Assessment of Access of Reading Resources in Bolstering Extensive Reading Habits and Composition Writing Skills in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Reading resources in schools can help in inculcating the reading culture and reading proficiency amongst students. This may help learners develop rational skills that are crucial in dealing with the current unpredictable and dynamic world. There has been a concern from educationist and researchers about the declining reading interest among secondary school learners in Kenya and one of the causes could be unavailability of reading resources amongst other determiners. This study was prompted by the lack of adequate reading resources that can bolster and sustain reading interest among secondary school learners in Laikipia County in Kenya. The study therefore sought to establish whether there existed any relationship between availability and access of extensive reading resources and development of extensive reading habits evidenced in composition writing amongst learners. The study was guided by Piaget's (1952)) Schema Theory. The study used descriptive survey research design. Fifteen secondary schools in Laikipia County were sampled using proportional stratified sampling technique in five sub-counties across the County. Purposive sampling was used to sample 30 out of 80 (37.5%) teachers of English language. A Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 327 students out of approximately 2670 students (12.24%) in form 2 and 3 in the County. The research instruments used for data collection included: questionnaire for students, interview guides for teachers and composition writing test. A pilot study of the instruments was done to ensure their validity and reliability in a co-educational secondary school in the neighbouring county that was not involved in the study. The reliability of the questionnaire and interview guide was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient as 0.871 which met the recommended threshold of 0.7 and above.   Analysis of data was done using descriptive statistics such as frequency, tables and percentages. T-test was done at 95% confidence level (F(2) = 80.933, P = .001) to establish whether there was statistically significance difference between availability of reading resources and development of extensive reading habits captured in composition writing mean scores of different categories of school using (SPSS) version 17. Qualitative data were organized according to the study themes and presented descriptively on the basis of the study objective. It was established that learners in secondary schools with adequate extensive reading resources performed better in composition writing than those who did not. Therefore, it was established that inadequate supply of reading resources in schools had a negative impact

on development of reading interest amongst learners. The study recommended that schools should collaborate with various stakeholders to solicit reading resources so as to promote access of reading materials and reading culture in schools and consequently improve learners' composition writing skills.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

One of major aspects that influence students' attitudes toward extensive reading is reading resources. Reading resources are very important for encouraging the students to learn. Extensive Reading Foundation (2014) observes that extensive reading is a way of reading for pleasure where learners are allowed to choose reading materials which suit their interest. Materials that are selected should be fun, interesting, enjoyable, and should address students' needs, tastes, and interests because the more the students are interested and enjoy the reading they do, the better. It should not be bound by time, space, or even class. Moreover, the materials also can be taken from many types of texts, books, novels, magazines and newspapers which should be planned and provided with guidelines by the language teachers so that it would be more organized for the students to engage in reading (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2014).

Higginbotham (1999) did a study in Atlanta, Georgia on extensive reading interests by gender. The study was based on a metropolitan public school where he analyzed extensive reading interests of sixth, seventh and eighth grade learners. The results of the study presented differences in reading interest and preference by gender of the learners. It was found that female learners had a fascinating liking in romance, fables, adventure and historical fiction. However, male learners were found to have a stronger liking for reading materials having content to do with sciences and sports. It was also noted that male learners in India preferred non-fiction reading materials than their female colleagues.   The gender as a variable influenced reading preference and thus it was important for schools to engage learners in the process of procuring reading materials so as to ensure that their interests are taken care of.

Krashen (2011) observes that when learners are exposed to large quantity reading input inside or outside their classrooms, it helps in improving many types of language skills such as vocabulary recognition, sentence construction, reading speed and listening comprehension. However, Okwany (2014) notes that most learners nowadays lack interest of purchasing and reading books, which are crucial in vocabulary acquisition and language use thus failing to develop a commendable culture of reading.

Day and Bamford (2002) opine that different types of reading materials should be availed to learners considering the different linguistic abilities of the learners.   Learners should be free to choose to read what interest them and thus read at a faster pace because the material chosen is within their linguistic ability. The language teachers play the role of being good role models and act as mentors to the learners (Day & Bamford, 2002).

