

Teachers' Perception' on the Level of Preparedness in Implementing Early Grade Reading Programme in Kenya Public Primary Schools

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Abstract: *Introduction of early grade reading programmes in Kenyan public primary schools lower primary section was aimed at improving reading skills among pupils. However, no substantive research has been conducted yet to determine the views of teachers on their preparedness on the implementation of this programme since it was launched in January 2016 countrywide. The study sought opinions of lower primary school teachers who are the implementers of early grade reading. The target respondents were 551 teachers from Chepkorio division in Keiyo South Sub County, Elgeyo-Marakwet County Kenya. A sample size of 163 teachers were selected through stratified random sampling method. The study used teacher preparedness scale questionnaire as data collection instrument. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis for qualitative data. Research findings shows that majority of teachers were not adequately prepared for implementation of early grade reading programmes in Kenya. The study recommends that the government through the Ministry of Education should continuously offer in-service training to teachers and follow up on programme implementation in primary schools.*

Keywords: Early grade reading, lower primary, pupils, perception and preparedness

1. Introduction

Reading among pupils in schools include the expression of several behaviours such as reading real words in isolation or in context, reading pseudo words that can be pronounced but have no meaning, reading text aloud or silently, and demonstrating comprehension of text that is read silently or orally (Kourieos, 2011). Reading is done with the aim of generating meaning from a text. To achieve this, pupils have to decode graphemes (lines and shapes that represent spoken sounds) into words, sentences and then continuous text and attach meaning to them. Decoding and reading for meaning are two psycholinguistic processes that develop from separate roots but are intertwined. This integration occurs as the child begins learning to read through a teacher or parent, connecting oral language with phonological awareness. Learning to read is embedded within social and cultural context in which pupils learn to speak. According to the US National Reading Panel and Center for Education (2010), there are five key reading skills that children need to be able to read:

- 1) Phonological awareness (discriminating different spoken sounds in words)
- 2) Phonics (sound to letter relationship)
- 3) Fluency (ability to read orally aloud or silently with speed, accuracy, and proper expression and contributing to comprehension)
- 4) Vocabulary (acquiring sight vocabulary, inferring new words)
- 5) Comprehension (meaning making)

These reading skills are developed during children early years of education. Lower primary schools teachers (Standard 1- 3) play a significant role in shaping the necessary foundation for early literacy skills for pupils in primary schools. According to Lyons (2003), learning to read is critical to pupils' academic success and has a tremendous impact on their emotional and social development throughout life. The acquisition of appropriate reading skills provides pupils with success academically,

socially, and emotionally. According to Lyons and Weiser (2009), not all children grasp these skills in the early years and some children begin to struggle with rudimentary reading skills during their upper classes leading to massive dropouts in primary schools especially in developing countries. The struggle that children in ECDE face point to gaps and challenges in the curriculum implementation that is usually directed by the teacher.

The preparation of teacher is critical for successful implementation of curriculum in primary school (Wambiri, 2016). It is assumed that teachers' level of preparedness could affect the way they deliver instructions effectively. The International Reading Association (2003) suggested that quality teachers are capable of implementing reading instruction successfully and could rectify reading problems. Teachers' feeling of preparedness is one important indicator of the extent to which they are prepared to meet the challenges that characterize their profession. As a subjective measure of teacher quality, teacher preparedness incorporates what the teacher brings to the classroom from pre-service learning and on-the-job learning. Professional development is geared to providing on the job learning in key areas of classroom teaching, recent participation in professional development programs contribute to teachers being better prepared for the requirements of classroom teaching. In order to prepare teachers to implement curriculum, Findings must be translated into teacher preparation curricula with regard to both the content of specific instructional practices as well as the implementation methods needed to utilize these practices effectively in the classroom (Murray & Rabiner, 2014). This support is needed to ensure that the reading programme is implemented in schools effectively.

