

**INFLUENCE OF READING READINESS SKILLS ON PERFORMANCE OF  
ENGLISH READING IN STANDARD ONE: A CASE OF KEIYO SUB COUNTY,  
KENYA**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF  
EDUCATION DEGREE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY  
EDUCATION IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND  
INSTRUCTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET, KENYA.**

OCTOBER, 2017

**DECLARATION**

This thesis is my original work and has not submitted for an award of degree in this or any other university.

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**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my sons Allan and Rodgers Korir, daughter Audrey Jepyegon and husband Mr. Richard Korir.

## ABSTRACT

Reading Readiness is a point at which a learner is ready to learn to read and the time during which a learner transits from being a non-reader into a reader. This is made possible by acquisition of pre reading skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading in Standard one. The objectives were to establish the relationship between a learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English Reading in Standard one, to determine if a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound enhances performance of English Reading in Standard one, to find out whether a learners' ability to recognize a familiar word enhances performance of English Reading in Standard one and to find out if a learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression facilitates performance of English Reading in Standard one. The theoretical framework was based on Lev Vygotsky's theory which postulates a concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is the difference between what the child can accomplish on his or her own and what the child can accomplish with the help of adults and other competent peers. The study adopted a mixed approach research methodology. The geographical locale of the study was Keiyo Sub County. Stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select the 26 schools and 78 teachers. Fifty two (52) pupils of Standard one were selected (a boy and a girl) using simple random sampling and assessed. The instruments used were questionnaire for ECDE and Standard one teachers and an EGRA checklist for Standard one learners. A pilot study was conducted in three schools in Keiyo South Sub County and test re-retest was used to establish reliability and validity of the research instruments. The quantitative data was analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program by use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used were frequencies, percentages and means. Multiple regression analysis technique was used to determine the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The results indicated that there was a significant relationship ( $p = 0.000$ ) between the learner's ability to correspond letters of the alphabet with their sounds and performance of English reading in Standard one and a significant relationship ( $p = 0.000$ ) between a learner's ability to recognize a familiar word and performance of English reading in Standard one. The study recommended that teachers should emphasize letter sound correspondence and familiar word recognition in Preschool to prepare learners for English reading. Finally the introduction of alphabetical letters should start with letter sounds before letter names. The alphabetic instruction should involve pairing up the uppercase and lowercase letters as they have same sounds.

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## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS.**

**Alphabet** – The alphabet is a Standardized set of 26 letters used to print written language. It is a Standard set of letters (Basic written symbols or graphemes) which is used to write one or more languages. It consists of vowels and consonants.

The modern English alphabet is a Latin alphabet consisting of 26 letters (uppercase or lower case).

**Early Grade Reading Assessment** - This is a tool used to measure learners' progress towards learning to read. It is a test administered orally, one learner at a time. In about fifteen minutes, it examines a learner's ability to perform basic pre-reading and reading skills.

**Familiar word reading-** the ability to decode words (sound out words).

**Language Acquisition Device:** The innate ability to acquire language.

**Letter sound correspondence-**the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and graphemes.

**Literacy** – This is the ability to read, use written information and write appropriately in a range of contexts.

**Phoneme-** Phonemes are defined as the smallest parts of sounds in spoken word.

**Phonological Awareness-** this is the learners ability to analyze, separate, blend and manipulate sound to form rhyming words, understand relationship between the spoken word and print, and make the connections between letters and sounds.

**Reading progression-**the knowledge of directionality in reading; text is read in left-right, top bottom progression.

**Reading Readiness skills** –also referred to as Pre-reading skills; involves ability to read own name ability to recite and recognize letters of the alphabet, ability to correspond letters to correct sound and ability to read text in left right; top bottom progression.

**Recognizing letters of alphabet;** involves identifying letter shapes (graphemes) by their names.

**Standard-** A Standard is an academic level organized into stages of learning progressions. Learning progressions map out a specific sequence of knowledge and skills that learners are expected to learn as they progress through their Primary Education.

**Zone of Proximal Development:** This is a difference between what a child can accomplish on his or her own and what he or she can accomplish with the help of a knowledgeable other; peers or adults.

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ECDE – Early Childhood Development Education

EFA – Education for All

EGRA – Early Grades Reading Assessment

KICD – Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development

LAD – Language Acquisition Device

LOI- Language of Instruction

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

M o E – Ministry of Education

RTI-Research Triangle Institute

UNESCO-United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization

USAID-United States Agency for International Development

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My special gratitude goes to the Almighty God for giving me health, strength and inspiration to prepare this thesis.

I am grateful to my supervisors Dr. Alice Limo and Dr. Rachel Koros for guiding and assisting me with skills and knowledge in research writing. I am most grateful and deeply indebted for the help and guidance they fundamentally imparted in my work and for giving their valuable time to guide me throughout this study. I am fortunate to have them as my mentors because they helped me realize my dream.

I acknowledge the entire University of Eldoret fraternity, for their critical and invaluable professional input.

Special thanks go to my family members especially my husband Mr. Richard Korir, sons Rodgers Kipkoech and Allan Kigen and daughter, Audrey Jepyegon for their patience and understanding while I was pre-occupied with the preparation of this thesis.

I am grateful to my Head Teacher, Mr. Sylvester Togom of Kaburgei Primary School for his support and encouragement during collection of data.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter consists of background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives, research hypothesis, justification of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study, theoretical framework, conceptual framework and operational definition of terms.

#### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Learners in Standard one have challenges in reading to understand. Researchers have varied views on learning abilities. According to Piaget (1980), children learned to recognize individuals, make judgments, reason, imagine, memorize information and solve problems. In his theory of cognitive development; the process of constructing knowledge and skills is an extension of biological growth and a sequence of four qualitatively distinct stages; sensori- motor from birth to age 2, Pre operational from 2 to 7 years of age, Concrete operational stage from 7 to 11 years and the formal stage, from 11 years to adolescence. Children communicate by imitating sounds and simple words. Piaget also believed that children develop more language experiences and mental imagery through the pre-operational stage. They are ego-centric at this period and develop the ability to pretend, write, think and reason. Piaget believed that children master separate levels of understanding in each stage and that each successive stage incorporates elements of previous stage.

Stanlaw, (2005) referred to Vygotsky (1896-1934) who propagated the social interaction theory that states; language development occurs in the context of social interaction; as children interact with adult and other children. This means that language development is interactive. In his theory Vygotsky developed a concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This is a difference between what a child can accomplish alone and what he or she can accomplish with the help of a more knowledgeable other (adults or peers). The full development of zone of proximal development depends upon full social interaction. This is where full support or scaffolding of language development of a learner is done to broaden the zone of proximal development.

According to the theory of Chomsky (1986), 'The Nativist theory,' human beings are born with certain cognitive models. Therefore, a child is endowed with an innate ability to acquire language. This programming is called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This enables children to learn and acquire language skills. According to the Nativist theories, children are capable of acquiring language without reinforcement, modeling and interactions with adults. They argue that language depends on maturation. As children mature, their language grows. Language learning is viewed as a natural ability.

Teaching young children to read is the cornerstone of improving educational outcomes and has far reaching implications. Unless they learn to read at an early age, children cannot absorb more advanced skills and content that they rely on reading. Children who do not learn to read in the early Standards risk lagging behind later as they cannot absorb

printed information, follow written instructions or communicate well in writing. These challenges rooted in poor reading skills, lead to disappointing results and learning achievement (Hanushek and Woessman, 2012). Barasa, (2005) in his suggestions for further study points out that there is a lack of a well documented language policy for Kenya. In seeking to honor the commitments of the United Nations' Education For All campaign and Millennium Development Goals; most countries have a high rate of enrolment in Primary schools (UNESCO, 2010) and due to teacher pupil ratio which is above limit, assessment of reading is now posing a challenge.

The Uwezo survey (2011) was a study carried out in three countries Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania on Impact of Literacy and Numeracy levels on learning outcomes. English and Numeracy tests were administered to learners of between 7 to 16 years of age. The English tests involved reading a letter (letter sound), reading a word, reading a paragraph and reading and comprehending a short story. It applied stratified random sampling procedure to select sub-groups of schools and households to which subjects were obtained from using simple random sampling. The findings were that while Kenyan and Tanzanian children perform approximately the same on numeracy tests, 20% more Kenyan children are able to pass Literacy tests (76% versus 50%). On average Ugandan children perform worst on all tests – less than four in ten children aged ten to sixteen displayed both Numeracy and Literacy skills at Standard two level. Learning levels in Kenya are poorest in arid and semi-arid regions. The same applies to Western region of Kenya. This was attributed to teacher absenteeism and low teacher-pupil ratio. On average, every Kenyan Primary school has a shortage of four teachers. Also, on a single



day thirteen out of a hundred teachers are not in school and three out of a hundred children seated in classroom may be having poor eyesight. According to Uwezo Kenya Report (2011), one out of five children in Standard four cannot read this simple Standard two paragraph;

*Sarah has one brother,  
His name is Tom,  
Tom is six years old,  
He is in class one.*

The Uwezo Report attributes this deficit in reading to teacher absenteeism and low teacher-pupil ratio. Children have had to join Standard one from ECDE level without the ability to read simple texts. Most teachers have had to spend most of Standard one's year preparing learners to read yet most subject areas require reading for comprehension. Successful English Reading has a positive influence on entirely all subject areas. The present study observed that this study left out the basic underpinnings of Education where Early Childhood teachers are to be adequately prepared with pedagogical skills that promote acquisition of English Reading Readiness Skills.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) was conducted in Kenya by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) funded by USAID-Washington and USAID-Kenya to investigate the skills of children in mother tongue, English and Kiswahili in context of mother tongue language policy. It was piloted in 2007 and a research study conducted in 2009 involving Luo-Nyanza region and Central Kenya. Classroom observation data was collected that specifically looked at what languages were used in the classrooms. This observational data was matched with pupil achievement data to determine whether

different mixes of language use was correlated with pupil outcomes. The assessment involved subtasks such as letter naming fluency, phonemic awareness familiar word fluency, oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. The findings were that pupils leave the early Standards with very low levels of reading skills. Following the findings of this study, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started a program 'The Tusome Early Grade Literacy' in Kenya in 2015. It is a four year program aimed at improving reading skills of Standards one and two in approximately 21,000 Public Primary schools and 1000 low cost Private schools in non-formal settlements in four cities, Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu and Mombasa. The project was to reach approximately 5.4 million Kenyan children. The Tusome program materials provide daily activities in phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing. Lesson plans consist of several activities designed to teach learners the specific skills needed to be successful readers. The activities cover the four skills of language, namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing putting into emphasis the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). The Tusome Early Grade Literacy in Kenya, (2015) program is an intervention to the reading challenges though given at a later stage. At Standard one the syllabus has been organized in such a way that learners are expected to understand what is in print. The instruction of phonemes in Standard one and two is helping alleviate reading challenges in Primary schools of Kenya. However, introduction of grapho-phonemic awareness right from preschool is necessary.

The current Kenya Constitution provides for Free and Compulsory Basic Education to all children. Vision 2030 too has an ultimate goal to transform the country into a globally competitive and prosperous nation by 2030. Among its aspirations is the provision of high quality education and training to produce a high skilled labour force and an education system that is linked to the global market and industry. The sessional paper No. 14 of 2012 provides for appropriate pathways and a hundred percent transition in Basic Education levels without compromising the quality of education (Belio, 2015). The proposed new curriculum proposes that by the end of early years of education, the learner should be able to communicate appropriately using verbal and non-verbal modes, demonstrate basic literacy skills and apply digital skills for learning and enjoyment. The curriculum also seeks to move the system from rote learning to Competence-Based Education. Subjects to be taught in lower Primary will include literacy, Kiswahili, English and indigenous languages (Wanzala, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2016). It is from this view that this research is concerned with the Reading Readiness skills that prepare learners for English reading.

Researchers associate the ability to read with maturation, developmental readiness, social interaction and critical thinking ability. Researchers also view maturation as a measure that determines the appropriate mental readiness for successful reading and attitude towards learning to read. This study sought to investigate the influence of Reading Readiness skills on learners' ability to read. Reading Readiness skills allow young

learners to acquire good alphabet knowledge, phonological skills, word recognition ability and print awareness skills.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

There is an influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English Reading in Standard one of Primary School Education. Young children should transit to Standard one with adequate acquisition of Reading Readiness skills so as to perform well in English reading at onset of Primary Education. They should exhibit Reading Readiness skills at the end of Pre-school. Those children who struggle with reading in Standard one to three are at a disadvantage in terms of academic success compared to children who acquire Reading Readiness skills much earlier. Most national and international assessments are paper and pencil tests administered to pupils in Standards four and above; thus they assume learners can read and write. From results of these tests evaluators may not tell whether poor scores are due to lack of knowledge tested by the assessments or because they lack basic reading and comprehension skills. Keiyo Sub County being a semi- arid region makes it susceptible to challenges like rampant absenteeism. This is due to learners' interests in activities like herding. Though the government has ensured feeding programmes run in this area, there is inconsistent supply of food. Food insecurity, therefore, is still a challenge that leads to absenteeism. According to Uwezo Kenya Report (2011), 1 out of 5 children in Standard 4 cannot read a simple Standard two paragraph.

It is on the basis of this background that this study examined the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English Reading in Standard one. This research

investigated the ability of a learner to recognize letters of the alphabet, correspond some or all letters with their correct sound, recognize a familiar word, and be able to recognize that progression of text is left to right; top to bottom. These are Reading Readiness skills that a pupil should acquire in Preschool level because in Standard one, tests are dependent on the pupil's ability to read and comprehend.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English Reading in Standard one.

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The research objectives were to;

1. Establish the relationship between a learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English Reading in Standard one.
2. Determine if a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound enhances performance of English Reading in Standard one.
3. Find out whether a learner's ability to recognize a familiar word enhances performance of English Reading in Standard one.
4. Find out if a learner's ability to read a text in left- right, top- bottom progression facilitates performance of English Reading in Standard one.

#### **1.6 Null Hypothesis**

This study was guided by the following null hypothesis;

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to recognize

letters of the alphabet and performance of English Reading in Standard one.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There exists no significant relationship between the learner's ability to correspond letters with correct sound and performance of English Reading in Standard one.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There exists no significant relationship between the learner's ability to recognize a familiar word and performance of English Reading in Standard one.

Ho<sub>4</sub>: There exists no significant relationship between learner's ability to read text in left-right, top-bottom progression and performance of English Reading in Standard one.

### **1.7. Justification of the Study**

According to Gathumbi, (2008) the operative language in education policy in Kenya is that mother tongue, Kiswahili and English are all three taught as languages of initial literacy right from Standard one. English and Kiswahili are to be used as the medium of instruction in linguistically-heterogeneous communities while the mother tongue is used in linguistically homogenous communities. Going by this policy, children in schools that use English as the medium of instruction right from Standard one strive for success in reading while children in schools that use mother tongue or Kiswahili have a harder pathway to trek in their struggle to attain English literacy. This is because their access to the English language in school is not as high as that of other children. Some children fail to realize that written word and language has meaning and therefore find it difficult to cope with learning English. Those who are adequately prepared with pre reading skills make it a success and progress steadily. There needed to be a way to enhance development of English literacy norms. This proposal led to the advancement of teaching

methods into more communicative teaching method of English in upper Primary school. The study was interested in underpinnings of English reading achievement, Pre reading skills.

There are Early Childhood Development Service Guidelines for Kenya among them, ‘No interviews shall be conducted for purpose of admission to class one in Primary school’. This limits teachers to measure the ability of an individual to read a familiar word, recite and recognize letters of the alphabet, correspond letters with their correct sound, and be able to read text in left- right, top- bottom progression. Lack of these pre-reading skills causes delay in development of critical thinking, communication skills, and vocabulary, creative and writing abilities.

