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## Improving learners' literacy competencies in early years education through children's storybooks

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**Abstract**

Since independence, the Government of Kenya recognizes the value of education as a one of the fundamental factors of development. This is because education raises people's creativity productivity and plays a critical role in securing social and economic progress. In this regard, the government has not only made basic education mandatory (Basic Education Act, 2013) but has also performed remarkably well in increasing primary school gross enrolment. Additionally, in order to ensure that children are taught "the right skills", the Government, through the Ministry of Education, together with other stakeholders rolled out the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in order to increase access to quality reading instruction in schools. Despite all these efforts, low literacy is a problem that is not only prevalent but continues to plague Kenya today. Children from rural and informal settlements in urban areas are particularly at risk for below-average literacy skills due to a lack of age-appropriate literary resources, low rates of caregiver literacy, and low levels of teacher support. Borne out of the concern to improve literacy levels among children in early years education, this article examines ways in which children's storybooks can be used as an intervention to improve learners' capabilities. Drawing from lessons learnt from reading sessions conducted among grade three learners in selected schools in Machakos Township sub-county during fieldwork, the article presents various strategies that could be deployed to make reading sessions interesting, memorable and engaging to all the learners regardless of their reading abilities. Thus, the article shows how children's storybooks foster fundamental skills in reading that are necessary for improving oral reading fluency and comprehension among learners in early years education.

**Keywords:** competency, competency based curriculum, early years education, children's storybooks, literacy

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### Public Interest Statement

Literacy competencies among learners in Early Years Education are essential to learners' academic achievement and pursuit of various educational goals in life. Research has, however, shown that there are low levels and widening literacy skills gap among learners in early years education in Kenya. Various strategies such as exposing learners to various reading and comprehension skills have been put in place involving various stakeholders in order to forestall this worrying trend. Consequently, the study examined whether Grade 3 teachers handling reading lessons among learners in selected schools in Machakos Town sub-county use various strategies to help learners learn how to read.

### 1.0 Introduction

The ability to read and understand simple text is the most basic skill that children need in early years education, especially in Grades one, two and three. Low literacy levels among children in early years education affect their performance in other subjects, including mathematics, science, and social studies. Piper and Mugenda (2012) observe that children who cannot read are also more likely to drop out of school before they complete primary school because of frustration, discouragement, and stigmatization by their peers and teachers. Similarly, Mathew Jukes et al (2016) observe that low literacy not only affect learner's association with others but has a bearing on the learner's future life.

Literacy is one of the most integral parts of any human development. UNESCO (2010) views literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. Literacy is a right. Literacy is a foundation for all further learning.

Despite the strides made in improving access, equity, and quality of education in Kenya, existing research shows that learners have low levels of reading skills (Piper 2010, Uwezo 2016; NASMLA 2018). In the study conducted in Malindi in 2007, Class 2 pupils were able to identify an average of only 4.7 and 22.7 letters per minute in Kiswahili and English respectively. When asked to read a short story, the pupils could only read 10.2 and 11.4 words per minute (wpm) in Kiswahili and English respectively (Piper, 2010). In a study conducted in 2009 in Central Kenya and Luo Nyanza, the average oral reading fluency was 30.4 wpm in English. Numeracy levels are similarly low. In Malindi in 2009, Class 1 children could identify only 27.5% of the numbers they were shown and could fill in the missing number only 5.3% of the time. Fifty per cent of the children in Classes 1–3 answered less than 50% of the word problems correctly, with Class 1 pupils answering only 25.8% of the word problems correctly.

Early grade reading helps learners expand their thinking skills, learn to concentrate and enlarge their vocabulary. However, reading can be a complex act requiring many years of experience and use in order to do well. Successful reading and writing involves comprehension, fluency, mastery of essential strategies and motivation (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). English reading and speaking is based on the alphabetic principle focusing on letter sounds which acquire meaning when the sound units are combined. Before reading or spelling, children must understand that written words are made up of sounds or phonemes.