Palani (2012) observed that for educational success to be realized amongst learners, they must be taught effective reading habits because effective reading and good performance are interrelated. Palani believes that a good reader should be able to identify symbols and relate them with appropriate meaning. Palani

(2012) further opined the teacher should be able to guide the learners in developing comprehension skills so that they are able to deduce the meaning of words in contexts and also when words are on their own. Dempsey (2010) opines that children cannot be good readers if teachers and parents that they are expected to emulate as role models do not read at all. He claims that a country cannot succeed in becoming a reading nation if her population does not have a strong craving and passion for books and visiting the library regularly. However, he points out a very big challenge in reaching this ideal in developing countries in Africa and Asia as being weak and unstable book industry, lack of adequate libraries and low economic status of majority of the population that affects their purchasing power.

Krashen (1998) posits that exposure of learners in conducive environment where they can increase the reading input can assist in development of different language skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, writing and reading speed. So if teachers and parents present themselves as good role models in reading and share what they read with the learners, then the learners may be motivated, attach some value in it and the reading behaviour acquired may shape or improve their reading patterns

During The African Union continental conference under the theme 'Promoting a Culture of Reading in Africa' held in Addis Ababa Ethiopia from 18th September to 20th September 2019, Tessema (2019) cited in Xinhua (2019:22) noted that, "the development of the reading culture in Africa is an issue of high importance, but yet unanimously given insufficient regard especially in Africa." In the same forum Njenga (2019) cited in the African Union Commission (2019) noted that, "without wide reading learners cannot develop skills of locating, selecting, organizing, manipulating, analyzing, evaluating and processing information." This shows that poor reading culture was causing great concern in most of the African countries and as such it was an important issue that needed to be addressed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess availability of extensive reading resources that bolster extensive reading habits in secondary schools in Laikipia County, Kenya.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Schema Theory was proposed by Jean Piaget. The theory proposes that   knowledge kept in the mind of a person is organized into units called schemata. Language experts and cognitive-psychologist have used the concept of schemata to understand how comprehension takes place in an individual. A schema then can be said to be a conceptual system for comprehending how knowledge is represented in the mind and how it is applied. Paran (1996) notes that reading can be presented as a psycholinguistic process where the reader interacts with a text, makes hypotheses from the text and reads to confirm or reject them as he tries to make new hypotheses. At this point the reader rather than the text is the main determinant of success of the reading process. Rumelhart (1980) states that schema can represent knowledge at several levels from ideologies to knowledge on morphology, syntax and semantics of a text. Finally, schemata are our

knowledge that we possess from various sources and if the learners have limited exposure to reading materials then their schemata will be limited.

This theory was found to be relevant for this study as it recognizes reading as a cognitive process. The theory suggests that weak struggling learners lack the vital schema which is important in providing connections before reading, while engaged in reading and after reading a text. The theory also suggests that schema operates like a filing system of the human mind where all the files of knowledge are stored. It also suggests that the more the reader is exposed to reading and new experiences, the more the thickness of the files grows and the more knowledgeable the reader becomes.

Krashen (1998) posits that exposure of learners in conducive environment where they can increase the reading input can assist in development of different language skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, writing and reading speed. So if teachers and parents present themselves as good role models in reading and share what they read with the learners, then the learners may be motivated, attach some value in it and the reading behaviour acquired may shape or improve their reading patterns. Therefore, teachers should ensure there is access of reading materials and also scaffold the learners on the best reading skills so as to assist learners develop effective reading habits in their schools. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 presents a representation of the relationship among variables and was derived from theoretical framework.
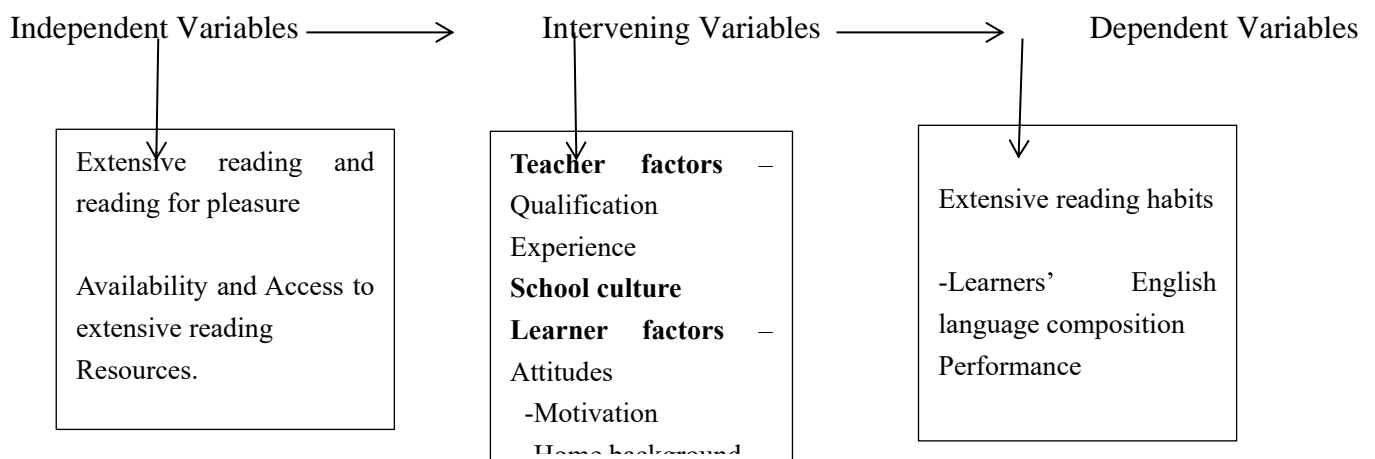