Despite this, problem persists in learners reading competencies across several countries in sub Saharan Africa. Early grade reading assessments in several countries have shown that many children spend two or three years in school without learning to read a single word. In Mali, for instance,

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94% of second graders could not read a single word in French and at least eight out of ten could not read a single word in four national languages, despite the fact that Mali is the most advanced among West African francophone countries in using national languages in education. In Southern Africa, Junias (2009) reported that learners' failure rate in their national examinations (Grade 10 and 12) was always high, especially in English in Namibia schools. This has been a recurring problem annually. The results reflected the poor background of language (English in that country) teaching in their lower primary Grade levels. In South Africa, Stephen (2014) showed that 80% of South African children were not yet reading with comprehension after five years of schooling with the problem being particularly among poor children. In Tanzania, Nyamwala (2014) reported that some primary school pupils in Tanzania complete their primary education without having acquired reading skills that would enable them to read and write in Kiswahili. Research conducted in Kenya by researchers and organisations shows that pupils' level of reading skills is low (USAID, 2009; Omuse, Onsare & Kurgatt, 2016). In Kenya, Omuse et al (2016) argued that many learners in Kenya are still not proficient in English reading skills despite going through the English course.

To address the reading challenges that pupils in public primary schools face, the government of Kenya through the support of developed partners started initiating early grade reading assessments projects. In 2007, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGMA) was piloted to assess literacy outcomes in Malindi. After piloting of Programmes that aimed at improving English, Kiswahili and Mathematics between 2007-2009. The country adopted the two models and carried out a research on Literacy and numeracy where the findings indicated that pupils in class 1 to 2 have low literacy and numeracy skills. The analysis of the research suggested that Lower Primary received less interest and attention from Head teachers, parents and teachers who were found to be using instructional methods that were wanting. The results of the studies formed the basis of the Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative, a program implemented by MOEST with financial support from USAID and technical support from an NGO namely RTI International from 2011 to 2014. PRIMR implementation indicated that Curriculum Support officers (CSOs) formerly Teacher Advisory Centre (TAC) tutors and teachers can improve the quality of Instruction and pupil outcomes significantly. In an effort to cover the gains of PRIMR, the TUSOME Programme was conceptualized and developed as a National Literacy Programme. It targets approximately 60,000 Teachers, 22,600 Schools for the Improvement of Literacy Instruction and Outcomes. It is envisaged that 5.4 Million class 1 and 2 pupils will be twice as likely to meet MOEST benchmarks for literacy.

The programme launched in January 2016 was implemented in all Public Primary Schools and 1000 alternative basic education institutions serving Low Cost Urban Settlements in Kenya. The programme targeted 5.4 million Children in public primary schools, 100,000 learners in alternative basic institutions, 48,000 teachers in public primary schools, 2000 Teachers in alternative basic education institutions, 1052 CSOs who will participate in training and supervision and

67 instructional coaches who participated in implementation. One of the goals of the literacy outcomes for standard 1 and 2 pupils was to improve teacher capacity, enhance supervision of teachers by CSOs, coaches and head teachers and enhance the education sector to sustainably improve literacy outcomes. This shows that the TUSOME early grade reading programme is aimed at developing teachers' capacity to translate curriculum objectives into action in schools. This paper therefore looks at the perceptions of teachers on the level of preparedness in the implementation of early grade reading programme in public primary schools in Chepkorio division, Kenya.

Research Problem

Much evidence suggests that many children who attend lower primary school (ECDE) have low skills in reading in majority of sub-saharan Africa countries. To mitigate this problem, the government of Kenya and developing partners (USAID and DFID) launched the TUSOME Early Grade Reading Programme in lower primary schools in January 2016 after being piloted in 1384 schools across the country from 2011 to 2014. The aim of introducing this programme was aimed at improving literacy learning outcomes of pupils. Teachers who are the curriculum implementers', their capacity is key to effective delivery of the Tusome curriculum. Teachers' readiness to Tusome curriculum implementation in public primary schools is not yet known despite them being undertaken for training prior to the programme being launched countrywide in January 2016. I believe that it is not possible yet to determine the impact of the programme but determining the readiness of the implementers is key to ensuring that the programme proceeds well in public primary schools. Therefore, the researcher will seek teachers' opinions towards their preparedness in the implementation of Tusome early grade reading programme in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division.