Children's early language skills are the foundations on which reading well at primary schools is based (Read on Get on, 2014). For both boys and girls to learn foundational reading skills, they should be provided equal opportunities to access quality education (Piper & Mugenda, 2013). Many schools in Britain have achieved impressive results for their pupils in every challenging circumstance, demonstrating that while poverty often makes it harder for a child to learn and achieve, it should not be an excuse for low ambitions (Read on Get on, 2014). In developing countries however, the case may be different since children from poor backgrounds may be disadvantaged as their parents and guardians may not be able to provide them with educational materials likely to enhance learning to read. Thus

such children would end up attending school without the required reading materials, leading to low ambitions among them as compared to children from better backgrounds.

Research has shown that instruction in phonological awareness should begin in preschool to enable children learn that written words represent spoken sounds, a process known as decoding involving breaking a word into separate sounds (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). To decode, children need to be explicitly taught how to sound out words into phonemes. As children learn to decode and read words, they are able to focus on building their comprehension. The more a child is exposed to reading, the more likely he or she is to acquire the required skills for reading. Thus, children must learn that words on a page have meaning and that reading is done from left to right and from top to bottom. Children who have not been read to before they enter school may not have experienced listening to rhythm and sounds. They may not have developed an interest in reading and may not be motivated to learn to read (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013).

Research conducted by Uwezo (2016) and NASMLA (2016) shows that being able to read is a valuable skill. People who can read have access to printed information available in books, newspapers, magazines and on the internet. For children at school being able to read is essential. Children who fail to read in the early grades fall further behind each school year. Reading ability is progressively used as a tool for acquiring other types of knowledge. Because Children spend the majority of their life outside of school, story books can be used in both environments to improve literacy skills. Hence, many children face an uphill task in reading after entering primary school without the requisite literacy preparation necessary for school readiness. The study sought to show that utilizing children's storybooks is one of the innovative ways of bridging the literacy gap among learners combined with dialogic reading, a technique that involves engaging children in conversation about the text while reading.

## **2.0 Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Reading Competencies and Strategies among Learners in Early Years Education**

Reading competency is essential for lifelong learning. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985) posit that reading is a basic life skill and a cornerstone for a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success are inevitably lost. This emphasis is necessary considering that reading is not a skill that can be automatically learned. Reading is also described as a complex process of making meaning from a text, for variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts by other experts (Allen & Bruton, 1998).

In the reading process, readers use reading strategies, linguistic knowledge along with their background knowledge about the text's topic and structure to achieve their purpose for reading (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand a written text (Pang et. al., 2003). According to Teale (2003), a student's ability to read is a key determinant of whether or not they will succeed in school and have a positive impact on their community. Learners who read may improve their critical thinking, concentration, and language abilities.

Despite its importance, reading is one of the most challenging areas in the education system. The ever-increasing demand for high levels of literacy in society today makes this problem even more pressing. Sloat, Beswick and Willms (2007) observe that poor literacy can negatively impact learners' academic achievement. They point out that learners who fall behind their peers in reading may find themselves struggling to understand instructions in different disciplines. Even learners who excel in other learning areas such as mathematics may not reach their full potential if they are not proficient in reading and writing. In addition to having a negative impact on a learner's overall progress, poor reading skills can also be detrimental to a learner's social well-being leading to feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and eventually a loss of confidence (Sloat, Beswick and Willms 2007).

Further, Sloat, Beswick and Willms (2007) point out that the ability to read is tied to everything we do and that connections in social situations and practices are very important in developing literacy skills in children. As a crucial part of academic success, reading comprehension is must-have ability (Teng, 2009). Learning to read is a crucial stage in the current trend of developing mental and linguistic talents in school (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Those with poor reading abilities may lose out on the opportunity to improve reading comprehension methods if they encounter reading content that is too complex, and they may develop a negative attitude toward reading as a result, according to Amer (2012).

Though reading is an important aspect of teaching, it has been overlooked overtime. Closer inspection of the Early Years Education syllabus specification emphasizes that reading skills have to be taught to learners in order to foster the competencies. The syllabus also outlines various reading strategies that learners have to be exposed to in developing their reading competency and underscores the need to teach reading strategies explicitly as one of the desired outcome of the curriculum. Thus, the curriculum bestows upon the teachers the responsibility to teach learners about reading strategies and how to utilize them. To provide comprehension, teachers should aid learners in understanding and using reading strategies (Yigiter, Saricoban, & Gurses, 2005). It is the teacher who must introduce and provide practice in using reading strategies for coping with texts in an unfamiliar language (Eskey & Grabe, 1995). The question is: do teachers in Early Years Education in the country teach reading strategies to their learners? Most importantly, are the teachers aware of the need to do so and how? The study sought to answer these questions.

