

Factors Affecting Reading and Writing Ability of the Standard Two Pupils in Mbarali District's Public Primary Schools

Ambindwile Aleni & Salvius Kumburu
Ruaha Catholic University
ambindwilealeni@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper investigates the factors affecting reading and writing ability of standard two pupils in Mbarali district. The paper adopted both qualitative and quantitative data which obtained through questionnaires and interviews. Data were analyzed quantitatively by using Microsoft Excel-2019 version and those from interviews analyzed qualitatively through content analysis. The study was guided by Social Cultural Theory of Cognitive Development under Lev Vygotsky. The finding of the study revealed that overclouded classes, unsupportive classroom environment, insufficient reading and writing materials, lack of food service to pupils, involvement of pupils in domestic activities, weather condition especially during the rainy season, high extension of enrollment period of standard one pupils and lack of in-service teacher training programme to standard one and two teachers are the factors which affect reading and writing ability of pupils. The study concluded that among those factors, home-based factors are the most described factors which affect pupils reading and writing ability. The Ministry of Education need to ensure that teachers attend the in-service training programmes so as to ensure that they get skills and knowledge on how to use the modern and appropriate techniques in teaching pupils. The Government primary education policy should be reformed so as to allow the enrolment time frame to be short as possible so that all pupils would have to start learning at the same time.

Keywords: Pupil, Reading Ability, Writing Ability, Public Primary Schools and Skills.

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Introduction

Reading can be defined as a cognitive ability in which a person is able to use when interacting with text (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Writing ability is defined in classroom assessment, since the construct that is to be tapped and measured in a test in generally considered to be a broad bases for development and use of language tests and language

testing research (Bachma, 1990). Reading and writing are crucial skills for academic attainment and future progress in education. Mastery of these skills to pupils in early grades in many Districts in Tanzania is still problematic (Mkumbo, 2011). Mbarali district council is among the districts in Tanzania that faces the challenges of pupils reading and writing ability that cause unsatisfactory performance in national examinations (Chikoyo, 2020).

For example, in the year 2016 some of the students who were selected to join secondary schools after the primary school leaving education at Mawindi secondary school and Igava secondary school were found not able to read and write even their own names. For the past three years the pass rates Standard Seven Leaving Examination (PSLE) in Mbarali district were absolutely poor. One of the explanations that could serve to describe this situation was poor literacy background of the pupils in the district. To exemplify this, claim the following is the scenario. In 2013 only 12% passed, in 2014 only 8% passed and in 2015 only 8% passed. This has been the trend for the past five years thereafter (Uwezo, 2013 & Eliezar, 2017).

Several studies on literacy situation in Tanzania such as Kumburu (2011) on the effectiveness of short-term literacy skills intervention on children at risk of reading and writing difficulties in Tanzania. Ngorosho, (2011) on reading and writing ability in relation to home environment in primary education in rural Tanzania, have confirmed that the quality of literacy learning in Primary Schools in Tanzania is not better at all. Thus, if this situation is left unchecked more and more pupils in Tanzania would complete primary education with very poor literacy competences that ultimately might affect the national effort towards creating mid-income country. Mmasa & Anney (2016) exploring literacy and numeracy teaching in Tanzania classrooms insight from teachers' classroom practice, stressed that in Tanzania there is serious problems of literacy teaching in public primary school which caused by teachers who lacks literacy teaching skills. In Tanga, 64% of standard two pupils are not able to read and write. Thus, given this situation there is a need to seriously investigate on the factors that might contribute the poor literacy performance among standard two pupils specifically in Mbarali district public primary schools.