Most national and international assessments are paper and pencil tests administered to pupils in Standards four and above; thus they assume learners can read and write. From results of these tests evaluators may not tell whether poor scores are due to lack of knowledge tested by the assessments or because they lack basic reading and comprehension skills. What is needed is a simple instrument that could report on the foundations of learning including assessment of the first steps that learners take in learning to read, that is, recognizing letters of the alphabet, corresponding letters to their sounds, word recognition and reading in left- right; top- bottom progression. These are the smallest building blocks of reading languages which are alphabetic-based like English. This research was, therefore, conducted to find out the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading at onset of Standard one.

### **1.8 Significance of the Study**

This study will help fill knowledge gaps in understanding the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English Reading in that; the learners will benefit as they will be adequately prepared with pre reading skills before transiting to Standard one. It will help teachers of Primary schools be aware of the importance of emphasizing pre reading skills in early years. It will also help the Ministry of Education develop policy framework and service Standard guidelines that ensure proper foundational skills to the acquisition of English language.

### **1.9 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study investigated the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English Reading in Standard one. The independent variable was Reading Readiness skills while the dependent variable was Performance of English Reading in Standard one. The study was conducted in Keiyo Sub County, Elgeyo Marakwet County. Those who participated as respondents included Standard one and ECDE teachers and Standard one learners in Keiyo Sub County, Elgeyo Marakwet County. The study was done in the months of February and March, 2016.

There may have been dishonesty on the part of respondents; the researcher used diplomacy to obtain information. Data collection was dependent on the cooperation and willingness of participants. In the process of data collection, a number of difficulties were experienced as schools on the hanging valley were not accessible by car and the journey on motorbike was so scary as it rode on steep stony path. Crossing a river on motorcycle was quite a terrifying experience; tolerance however enabled continuity of the study.



### **1.10 Theoretical Frame - Work**

This study was anchored upon Lev Vygotsky's (1986) theory. Stanlaw, (2005) referred to Lev Vygotsky (1986) who proposes that language development or acquisition occurs through social components: peers, adults and materials. In this theory is the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is the difference between what the child can accomplish on his or her own and what the child can accomplish with the help of adults and other competent peers. What a child can achieve alone is labeled as Lev Vygotsky's level of actual development and what he accomplished with assistance is his level of potential development.

According to Vygotsky, full development of ZPD requires social interactions. Vygotsky uses the term 'scaffolding' to mean support that adults or peers give to learner to support language development. Vygotsky believes that for children to learn most effectively, they must experience tasks that are challenging to them. With the collaboration of a teacher or other adults, children can overcome cognitive challenges, succeed and move to more advanced tasks. Therefore, the interaction between the teacher and the child is key component to a child's construction of knowledge and meaning. To help learners through this process, teachers need to provide scaffolding or support children in incorporating new skills and concepts into already existing ones. During teacher led Scaffolding, questions or discussions are used to draw out existing knowledge and build upon it, which helps children develop necessary strategies to solve new problems.

To recognize letters of the alphabet, teachers need to give scaffolding activities for example creating a song to enhance recitation of alphabet letters. Recognition of letters may be done using letter cut-outs, molding and tracing. All these activities require materials where the presence of a teacher and peers will give necessary support towards recognition of alphabetic letters.

Learners will be able to correspond sound with a particular letter if there is a more knowledgeable person to provide the correct model on letter sounds. Learners will be offered support through manipulative skills. Activities where letters making up a word are jumbled up for learner to organize will ensure mastery of sounds. This indicates the importance of broadening the zone of proximal development in young learners.

Promoting familiar word reading promotes concrete understanding of words, meaning scaffolding is, therefore, necessary to ensure learners get to associate letters present in a word with the meaning of a word. Picture labeling is important at this stage as associations are made. For example a picture of a man and a woman will be distinguished after looking at them often and naming them. Before joining Standard one, learners need to have been helped to write a familiar word with correct spelling, making the name so familiar that on presentation a learner recognizes it.

The ability of a learner to read a text in left- right, top- bottom progression requires support by a teacher who ensures that learning materials are available to the learner. Ensuring that learners offer meaning to text will require use of the chalkboard so as to

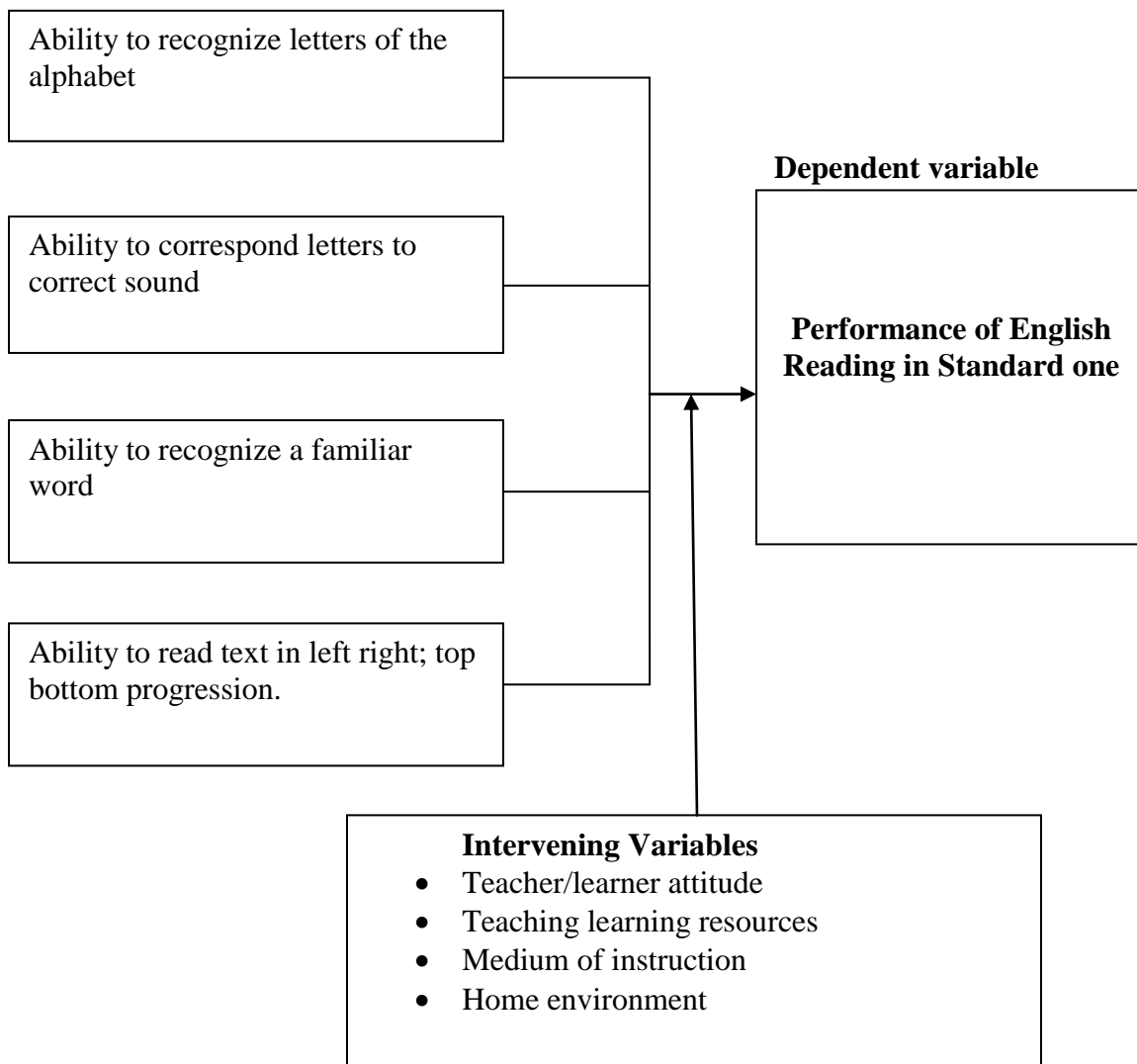
write simple sentences having familiar words on it. The teacher will then ensure learners follow what the teacher points at in the direction of left right, top bottom progression. Early exposure to written text allows learners to develop reading skills. Vygotsky, (1986) identified a Zone of Proximal development where children can learn new things that are a little above their current understanding with the help of more knowledgeable peers or adults. This new knowledge is incorporated into their existing knowledge base.

### **1.11 Conceptual Frame Work**

In the study, the variables were related as illustrated in figure 1.1 where the independent variables; Reading Readiness skills were investigated to see their relationship with the performance of English Reading in Standard one. There may have been other factors inhibiting English Reading within the environment; intervening variables.

**Fig.1.1 Conceptual framework relating to Reading Readiness skills and English Reading performance**

**Independent variable**



**Source: Author, 2017**

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviewed literature based on alphabet recognition, phonological awareness, familiar word recognition and print awareness. A review of related studies was done and a summary of literature review that relates to Reading Readiness skills in relation to performance of English reading in Standard one was discussed.

#### **2.2 Alphabet Recognition**

Alphabet recognition is an important component of literacy acquisition. It involves letter-name knowledge and letter shape recognition. It has historically been used as an indicator of future reading achievement. A Pre reader's letter name knowledge is a strong predictor of success in early reading achievement. A learner's entry behavior to level one should include ability to recognize and name upper and lowercase letters. Children need to memorize letter names through direct instruction along with exposures to the letters in print (Snow, 2010). Scarborough (2009), found that a child's verbal memory was a stronger predictor of later reading achievement. Additionally, the correlation between verbal memory and later reading achievement is comparable to other predictors of reading achievement such as letter identification. A child with automatic, accurate recognition of letters will have easier time learning about letters; will have easier time learning about letter sounds and word spellings than a child who does not know the letters of the alphabet (Stahl and Murray, 2011). When educators discuss the importance of children possessing knowledge of letters of the alphabet, they are often discussing a variety of skills. Some may only mean that learners will learn to recognize and name

letters of the alphabet. Others will include learning how to write the letters as part of this skill, while others will include matching knowledge (Adams, 2010). Helping children to recognize letters of the alphabet in early years is very important. Pedagogical practices should involve activities that reinforce mastery of letter shapes and letter names. These may include modeling letter shapes and singing the letter names.

Strickland (1998), points out that recognition of letters can be taught by encouraging children to distinguish shapes and case by manipulating magnetic letters and letter models. Use of everyday natural occurrences where children can visually identify letter shapes comes in handy. Teachers and caregivers may use alphabet sorting boxes, alphabet books and charts to help learners distinguish shapes of letters. When introducing letters to young children, consonants are typically presented before vowels. This order is based upon the belief that consonants are more consistent in their sounds than are vowels and are, therefore, easier for children to learn. Some teachers use a “letters of the week” method to introduce alphabet letters to their learners. Although it is recommended that teachers introduce a few letters at a time rather than teaching all of the letters at once, teachers need to be sure that the pace of letter introduction is not too slow (Wuori, 2008). Wagstaff (2001), found the ‘letter of the week’ approach problematic because it isolates the letters by removing them from the meaningful context of written language. He warned that the slow pace of programs like ‘letter of the week’ is a serious disadvantage. Aside from the slow pace of teaching only one letter a week, often teaches letters without connection to meaningful reading and writing; these children spend time practising letters in isolation and do not learn to transfer this knowledge to literacy tasks.

Therefore, letters should be taught in some order that do not cause confusion. Upper case letters should be introduced while paired up with lower case letters as learners will be able to internalize letter names and associate with the shapes of the letters. After children learn names of the letters, they learn to recognize their corresponding shapes and then establish the concept of letter-sound correspondence later. Teachers should then teach children how to write the letter shapes using different activities like tracing, writing on the soil or even following by finger in the air to indicate letter shapes.

Scanlon and Vellutino (2005) further revealed that letter knowledge was a strong predictor on its own as other predictors combined. Without a firm knowledge of letters, children will have difficulty with other aspects of literacy (Bradley and Stalil, 2001). The learning of letter names helps children understand the alphabetic principle; or how letters and sounds connect, because names of many letters contain the sounds they most often represent (Lyon, 2002). Children who have already learned to recognize most letters as pre scholars will have easier time learning upon formal school entry. Those whose knowledge of letters is not well developed when they start Primary school require organized instruction and practice that will help them learn how to identify, name and write letters.

Letter recognition is therefore a critical factor in learning to read, as letters are the most basic units of written languages. Beginning readers cannot become skilled readers if they do not understand the alphabet (Ehri, 2003). Alphabet recognition is especially important

because it is critical for understanding phonics. The goal of phonics instruction is to teach the alphabetic principle (Chard and Osborn, 2000). Children learn to discriminate letter forms at about 4-8 years, a seemingly obvious prerequisite for learning to read. However, letter identification may be realized at three years of age. Letter recognition is typical of everyday object recognition and the underlying visual computations are the same as those used to recognize a spoon, a face or a building (Rayner, 1998). Richgels, (2015) indicates that children differentiate letters according to their visual form. Given the complexities of the visually distinct forms of letters (upper case and lower case), simultaneously teaching two versions of letters with their confusable sounds and labels may be overwhelming to the young child. However, there is no substantial evidence to suggest which particular form (upper or lower case) should be taught first (Adams 2010). The pre-school set up involve learners between 3 to 6 years of age. At between 3-4 years they do not need to engage in a lot of writing activities thus memorizing letter names will be most appropriate at their level. As they progress, they learn the letter shapes with the upper case paired with the lower case. Instruction should then involve visual materials with colour variations to capture young minds' attention.

According to Murray (2000), letter recognition depends on understanding a sequence of letters as organized in the alphabet. To familiarize learners with the letters of alphabet, they can be asked to trace over printed letters with fingers while naming them or building up letters with clay or plasticine (KISE, 2002). Letter recognition can be taught by letting children match same letter shapes from two groups of letters. They can trace letters from stencils, drawing letters in sand or modelling with clay (KIE, 2008). According to



Ndiaye (2010), activities involving letter recognition both lower and upper case should be emphasized before joining Standard one. Gilbertson and Bramlett, (2011) observe that to be successful readers and spellers of alphabetic languages, teachers should consider the rapidity at which children could name alphabet letters. Learning the alphabet is a complex task that requires not only recognition and discrimination of letter shapes, but also learning the corresponding letter names and sounds. While alphabetic knowledge is to be emphasized, some writers have debated whether the acquisition of letter name knowledge precedes letter sounds in children's literacy (Gillet and Temple 2010). This research was to find out if learners were taught letter recognition before introducing letter sounds. Learning letter names and shapes can serve as a mnemonic for letter-sound association which then allows young children to devote more energy to grasping letter names and associating with particular shapes.

Badenhop (2013), studied letter naming, letter writing from dictation and letters copied. The measures were administered in the fall of the preschool year and at the start of the Kindergarten year. They found that letter naming was significantly related to handwriting letters. Significant correlations were also found between letter naming and letters that were handwritten from dictation or copied; however, the correlations between naming the letter and handwriting the letter were stronger in the dictation condition. Since dictation requires that the writer to visualize the appropriate letter in order to then write it, the writer would have to know the name and the visual representation of the letter as opposed to being presented with a model to copy the letter. Exposing learners to letter names and letter shapes enables letter recognition.

Exposure to letter recognition activities is a Primary vehicle for alphabet knowledge. Children who participate frequently in adult-child writing activities that include a deliberate focus on print have better alphabet knowledge (Luria, 2010). Letter name knowledge has always been a part of most, other than the strictly whole word methods of early literacy instruction (Rohl and Tunmer, 2010). Despite the apparent importance of recognizing and learning the alphabet, confusion has arisen in relation to the role letter name knowledge plays in early reading and spelling instruction. Central to this confusion is the consistent finding that letter name knowledge is the single best predictor of reading achievement (Luria, 2010). Liberman and Shankweiler, (2015) noted this anomaly when they reported that letter name knowledge correlated highly with reading ability, but there was no evidence that letter-name knowledge facilitated reading acquisition. Using letter names in encoding and decoding words is an ineffective strategy because letter names do not approximate the pronunciation of words. Some letters for example 'w' is a challenge to learners because the letter name has no relationship with sound /w/.

Gillet and Temple (2010), explained that letter name knowledge was related to reading achievement when they suggested letter name knowledge was probably an indicator of children's broad preschool reading experiences, which encompass more than recognizing alphabet names. Thus although poor letter name knowledge is a symptom of a low level readiness for reading and spelling, it is not the single cause of literacy failure. Other variables, such as parents reading aloud to children or playing language games, could account for children's alphabet knowledge but also influence reading achievement. There was a moderately high correlation between letter name knowledge and reading.

