

Influence of Oral Skills on Reading Competency of Learners in Rural and Urban Schools in Kenya

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Listening and speaking are fundamental for a learner's development of reading competencies. These two skills are as important as reading and writing, and they must be planned for in order to deliver them effectively in the classroom. It is helpful for educators to connect speaking to writing and listening to reading, as each of these two pairs involve similar processes. Speaking and writing are focused on output, while listening and reading are about input and comprehension. The four main language skills usually develop in the order thus: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study aimed at establishing influence of oral skills on reading competencies of learners in rural and urban schools in Kenya with reference to Uasin Gishu County. Quasi experimental design was used. The target population was composed of 7213 learners and 40 teachers. Stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain the sample. Data collection was via a reading test and an observation schedule. Reliability of the reading test was determined by use of test-retest and that of the observation schedule was determined by use of split-half method. Descriptive data were analysed by use of frequencies, means and percentages. Independent samples t-test was used to test hypothesis. The results showed that learners in the urban set up performed slightly better than those in the rural areas. The implication of the finding was that school location contributed to a learner's development of reading abilities. The study concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in reading competency of pupils when compared by location of schools in Kenya. The study recommended that the continuous teacher of English training be encouraged so as to renew teachers' teaching skills which they obtained while undertaking pre-service courses.

Keywords: oral skills, reading competency, rural, urban schools

Introduction

Reading ability which is also translated to mean literacy has increasingly become a very important tool to access information and knowledge through a variety of media, such as internet and newspapers. A high rate of literacy often becomes one of the most significant indicators of a country's development in general. Literacy has, in addi-

tion, become an important form of communication skill that may locate someone in the marketplace, a place where life chances are determined (Weber, 2006), and social mobility is enabled (Traxler & Gernsbacher, 2006). This research paper targeted grade one learners because according to Joncas (2008), this is an appropriate stage for assessing the reading ability in order to allow educators for further improvement through educational interven-

tions.

Mucherah and Ambrose-Stahl (2014) conducted a study on relation of reading motivation to reading achievement in seventh-grade students from Kenya and the United States. The intent of the study was to investigate whether motivation to read and reading achievement were related similarly in the two settings. Through regression analyses, it was revealed that efficacy (positive) and importance of reading (negative) were predictors of reading achievement for the U.S. students while challenge and compliance were both positive significant predictors of reading achievement for the Kenyan students. Overall, girls reported being more motivated by compliance and social reasons and boys by challenge. Girls showed higher reading achievement. Therefore, the motivation for reading and its relationship to success in reading differed by cultural setting and by gender.

In Malaysia, Lyall (2012) did a study on reading strategies of a reading program in rural Malaysia. The aim of the study was to find out the impact of a reading program on students' silence in reading. The target population was students drawn from rural primary schools. The students were selected on the basis of high-frequency vocabulary and those who had repeated grades. The findings of the study showed that the students lagged behind in reading and the reasons that were attributed to the finding were that; students lacked books at home and equally school libraries were poorly stocked; at home, the parents did not guide the students to read.

Ratri (2016) carried out a survey on factors affecting reading ability of the 4th Grade Students in Indonesia. The survey examined the effects of factors related to student, home, school, and teacher characteristics on reading ability. The survey sought to answer this question "what factors related to student, home, and teacher characteristics that significantly affect the 4th grader's reading ability? The survey was an exploratory study to one facet of educational process in Indonesia. Home, school and classroom were three different

loci of learning that could operate together to generate effects on the development of the student reading competency.

However, the positive effects of these factors could only be optimized if home, school, and classroom had conducive environments, which were equipped with supporting resources that are used in activities related to learning development in general and reading in particular. In order to be able to provide such resources, it was necessary to have economic and cultural resources at home, school, and classroom. Therefore, for instance, a school that was located in an affluent community and attended by students from this type of community tended to have better teaching resources and well-qualified teachers. As a result, students were more likely to have better learning outcomes, including reading ability. However, cultural and social specificity of a country might also make a difference in terms of learning environment and its effects on student attainment.

