

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND PUPILS' READING SKILLS IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SERERE TOWN COUNCIL,
EASTERN UGANDA**

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the use of Institutional Materials (I.M.S) as a strategy for developing the reading skills in pupils in primary schools. Serere Town Council, Serere District in Eastern Uganda was taken as a case study. As a third world country, Uganda is faced with challenges in the area of education which have had a direct impact on the literacy level of learners. Being a country of diverse cultures, learners are taught in a language (English) which is not their mother tongue. The socio-economic challenges, particularly of having little or no parental support, as well as the challenges of educators who are not proficient in English as a medium of instruction, and large class sizes contribute to the low literacy levels. The study main objective was to establish whether the availability and use of I.M.S could improve reading skills among primary school pupils. The study revealed that I.M.S when properly utilized in the teaching of reading skills makes it easier for the learner to excel in academic performance at all levels of education. I.M.S therefore, are of great importance for the teaching and learning of reading in primary schools especially at lower levels of education. The researchers therefore recommend that Primary school teachers should embrace the use of I.M.S, to develop the reading skills of pupils in primary schools.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Institutional Materials, Pupils, Reading Skills

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effectiveness of instructional materials (IMS) on pupils' reading skills continues to be of great importance in the development of reading skills. Globally, failure to use reading materials in the teaching of reading skills becomes a challenge to most pupils in schools. According to Obanya (2001), I.M.S are material objects that make learning and teaching possible. While in the views of Abdullahi (2003), they are materials or tools which help the teacher to make the lesson much clearer to the learner.

Todaro (1992), states that for any realization of goal performance in a school, I.M.S must be put in place and used effectively in the teaching and learning process. He further noted that the formal education system of nation is the principal institutional mechanism, which is used for developing human skills and knowledge. Education is therefore viewed as an indispensable catalyst that strongly influences the development and economic future of a nation and the quality of life of its people.

In Uganda, the government has tried to avail some reading materials to schools such as reading charts, text books, reaching cards especially for lower primary classes in a bid to facilitate and improve on the reading skills of pupils (Serere District Education Office, 2010). The USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Programme have also attempted to help in improving reading in primary schools in Serere Town Council in Serere district in general by providing reading books and training lower primary teachers on how to develop reaching skills in pupils (Uganda School Health and Reading Programme, 2015).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The use of instructional materials is basic in assisting learners develop the reading skills needed in reading, especially in primary schools. Isola (2010) referred to instructional materials (IMS) as objects or devices which help the teacher to make a lesson much clearer to the learner. In developing the reading skills in learners, materials such as text book, word cards, reading charts, picture charts, jig-saws and other reading materials, when effectively used by teachers to help learners to develop the reading skills. This will help the learners to perform well in their academics since they can read and understand what they are reading. The performance in schools will be excellent.

As a third world country, Uganda is faced with challenges in the area of education which have had a direct impact on the literacy level of learners. Being a country of diverse cultures, learners are taught in English which is not their mother tongue. The socio-economic challenges, particularly of having little or no parental support, as well as the challenges of educators who are not proficient in English as a medium of instruction and large class sizes also contribute to the low literacy levels.

In Serere Town Council, most learners are not able to read and understand. The percentage of learners who cannot read and understand is about 70%. This is evident especially at the end after the teaching has been done, the tests and assignments are given to examine how much the learners have understood. The scores obtained by the learners are oftentimes very low, unveiling the level of little understanding of the learners on the concepts delivered. It is more alarming especially at the end of the year when promotional examinations are sat to note that very few learners score well, with the majority scoring poorly. This is evident especially when Primary Leaving Examination results are released at the end of the year where Serere as a district has always been rated among the worst performing districts for the last three years in Uganda. It is against such a backdrop that the researchers were motivated to establish what the influence of instructional materials on pupils' reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council in Eastern Uganda could be.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were as follows:-

- i. To establish the types of instructional materials used in teaching reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda.
- ii. To find out the frequency of use of instructional materials on pupils' comprehension in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda.

- iii. To establish the influence of instructional materials on pupils' reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda.

1.4 Research questions of the Study

The research questions of this study were as follows:-

- i. What are the types of instructional materials used in teaching reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda?
- ii. What is the frequency of use of instructional materials on pupils' comprehension in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda?
- iii. What is the influence of instructional materials on pupils' reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Types of Instructional Materials Used in Teaching Reading Skills in Primary Schools

Several scholars have dealt with the subject of types of instructional materials in teaching reading skills. Agina-Obu (2005), points out that a good classroom environment plays a very important role in contributing to the development of reading skills. This argument is supported by Abolade (2009), who advocates for the use of a variety of instructional materials to teach reading skills. According to them, learners should be provided with a variety of expository books which reflect the interests of learners. The use of a variety of reading materials to teach reading skills is more significant and motivating for learners. Some of the reading materials include but are not limited to library books, newspapers, flash cards, periodical journals, magazines, printed materials, charts, recordings, videos, pictures, online resources and all technology-based resources.

