



**INFLUENCE OF READING ACTIVITIES
ON PERFORMANCE IN READING ENGLISH AMONG
GRADE ONE PUPILS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS
IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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Abstract:

Reading activities are becoming a focal point in teaching pupils a new language especially English. Based on the studies that have attempted to show the influence of reading activities on performance in reading, it remains inconclusive that reading activities have significant influence on performance of the learners in English as one of the subjects learnt in lower primary schools in Kenya. There are inadequate studies on the influence of reading activities on performance of learners in reading in English in Grade One. This study sought to investigate the influence of reading activities on performance of learners in reading English among Grade One pupils in public primary schools in Kayole Zone of Embakasi Sub-County, Nairobi County. The study employed descriptive research design. The target population was 180 teachers and 3600 Grade One pupils summing up to an overall target population of 3780 respondents in 20 schools. This study employed stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques to obtain a sample size of 241 respondents comprising of 36 teachers and 205 Grade One pupils. The researcher used questionnaires and performance tests to collect data. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively and presented in form of percentages, frequencies and means for all objectives and correlations between the objectives. Qualitative data was analysed by categorizing it into themes and presented in form of themes and verbatim quotation where necessary. The study findings revealed that reading activities identified include sound reading, word reading, shape reading and colour reading. In addition, pupils perform better (mean of 3.52) in reading speed followed by interpretation of colour and shapes (mean of 3.51) and the least performance is in fluency (mean of 3.38). The study findings established that, sound reading activities and shape reading activities positively influenced performance of

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pupils in reading English. Also, word reading activities and colour activities did not significantly influence performance in reading English. The study concludes that not all reading activities significantly influence performance of the pupils. The study recommends that school administration and teachers should improve their strategies in improving delivery and performance of pupils in English.

Keywords: reading, performance, English, grade one pupils, reading activities

1. Introduction

Many studies have associated reading habits with academic performance. For example, Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe (2012) established that reading habits are important building blocks in the performance of the learners in language activities. This implies that learners who have more reading habits have a higher marginal propensity of performance in language. This was well demonstrated by the fact that learners who repeatedly read same words and images had developed comprehension skills thereby retaining such words and images for longer time. Also, during repeated reading, the learners developed techniques of identifying and interpreting similar, related or complex words and images. However, the study done by Issa et al. (2012) focused on college students thereby contributing to the knowledge gap on the extent to which habits employed through language activities enhance performance in reading among Grade One pupils.

In China Pearson (2004) found out that University students performed highly in reading books in out of class learning as compared to performance in classrooms. The students were observed to read more of internet materials and game guides thereby performing better such as reading fast and identifying key words in the texts. The proficiency in reading was observed more in computer games as the students wanted to enjoy the game. Pearson (2004) concluded that students were more motivated outside their classrooms than during their classroom time. In this regard, games and internet acted as motivating factors that improved performance, yet this had not been determined in Grade One pupils, thus prompting the study to investigate how performance in reading was exhibited in reading activities in Grade One as pupils learn English.

Muter and Snowling (2009) provided a simple view of reading model that showed different patterns of performance. In the model, performance of the learners was determined by variations in language comprehension processes and word recognition processes. According to Muter and Snowling (2009), performance was good when there was good word recognition and good comprehension, or it was poor when there was poor word recognition and poor comprehension. This implied that, there are at least two possible outcomes of performance in reading activities: poor reading and good reading characterized by poor word recognition and comprehension skills as well as good word recognition and comprehension skills respectively. This study therefore

investigated how reading activities influenced performance in reading among Grade One pupils.

A study done by Cimmiyotti (2013) in California revealed that there was a strong positive correlation (an r value of .67) between reading performance level and mathematics performance level. The findings implied that good reading ability is a prerequisite to good understanding of the mathematical problem hence easier to solve. Similar findings by Duru and Koklu (2011) observed that poor performance of students in mathematics was associated with poor reading skills characterized by lack of knowledge and skills to get meaning of symbols, signs and words used in Mathematics. Another study by Cromley (2009) revealed that reading comprehension correlated highly (0.819) with proficiency of learners in science. Improved performance in mathematics had also been linked to good reading comprehension skills (Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola, & Nurmia, 2008). These studies dwelt on mathematics and science thus the need to find out the performance in reading activities relationship in English which may be a pillar to better comprehension.