The International Reading Association (2007) distinguishes the difference between reading skills and strategies. A key finding of this study is the distinction between deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meaning from text and automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency while the reader is usually unaware of the components or control involved in these efforts. Thus, a reader's actual behavior and thoughts do not determine if an act is a skill or a strategy. Rather we cannot know whether an action or activity is a skill or strategy until we know whether it is under automatic or deliberate control. Thus, continuous use of reading strategies leads the readers to become skilled and later be able to utilize the reading skills acquired without conscious efforts. Reading in Early Years Education, enables learns to construct meaning, learn to find main ideas, to skim, and to re-read first as deliberate actions and, with practice, later accomplish the same actions with less effort and awareness. In this regard, deliberate reading strategies become fluent reading skills. It can be assumed then that the awareness of reading strategies is of crucial importance especially for beginning readers. Awareness helps the reader select a certain path, the means to the goal, and the processes used to achieve the goal.

## **2.2 Promoting a Reading Culture among Children in Kenya**

The promotion of a reading culture in Kenya is not a new concept. Many activities and programmes have taken place to promote the concept since the beginning of the 20th century. For instance, many scholars, NGO's, publishers, book industries, international bodies, such as United Nations, have since as early as the 1980's been agitating for the development of a reading culture in Kenya and the world at large. The Kenya National Library service Board Act (Chapter 225 of 1986) empowers KNLS to stimulate public interest in books and promote reading for knowledge, information and enjoyment. The other body that is aggressively trying to promote a reading culture is the National Book development Council of Kenya, which works in collaboration with other interested bodies.

The promotion of a reading culture in Kenya is mainly conducted using the reading tents. According to Makenzi (2004) the reading tent is an old concept but new approach for promoting reading and enhancing literacy in both the rural and urban poor communities in most parts of the world. The reading tent approach focuses mainly on promoting reading for leisure and making books and other reading materials accessible to children in areas that lack adequate library services. The

reading tent approach has been used in Kenya since early 1990's as an attempt to enhance reading skills and habits among children. The aim of this approach is to promote a love for reading and to develop a reading culture among children. Various organizations and institutions are using this approach to promote reading. Among them are Egerton University Reading Tent Project (EUTRP), Kenya National Library Services (KNLS), Kenya library Association (KLA), Reading Association of Kenya (RAK), and Kenyatta University Basic Education Resources Center (KUBERC). Most of these organizations run the children's reading tents (CRT) activities under the umbrella of the National Book Development Council of Kenya (NBDCK). The National book development council of Kenya has been running children's Reading Tent activities since 1997 under the banner of the National book week celebrations which is an annual event of NBDCK.

Since primary schools in Kenya comprise the first phase of formal education, it is normally at this stage that pupils are introduced to read and it is at this age they are made readers. Although there are no policies on cultivation and promotion of a reading culture, nevertheless some efforts are underway to foresee the attainment of reading culture. In Kenya much of the responsibility designed to cultivate and promote a reading habit is entrusted to language teachers. This is normally done through the use of library lessons designed to allow pupils have a silent reading session in class or in the school library. The library lessons were put in place in primary schools as per the requirement of the Kenya Ministry of Education. They are usually programmed in such a way that each class from standard one to eight have two library lessons per week, comprising Kiswahili (Maktaba) and English library lessons.

Schools with libraries allow their pupils to read in the library during the lessons. The pupils normally go to the library, select books from the shelves and read them during the lessons. The library lessons are organized in such a way that during Maktaba lessons pupils are required to read Kiswahili storybooks while during the English library lesson they are required to read English story books. In schools with no library, the responsibility of selecting reading books is left to the language teacher who selects books from the school store and takes them to class for the pupils to read. This denies the pupils the freedom to choose their reading books.

Despite the fact that schools use library lessons to cultivate a reading habit, there are no guidelines provided on the establishment of libraries. Besides, it is not clear how schools assess reading habits among the pupils. In view of the fact that library lessons are not clearly enumerated, most schools see no point of participating in such activities. Most schools see the syllabus as too demanding. They see no need to conduct library lessons when they are not examined. Some schools especially public primary schools see no point in conducting such lessons, because of lack of school library. Only schools that have libraries have well-organized library lessons.