Therefore, letter name knowledge, should be taught to pre-readers to prevent reading failure. Thus, the assumption was made that letter-name knowledge and reading are casually related. In their investigation of the correlates of reading, Liberman and Shankweiler, (2015) explained that reading is a system of conceptualization that involves graphic symbols; therefore they should correlate highly. This correlational relationship should lead to the simplistic view that knowing the alphabet is sufficient to read words, though the ability to identify letters by name does not cause children to read words. Teaching the alphabet should therefore follow a sequence where letter name is taught before letter shapes.

While letter names yield some success in early spelling attempts, most letter names bear little resemblance to the sounds said when a word is pronounced (Goodman, 2010). For only a minority of letters: *b, d, f, l, n, r, v, and z* it is possible to identify the phoneme it represents from the initial sound in the letter name (Groff, 2014). This presents two issues for the beginning reader and speller. First, children who have learned alphabet names to the exclusion of letter sounds will not advance in their spelling ability beyond this set of letters. Although some children come to school having learned letter names and apply this knowledge to beginning spelling, teaching those who do not know letter names would not result in alphabet knowledge (Liberman and Shankweiler, 2015). Frith (2011), points out that exposure to instruction in letter names was a strong predictor of children's knowledge of print conventions. This further endorses the view that unlike speech development, learning to read is not innate, and if supposedly advanced 'early talkers' from literate households require instruction in alphabet knowledge in order to read and

spell, children with limited print awareness will need immediate support when they begin school. Although the children were considered verbally prepared as they join preschool, they did not demonstrate readiness in reading. The teacher here is the more knowledgeable person to guide the learner to decode letters.

Gilbertson and Bramlett, (2011) showed very young or beginning spellers may depend on a letter name strategy where the particular letter of the alphabet is used to directly represent the sound, but pre-school aged children were usually more familiar with letter names. Children pass through a stage in learning to spell during which they use letter names whenever possible. During this stage children spell all sequences of phonemes that make up the name of a letter with that letter (Rohl and Tunmer, 2010). Goodman, (2010) studied the relationship between letter knowledge and writing in preschoolers and found a significant correlation between 4- and 5-year-old children's letter naming and invented spelling in their written work. Recently, Liberman and Shankweiler, (2015) examined preschool children's skills in alphabet. Using three different writing tasks, the greatest challenge faced by the child learning to read and spell in English is understanding and utilizing the alphabetic code, in particular, the conscious awareness that letters encode spoken language at the level of the phoneme. A learner's recognition of letters is very important as he or she should be conversant with letter names and letter shapes (both upper and lowercase) before they are introduced to letter sound correspondence.

### 2.3 Letter Sound Correspondence

According to Ehri, (2003) Letter sound correspondence is the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes). These connections between the sounds in words and the letters that are used to represent those sounds are referred to as letter sound correspondence. Knowledge of letter sound correspondence means knowing for example, that the /t/ sound is represented by letter *t*. It also means knowing that the sound /s/ can be represented by more than one letter, for example *s* as in *soft* and *c* as in *city*. To decode (sound out) words, learners need to have a level of phonological awareness and to know the relationship between sounds of letters and their written forms. For example, to decode the word *bed*, learners need to know that the written letter *b* makes a /b/ sound, *e* makes an /e/ sound and *d* makes a /d/ sound. For learners knowing letter sound relationships is not always helpful in some words such as *cough*, *one*, *come* and *have*. They need to be learnt as sight words or worked out by the phonic method (likening the new word to one learner knows already) if the learner knows other similar words. As an example, learners who know the word *night* can use this knowledge when they come across the unknown word *right*.

Scott and Ehri (2013) support the relationship between letter names and letter sounds as they demonstrated that pre readers become capable of forming letter sound correspondence when they learn letters well enough to take advantage of the phonetic cues the letters provide. Learners who acquire and apply their alphabetic principle will reap long term benefits in reading acquisition. The goal of phonic instruction is to teach the alphabetic principle, that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds

(Chard and Osborn, 2000). Studies which track eye movement during reading revealed that skilled readers attend almost every word in a sentence and process the individual letters that each word comprises (Levin, 2002). Basing on this, education system should be one that emphasizes teachers education qualification is checked in giving instruction to beginners. This study was to find out if learners were able to correspond letters with the sound they represent. They are able to do this when they have acquired phonemic awareness.

Children's initial awareness of the sound properties of language through play with rhyming words is considered unconscious and thought to indicate a general implicit awareness of the sound content of words (Cunningham and Stanovich, 2010). The ability to encode and decode words is affected by an individual's existing knowledge of letter-sound correspondences and letter combinations. The importance of phonemes to the reading process has, at times, overshadowed its role in spelling, yet many writers take the view that the process of early spelling is dependent, to a greater extent, on application of letter-sound knowledge. Gilbertson and Bramlett, (2011) drew a parallel between the grapheme and phonemic phases of the reading and spelling process and noted that, prior to learning letter-sound correspondences children can only read or spell whole words from memory. Letter-sound knowledge gives the child the ability to generate spellings and to create words not seen before. He also suggested that alphabetic spelling facilitates the coding of orthographic sequences in memory and assists children to recreate the spellings of known words. In order to decode and encode words in an alphabetic language, knowledge of letter sounds is more useful initially than letter names, but both

are important. Relationship between letter shape, name and sound is important for instructors to distinguish to their learners. While historical reasons account for letters having particular names and sounds, this information is not helpful to a young child or illiterate adult trying to learn letter-sound correspondences (Gilbertson and Bramlett, 2011). Letter sound correspondence guides learners towards understanding word spelling with ease. This leads to correct encoding of words as phonemes are handled with distinction.

### **2.3.1 Phonemic Awareness**

Ehri, (2010) explains that a phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language that holds meaning. Almost all words are made up of a number of phonemes blended together. Phonemic awareness involves an understanding of the ways that sounds function in words. It deals with only one aspect of sound; the phoneme. Consider the word 'ball'. It is made up of three phonemes; /b/ /aw/ /l/. Each of its sound affects the meaning. Take away the /b/ sound and replace it with /w/ and you have an entirely different word. Change the /aw/ for /e/ sound and again the meaning changes. Phonemic awareness is only an understanding of the most minute sound units in words. The ability to tell the difference between the individual sounds (phonemes) is called phonemic awareness. When beginning school, phonemic awareness is a predictor of success in reading instruction (The reading panel, 2000). According to Light and McNaughton (2012) alphabet instruction should start by teaching the sounds of letters not their names. Knowing the names of letters is not necessary to read and write. Knowledge of letter names can interfere with success of decoding. For example the learner looks at a word and thinks of the names of letters instead of sounds. Early Childhood curriculum needs to

outline the order of teaching the alphabetic phases: the letter name, letter shape and letter sound.

McGuiness, (2013) asserts that phonics emphasize the alphabetic principle; the idea that letters represent the sounds of speech, and that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words which is specific to the alphabetic writing system, children learn letter sounds first and then blend them to form words. For example; (b=the first sound in ball b=first sound in blue). Phonemic awareness is important because it improves children's word reading and reading comprehension and it helps children learn to spell. Unlike a Japanese logographic language where symbols convey meaning, the English alphabet letters represent sounds. Meaning can only be attained when these letters are translated into sounds. Phonemic awareness can be developed by engaging learners in various activities to enable them identify phonemes, categorize phonemes and blend them to form words (Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn, 2003). Learners should therefore be helped to distinguish phonemes that make up a word.

Caldwell and Leslie (2005), add that alliteration and counting tasks using sounds in words are also helpful to developing phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness includes the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate individual sounds and words (Stahl and Murray, 2011). According to Lundberg et al, (2009) teachers can help their learners become aware of phonemes before they need to realize that phonemic awareness will become more sophisticated as learners reading skills develop. Griffith and Priscilla (2003) find that children with high phonemic awareness outperformed those with low phonemic awareness on all literacy measures. Whole language advocates need to admit



that not all children develop this necessary ability simply through immersion in a print-rich environment and that some children will need direct instruction in phonemic awareness. Adams (2010) agrees that; teaching learners' letter-sound correspondence is meaningful when learners have a solid visual familiarity with the individual letters and if they understand that sound paired with letters are what make up words. These sounds may seem complex and notoriously rule-breaking, but with learners understanding, there will be correct letter-sound correspondence. Presenting to the learners paired up letters in order of upper and lowercase respectively will increase visual familiarity of letters with same sound.

Adams, (2010) posits that, it is much more than simply naming letters that supports reading acquisition. An overall familiarity with letters and their sounds is necessary in attainment of early reading skills. Children with phonemic awareness skills are more successful at learning to read than those without these skills. Phonemic awareness instruction provided to children in Preschool had modest but significant positive effects on these children's reading skills (Bentin and Leshem 1993 and Adams 2010). Torgensen and Mathes (2000) confirm these findings when they tested children on the growth of their sight words (word identification) and word attack (Phonemic decoding) skills. When they compared those children who began Standard one with average phonemic awareness skills to those who began Standard one below that threshold, they found that those with higher phonemic awareness in first Standard tested higher for sight words and word attack skills in every Standard. Those children with sufficient phonemic awareness had a better understanding of how words work, and were therefore able to identify and read

words by sounding them out. Those learners who did not possess sufficient phonemic awareness skills had to rely on memorizing words by sight. As these children entered the next level, the texts they read grew less patterned and predictable and as a result their reading skills began to suffer. These results prove that deficit of phonemic awareness persists over time. If it is not corrected, it will continue to affect reading performance in middle and high school and into adulthood (Fawcett and Nicholson, 2011). Therefore, phonemic awareness is to be emphasized in ECDE ensuring that pupils are engaged in phonological activities.

Phonemic awareness can also help in acquisition of other literacy skills such as comprehension and spelling. For children to understand what they are reading, they must be able to read words fluently and accurately. By so doing, fluency frees learners from the decoding process and allows them to attend to meaning of the text (Put Reading First, 2003). Armbruster, (2003) urges that phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet and when instruction focuses on only one or two rather than several types of phoneme manipulation. Cook and Cook, (2014) explain phonemic awareness as the understanding that words are made up of smaller units of sound, or phonemes. This understanding involves associating printed letters with the sounds that go with them. Phonemic awareness begins developing during the early years of formal schooling as children interact with each letter and with various letter combinations. In relation to these a learner is to acquaint with phonemic awareness before putting this knowledge into print. This

research was to find out if teachers help learners distinguish between letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds.

Spoken words are made up of phonemes and written words are made up of letters. However knowledge of those two facts is not sufficient for developing good decoding skills. A reader with strong phonemic awareness will demonstrate the ability to hear rhyme and alliteration, and to blend and segment phonemes (Rohl and Tunmer, 2010). According to Githinji and Wanjohi (2009) for a child to succeed in reading, he or she should be able to differentiate sounds and remember what has been said. Phonemic awareness should be enhanced by providing opportunities for learners to identify words from a group which have the same letter sound. Phonemic awareness is just one aspect of phonological awareness, while phonological awareness encompasses a child's ability to recognize the many ways sounds function in words. Therefore, preschool education should promote phonological awareness.

### **2.3.2 Phonological Awareness**

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize that words are made up of a variety of sound units. The term encompasses a number of sound related skills necessary for a person to develop as a reader. As a child develops phonological awareness he or she not only comes to understand that words can be segmented into larger sounds 'chunks' known as syllables and each syllable begins with a sound (onset) and ends with another sound (rhyme). Phonological awareness provides the basis for phonics. Phonics, the understanding that sounds and print letters are connected is the first step towards the act of reading. A child's phonological awareness is determined by the ability to apply several

skills; recognizing and using rhymes, breaking words into syllables, blending phonemes into syllables and words, identifying the beginning and end of sounds in a syllable and seeing smaller words in larger words like *cat* in *catalogue* (Ehri, 2010). Letter sounds are introduced in association with letter names which provide valuable cues towards appropriate sound. When learners grasp sound, reading becomes easier as each word is broken down into individual letter sounds by a learner.

Children without proper phonological awareness skills must memorize words. This is inefficient process for reading and therefore cannot spend the necessary attention to comprehend text. In addition, phonological awareness, particularly the skills of segmenting words into phonemes can help children learn to spell. When learners understand that sounds and letters are related in a predictable way, they can connect the sounds to letters as they spell new words (Put Reading First, 2003). The understanding of letter sound correspondence is a prerequisite to effective word identification and a Primary difference between strong and poor readers is their ability to use letter-sound correspondence to identify words. Alphabet books are another valuable resource for promoting phonological awareness. Teachers and children talk about sounds as they look at and read alphabet books (Juel, 2000). Going by this, it was important to find out if there were learners who memorize words instead of exhibiting the ability to spell words; sound the letters making up a word.

According to Snow, Burns and Cunffin (2004), phonological awareness is the ability to identify sounds in words; to separate words into sounds and manipulate them. It is a more

general appreciation of sounds of speech as distinct from their meaning. It is the ability to distinguish two different sounds in a spoken word. For example children must learn that the word 'sat' is made up of three sounds /s/a/t/. Instruction at this stage focuses on hearing and distinguishing beginning of sounds as in /m/ in milk, monkey and moon. In learning to read, children must isolate the beginning sounds of words. Letter knowledge plays an influential role in the development of phonological awareness, and higher levels of letter knowledge are associated with children's abilities to detect and manipulate phonemes. For example, the child who knows the letter 'b' is likely to remember the sound of /b/. Consequently, letter knowledge may reflect a greater underlying knowledge and familiarity with literacy related skills such as language and print (Luria, 2010). A high level of phonological awareness makes learning to read easier and more successful.

Phonological awareness helps children to understand the relationship between spoken and written language, letter-sound knowledge is the key to applying this understanding to read and spell words. Poorly developed knowledge of letter-sound correspondences has been found to be the most common cause of reading difficulty (Groff, 2014). Mastery of letter-sound correspondences is essential for the accurate and efficient recognition of many words because skill in the application of letter-sound knowledge leads children to develop rapid and accurate decoding of phonically regular words (Goswami and Bryant, 2010). This 'automatic' recall and application of letter-sound knowledge to decoding these words enables children to concentrate on text comprehension. When children cannot automatically decode words, they have limited attention to devote to meaning. This relationship is easy to understand when one realizes that a symbol such as G has

meaning both as a specific sound and as a specific mark. In order to master reading and writing, individuals must integrate both of these meanings (Luria, 2010). Here, it is important to note that knowledge of letter names offer clues to sounding the letters. Therefore it is necessary to ensure learners are taught letter sounds and after memorization, then introduction of letter shapes and finally letter names may come in. Phonological awareness is a prerequisite towards successful reading. This study sought to find out if teachers of ECDE begin by teaching letter sounds first or letter names.

Educators agree that readers must learn letter names and letter sounds (phonemes), but writers must also learn these concepts in order to write or spell correctly (Fitzgerald and Shannon, 2000). Phonological awareness is defined as the ability to discriminate and manipulate the sound structure of language while phonemic awareness is the understanding of a sound, such as the initial sound of a word. Pupils struggling with knowledge of letter names, letter sounds, and phonemic awareness may have difficulty learning reading and writing skills (Adams, 2010). Chard and Dickson, (2011) examined pupils in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade and found that pupils who were proficient at identifying letters and recognizing letter sounds at Kindergarten entry had higher skills on measures of phonological processing and word reading in first grade. Handwriting words assists pupils in learning about print and increases the number of words they can vocalize (Brown, 2010). Kindergarten pupils who were more proficient at understanding the correspondence between letter sounds and letter names produced a higher level of writing (Badenhop, 2013). Learning to read English words, depends on

the ability to analyze sounds in words, therefore teachers should provide opportunities for children in ECDE to discriminate words using phonological cues.

