Enhancing Reading Culture among School Learners in Kitagata Sub-County School Sheema District: A Multifaceted Approach

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in the educational and social development of individuals. This paper delves into the multifaceted nature of reading, exploring its definitions, types, and importance in education. It investigates the challenges primary school learners face in developing proper reading skills, particularly in Uganda, and proposes strategies to enhance reading culture in primary schools. The study utilizes a descriptive research design, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The research findings highlight the factors influencing students' reading habits, including access to reading materials, the role of libraries, and the influence of peers and teachers. Additionally, the study explores the impact of reading clubs and storytelling initiatives in promoting reading among students. The paper concludes with recommendations for fostering a conducive reading environment in primary schools, emphasizing the importance of diverse reading materials, the establishment of readers' clubs, and the integration of storytelling activities into the curriculum.

Keywords: Reading culture, performance, students, schools

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a term used to refer to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader. It involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall or meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader [1]. The resulting meanings are thereafter organized into thought process according to the purpose adopted by the reader, such an organization leads to modified thought and/or behaviour, or else leads to a new behaviour which takes its place either in personal or in social development. From another perspective, reading is defined as the vocalization of words in a given passage and the process of giving meaning to materials. This definition refers to reading aloud which beginners do quite often and enables teachers to detect and to correct errors spontaneously. Although, reading can be done aloud but vocalization in the course of silent reading slows down reading pace. For reading to be effective, it should be done with a good speed.

[2] observed that there are two types of reading namely, reading aloud and silent reading. Reading aloud involves audible vocalization of what is being read and is good for young learners because it exposes error for timely corrective measure. Reading aloud is used for speech delivery in public gatherings, and is also the format for dictation and oral comprehensive tests. In silent reading, the reader reads in the inside of him. In other words, he does not vocalize what he reads. Wide reading imposes reading silently and this is necessary for developing the reading habit, effective reading and for a profound understanding of literate and technical tests. The ability to read is essential to being able to learn any subject taught in school. In our high-tech society, proficiency in reading is a must to compete favourably in today's job market.

Language is one of the most useful tools we have as humans. Without it we could not think thoughts expressible to others, nor could we engage in the activities that commonly take place in the society we build ourselves [3]. Language is very important in education. For instance, [4] asserted that education is carried out largely through the medium of language, thus, language is very significant in the education process. Additionally, [5] argues, "Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education". Language plays a crucial role in learning, and if the learner is handicapped in the language of instruction, then learning may not take place at all as the instructor or teacher and the learner will not be communicating [6].

The language of instruction in post primary education to both Uganda and Kenya is English. English subject is taught with consideration of the objectives stipulated in the syllabus. For example, the objectives are important since they provide means through which the goals of education in Uganda could be achieved. It is through the syllabus that can assure the teacher if or whether he has achieved the goals or objectives of the course. With such situation it is important for teachers to establish objectives before working towards meetings the goals.

According to [7] reading culture is essential to success in our society. The ability to read is highly valued and important for social and economic advancement. [8] point out that reading is a complex developmental challenge that we know to be intertwined with many other developmental accomplishments such as attention, memory, language and motivation. When the child reads well in English it means that she/he has gained a fundamental knowledge of the principles of the English alphabetical writing system.

Reading difficulties among primary school learners is an issue of concern in any society. Reading is considered to be a basic need in the modern world of science and technology. Many children in Uganda's lower primary schools lack proper reading skills and cannot read properly. Some learners have dropped out of school without acquiring the necessary reading skills while others read without understanding what they are reading [9].

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design that utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive research design was most suitable because the study was based on questionnaires [10]. The design used enabled the researcher to capture useful data from the respondents

Study Population

The researcher targeted teachers, head teachers and students. The researcher targeted a population of 30 respondents. This sought to give enough information towards the study phenomenon.

Table 1: Showing sample size

Respondents	Sample size	Sampling techniques
Head teachers	04	Purposive sampling
Teachers	16	Random sampling
Students	10	Random sampling
Total	**30**	

Sample Size and Subject Selection

From the table above, it was indicated that the most size sample of the respondents were teachers since they are the ones encouraging reading culture among the learners.

Sampling techniques

The researcher used purposive sampling methods to select key respondents who were head teachers and their deputies while simple random sampling was used to select the rest of the respondents.
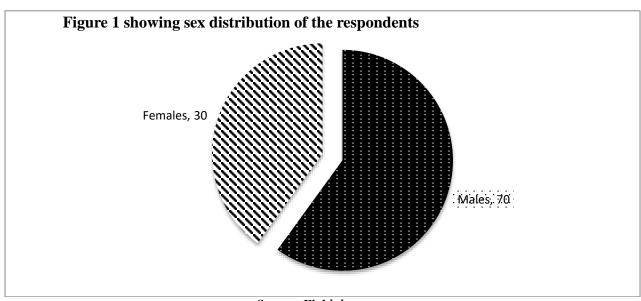
Research Procedure

The researcher having formulated the topic of the study got the introductory letter from the head of department (Education) introducing her to the respondents and sought permission and assistance from the management to identify the respondents and administer the questionnaires to selected respondents. The study was conducted in three phases. Phase 1. Pilot study in selected schools to ascertain the validity of instruments and this will take 2 weeks.