Literacy has been popularly and conventionally defined as the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication. However, literacy does in fact go beyond reading and writing and it is indeed a contested term (Usha, 2014). In the broader sense, literacy encompasses the basic learning skills of listening, reading and writing. Literacy, specifically reading literacy, forms the foundation of scholastic success at primary, secondary and tertiary level. It is further confirmed by Pretorius (2002), that learners who are good readers also tend to excel academically. The researcher adds to the writers' views that learners who become good readers in class not only excel academically but also have a higher chance of getting better placements in their future.

The most important constituent of high quality education is literacy (Usha, 2014). Without the ability to read, people are deprived of access to important information that influences their lives. Illiteracy in Uganda is an entrenched social phenomenon and is threatening the socio-economic transformation and development of the country. It is crucial that reading literacy in primary schools in the country be improved. Reading and writing are essential for success in school, at work and in everyday life (Berman, 2009). Students use reading to analyze and acquire information presented in online text, books, and other printed materials, whereas writing is used to sharpen and promote students' learning and assess what they know (Bangert et al, 2004). In light of the importance of reading and writing to life in the 21st century, there

is considerable concern that many youngsters do not acquire the literacy skills needed to be successful in an increasingly digital and information - based world (Hsiang & Graham, 2016). This is in line with earlier findings of Michaelowa (2001), who carried out a study on the quality of primary education in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa.

Junias (2009) points out that a good classroom environment plays a very important role in contributing to the development of reading skills. This argument is supported by (Hulme & Snowling, 2015) who advocate for the use of a variety of instructional materials to teach reading skills. According to them, learners should be provided with a variety of expository books which reflect the interests of learners. The use of a variety of reading materials to teach reading skills is very significant and motivating for learners. Some of the reading materials include but are not limited to library books, newspapers, flash cards, journals, magazines, printed materials, charts, recordings, videos, pictures, online resources and all technology-based resources.

Literacy has been popularly and conventionally defined as the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication. However, literacy does in fact go beyond reading and writing and it is indeed a contested term (Naidoo, Reddy & Dorasamy, 2014). In the broader sense, literacy encompasses the basic learning skills of listening, reading and writing. Literacy, specifically reading literacy, forms the foundation of scholastic success at primary, secondary and tertiary level (Pretorius & Mchet, 2008). It is further confirmed by Pretorius, (2002) that learners who are good readers also tend to excel academically. The most important constituent of high quality education is literacy (Naidoo et al, 2014).

Furthermore, several recent reviews have focused on whether writing and writing instruction improved students' reading performance. Graham & Hebert (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of true and quasi- experiments to determine whether writing about materials, reading, teaching writing, or increasing how much students wrote enhanced the reading of students in grades 1–12. In each of these cases, the tested writing interventions had an overall positive impact on reading. Writing about text that had been read by the students statistically improved comprehension of it. Teaching writing raised students' word reading, reading fluency and reading comprehension skills. Therefore, increasing how often students write enhances their skills at comprehending text. This is further backed by Graham & Santangelo (2014) who carried out a separate analysis with pre-school through grade 12 students and re-counted that spelling instruction statistically raised word-reading and reading comprehension scores.

In examining the effects of reading on writing, Graham (2000) noted that reading can enhance spelling which is in tandem with (Share, 1995). In the same vein, Wanzek, Vaughn, Scammacca, Metz, Murray, Gregg & Danielson (2013) assert that specific forms of word-reading instruction as a strategy can enhance literacy. Even more importantly, a recent meta- analysis by Graham, Liu, Bartlett, Ng, Harris, Aitken, Barkel, Kavanaugh & Talukdar, (2018) found that the impact of reading and reading instruction is not limited just to spelling. Reading texts and providing reading instruction not only improved students' skills as spellers but also enhanced the quality of their writing.

Performance of pupils in academics or learning is enhanced when reading and writing are used together to achieve a desired goal. According to (Shanahan, 2016), reading and writing are tools that can be used together much as a carpenter might use a spirit level and sabre saw alternately in building construction. Maingi(2015) in his research on enhancing learners' strategy use for reading proficiency in Kenya contends that reading is by far the most important of the four macro skills particularly in situations where English is learnt as a second or foreign language. Like the case is in Kenya, this is true to students in Uganda since the reading skills give them a wide range of interesting and valuable information as well as a variety of language structures which give them a command in the use of the language (Macdonald, 2016).Gove & Wetterberg (2011) also state that there are many other benefits of reading skills. For instance, teaching young children reading skills is not only the foundation of improving educational outcomes, but also has important implications for future learning (McIntyre,Hullan&Lane, 2011). Likewise, Vacca &Vacca (2005) noted that students need reading skills to analyze and comprehend the superfluity of knowledge and facts available through the internet and other media.

