READING ABILITIES OF CLASS FOUR LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN FOUR SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THARAKA-NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY.

JULY 2017
DECLARATIONS
This dissertation is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God, my parents Severinus and Josephine Njabani and my siblings, for their continued support and encouragement throughout this course.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors Dr. Martin Njoroge, Dr. James Njiri and Dr. Mwangi Gachara for their invaluable suggestions at all stages of this work. They kindly read my work and offered detailed pieces of advice in all areas.
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<tr>
<td>AKF</td>
<td>Aga Khan Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGRA</td>
<td>Early Grade Reading Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCPE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Primary Education</td>
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<td>K.I.E</td>
<td>Kenya Institute of Education</td>
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<td>KNEC</td>
<td>Kenya National Examinations Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNR</td>
<td>Letter Name Recognition</td>
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<td>LSK</td>
<td>Letter Sound Knowledge</td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEP</td>
<td>National Assessment of Education Programs</td>
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<td>NASMLA</td>
<td>National Assessment for Monitoring Learner Achievement</td>
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<td>NCES</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics</td>
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<td>NER</td>
<td>Net Enrollment Rate</td>
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<td>NRP</td>
<td>National Reading Panel</td>
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<td>PA</td>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>Passage Reading and Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI</td>
<td>Research Triangle Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACMEQ</td>
<td>Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS
The following terms have been used in the proposed study as follows:

**Assessment:** The process of finding out if a learner has acquired reading skill or not.

**Automaticity:** Ability to read fluently without getting stuck.

**Decoding:** Ability to translate a written word into a sound.

**Dictation:** Ability to listen to sounds and identify and write letters that represent those sounds to form words.

**Grade:** The class level at which the learner is.

**Grapheme:** The most basic unit in an alphabetic written system. Graphemes combine to create phonemes.

**Non-reader:** Learners who are unable to read.

**Phonemic awareness:** Ability to identify various sounds that make a word.

**Phonics:** Instructional practices that emphasize how spellings are related to speech sounds in systematic ways.

**Reading ability:** A number of reading skills acquired by a learner.

**Reading comprehension:** Ability to get meaning from what is read.

**Reading readiness:** Capability of a learner to read and understand materials of his or her level.

**Reading skills:** The ability to turn writing into meaning and achieve the goals of independence, comprehension, and fluency.
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ABSTRACT
The importance of reading skills in today’s society is great since one has to rely on reading to get information from many sources. This study focused on assessment of learners’ reading abilities in rural areas of Maara sub-county in Tharaka-Nithi County. This provided insight into the reading abilities of learners during their early grades in primary schools since the main objectives of this study is to assess the reading abilities of class four learners in rural areas, to assess reading readiness in using English as the language of instruction, and to determine challenges faced by class four pupils in reading of English. The study used EGRA sub-tasks and teachers’ interview schedules in collecting data. The bottom up theory of reading by Flesch and Gough (1985) was used in the study in order to achieve the objectives. The study used qualitative research design. The sample size included 44 respondents, 40 learners and 4 teachers of English, who were sampled purposively and systematically. Data was analyzed and presented using Microsoft Excel pivot tables and graphs. The findings of the study showed that class four learners in Tharaka-Nithi County face challenges in reading and comprehending materials of their level. The learners have not acquired the reading skill because they are below the oral fluency national benchmark proposed by RTI in 2010. These findings show that these learners are not ready to use English as their language of instruction. This study emphasizes on the need to expose learners to numerous reading materials so as to build new vocabularies. Learners should also be assessed individually so as to establish individual challenges in reading and deal with those challenges.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction
This chapter deals with the background to the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, assumptions of the study, rationale of the study, scope and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background to the study
Reading involves recognizing and identifying words, comprehending them and reading them aloud in a fluent manner. It is making meaning from print (Leipzig, 2001). In Chall’s (1996) stages of reading development, reading is conceptualized as a process that changes as the reader becomes more proficient in his or her reading abilities. It is not viewed as the same from the initial to the advanced stages. This means that reading is viewed as essentially different at various schooling stages, like the preschooler, class one to class four, class four to class eight, high school level and tertiary level. The reader first acquires the basic pre-reading skills during the initial stages or in early grades and moves on acquiring more complex reading skills as he or she moves up the grade ladder. The more the skills the reader acquires, the more proficient he or she becomes.

Reading ability is the state of possessing a number of reading skills all of which need to be nurtured and developed in order for a child to read creatively. It also refers to the possession of the physical and cognitive capacity for efficient reading. Despite
the importance of establishing reading abilities of early readers, not much has been
done in the area judging from the amount of available literature on reading abilities.

A number of researchers have observed the effect of reading difficulties on
achievement of literacy and numeracy skills. R. Lyon (1999); Mercer & Mercer
(2001) and Tunmer, et al (2002) for example observe that learners who have
difficulties in reading tend to have negative academic experiences in schools. As a
result, they lose their self-esteem, get demotivated and end in poor academic
achievement. Mercer & Mercer (2001) also noted that approximately 10-30% of
school going children have difficulties learning to read. This can be attributed to the
fact that most learners enter school with very limited knowledge in spoken language
and little prior understanding of concepts related to letter knowledge, letter
identification, sound knowledge and general communication skills of the language. It
is thus important and critical for teachers to assess learners’ reading skills in order to
identify their abilities and their reading difficulties to be able to come up with
appropriate interventions early enough.

According to National Assessment of Education Programs (NAEP) report (2003),
which was done in United States by the National Center for Educational Statistics
(NCES), reading problem has been largely neglected in many countries worldwide.
This problem is not only in the developing countries but also in developed countries.
A research done in America by NAEP (2009) shows that 37% of class four learners
in America have severe reading difficulties such that they cannot successfully understand and complete class four level assignments. Research Triangle Institute (RTI) (2009) report also shows that in developing countries the problem is worse since learners cannot read even simple words. In 2009, a research conducted by RTI in Luo-Nyanza and Central parts of Kenya showed that 9% of 1002 class three pupils in Central and 19% of 998 pupils in Luo-Nyanza were non-readers.

In Africa, many primary school going children have difficulties in reading. Research done on various countries in Africa show that learners are not learning to read at all within the first two or three years of schooling. UWEZO (2010) findings in Tanzania show that most learners in primary school are unable to demonstrate basic reading skills. By the time they reach standard three, 7 out of 10 learners cannot read basic English and by the time they complete primary school, large numbers of these learners cannot do what they should have mastered five years earlier in standard two.

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education has achieved notable progress in ensuring free access of primary education for all children, achieving a Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of 91.4% in 2010 with near gender equity. However, the quality of education given to these children remains quite low. Early Grade Reading Assessment(EGRA) that was carried out in Malindi, Kenya in 2009 shows that class two learners could read only one word per minute, far below the national benchmark of 100+ words accepted by the policy experts at the Ministry of Education in 2010. This research assessed
class four learners since class four is the transition class in the Kenyan Education policy. This means that it is the stage where there is a switch from the use of mother tongue (MT) to the use of English as the language of instruction.

This research was conducted in Maara District in Tharaka-Nithi county which is located in Eastern part of Kenya under the Meru tribe. The Meru language is composed of nine dialects, Kitigania, Kiigembe, Kiimenti, Kimuituni, Kiigoji, Kimwimbi and Kimuthambi. The catchment dialect of the people in Maara District is mostly the Kimuthambi dialect. However, children in lower primary schools are taught using Kiimenti dialect rather than their own dialect, Kimuthambi.

Current studies that assess learners’ reading abilities use the EGRA toolkit. This is a simple, effective and low cost tool that measures learners’ learning outcomes. It was developed in 2006 by RTI (Research Triangle Institute) International under the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) to help educators in low-income countries break the pattern of illiteracy among their poor and to measure in a systematic way how well children in the early grades in primary schools are acquiring reading skills. One of the primary purposes of EGRA is to diagnose at the system level areas for improvement in early reading instruction.

According to RTI International (2009), the most important skill that every learner should learn is how to read and understand a simple text. This is referred to as basic
literacy skills, without which a learner has very little chance of escaping intergenerational circle of poverty. Recent evidence indicates that learning to read both at an early stage and at a sufficient rate (with comprehension) is essential for reading to learn. In many countries though, especially the developing countries, learners who are as far as class four are unable to read and comprehend simple texts.

According to Gachathi Commission of 1976, English and Kiswahili languages should be taught as subjects in all schools right from standard one, indigenous Kenyan languages should be taught and used as language of instruction from class one to class three in linguistically homogenous areas while English and Kiswahili should be used as language of instruction in linguistically heterogeneous areas. From standard four onwards, English should be used as the language of instruction in addition to being taught as a subject. This is the policy that the Kenyan Education system is currently following. (Sifuna 1980 as cited in Andima 2014)

Class 4 is the transition class and so learners at this stage are expected to possess skills and abilities to read and comprehend texts. Primary class four is therefore an appropriate stage for assessing learners’ reading abilities since they are in the process of becoming independent readers after three years of guided instruction and hence the timelines of the proposed study.
1.2 Statement of the problem
Reading serves as the major fundamental skill for school based learning. When learners have difficulties in reading, their love for learning and motivation diminishes rapidly and thus they end up performing poorly, not only in English as a subject, but also in other subjects in the curriculum. By the end of the lower primary school level in Kenya and at the beginning of upper primary, pupils should be able to read books and other materials of their level independently, fluently and with understanding. At class four, a pupil should also be capable of retelling familiar stories, summarizing new ideas and answering questions from a story that he or she has read.