Figure 1: **Relationship between independent, intervening and dependent variables of the study**

The conceptual framework shows the independent variables in this study as extensive reading and availability and access to extensive reading resources. These variables were investigated to establish whether they have any impact on learners' development of desirable reading habits and performance in composition writing. The dependent variable was Learners' performance in composition writing. Intervening variables are variables that may have an influence on the independent variables in explaining the outcome of the study. The intervening variables in this study were teachers' factors that include teachers' qualifications, teachers' attitudes, students' attitudes and school environment. To account for these variables, the teachers who participated in the study were those who were assumed to have pedagogical skills of teaching reading and were in a possession of a degree in education. The selected teachers were also trained to teach English in secondary schools. They must have taught for at least two years.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. According to Schinder (2003) a research design is a plan, scheme and structure for investigations to obtain answers to questions and may be compared to a blue print for collection, measurement and analysis of data. In addition, the research design includes all procedures selected to answer a particular question. Descriptive research was used to obtain data on availability and access of extensive reading resources that could promote extensive reading habits in secondary schools. The research design helped in collecting a complete and possibly accurate data from the research subjects which was used for detailed analysis and which led to important recommendations that were made. The study was supplemented by views of qualitative data in form of respondents' views, comments and opinions on main themes the study had raised. The study also used descriptive statistical methods to analyze and present quantitative data. The study used qualitative method because it involves analysis and presentation of data in forms of descriptive nature (data obtained are expressed in words). For qualitative data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with English language teachers. Quantitative method of data collection was employed because the study used descriptive statistical methods to present and analyze study data in frequencies and percentages. For quantitative data, the researcher used structured and an open ended questionnaire and a composition writing test with learners.   The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection helped determine the extent access to reading resources lead to the development of reading habits and performance in composition writing.

Target Population and Sample Size

Secondary school students and teachers in Laikipia County were the target population. About two thousand, six hundred and seventy (2670) learners in form 2 and 3 and eighty (80) teachers of English were the target population. Form 2 and 3 were selected because learners in these classes were assumed to have adequate reading exposure and also had settled down in secondary schools. The two selected forms were also not examination classes. At the time of the study, Laikipia County had sixty seven (67) secondary schools among them were four (4) boys' secondary schools, six (6) girls' secondary schools and fifty seven (57) co-educational secondary schools.   A simple random sampling was used to obtain a sample of 20 students in form 2 and 3 in each school totaling 300 students in 15 schools to fill in a questionnaire and also sit a composition writing test. An addition (30) 10% of the questionnaire was added for non-response to bring the total number of student respondents to three hundred and thirty. However, three questionnaires were not responded to making a total sample of 327 learners. A purposive sampling was used to sample 30 out of 80 (37.5%) of the English language teachers. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) assert that for descriptive studies, a 10% of the target population is representative enough.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires, interview guide and composition writing text were data collection instruments that were used in the study. The questionnaire was administered to the learners to elicit data on availability and access of various extensive reading resources in their schools and how they influence learners' extensive reading

habits. The questionnaire also generated data on learners' reading preferences. In total (99%) 327 questionnaires were responded to with only 3 (1%) registering a non-response. The interview guide was administered to teachers of English to elicit data on how extensive reading was conducted in their schools and the challenges the faced during teaching of reading. This information was corroborated with data available in English language teachers' professional documents that they use for teaching such as lesson plans and schemes of work. Learners also sat a composition writing test to establish aspects of extensive reading habits evidenced in their writing.