According to Chaiklin(2003), in many countries children engage with stories and informational texts early in life, on the laps and by the sides of caring adults. These repeated engagements build familiarity of narrative while also enticing children into the "story world" that will continue to engage their interests and build their knowledge about the world. From the time a child begins hearing and seeing stories, whether told from a family member or viewed on television or stitched from images, that child begins to construct narratives. Children's responses to those stories, whether represented through play or talk or image, both demonstrate their understanding while also strengthening the child's meaning making.

2.2 Availability and Use of Instructional Materials

The development of reading skills depends on many factors and among them is availability and use of appropriate instructional resources. Okwara (2009) observed that availability of essential instructional resources is a condition ideal for effective teaching of reading skills. He argues that when instructional resources in a school are inadequate in numbers, it generates enormous reading problems thus it is the role of teachers to make instructional materials and integral parts of their instructional process (Minae, 2004).N'Namdi(2005);Lindsay &Knight(2007)&Ambuko(2013) supported this view by arguing that availability of reading materials is crucial aspects in language learning. They note that learners will require a variety of reading materials. Junias (2012) in her study of factors affecting teaching English reading skills to Grade 3 learners established that insufficient teachers, learners' interactions and overcrowded classroom were significant factors that made the teaching of reading skills unsuccessful. The researchers corroborate Junias' ideas; learners cannot be successful in reading the second language unless they are proficient in reading the first language. This will only succeed if the reading materials are available and utilized well by the teachers.

The study gives some insight to the current situation in looking at the availability and use of instructional materials in teaching reading skills in schools. Previous studies in East Africa reveal scarcity of reading instructional materials in school. Mwanamukubi (2013) investigated challenges faced by the teachers when teaching reading skills to the learners with reading difficulties. Her study established that the main challenges teachers faced were inadequate

teaching and learning materials. The study recommended that schools should provide adequate learning and teaching materials. Nalusiba (2010) investigated the strategies for the development of reading culture among pupils in primary schools and concluded that inadequate reading materials inhibited the reading culture among the pupils. Mberia (2002) & Wangui (2012) found out that instructional materials for English reading skills are inadequate in most schools in the East African region both in terms of quality and variety. Though the scholars found out that the instructional materials were inadequate and of less quality for English skills, this situation applies for reading skills not only in English as a second language. They observed that in most schools supplementary readers are not used. The researchers argue that the reading materials should adequately be provided and used.

The use of instructional materials helps learners to develop the reading skills especially in primary schools. Isola (2010), urges that instructional materials are objects or devices which help the teacher to make a lesson much clearer to the learner. He adds that materials such as text books, word cards, reading charts, picture charts, jig-saws and reading materials, when effectively used by the teachers, help learners to develop the reading skills. The researcher agrees with the writers' ideas in that if learners are helped to learn how to read early, they will perform well in their academics since they can read and understand what they are reading. The performance therefore in schools will be excellent as long as the reading materials are available and properly used. Wales (2009), asserts that the use of instructional materials makes discovered facts to glue firmly in the memory of learners. This makes them enjoy participating in reading lessons and even make them repeat their activity during free time. This enables the learner to keep the ideas in their long-term memory. The researchers are in tandem with the scholar's views in that as teachers' use the instructional materials well regularly in reading lessons, the learners will capture and retain the concepts learnt and hence will be able to use them as they continue with their reading lessons.

Abolade (2009), advocates for the use of a variety of instructional materials to teach reading skills. According to him, learners should be provided with variety and expository books which reflect the interests of learners. The use of a variety of reading materials to teach reading skills is more significant and motivating for learners. The researchers agree with the scholar's ideas in that learners will be motivated to read when a variety of reading materials are given and used in classes whenever teaching is conducted. This makes learners to develop the reading culture even when the teacher is not with them. The learners will always be engaged in reading activities in their classes.

2.3 Influence of Instructional Materials on Pupils' Reading Skills in Primary Schools

Instructional materials are influential in the teaching and learning process. They are essential and significant tools needed for teaching and learning of school subjects as they promote teachers' efficiency and improve students' performance.

They make learning more interesting, practical, realistic and appealing. They also enable both the teachers and learners to participate actively and effectively in lesson sessions. The IM give room for acquisition of skills and knowledge, development of self- confidence and self-actualization (Abdu-Raheem, 2016). The influence of instructional materials on reading is also based on their availability, how well they are utilized and the ability of the teacher.