In the study by Vilenius-Tuohimaa, et al., (2008), students with good reading comprehension skills solved word problems in mathematics easily than students with poor reading comprehension skills. The reason for the low performance in mathematics was that students with poor reading comprehension skills struggled with reading the text thereby exhibiting poor decoding skills which limited logical reasoning. It was from this basis that Vilenius-Tuohimaa, et. al., (2008) strongly associated the students' dismal performance in mathematics to other subjects.

Findings by Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola and Numia (2008) are in concurrence with findings by Grimm (2008) who found that, problem solving, and data interpretation skills were associated with reading comprehension. In this regard, students with high level of reading comprehension showed high ability to solve and interpret mathematical problems. However, there still existed a literature gap on the extent to which such findings could be proved in the Kenyan primary school setting from the perspective of performance of the Grade One pupils as reflected by their performance in reading.

In the Philippines, overall students' performance in reading comprehension and science was indexed at low mastery level (Imam, Mastura, Jamil & Ismail, 2014). Generally, four out of six reading skills such as understanding vocabulary in context, noting details, predicting outcome, and making inference made up the overall reading skills that positively correlated with science performance of students. The study concluded that although the strength of the influence was considered weak, students with high reading skills showed improvements in science than students with low reading skills. However, while the study by Imam et. al., (2014) shows the influence of reading skills on performance in science, there was no documented evidence showing similarities or differences in the findings of the study in other subject studies done among primary schools in Kenya.

In Ghana, Owusu-Acheaw (2014) found out that students with good reading habits could understand questions easily and express themselves better as opposed to

those who neither had good reading habits nor reading skills at all. Although the study by Owusu-Acheaw (2014) did not measure the performance of the learners and tie it to reading habits, Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe and Adedeji (2012) argued that engaging in continuous reading considerably influenced ones studying skills and subsequent academic performance. As the study by Owusu-Acheaw (2014) demonstrated, poor reading habits were perceived to influence poor academic performance, the poor reading habits were not shown to result from language activities. As such, this study focused on performance in reading activities.

Studies carried out in Kenya focused on different aspects of language and performance. The findings by Achieng (2012) indicated that, majority of pupils in Migori had low reading skills, grammar skills and writing skills. This was however in Kiswahili language but the current study focused on reading skills in English. Onchera and Manyasi (2013) carried out a study in Nyanza on the acquisition of functional skills by students in secondary schools. The study revealed that teachers had different understanding of the functional skills they taught and that they gave minimum support in the acquisition of these functional writing skills. As a result, this limited exposure of students to a variety of functional writing texts. The findings implied that, exposing learners to functional writing texts was a language activity that was necessary for the learners. The study touched on one of the language activities, but the concern of this study was not addressed, thus there was need to have a study to assess performance of learners in reading activities in English.

Odima (2015) investigated the relationship between teaching English and acquisition of English language skills in primary schools in Busia County. By utilizing descriptive survey research design, the findings revealed that the process of teaching English language depended on the level of children's acquired first language in which mother tongue supported the acquisition of language skills. Although the study brought out the challenges that limit acquisition of language skills among children, it did not link such challenges to specific language skills such as reading skills. Therefore, this study attempted to establish the influence of language reading activities on performance of the learners.

A study by Iribe Mwangi and Mutua (2014) in Machakos County on language games and language teaching, sought to investigate poor performance in language among class three pupils. The study utilised quasi-experiment research design where results from pre-test and post-tests were obtained and correlated. The findings revealed that, learners who used language games in class to learn Kiswahili performed better than those who did not. The study only attempted to generalize the performance of language thereby limiting the linking of games as a language activity to reading skills. However, the study does not articulate specific skills that are influenced by games as a language activity. The study only generalized the performance of language thereby limiting the link of games as a language activity to specific skills especially reading skills. Thus, there was need for a study on reading activities and performance of learners in lower primary schools.

According to a study by Otieno (2010), basic reading skills involved the ability to pronounce written words accurately and this required appropriate teaching instructions in a language most familiar to the pupils. The study was carried out to investigate language practices in primary schools; the teachers' perspective on both English and Kiswahili languages. The findings of the study revealed that, there are conflicting practices regarding language of early reading instructions and language use in the schools which had resulted from both English and Kiswahili being working recognized languages in Kenya. The study concluded that schools especially public and community schools in Nairobi were not able to adopt Kiswahili exclusively for reading instructions. The types of language activities also have a direct influence on the performance of the learners whether in English or Kiswahili. This study therefore sought to bridge the gap by investigating the performance of learners after being taught reading activities.