As indicated in section 1.1, a report written by NAEP shows that reading problems have been neglected in many countries worldwide. Studies done by RTI (2009) in Kenya have shown that majority of learners in lower primary classes do not acquire the basic reading skills necessary for successful learning. In 1998, Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) administered a criterion referenced English language reading test to a representative national sample of Kenyan primary schools. The results of this study showed that 77% of Kenyan standard six pupils had not attained the English language mastery level deemed desirable for successful learning. Kigotho (2012) observes that 20% of Kenyan children complete primary school without having learned how to read, a skill that should be obtained in the first two years of primary school learning.
It is thus necessary to assess these learners to find out which basic reading skill they have acquired in English and which they have not so as teachers can take necessary measures to ensure that all learners acquire the basic reading skills to enable them become independent readers.

This study thus, focused on the assessment of reading abilities of class four pupils in English language in rural areas and aimed at determining how well these pupils can read and understand materials of their level and how ready they are in embracing the switch of the language of instruction from mother tongue to English.

1.3 Research objectives
The study was guided by the following objectives:

a) To determine the reading abilities of English of class four learners in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county.

b) To assess the reading readiness of class four learners in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county in reading texts of intermediate lexical density.

c) To determine the challenges faced by class four learners in reading in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county.

1.4 Research questions
The study answered the following questions:

a) What are the reading abilities of class four learners in rural areas in Tharaka–Nithi county?
b) Have class four learners in Tharaka-Nithi county reached the minimum threshold 40 words per minute in reading texts of intermediate density?

c) What challenges do class four learners in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county face in reading?

1.5 Research assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

a) There are appropriate reading texts available to class four learners in schools in rural areas of Tharaka-Nithi county.

b) There is availability of teachers of English language who take learners through reading lessons in schools in rural areas of Tharaka-Nithi County.

c) Class four learners are already reading in their first language and to some extent in English.

1.6 Rationale of the study

Reading is important in the achievement of learning outcomes. A study that assesses the reading abilities of early grade learners is therefore crucial and timely. This research provides insights on how to improve English reading and comprehension. The information gathered can be used as a springboard to improve reading since teachers will be aware of both general and specific factors that influence learners reading abilities and work on eliminating or minimizing those factors. The research also gives teachers insights on the strategies to use in teaching to promote learners reading abilities since it helps them gather clues on their learners’ strengths and weaknesses.
The study may also furnish English teachers with the information on the importance of assessing learners reading abilities and the need to develop reading skills in learners to make them competent and fluent readers who can read with understanding and also shape learners into diligent lovers of reading.

The findings of this study are likely to help education planners and material developers to plan, monitor and evaluate policies and programs in education; shed some light on the reading needs of learners thus improving the content by providing more materials that help to cater to specific needs of learners and to help teachers adapt rigorous but easy-to-understand ways of teaching. The findings may also shed light on the efforts of individual researchers and organizations motivating and modeling a response to the reading crisis.

1.7 Scope and limitations

Reading is considered the fundamental skill among the four skills taught in English; reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. The importance of reading skills in today’s society is enormous since getting information from many sources relies on one’s reading abilities. However, from the literature reviewed, not many studies have focused on determination of reading abilities among learners in Kenya. Thus, the study concentrated on reading and also because focusing on all the four skills would make the scope too wide.
The assessment was limited to the data collected using sub-tasks guided by the EGRA toolkit, which were administered to selected individual students and then the data was analyzed, presented and interpreted qualitatively.

The study focused on all the class four learners in rural areas in Maara Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County which is located in rural parts of Eastern Kenya. This is because class four is transition class where learners graduate from lower to upper primary school where the language of instruction and the language of examination changes from mother tongue to English. It is still at this level that learners are expected to be independent readers who can read fluently and with understanding.

The study was carried out in Maara Sub-County since it was not possible to cover all the sub-counties in Tharaka-Nithi County because of time and financial limitations.

There are two categories of primary schools in Maara Sub-County; private and public schools. The study was limited to public schools since they are mostly located deeper in the rural areas as opposed to private schools which are mostly located in towns.

Most children in rural primary schools in Maara sub-county speak in Kimeru both at home and at school. Since the language of assessment is English, this became a constraint because it hindered communication between the researcher and the respondents.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction
This chapter deals with the review of related studies done on this area of study. First is the section on reading in general, secondly, studies done on reading abilities. Further, there is a section on reading difficulties followed by factors influencing reading abilities and then a section on EGRA toolkit. Finally, a section on the theories within which the study was done, that is theoretical framework concludes the chapter.

2.1 Reading in General
As noted in 1.1, reading is the process of looking at symbols and getting meaning from them. In other words, reading starts by recognizing individual letters, using these letters to form a particular word, reading the words and identifying what each word means not just as an individual but as part of a sentence or a text.

Reading is making meaning from print. It requires the ability to identify words in print – a process called word recognition; ability to understand the meaning of these words – a process called comprehension; and an ability to combine identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – an achievement called fluency. According to Ekwall’s (1992) model of reading, reading involves recognizing words and understanding them. One should be able to read what is written, starting from recognizing the letters, associating those letters to the sounds they represent, reading words, and understanding their meaning for them to be
considered as having reading abilities. Ekwall’s model greatly informs the study because it aimed at assessing if learners can recognize letters of English, identify letter sounds up to reading words and understanding them. This way, the reading readiness of the learners can be easily determined.

Chall (1983) says that there are two major stages of reading development. The first stage is characterized as a period where children are ‘learning to read’ and the second stage as a period where children are ‘reading to learn’. The first stage typically encompasses class 1 to 3 and second stage encompasses class 4 and beyond. Learning to read usually involves a stage where learners are learning the letters of the alphabet and the sounds represented by these letters and how sounds combine to form words. Reading to learn on the other hand involves learners’ ability to read fluently and comprehend the content. Learners who do not ‘learn to read’ during the first three years in school experience enormous difficulty when they are subsequently asked to ‘read to learn’. NAEP (2009) confirmed that the majority of students in class four struggle with reading. This is because of not learning to read adequately during class 1-3 and as a result, they then develop problems with fluency and comprehension, and so they fail to read to learn.

Learning to read is the process of acquiring the skills necessary for reading, that is, the ability to acquire meaning from print. These studies done on reading and reading development will inform the proposed study since it aims at finding out if the first stage of ‘learning to read’ was successfully achieved by class four learners and their
readiness to switch to ‘reading to learn’. The methodology used in such studies, for example RTI (2009) which used excel pivot tables to analyze their data, has greatly benefited this study.

For a child to learn to read, he or she has to be taught the basic skills of reading (Adams and Bruck, 1993). Since reading is a complex skill involving many sub-skills, teachers should know all the sub-skills required for a learner to learn how to read and the methods of instruction suitable for each particular sub-skill. Mberia (2002) sought to determine the methods used by teachers to teach English in lower primary level and she observed that intensive reading is not done thoroughly with thoughtful guiding questions to challenge and arouse pupils’ interests so that they can interpret what is read. As a result of this, many learners perform poorly in English as a subject. Since objective 1.5 c sought to find out the challenges faced by class four learners in reading, this information helped the researcher to collect data according to sub-skills of English so as to determine the skills which are difficult to class four learners.

2.2 Reading Abilities

Reading ability is a broad term for which one single absolute definition is probably not possible. The ability to read is based on a number of skills all of which need to be taught and mastered in order for a child to read. Some of these skills include alphabetic principle, fluency in reading, reading comprehension, the phonemic
awareness and so on. One is considered to have reading ability if he or she possesses those early reading skills.

The basic goal for every learner during early stages is the ability to read and understand a simple text. Therefore, a learner who has challenges in reading faces challenges in acquisition of knowledge as well as skills embedded in the curriculum. This negatively affects his or her learning outcomes or academic achievement. When learners cannot read or struggle to read, their ability to learn other subjects matter and achieve at a grade level is severely limited (Bradley & Danielson, 2002). Basic reading skills act as a foundation to learners’ future reading abilities. Learners who attain solid reading skills in the early grades, end up performing so well in later stages. As a result, they will tend to enjoy reading more frequently and widely which in turn will broaden their reading experience and improve their comprehension skills.

Reading is acquired in phases, from the most basic concept of letter recognition to the more complex concept of fluency and comprehension. The most basic phase being the letter name recognition and the most complex being comprehension (understanding). A learner should have mastered all these phases for him or her to have adequate reading abilities. The major objective of the proposed study was to determine the reading abilities of class four learners. The studies discussed on this section clearly show the number of skills that a learner needs to possess for him or her to have adequate reading abilities. This section is crucial to this study because it
greatly helped the researcher in assessing each of these skills and thus help in determining learners’ reading abilities.

2.2.1 Alphabetic Principle

Another part of learning to read is the ability of the learner to understand that every letter of the alphabet stands for a particular sound or phoneme. For example, letter y stands for sound /j/. Letters can be used together with other letters to stand for a phoneme. For instance, letters sh and ng stand for phonemes /ʃ/ and /ŋ/respectively. This knowledge is called the alphabetic principle. According to Rath and Kennedy (2004), alphabetic principle is the understanding that the sequence of letters in a written word represents a sequence of sounds in spoken words. For example, letters young in the written word are represented by sounds /j/, /ʌ/ and /ŋ/ in spoken form.