(Mohd & Ahmad, 2003) carried out a study in Malaysia. The study described an extensive reading program conducted in three rural secondary or middle schools in Malaysia, which aimed at motivating the students to read extensively in English and helping them overcome their problems in understanding English texts as a means towards increasing their proficiency in the language. The tools used for collecting data were a classroom observation, videotaping and teachers dairies. Three classes of various levels of learners and one teacher were targeted for the study. The study established that majority of students lacked fundamental language skills to enable them read. They also lacked vocabulary. The finding was attributed to the fact that students did not practice speaking English once outside the classroom.

In a study by Hsueh-Chao and Nation (2000) which examined what a learner needed to read a text; the researchers estimated that most learners needed to know around 98% of the words for them to be able to read a text. This was the reason why many students referred to their dictionaries for

the meanings of words, making reading tiring and time-consuming. This sometimes resulted in their losing interest in reading in English. On the one hand, it was important to recognize that dictionaries would greatly help students to understand new or difficult words, but on the other hand, to refer to each and every difficult word in the dictionary took the pleasure out of reading. Thus, teachers had to strike a balance between teaching students to use the dictionary and helping them to guess the meanings of words in a context.

Statement of the Problem

The oral interactive approaches skills are used to teach listening and speaking. These two skills are as important as reading and writing, and they must be planned for in order to deliver them effectively in the classroom (Gibbons, 2002). However, there are significant delays in the acquisition of basic reading competencies among Kenyan primary school learners according to various literacy assessments conducted in Kenya. The assessments include the 2011 Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), The National Assessment System for Monitoring Learner Achievement (NASMLA, 2010). According to the assessments there is no clear cut between reading abilities of learners based in rural and urban schools respectively. Therefore, this paper sought to investigate the influence of oral skills on reading competencies of learners in rural and urban schools in Kenya. Particularly the paper focused on state owned schools.

Research Questions

1. What is the reading ability of learners in urban and rural schools in public primary schools in Uasin Gishu, Kenya.
2. What is the relationship between oral skills interactive approaches and reading competency of pupils of different gender in primary schools in Uasin Gishu, Kenya.

3. What is the relationship between location of public primary schools and learners' reading competency in Uasin Gishu, Kenya?

4. What is the relationship between pupils gender and reading competency of pupils in primary schools in Uasin Gishu County?

5. What should be done to promote learners' reading competency in primary schools in Uasin Gishu, Kenya.

Hypotheses

- H_1 : There is a relationship between oral skills interactive approaches and reading competency of pupils of different gender in primary schools in Uasin Gishu, Kenya
- H_2 : There is a relationship between location of public primary schools and learners' reading competency in Uasin Gishu, Kenya
- H_3 : There is a relationship between pupils gender and reading competency of pupils in primary schools in Uasin Gishu County

Method

Research Design

The study was conducted in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. Non-equivalent control group design namely pre-test post-test intact group design was used. The rationale behind the choice of the design was that it was not practical to apply randomization procedure in assigning participant pupils to experimental and control groups. procedure to set up the design: the researcher first obtained a list of all primary schools in Uasin-Gishu County. To enhance the representativeness of schools, the schools in the list were organized into two groups namely rural and urban. All primary schools in Uasin-Gishu County were mixed day schools; therefore the researcher adapted simple random selection to obtain a representative sample of schools that would participate in the study. The random selection procedure was applied to each group. The selected schools from each location were randomly

placed into two groups namely experimental and control.

At the outset of the experiment, pupils in each group (experimental and control) were subjected to an English reading test (pre-test). The researcher was thus able to measure pupils' reading competency before treatment. In every experimental school, teachers who taught English were subjected to a two-day sensitization workshop on the instruction of oral skills using interactive approaches (such as stories, games, role play, songs, and tongue twisters). And they mastered them. The teachers teaching in the control group schools were left to teach oral lessons without allowing learners to use participatory approaches. After the sensitization, the teachers were commissioned to begin teaching in their respective schools. Every one of the participating teachers was observed at least once in a week for a period of two months.

The same procedure was applied in control schools. There were regular observations of teachers. After two months, pupils in both experimental and control schools were subjected to an English reading test. The pre-test and post-test English reading test scores were compared to assess if there was significant difference in performance in reading competence before testing and after testing and between the experimental group and the control group.

Sampling

The study targeted 4032 girls and 3181 boys all drawn from urban and rural public primary schools. Stratified random sampling was applied to select schools from the urban category of schools and as well as from the rural category. This is because the target population were mutually exclusive. The sample size consisted of 56 learners.