Clay, 2011), notes that phonological awareness is a critical predictor of children's reading achievement. Discriminating units of language (words, segments, and phonemes) is strongly linked to successful reading (Cunningham and Stanovich, 2010). Phonological awareness is no doubt a consequence of vocabulary development and learning to read (Chard and Dickson, 2011). Typically developing children begin first to discriminate among units of language (phonological awareness), then within these units (phonemic awareness). Phonological awareness refers to the general ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its meaning. Phonemic awareness is the insight that every spoken word can be conceived as units of sounds that are represented by the letter of an alphabet (Badenhop, 2013). Teachers need to distinguish between phonemic awareness and phonological awareness so as to offer constructive instruction for word processing to be made easier to young learners.

Bryant et al, (2010) suggests that children achieve syllabic sensitivity earlier than they achieve sensitivity to phonemes, and sensitivity to rhyme before sensitivity to alliterative sounds. Ball and Blachman, (2011) point out that children's entry to these skills typically begins with linguistic activities such as language games and nursery rhymes that implicitly compare and contrast the sounds of words, and include alliterative phrases. But implicit comparisons, alone, may be insufficient. Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are meta-linguistic abilities (Adams, 2010). Children must not only be able to

recite and play with sound units, they must also develop an understanding that sound units map onto whole or parts of written language.

The isolation of sounds in words precedes the alphabetic phase of spelling and equips individuals at all stages of spelling proficiency with a strategy to attempt to spell any word, particularly when taught in conjunction with letter-sound correspondences (Ehri, 2010). Similarly, while a level of appreciation of the sound structure in words is essential to learn to read it is not sufficient (Ellis, 2012). A combination of awareness of sounds in words and letter-sound correspondence training is necessary to understand the alphabetic principle and decode words (Denckla, 2013). Ellis, (2012) highlighted the importance of teaching spelling patterns together with sound patterns when they reported that teaching phonological skills must be explicitly linked to letter-sound knowledge to result in improved literacy skills. Spelling patterns develop once a learner has been exposed to phonological activities.

Bentin and Leshem, (2013) have placed phonological awareness as a critical part of the complex braid of language abilities. Its tie to children's ability to decode has been clearly established. At the same time, quality indicators would do well to recognize that phonological awareness skills are integrally connected to other important language skills which need to be strongly reinforced in these early education and care programs. There is a strong linkage between oral language, letter knowledge and phonological awareness in the Pre-school years. These skills are highly interdependent. Phonological awareness appears to influence vocabulary development and vocabulary rate. Letter knowledge



supports phonological awareness. Pre- reading skills are highly predictive of children's initial early reading success. Each of these skills, when integrated in meaningful activity, has an important role to play in children's literacy development.

As children become consciously aware of the sound properties of words their ability to manipulate smaller units of sound develops (Clay, 2011). Bradley and Bryant, (2010), suggested that difficulties in phonological awareness were the foundation of reading problems and reports that a deficit in phonological awareness contributed to the reading difficulties experienced by otherwise normally developing school age children. Bentin and Leshem ( 2013), observed that individual differences in phonological awareness distinguished between children, with and without confounding learning issues, will experience difficulties learning to read. The presence of phonological awareness is thought to be characteristic of good readers, while its absence is considered a consistent characteristic of poor readers irrespective of the age and intelligence of the individual (Adams, 2010). She further describes five levels of phonological awareness in terms of abilities to hear rhymes and alliteration as measured by knowledge of nursery rhymes, and compare and contrast sounds of words for rhyme and alliteration to blend and split syllables, to perform phonemic segmentation such as counting out the number of phonemes in a word, and to perform phoneme manipulation tasks like adding, deleting a particular phoneme and generating a word from the remainder. Teachers begin by children hearing rhymes and alliteration. Activities that reinforce these skills can be taught common word families which will assist learners in using these patterns to identify unknown words. The ability to hear, see and use rhymes as a reliable clue for reading

new words and spelling words that sound alike offers learners a powerful insight into how English spelling works. Learners then need to be able to hear and discriminate different beginning, middle and ending sounds. Phonological awareness will be acquired effectively only if pre-reading skills emphasize letter-sound-correspondence activities. This will enable children to distinguish letter sounds through rhymes and alliteration.

At pre-school level, children engage in activities that direct their attention to sounds in words, such as rhyming and alliteration games; they should be taught to segment and blend, combine training in segmentation and blending with instruction in letter-sound relationships, the examples given should be in a systematic sequence for readers to identify and sound letters and syllables appropriately. Engaging learners of pre-school, Kindergarten and Standard one in oral activities that emphasize the sounds of language may go a long way in helping them become successful readers and learners (Spector, 2006). Phonological awareness is an auditory skill that involves an understanding of the sounds of spoken words. It includes recognizing and producing rhymes, dividing words into syllables and identifying words and sounds. Phonological awareness represents a crucial step towards understanding that letters or groups of letters can represent phonemes or sounds. This understanding is highly predictive of success of beginning reading. Phonological awareness enables children to hear sounds in words, to segment words into sound units, and blend them again (Stahl and Murray, 2011). Pullen and Justice (2003), raise concern on support for phonological awareness which should be integrated into everyday activities of the preschool classroom. That phonological awareness for the learners at particular risk for early literacy achievement may best be

encouraged through formalized lessons. That is, for young children with limited opportunities for language play at home or who are at risk for developing a reading disability, explicit instruction in phonological awareness should be provided daily. Explicit does not refer to drill-like activities but rather the structuring of engaging, meaningful, and enjoyable activities that help children to actively attend to phonological structure of oral language. Activities should focus on those skills acquired during the preschool years, which have been identified as predictive of later reading achievement. These include activities to promote rhyme and alliteration awareness, as well as those designed for promoting blending and segmenting skills.

### **2.3.3 Blending and Segmenting Skills**

Blending and segmenting skills should begin at the word and syllable level and for older and more capable preschool learners may include activities that help children begin to develop skills at the onset of phoneme levels. It is important to note that children's attainment of phonological awareness moves from shallow to increasingly deep levels of awareness; fostering attention to larger phonological units, such as words and syllables. Phonics instruction aims at helping children to be able to state the rules governing letter sound relationships. This is to get across the alphabetic principle; that there is a relationship between sounds and letters. Use of phonics then is a system of instruction used to teach children the connection between letters and sounds (Snow et al, 2004).

Cultures whose written language represents speech at the level of whole words or syllables such as Chinese and Japanese; have difficulty segmenting speech into individual sounds (Bergeron, 2010). Explicit sound awareness is an understanding that develops as a

consequence of learning an alphabetic script. Indeed, reading disability is relatively unknown in Japan and China and this is explained on the grounds that only 10 percent of reading difficulties are thought to be visually based, and these reading systems do not rely on phoneme-grapheme correspondences (Bentin and Leshem, 2013). According to Brown, (2010), the discovery of phonological awareness is the single greatest breakthrough in reading pedagogy in this century; this means that early identification and intervention programs for children with poor phonological awareness skills prepares them for later reading instruction, including instruction in phonics, word analysis and spelling. It should be a part of the junior Primary school curriculum (Bryant et al, 2010). Sound manipulation or the blending of sounds together to approximate the pronunciation of a word is a skill related mostly to reading ability (Badenhop, 2013). Berninger, (2015) points out that in conjunction with the isolation of phonemes in words, blending is the phonological awareness skill most related to reading development. Blending of phonemes and segmentation of words are tasks achieved when a learner has acquired phonological awareness.

Blending sounds is considered to be one of the simpler phonological awareness tasks for children. The challenge with blending phonemes is in remembering and joining together arbitrary sequences of sound. The more experience the child has with hearing and manipulating phonemes, the easier they will be able to recall and blend sounds (Bergeron, 2010). Integrated instruction in segmenting and blending sounds has been reported to provide the greatest benefit to reading acquisition (Ball and Blachman, 2011). Badenhop, (2013), highlighted the importance of teaching phoneme blending and

segmenting to form a word before children can learn to decode words. Children can listen to and blend individual phonemes together orally. This is because the application of letter-sound correspondences to text generally guide in the pronunciation of a word. Teaching decoding that begins with phonological awareness activities and includes explicit instruction in letter sounds is a success towards reading. According to Badenhop (2013), knowing sound-symbol associations is insufficient to read a word. Children must understand that words comprise joined together sounds. Phonological tasks involving arranging jumbled up letters to form a word creates a deeper understanding of grapheme phoneme relationship.

Adams, (2010) found beginning readers who were taught letter-sound correspondences and how to blend explicitly outperformed controls who were taught only letter sounds. The intervention group showed superior decoding of non-words and passage comprehension. This finding is important because it demonstrates the importance of teaching blending explicitly to decode and comprehend text. The relationship between young children's sensitivity to rhyme and beginning literacy development is not straightforward. The isolation of individual sounds in words has led most researchers to position phonological awareness, in particular, complete segmentation of words into phonemes at the most difficult end of phonological awareness tasks. In relation to spelling, phonemic awareness does not entail knowing how to spell an unknown word, only that it can be spelled. Once children appreciate that print depends on speech, they will with understanding participate in phonological tasks. Without awareness of the individual sounds in words matching letters to phonemes is a nonsensical process and the

spellings of words can only be learned by rote. The writers argued the same is true for reading. In order to appreciate that the sounds of speech are encoded manifestations of print, children must understand that speech is comprised of phonemes which, if rearranged, make different words. For example, once again consider the sentence: *the dog barked*. Once the word *dog* is isolated, the next stage of phonological awareness considered necessary in order to read or spell this word is to reflect on the structure of the word as the composition of three phonemes, *d+o+g*. If a child is able to segment and blend phonemes, then phonological awareness has been realized (Berninger, 2015). After learners have acquired phonemic awareness, instructors should help learners build up their vocabulary through blending of phonemes to form words. Word segmenting is necessary to distinguish different phonemes.

When children are aware of phonemes and can partially or completely segment words, they appreciate the words *dog* and *jog* differ by one phoneme, share the same endings, but mean something entirely different. Research into the relationship between auditory segmentation of phonemic units and reading acquisition has shown that a predictive relationship exists between the ability to isolate individual sounds in words and early reading ability (Bryant et al, 2010). Pedagogical preparation of Early Childhood teachers should bring out a clear distinction of grapheme phoneme connections. Blending and segmenting should therefore be emphasized through explicit phonological tasks in early grades.

The segmentation of words into phonemes is considered the underpinning that enables the beginning reader to move from spoken language to written representation of language (Davidson and Jenkins, 2014). Children with poor phonological segmentation skills when introduced to reading instruction, tend to be less skilled word readers at some later time (Denckla, 2013). In contrast, beginning readers who are consciously aware of and can access the relationship between letter sounds and oral language are better equipped to understand the phoneme-grapheme system of written language and how to decode words (Gilbertson, 2011). It is important to test sound segmentation to identify children who may be at risk for success in reading, as well as direct teaching of segmenting as a preventative measure (Frith, 2011). The main task for a child learning to read an alphabetic language is to understand how speech sounds are represented by letters, that is the grapheme-phoneme conversion rules, and how to translate between written and spoken language by meaning of such rules. This alphabetic strategy requires children to segment continuous speech stream into individual phonemes and to map them onto corresponding graphemes which they read. In this process, phonological skills are crucial. A phonological deficit will give rise to poor grapheme-phoneme conversion which will affect reading development (Ball and Blachman, 2011). Reducing pre reading deficits early in time will enable a learner to appreciate orthographic rules in English thus enabling the reading process.

Fox and Routh, (2014) noted that phonological segmentation had overlooked spelling in favour of reading and argued explicit awareness of phonemes was more closely related to spelling. They designed two tasks to assess children's ability to isolate sounds in words.

They reported that poor spellers, irrespective of their reading skill, had difficulty compared to good spellers in operating on the phonemic level of speech. They found that children's ability to perform a segmentation task was not significantly different from their ability to spell and concluded that the close connection between these skills showed necessity of explicit awareness of phonemes in spelling words. Subsequent studies have shown that phonological segmentation is an important contributor to spelling (Ehri, 2010; Ellis, 2012). Frith, (2011) took this argument further when they examined whether spelling problems reflect core deficits in phonological processing. They examined the spelling performance of beginning spellers who were classified as good and poor readers according to their ability to decode words in isolation. The poor readers tended to be poor at spelling and performed worse than the good readers on the phonological task of phoneme deletion. These findings support the phonological deficit hypothesis that difficulties in phonological analysis appear to be one cause of spelling problems.

Ehri, (2010) highlight the strong relationship between awareness of individual phonemes in words and reading and spelling development. Ellis, (2012) described two processes by which children learn to spell unfamiliar words: by internalizing the orthographic patterns of written words by imitation and by analogy. There is a link between an awareness of sound segments in words and learning to spell, both through imitation and analogy. He found that learning to spell unfamiliar words is influenced by knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, the amount and complexity of orthographic information children can process and their knowledge of word structures. To spell words by making comparisons between them, children needed to recognize, segment, delete and substitute sounds.



Children who had the poorest levels of phonemic awareness, that is the ability to segment words into sounds, made the smallest gains in a spelling instruction (Ellis, 2012). Spelling instruction is made easy by knowledge of letter sound correspondences which enable children to view words as familiar to them.

Davidson and Jenkins, (2014) investigated the effect of phonemic awareness instruction on the spelling development of Kindergarten children. Children received instruction in segmenting words into phonemes that included instruction in letter names and sounds for a period of 11 weeks. The children were required to spell a series of words, not included in the training program, and selected on the basis of the phonemic composition of the word that ranged from relatively easy *lap* to more difficult *elephant*. Davidson and Jenkins, (2014) reported that children who received the intervention produced developmentally superior invented spellings than their peers who did not receive treatment. Further, the treatment children significantly outperformed the control children on the isolation and identification of phonemes in words and alphabet knowledge, as well as reading phonetically regular words. In a follow-up study one year later Davidson and Jenkins, (2014) tested the treatment children who, after participating in their previous study, received a first grade reading program that continued to emphasize phonological awareness and the alphabetic code. These children outperformed the control children on measures of invented and standard spelling. These studies support the view that a reciprocal relationship exists between children's reading and spelling development and level of explicit phonological awareness, is critical for development in each (Fox and Routh, (2014). Blending and segmentation should begin by one or two syllable words

then later to longer words. This leads to successful word segmentation and blending; thus acquisition of the pre reading skills in English.

## **2.4 Familiar Word Recognition**

Kuiper and Scott Allan (2004), explain that early readers access spelling sound, meaning and context of a familiar word automatically. If a word is known to the reader; its meaning is accessed automatically in the visual Word Form Area of the human brain. Initially what occurs in the visual Word Form Area is characterized by slow and effortful letter-to-sound processing. Gradually as the responsiveness grows from back to front of Word Form Area, both the speed of the systems responses and complexity of spelling patterns that gain direct connection to the language centers increase as one matures, Sandak, Mencl, Frost and Pugh (2004). For beginning readers, the very process of decoding a word leaves a trace in memory that connects the letters of its spelling with the matching components of its pronunciation. Phonemic sensitivity grows as the same letter maps to and clarifies the same sound in many words while, reciprocally, the pronunciation of each word will come to be represented in terms of its phonemes as defined by its spelling. As children interact with print rich environment they build up a network of connections, letter sequences, letter patterns and associations between more meaningful readings (Adams, 2010). Word recognition is a gradual process that entails grapheme phoneme correspondences which leads to decoding and encoding a sight word while reading.

Children progress through developmental stages in word reading and word analysis ability in early years, acquisition of word recognition skills is gradual. When children

learn sight words and can make connections between letters in written words and the corresponding sounds in speech, they have reached full alphabetic phase. In the full alphabetic phase children use mainly grapheme phoneme connections correspondences to identify words. Sight word reading refers to what is already stored in memory. Words become sight words once they have been read several times. Connections are created that link the written word with the sound, and meaning. There are words that readers know by sight, the words identity is triggered in memory very fast. When sight words are already known, readers can recognize their pronunciations and meanings automatically without much effort at sounding out letters (Ehri, 2010). Teachers in Preschool should help build up vocabulary of children by exposing them to as many words as possible. A word that is seen most often is easily recognized on sight.