In Narok, Mwoma (2017) in a study on ability of children in reading established that, boys performed slightly better than girls in reading in two subjects. Availability of reading materials whether at school or home were found to promote reading abilities of the learners. However, the study focused on grade three learners. This study will therefore focus on grade one learners.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of reading activities on performance of reading in English language among Grade One children in Kayole Zone, Embakasi Sub-County, Nairobi County.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed mixed method research that supported both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Using quantitative research approaches, the researcher applied descriptive techniques at different stages of data analysis. Descriptive techniques ensured data collected was easily expressed in form of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means. In addition, qualitative approaches ensured that data collected captured behaviour and attitudes of respondents. In this study, the levels in sound reading, word reading, shape reading, and colour reading were taken to determine the level of performance in reading activities exhibited among Grade One learners. This design assisted in obtaining in-depth meaning from both quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, the researcher attempted to determine the performance of learners in reading activities. The study used a sample of 36 purposively sampled grade one teachers and 205 randomly sampled grade one pupils from a target population of 180 teachers and 3600 Grade One pupils summing up to an overall target population of 3780 respondents in 20 schools.

3.1 Instrumentation

The researcher used questionnaires and performance tests to collect data. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers. Questions were both structured and unstructured. Standardised performance tests for all pupils were also used to collect performance scores obtained in computing reading ability. The study adopted Uwezo test on reading in collaboration with lower primary syllabus formulated by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD).

4. Findings and Discussions

The major task was to analyse the influence of reading activities on performance in reading activities. Perceptions of teachers on reading activities in relation to performance were also analysed. In addition, correlations between perceptions of teachers on reading activities and performance of pupils were obtained.

The findings on perceptions of teachers on reading activities and its influence on performance in reading English were analysed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceptions of Teachers on
 Reading Activities and Performance of Pupils

Narrative	Mean (n=36)
Continuous engagement of learners in sound reading activities has improved their ability to read fluently.	4.44
The engagement of learners in word reading activities has improved word reading speed.	4.33
The use of shape reading activities in English lessons has improved the ability of learners to interpret different shapes.	4.31
The inclusion of colour reading activities in English lessons has improved the ability of learners to identify and read different colours.	4.28

Scale of 1-5 where: 1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Undecided (UD), 4=Agree (A), 5=Strongly Agree (SA).

Findings in Table 1 indicate that reading activities led to improved performance of the pupils due to interventions made by teachers. For example, pupils were improving their performance in reading fluently as observed by most teachers (mean of 4.44) as a result of teachers making reading part of the major activities during learning. Also, teachers had increased engagement of pupils in word reading and interpretation of shapes and colours. These engagements had improved their performance in English as most teachers agreed.

Analysis on whether performance in fluency was related to sound reading activities was done and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between
 Sound Reading Activities and Performance in Fluency

Correlations			
		Performance in Fluency	Sound Reading Activities
Performance in Fluency	Pearson Correlation	1	.354*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	146.078	8.556
	Covariance	.716	.244
	N	205	36
Sound Reading Activities	Pearson Correlation	.354*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	8.556	14.889
	Covariance	.244	.425
	N	36	36

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Findings in Table 2 indicate that the performance of pupils in fluency was related to sound reading activities. With a Pearson Correlation coefficient of .354 at 0.05 significant level, there is significant relationship between sound reading activities and performance of the pupils in fluency. Also, with a positive Covariance of .244, performance in fluency is positively related to sound reading activities. These coefficients imply that, sound reading activities have significant influence on performance of the pupils in fluency. Some of the teachers stated that sounds help in formation of words while others stated that learners have extra time in the afternoons for further practice.

The association of sound reading activities to fluency was strongly attributed to building of confidence among the pupils. This finding agrees with Otieno's (2010) who established that basic reading skills involve the ability to pronounce written words accurately and this requires appropriate teaching instructions in a language most familiar to the pupils. This explains the overall mean of 3.38 recorded among pupils. These findings support Vygotsky's (1962) language learning theory that teachers apply scaffolding to ensure that learners adjust their performance progressively through increase in intensity of the reading activities. In this regard, continuous engagement of the learners in sound reading significantly improves performance of the learners in fluency.