Research Results and Discussion

From the data obtained during the study, it was established that there was a mismatch between what the learners wanted to read and the reading resources available in their schools. Extensive reading programmes in schools cannot be successful if reading interest of the learner is not established and addressed appropriately in terms of provision of reading resources. In two national schools studied, their libraries were relatively stocked with reading resources but in most of the sub-county schools libraries were non-existent and scarcity of reading materials for extensive reading worrying. From the study data various reading resources were established to be available in schools. These resources ranged from newspapers, reference materials, novels, pacesetters to magazines as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Reading Resources Available in Schools

Reading Materials	Responses	
	N	Percent
Newspapers	280	41.8%
Pacesetters	204	30.5%
Novel	118	17.6%
Magazines	45	6.7%
Reference books	22	3.3%
Total	669	100.0%

The study findings obtained from school libraries in the Table 1 indicate that a majority 280 out of 669 (41.8%) of all available reading materials in schools were newspapers. Two hundred and four (30.5%) were pacesetters and 118 (17.6%) were novels. Forty five (6.7%) of the resources in schools were magazines while 22 (3.3%) were reference materials.

From the study data it was deduced that variety and adequate reading materials for promoting extensive reading were missing in secondary schools. This implies that it could be difficult to initiate successful extensive reading programmes with scarcity of reading materials in our secondary schools. The study established that majority of schools had newspapers in the libraries yet majority of the learners preferred reading novels and storybooks as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Reading Preference by the Learners

Genre/Reading Material	Frequency	Percent	Rank
Novels & Story books	253	77.4	1
Subject text books	20	6.1	2
Love stories	16	4.9	3
Newspaper	11	3.4	4
Science fiction	9	2.8	5
Magazine	9	2.8	6
Revision Materials	7	2.1	7
Religious books	2	0.6	8
Total	327	100.0	

(n=327)

As indicated in Table 2 a majority of the learners 253 out of 327 (77.4%) reported that they preferred reading novels and short stories. Twenty (6.1%) reported that they enjoyed reading subject text books while 16 (4.9%) of the learners reported that they enjoyed reading love stories. Eleven (3.4%) reported preferring reading newspapers while 9 (2.8%) reported that they preferred reading science fiction. A similar number preferred reading magazines. Seven (2.1%) of the learners said they preferred reading revision materials. It can be clearly deduced that majority of reading materials in schools are newspapers while majority of the learners liked reading novels and short story. This mismatch in supply of reading materials and learners' preference need to be corrected so as to enable the learners read what they enjoy and also enjoy what they read. Over reliance on classroom text books reading that calls for intensive reading of content was also captured. Learners need exposure to reading materials outside the syllabus so as to widen their world view. The English language teachers reported additional extensive reading resources that they felt were in short supply in their schools. They felt that should the materials be added in the library list, they would assist in providing a variety where learners can choose what they want to read and thus promote a reading culture in schools. These additional materials are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Recommended Additional Reading Resources for Extensive Reading

Scarce reading resources	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Adventure stories	2	6.7	6.7
Audio-tapes	2	6.7	6.7
Audio-visual materials	2	6.7	6.7
e-books	9	30.0	30.0
Encyclopedias	1	3.3	3.3
Graded readers	3	10.0	10.0
Journals	4	13.3	13.3

Love stories	1	3.3	3.3
Magazines	2	6.7	6.7
Newspapers	2	6.7	6.7
Novels	1	3.3	3.3
Periodicals	1	3.3	3.3
Total	30	100.0	100.0

Data obtained from the English language teachers as indicated in Table 3 suggested additional materials that they felt were scarce and that if availed in schools would motivate learners to engage in independent reading. Two (6.7%) of the teachers suggested adventure stories. A similar number also suggested purchase of audio-tapes and audiovisual materials. Nine (30%) of the English language teachers recommended purchase of e-books (kindle) in their schools. The study also sought to find out whether there existed a relationship between library availability in schools and composition writing scores The study established that schools with libraries had higher mean scores than those that did not as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Availability of Library in Schools and Composition Writing Scores