Methodology and Materials

The paper investigates the factors affecting reading and writing ability of standard two pupils in Mbarali district. This study used mixed method research approach in analyzing and obtaining data. Qualitative and quantitative data obtained through questionnaires and interviews administered to respondents, whereby data from questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively by using Microsoft Excel - 2019 version and those from interviews analyzed qualitatively through content analysis. 49 participants including 20 teachers, 10 head of schools, 02 district Education Officers, 02 Ward educational officers and 10 standard two pupils were involved in which they were both purposively and randomly selected from 10 public primary schools in Mbarali district Mbeya region. This study was guided by Social Cultural Theory of Cognitive Development under Lev Vygotsky (1978). The theory provides that,

learning occurs in social context. It appears through interactions with the communities, peers, adults, teachers and others and teachers have the ability to control many factors in an educational setting including tasks, behaviors and responses. The basis of this theory is logical language in learning which includes the argument that language supports the activities of reading and writing.

Findings and Discussion

The objective of this paper was to describe factors affecting reading and writing ability to Standard two Pupil's in Mbarali district public primary schools. Findings show that there are different factors which affect standard two pupils reading and writing ability. The obtained factors include those from school environment, home environment and the Government educational policy as they described at this part.

Overclouded Classes

Findings revealed that the existing number of pupils in schools are large more compared to the number of teachers available. This situation made an equal ratio between pupils and teachers in Schools hence poor interaction between teachers and pupils in classes. For example, among ten schools visited, the school with lowest number of pupils in a standard two class had a teacher-pupils ratio of 1: 70, and in a school with highest number of pupils the ratio was 1: 210. To prove this, in an interview with a Head teacher from school C was noted:

In this school the number of available teachers is too low compared to the number of enrolled pupils. This situation made poor interaction between teachers and pupils in the classroom because teachers get difficult assist each pupil hence poor reading and writing ability to pupils. (Head teacher, School C: March 02, 2021).

Further, regarding to the same issue, one standard two teacher from school E commented the following:

As a standard two teacher, I get difficult in helping each student on how to read and write because of large number of pupils in the class which almost have 123 Pupils...this is to large number of Pupils to accommodate. For example, I can write a certain word on a blackboard and requires all pupils to pronounce it but not being able to make follow up on every pupil to determine whether they have pronounced it correctly due to large number of pupils per class hence having no enough time to do so (Teacher 2, School E: March 04, 2021).

The quotations show how the large number of pupils in schools contribute to affect pupil's reading and writing ability, because the available standard two teachers are not enough to accommodate all pupils in respective Schools. These findings are supported by Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, Justice & Pianta (2010) and Hanum (2016) whose stressed that classroom interaction has important role in the teaching and learning process as it helps the teaching and learning process run smoothly and can increase

learners' communicative. Again, Beth, Randall & Sarah (2013) found that social interaction improved the learning by enhancing their knowledge of literacy and teaching and their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, Ponitz, Rimm-Kaufman, Grimm & Cubry (2009) found different results that teacher-child interactions were directly linked to children's reading skills through classroom engagement. Therefore, in line with the finding, there is no doubt that class interaction between teacher and pupil play a great role in enhancing reading and writing ability to pupils in schools.

Unsupportive Classroom Environment and Insufficient Reading and Writing Materials

Findings revealed that most Pupils fail to read and write because the available classroom environment in schools are not supportive to motivate standard two pupils in practicing reading and writing as the reason was supported by 87% of respondent teachers. Finding show that in the area, most of standard two classes lack the necessary facilities such as blackboard, talking wall, picture and desks which are essential in motivating pupils to stay in classes and practice reading and writing even in the absence of teachers. Insufficient reading and writing materials in schools has also been addressed as a factor which hinder Pupils' achievement in reading and writing ability. For example, to validate this, one teacher from school H states:

In this school there is no enough reading and writing material to be used by pupils. The situation made some pupils to miss the available few books, even if I try to use grouping method still some pupils fail to be reached by the books because always one group contain 15 pupils with 01 book (Teacher 1, School H: March 16, 2021).