Although KNLS endeavors to promote a reading culture through reading tents and book week celebrations, few schools participate or collaborate with them in this direction. KNLS coordinates the following activities with schools this among them includes, the training of teachers/librarians on how to handle and organize informational materials in the school store/library and also the participation of the schools in the annual book week, where various reading activities are carried out.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study adopted a participatory research design. The study population comprised Grade 3 learners drawn from ten (10) public and private primary schools in Machakos Town Sub-county. Participatory data gathering approaches involving turn reading, listening, monitoring learner behaviour, observation and post-reading focus group discussions were used. Narrative content analysis was used in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data as the findings of this study.



#### 4.0 Interpretation and Analysis of the Findings

##### 4.1 Nurturing a Reading Culture in early Years Education

The early education syllabus points out literacy areas where children need to be guided in order for them to acquire literacy. However, in order to help pupils develop literacy skills, there is a need to create sustainable literate environments for that individual to live in because a learned person is a product of literate environments (UNESCO, 2011). Creating a dynamic and stimulating literate environment is essential to literacy acquisition, development and lifelong use (Easton, 2006).

In this regard, there is need to design a responsive literacy learning environment to foster the growth of literacy skills and nurture a reading culture among learners in early years education. This environment should be tailored to not only encourage reading but stimulate inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, key aspects in the competency based curriculum. The researcher realized that creating such a reading environment, individual learners' interests, and learning styles should be taken into account. With this in mind, the researcher strove to create an environment which allowed and encouraged learners to raise questions, express opinions, and explore their reading abilities. The environment also provided ample opportunities for reflection, conversation and collaboration as the researcher engaged the children on the stories they had read. The ultimate purpose for this was to foster positive attitudes about reading and literacy development.

Promoting a literate environment calls for greater attention and focus on access to reading materials that are responsive to the interests and learning needs of learners. Aware of this responsibility, the researcher ensured that the reading environment was not only appropriate but also enabling for the pupils. This involved reorganizing the classes into circular and semi-circular patterns during the reading sessions. At times, and if the weather enabled, the researcher conducted the reading sessions under a tree with the pupils seated on the ground and the researcher on chair. This was deemed important because it made the learners relax and enjoy the reading sessions. The framers of the competency based curriculum argue that learning should not only be restricted to the classroom. They argue that a lot of learning occurs outside the classroom. The physical environment is a "literacy stimuli." It has an effect on the development and functioning of learners. This was evident in the reading sessions under the tree.

Teachers are the key players in enabling children acquire literacy. A teacher, who is successful with literacy, forms a critical foundation block for thriving at school. Hence, teachers should work towards sowing the seeds of a reading culture among children. Cognizant of the fact there is need to there is need to cultivate a reading culture among children, the researcher allowed to pupils to read the selected storybooks in turns. The competency based curriculum encourages that active learning strategies should be deployed to make learning enjoyable and interesting to the learners. Allowing the pupils read in turns and imitates certain forces in the story was interesting. In one school, the pupils imitated the probable voices for Milo, Milo's mother, Milo's father and the growling monkeys in *Lazy Milo* (2010). In another instance, pupils imitated the probable voices of Giraffe, Leopard and Gazelle in *I Stand Tall* (2011) while in another, the pupils imitated those of Buka, Mr. Kitivo and Inspector Magiri in *Buka helps the Police* (2007). All these made the reading sessions interesting.

##### 4.2 Stimulating Children's Reading Interests

Reading can be fun, a source of pleasure and for language development (Easton, 2006). The need to imbibe the right reading culture among children is at the core of the competency based curriculum. It is believed that by making reading a regular habit, children are able to improve their literacy levels. Basing on the strategies this research deployed on fieldwork, the following are the ways in which teachers can generate reading interests among children:

#### 4.2.1 Adopting a Comprehensive Reading Instruction

A comprehensive reading instruction is key antidote to stimulating literacy among learners. This approach takes cognizant of the fact that reading is more than just recognizing written words on a page. It is a process that involves several skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The approach involves learners working hand-in hand with their teacher in developing various reading skills. In so doing, learners to develop and take control of their reading thereby becoming independent readers. At this level, the learner is not under pressure to read but encouraged to read for pleasure, which reduces anxiety among learners.