Schools	Availability of a library	FORM 2 N	Mean score x/40 %	FORM 3 N	Mean score x/40	%
A	Yes	11	31.1 77.7	11	33.54	83.90
B	Yes	11	24.36 60.9	11	26.40	66.00
C	No	12	21.90 54.7	11	24.48	61.20
D	No	10	16.30 40.8	11	17.50	43.75
E	No	11	14.76 36.9	10	13.45	33.63
F	No	11	18.46 46.15	11	19.55	48.88
G	Yes	11	25.10 62.75	11	24.40	61.00
H	No	11	22.54 56.35	10	23.82	59.55
I	Yes	11	24.64 61.6	11	25.95	64.88
J	No	11	17.18 42.95	11	18.80	47.00

K	No	11	18.18	11	19.62	49.05
			45.45			
L	No	11	17.82	10	19.60	49.00
			44.55			
M	Yes	11	28.36	11	30.50	76.25
			70.9			
N	No	11	17.72	11	19.67	49.18
			44.3			
P	Yes	11	27.46	11	28.56	71.40
			68.65			
	Total	165	21.73	162	24.52	61.30
			54.33			

Data in Table 4 indicate that 7 out of 15 (46.6%) schools A, B, G, I, M, O and P had relatively well stocked libraries and thus they were able to post very impressive mean scores that were above average in their composition writing. The remaining 8 (53.3%) schools C, E, F, H, J, K, L and N   their scores were below average which was a good indicator that libraries in schools played a major role in promoting extensive reading and sharpening learners' writing skills. This finding concurs with Wafula (2017) who found that lack of reading materials, time and space were major challenges that hindered learners' engagement in extensive reading.

It was established that learners who reported having a library had higher scores in composition writing than those who did not. This could be due to the availability of variety of reading materials that motivated and encouraged learners to get involved in extensive reading as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Library Availability in Schools and Composition Writing Scores

Presence of a library in schools	N=327	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Yes	209	63.9	22.9	3.767	.261
No	118	36.1	19.8	3.544	.326

Data in Table 5 show that when learners were asked in a questionnaire whether their school had a library, 209 (63.9%) of the learners agreed they had a library while 118 (36.1%) of the learners responded that they did not have a library. Those learners with a library had a higher mean score of 22.9 than those without a library who had a mean score of 19.8. Further an independent t-test at 95% confidence level was conducted to establish whether the difference was statistically significant as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

T-test Analysis on Presence of Libraries in Schools and Composition Writing Score

Independent Sample Test

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	Levene's Test for Equality of		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances									
Composition Score assumed on	1.438	.231	3.528	325	.000	1.498	.425	.663	
			3.589	255.405	.000	1.498	.418	.676	2.334

It is evident from Table 6 that the difference between presence of libraries in schools and composition writing mean scores was statistically significant (t (325) = 3.528, P = .000). Those who had a library had a higher mean score than those without. From the analysis in Table 6, it is important to establish good libraries in schools as it is the backbone to the success of establishing a reading culture which leads to better performance in examinations. Furthermore, a predictor analysis was generated at 95% confidence level to establish the probability of learners with a school library performing better than those without one as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

Predictor Analysis on Presence of Libraries in Schools

	Value	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower	Upper
Odds Ratio for Does your school have a library (Yes / No)	.587	.366	.943
For cohort Score level = Below Average	.706	520	958
For cohort Score level = Average and above	1.202	1.011	1.428
N of Valid Cases	327		

Variables in the equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)

						Lower	Upper
Does your school have a library(1)			4.844	1	.028	1.703	1.060	2.736
	.532	.242					
Constant	.377	.187	4.053	1	.044	1.458		

Data in Table 7 reveal that learners who were in secondary schools that had a relatively well stocked library were 1.703 times more likely to score above average than those who had no library (P=0.028, C.I (1.060-2.736). However, Sindabi (2014) observes that many education experts have blamed the declining reading culture among Kenyan population to be as a result of failure by each successive government to establish libraries especially in public schools and community centers.

CONCLUSION

Data analysis and interpretation of the responses revealed that secondary schools in Kenya had an acute shortage of adequate and updated reading resources and materials to support extensive reading programmes. Learners were not able to access reading materials and resources of their preference. Most the schools that were in dire need of the reading materials were the county and sub-county schools. Ironically, these schools admitted average to below average learners. National schools were relatively well stocked with reading materials. In secondary schools that had reading materials, there was a mismatch between the reading materials in schools and what the learners preferred to read. It was also established that in schools with relatively stocked libraries, learners registered higher composition writing mean scores mostly due to development of better reading habits due to exposure to variety of reading materials.

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