The process of automatically and accurately recognizing words, suggests that children can decode words and understand what they are reading. This may be promoted by shared read- aloud and repeated readings by teacher as a model. Children benefit from classroom environments that associate reading with pleasure and enjoyment as well as learning and skill development. Involvement in interesting activities involving letters such as formation of words using cards influence their motivation to work towards learning to read and write (Hart and Risley, 2002). Readers learn to process spellings of words as phonemic maps that lay out elements of their pronunciations visually.

Beginners become skilled at computing these mapping relations spontaneously when they read new words. This is the critical event for sight word learning. Grapheme phoneme

connections provide a powerful mnemonic system. They provide the bonding of letters in written words into pronunciations in memory along with meanings. After alphabetical mapping system is known, readers can build a vocabulary of sight words easily. Unfortunately, some children have difficulty with the automatic mapping between print and speech. They require much more practice to achieve a normal level of sight word learning. Exposure to words enables early graders to retain information about spellings of specific words in memory and this memory persisted (Saltmarsh & Ehri, 2005). Since grapheme phoneme connections provide a powerful mnemonic system, preschool curriculum is to ensure that the alphabet principle is given due attention to prepare learners in word processing.

Oral language is the foundation of literacy development and linked to recognition of familiar words which is a valid predictor of later reading in Kindergarten (Adams, 2010). Ability to recognize familiar words are the important prerequisite skills pupils need to master to succeed academically in later grades. Most countries expect Kindergarten teachers to emphasize readiness skills by incorporating them into their content of specific levels (Bryant et al, 2010). School readiness matters in the long run and addressing children's developmental needs before and during their first year of school will boost their chances of success. Sadly, most children do not attend a high-quality preschool and many do not enter Kindergarten fully prepared. These pupils fall behind in the knowledge of skills that will facilitate their ability to succeed in Kindergarten and beyond (Catalado and Ellis, 2010). The alphabetic principle focuses on the letter-sound correspondence and word blending and links the phonemes (sounds) and graphemes to

the spelling of words (Gillet and Temple 2010). Understanding the alphabetic principle is necessary in both reading and writing of English words (Gilbertson and Bramlett, 2011). Familiar word reading should not be handled as a higher level skill. It is a skill to be developed right from Kindergarten by integrating into everyday content.

Many pupils begin Kindergarten with great differences in vocabulary knowledge (Castle, 2014). Some pupils enter school with thousands of hours of exposure to books and a wealth of rich and supportive oral languages experiences with peers who have rich vocabulary knowledge. Other pupils begin school with very limited knowledge of language and word meanings. Sadly, the vocabulary gap grows larger in the early grades as pupils with limited vocabulary knowledge grow more discrepant over time from their peers who have rich vocabulary knowledge (Catalado and Ellis, 2010). Exposing learners to print rich environment enhances development of vocabulary. Words become familiar once they have been sounded out and meaning taken in by learners.

Structured and supported oral language activities, such as listening to and discussing storybooks are direct ways to promote language and vocabulary development in young pupils. This type of activity is not equally effective for all pupils. Pupils who are at risk for reading impairment with lower initial vocabularies are less likely than their peers with higher vocabularies to recognize familiar words incidentally while listening to stories. This is quite possible in part because these pupils are less able to make use of context to infer word meanings because of their limited vocabulary and content knowledge. This calls for more intentional, teacher-directed vocabulary instruction and intervention to

complement traditional reading activities for pupils who are at risk for language and reading difficulties. Pupils with weaker vocabularies are less likely to learn new words from listening to stories than children with larger vocabularies. Thus, teachers need to provide more one-on-one or small group explicit vocabulary instruction for pupils with smaller vocabularies (Catalado and Ellis, 2010). Reading difficulties occur when there is limited exposure to new words. Instructors and caregivers should always say stories while emphasizing a new word to the readers. Repeated decoding of the same word helps in mastery of the word.

Rapid learning of a sight word is possible only because a reader has a powerful mnemonic system in the form of alphabetic knowledge that is activated when words are read. Readers learn sight words by forming connections between letters in spellings and sound in pronunciations of the words. The connections are formed out of reader's knowledge of the alphabetic principle. This includes knowledge of grapheme-phoneme relations and phonemic awareness; knowing how to distinguish the separate phonemes in pronunciations of words. This also includes knowledge of spelling patterns that recur in different words. When readers learn sight words, they look at spelling, produce the word, distinguish separate phonemes in the pronunciations and they recognize how the graphemes match up to phones in the word. Reading the word a few times secures its connections in memory (Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004). If learners are helped through all alphabetic phases, spelling challenges will not arise in future writing of an individual learner.

On a well spelt word, all graphemes can be connected to phonemes in pronunciations. This connection forming process also depicts irregularly spelt words. It turns out that most letters in irregularly spelt words conform to grapheme-phoneme conventions. Therefore, exception of words is only exceptional when someone tries to read them by applying a decoding strategy. When they are learned as sight words they are retained in memory by the same connections as regularly spelt words, with only the exceptional letters unsecured. Whether all the letters in spelling become secured to pronunciations in memory depends not only on irregularities in spellings but also on the readers' knowledge of the alphabetic principle. If readers do not know short vowel spellings, when they encounter these letters in particular words, the letters will not become bonded to the phonemes in memory. Knowledge of these graphophonemic relations must be learned through either explicit instruction or implicit learning and practice before bonding can occur. It is important to understand how learners apply their general alphabetic knowledge to retain specific words in memory (Ehri, 2010). To secure a word's pronunciation in memory, learners need explicit instruction by phonic method of teaching. This ensures that words which have graphophonemic relations are taught together.

If the child can recognize that the spoken word 'man' begins with the phoneme, /m/, he or she can build a new connection, pairing the initial letter of the written word man with the initial sound of its pronunciation. It is through the mappings from the spellings of words to their pronunciations that print becomes bound to the language centers of the brain. Just as it is easier to hear the initial phoneme of a word, the children's spelling-

sound knowledge tends to begin with word initial consonants progressing to final consonants, medial vowels and blends (Duncan, Seymour, and Hill, 2003). For a beginning reader, the first letter of their first name is the most important. Creating activities that involve children's names will help them grasp the letters making up their names. According to Owocki, (2001), use of rhymes (word endings that sound the same) and alliteration (word beginnings that sound the same) help learners to relate known sounds to new sounds. Children learn more words when they identify rhymes and alliteration on words and match them. Learners should be taught alliterative phrases and made to understand common starting sounds of words, middle sounds and ending sounds.

Introduce the idea of letters early and words as written symbols early. Toddlers and preschoolers each have a personal written symbol they learn to associate with their name. Preschoolers begin exploring written symbols by writing the letters of their names and then move on to familiar words they see around the room. Children quickly learn to read and write their symbol as 'name' and to recognize those of their classmates, symbols, drawings and words also identify the areas of the room to help them retrieve and return play materials easily. Pairing graphics and word labels also lead to associations which help young children to realize that symbols stand for real objects and actions. They want to learn these symbols so as to find what they need and identify what is theirs. Toddlers enjoy exploring and playing with a wide variety of blocks with letters on them. Some of them see their belongings labeled with their personal symbol and 'their' letters and see that together those letters make up their name. In this very natural way, letters become familiar part of a toddler's world. Use of grade appropriate knowledge of letter sound



relationships, children sound out regularly spelt, unfamiliar words in text when writing. They focus on one syllable words such as 'cat' and 'pen' with regular one – to – one letter sound correspondences. As children's reading skills increase, they progress systematically to more complex patterns such as blends, vowel combinations and silent letters, to the letter patterns of multiple syllable words and to suffixes, prefixes and root words (Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004). Pedagogical practice should consider introducing simple words before those with multiple syllables.

Cunningham and Stanovich, (2010) identified name reading as an indicator related to later reading ability, even after controlling for IQ and socioeconomic status. Name reading appears to be based on the alphabetic principle. Clay, (2011) found children's skills in naming letters and writing their name at five years was linked with their reading skills at age seven years. Pupils' ability to read familiar words is interwoven with their ability to write letters and words (Chard and Dickson, 2011). Reading and writing are highly similar but they are not identical cognitive processes. Reading familiar words is much easier than the process of selecting words and then writing them on paper (Bryant et al, 2010). Most learners proceed to Standard one without preparedness to encode and decode words. This becomes a barrier to achievement in reading.

Learning to recognize the letters in their name and to write their name provides children with a personal connection to writing. Within everyday routines, children are frequently exposed to their written name, providing them with multiple learning opportunities to connect with their name. Having children write their name is an important step toward

literacy (Clay, 2011). Bradley and Bryant, (2010) found that one of the top six variables that correlated with later literacy and predicted literacy development, even when IQ and socioeconomic status (SES) were accounted for, was the ability to write letters in isolation on request or to read one's own name (Bradley and Bryant, 2010) identified both letter naming and ability to recognize one's own name as strong predictors of reading, accounting for 31% and 45% respectively, of the variance found. A study by Bergeron, (2010) found letter naming and name writing skills in children at age five were linked to their reading skills at age seven years. Badenhop, (2013) studied name writing with preschoolers to learn how the written name mirrors a child's literacy acquisition. Forty percent of the writing samples from 4- and 5-year old children were found to include the letters of their name. The ability to write their name correlated with alphabet knowledge. This was supported by a study of preschoolers' name writing skills completed by Brown, (2010). He found ability to recognize one's own name and letter naming were significantly correlated, but also found that children's scores on name reading were significantly better than scores on writing dictated letters or copying letters. Children most easily identify the letters of their name and teachers should use pupil's name as an example of word formation. The child's name is made familiar when the letters making it up are also familiar to the learner.

Being able to write one's name automatically appears to indicate emerging knowledge of the alphabet, recognition of sight words, and visual tracking skills (Clay, 2011). Badenhop, (2013) points out that familiar word recognition is the foundation of the reading process. Brown, (2010) further explained the importance of familiar word

recognition in the reading process. While it is possible for a person to have poor reading comprehension ability despite adequate word decoding skills, it is highly unlikely that excellent reading comprehension will be observed in face of deficient word recognition skills. Therefore he concludes that efficient word recognition seems to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for good comprehension in adults, just as it is in children. The role of phonological coding in the word recognition processes can best be explained by the general definition of written language. There are three elements involved in written language, namely script, sound, and meaning. In English, which is an alphabetic language, the written symbols primarily represent sounds, and it is through their representation of sounds that configurations of letters come to refer to meanings (Bentin and Leshem, 2013). Phonological coding is a natural cue for word recognition in the reading process and it can be found in most reading models, whether as an information processing procedure, as a componential unit, or as a processing unit connected to other units (Adams, 2010). Manipulating phonemes in classroom and allowing children to form words will help as a word recognition strategy. Asking a child to write his or her name before mastery of graphophonemic connections will cause reading difficulties. Therefore ECDE curriculum should ensure gradual introduction of the alphabetic principle.

According to Catalado and Ellis (2010), the relative use of the orthographic and phonemic code is determined by factors such as the learner's reading ability. Bryant et al, (2010) maintains that phonological cues for reading are more reliable than the visual codes as they make use of a system of rules, i.e. the grapheme-phoneme conversion rules, which can be easily remembered and formed links to the semantic representation of the

words in memory. The visual cues, on the other hand, can be unreliable as the associations formed between visual cues and words are hard to remember because they are unsystematic and arbitrary. Unless the words are read frequently and become familiar, visually similar words can easily be mistaken for one another because the visual cues selected are not unique to individual words. Skilled readers may use the visual cues and the phonological cues to encode words depending on word frequency.

Catalado and Ellis, (2010) are more definite about the frontline role of phonological recoding in the word recognition processes. They proposed the Universal Phonological Principle which is based on the assumption that contact with printed words automatically arouses phonological properties associated with the words. In other words, the phonological activation always occurs in the word recognition process. Phonological activation is a necessary step in the reading process. Phonological activation does not only serve word identification, it also has important function in the comprehension process. Word recognition process is to be promoted by ensuring that learners acquire phonological awareness skill.

If the phonological representation of the identified word is not sustained in working memory, the comprehension processes will not have the raw materials to operate efficiently and thus understanding of the text will be impaired (Bergeron, 2010). Adams (2010) further illustrates the role of phonological representation in working memory: Without the mnemonic support of the spelling-to-sound connections, the visual system must eventually become overwhelmed. Spelling-sound regularity refers to the

consistency of the mapping between the letters in the word and the sounds in its pronunciation. Regular words are those whose pronunciations reflect common spelling-sound correspondences; whereas irregular words are those whose pronunciations reflect atypical correspondences (Cunningham and Stanovich, 2010). In order to expand on the relationship between letter-sound knowledge and spelling it is first necessary to distinguish between phonically 'regular' and 'irregular' words. All words fit into one or the other category. Regular words are defined in the first instance as any word in which each letter represents its respective, most common sound (Gilbertson and Bramlett, 2011). However as an individual's knowledge of letter-sounds, letter combinations and orthographic rules increases, a greater number of words may be systematically analyzed, converted to sound and pronounced. Irregular words, at the early stage of literacy acquisition, are defined as 'any word in which one or more letters does not represent its most common sound' (Goodman, 2010). Thus to a beginning reader, with limited knowledge of letter-sound combinations many words will be classified as 'irregular'.

Denckla, (2013) asserts that as he had gathered spelling data from pre-scholars with no formal reading and spelling instruction, memorization of words at this early stage was unlikely. He also ruled out direct instruction and copying. Based on these observations and analysis that showed most words were spelt consistently incorrectly by different children in the sample. Phonemic segmentation and categorization as well as other cognitive processes applied to language exerted the greatest influence on beginning spelling: Whatever variations there may be in individual development, the crucial conclusion remains that children can, (and to some degree, must) make abstract

inferences about the sound system of their language before they learn to read and write. Children's consistent error patterns could not have been the result of adult intervention because children are unlikely to be exposed to models of incorrectly spelt words. This view is shared by (Davidson and Jenkins, 2014) who argued that children have the skill to work out how language works and by extension generate their own spellings of words based on their limited knowledge of the alphabet. Learners should be presented with tasks which involve jumbled up letters for them to organize into a familiar word. Materials like flash cards bearing familiar words should be displayed on walls of classroom to ensure that children are acquainted with the letters that make up a word.

Beginning reading strategies may include using a salient feature of a word or a cluster of letters to recognize a word (Ehri, 2010) segmentation at the point of onset-rhyme to identify the rhyme in new words by analogy to known words (Frith, 2011), or the application of letter-sound correspondences to decode a word systematically (Gentry, 2012). An associated component of this research concerns reading comprehension and it is assumed that if children are to understand readily what they read automatic decoding of words is necessary (Frith, 2011). Brown, (2010) provide abundant evidence to support the understanding that children who are severely impaired in recognizing familiar words in the elementary grades will continue to be impaired in English reading throughout their educational career if they do not receive appropriate remediation. However, there is also evidence to show that the majority of the pupils who encounter early reading difficulties can be brought up to grade level if they are provided with early, individualized, and intensive intervention.

There is evidence to support that interventions given in a small group format can substantially reduce the number of pupils who experience long term reading problems (Bentin and Leshem, 2013). Exposure to reading materials like picture books will provide opportunities for teachers to help children to learn sight words. This will enable learners to transit to Standard one with reading abilities thus provides opportunities for acquisition of English Reading. This research wished to investigate the ability of learners to recognize familiar words in the reading process. Instruction in ECDE centers should ensure adequate preparation on Reading Readiness skills. This is because learners need to identify alphabetical letters by their form and sound. They should be able to read familiar words and decode any written work within their level. Since Vygotsky's (1986) learning theory is based on the idea that children learn by connecting new knowledge to previously learned knowledge, it includes learners using scaffolding to organize new information. If children cannot connect new knowledge to old knowledge in a meaningful way they may with difficulty memorize it (rote learning) but they will not have a real understanding of what they are learning basing on the vocabulary they acquire. The simplest way of noticing familiar word reading is by presenting the child's own name to see if they know the letters making up the name.