Analysis on whether performance in reading speed was related to word reading activities was done and presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between
 Word Reading Activities and Performance in Reading Speed

Correlations			
		Word Reading Activities	Performance in Reading Speed
Word Reading Activities	Pearson Correlation	1	-.200
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.243
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	20.000	-5.333
	Covariance	.571	-.152
	N	36	36
Performance in Reading Speed	Pearson Correlation	-.200	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	-5.333	179.190
	Covariance	-.152	.878
	N	36	205

Findings in Table 3 indicate negative correlation coefficient and covariance. With a correlation coefficient of $-.200$ at significant level of 0.05 and covariance of $-.152$, it is evident that, word reading activities are not related to the performance in reading speed. These findings indicate that despite teachers noticing improved performance in reading speed, the improvement was not related to engagement of learners in word reading activities.

The teachers had stated that, emphasis placed on repetition of words and reading in a group enabled the learners to improve speed. The correlations however, show otherwise, and this indicates that there are some interventions that contribute to overall mean of 3.52 in reading speed among pupils. These findings support Vygotsky's (1962) language learning theory that children acquire language not only through exposure to words but also on the interdependence between thought and language development. This implies that continuous engagement of the learners in word reading activities is not what improves performance in reading speed. In this regard, reading speed could be acquired through other social interactions outside their classrooms.

Analysis on whether performance in interpretation of shapes was related to shape reading activities was done and presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between
 Shape Reading Activities and Performance in Interpretation of Shapes

Correlations			
		Ability to Interpret	Shape Reading Activities
Ability to Interpret	Pearson Correlation	1	.024
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.887
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	171.239	.444
	Covariance	.839	.013
	N	205	36
Shape Reading Activities	Pearson Correlation	.024	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.887	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	.444	9.639
	Covariance	.013	.275
	N	36	36

Findings in Table 4 indicate that there is positive correlation coefficient and covariance. With a positive coefficient of .024 at significant level of 0.05 and covariance of .013, shape reading activities are related to performance of the learners in interpretation of shapes. However, while the shape reading activities positively relate to ability of the pupils to interpret shapes, the correlation is weak hence not significant. This is despite teachers stating that seeing of shapes (charts) by pupils relates to words and learners can identify with items in the environment.

The findings imply that despite improvement in interpretation of shapes (overall mean of 3.51), the performance is not largely attributed to shape reading activities. These findings agree with findings in the study by Grimm (2008) who established that ability to interpret shapes was associated with reading comprehension. In this regard, performance in interpretation of shapes could be associated with reading comprehension.

Analysis on whether performance in interpretation of colours was related to colour reading activities was done and presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation between
 Colour Reading Activities and Performance in Interpretation of Colours

Correlations			
		Ability to Interpret	Colour Reading Activities
Ability to Interpret	Pearson Correlation	1	-.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.861
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	171.239	-.778
	Covariance	.839	-.022
	N	205	36
Colour Reading Activities	Pearson Correlation	-.030	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.861	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	-.778	19.222
	Covariance	-.022	.549
	N	36	36

Findings in Table 5 indicate negative correlation coefficient and covariance. With a correlation coefficient of -0.030 at significant level of 0.05 and covariance of -0.022 , colour reading activities are not related to the performance in interpretation of colours. These findings indicate that despite teachers noticing improved performance in interpretation of colours, the improvement was not related to engagement of learners in colour reading activities.

Reading colours is more of visual activity that utilises other learning activities other than language activity. In this regard, language activities contribute to acquisition of colour interpretation skills just as other learning activities such as science. In Kenya's syllabus, science activities allow learners to acquire colour interpretation skills.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that on the scale of 1-5, the mean performance of the pupils in English is above average. In addition, sound reading activities influence significantly the performance followed by shape reading activities while word reading activities and colour reading activities do not significantly influence performance of pupils in English.

5.1 Recommendations

To improve performance of the learners, the government, through the Ministry of Education should improve syllabus for Grade One by providing more resources to support reading activities. School administration should increase supplies of teaching and learning materials. This will reduce the challenge on inadequate curriculum materials in reading activities. Also, parents should support learners acquire language skills through monitoring their reading at home.

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