Research Objectives

- The paper was guided by the following research objectives
- (i) To determine perceptions of teachers' on the implementation of early grade reading programme in lower primary schools
 - (ii) To determine the level of teacher competency in the implementation of early grade reading programme in lower primary schools
 - (iii) To determine challenges influencing teacher preparedness in the implementation of early grade reading programme in lower primary schools

2. Literature Review

There is a growing body of literature on preparedness to implement curriculum which touches on a wide range of areas including teacher training, attitudes of the teacher and learner and availability and/or adequacy of instructional resources.

Related Studies

Kimosop (2015) alludes that teachers in primary schools need to prepare all the stages of the implementation of curriculum documents before they are actually used by the pupils through their assistance in class. The process involves the preparation of the lessons by putting in place a scheme of work and a lesson plan having identified the instructional objectives, teaching aids and assessment tools, and use of the appropriate methods of teaching. It is expected that curriculum instruction will be based on these sound teaching principles that the teacher ought to follow for effective classroom instruction. Kourieos (2011) offered prospective and practising primary teachers a voice to express their own views regarding the content and teaching approach of a potential ELT module within teacher education curricula. The research adopted a mixed-method sequential approach carried out in two phases between March and July 2010. Data was initially obtained from 296 in-service primary teachers and 124 student teachers through a questionnaire-based survey. The study suggests that providing student teachers with meaningful opportunities to form links between the taught theory and its practical application is a fundamental basis for a more holistic teacher approach to teacher education. This study provided evidence that participants view learning as a process embedded in a social context, within which knowledge is constructed through collaborative, awareness-raising tasks set by mentors whose mediating roles in the creation of desirable learning contexts is perceived to be crucial.

Piper, Jepkemei, Kwayumba and Kibukho (2015) used Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative to implement a randomized controlled trial of three ICT interventions to enhance learning outcomes: tablets for instructional supervisors, tablets for teachers, and e-readers for students. All three showed significant impacts in English and Kiswahili above the results of the control group. The impacts of the three interventions were not statistically significantly different from each other. Abobo and Orodho (2015) investigated the level of preparedness by teachers and school managers in implementing the Life Skills Education in secondary schools in Trans-Nzoia West District. 150 teachers and 37 principals in 37 public secondary schools in the district, stratified random sampling technique was adopted to draw 15 principals, 30 teachers and 180 students yielding 225 subjects. It was established that most teachers had not been trained on Life Skills Education hence indicating low level of preparedness by teachers. While teachers had negative attitude towards teaching of LSE, students portrayed a positive attitude towards learning of LSE. Regarding the level of availability and adequacy of teaching and learning resources, the study found that although the critical teaching/learning resources were available, they were grossly inadequate in most secondary schools studied.

Wafula (2012) discussed the teachers' awareness, training and professional preparedness on the use of integrated methods to teach oral literature in secondary schools. The study was conducted in Eldoret Municipality, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. It emerged that the teachers' understanding of the integrated method was in some cases very good, in others, good, average or poor. In addition, most of the teachers stated that none of the seminars or in-service

courses they attended was specifically prepared for oral literature.

Kimosop (2015) examined whether teachers: set instructional objectives and structured the content to be delivered. Descriptive survey research was carried out to establish this with forty five (45) form four C.R.E teachers in forty five (45) public secondary schools who were selected using simple random sampling. The study established that 22 (48.6%) never accomplished the learning objectives. 30 (66.6%) wrote schemes of work but majority 25(55.5%) never refer to them often. The majority 39(86.7%) never wrote lesson plans. In United States, Chumley (2011) determined if a reading intervention plan would increase the basic kindergarten readiness skills of students in kindergarten. Exploring effective strategies to build letter and sound recognition, sight word recalling, and reading comprehension for students from low socio-economic backgrounds was an important part of this study. Data collection for this study consisted of mixed-methods. Quantitative data was used for pre and post scores. A control group that did not receive the intervention plan was used for comparative data. For the qualitative portion of the study, a teacher focus group was made. The students participating in the study kept a pictograph. Through the analysis of multiple sources of data, the kindergarten reading readiness intervention proved to have gains on students' scores on the Lexia Reading Assessment. Leland (2013) examined how pre-service teachers' knowledge of how children learn to read changed because of their participation in a literacy preparation course that focused on the concept of emergent literacy. This study utilized results from a questionnaire distributed on the first and last day of class to determine if participants' content knowledge of emergent literacy increased. The results suggested a substantive change in teacher knowledge occurred as a result of this experience.