## **2.5 Print Awareness**

Print awareness is a child's understanding that print has a function. As children develop print awareness they begin to understand the connection between oral and written language. A child with well developed print concepts knows several essential points that are necessary to reading acquisition. When developing print awareness children learn that print has meaning and is organized in a specific way; For example, a child may know that

the print tells a story, text on a page is read from left to right, progression through text moves from the top of the page where text is read, the story continues on the following page and that the white spaces between groups of letters represent a break between word boundaries. Before entering Kindergarten, many children begin to construct meaning from print and learn its conventions, including directionality, the concept of word and punctuation (Clay, 2003; Justice and Ezell, 2001). Jean Piaget (1980) proposes that children should be given items to manipulate using movements that require them to engage their eyes, arms and hands in top bottom and left right 'directions'. Knowledge of print forms is the understanding that print concepts can be named and distinguished for example *p* is a letter and 9 is a number; words and letters differ. Understanding of print conventions is the knowledge that print has an organizational scheme for example; English is read from left to right and top to bottom.

Stanovich, (2013) describes the "Matthew Effect Phenomenon" where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. By this, he refers to children who acquire pre reading skills early in life and become successful readers and those who develop reading difficulties due to lack of exposure to pre reading skills. According to Clay, (2003) concepts of print have been found to support reading acquisition. Children's interaction with environmental print is another key aspect of print awareness. Awareness of environmental print like signs and logos in four year olds may be indicative of a print rich home environment, a factor associated with early literacy development. Children who have interacted with a print rich environment will be able to hold a book with spine on the left and cover facing up. They are able to recognize the letters in words. Although



environmental print is a necessary step in reading attainment, children must move beyond that understanding to an understanding of the alphabetic principle. Therefore, teachers should not underestimate the simple tasks that enable reading achievement.

Scarborough (2005), adds that print awareness concepts have been related to other measures of Reading Readiness such as phonological awareness. A child's awareness of the forms, function and use of print provides the foundation upon which reading and writing abilities are built. Children begin building concepts about print through literacy based interactions with adults in their lives at a very young age. Infants as young as 8 months of age begin handling picture books turning pages and actually babbling in a reading like manner (Snow et al, 2004). Children demonstrate print awareness when they scribble on a piece of paper and bring it to the adult. They know that marks on a paper have meaning and a reader can interpret those marks. Learners who have difficulties reading in early years, keep asking, "What does this say?" This is quite frustrating and helping them with understanding print concepts becomes a successful beginning to a lifetime of reading. As a child interacts with print-rich environment, meaning is first provided by familiar visual clues around print (Kassow, 2006). Print awareness is such an exciting piece of early literacy puzzle. In developing print awareness a child begins to understand how print works and the fact that it carries meaning (Strickland and schickedanz, 2004). This study sought to investigate if a learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression facilitates the performance of English Reading in Standard one. Other researchers have cited print awareness as a component that measures Reading Readiness.

There is evidence of print awareness when a child is able to hold a book in the right way and distinguish between letters and words. They may scribble on paper and ask an adult to read what they wrote. Children from age 3 to 5 develop print awareness when adults engage them in activities that build their early literacy skills like letter sound correspondence and word reading. They should be allowed to play with letters of the alphabet, use pocket charts that can be used to develop words using letters on cards and be given opportunities to read labeled object on centers of classroom. Environmental print is a sample measure of pretending to read, and pretending to read is a component of emergent reading. Emergent reading consists of a set of skills and processes referred to as ‘outside-in’ processes which defined a child’s understanding of the context in which the print they are trying to read occurs (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Pre reading skills are to be introduced to children of between 3 to 5 years where finger pointing is to guide the reading progression.

There is a distinction between print and picture and this is important because it establishes a separate identity for print and allows children to begin learning about its function and structure (Christie, Enz & Vukelich, 2003). Print concepts including print forms, print conventions and book conventions are skills that provide contextual framework for interpreting printed information (Van Kleeck, 2003). When children see signs, labels, logos and print they utilize their already existing knowledge of the environment to understand the context of the print they see and they pretend to read it. Children are generally able to recognize environmental print before they are able to read print in books (Aldridge & Kuby, 2004). There is a distinction between environmental

print and print awareness. Print awareness is a set of skills that children gradually come to learn and understand whereas environmental print has to do with children's natural engagement with the environment (Lesiak, 2000). The main elements of print awareness include understanding the difference between letters and words, knowing that print is print no matter what tool is used to record (whether chalk or ink), understanding that print corresponds to speech and gradually learning the phonemes associated with different letters, understanding that words are read from left to right in English alphabet and that lines of text are read from top to bottom. Print awareness elements are the product of multiple experiences with print and are not developed one at a time (Durkin, 2010). Acquiring print concepts such as the reading progression is gradual. Learners who are exposed to print at an early age tend to begin reading much faster than those who are not engaged with print activities such as being read to in left- right; top- bottom progression.

Children learn concepts of print through engagement in print- rich environment and that print awareness is related to reading achievement (Reutzel & Moore, 2003). The facts that these young children have not yet learnt to read, but have begun to recognize familiar print and logos; is interesting to think about in terms of what is occurring in their cognitive development during symbolism period. One of the most important cognitive achievements of Early Childhood and the early school years is the ability to understand and use symbols (Bialystok & Martin, 2003). Children begin to demonstrate the appearance of symbolic function at around the age of two young children begin to develop the ability to make something represent another which is not present there and then. This skill is often seen during symbolic play such as when a child uses a cardboard

as a racecar. Universally, children acquire language and master symbolic artifacts of their culture (Lillard, 2000). However, becoming skilled in symbolic functions is quite challenging and does not happen in a stage-like manner, but rather depends on the characteristics of the symbol itself and the context of the situation (DeLoache, 2000). Children who are 4 and 5 years, given tasks such as ‘moving word tasks’ should be able to display symbolism. During these tasks, children are presented with a word card bearing a word such as *dog*, the card is placed beside a toy dog. The card is then placed next to a toy car. Under these two contexts of card placement, the child is asked what is written on card. If they understand that print is symbolic, they will know that the card read ‘dog’ no matter where it is placed. When children ‘read’ environmental print, they are actually reading the graphic cues around the print. When contextual cues are withdrawn, children have great difficulty identifying environmental print (Bialystok & Martin, 2003). Basing on this, the researcher sought to find out if learners utilized print awareness in reading their own names without memorizing. The learners of between 5 and 7 years in Standard one should have gone beyond symbolism and be able to read print without environmental graphic cues like pictures and models.

Print awareness is a necessary foundational skill that children must possess in order to become proficient readers. Print awareness is developed through daily adult child interactions with print in the child’s environment and through shared reading experiences. Print awareness can be increased with structured adult-child shared reading that includes an explicit focus on print using both verbal and non verbal cues. Shared reading accelerates pre reading skills. This helps learners who would otherwise been at risk for

later reading difficulties. Use of consistent and sustained print referencing during shared reading is a prerequisite to later reading. Preschool learners whose teachers use shared reading with explicit print references demonstrate high achievement in Kindergarten and Standard one compared to those learners whose teachers used a more traditional approach to shared reading. By embedding explicit referencing within preschool curriculum, teachers are able to significantly reduce risk for later reading difficulties. Using explicit print referencing during shared reading is a particularly powerful strategy for increasing children's pre reading skills because it requires few resources and can be easily embedded in existing instruction. And with little formal training parents and caregivers can increase the child's print awareness by engaging in shared reading activities that include print referencing (Adams, 2010). Later reading difficulties are reduced by ensuring adult-child shared reading in early years. Instructors and caregivers should therefore expose young children to print rich environment.

Early literacy theory emphasizes the more natural unfolding of skills through the enjoyment of books, the importance of positive interactions between young children and adults and the critical role of literacy rich experiences. Formal instruction to require young children who are not developmentally ready to read is counterproductive and potentially damaging to children, they may begin to associate reading and books with failure (Hart and Risley, 2002). Two powerful ways to support the development of print awareness in young children is through adult-child shared story book reading and ensuring print rich environment. Children benefit on gaining steady eye movement from such opportunities (It includes knowing that books are organized from left to right; the

words are read from left to right, and top to bottom (Justice and Kaderavek, 2002). According to Githinji and Wanjohi (2009), spatial perception has to do with the ability to recognize the spaces within printed information, notice the difference between items, objects, letters, words, lines and paragraph and be able to remember the spaces when it comes to reading and writing. This will include activities such as eye-brain coordination and left right movement of eyes. A child with a problem noticing space will combine words which are not supposed to be combined in reading and writing. Formal assessments should include reading assessment where learners are provided with short sentences or paragraph to test eye-brain coordination (left right; top bottom progression of text).

The interest of the researcher was to find out if learners have been given opportunities to interact with books and be able to realize that text is read in left right, top bottom progression. The instructors may not be using pointers to read on chalkboard to ensure eye movement in the right direction while reading simple sentences. If learners will not be able to read as required then it will affect acquisition of reading. This study also sought to find out if children have acquired spatial perception where white spaces are meant to separate words. Reading in left right, top bottom progression helps learners to realize continuity of text.

Looking at early literacy development as a dynamic developmental process, there is a connection between an infant mouthing a book, the book handling behavior of a two year old and the page turning of a five year old. The first three years of exploring and playing

with books, singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, recognizing words and scribbling are building blocks for language and literacy development. Learners grow in their ability to read when they understand that reading is a purposeful activity. This awareness that reading is purposeful evolves when children observe adults using reading in functional ways (on road signs, labels and reading for pleasure). Reading skills are developed with support of adults. Reading experiences influence oral language development as witnessed when children who encounter new words in print add these to their speaking vocabularies. Literacy develops as children gain experience with oral language and print thus success in reading (Schickedanz, 2004). This foundation however is not built automatically. It requires active participation with adults in print-focused interactions that are appropriate in a cognitive, emotional, social and physical sense (Adam, 2010; Snow, et al, 2004). Providing age appropriate print is essential since a three year old will find picture reading interesting compared to a 7 year old.

A child may use self-determined symbols or letters to represent whole words or syllables or scribbles which may be meaningless to adults, but which the child can read to tell about the drawing that was made. Children that spend time with books and printed materials are beginning to construct their own understanding of the reading process. Computers may be equipped with age appropriate software to offer satisfying, child friendly programs. While many programs use letters and numbers, incidentally, preschool word processing programs allow children to produce enlarged print and in some instances children can hear what they have written. Children may also use the mouse to draw and make scribbles and marks to accompany their drawing. Learners need to experience the

joy of being read to by an adult and also by other children. This interaction between the reader and the listener enhances children's interest in books and their ability to read. It allows children to empathize with characters in the story and relate their own personal experiences to the story. Children are also able to acquire and extend many skills that they use as independent readers. They learn left right top bottom sequence in reading and also learn that pictures provide context clues and build a sight vocabulary, among other things. Children also learn to predict the sequence of a story. Acquiring such skills however, is secondary to the experience of being read to, a satisfaction that enhances children's interest in books (Hohmann and Weikart, 2008). With technological advances, children should be exposed to computer programmes that are age appropriate. The software is to be programmed to cater for learner's interest through coloured graphics and voiced print.

It is actually during the preschool years that children come to know that print conveys meaning and they acquire an increasingly sophisticated understanding of print forms (Justice and Ezell, 2001). Clay, (2003) asserts that children who have heard many stories read to them develop awareness that book language is different from spoken language. Clay's assertion was supported in a series of studies by Justice & Ezell,(2001) and Bakeman, (2002) which showed that adult- child shared story book reading experiences that involve discussion about print increases children's knowledge of important print concepts like reading in left- right top bottom progression. Learners begin to realize that written words on a page are matched to the words spoken when reading aloud; they understand how oral language is represented by words. Each word in itself is made up of



individual letters of the alphabet, each with its own shape and name (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Through experiences in being read to, children move beyond this understanding that print conveys meaning to a more comprehensive view of book knowledge.

Through adult child shared reading, a child gets to know how to hold a book; where reading begins and how to turn pages. When an instructor points to a few words and pictures as they read, children learn to follow the meaningful print and begin to understand the differences between print and pictures (Schickedanz & Caspergue, 2005). The ability to discriminate letters and words visually, depended on the development of print concepts and directly influenced grapheme phoneme correspondence knowledge (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007). For children to become skilled readers (Gillet and Temple 2010), they will also need to develop a rich conceptual knowledge base and verbal reasoning abilities to understand messages conveyed through print. Successful reading ultimately consists of knowing a relatively small tool kit of unconscious procedural skills, accompanied by a massive and slowly built-up store of conscious content knowledge. It is the higher-order thinking skills, knowledge, and dispositional capabilities that enable young children to come to understand what they are reading. These capabilities will benefit children in answering comprehension questions as English reading advances to higher grades.

Lundberg and Petersen (2009), explain that schemas provide children with the conceptual apparatus for making sense of the world around them by classifying incoming bits of

information into similar groupings. Children's earliest experiences become organized or structured into schemas, the building blocks of cognition. Liberman and Shankweiler (2015), for example, provided a compelling case for schemas and their usefulness for recalling information about stories. Well-read to children internalize vocabulary and a set of expectations of how stories are told which enhances their understanding. Knowledge becomes easier to access producing more knowledge networks. And those with a rich knowledge base find it easier to learn and remember (Groff, 2010). Gillet and Temple (2010) identified a set of conventions that could be understood without being able to read. These conventions included, among others, the directionality of print in a book (left-to-right, top-to-bottom, and front-to-back), differences between pictures and print, uses of punctuation, and definitional characteristics of a letter and a word. Knowing these conventions, she found, helped in the process of learning to read. After a learner has acquired phonemic and phonological awareness he or she should be able to read in left right, top bottom progression and realize that a story continues to the next page.

Lundberg and Petersen (2009), demonstrated the relationship of these skills to later reading success, however, there is little evidence to suggest the predictive power of these skills on later achievement. Rather, print conventions act as an immediate indicator of children's familiarity with text, and are not integrally related to the other language based skills associated with reading success. Therefore, while such conventions might be helpful to young children in navigating through books, these skills may not in the long run play a powerful role in learning to read. Children who are English language learners experience each of these critical dimensions in the context of learning two languages,

which only increases the complexity of the processes of language and literacy development. In order to become proficient in their second language, young children will need to familiarize with the phonology to the second language, its vocabulary (typical everyday discourse as well as academic vocabulary, its morphology and grammar (Goswami and Bryant, 2010). Knowledge of book conventions is the understanding of how books are created, how they function and how they are organized. The distinction between print and pictures is one of the first concepts that children learn about literacy. Children need an orientation to print and meaning in some general sense as a foundation for learning more specifically about alphabet principles related to print and reading (Puranik, Lonigan and Young-Suk 2011). Explicit exposure to books enables learners to interact with print conventions. Adult child reading comes in handy in early years as learners through scaffolding get the right model of word pronunciation. It was important therefore to find out if teachers offer help to learners on how to hold books early in time and ensure development of print concepts. Children should be exposed to books which have short stories as early as preschool. This will ensure that learners develop print awareness. This research sought to find out if there was print rich environment in school that enabled learners develop print awareness.

Reading in left right top bottom progression can flourish only when children displace the belief that print is like pictures with the insight that written words are comprised of letters that, in turn map to speech sounds. Even as children begin to learn about spellings, they must also develop more sophisticated understandings of the forces beyond pictures and individual words that direct meaning (Clay, 2011). It is generally accepted that children

do not proceed from being non-readers and non-spellers to proficient readers and writers instantly. Instead, children appear to move through a predictable series of broad overlapping stages of reading and spelling achievement (Brown, 2010). Learners spell words when they can decode the sounds. They will then encode the words they read and visualize what is communicated in print. By then, they can tell that print is purposeful.