Gray (1969) says that the alphabetic principle assumes that familiarity with the names and forms of letters helps pupils to recognize and pronounce words. The chief objection of this is that the name of the letters do not always indicate the pronunciation of words. For instance, in the word ‘cat’, the first letter /c/ is pronounced as the sound /k/ and in the word ‘cease’, the same first letter /c/ is pronounced as /s/.

Understanding of the alphabetic principle is very crucial in reading development of learners. Alphabetic principle is acquired in a sequence beginning with the names of individual letters, the shape of each letter and finally the sound represented by each letter. Inability to know the names of individual letters leads to difficulties in
learning the sounds associated with the letters and also difficulties in recognizing and reading words. Failure to recognize a number of letters leads to failure in the application of the alphabetic principle. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows learners to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words, and to begin to read with fluency.

One of the phases of reading development that is crucial to learners reading ability is their capability to turn letters into sounds. Since the study aimed at assessing learners’ reading abilities, these studies guided the researcher on how to assess the learners’ knowledge on the relationship between letter name and letter sound.

2.2.2 Reading Fluency

Fluency means the ability of a reader to recognize words accurately and automatically and to appropriately use prosody and syntax for better comprehension of a text. A good reader who is fluent should show these abilities. A slow reader on the other hand will lack these abilities thus hindering their understanding of a text.

Reading fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly and with comprehension. Fluency bridges word decoding and comprehension. A fluent reader should be able to decipher a word automatically and form meaning out of it. (National Reading Panel, 2001).

Reading fluency is the ability to read words, phrases and sentences smoothly and quickly, while understanding them as expressions of complete ideas. Learners
without reading fluency spend so much time trying to decode words; as a result they have less time and energy to focus on the meaning of an entire text. NAEP found that nearly half of American fourth graders had not achieved a minimal level of fluency in their reading, which was associated with significant difficulties in comprehension while reading silently (Pinnell et al., 1995).

Fluency is more than just pronouncing or knowing words—it also includes areas like the ability to read quickly, to recognize words and their meaning, pronunciation of words using the right intonation and stressing the right syllable or words so that a sentence sounds natural (Shriver, 2007).

Reading fluency has three dimensions – one dimension stresses the importance of accuracy in word decoding, a second dimension focuses on quick and automatic recognition of words, and a third dimension stresses expressive and meaningful interpretation of text. These dimensions are related to one another – accurate and automatic reading creates the conditions for meaningful reading. All three are important for effective comprehension and overall good reading. All must be taught, and all must be monitored (Rasinski, 2003). In the assessment of reading fluency, the teacher should make sure that he or she captures all the three dimensions.

This section on reading fluency informed the study in that the subjects of study, class four learners, are at the stage where they are supposed to ‘read to learn’. This means
that the learner should be fluent in reading in order to comprehend the text being read. These studies done on reading fluency thus guided the researcher in determining the dimensions that need to be assessed to determine the learners’ levels of reading fluency.

2.2.3 Reading Difficulties

Reading difficulties is as a result of a learner having difficulties in one or more of the following areas: decoding, reading rate, reading fluency or reading comprehension. According to R. Lyon (1999), approximately 20-30% of school going children have difficulties learning to read. This brings humiliation to them which lead to decrease in motivation and self-esteem and this may cause many to drop out of school. Mercer & Mercer (2001) also say that between 10-15% of school going learners have reading difficulties. Almost all the activities in the classroom involve reading, and if a learner has difficulties in reading then he/she will have difficulties catching up with all the activities in the classroom and as a result the general performance of that learner will be at stake.

Students who do not learn to read in the early grades experience enormous difficulty in reading in the upper grades. NAEP confirmed that the majority of students in fourth class struggle with reading and that the achievement gap between the disadvantaged and their counterparts is still very prominent (NCES, 2007). At the fourth grade, learners are expected to have perfected their reading skill because at this stage, they do not learn to read but rather they read to learn.
Leach, Scarborough & Rescorla (2003) observe that if a learner has reading difficulties then the first indicator is poor performance on comprehension tests in fourth class. At class four, texts become more complex and demanding with regard to length, content, context, syntax and semantics. A learner with reading difficulties will have challenges with those increasing demands due to their lack of speed in word recognition and text reading fluency.

Word recognition starts from basic to complex reading. If a learner is weak in basics, then he or she will have limitations in his or her complex reading tasks. For instance, the reading pace for a child who struggles in recognition of words, is quite slow. A major concern is that without adequate early assessment and the longer the reading problems persist, the more complex and deep seated they become. It is necessary for instructors to understand the aspect of reading in which a learner encounters difficulty at an early stage and have interventions put in place. Assessment of learners’ reading abilities involves finding out and understanding the aspects of reading in which the learners have strong capabilities and areas that they find difficult. The factors discussed in this section informed the proposed study since its main focus is to assess learners’ reading abilities.

2.2.4 Factors influencing Reading Abilities

The main factor that influences learners reading ability is lack of fluency and automaticity, that is, to quickly and accurately recognize words and phrases. Lack of
fluency tends to result, ultimately, in children's reading less and avoiding more
difficult materials (see Chall, 1983, 1996; Stanovich, 1986). Learners reading
abilities thus do not improve as they move up the grade levels.

Reading problems can partially be attributed to the fact that English is one of the
most difficult languages to learn. According to Gimson (1980), English is made up
of 44 phonemes; 24 consonants and 20 vowels, but only uses 26 letter symbols to
represent those sounds. Because of this ratio, several additional letter combinations
must be used to represent the other sounds. For example, the sounds /θ/ and /ʧ/
are represented by letters th and ch respectively. Further complicating the process, there
are letters which borrow sounds from other letters. For example, sounds /k/ and /s/
can be derived from letter C like in the words ‘cook’ and ‘center’ respectively.

Individuals who are most at-risk for reading difficulties are those who enter school
with limited exposure to oral language interactions and little prior understanding of
concepts related to the sounds of the language, letter knowledge and general verbal
skills. Poverty also influences reading ability in that learners raised in poverty where
there is limited proficiency in English or learners who come from homes where little
reading takes place are at a higher risk of reading failure. However, there are some
learners who are adequately exposed to language and opportunities to learn to read
but still have shown significant difficulties in acquiring reading skills. This occurs as
a result of deficits in phonemes awareness, phonics development, reading fluency, reading comprehension or a combination of two or more of these.

The study aimed at finding out the readiness of class four learners in embracing the switch from the use of MT to use of English as a medium of instruction and also from dependent to independent readers. Various factors influencing this switch, such as those discussed above greatly informed this study.

2.3 Challenges faced by learners in reading of English

Learners of English face some challenges that interfere with the rate at which they acquire the reading skill. Adeniji et al (2010) cites lack of reading materials as one of the critical impediments of effective teaching and learning of reading in the primary school grades. With introduction of free primary education in Kenya, classes have become crowded and learning resources have become scarce. When given reading tasks as homework, learners face challenges because some do not have access to the limited number of textbooks in the schools. Andima (2014) indicates that in 95% of the reading lessons in Kisii Central, the course book was the only key resource book used in the teaching of reading. Clark (2011) established that reading resources were associated with better reading ability among children.

Pronunciation is another challenge in learning to read. Andima (2014) observes that most learners’ pronunciation of English words was heavily affected by their first language. This makes it difficult for them to read English language texts fluently
with understanding. Most emergent learners do not know that sound /tʃ/ is not pronounced in the word **yacht**, rather they will pronounce it as /j/, /a/ , /tʃ/ and /t/.

Failure to recognize that English words are made up of phonemes. For example the word **ox** has two letters o and x but is made up of three phonemes /o/, /k/ and /s/. A proficient reader should be able to realize that as well as have the ability put the phonemes together to form a word. According to Stanovich (2000), children who begin school with little knowledge of letters and sounds develop challenges acquiring alphabetic coding skill and thus have difficulty recognizing words.

### 2.4 Research done on Early Grade Reading

A study carried out by SACMEQ in 2000 in Kenya which aimed at finding out the reading level of pupils in class six, found out that only about 25% of pupils could read at the required competence. To address this concern, the Kenyan government approved the establishment of the National Assessment for Monitoring Learner Achievement (NASMLA) whose work was to gather information on educational learning achievements at various levels nationally. With the help of NASMLA, Kenya National Examinations Council did a monitoring of learner achievement for standard three in 2010. The findings were that majority of pupils in this class demonstrated reading abilities suitable for standard two level.
An investigation on early grade reading done by RTI, MOE, USAID and EMACK in Malindi, Kenya in 2007 using EGRA toolkit showed that learners read roughly 11 words per minute in both English and Kiswahili. In 2009, RTI conducted a research in Nyanza and central parts of Kenya with learners at the end of class three. Out of 1002 learners in central, 9% were non readers and 19% of 998 learners in Nyanza were non readers.

RTI together with MOE in Kenya conducted a benchmarking exercise in 2010 to help define oral fluency standards, correct words read per minute, for a desired comprehension level in each language of instruction used in the Kenyan school system. Below is a table showing proposed benchmark.

**Table 2.1 Proposed Kenya oral reading fluency benchmark**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1-39</td>
<td>40-99</td>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
<td>1-29</td>
<td>30-59</td>
<td>60+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that for a learner to be considered proficient in reading, he or she should be able to read more than 99 English words per minute. This is a learner who can read fluently and with comprehension. Learners who can only read 1-39 English words per minute are in the emergent stage. This is the stage where a learner can recognize letters names but has challenges connecting these letters to sounds associated with them.