Research Instruments

Data for the study was collected by use of a reading test and an observation schedule.

Observation Schedule

There are certain fundamental competencies that must be demonstrated when teaching an English oral lesson. These competences included but were not limited to: subject matter content; organization; rapport; teaching methods; presentation; management; sensitivity; assistance to students; personal and physical aspects of classroom. The researcher developed a comprehensive lesson observation schedule that was used to observe the demonstration of the stated competencies by the teacher in a real classroom setup.

Reading Test

A pre-test and post reading test was developed by the researcher to test reading ability of the pupils. The test that was developed focused on the following standard reading ability competencies: phoneme awareness, fluency, print awareness, motor skills, letter knowledge, visual discrimination and spellings.

Validity of Instrument Results

To ascertain whether the research instruments yielded valid results the researcher subjected each tool to at least three independent experts in English. The experts in this case were the teachers of English with a minimum of five years in teaching and/or curriculum development.

Pilot Study of the Instrument

Before administration of the research tools a pilot test was conducted. Pilot testing was done in the same area where the study was carried out but this population was not included in the study. The Pilot testing procedure was a critical phase in any research process as it gave the researcher a feel of actual field experience. The researcher visited three schools and arbitrarily drew a sample of three teachers and 10 pupils. The lesson observation schedule and English reading test were pilot tested on selected teachers and class one pupils. During

the pilot test phase the research tools were tested for comprehension, readability; clarity of instructions; logical organization; and presence of errors.

Reliability of Instrument Results

To determine the reliability of items on the observation schedule, the split-half method was utilized. This technique involved the researcher splitting the observation schedule into two parts of odd and even numbers. Then, the researcher obtained summed scores for the odd numbered items and those of even numbered items for each respondent. The researcher used Pearson Moment of Correlation to compute a correlation coefficient between the scores based on the odd and even items. To obtain the reliability of the whole schedule, Spearman Brown prophesy formulae was used. A reliability index of the items on the observation schedule scale was 0.75.

To determine reliability of the reading test items, test-retest technique was used. This was done by administering the test twice to the same respondents and then the results from the first and that from the second administration were correlated using Pearson Moment Correlation. A reliability index for the reading ability items was 0.76.

Data Analysis

Both inferential and descriptive statistics were used in data analysis. Counts, percentages, frequencies, standard deviations and means comprised the descriptive statistics employed. Hypotheses were tested using independent samples t-test.

Results

Information on the effect of utilizing oral skills (listening and speaking) on reading competency of learners in urban and rural schools was sought. Learners in their various locations of schools were tested to establish which category of learners had acquired the key reading competencies after exposure to oral skills. The results are shown in

Table 1. Thereafter, the mean scores of learners in the comparison and intervention groups were computed to find which group in the rural and urban schools had been affected by the use of oral skills. The results of how they performed in comparison and intervention groups were displayed in Table 2.

Table 1
Frequency and percentage distribution of learner reading competencies by school location

		Location of School					
		Urban		Rural		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Demonstrated awareness of silent letters	Average	6	75.0	42	87.5	48	85.7
Able to orally segment a word	Good	2	25.0	6	12.5	8	14.3
	Poor	7	87.5	43	89.6	50	89.3
Has understanding of vowel principle	Average	1	12.5	5	10.4	6	10.7
	Good	3	37.5	6	12.5	9	16.1
Able to blend parts of a word	Average	3	37.5	25	52.1	28	50.0
	Good	5	62.5	23	47.9	28	50.0
Can delete phoneme to make new word	Average	7	87.5	47	97.9	54	96.4
	Good	1	12.5	1	2.1	2	3.6
Used knowledge of letter sounds to decode	Poor	8	100.0	42	87.5	50	89.3
	Average	0	0.0	6	12.5	6	10.7
Used intonation stress pitch juncture appropriately	Average	5	62.5	37	77.1	42	75.0
	Good	3	37.5	11	22.9	14	25.0
Has ability to associate sounds with letters	Poor	0	0.0	4	8.3	4	7.1
	Average	7	87.5	44	91.7	51	91.1
Skipped some words in a sentence	Good	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	1.8
	Poor	6	75.0	43	89.6	49	87.5
Pronounced all words correctly	Average	1	12.5	5	10.4	6	10.7
	Good	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	1.8
Substituted some words	Average	3	37.5	34	70.8	37	66.1
	Good	5	62.5	14	29.2	19	33.9
Recognises progression from right to left	Poor	8	100.0	42	87.5	50	89.3
	Average	0	0.0	6	12.5	6	10.7
Able to identify correctly spelt words	Average	1	12.5	12	25.0	13	23.2
	Good	7	87.5	36	75.0	43	76.8
	Poor	0	0.0	1	2.1	1	1.8
	Average	4	50.0	32	66.7	36	64.3
	Good	4	50.0	15	31.3	19	33.9