A comprehensive reading instruction requires dedicated time for reading each and every day and the use of strategies that build learners' motivation to read. One of the most important factors in comprehensive reading instruction is having motivated learners. Part of building that motivation from a young age comprises asking the learners to read a little every day. By constant reading practice, a child will come to see themselves as a good reader and be more likely to pursue reading on their own. A comprehensive approach to reading will teach young learners to think about reading, monitor their understanding, and help them figure out what they know and need to know to make sense of different texts.

A comprehensive reading instruction also requires deliberate efforts to be made to create the desire to read among children at the early stages of their reading habit formation. Reading is like travelling, a sort of excursion into other worlds. Children are transported beyond their actual environment, into experiences beyond their physical reach. Reading enables children to enlarge their ideas and their personal experience. The more children read, the wider their experience and their outlook, because their minds become more open to deal with the problems and prospects of life and living. In this regard, children should be allowed to read when and whatever they feel like reading, but encouraged to develop the habit of reading frequently and regularly.

#### 4.2.2 Flipped Reading

As pointed out earlier, the competency based curriculum encourages active learning among learners. While engaging in active learning, teachers should ensure that learners' focus remains on the set task. At this level, the learners' concentration spans are low, therefore, the teacher should closely monitor the reading process. This can be managed by providing extension reading and goal-focused-reading where learners read with the aim of obtaining certain information or a specific phrase from the text.

While reading *Buka helps the Police* (2007), the researcher asked the learners to look for various "helps" in the story. In another instance, the researcher asked the pupils to identify how many times Leopard lied to his friend Giraffe in *I stand Tall* (2011) and what each lie was. The search was a targeted learning activity which not only engaged the pupils but also required them to comb through the story in order to get the right information. Flipping reading sessions is an intensive learning activity which has greater literacy outcomes through greater in-reading learner engagements.

The flipped-reading strategy is an active learning strategy which allows for dynamic reading sessions. Whereas some learners were lost in the maze, causing anxiety and frustration, for others, this was exactly the type of excitement and energy they need to show their reading prowess. The excitement was taken a notch-higher for a vast majority of the learners when a reward for every correct answer was introduced.

#### 4.2.3 Choosing Literacy Materials

Literacy materials are tools that can facilitate literacy development, acquisition and application which include reading and writing materials, counting objects and even audiovisual materials (UNESCO 2011). The choice of reading materials has a bearing on the learner's development of literacy. Though meant to be read for the same class, the selected texts of this study were ranked in different categories.

*Buka helps the Police* (2007) was ranked category j, *Lazy Milo* (2010) category p and *I stand Tall* (2011) category t. This ranking is important because it shows increased intra-difficult within the same level. It therefore follows that learners will find it easier to read the story of *Buka helps the Police* (2007) when inducted into reading and as their competence improves, *Lazy Milo* (2010) and *I stand Tall* (2011) are introduced respectively.

The use of pictures in the selected books was another factor which generated excitement among the learners. Fattal (2017) observes that pictures create a miniature ecosystem in for enhanced learning experience. This is brought about by the reciprocating actions of words and pictures in books where each one becomes a basis of existence of the other. The use of pictures in *Lazy Milo* (2010) enriched the reading experience. The children were thrilled, for example, with of a photo of Milo being beaten by the safari antics, milo running away from the baby hyenas without his shirt and the monkeys hitting him with guavas. The visual images spurred the children's imagination and triggered children's motivation to read.

During the reading sessions, some of the pupils actively engaged with the pictures in the stories often mapping them with the written material. In this regard, the pictures captured imaginations of children as different characters are introduced into their imaginative spheres. Children spent time drooling Buka watching the three men disappear into the bush in *Buka helps the Police* (2007). They wondered how the three men would not see Buka staring at them. Thus, the pictures acquaint learners with new experiences to describe what they seeing as well as reading. In this interaction, children related text to image. This stimulates constructive and active thinking among children and enhances their literacy. Consequently, pictures help learners to develop not only technical skills but also imaginative, constructive, and practical skills (Wilhelm, 2016; Pinter, 2017).