USAID (2003) results of a study carried out in Kenya showed that girls outperformed boys in early grade reading. This is consistent with Ouko (2015) who focused on children’s literacy skills in class one. He observed that girls performed better than boys at 72 and 65 respectively. Clark (2012) has also shown that girls enjoy reading more than boys. Girls read for longer periods of time than boys.

A study done by Mwoma, T. in 2017 on children’s reading ability in early primary schooling showed contradicting results. The study was carried out in Narok County, Kenya and it showed that boys had slightly better mean scores in reading than girls. She used class three pupils who were tested using EGRA tests and systematic random sampling was used to get the sample size. She pointed out that both boys and girls performed far below the national benchmark of 100+ words per minute. Boys were better in phonemic awareness, reading fluency and reading comprehension. According to this study, some of the factors that influenced learners’ reading abilities include language used at home, availability of teaching learning materials, methods of teaching reading among others.
2.5 EGRA Toolkit.

EGRA toolkit is a simple, effective and low cost tool that measures students learning outcomes. It was developed in 2006 by the RTI International under the USAID. In Kenya, RTI and the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) applied baseline and follow-on assessments in treatment and control schools. In each of the 20 treatment schools, teachers were trained in early reading instruction techniques and continuous assessment.

EGRA toolkit is flexible to be adapted by any researcher to test learners’ reading abilities of any language. It works on the basis that learners of any language go through similar phases and there are common characteristic in early reading across languages. This tool therefore, can identify reading skills acquired by each learner and skills which have not been acquired.

The purpose of this toolkit is to document student performance on early grade reading skills in order to inform ministries and donors regarding system needs for improving instruction. NRP (2000) highlighted five essential components of effective reading instruction, as follows:

a) Phonemic awareness – this is a method of teaching learners how to separate sounds (or phonemes) in words.
b) Phonics – teaching learners how to link letters to the corresponding sound and the spelling patterns in English language. This is called grapheme-phoneme correspondences.

c) Fluency – this is oral instruction that guides learners on how to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression.

d) Vocabulary – instruction meant to increase the knowledge of learners in various words so as to make reading and comprehension successful.

e) Comprehension – instruction that teaches learners how to get meaning from the text they read or that are read to them.

The EGRA toolkit consists of eight sub-tasks that are administered to learners: Letter name knowledge, Phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, familiar word reading, unfamiliar word reading, oral reading fluency with comprehension, listening comprehension and dictation (RTI, 2009).

2.5.1 Letter Name Knowledge
The test of letter name knowledge is the most basic of assessments of student reading preparedness. Letter name knowledge is a consistent predictor of reading development for non-native speakers of English and other alphabetic languages (Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002). It demonstrates the students’ skill of letter recognition by asking them to provide names of upper and lower case letters put in random.
According to the EGRA analysis in Nyanza and Central parts of Kenya in 2009, 3.4% of Standard 3 children in Nyanza and Central Kenya cannot read a single letter. At class three, the learner should be equipped with reading skills that will help him or her to switch from guided reader to independent reader in class four. If a learner cannot read letters of the alphabet, then it means that a learner is completely a non-reader.

2.5.2 Phonemic Awareness
Reading process involves turning letters into sounds, sounds into words and words into meaning. Successfully managing this process requires the ability to work in reverse; that is, in order to understand the process of moving from letters to sounds to words, students should also grasp that words are composed of individual sounds and understand the process of separating words into sounds. The ability to identify sounds in words, to separate words into sounds, and to manipulate those sounds is termed phonemic awareness (Snow et al., 1998).

According to Stanovich (2000), children who begin school with little knowledge of letters and sounds develop challenges acquiring alphabetic coding skill and thus have difficulty recognizing words. Research has found that phonemic awareness plays an important role in reading acquisition. It has been shown to be the number one predictor of success in reading, better than socioeconomic status, preschool attendance, or reading time in the home (Share, Jorm, Maclearn, & Matthews, 1984). Testing for and remediating this skill is thus important for later reading development.
2.5.3 Letter Sound Knowledge
Knowledge of how letters relate to sounds is another critical skill that learners must master to become successful readers. Letter-sound correspondences are typically taught through phonics-based approaches. Letter sound knowledge is a fairly common assessment approach and is used in several early reading assessments (Lonigan, Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 2002).

Letter-sound knowledge is prerequisite to effective word identification. A good reader will effectively identify sounds from letters when reading but a poor reader will face challenges in the ability to use letter sound correspondence to identify words (Juel, 1988).

2.5.4 Familiar Word Reading
Familiar word reading is used to assess learners’ word recognition and decoding skills. This is done by giving learners a reading list of familiar unrelated words. For this assessment, familiar words should be high frequency words selected from early grade reading materials and storybooks for first, second, and third-grade materials progressively increasing in difficulty. (RTI, 2009)

2.5.5 Nonword Reading
Pseudo word or nonword reading is a measure of learners’ ability to identify sounds that make up different words. This is done to discourage learners from memorizing words. Most learners, at an early stage, recognize familiar words by sight and cannot separate sounds that form such words. For instance, a learner may memorize the word tap but once the letters are interchanged to form the word pat, the learner will
still read it as tap. Exhaustion of this sight word vocabulary at around age of ten has been associated with the “fourth-grade slump” in the United States (Hirsch, 2003). To be successful readers, children must combine both decoding and sight recognition skills.

2.5.6 Passage Reading and Comprehension

Passage reading and comprehension tests a learner’s reading fluency. Oral reading fluency is a measure of overall reading competence, it tests the ability of a learner to translate letter to sounds, join sounds to form words, connect the words to create sentences and texts, make meaning from the texts and also filling in missing information in the texts by making inferences. As skilled readers translate text into spoken language, they combine these tasks in a seemingly effortless manner; because oral reading fluency captures this complex process that can be used to characterize overall reading skill. Poor performance on a reading comprehension tool would suggest that the student had trouble with decoding, or with reading fluently enough to comprehend, or with vocabulary.

According to Gough, Hoover & Peterson (1996), reading comprehension is the product of two variables: reading decoding and linguistic comprehension. Reading decoding represents the ability to apply letter sound correspondence rules when reading words and non-words. Many individuals fail to develop proficient reading decoding abilities which limits their reading for understanding (Lyon, 2002).
Linguistic comprehension represents the process by which the components of a language (that is, words, sentences, or discourse) are understood.

According to Meichenbaum & Biemiller (1998), an emergence of comprehension difficulties around class three and four is sometimes referred to as fourth grade slump. This is the stage where transition from ‘learning to read’ to ‘reading to learn’ takes place. If the learner has not mastered the concepts of early reading skills taught in lower grades, he/she will have difficulties in reading and comprehending the texts. For comprehension and reading to occur, a reader must understand approximately 85% of the words in the text (Nagy, Anderson and Herman, 1987).

2.5.7 Listening Comprehension
For a teacher to assess listening comprehension, he or she reads passages aloud to learners and then asks oral questions which they respond to. This is important as it tests learners’ approach, process and response to texts. It also tests the understanding of sounds without necessarily looking at the letters which represent them and the ability to pronounce sounds as they respond to the questions. Listening comprehension assessment can also be used as an alternative assessment for disadvantaged children with relatively reduced access to print (Orr & Graham, 1968).

The purpose of this assessment is to see whether the student can listen to a passage being read and then answer several questions correctly with a word or a simple
statement. Poor performance on a listening comprehension tool would suggest that children simply do not have the basic vocabulary that the reading materials expect, or that they have difficulty processing what they hear.

2.5.8 Dictation
Dictation is an exercise frequently used by teachers to test both oral comprehension and writing skills. The ability of learners to listen to sounds and to correctly write the letters representing those sounds shows their capability in the application of the alphabetic principle. Dictation helps to practice listening and writing skills and within the latter, a range of sub-skills from letter formation to spelling, punctuation and lay-out. It also practices vocabulary, grammar and reading.

The EGRA toolkit consists of sub-tasks assessing early grade reading skills. Since the proposed study is mainly aimed at assessing class four learners’ reading abilities, that is, the reading skills that these learners possess that would enable them to become proficient readers, information on the EGRA toolkit greatly informed this study as well as guiding the researcher in constructing the EGRA sub-tasks instrument that was used in the study.
2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Bottom up theory
The proposed study was guided by Bottom-up theory as propounded by Flesch (1955), Gough (1972), LaBerge, and Samuels (1975) and used by Urquhart and Weir (1998) who describe reading as a process from the perception of the letters which make up the text, to an oral realization of the text. It was also used by Gray & Rogers, cited in Kucer (1987), who see reading as a linear process by which readers decode a text word by word, linking the words into phrases and then sentences.

The key principle of Bottom-up theory is that learning to read progresses from learning the parts of language (letters), to understanding whole text (meaning). In other words, the reader decodes the intended message of the writer from the lowest levels such as letters and then words towards the higher levels like decoding clause, sentence, and paragraph. The emphasis of the theory is on the role of first understanding the words singularly as they are presented and then moving from the decoding of the word to comprehension. The Bottom up theory asserts that it is necessary for children to excel in phonetic decoding and word recognition so as to comprehend the text.