The improvement of English reading and comprehension is dependent on many aspects and among them is the availability and use of appropriate instructional materials. Okwara et al (2009), noticed that availability of important instructional materials is the perfect situation for effective teaching of reading skills. They further argue that when instructional materials in a school are scarce, it translates to massive reading problems which is the case with the pupils in Serere District. According to Gauthier & Lawson (2004), instruction of reading skills depends on the availability, quality and utilization of appropriate instructional materials and the ability of the teacher. This is because instructional materials simplify the understanding of difficult concepts as well as the teaching and learning of the reading skills. Moreover, instructional materials make it easier for learners to follow, understand and retain content of the lesson. The argument above implies that a short fall in the provision of instructional materials may impact on meaningful teaching and learning of English reading skills. Twoli, Maundu, Muindi, Kiiio & Kithinji (2007) support this view by arguing that teachers need to select and use a wide variety of instructional materials when teaching to take care of the individual differences that are ever present in every class. This is because these materials make the entire teaching and learning processes wholesome and purposeful. Sadly, the provision of instructional materials for teaching English reading skills has received little attention (Junias, 2009).

The availability of instructional materials helps students to both read and write during instruction. This increases the likelihood of teachers using reading and writing concurrently in a supportive way. However, this is less likely to occur in the absence of instructional materials, as students typically do little writing in school and teachers spend little time teaching writing (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). It is important to note that the availability of instructional materials greatly aids the teaching of reading and comprehension. However, lack of these materials has adverse consequences on the teaching and learning process.

In his study on the contribution of instructional materials to the academic achievement of secondary school students in Social Studies, Abdu-Raheem (2016), highlighted and emphasized the need for teachers to use relevant instructional materials for their teaching and also improvise where and when the materials are not available. He further advised that it was imperative to have concerted efforts among parents, school and the government to make available the important and necessary instructional materials to teachers for enhanced teaching as this resulted in improved achievement of students in the subject.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

According to Sekaran (2010), a research design is a way in which the requisite data can be gathered and analyzed to arrive at a solution. Thus the researchers adopted a cross-sectional research design, because data was collected from different categories of respondents. This approach was used in order to generate quantifiable data; it is reliable and quick with low error rate and an appropriate coding. The approach collects vast amounts of data at ago. This enabled the researchers to have an in-depth understanding of the problem under study (Sekaran, 2010). The quantitative data collection technique was used to gather information from the respondents by using a Likert scale structured questionnaire. Frequency and percentage tables were used to analyze the data, descriptive statistics were run to interpret and justify the findings.

3.2 Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendation

According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), qualitative data collection techniques was be applied to enable the researcher collect unquantifiable data and to enhance interpretation of results. Correlation and Regression analysis was applied using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS), aiming at establishing a relationship between instructional materials and pupils' reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda.

3.2.1 Discussion of the Findings

The study was guided by three research questions which included establishing the types of instructional materials used in teaching reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda. According to the findings they include: alphabets for both English and local language displayed in class, word cards displayed in class, reading trees in class, word puzzles made for pupils to fill during activity, readers for local language during the reading lesson, English readers during the reading lessons.

The second research question dealt with finding out the frequency of use of instructional materials on pupils' comprehension in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda. The study established from the findings that the instruction materials used which include alphabets, word cards, reading trees, and word puzzles, local language reading books, English readers, jig-saws, reading charts, picture cards were frequently used.

The third research question dealt with establishing the influence of instructional materials on pupils' reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda. According to the findings, the use of alphabets, word cards, reading trees, word puzzles, local language reading books, English readers, fitting jig-saws, using reading charts regularly, use of picture cards during reading lessons, using magazines which all make reading effective was limited at the Serere Town Council schools.

3.2.2 Conclusions

The researchers made the following conclusions from the study:

- i. The types of instructional materials used in teaching reading skills in primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda include: alphabets for both English and local language displayed in class, word cards displayed in class, reading trees in class, word puzzles are made for pupils to fill during activity.
- ii. There is no frequency in the use of instructional materials among primary schools in Serere Town Council, Eastern Uganda.
- iii. The instructional materials used for reading among the pupils in primary schools in Serere Town Council are not effective and efficient enough to improve their academic performance during the Primary Leaving Examinations.

3.2.3 Recommendations of the Study

- i. Primary school teachers in Serere Township schools should have proper instructional materials to enhance pupils' reading skills.

- ii. Primary school teachers in Serere Township schools should frequently apply a variety of instructional materials for better comprehension skills among primary school pupils.
- iii. Primary school teachers in Serere Township schools should use instructional materials more effectively the effective reading skills in the classroom to improve pupils' performance at Primary Leaving Examinations.

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