainly on teacher training and research in early years' education. He has done a number of training modules for training in the area of early childhood studies. He has published in a number of referred journals on the area of early years' education. The author is a consultant in early years' curriculum design and development, children's rights advocacy, community education and development, research in family and child studies among other aspects involving young children. He is a board member of the school education Kenyatta University. He supervises both Ph.D. and masters students for both Kenyatta University and Mount Kenya University. He is a founding member and secretariat of the National ECD Network for Kenya.



Ms Nderitu N Elizabeth

Elizabeth Nderitu has a master of education (Early Childhood Studies) degree from Kenyatta University. She is a trained teacher and is currently teaching in a private primary school in Nairobi. She has a bias to young children and will be commencing a doctorate course in the area of early years education

particularly in the light of the new competence based curriculum (CBC) in Kenya.