Dechant (1991), said that Bottom-up models operate on the principle that a written text is hierarchically organized and that a reader first processes the smallest linguistic unit, gradually compiling the smaller units to decipher and comprehend the higher units. Reading is therefore a sequential or serial mental process. According to Gough
(1972), readers begin by translating the parts of written language (letters) into speech sounds, and then piecing the sounds together to form individual words. These are then put together to arrive at an understanding of the author’s written message as illustrated in figure 2.1 below:

![Diagram of the bottom up model with three levels: Level 1 - Letters/sounds, Level 2 - Words, Level 3 - Meaning.](image)

**Figure 1.1 Bottom up model**

This theory was best suited to guide the study since learners should be assessed hierarchically because earlier stages in reading development tend to influence later stages. This hierarchal assessment helped the researcher to find out the levels of reading abilities of every individual learner.

According to Boothe and Walter (1999), the Bottom-up approach to reading consists of the following features: identify letter features, link these features to recognize letters, combine letters to recognize spelling patterns, link spelling patterns to recognize words, and then proceed to sentence, paragraph and text-level processing. This theory informed the research since it was assessing the early reading skills
starting from the knowledge of the basic skill (letter recognition) up to the complex skill (comprehension).

According to Samuels and Kamil (1988), this model is mostly promoted by educators who view reading as a set of sub skills that must be mastered by students and integrated to the extent that children use them automatically. Stepwise, they first must learn to recognize letters, then words and finally words in context. Kenya Institute of Education also recommends the use of bottom up theory in teaching reading at the lower levels in schools whereby the learner understands the basic levels of reading before he or she is introduced to complex levels. This theory then acted as a tool that guided the researcher in identifying certain methods of teaching reading that are used by teachers in lower grades and also in fourth grade to promote learners reading abilities.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction
This chapter of the research mainly focuses on research design, study location, target population, sampling procedure and sample size, research instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis and presentation and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design
The study used qualitative research design because data was collected, analyzed, presented and interpreted using the qualitative approach. According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2012), this design is used to generate explanatory information or characteristics about a specific population or phenomenon (p.86). This design was the most suitable for the study since the study intended to use a small group of learners to gain insights on the class four learners reading abilities in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county.

3.2 Study Location
The study was carried out in Tharaka-Nithi County, Eastern part of Kenya. Tharaka-Nithi has three sub-counties namely Chuka-Igambang’ombe, Tharaka and Maara. In order to make the study manageable and increase efficiency, the research was within Maara sub-county which is the smallest sub-county among the three. Maara sub-county has 107 public and 39 private primary schools. Majority of these, especially the private schools, are located in economically developed parts of the sub-county. The study only considered four selected schools namely: Rurea primary school,
Karigini primary school, Mumbuni primary school and Ntakani primary school. The four selected schools are situated in a rural setting in Maara district since the study was aimed at assessing reading abilities in low-income areas. This is because the available literature review has shown that the quality of education given to learners in low-income areas is quite low.

3.3 Target Population
The target population for this study included all class four pupils in Maara sub-county and their teachers of English language. There are 3143 standard four pupils in Maara sub-county and 146 teachers of English

3.4 Sampling Technique
No study can include everything and no researcher can study everyone, everywhere and doing everything (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is in this view that the researcher came up with a representative sample from the entire study population.

The study used both purposive and systematic random sampling. The four schools were selected purposively. The schools which met a certain criterion of interest to the researcher were selected. The criterion was based on the location of the schools. This sampling method thus helped the researcher to select the most suitable schools with that characteristic so as to be able to gather the required data to answer the research questions.

The researcher could not study all the learners in the schools due to the limitation of time and resources. Therefore, the researcher sampled class 4 using purposive
sampling. Class four is the transition class where learners graduate from lower primary to upper primary where there is a switch in use of English as the language of instruction. This sampling method ensures that the selected subjects are the most suitable for the study.

The four selected schools had a total of 120 class four pupils. The learners from the four schools were selected using systematic random sampling. This involved first dividing the class into two groups in terms of gender and then randomly allocating numbers to the learners in both groups. The total number of learners per group was then divided by the number of respondents required. This gave a total of ten learners from each school, for example

\[
\text{Total number of learners per group (15)} \div 3 = \text{n} \quad (n)
\]

Number of respondents per group (5)

The researcher then picked systematically every nth number, that is, 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15 to get five respondents from each gender. The ten respondents served as subjects from whom data was elicited. This method ensured that every individual has equal chances of being selected as the respondent and helps in avoiding bias. It also ensured that there was equal gender distribution among the respondents. The study had 40 respondents with each gender comprising of 50% of the total number, which is 20 respondents. The class four teachers of English were also included as the
subjects, making a total of 4 teachers from the four selected schools. These together with the learners made a total of 44 respondents for the study. The table below shows the distribution of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rurea</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karigini</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumbuni</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntakani</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Distribution of the respondents

3.5 Research Instruments
The proposed study used the following research instruments:

3.5.1 EGRA Sub Tasks
This was the major data collection instruments. EGRA toolkit is a standard toolkit designed by RTI. However, the sub-tasks were slightly modified to suit the needs of this study. These sub-tasks included (Appendix A1):

a) Letter name identification

b) Phonemic awareness

c) Familiar word reading

d) Unfamiliar word reading

e) Oral reading fluency with comprehension

f) Listening comprehension
g) Dictation

**3.5.2 Interview Schedules**
The study also used oral interviews which were conducted on teachers to elicit information on their views on the learners reading abilities and difficulties. The information obtained through the interview schedules was used to answer the research question [c] in section 1.4. See Appendix A2.

**3.6 Pilot Study**
The research instruments were pilot tested with pupils from Muthambi primary school, one selected school that was not part of the study before data collection. The researcher visited the school and made arrangements with the administration on the best day to conduct the pilot study. During piloting, the researcher randomly picked five class four pupils who did the sub-tasks on the EGRA toolkit. It was noted that the pupils had a challenge in reading and interpretation of the sub-tasks and so the researcher had to translate for them. The aim of pilot testing was to help ensure the tool was accurately measuring what learners know in the specific context in English, allow one to verify the validity and reliability of the instruments, and help to identify ambiguities and misunderstandings arising from the subtasks. The results obtained from the pilot study showed that the toolkit was reliable for this study.

**3.7 Data Collection Procedures**
The selected respondents were contacted in advance and notified on the purpose of the study. During data collection, the respondents were introduced to the exercise and shown by use of examples how to answer the questions in the subtasks. They
were then given the sub-tasks (Appendix A1) to help gather information on the extent to which they have mastered the reading skill. The sub-tasks were given by the researcher to individual learners and the data collection procedure was monitored by the researcher who guided the respondents. The data collection procedure involved going through each sub-task. Some sub-tasks were timed and others were untimed. The researcher would read the instructions and translate them into respondent’s local language, kimeru, and ensure the respondent understands the instructions (see appendix A1 for instructions). Data from the interview schedules was collected by the researcher orally asking the teachers of English the questions in the schedule and writing down his or her responses. Each respondent was given 15-20 minutes. The process was repeated to all the respondents.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data from both subtasks and interview schedules was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The data was tabulated against independent variables; age and gender of the respondents (figure 4.1 and 4.2). This was to find out whether these variables affect the reading readiness of class four learners in rural areas. The researcher presented and analyzed data according to objectives. The sub-tasks were then categorized in terms of the research questions that they aimed at answering. The mean and standard deviation were calculated from the data in each sub-task and then presented using tables and bar graphs. The scores were then compared to national expectations of learners at class four level to determine their reading abilities and readiness.
Data from the interview schedules was coded thematically according to the methods of assessment and the views of teachers on the teaching of reading. The results were then presented in tables and interpreted qualitatively.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought informed verbal consent of the respondents from the head teachers of the selected schools and also from their parents since the respondents were children.

The head teachers were assured that except for the purpose of this study, the information collected would remain confidential. Only the required information was obtained from the respondents. Research permit was also obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (appendix A3). The researcher also obtained research authorization from the Director of Education Tharaka-Nithi County (appendix A4)

3.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed research methodology in the light of research design that was used to conduct the study. The other areas include area of study, study population, sampling procedures, data elicitation and analysis of the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with data analysis, presentation of the findings and interpretation of the results. The results of 40 sets of sub-tasks were analyzed. Data that was obtained from respondents which came from various class four learners was analyzed with the aid of Excel pivot tables and all the results were evaluated and presented accordingly. This chapter presents the quantitative research findings of the research and is divided into four main sections: demographic analysis, various reading abilities portrayed by class four learners, their various levels of readiness to read and the challenges faced by these learners as per the objectives of the study.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

This measured the changes in the sampled population. The study used gender and age as the demographic variables. The researcher used this to determine how the reading abilities of the respondents changed across age and gender.

4.1.1 Gender

The research had 40 respondents who were both male and female. Each gender comprised of 50% of the respondents as shown in figure 4.1 below.
4.2.2 Age
The age of the respondents ranged from 9 to 12 years. Based on the table below, the age range with highest percentage is 9 to 10 years’ old which is 55% of respondents. In contrast, the age range between 11 and 12 years’ old gains the lowest percentage which is 45%. The data shows clearly that the learners sampled were within the learning ages for class four students.
### Table 4.1: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-10 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.3 Reading abilities

Reading is conceptualized as a process that changes as the reader becomes more able to read. For a learner to acquire reading abilities, then he or she needs to first acquire the basic skills of reading such as letter name recognition and letter sound recognition. From the data obtained in this research, it was established that class 4 students in Tharaka Nithi county have several reading abilities. This section will discuss the findings for letter name reading, letter sound knowledge and passage reading and comprehension. Passage reading and comprehension served as a great tool in assessing the reading abilities of the respondents.