Therefore, the quality of materials used has a bearing on learner's literacy. As reflected in the selected texts for this study, good quality reading materials should target all types of learners (UNESCO, 2003). To do so, the following factors need to be considered: Appropriateness and relevance of materials. Reading materials should be appropriate and relevant to all types of learners. Materials based on the reading level, interests and needs of the learners, written in the languages they speak, addressing the problems they have identified and helping to achieve their personal and community goals, will serve as a useful resource for their development (Malone and Arnove, 1998). Thus in order to improve learners' literacy, there is need to select materials that they can easily comprehend and enjoy. Such materials should be simple readable texts that would help children develop their vocabulary and power of expression. It is important to note that children have their own tastes and interests. The choice of reading materials should reflect these interests as well.

#### 4.4 Strategies for Improving Learners' Literacy Proficiency

Choosing appropriate reading strategies in form of relevant meaningful activities to utilize in reading goes a long way to improve literacy among learners. The purpose of this section is therefore to present possible strategies/activities that could be used to improve learners' reading proficiency in schools.

##### 4.4.1 Individualized Reading

This involves one pupil reading under the teacher's guidance. In individualized reading, learners assume responsibility for their reading, proceeding with activities and materials at their own level or rate in school, home, elsewhere. The choice of reading materials is made by the children. The role of the teacher here involves:

- i. Monitor the reading process
- ii. Provide reading activities to elicit learners' active participation in the reading process
- iii. Evaluate learners' reading competences
- iv. Giving follow up activities which allow the learners apply learned reading skills.



#### 4.4.2 Group Reading

The mission of the competency based curriculum is nurturing every learner's individual potential. Learning strategies that encourage cooperation among learners is one of the key ways on unlocking learners' innate potentials. Group reading is one of the keys ways in which learners' proficiency can be improved. During fieldwork, the researcher discovered that some learners were struggling to read before the rest of the class. When the class was divided into smaller groups of four to five pupils, the learners were able to read effortlessly. Thus, group reading, as a cooperative activity, is an effective strategy of improving learners' proficiency in reading. The role of the teacher here involves:

- i. Identify group skills that are specific and appropriate for developing reading competencies among learners in groups.
- ii. Set-up the reading groups based on learners' diverse reading abilities
- iii. Encourage and guide learners in group reading activities
- iv. Encourage diversity. Help learners to understand that the ability to work in diverse groups is highly valued and is a principle that governs the competency based curriculum.

#### 4.4.3 Controlled Reading

The teacher should at any given time control and monitor reading activities of learners through the following:

- i. **Control of individual reading**  
The teacher could provide guided questions which will provide clues to what he wants the individual to read. With these questions, the pupils can read and look for specific information from the text. Such questions are usually given before the text or passage is read so that they stimulate, encourage and guide the individual reader on the directions the teacher wants him or her to go.
- ii. **Control of Group Reading**  
The teacher can control the group reading activities of the learners based on the groups' set-up. Various group leaders can be assigned to take control of the groups. The various group leaders may act as the speakers of the group. The teacher then can assign a text to each group to ensure that the right material is being read.

#### 4.4.4 Encourage mixed reading

The formation of effective reading groups has its own dynamics and therefore teachers are encouraged to exercise precision and patience. Teachers are encouraged to form reading groups with mixed abilities among learners. Amongst the major considerations are the learners' proficiency level, reading skills, gender and ability. It is important to consider both the highly gifted (fast learners) and the time takers (slow learners) when forming the groups. The teacher should identify these learners in order to design reading activities appropriate to their proficiency level.

### 5 Conclusion

This article has various strategies and ways of improving learners' reading proficiency. The strategies are borne out of evidence and reflections of the researcher based on the fieldwork conducted among grade three learners in Machakos Township sub-county. The article has shown that stimulating and nurturing reading culture among children requires a combination of various strategies such as creating the right literacy environment, adopting a comprehensive reading instruction, flipped reading, and selecting the

right materials. The article also showed that various strategies could be deployed such as individualized, group, controlled and mixed reading to improve learners' reading proficiency. The strategies ensure that individual learners are active involved in the reading process, encourage interpersonal development, develops learners' social skills, and enhances satisfaction of learners own reading experiences.

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