Another comment obtained from a Head teacher who said that;

Reading and writing materials in this school are not enough compared to the number of pupils. In the classes also there is no supportive features such as drawn pictures as commonly known as talking walls which help students to master reading ability. This is caused due to insufficient school fund (Head of school, School A: March 16, 2021).

The quotations show that pupils writing and reading ability has been affected by the classroom environment which are not supportive to the pupils and lack of reading and writing material in schools. In the same vein the study by Aryal, (2019) argued that, physical facilities such as adequacy of space, seating arrangement, comfort inside classroom, placement of chalk/white boards and their sizes and light and ventilation and display of materials, have an impact on reading among early graders in Nepalese schools. Therefore, it can be concluded that, quality and quantity of most of the physical facilities in early grades significantly affected reading and writing ability to pupils in schools.

Lack of Food and Service to Pupils

Finding reveal that most of the pupils especially who dwell far from schools 'environment, eat only once per day, therefore, during classroom hours they fail to concentrate to what teachers teach. For instance, there are a lot of cases whereby the pupils do not get breakfast in the morning hence they enter into the class while hungry. In schools there is no meal service provided, the situation which made pupils to be hunger hence not being able to understand the teachers when teaching how to read and write. Regarding to the point, the following was noted from a comment of school B teacher:

75% pupils in this School are coming from poor family, and those family are dwelling far from school's environment which require their children to get breakfast early before attending School, but this are not done to them due to family condition. In school there is no meals to pupils, the situation made most pupils to feel hunger during classroom hours (Teacher1, School B: February 27, 2021).

The quotation implies that absence of food service to pupils contribute to the difficult of pupil's learning how to read and write. In the same vein, Mapigano (2018) argued that, lower educated parents make it difficult to support their children academically either by paying school fees in time, giving their children basic needs such as food, stationeries and counseling sessions. The combination of all these, make pupils not succeed in their academic struggle.

Involvement of Pupils in Domestic Activities

Finding reveal that 40% of pupils who are not able to read and write are those who are affected with domestic activities which denies them to attend Schools. This makes them to be out of the school for the whole season. Once the cultivation season is over and then the parents let their children attend school as most of the cultivation activities were completely done. This makes the returning pupils to be left behind by their fellow pupils who were attending the school. In a conversation with a teacher from school I the following was noted:

Some pupils in standard two fail to read and write because, when it reaches the cultivation season, the parents do not allow them to attend to school as they require their children to assist them with work. The matured children to stay at home taking care for their young brothers and sisters as the parents being busy with the agricultural activities especially during cultivation period. This make those students not be able to read and write because are not fully engaged into classroom learning (Teacher 4, School I: March 05, 2021).

The quotation shows how pupils especially who come from poor family fail to reach the goal of adopting skills of reading and writing because most of the time they are not attending schools because parents are engaging them into domestic activities. Similarly, Otieno & Yara (2010) asserted that, learners from low socio-economic status families tend to value domestic activities more than schooling. Such children

are subjected to child labour and have little time for studies. They indicated that in most developing countries, there are many families whose members despite their full day's hard labour do not find it possible to reach goal. The citation therefore, add something that not only parents force their children to be engaged in domestic activities such as cultivation, but also some children tend to value domestic activities, the situation which block them to reach their goal.

Weather Conditions

The findings of the study revealed that weather conditions especially during the rainy season has contributed to the problem of primary school standard two pupils reading and writing. This is due to the fact that, during the rainy season floods occurs frequent which make pupils fail to cross rivers and attend the School hence cause them left behind. This can take up to four months whereby pupils just stay at home waiting for the floods to disappear for the whole period of time. For example, it was indicated by one of the head of school that, 50 out of 120 pupils do not attend school because rivers are too cross being flooded. A study by Hill (2018) revealed that, a child's home environment has significant effect on learning and school performance since it provides foundation for learning. The presence of disasters in the society affects pupil's performance in schools as what takes place in Mbarali district's public primary schools.