Clay, (2011) was one of the earliest writers to describe the reading progression in discrete periods of development: getting ready to read; acquiring initial skills; rapidly perfecting skills; applying reading skills; and refining reading practices, tastes and attitudes. While Clay's stages indicated the progression children made from novice to competent readers, the stages were signaled by very general reading behaviour. A number of models have emerged in recent times that attempt to chart, more precisely, children's knowledge of how print works. Well before children begin to learn to read and spell they have accrued different experiences with print. Most children are exposed to everything from cereal boxes to street signs while others are read to and encouraged to look at books in the home. 'Print awareness' refers to general understandings of the nature and function of print, rather than knowledge about specific letters or words. The importance of teaching children how to hold a book, which way to turn the pages and in which direction to read the words is that they will engage in meaningful reading. Denckla, (2013) explained that children must also understand that it is print that represents speech, not the white spaces between words or the illustrations. Print awareness has been shown to have a moderate correlation with reading ability in the Primary grades. Castle, (2014) proposed a two stage model of beginning reading that identified and explained the shift between young

children's ability to read in left right top bottom progression. These writers isolated two components of reading, word recognition and systematic decoding. They argued most children develop insights into the nature and functions of print by being read to and interacting with books and writing. From this, children become aware that print encodes language and thus are able to enter the first stage of the reading process by learning to read in left right top bottom progression, the pairing of partial stimulus cue, such as a single letter, or the shape of the word, to a response (Castle and Nicholson, 2014). Learners should be allowed to interact with reading materials in Early Childhood to ensure development of print awareness where one understands that books are held with spine on the left and top cover facing up. This prepares learners to open pages in the right way leading to correct reading progression.

Davidson and Jenkins, (2014) reported that children with no means of remembering words other than visual cues tend to associate words with their meanings with whatever salient cue is available. Ability to read in left right top bottom progression has been identified by other writers as a critical stage of reading development because children can, without help, read unfamiliar texts (Denckla, 2013; Frith, 2011). Another stage model of reading development that emphasized the importance of decoding was put forward by Ehri, (2010). The researcher however sought to investigate a learner's ability to read text in left right, top bottom progression to realize continuity of text as this facilitates English reading.

## 2.6 Review of Related Studies.

The Uwezo survey (2011) was a study carried out in three countries Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. English and Numeracy tests were administered to learners of between 7 to 16 years of age. The main objective being the impact of literacy and Numeracy levels on learning outcomes. The English tests entailed: reading a letter (letter sound), reading a word, reading a paragraph and reading and comprehending a short story. It applied stratified random sampling procedure to select sub groups of schools and households to which subjects were obtained from using simple random sampling. The findings were that while Kenyan and Tanzanian children perform approximately the same on numeracy tests, 20% more Kenyan children are able to pass Literacy tests (76% versus 50%). On average Ugandan children perform worst on all tests – less than 4 in 10 children aged 10 to 16 display both Numeracy and Literacy skills at Standard 2 level. According to Uwezo Kenya 2011 Report, 1 out of 5 children in Standard 4 cannot read this simple Standard two paragraph.

*Sarah has one brother,  
His name is Tom,  
Tom is six years old,  
He is in class one.*

Learning levels are poorest in arid and semi-arid regions. The same applies to Western region of Kenya. This was attributed to teacher absenteeism and low teacher-pupil ratio. On average, every Kenyan Primary school has a shortage of 4 teachers. Also, on a single day 13 out of 100 teachers are not in school and 3 out of 100 children seated in classroom may be having poor eyesight. The researcher observes that this study left out the basic underpinnings of Education where Early Childhood teachers are to be adequately prepared with pedagogical skills that promote acquisition of language and numeracy

skills. This will ensure mastery of Reading Readiness skills that lead to acquisition of English reading.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment is a study that was conducted in Kenya by RTI funded by USAID-Washington and USAID-Kenya. It was piloted in 2007 and the research study conducted in 2009 involving Luo-Nyanza region and central Kenya. The main objective of this study was to investigate the skills of children in mother tongue, English and Kiswahili in context of mother tongue language policy. Classroom observation data was collected that specifically looked at what languages were used in classrooms. This observational data was matched with pupil achievement data to determine whether different mixes of language use was correlated with pupil outcomes.

The assessment involved subtasks such as letter naming fluency, phonemic awareness familiar word fluency, oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. The findings were that pupils leave the early grades with very low levels of reading skills.

This study however found EGRA assessment viewing reading skills from a very broad spectrum involving skills used in mother tongue, English and Kiswahili. The study wished to find out the deficits of Reading Readiness skills that hinder preparedness for Standard one in Primary schools. It examined various pre reading skills exhibited by learners on subtasks given and obtained useful information from respondents by use of questionnaire.

## **2.7 Summary of Literature Review**

In regard to Reading Readiness skills there have been many researchers with various views on Alphabetic recognition, letter sound correspondence, word recognition and reading in left right, top bottom progression. Learners' knowledge of letters is a strong predictor of his or her success in reading that when they are able to discriminate letter forms early enough, it becomes a seemingly obvious prerequisite for learning to read (Snow, 2004; Adam, 2010; Pallatsek and Rayner, 2007). Learning of letter names help children understand alphabetic principle and will reap long term benefits in reading acquisition (Scott and Ehri, 2013; Stanovich, 2013, Lyon, 2002; Murray, 2000 and Ndiaye, 2010). Chard and Osborn, (2000) disagree with Ehri, 2003 by saying that the goal of phonics is to teach the alphabetic principle. Ehri (2003); Catalado and Ellis, (2010) and Badenhop, (2013) assert that alphabet recognition is especially important because it is critical for understanding phonics. Rohl and Tunmer,(2010); Goodman,(2010); Gillet and Temple,(2010) and Gilbertson,( 2011) agree that learning Alphabetical letters is the first step to learning to read. The study sought to investigate the relationship between the learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance in English reading in Standard one. Though the previous studies have clearly explained the importance of letter knowledge as a predictor of success in reading, most schools in Primary level still face great challenges in reading for comprehension. In Early Childhood centres recitation is done but letter recognition is not emphasized yet the two, recitation and recognition of alphabetic letters, are inseparable. Learners recite letter sounds at onset of schooling as they do not have the grasp of recognition. Immediately they are able to recite, then letter recognition is emphasized through interesting activities



such as modelling, printing, cutting out letter shapes and using varied colours to display letters. Letter knowledge should begin by introduction of letter sounds then letter shapes. After the introduction of letter shapes (upper case paired with lowercase) is successful, teaching of letter names is done. This will be the foundational building blocks of successful reading.

Identifying letter sounds guides reading because segmentation and blending helps in word formation (McGuinness, 2013; Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn, 2003). Light and McNaughton, (2012) argue that letter sounds should be taught before letter names, that knowledge of letter names can interfere with success of decoding. That a learner may look at a word and begin to think of letter names. Caldwell and Leslie, ( 2005); Spector, (2006) agree that children are to be taught to segment and blend with instruction in letter sound relationship. Griffith and Priscilla (2003); Adam, (2010); Bentin and Leshem (2013); Adams (2010), Torgesen and Mathes, (2000) assert that phonemic awareness improves word attack skills as learners are able to acquire correct letter-sound correspondence on looking at a word. Fawcett and Nicholson, (2011); Juel, (2000) and Put Reading First, (2003) are in agreement that reading performance is influenced by phonemic awareness. This is because learners may only memorize words associated with pictures or activities without the knowledge of phonics. The deficit of phonemic awareness may persist overtime. Gillet and Temple (2010); Goodman, (2010); Gilbertson, (2011); Liberman and Shankweiler, (2015) agree that the alphabetic principle focuses on the letter-sound correspondence, word blending and links the phonemes (sounds) and graphemes to the spelling of words. Understanding the alphabetic principle

is necessary in both reading and writing. Bergeron, (2010); Brown, (2010); Bryant, (2010); Gilbertson, (2011); Ellis, (2012); Denckla, (2013); Davidson and Jenkins, (2014) reiterate the importance of teaching blending and segmentation as they are phonological awareness tasks. The ability to encode and decode words is affected by individual's existing knowledge of letter - sound - correspondences. The study therefore, wishes to find out if phonemic awareness facilitates English reading at Standard one. This is because of the knowledge gap as seen in previous research that learning letter names first causes difficulty in letter decoding. In the study's hypothesis, letter sounds should be learnt first followed by letter names. This allows a learner to sound all letters of the alphabet before the names. This leads to successful word segmentation and phoneme blending; thus acquisition of the reading skills in English.

In a child's brain is Word Form Area that processes connections between written word, letter sound and meaning. As children interact with print rich environment they build up a network of connections thus more meaningful reading. Therefore, learners should be helped to pair up initial letter of a written word with initial sound of its pronunciation (Adams, 2010; Ehri, 2010; Kuiper and Scott, 2004; Sandak, Menci, Frost and Pugh, 2004; Duncan, Seymour and Hill, 2010). Children with no means of remembering words other than visual cues tend to associate words with their meanings with whatever salient cue is available in form of graphic or real object. Phonological cues for reading are more reliable than visual codes as they make use of a system of rules (Bryant, 2010; Catalado and Ellis, 2010; Cunningham, 2010; Gillet and Temple, 2010; Gilbertson, 2011; Clay, 2011; Badenhop, 2013; Davidson and Jenkins, 2014). The study agrees with the previous

studies on basis of forming connections between letter sounds and meaning but then wishes to emphasize scaffolding activities in blending and segmentation which will help the learner to recognize familiar words.

Print Awareness promotes successful reading as learners gain steady eye-brain coordination that allows them to follow text in left-right, top bottom progression. Print concepts are developed when children interact with environmental print to allow them realize spaces within printed information and be able to appreciate the fact that any text has meaning or tells a story (Piaget, 1980;Clay, 2001; Snow, 2004; Justice and Ezell, 2001;Justice and Kaderavek,2002;Castle,2014).

The study however sought to investigate a learner's ability to read text in left right, top bottom progression to realize continuity of text. Learners should be allowed to interact with reading materials in Early Childhood to ensure development of print awareness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises research design, study area, target population, sampling procedures and sample size, research instruments, validity of research instruments, reliability of research instruments, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design. Orodho (2009) states that, “a survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals.” A survey design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning acquisition of Reading Readiness skills. It described acquisition of pre reading skills using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed method approach was chosen as the best way to triangulate or combine the methodologies to fit this particular area of study. Proponents of quantitative research methods criticized qualitative methods for lack of numerical data to explain and provide proof of the researcher’s examination of the problem. However, mixed methodologies highlights the significant contributions of each method and provide a more comprehensive and analytic summary of the study. It offered the potential for deeper understandings of the research question and attempted to bridge the rifts between qualitative and quantitative paradigms (Viedero, 2005). The method allowed the researcher to draw from the strengths of qualitative and quantitative designs and

minimized their weaknesses in one study. Mixed method opened the potential for future research of a specific topic and helped to advance the concepts and paradigms (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this study mixed methods were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English Reading in Standard one.

### 3.3 Study Area.

The study area was Keiyo Sub County, Elgeyo Marakwet County. Elgeyo Marakwet County is found in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. It borders the large farms of Uasin Gishu County to the west, Baringo County to the East and West Pokot to the North. The County has four Sub Counties: Marakwet East, Marakwet West, Keiyo South and Keiyo Sub County. The languages of the catchment area are Keiyo, Tugen and Marakwet.

### 3.4 Target Population

The respondents were Standard one and ECDE teachers and Standard one learners in Keiyo Sub County, Elgeyo Marakwet County. Keiyo Sub County has two Divisions, Tambach and Kamariny.

**Table 3.1: Target population**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>Number of Pupils</b>
<b>Tambach</b>	Kessup	16	48	670
	Kaptum	17	51	725
<b>Kamariny</b>	Kamariny	25	75	383
	Bugar	25	75	510
<b>Total</b>		83	249	2288

**Source: Keiyo Sub County Director of Education Records, 2016.**

### 3.5 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Sampling is the process of selecting a sub-set of cases in order to draw conclusions about the entire set whereas a sample is a subset of the population which is actually investigated by a researcher and whose characteristics will be generalized to the whole population Orodho (2009). The study sampled schools from the target population using the stratified sampling procedure. The sample size should be large enough to ensure that the stratum represents the population. According to Borg and Gall, (2003) a sample size of 30% is adequate and good for representation of the target population of a study.

**Table 3.2 Sample Size**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Sample size for Schools</b>	<b>Sample size for Teachers</b>
<b>Tambach</b>	Kessup	5	15
	Kaptum	5	15
<b>Kamariny</b>	Kamariny	8	24
	Bugar	8	24
<b>Total</b>		26	78

### 3.6 Research Instruments

The EGRA Checklist and questionnaire were used as research instruments to collect data from learner and teacher respondents respectively.

#### 3.6.1 EGRA Checklist

This research utilized instruments such as an assessment test with subtasks as a reading test for Standard one learner. The sub-tasks tested the Reading Readiness Skills acquired by learners using Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool. This is a tool used to measure learners' progress towards learning to read. It is a test administered orally to one learner at a time. In about fifteen minutes, it examines a learner's ability to perform basic

Pre-reading and reading skills (Research Triangle Institute, 2009). Each component assessed was either correct or incorrect according to the pupil's response.

### **3.6.2 Teachers Questionnaire**

According to Kombo and Tromp, (2006) a questionnaire is a research instrument that gathers data over a large sample. It can reach a large number of subjects who are able to read and write independently. Questionnaire were developed for Standard one teacher and ECDE teachers. It was organized as per the objectives and consisted of the following sections: Section A, for questions concerning background of study, section B involved questions relating to ability to recite and recognize alphabetic letters, section C for questions regarding ability to correspond letters to their sounds, section D dealt with questions regarding recognizing a familiar word, section E sought responses concerning reading in left right; top bottom progression and Section F sought responses on indicators of Performance of English Reading. Unstructured questions were also presented to respondents as they allowed for their own views to be supplied. More information was obtained through the open ended questions to offer qualitative data.

### **3.7 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted in Keiyo South Sub- County which is a neighbour to Keiyo Sub County where actual research was to be carried out. The study adopted a test retest technique to assess reliability of instruments. A sample, 10% of the target respondents was given questionnaire and a test. A post- test was administered two weeks after the first one. The scores on the two occasions were then correlated to estimate the reliability coefficient.

### **3.7.1 Validity of Research Instruments**

Validity is the degree to which results obtained from analysis of the data actually represented phenomena under study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). To ensure the instruments were valid, the University appointed supervisors appraised them and gave further suggestions for improvement of face validity. For external validity, a pilot study was necessary so as to correct ambiguity on questions and eliminate biases. To ensure content validity the researcher gave adequate questions regarding one variable under investigation.

### **3.7.2 Reliability of Research Instruments**

Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) define reliability as a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials. An instrument is reliable when it can measure a variable accurately and obtain the same results over a period of time. However reliability in research is affected by random errors, thus Pre-test helped the study identify the most likely source of errors and hence respond to before the actual study. The study adopted a test re-test method of measuring reliability. A test re-test survey was conducted among randomly selected respondents (not included in the main study). The study randomly administered questionnaire to the same respondents on two occasions. The first time the test was given was referred to as (T1) and the second time was referred to as (T2). The test was measured on 9 respondents on two separate occasions. The scores on the two occasions were then correlated to estimate the reliability coefficient also known as the coefficient of stability. The findings were as presented in Table; 3.3



**Table 3.3: Test re-test results**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
		Mean	Std. Deviation
Test 1 (T1)		4.5833	1.62979
Test 2 (T2)		4.6811	1.21745
<b>Correlations of the two scores (T1 and T2)</b>			
		Test1	Test 2
Test 1(T1)	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>.958(**)</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	9	9
Test 2(T2)	Pearson Correlation	.958(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	9	9

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A high degree of reliability of the two scores (T1 and T2) with a strong positive coefficient of stability ( $r=0.958$ ) was established. The findings of the test re-test reliability indicate that the data collection instrument (questionnaire) provided consistent results overtime and was sufficiently reliable to be used in the main study.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher sought a Formal Research Authority from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation by submitting an introduction letter from the department of Curriculum and Instruction of the University of Eldoret. Authority to collect data from Primary schools was sought from Elgeyo Marakwet County Commissioner's Office. The researcher visited schools, assessed learners using Early

Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) instrument and issued copies of questionnaire to ECDE and Standard one teachers.