3. Materials and Methods

This paper used a descriptive survey. The target population for the study involved 551 teachers from Chepkorio division public primary schools. To select the sample size, 30% of the target was taken to be the sample size for the research. The respondents were selected through stratified random sampling technique. The study utilised questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics for quantitative data while content analysis was used for qualitative data.

4. Results

Demographic Results of Respondents

The teachers who participated in the research were asked to indicate their demographic details on gender. The results are given in Figure 1.

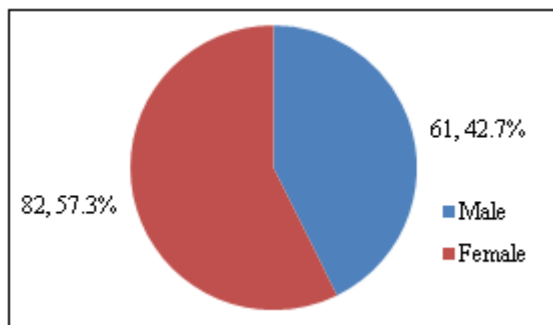


Figure 1: Teachers Demographic Profile

Research findings shows that majority 82 (57.3%) of teachers who participated in the study were female and only 61 (42.75) were male. This shows that the distribution of female teacher is higher in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division compared to males. The respondents were also asked to indicate their education level. The responses are illustrated in Figure 4.2.

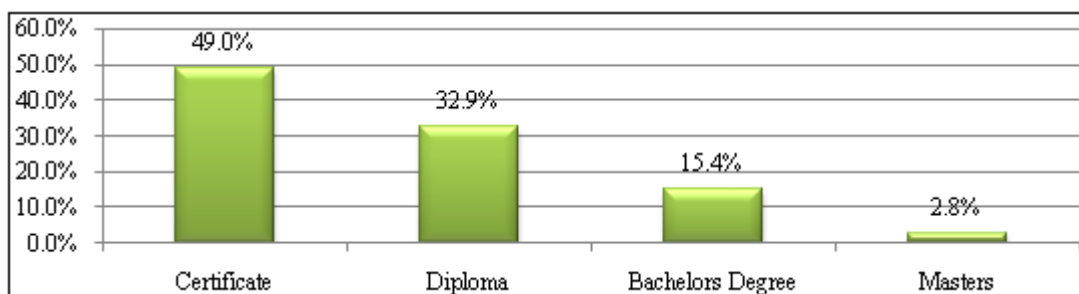


Figure 2: Teachers Education Level

Statistics shows that close to half 70 (49.0%) of teachers had certificate level of education (P1 and P2), 47 (32.9%) had diploma, 22 (15.4%) had degree and only 4 (2.8%) possessed masters degree in education. This shows that all teachers have the required qualifications to teach in primary schools as per TSC code. Moreover, teachers are seen to advance in their education as 51% have gone beyond the entry level of P1. The study further asked the respondents to indicate their work experience. Results are presented in Table 1.

Research results shows that 16 (11.2%) had been teaching for less than 3 years, 30 (21.0%) had worked for 4-6 years, 40 (28.0%) had worked form 7-9 years and 57 (39.9%) had worked for 10 years and above. The findings suggests that majority of teachers were experienced in teaching in primary schools in the study area.

Table 1: Teachers Work Experience

Experience	Freq	Percent
Less than 3yrs	16	11.2
4-6yrs	30	21.0
7-9yrs	40	28.0
10yrs and above	57	39.9
Total	143	100.0

Level of Implementation of TUSOME Reading Programme in Public Primary Schools

The government of Kenya introduced Tusome early literacy reading programme in lower primary schools standard one and two to improve their reading skills. Therefore, the study asked the respondents to indicate their views on the level of implementation of the programme in their schools. The results are given in Figure 3.