##### 4.3.1 Letter name reading (LNR)

The researcher was interested in establishing the ability of learners to recognize and identify letters of the alphabet. This is because it is the first stage in the reading process and familiarity with the letters helps the learner to pronounce words and also to read fluently. The results were categorised according to demographic characteristics of the respondents in order to understand the reading abilities of the
entire group. Table 4.2 shows the relationship between gender and LNR. It can be established from these results that gender is a good predictor of LNR ability. From the results, girls have good scores in LNR compared to boys. The mean for LNR in this study is 55.35. The standard deviation is 11.3577. This is presented in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics for the Relationship between LNR, sex and age

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<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LNR</td>
<td>55.3500</td>
<td>11.35677</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>1.5000</td>
<td>.51299</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>10.0000</td>
<td>2.51312</td>
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Class four learners in this study can recognize and identify an average of 55 letters of the alphabet in one minute. A girl can recognize and read 59 letters while a boy can recognize and read 51 letters in one minute. This is presented in fig 4.2 below.
John B. (2011) says that a good rule of thumb is that in average text, the average word length is 5 letters. This means that class four learners in rural public schools in Tharaka-Nithi county can only recognize and read 11% as per the national benchmark of 500 letters per minute (100+ words). According to gender, boys can recognize and read 10.2% and girls 11.8%. This is in consistent with the findings of USAID (2013) which showed that girls outperformed boys in early grade reading.

The researcher also sought to establish the relationship between LNR and age. The result unveiled that age is not a good predictor of LNR. This is to mean that LNR abilities of learners are not affected by age as shown in figure 4.3.
The figure above shows that learners who are at the age of nine can read 58 letters per minute, at the age of ten can read 52, at the age of eleven can read 50 and at the age of twelve can read 65 letters per minute. This means that unlike gender, one cannot predict how well a learner can read letters based on their age.

4.3.2 Letter sound knowledge (LSN)
Letter sound knowledge for the purpose of this research refers to the ability of a learner to comprehend letter sounds. Just like LNR, it was cross tabulated against age and sex to establish the effect of demographic factors on LSN. The results of the test
revealed that age cannot be a perfect predictor of LSN abilities among the sampled group. Figure 4.4 below shows a summary of these results.

**Figure 4.4: Relationship between age and LSN**

Most learners scored between 30-60 sounds per minute. Students of age nine had a mean of 44, age ten had a mean of 58, age eleven had a mean of 32 and age 12 had a mean of 49. The scores vary in a diverse way across different ages and so one cannot rely on the learners’ age to predict their LSN.
The respondents of this study can recognize and read 11 letter sounds in one minute, which is 5% of what they are expected to read at their level. Learners at class four level are expected to read 225 letter sounds per minute (45 words). Girls can read 14, which is 6% while boys can only read 8 letter sounds per minute (4%). From these results, it is quite evident that these learners can hardly recognize and read sounds attached to letters of the alphabet yet these sounds are so crucial for reading fluency as well as reading comprehension.

4.3.3 **Passage reading and comprehension (PRC)**
This refers to the ability of a learner to read and understand passages such that he or she can answer questions asked from any given passage of their level. In order to establish that a learner has good PRC skills, the researcher assessed the ability of learners to read passages and answer questions (appendix A1). The results obtained
were cross tabulated in relation to age and gender. There was no relationship between the age of the learners and their PRC abilities, but it was evidently clear that the gender of the respondents had an immense change on the PRC ability. The boys have perfected their PRC skills as compared to girls.

The ability of learners to read and comprehend a text was in no way influenced by their age. Fig 4.6 below shows that the best respondent who read and understood the given text was 9 years old while the one who performed poorly was 10 years old. The respondents who ranged from 11-12 years were average readers in relation to the overall performance.

**Figure 4.6: Relationship between age and PRC**
In relationship to gender, boys had a mean of 4.9 (33%) and girls had a mean of 4.6 (31%). This supports the fact that these learners have difficulties in reading as well as comprehending what they read. It is possible that these learners lack abilities in answering simple questions from a passage of their level.

**Figure 4.7: Effects of gender on PRC**

![Bar chart showing differences in PRC between males and females.]

SEX

Figure 4.7 above clearly shows that boys are better at comprehending what they read than girls. Boys are generally slow at identification of sounds but they read with comprehension whereas girls were fast at reading but failed to clearly understand what they read. As a result, girls performed quite poorly in comprehension questions as compared to boys. This is consistent with Mwoma (2017) findings that boys were better in reading fluency, segmenting and reading comprehension.
4.4 Learners’ readiness to read
Readiness to read can be defined as the time when a learner transforms from being a non-reader to a reader. Since class four is a transition class in Kenya curriculum (Gachathi Commission 1976) where learners are expected to be instructed and assessed in English, the researcher found it necessary to determine how ready they are to switch from mother tongue to English. The researcher selected several variables to assess the level of reading readiness among the sampled group. These included phonemic awareness, familiar word reading and unfamiliar word reading.

4.4.1 Phonemic awareness (PA)
This refers to the ability to identify individual sounds in both spoken and written words. The level of phonemic awareness for learners can be used to predict their readiness to read. This is because children need to become aware of how sounds in words work before they learn to read print (A Teacher’s Handbook, 2008). From the study, it was established that the highest score in phonemes identification was 12 and the lowest was 0 out of 32 phonemes in appendix A1.
From the findings, only 20% of the respondents got the highest score of 12 (39.5%), 20% of the respondents scored 0 in phoneme recognition. This means that they have no knowledge of sounds that make English word. 20% of the respondents in this study can be said to be in the emergent stage.

4.4.2 Familiar word reading (FWR)
This refers to the ability of learners to detect familiar words and read them. It is an indicator of readiness to read. It was established from the research that most learners could read only 25 words in the instrument. This is far below the national benchmark of 100+ words per minute which learners of their level should read (see table 2.1). None of the respondents managed to attain the national benchmark. 80% of the respondents ranged between the low scores of 1-39 and 20% between moderate scores of 40-99 words read per minute.
4.4.3 Non-word reading
This refers to the ability of learners to read unfamiliar words. It is also a measure of reading readiness. From the research, it was established that most learners in the selected group of learners could read as many as 20 words per minute. The fig below shows a summary of these findings
This means that a class four learner in rural public primary schools in Tharaka-Nithi County can only read 20 unfamiliar one-syllable words per minute. This is also far below the national benchmark of 100+ words per minute and a clear indication that the learners in this study have a challenge in identifying sounds that make up different words and as a result they fail to read words that are not familiar to them. This shows that these learners are not ready to read and embrace the switch from use of mother tongue to use of English as a language of instruction.

4.5 Challenges faced by learners in reading
In this research, the researcher sought to determine challenges faced by learners in all reading processes. First the learners were subjected to dictation which aimed at finding out their level of comprehension, familiarity with letters, sounds as well as words. One cannot clearly write a sentence dictated to him or her unless he or she
understands the meaning of it, recognizes the words and finally be able to identify the sounds and letters forming those words.

The researcher also used the teachers’ interview schedules to determine areas that gave challenges to learners in their reading lessons and the major causes of the challenges.

4.5.1 Dictation

Through dictation, the researcher was able to detect learners’ comprehension skill, as well as familiarity with words and if they can recognize sounds and relate them to the corresponding letters. It was established from the dictation that learners had problems in comprehending meanings of words especially words which are easily confused by learners. For example, most had problems with the following words: they, their and there.

A respondent wrote, “They mother came to see what there were doing.” This was meant to be, “Their mother came to see what they were doing,”

The same sentence was written by a different respondent as, “The mother kam tu si the are ndii”.

Another respondent wrote the first sentence as, “The chundren mend amburasi auti of odboxs” This was meant to be “The children made an ambulance out of old boxes.” The last respondent is a case of mother tongue interference whereby the alveolar nasal /n/ is mostly added before the alveolar plosives /t,d/ as it is in the word “chuhndren”.


It can also be observed that the respondent uses the alveolar trill /r/ in place of the alveolar lateral /l/ which is also a common feature in their local dialect, Kimuthambi. This is clear evidence that these learners are experiencing challenges which make it hard for them to acquire reading abilities and readiness to read.

4.5.2 Learners assessment
The researcher sought to find out if teachers took time to assess their learners reading abilities, how they did it and how often they assessed them. Assessment of reading is done by teachers so as to determine reading abilities and challenges faced by individual learners in their classes. All the teachers claimed that they assessed their learners regularly but their methods of assessment differed. The table below summarizes this.

**Table 4.5: Methods of assessment**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Methods used</th>
<th>% of teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual learner’s reading</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diagnostic reading test</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observing reading behaviour</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Most teachers in this research do group assessment of the reading skill which is not favorable to ‘poor’ readers since it is hard to identify their weaknesses in a group. None of the teachers used diagnostic reading test which is the best to show which reading skill and strategies that learners have acquired and which they have not.
Teachers were also asked how often they did the assessment and only 25% did it on monthly basis while 75% assessed learners on termly basis. This shows that the method of reading assessment used by teachers has a major role to play on learners reading abilities since it is through assessment that a teacher can identify poor-readers and know how to help them.