Information provided in Table 1 show that 6(75.0%) of the learners in urban and 42(87.5%) in rural schools respectively, on average demonstrated awareness of silent letters in words after receiving a treatment. The finding indicated that the pronunciation of the pupils had improved and, therefore, they were progressively developing reading abilities. The finding concurred with (Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Barker, 1998) who had established that at early classes, reading abilities depended heavily on emerging word-reading skills developed. The other implication of the finding was that literacy instruction was basically the effort of the teacher (Dubeck, Jukes, & Okello, 2012). The other justification of the observation made was that oral skills instruction was a precursor to reading development. The finding agreed with that of Syomwene, Barasa, and Kindiki (2015) who had asserted that when oral skills approaches such as games were used to teach oral lessons, learners acquired new vocabulary along with spelling and pronunciation.

As shown in Table 1, pupils demonstrated understanding of the vowel principle. The finding is evidenced by 5(62.5 %) of learners in urban and 23(47.9%) pupils in rural schools who were awarded a good grade. Whereas, 3(37.5%) of learners in urban schools scored an average grade; as well as 25(52.1%) of the learners in rural schools. The finding meant that during the teaching of speaking and listening skills, tongue twisters were employed. And according to Alicia (2012), this approach helps students learn correct pronunciation of English words and to correctly use vowels and consonants. The other inference of the finding was that oral skills created awareness among learners that letters and letter combinations represent sounds, and that vowels and vowel sounds make a word (Catts, Hogan, & Adlof, 2005).

Data presented in Table 1 showed that a good grade was awarded to 3(37.5%) of learners in urban and 4(22.9%) learners in rural schools who used knowledge of letter sounds to decode sounds. An average grade was awarded to 5(62.5%) of

learners in urban and 37(77.1%) in rural schools who demonstrated the use of the already stated aspect. The finding indicated that the learners were able to combine letters to form words. The finding concurred with that of Catts et al. (2005) who established that at the early childhood stage the learner relied heavily on the oral skills to stare at print (decode) and sounding out words. At the same time, the child attempts to break the code of print and realizes that letters and letter combinations represent sounds.

Learners were not able to delete phonemes to make new words as represented by 8(100%) of learners in urban and 42(87.5%) in rural schools respectively. The finding meant that through exposure to oral skills, the phonemic awareness had increased as established by Andzayi and Ikwen (2014) . The other implication of the finding was that learners were developing language potency and awareness of how to correct errors while reading (Feng & Yun, 2009).

According to data presented in Table1, learners were awarded a good grade on pronouncing all words correctly. The aspect is represented by 5(62.5%) of urban and 14(29.25%) learners of rural schools. The finding meant that through oral interactive approaches like stories, learners had developed sensitivity to how language worked and those approaches drew a learner's attention to language sounds (Fisher & Medvic, 2000).

Data presented in Table 1 show that 4 (50.0%) of the urban pupils and 15 (31.3%) of the learners in rural schools were awarded a good grade on the aspect of ability to identify correctly spelt words. The reason for this was that through oral skills, pupils were aware of how to correct errors while reading (Feng & Yun, 2009). After the intervention, it was realized that learners recognized that progression of reading was from right to left. The aspect was represented by 7 (87.5%) learners in urban and 36 (75.0%) in rural schools who obtained a good grade. The finding meant that the learners had developed print awareness as a basic skill for developing reading readiness (Andzayi

& Ikwen, 2014). Means of the two groups (comparison and intervention) were compared after the completion of the experiment. The purpose was to find out whether there was an effect of the experiment on reading competency. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Reading competencies mean scores of comparison and intervention groups in different location of schools