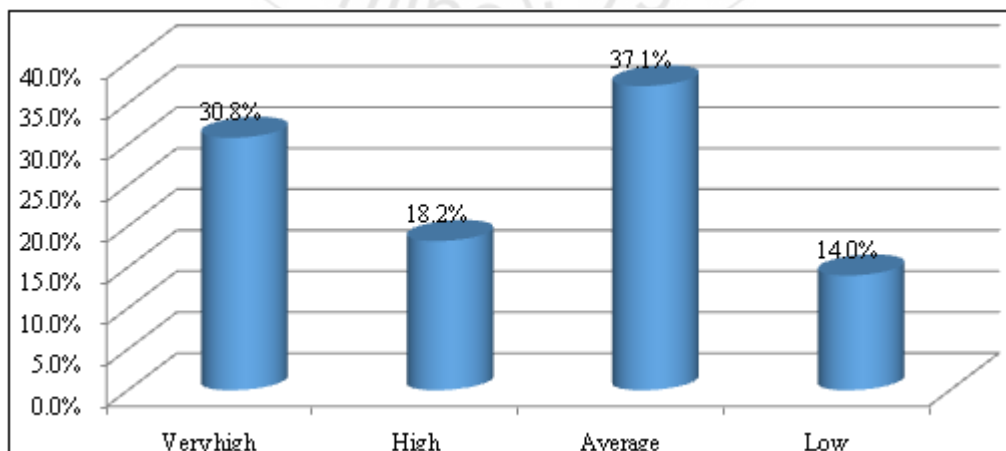


Figure 3: Level of Implementation of TUSOME Reading Programme

Results shows that 53 (37.1%) of teachers perceived that the level of implementation of the early grade reading programme in their schools to be on average, 44 (30.8%)

mentioned it to be very high, 26 (18.2%) indicated that it was high and 20 (14.0%) said the level of implementation is low. This shows Tusome early grade reading programme has

not been fully implemented in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division. To know why the programme has not yet been fully implemented in schools, the study sought to

understand teachers' level of preparedness in teaching the programme in schools. The results of the analysis are given Table 2.

Table 2: The level of teacher competency in the implementation of early grade reading programme in lower primary schools

Level of preparedness	Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
I have gained enough skills in TUSOME programme	80	55.9	40	28.0	23	16.1	143	100.0
I ensure that I have accomplished all objectives of TUSOME reading programme	78	54.5	25	17.5	40	28.0	143	100.0
I can utilise ICT resources in classroom teaching	74	51.7	51	35.7	18	12.6	143	100.0
I have positive attitude towards the implementation of TUSOME programme	70	49.0	45	31.5	28	19.6	143	100.0
I understand how to operate TUSOME apparatus	64	44.8	56	39.2	23	16.1	143	100.0
I have confidence in teaching TUSOME programme	62	43.4	48	33.6	33	23.1	143	100.0
I regularly prepare and plan before implementing TUSOME programme	59	41.3	54	37.8	30	21.0	143	100.0
I have lesson plan for TUSOME programme	55	38.5	60	42.0	28	19.6	143	100.0
We received adequate training prior to implementation of TUSOME programme	54	37.8	41	28.7	48	33.6	143	100.0
Composite scores	66	46.3	47	32.6	30	21	143	100.0

Research findings shows that only 80 (55.9%) of teachers mentioned that they had gained enough skills in implementing TUSOME reading programme in lower primary schools. This implies that 44.1% of teachers are not adequately trained to implement the programme in public primary schools in Kenya. Lack of training by the implementers of the curriculum may affect the acquisition of reading skills by standard one and two pupils. Findings also showed that 78 (54.5%) of teachers admitted that they ensure that they have accomplished all objectives of TUSOME reading programmes during classroom learning, however, 25 (17.5%) were unsure and 40 (28.0%) disagreed with the statement. The results shows that a good number of teachers complete the objectives of early grade reading programme but a substantial number does not.