Phase II. This was to distribute the questionnaires and to collect them from selected schools. And in the last phase, it included data analysis, writing a research report, typing it, building it and presenting it to the supervisor for marking and grading.
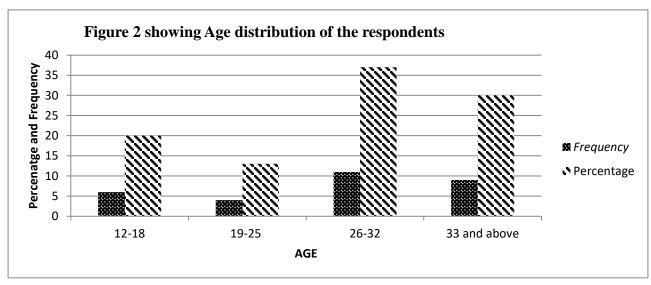
Data Analysis

Data analysis was done after collecting the raw data from the study area [11]. Editing and checking for accuracy of information, consistency and uniformity, the edited data was analyzed for both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data was grouped in statistical descriptions such as tables showing frequencies and percentages and pie charts as well as graphs were used for better interpretation. Qualitative data was analyzed in a way of identifying the responses from respondents that are relevant to the research problem. Mainly such data was analyzed by explaining the facts collected from the field under which the researcher was able to quote respondents` responses.

RESULTS

Figure 1 showing sex distribution of the respondents

Females, 30

Males, 70

Source: Field data 2018

Figure 1 above displays information on sex of respondents. It indicates that a smaller percentage (30%) were females which shows that in the study males dominated. It also shows that a bigger percentage (70%) were males.

Figure 2 showing Age distribution of the respondents

Source: Field data 2018

Figure 2 shows that a smaller percentage of respondents 04(13%) were between 19-25 years, 6(20%) of the respondents were between 12-18 years of age, 9(30%) of the respondents were above 33years while the biggest percentage 11(37%) of the respondents was in the age range of 26-32. The researcher sought information on marital status of respondents and the results are displayed in table 3 below.

Table 2: Showing the marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	10	33
Married	13	43
Widow	4	13
Widower	1	3
Separated	2	7
Total	30	100

Source: Field data 2018

Table 2 above shows that 10(33%) of the respondent were single because most of them were still in schools and others had not married. Secondly, the figure above also indicates that a largest percentage of the respondents 13(43%) were married and gave most of the views in the study area. In the figure we also see that 4(13%) of the respondents were widows, 2(7%) of the respondents had separated. The researcher also sought information on education levels of respondents and the results are shown in table 2 below.

Table 3 showing education levels of respondents

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	10	33
Secondary	3	10
Tertiary	15	50
Never gone to school	2	7
Total	30	100

Source: Field data 2018

Table 3 above displays information on education of the sampled respondents. In the table, the least number of respondents 2(7%) never went to school. The table also shows that 3(10%) stopped at secondary level. 10(33%) of the respondents were still in primary studying and lastly the biggest percentage 15(50%) had gone to tertiary institutions. Seventy per cent of the students interviewed admitted that they engaged in reading activities daily, i.e. every day of the week they got to read either a textbook or a storybook. Other students stated that they read during their free time, such as during the morning or lunch break or after classes. Some of these respondents stated that they read from habit while others said that they only read to pass their examinations, hence they read mainly textbooks. The other students admitted that they hardly read at all because they lacked interest in reading.
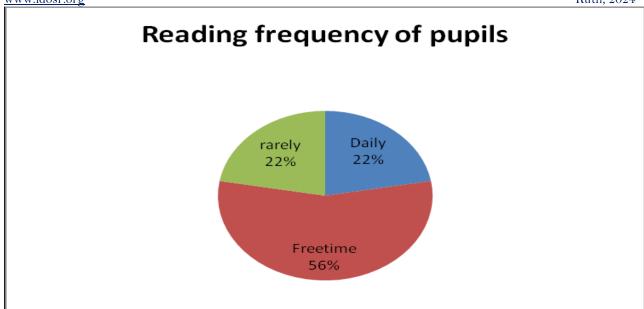
Figure 3: Reading frequency of students
Source: Field data (2009)

As indicated in Figure 3 above, out of the 45 students interviewed, 22 per cent stated that they read on a daily basis after they left class. They remarked that what they read included textbooks to help them gain better understanding of their lessons at school. On the other hand, 56 per cent of the students interviewed stated that they read during their free time and that this was whenever they felt like reading. This implies that these students only read when they had some free time on their school timetable. Furthermore, 22 per cent of the students confessed that they were not interested in reading so they hardly read any books at all. Figure 3 represents the reading frequency of students in the various schools where the study was carried out. One of the respondents, a senior three student from Kyeibanga High School said:

I don't have time to read books like storybooks because I don`t understand some of the words and i find the books boring, the only time I can force myself to read is when i am going to do exams because I want to pass them. Another student of senior three interviewed, said that "I don`t like to read because most of the books are written in English and I can`t read it easily because I don`t understand the words."