Location of School		Comparison		Intervention	
		Pre-test Score (%)	Post-test Score (%)	Pre-test Score (%)	Post-test Score (%)
Urban	Mean	40.98	47.39	45.17	58.52
	N	20	20	8	8
Rural	Mean	29.64	35.99	33.73	51.27
	N	28	28	48	48
Total	Mean	34.37	40.74	35.37	52.31
	N	48	48	56	56

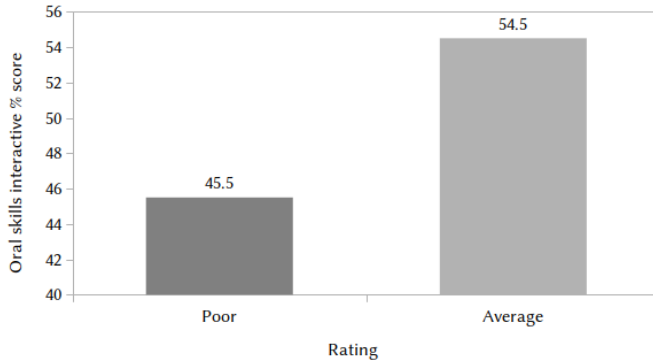
As shown in Table 2, the learners in the rural and urban schools were assigned to two groups, comparison and intervention. Both groups were tested twice (pre-test and post-test). The results obtained indicated that, at the pre-test level, the learners in the urban set up but in the comparison group posted a mean of 40.98 while those in the rural comparison group scored a mean of 29.64. The finding showed that learners in urban schools had a somewhat better performance in reading than the learners in the rural set up. The finding meant that learners in rural areas did not practice speaking English once outside the classroom. Speaking is part of oral skills and it contributes to reading readiness development (Mohd & Ahmad, 2003).

The intervention groups (urban and rural) were equally pre-tested. The learners in the urban schools but in the intervention group obtained a mean score of 45.17 whereas those in the rural area obtained a mean of 33.73. The results showed that

learners in the urban set up performed slightly better than those in the rural area. The implication of the finding was that school location contributed to a learner's development of reading abilities. The finding is in agreement with Ratri (2016). According to Table 2, the learners in comparison and intervention groups were post tested, the learners in urban schools obtained a mean score of 58.57 while the learners in rural schools had a mean score of 51.27 but the overall mean was 52.31. A great difference was noticeable between the pre-test and post-test mean scores in urban schools. Since no treatment was given to the comparison group, then the observation meant that, perhaps, there were new learners who had joined the school and this would have contributed to the improved reading ability mean score. The reason why urban schools performed better was that most parents in urban set up guide their children to read (Lyll, 2012).

Learners in rural schools scored a mean of 35.99, although there was a slight difference in means between the pre-test and post-test scores for learners in the comparison group, it was explained that their reading abilities did not improve much. The results presented in Table 2 showed that the intervention groups registered an increase in performance after they received treatment because the urban intervention group scored a mean score of 58.52 whereas the rural intervention scored 51.27. The overall mean for the group was 52.31. The implication of the finding was that oral skills contribute greatly to the development of reading abilities. However, the urban schools outperformed the rural schools. The finding showed that schools located in affluent communities tend to have better teaching resources; learners are, therefore, more likely to have better reading outcomes (Ratri, 2016). The researcher also computed the oral skills interactive approaches score to establish how teachers performed as they taught oral lessons through the use of songs, plays, games and stories. The result is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Oral skill interactive approaches



As shown in figure 1 the teachers’ who attained an average performance in the use of oral skills were only 54 % out of all the teachers who took part in the study, while 45 % of the teachers were awarded a poor grade. The finding meant that the teachers were not well trained on how to teach listening and speaking skills and, therefore, the reasons why the application of oral interactive approaches was low and this is reflected in Table 3 whereby it is displayed that the relationship between oral skills and learners’ reading competency was weak but significant. The other interpretation of the finding could be that since most of the teachers who took part in the study were affected by mother tongue interference, then probably they were not comfortable teaching oral lessons and thus the application of oral interactive approaches was minimal.