On the utilisation of ICT resources in classroom teaching, 74 (51.7%) utilised, 51 (35.7%) were undecided and 18 (12.6%) disagreed. This shows that half of the teachers are acquainted with ICT knowledge and appears to be the ones who have embraced the technology aspects that come with TUSOME programme. When asked on their attitude towards the implementation of TUSOME programme, 70 (49.0%) said that they had positive attitude and 28 (19.6%) said that they had negative attitude. This shows that more than 50% of teachers do not have a positive attitude and this could influence implementation of TUSOME programme in lower primary schools. Further, findings showed that only 64 (44.8%) of teachers understood how to operate TUSOME apparatus, 56 (39.2%) were not sure and 23 (16.1%) said they did not know. The result suggests that majority of teachers in public primary schools were not technically able to operate the early grade-reading programme and this affects its effective utilisation in class. When asked to indicate whether they had confidence in teaching the programme in class, 62 (43.4%) said they had, 48 (33.6%) were not sure and 33 (23.1%) did not have confidence. This shows that a significant number of teachers have not gained confidence in using TUSOME during teaching of reading activities to early grade learners in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division.

It was revealed that only 59 (41.3%) of teachers regularly prepared and planned for TUSOME classroom instruction programme, 54 (37.8%) sometimes prepared and 30 (21.0%)

did not plan for the programme. Lack of teacher lesson planning may affect the effectiveness of the programme in nurturing pupils reading skills in class. This is further justified by 55 (38.5%) of teachers who indicated that they had lesson plan, 60 (42.0%) sometimes had and 28 (19.6%) did not have lesson plan for TUSOME programme. Lastly, only 54 (37.8%) of acknowledged to have received adequate training on TUSOME early grade reading programme prior to its implementation, 41 (28.7%) were not sure and 48 (33.6%) did not receive adequate training. This shows that adequate training has not been provided for teachers to help them acquire necessary competencies in teaching early grade reading in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division. It was ranked least in this study, composite scores shows that only 66 (46.3%) of teachers were found to be adequately prepared, 47 (32.6%) were moderately prepared and 30 (21.0%) were not prepared to implement TUSOME programme in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division, Keiyo South Sub County, Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya. The teachers were asked to indicate the challenges that they encountered while implementing this programme in schools. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers Perceptions on Challenges faced during implementation of TUSOME reading programme

Challenge	Freq	Percent
Lack of adequate in-service training	113	79.0
High pupil: teacher ratio	93	65.0
Teacher workload	88	61.5
Inadequate lesson time in the school timetable	80	55.9
Lack of adequate instructional supervision by heads and CSOs	76	53.1
Lack of adequate support from head teachers	63	44.1
Lack of adequate resources	62	43.4
Teachers attitude	58	40.6
Lack of teamwork among teachers	53	37.1

The challenges influencing effective implementation of TUSOME reading programme in schools in the area was due to; lack of adequate in-service teacher training (79.0%), high pupil teacher ratio in class (65.0%) making teacher assessment of pupils difficult, teacher workload (61.5%) due to inadequate teaching staff in the schools, inadequate lessons in the school timetable (55.9%) and lack of adequate

instructional supervision by head teachers and CSOs in schools (53.1%). Other challenges were inadequate support from head teachers (44.1%), inadequate instructional and infrastructural resources (43.4%), teachers' attitude (40.6%) and lack of teamwork among teachers in schools (37.1%). The above findings confirms that challenges influencing teacher preparedness in implementation of early grade reading programme in Chepkorio primary schools are personal, school based and government related factors. If the challenges are addressed, the objective of improving early grade reading programme in lower primary schools will be attained in the division and country as a whole.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that preparedness of teachers in implementation of early grade reading programme in lower primary schools in Chepkorio division is on average. For instance, research data has shown that only 49.0% of teachers reported the level of implementation of TUSOME early literacy reading programme as high. This was due to teachers preparedness in implementing the programme where only 46.3% were found to be adequately prepared, 32.6% were moderately prepared and 21.0% were not prepared at all to implement the early grade reading programme in standard 1 and 2 classes. Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends that all teachers in public primary schools should be provided with adequate training on the programme, inservice programmes to be regularly provided and government to provide more teachers in public primary schools to manage higher pupils admitted through free education programme.

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