4.5.3 How teachers view the teaching of reading
Teachers of English in this study claimed that teaching of reading was difficult. Each had been told to give two reasons why it was difficult to teach reading, and the results were presented in table 4.6 below. This showed that class four learners had so many challenges which hindered them from acquiring reading skills and as a result making the teaching of reading difficult. 75% of the teachers said that their learners’ reading ability is greatly affected by MT influence. Overcrowded classrooms and lack of enough reading materials were other major challenges that also hindered the learners from acquiring reading skills. One respondent claimed that overcrowding was as a result of lack of enough teachers who are well trained to teach reading. Most teachers and learners lacked motivation and practice since there were no enough reading materials in their schools. It was evident that time set aside for the teaching of reading was enough.
Table 4.6: Difficulties in teaching of reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in teaching of reading</th>
<th>% of teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother tongue interference</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overcrowded classrooms</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of enough teachers</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of enough reading materials</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation and practice</td>
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The table above is in line with the findings of Andima (2014) who indicated that most learners’ pronunciation was heavily affected by the first language making it difficult for them to read English texts fluently and with comprehension. Adeniji et al (2010) also showed that lack of enough reading materials affected teaching and learning of reading in the primary school. Overcrowded classrooms also make the resources scarce as well as impossible for the teacher to give the learners individualized attention.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction
The findings of the research are divided as per the objectives of this study which are:
to determine the reading abilities of class four learners in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi
county in terms of gender and age, to assess the reading readiness of class four
learners in rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county in using English as a language of
instruction and to determine the challenges faced by class four learners in reading in
rural areas in Tharaka-Nithi county.

5.1 Reading abilities
From the results in the previous chapter, it is evident that the majority of class four
learners in rural public primary schools in Tharaka-Nithi county are non-readers with
70% of the learners unable to read more than 30 words per minute. The researcher
noted that the respondents had difficulties reading new words and words with more
than one syllable. This shows that the learners have not been exposed to numerous
reading materials and new vocabulary.

It was also noted that learners had major difficulties reading a passage aloud because
they mispronounced many words and also skipped words that they could not
pronounce. As a result, they had challenges comprehending the passage as well as
answering simple questions from the passage. These findings are in line with Mercer
&Mercer (2001) who said that between 10-15% of school going learners have
reading difficulties. (Section 2.1.5)
5.2 Reading readiness
This is whereby learners transform from being poor readers to fluent readers. Most respondents scored zero in phonemic awareness test. This shows that they cannot identify a single phoneme in English words. The highest score was 39.5% which is way below average, and only 10% of the learners could score that. There are 41-51 phonemes in English (Tankersky, 2003). In summary, the results show that class four learners in rural primary schools in low income areas in Tharaka-Nithi County are below average and can hardly identify phonemes in English words.

Also, only 10% of the respondents managed to read 45 familiar words in a minute, 90% were below the national benchmark of 45 words per minute. All the learners were below the benchmark in non-word reading. It can be assumed that the majority of learners have memorized familiar words and so they face difficulties when they are presented with non-words. This shows that learners do not have mastery of phonemes that make words and letter sounds as well because these should help them read even the unfamiliar words. This clearly shows that these learners are not ready to use English as the language of instruction since they cannot read and cannot comprehend what is written as well.

5.3 Challenges faced by learners
There are many challenges faced not only by learners but also by teachers of English in class four level in rural public primary schools in Tharaka-Nithi County. For
instance, it is clear that most learners in this study could not write a simple sentence dictated to them. The major challenge is mother tongue interference. Most learners carry the characteristics of their mother tongue to English.

Another challenge is that learners are not assessed properly and so the teacher does not know individual reading weaknesses in his or her students. Learners are taught reading as a group and as a result the poor readers are left behind.

The result of these challenges is that learners do not acquire all the reading skills and so they end up being poor readers or non-readers. The teachers on the other hand end up being frustrated because they lack motivation when their learners fail to comprehend what they hear or read. In return, they switch to mother tongue as a language of instruction thus making the situation worse.

5.4 Conclusion
The study aimed at assessing reading abilities of English of class four learners in Tharaka-Nithi County and determining how well they can read and understand materials of their level. It also sought to find out how ready they are at embracing the switch from the use of MT as the language of instruction to the use of English.

From the findings presented in section 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4, it can be concluded that class four learners in Tharaka-Nithi County can hardly read and understand materials of their level and so they are not ready to change from use of MT to English as their
language of instruction. If the switch in the language of instruction is embraced by teachers in these schools, then the learners will not acquire any knowledge since their abilities to read and comprehend materials written in English are limited.

**5.5 Recommendations**

These recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusion of the study:

a) Learners should be introduced to reading as early as they join school. Teachers should also assess learners regularly to determine individual weaknesses and then deal with individual learners.

b) Teachers should therefore expose the learners more in letter sound and phoneme identification. This should start early in lower primary so that when learners get to class four (transition class) they would be adequately prepared to read and comprehend not only words but also sentences, paragraphs and passages of their level.

c) Teachers should have individual assessment of learners so as to establish each learner’s areas of difficulties and look for ways of helping them. Regular assessment should also be done so as to determine the skills that the learners have acquired and which they have not.
5.6 Areas for further research

Since there are four skills in English and this research has only looked at ways of assessing learners reading skill, more researches can be done on assessment of learners writing abilities, listening abilities and speaking abilities.

A research that compares learners reading abilities in private schools versus public schools in rural low-income areas can also be carried out. It can also be done to compare public primary schools in rural areas to public primary schools in urban areas.

A research can also be carried out to give insight into the methods employed by teachers of English in the teaching of reading and how these results influence the abilities of learners to read.
REFERENCES


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Booth, K. et al (1999) *What is a bottom up Model?* SIL International


Laberge, D & Samuel, S (1975).*Basic Processes in Reading Perception and Comprehension*. Hillsdale, N. S. Lawrence.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A1: SUB-TASKS OF EGRA TOOLKIT

INFORMED VERBAL CONSENT

(Read this verbal consent to every participant-class four pupils)

I am a student like you but from a university and am doing a research trying to understand how children like you learn how to read. You were picked by chance to represent other students and I would like your help in this but you do not have to take part in it if you do not want to. This is not a test and I will not write down your name so no one will know these are your answers.

Do you have a question?

Are you ready to start? Check box if verbal consent is obtained.☐

INTRODUCTION

[For assessor’s use only]

a) Date of assessment: Day…….. Month……...Year………….

b) Administrator’s name: ………………………………………

c) Name of the school: ………………………………………

d) School shift: ☐ Morning

☐ Afternoon

e) Assessment number: ………………………………………

f) Teacher’s code: ………………………………………

 g) Pupil’s unique code: ………………………………………
h) Student’s gender: □ Female □

i) Student’s age: .................................................................

j) Time started: .............. : .......(12 hour system)

k) Time ended ......................(12 hour system)

**SUB-TASK 1: LETTER NAME RECOGNITION.**

*[For assessor’s use only]*

Show the pupil the letters below and ask him or her to tell you the names of as many letters as he or she can within a duration of 60 seconds. Start timing the pupil when he or she reads the first letter. Follow along as he or she reads and mark any letter that is read incorrectly with a cross (X). If the learner self-corrects himself or herself, count it as correct answer. Do not talk to the learner while the assessment is going on except when providing answers if the learner hesitates for 3 seconds. The letters that you provide answers to should be marked as incorrect. When 60 seconds end, tell the learner to stop and put a slash (/) after the last letter read. If the learner fails to name any letter correctly in the first line, thank him or her then discontinue the exercise and check the box at the bottom.
[For pupil’s use]

Here is a list of letters of the alphabet, please say the names of as many letters as you can.

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[For assessor’s use]

Total letters read at 60 seconds: ______

Total incorrect letters at 60 seconds: ______

Total correct letters at 60 seconds: ______

ONLY IF COMPLETED IN LESS THAN 60 seconds, number of seconds at completion: _______
Check box if the pupil was discontinued because he/she had no correct answer in the first line  

**SUB-TASK 2: PHONEMIC AWARENESS**

*[For assessor’s use only]*

Read each word below aloud twice and ask the pupil to say all the sounds in every word (not name). Put a (/) through any incorrectly pronounced phoneme.

**Word phonemes**

a) Should  /sh/ /uu/ /d/  
b) Thank  /th/ /a/ /ng/ /k/  
c) Stand  /s/ /t/ /a/ /n/ /d/  
d) If  /i/ /f/  
e) Top  /t/ /o/ /p/  
f) Bag  /b/ /ae/ /g/  
g) Books  /b/ /u/ /k/ /s/  
h) zip  /z/ /i/ /p/  
i) Key  /k/ /i:/  
j) Food  /f/ /u/ /d/  

Count and write down the number of correctly pronounced phonemes:  

SUB-TASK 3: LETTER SOUND KNOWLEDGE

[For assessor’s use only]

Show the learner the letters below and ask him or her to tell the sounds (not names) of as many letters as he or she can. Provide one example to the learner. For instance, the sound of the letter A is /ah/. This sub-task should take 60 seconds and so timing should start when the learner reads first sound. Follow along as he or she reads and mark the sounds that are read incorrectly with a cross (X). Self-corrections should be counted as correct. Avoid interrupting the learner except when providing answers if the learner hesitates for 3 seconds. The sound provided to the learner should be marked as incorrect answer. When time ends, tell the learner to stop and put a slash (/) after the last sound read. If the learner fails to name any sound correctly in the first line, thank him or her then discontinue the exercise and check the box at the bottom.
Here is the list of the letters of the alphabet, please say the **sounds** of as many letters as you can.