Table 3: Materials read by students

Reading material	No. of respondents	Percentage
Storybooks	15	33%
Textbooks	5	11%
Newspapers	10	23%
Magazines	5	11%
Teacher- and student made materials	5	11%
Charts	5	11%
Total	**45**	**100%**

Source: Field data (2009)

Although the government is trying to support reading in various ways, it lacks reading materials that can arouse student`s interest, hence there is need to select reading materials with appropriate and interesting information to cultivate interest in reading among the students. The above findings imply that if students are provided with more non-text-book reading materials, such as storybooks, they will be encouraged to read more since story-books have interesting content like pictures and vocabulary which are likely to arouse interest in reading among the students as well as motivate them to engage in regular reading. To assess factors that motivate students to read, students were interviewed to find out what attracted them to reading materials since most of them preferred NTBRMs as the best option to indulge and strengthen their reading habits. Twenty-five (56%) students said a picture

(illustration) would play a fundamental role in motivating them to pick a book to read because it would make them curious about what the book was about, 15 (33%) students said that an interesting title would make them want to read a book, whereas 5

(11%) students said they only got interested in reading a book if it was recommended by a friend. Table 4 represents factors that motivate students to read books.

Table 4: Factors that motivate students to read books

Factors that motivate students to read	No. of respondents	Percentage
Illustrations	25	56%
Title	15	33%
Books recommended by friends	05	11%
Total	**45**	**100%**

DISCUSSION

The observation method revealed that some of the schools selected for this study lacked libraries or reading rooms where materials could be displayed for easy accessibility. The researcher found that at Kyeibanga High School books were kept in boxes in the head teacher`s office and in the general-purpose store, which made it difficult for students and teachers to retrieve them for reading as well as now what reading materials they could borrow. [12] noted that there was limited access to books in most of the schools because teachers seemed protective of books for fear of mutilation. Furthermore, some students attributed their lack of interest in reading to lack of an environment conducive to reading. For example, the students admitted that they could not easily read at home because they got involved in household chores and that there was usually noise at home so they could not concentrate on what they were reading. This implies that lack of facilities like libraries where students can get access to books and concentrate on reading influences students" reading habits. For instance, without a library setting students do not get exposed to a variety of reading materials which are displayed and they tend to be less enthusiastic about reading. This implies that the students tend to become less curious about reading materials since they are not exposed to a variety from which they can make a choice since the only place where that kind of variety can be found is a school library.

The teachers interviewed in the school in which the study was carried out revealed that there were a number of reading materials which were inappropriate for the students" reading activities. They singled out the *Red Pepper* newspaper, the „Ssenga section" in *Bukedde*, adult magazines, and war books. They considered such materials to be inappropriate because of the language they used, how they were presented, their content, their questionable cultural relevance and their moral influence on the students. They expressed the view that these reading materials did not influence the students to read quality and educative information materials.

According to [12] they noted that resource allocation in Uganda concentrated on text books without balancing the needs of NTBRMs. Therefore, the only information materials that were available for students to read were textbooks which they only read in order to excel in their class work and examinations. The availability of only textbooks in schools limited the students" interest in reading because the textbooks bored them quite quickly. This implies that restriction of the scope of information materials limits students" exposure to other materials that they could read to develop interest in reading. But out of the fear that students might get exposed to immoral information materials, schools ensure that students are limited to reading particular information materials which lack variety, hence over time they lose the motivation to read.

The interview revealed that by the formation of readers` clubs in schools will motivate students to read because they will be able to share their different experiences basing on the information materials they have read. One teacher from Hillside High School revealed that the experience they had had with readers` clubs such as Minds across Africa showed that a reader`s understanding of a text is enhanced by interacting with other readers. As students participate in book clubs they will learn from each other and work together to construct meaning [13], hence all the schools should be encouraged to set up readers" clubs in order to promote reading among their students. This implies that the students will get exposed to a wide variety of information materials as well as ideas that they will share with various students from other schools in order to arouse in them the curiosity to read and to make reading a habit.

The researcher noted that in some schools, students were encouraged to tell stories and in other schools, the writing of stories by students and teachers was an established practice. The use of story-writing as a strategy for promoting reading could be supported by measures such as establishment of classroom libraries in the form of displayed stories and lockups in which

students" stories are stored. This implies that if students are able to read their work as well as that of their friends when it is displayed in class they will strive to read more to gain better ideas for their next stories, and this will keep them reading.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underscores the imperative of fostering a robust reading culture among school learners in Uganda. The study identifies critical factors influencing reading habits, including the scarcity of suitable reading materials, inadequate library facilities, and restricted access to non-textbook reading materials. To address these challenges, the research proposes practical solutions such as the establishment of readers' clubs and the incorporation of story-writing initiatives. By creating an environment that nurtures curiosity and collaboration, educators can play a pivotal role in instilling a lifelong love for reading in students. The findings of this research contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on educational strategies to enhance literacy skills, ultimately fostering intellectual growth and socio-economic advancement among school learners.

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