High Extension of Enrollment Period

Finding reveal that 60% of teachers responded that enrollment of standard one pupils takes a long period of time to end. The government had set the time enrolment up to three months for the pupils to continue being enrolled in schools. This has led most of the children to be enrolled very late where by those who were enrolled early found that have covered most of the content in the syllabus while children who are late to be enrolled thus are left behind and cannot catch up with their fellows. These has forced teachers to create two groups of pupils within the same class so as to help those who were enrolled late to cover the aspects that their fellows have been taught already. The same teacher has to attend to other classes at the same time which create a challenge to help the late enrolled pupils to be taught effectively. This then has resulted in those pupils not being able to read and write. It was confirmed by one of the head teacher who responded that:

Between 15-30 March 2021, the school registered 10 new pupils while others were already started to be taught since early January. This situation affects classroom teacher to reach his/her goals of the scheme of work (Head Teacher, School J: March 08, 2021).

The quotation show how the Government also contribute to the failure of pupils in reading and writing ability since the allocated time for pupil's enrollment is too wide, hence made challenges to teacher who are curriculum implementers. In line with the finding, Mmasa and Anney (2016) in their study argued that in Tanzania there is a problem of late enrollment of pupils in many public primary schools. Therefore, through these arguments it can be proved that the problem is serios.

Lack of In-service Teacher Training Programmes

Finding reveal that in Mbarali district there is no enough in-service teacher training programme specific to standard one and standard two teachers which can help to impart teachers with skills of teaching reading and writing. Through questionnaires provided, responded that, large number of teachers who are involved in teaching standard one and standard two have never attended any training. Among 20 standard one and two teacher, 03(15%) teachers attended one-week programme, 02 (10%) teachers attended two weeks programme, other 02 (10%) teachers attended one-month programme and 13 (65%) teachers have never attended any training programme. This makes those teachers who never attended training to use just their experiences in teaching Pupils on how to read and write. For example, there were some teaching aids and materials that were brought by the government for teachers to use them in teaching standard two pupils how to read and write, but teachers failed to use them as effectively as required because teachers lack the skills in using them to teach the pupils. It is quoted with one Head of School C that:

There is lack of proper planning and policies by the district government of Mbarali on helping standard two teachers to attend training. This is because most of the training that has taken place in schools was due to the assistance from the private organizations and other stakeholders, but not the government (Head of school, School C: March 02, 2021).

The quotation implies that teacher lack skills of teaching pupils on how to read and write because they did not get training to the respective programmes. The reason of insufficient training programmes is because the Government is not fully engaged in funding In-service training programme, rather depending to the private sectors and organizations. Nzilano & Daudi (2019) stressed that the motive behind the In-service Teacher training in Tanzania is to produce teachers with new skills and knowledge that responds to the changes in technology and teaching methods. Meanwhile, empowering teachers with skills and orientations in the use of technologies in teaching and learning processes would improve teacher's teaching activities. Therefore, training teachers is very crucial due to changes experiencing in education sector.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Basing on the study findings the study concludes that, school-based factors, home based factors and policy-based factors are factor that has affect reading and writing ability among standard two pupils in Mbarali district. Among those factors, home-based factors are the most described factors which affect pupils 'reading and writing ability because children spend more time at home environment with their parents compared to schools. It is a time now to encourage parents to be in front line to help and assist their children through provision of reading and writing materials such as story books, learning toys, picture books and letter books to be used at home environment in order to make them practice easily reading and writing.

The government needs to recruit more teachers so that the big number of enrolled pupils should be effectively managed and taught, school feeding programs should be established in public primary schools so that pupils should be getting foot at school so as to make them learn comfortably. The Ministry of Education need to ensure that teachers attend the in-service training programmes so as to ensure that they get skills and knowledge on how to use the modern and appropriate techniques in teaching pupils. The Government primary education policy should be reformed so as to allow the enrolment time frame to be short as possible so that all pupils would have to start learning at the same time.

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