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<td>O</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[For assessor’s use]

Total letters read at 60 seconds: ______

Total incorrect letters at 60 seconds: ______

Total correct letters at 60 seconds: ______

ONLY IF LESS THAN 60 seconds, number of seconds at completion: __________

Check box if the pupil was discontinued because he/she had no correct answer in the first line
SUB-TASK 4: FAMILIAR WORD READING

[For assessor’s use only]

Show the learner a list of words below and ask him or her to read as many words as he can. Set the timer on 60 seconds. The timer should be started when the learner reads the first word. Any word that is read incorrectly should be clearly marked with a cross (X) but if the learner self corrects himself or herself, it should be counted as a correct answer. You should not interrupt the learner while the assessment is going on unless he or she hesitates for 3 seconds, then you can give the correct pronunciation of the word and tell the learner to continue. Mark the word you provide the answer for as incorrect. After 60 seconds, tell the learner to stop and mark the final word read using a bracket (]). If the learner does not correctly pronounce all the words in the first line, discontinue the exercise and thank him or her. Check the box at the bottom and move on to the next sub-task.
[For pupil’s use]

Here is a list of English words, please read aloud as many words as you can.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tall</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance</td>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Duster</td>
<td>Please</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seem</td>
<td>Fly</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drove</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>Should</td>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>Axe</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought</td>
<td>Ear</td>
<td>Nails</td>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve</td>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>Built</td>
<td>Gazelle</td>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortoise</td>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Brothers</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>Lamp</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stains</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>corner</td>
<td>Cloud</td>
<td>Write</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[For assessor’s use only]

Total number of words read at 60 seconds…………

Total number of incorrect words at 60 seconds……

Total correct words at 60 seconds………………….

Time remaining on stopwatch at completion (number of SECONDS): ☐

Check this box if the exercise was discontinued because the child had no correct answers in the first line. ☐

SUB-TASK 5: NONWORD READING

[For assessor’s use only]

Ask the learner to read as many words, from the list below, as he or she can. The timer should still be set on 60 seconds. Start timing when the learner reads the first word. Mark any word read incorrectly with a cross (X). Count self-corrections as correct. If the learner hesitates for 3 seconds before reading a word, provide the correct pronunciation for that word and then mark it as incorrect. Point to the next word and tell the learner to continue. Tell the learner to stop when the time ends and put a bracket (]) after the last word pronounced. If the learner fails to correctly pronounce all the words in the first line, discontinue the exercise and then thank the learner. Check the box at the bottom of the sub-task and move on to the next sub-task.
[For pupil’s use]

Here is a list of some made-up words (not English words), please read aloud as many words as you can.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xun</td>
<td>kut</td>
<td>mil</td>
<td>teng</td>
<td>ru</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jop</td>
<td>foj</td>
<td>gich</td>
<td>rew</td>
<td>paf</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zib</td>
<td>riz</td>
<td>tob</td>
<td>mik</td>
<td>bim</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et</td>
<td>sim</td>
<td>heg</td>
<td>tey</td>
<td>pid</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tef</td>
<td>lune</td>
<td>gax</td>
<td>fam</td>
<td>han</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reet</td>
<td>yut</td>
<td>hej</td>
<td>lok</td>
<td>sov</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>sax</td>
<td>wic</td>
<td>huz</td>
<td>ved</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mos</td>
<td>leb</td>
<td>nad</td>
<td>sen</td>
<td>sal</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tad</td>
<td>cen</td>
<td>ras</td>
<td>huf</td>
<td>oty</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kom</td>
<td>ruk</td>
<td>tif</td>
<td>neft</td>
<td>vij</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUB-TASK 6: PASSAGE READING AND COMPREHENSION

[For assessor’s use only]
Ask the pupil to read the passage below aloud and then take the text away after they finish. Ask him or her some questions on what he or she has read. Give the child at least 15 seconds to answer each question. Mark each question answered as correct or incorrect.

[For pupil’s use]
Read the passage below aloud and then answer the question asked about the story as best as you can.

Njeri and her brother usually go to school by bus, because the school is three kilometers from their house. One day, Njeri woke up very late. “Where’s Kamau?” she asked. “He’s already left,” said her mother. “He didn’t want to miss the bus.”

Njeri drank her tea quickly and ran to the bus stop. Too late! She had to walk to school. When she got near the school, she could see the other children in their lines.
By the time she arrived at the gate, they were already in their classrooms. Njeri ran to her classroom and found the teacher putting the register away. “I am sorry,” she said. “I got up too late this morning.”

The teacher sent her to cut grass for thirty minutes. When she came back, the class was beginning the second lesson.

(Adapted from KIE primary English book four)

[For assessor’s use only]

Read the following questions to the child, each at a time, clearly and slowly giving them time to respond to each question. Tick where appropriate.

a) By which means do Njeri and her brother go to school? Answer: By bus.
   □ Correct □ Incorrect □ No response

b) How far is their school from their home? Answer: Three kilometers.
   □ Correct □ Incorrect □ No response

c) What is the name of Njeri’s brother? Answer: Kamau.
   □ Correct □ Incorrect □ No response

d) Why did Njeri walk to school? Answer: the bus had already left when she got to the bus station.
   □ Correct □ Incorrect □ No response

e) Which punishment was Njeri given by the teacher for arriving to school late?
Answer: She was sent to cut grass for thirty minutes.

- Correct
- Incorrect
- No response

SUB-TASK 7: LISTENING COMPREHENSION

[For assessor’s use only]

Read the following passage to the pupil aloud, ONCE and slowly and then ask him or her to answer the following questions on what he or she has heard.

My name is Lucy. I am eleven years old. I have two brothers, my younger brother Mutwiri and my elder brother Mugambi. My brothers have gone with my parents to the shamba to harvest maize. I have remained at home to cook their lunch.

Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) How old is Lucy?</td>
<td>Eleven years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Correct</td>
<td>- Incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) How many brothers does Lucy have?</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Correct</td>
<td>- Incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) What are the names of Lucy’s brothers?</td>
<td>Mutwiri and Mugambi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Correct</td>
<td>- Incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Where did Lucy’s brothers and parents go?</td>
<td>To the shamba to harvest maize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Correct</td>
<td>- Incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Why did Lucy remain at home?</td>
<td>To cook their lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Correct</td>
<td>- Incorrect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUB-TASK 8: DICTATION

[For assessor’s use only]

Provide the pupil with a lined paper and a pencil. Read the following sentences slowly and aloud to the pupil. Each sentence should be read three times giving the pupil time to write what he or she hears.

a) The children made an ambulance out of old boxes.

b) Their mother came to see what they were doing.

c) We went to the city last Saturday.

d) I will be ten years old this year.

e) There are many pictures on our classroom walls.
APPENDIX A2: TEACHERS’ INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Answer the following questions as honestly as possible to the best of your knowledge. The information will be used for the study purposes and nothing else.

Tick where appropriate.

School:.................................................................................................

Class:......................................................................................................

Teacher ID:..............................................................................................

a) How many students are in your class?

A. 10-15       B. 16-21       C. 22-27       D. 28-32       E. 33 and more

b) For how many years have you taught English at class four level?

A. 0-5           B. 6-10         C. 11-15        D. 16-20        E. More than 20

c) How many English lessons do you have in a week in this class?

A. 5               B. 6            C. 7            D. 8            E. Any other number

d) How many of the lessons named above do you dedicate in reading instruction?

A. None           B. All          C. 1            D. 2            E. 3 and more

e) i) Do you assess your learners’ reading abilities? [If the answer is NO, skip questions (f) and (g)]

Yes ☐           ☐ No

ii) If yes, how do you assess them? [Tick appropriately]

Reading aloud in class ☐

Individual learners reading ☐

Diagnostic reading tests ☐
Observing reading behavior

f) i) Do you keep records of your pupils reading progress?
   Yes □ No □

ii) How often do you assess your pupils? [Tick appropriately]
   Weekly □
   Monthly □
   Termly □
   Yearly □

  g) Do you have any non-readers in your class?
   Yes □ No □

h) According to your experience in teaching, how would you describe the reading abilities of class four learners in your class?
   A. Very good □ B. Good □ C. Average □ D. Poor □ E. Very poor □

i) Do you think all the pupils in your class understand what they read during comprehension lessons?
   Yes □ No □

j) i) Do you think your pupils overall performance in English as a subject is in any way influenced by their reading abilities?
   Yes □ No □

k) i) How do you find the teaching of reading?
ii) Why? [Tick two reasons]

- Mother tongue interference
- Overcrowded classrooms
- Lack of enough teachers
- Lack of time
- Lack of reading materials
- Lack of motivation and practice
APPENDIX A3: RESEARCH PERMIT

[Image of a permit document]
APPENDIX A4: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

E-mail: dbon-graduate@ku.ac.ke
Website: www.ku.ac.ke

P.O. Box 43844, 00100
NAIROBI, KENYA
Tel. 8710301 Ext. 57580

Our Ref: C50/23467/2011

DATE: 17th November, 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION FOR NJABANI EMIS KAINYU
REG. NO. C50/23467/2011

I write to introduce Ms. Njabani Emis Kainyu who is a Postgraduate Student of this University. She is registered for M.A. degree programme in the Department of English and Linguistics.

Ms. Njabani intends to conduct research for a M.A. proposal entitled, “An Assessment of Reading Abilities of Class Four Learners in English in Four Selected Schools in Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya.”

Any assistance given will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

MRS. LUCY N. MBAABU
FOR: DEAN, GRADUATE SCHOOL