There is no Significant Difference between Mean Reading Competency Scores of Pupils of Different School Locations (Urban and Rural)

Independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis. The t- value and the p-value calculated were displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Independent samples t-test for difference in mean reading competency scores of pupils when compared by school location (urban and rural)

	Levene's Test		t-test				Low	Up	
	F	Sig.	T	df.	Sig. (2-tail)	Mn. Diff. ²			std. err. diff. ³
Reading skills ability % pre-test	.134	.715	5.19	102	.000	9.95	1.92	6.15	13.75
Reading skills ability % post-test	.023	.879	2.10	102	.038	4.93	2.35	.27	9.59

Independent samples t-test was used to test for differences in mean reading competency score of learners when they were compared by location of schools (urban and rural). The t-values and p-values computed are displayed in Table 3. The null hypothesis was there is no significant difference in mean reading competency score of learners when compared by location of school (urban and rural) in Kenya. The p-values obtained were 0.000 for the pre-test and 0.038 for the post-test respectively. The values are less than the set level of significance of 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in reading competency of pupils when compared by location of schools. The finding is in line with Ratri (2016) who had established that location of

¹significance two tailed

²Mean difference

³standard error difference

⁴confidence interval of the difference

a school can affect the development of the pupils' reading competency.

Table 4
Mean scores of reading ability by gender of pupils in different school locations

Gender of pupil	Comparison	Intervention	
		Pre-test score (%)	Post-test score (%)
Male	Mean	32.89	38.14
	N	23	23
Female	Mean	35.73	43.13
	N	25	25
Total	Mean	34.37	40.74
	N	48	48

Data presented in Table 4 show that during pre-test the male pupils in the comparison group scored a mean score of 32.89 and the female pupils in the same group scored a mean of 35.77. The finding showed that the female pupils posted a slightly better score compared to their male counterparts. The other meaning of the finding was that females are reported to be more socially interactive than males. And since language where reading is embedded is a social activity, it provides girls a better chance to do well in reading than boys.

When the pupils of either gender at the comparison group were post tested, they scored a mean of 38.14 for males and 43.13 for females. The difference between the mean scores was at the margin and, therefore, the pupils of either gender had abilities to develop reading skills at the same time. The other interpretation of the finding was that since the pupils learnt under the same classroom environment much difference in reading abilities was not expected.

As shown in Table 4, when the male pupils in the intervention group were pre-tested they scored a mean of 32.25 but when they were post tested, they scored a mean of 49.73. Whereas the female pupils

in the same group scored a mean of 37.10 when they were pre-tested and a score of 53.74 after they were post tested. The finding meant that the treatment which pupils of either gender received had an effect on their reading abilities. The implication of the finding is that oral skills interactive approaches contribute to pupils of either gender's reading ability on equal measure. The other interpretation of the finding is that although all the pupils in the intervention group improved after the treatment, the female pupils performed slightly better than their male counterparts.

Table 5
Independent samples t-test for difference in mean reading competency scores of pupils when compared by gender

Levene's Test	F	Sig.	T	df.	Sig. (2-tail ⁵)	Mn. Diff. ⁶	std. err. diff. ⁷	95% Conf. Int. of Diff. ⁸	t-test	
									Low	Up
Reading skills ability %	10.02	0.002	-1.32	102	.190	-3.07	2.32	-7.68	1.55	

The results obtained in Table 5 showed that,

- ⁵significance two tailed
- ⁶Mean difference
- ⁷standard error difference
- ⁸confidence interval of the difference

after testing the hypothesis there is no significant mean difference between reading ability scores of pupils of different gender using Independent t- test, the t value of 0.1.32 and the p- value of 0.19 were obtained. The p-value is greater than the significance value $\alpha = 0.05$. The finding showed that there is no statistically significant mean difference between reading ability scores of pupils of different gender.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The reading competency of pupils in both rural and urban schools before a treatment was administered was at par. The study concluded that grade one learners in public primary schools lacked basic reading competencies. It was concluded that reading abilities need to be developed in the formative classes of primary stage of education level of a child. It was concluded that development of reading ability was not dependent on the gender of a pupil but the language learning environment a child is placed in. It was recommended that all schools in Kenya (both those situated in rural and urban areas) to be equipped with necessary materials such as story books so as to enable learners develop reading competencies. It was recommended that teachers be retrained so as to refresh the skills and knowledge that they acquired during the pre-service sessions. The study recommended that the reading competency of a learner is not dependent on whether a learner is male or female but the environment in which they are exposed to.

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