### **3.9 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data Analysis is the process of bringing orderly structure and meaning to the mass of information collected. It involves examining what has been collected and making deductions and inferences (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Quantitative data from the questionnaire was coded and entered into the computer for computation with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data from the open ended questions were organized into themes and findings analyzed thematically. Quantitative information from the EGRA tool was also analyzed in percentages. In quantitative techniques, the researcher used descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and means to analyze and summarize the data while in inferential statistics, the Multiple Regression analysis technique was used to determine the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The following multiple regression analysis formula was employed:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + e$$

Where:

The independent variables -

$X_1$  = Recognition of alphabetical letters

$X_2$  = Letter sound correspondence

$X_3$  = Familiar word reading

$X_4$  = Reading progression

$\varepsilon$  = error term.

Y = the dependent variable (Performance of English Reading)

Independent Variable Coefficients are;

$b_1$ =coefficient of  $X_1$

$b_1$ =coefficient of  $X_2$

$b_1$ =coefficient of  $X_3$

$b_1$ =coefficient of  $X_4$

e = Error margin

Like correlation, regression analysis assumes that the relationship between variables is linear. The data was analyzed and then presented by use of tables and percentages that were generated by the data analysis tools. This was done with an aim of ensuring that the data would be easily interpreted and understood by anyone reading the document.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher sought an informed consent from head teachers and teacher respondents of sampled schools prior to the study. This is because prior information and seeking consent allowed respondents to be ready for participation in the study. It was also important to maintain confidentiality and privacy; therefore no individual's or school names were recorded on data collection instruments. The researcher ensured the purpose of research was clearly explained to respondents to allow them respond freely. The statements on questionnaire took care of respondents' psychological stability and therefore no question was to provoke psychological feelings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings of the study, analysis, interpretations and discussions of the results. The results were presented according to the designed objectives of the study which were to establish the relationship between a learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and the performance of English Reading in Standard one, to determine if learners' ability to correspond letters with their correct sound enhances performance of English Reading in Standard one, to find out whether learners' ability to recognize a familiar word enhances performance of English Reading in Standard one and to find out if learners' ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression facilitates the performance of English Reading in Standard one. The results were presented in the following section starting with the general and demographic characteristics of the study respondents and then the descriptive and inferential results.

#### **4.2 General and Demographic Information of the Respondents**

The study was conducted in Keiyo Sub- County, Elgeyo Marakwet County. The respondents included Standard one teachers, ECDE teachers and Standard one pupils. The study investigated the influence of Reading Readiness Skills on performance of English reading in Standard one. The independent variable was Reading Readiness skills while the dependent variable was Performance of English Reading in Standard one.

### 4.2.1 Teachers' Demographic Information

The sex of the teachers who participated in the study was determined and the results are presented in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Sex of Respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Male</b>	6	7.7
<b>Female</b>	72	92.3
<b>Total</b>	78	100.0

Table 4.1 shows that 72 (92.3%) of the teachers who participated in the study were female while 6 (7.7%) of the teacher respondents were male. This was important because according to Scozzaro and Subich (2007), gender and occupational sex type differences influenced job outcomes. The disparity found in sex of these teacher respondents is influenced by the gender roles defined by the African culture where women are to be care givers in early years of a child. Most men therefore, find it appropriate to undertake teaching lessons in upper Primary and beyond. A combined effort is needed in provision of Reading Readiness Skills to ensure learners transit from ECDE to Primary with good performance of English reading.

**Table 4.2 Academic Qualifications of Respondents**

The academic qualifications of teachers who participated in the study was determined and the results presented in Table 4.2

<b>Academic qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>O-level</b>	3	3.8
<b>Certificate</b>	31	39.7
<b>Diploma</b>	40	51.3
<b>Bachelor degree</b>	4	5.2
<b>Total</b>	78	100.0

As shown in Table 4.2 the study findings indicated that 40 (51%) of the teachers were Diploma qualification holders. It was established that 31(39.7%) had certificate while 4(5.2%) had Bachelor degrees. Further Table 4.2 indicates that only 3(3.8%) had O-level qualification. More than half (50%) of the respondent teachers had Diploma qualifications which meant that they were adequately prepared to handle children in early years. It was important to establish if the teachers handling ECDE were trained since Kenya's National and County governments are committed to ensuring access to quality Pre- primary Education as enshrined in Basic Education Act, 2012 and County Pre- primary Education Bill, 2015.

**Table; 4.3 Teachers' Work Experience**

Work experience of teachers who participated in the study was also sought and the results presented in Table 4.3

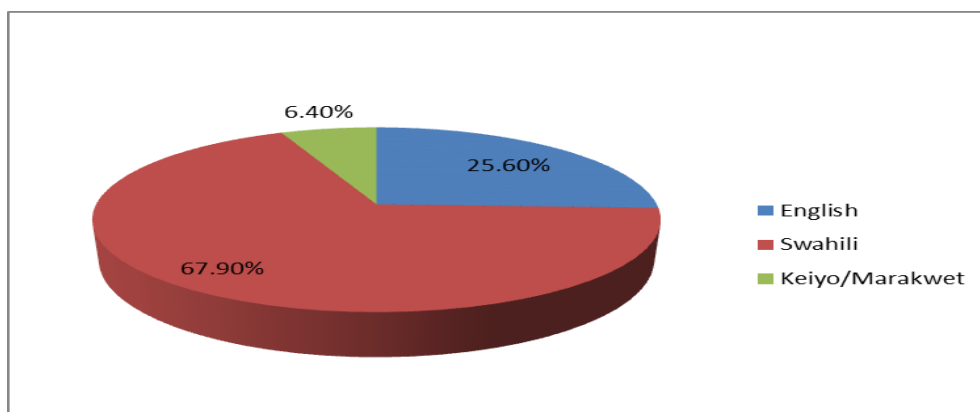
<b>Below 5 years</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9.0</b>
6-10 years	38	48.7
11-15 years	12	15.4
16-20 years	10	12.8
Over 21 years	11	14.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Findings indicate that 38(48.7%) had a work experience of between 6 to 10 years. It was established that 12(15.4%) had worked between 11 to 15 years while 11(14.1%) had worked for over 21 years. Another 10(12.8%) had work experience of 16 to 20 years while 7(9.0%) had work experience of less than 5 years. This finding implies that majority of teachers handling children in early years of their lives are well experienced to be able to manage classrooms of ECDE appropriately. This will enable them to attend to individual children's Reading Readiness deficits early in time.

#### 4.2.2 Language of instruction.

The language of instruction by the teachers who participated in the present study was determined and the established results are presented in figure 4.1

**Figure 4.1: Language of instruction.**



As shown in this figure (4.1), 67.9% of the teachers used Kiswahili as their language of instruction, 25.6% used English while 6.4 % used either Marakwet or Keiyo language. This study reveals that Swahili was commonly used as a medium of instruction. The cause of variation in the use of language of instruction is that Kenya's language policy

allows use of language of the catchment area in lower primary. This information was helpful as development of English reading depended on exposure to the language itself.

#### **4.2 Learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet**

The null hypothesis stated that there exists no significant relationship between learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English reading in Standard one. To be able to test this hypothesis, it was necessary to obtain responses from teachers.

Responses from teachers regarding learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet were rated using a 5 point likert scale. Particularly, the teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements about the learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet. These responses were then analyzed in terms of the extent to which they agreed with them, and therefore, tapping into their cognitive and affective components of their knowledge on the learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet. The findings are presented in Table 4.4.



**Table 4.4: Learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet**

Statement		SD	D	UD	A	SA	Total	Mean
1. Pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize all alphabetic letters	F	2	10	0	44	22	78	3.94
	%	2.6	12.8	0	56.4	28.2	100	78.8
2. Adequate teaching and learning materials enhancing learners ability to recite all alphabetic letters	F	3	18	3	40	14	78	3.56
	%	3.8	23.1	3.8	51.3	17.9	100	71.2
3. Pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize letters and form simple sentences in English	F	5	10	1	47	15	78	3.73
	%	6.4	12.8	1.3	60.3	19.2	100	74.6
4. Teaching of letters beginning with letter names followed by letter sounds enable learners to easily recite and recognize letters	F	8	6	2	32	30	78	3.89
	%	10.3	7.7	2.6	41.0	38.5	100	77.8
5. A learner at onset of Standard one is helped to recognize letters of the alphabet	F	10	32	1	26	9	78	2.89
	%	12.8	41.0	1.3	33.3	11.5	100	57.8
6. Uppercase letters are introduced to learners before the lowercase letters	F	17	28	6	22	5	78	2.61
	%	21.8	35.9	7.7	28.2	6.4	100	52.2

*Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; UD =Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree;F=Frequency.*

As shown in Table 4.4, it was established that 44(56.4%) agreed that pupils transiting to Standard one are able to recognize letters of the alphabet whereas 22(28.2%) teacher respondents strongly agreed with the statement. A further 10 (12.8%) respondents disagreed with the statement and 2(2.6%) of teachers strongly disagreed that pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize all alphabetical letters.

Pupils were tested using the Early Grade Reading assessment tool basing on the objectives of the study. Particularly the study sought to test learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet by name in relation to performance of English reading in Standard one. The findings were as shown in Table 4.5;

**Table 4.5; Recognition of letters by name**

Letter	Correct		Incorrect	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<b>Q</b>	22	42.3	30	56.75
<b>P</b>	39	75	13	25
<b>S</b>	43	82.7	9	17.3
<b>M</b>	47	90.4	5	9.6
<b>L</b>	25	48.07	27	51.92

As shown in Table 4.5, it was established that 22(42.3%) of pupil respondents were able to recognize letter Q. The remaining 30(57.69%) could not give the letter name. The letter P seemed familiar as 39 (75%) recognized it, 13 (25%) did not remember the letter name and confused with the number 9. It was seen that 43 (82.7%) recognized letter S by name while 9 (17.3%) did not identify letter s by name. Further 47(90.4%) recognized letter M whereas 5 (9.6%) did not identify letter M. It was established that 25(48.07%) identified letter L and 27(51.92%) did not recognize letter L. This was contrary to the teachers' views that pupils transiting to Standard one are able to recognize letters of the alphabet, as the test indicated that some learners could not recognize some letters by the letter name. The study also sought to find out from respondents activities that could help learners who cannot recognize letters of the alphabet and featured were tracing letters, colouring the letter shapes, modeling, joining dots to form letters, writing letters in the air and letter fishing games. These appropriate activities were outlined by a majority of

teacher- respondents while some teachers cited teaching learning resources such as textbooks instead of activities that could help learners to recognize letters of the alphabet. This meant that apart from activities that enhance letter recognition, teachers were aware of the teaching learning resources required to teach letter names and letter shapes.

Gillet and Temple (2010), explained that letter name knowledge was related to reading achievement when they suggested letter name knowledge was probably an indicator of children's broad Pre-school reading experiences, which encompass more than recognizing alphabet names. Thus although poor letter name knowledge is a symptom of a low level readiness for reading and spelling, it is not the single cause of literacy failure.

As shown in Table 4.4, the results indicate that 40(51.3%) agreed that there was adequate teaching and learning materials that enhance learners' ability to recognize all alphabetical letters whereas 18 (23.1%) disagreed with the statement. Further 14(17.9%) strongly agreed with the statement whereas 3(3.8%) of teachers strongly disagreed that there was adequate teaching and learning materials that enhance learners' ability to recognize all alphabetical letters. However 3(3.8%) of teachers were undecided. This was in agreement with Strickland, (1998) who points out that teachers and caregivers may use alphabet sorting boxes, alphabet books and charts to help learners distinguish shapes of letters.

As shown in Table 4.4, it was established that 47(60.3%) of teachers agreed that pupils transiting to Standard one are able to recognize letters that form simple words in English whereas 15(19.2%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further 10(12.8%) disagreed with the statement that pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize letters that form

simple words in English whereas 5(6.4%) of teachers strongly disagreed with the statement. However, 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. This finding was in contrast with Liberman and Shankweiler, (2015) who explained that reading is a system of conceptualization that involves graphic symbols; therefore they should correlate highly. This correlational relationship should lead to the simplistic view that knowing the alphabet is sufficient to read words, though the ability to identify letters by name does not cause children to read words.

It was established, as shown in Table 4.4 that 32(41.0%) of teachers agreed that teaching of letters beginning with letter names followed by letter sounds enable learners to easily recognize letters of the alphabet and 30(38.5%) of teachers strongly agreed with the statement. Further 8(10.3%) strongly disagreed with the statement that, 'teaching of letters beginning with letter names followed by letter sounds enable learners to easily recognize letters of the alphabet while 6(7.7%) disagreed with the statement. However, 2(2.6%) of teachers were undecided. While alphabetic knowledge is to be emphasized, some writers have debated whether the acquisition of letter name knowledge precedes letter sounds in children's literacy (Gillet and Temple 2010). This finding is in agreement with Light and McNaughton (2012) who explain that alphabet instruction should start by teaching the sounds of letters not their names. Knowing the names of letters is not necessary to read and write. Knowledge of letter names can interfere with success of decoding. For example the learner looks at a word and thinks of the names of letters instead of sounds.

Findings of the study indicate that 32(41.0%) of respondent teachers disagreed with the statement whereas 26(33.3%) agreed that a learner at onset of Standard one is helped to recognize letters of the alphabet. Further 10(12.8%) of teachers strongly disagreed with the statement that a learner at onset of Standard one is helped to recognize letters of the alphabet while 9(11.5%) strongly agreed with the statement. However, only 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. This finding was in agreement with a study by Snow et al, (1998) who observes that a learner's entry behaviour to level one should include ability to recognize and name upper and lowercase letters. Children need to memorize letter names through direct instruction along with exposures to the letters in print.

As shown in Table 4.4, it was established that 28(35.9%) disagreed with the statement, 'uppercase letters are introduced to learners before the lowercase letters' whereas 22(28.2%) agreed with the statement. Further 17(21.8%) of teachers strongly disagreed with the statement, 'uppercase letters are introduced to learners before the lowercase letters' while 5(6.4%) agreed that uppercase letters are introduced to learners before the lowercase letters. However, 6(7.7%) were undecided concerning the statement. This finding is in tandem with Richgels, (2015) who indicated that children differentiate letters according to their visual form. Given the complexities of the visually distinct forms of letters (upper case and lower case), simultaneously teaching two versions of letters with their confusable sounds and labels may be overwhelming to the young child. However, there is no substantial evidence to suggest which particular form (upper or lower case) should be taught first.

This finding implies that 78.8% of teachers agreed that pupils transiting to Standard one are able to recognize all alphabetical letters and 77.8% support the statement that, ‘teaching of letters beginning with letter names followed by letter sounds enable learners to easily recognize letters of the alphabet.’ Further, 74.6% support the statement that pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize letters and form simple sentences in English and 71.2% agreed that adequate teaching and learning materials enhances learners’ ability to recite all alphabetic letters. Notably, just slightly above average (57.8% and 52.2%) proportion of teachers supported the statement, ‘a learner at onset of Standard one is helped to recognize letters of the alphabet’ and that uppercase letters are introduced to learners before the lowercase letters respectively.

Particularly, the findings of this study indicated as put forward by Ehri, (2003) that without a firm knowledge of letters, children will have difficulty with all other aspects of early literacy. Children who have already learned to recognize most letters as Pre scholars will have easier time learning upon formal school entry. Those whose knowledge of letters is not well developed when they start school require organized instruction and practice that will help them learn how to identify, name and write letters. Letter recognition is therefore a critical factor in learning to read, as letters are the most basic units of written languages. Beginning readers cannot become skilled readers if they do not understand the alphabet.

#### **4.3 Learner’s ability to correspond letters with their correct sound**

The null hypothesis stated that there exists no significant relationship between a learner’s ability to correspond letters with their correct sound and performance of English reading

in Standard one. To be able to test this hypothesis, it was necessary to obtain responses from teachers. Teachers' opinion regarding learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound were rated using a 5 point likert scale. Specifically, the teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound. These response were then analyzed in terms of the extent to which they agreed with them, and so tapping into their cognitive and affective components of their knowledge on the learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound. The findings are as illustrated in Table 4.6

**Table 4.6: Learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound**

Statement		SD	D	UD	A	SA	Total	Mean
1. Learners transiting to class one have high ability of corresponding letters with their sounds	F	2	13	0	34	29	78	3.96
	%	2.6	16.7	0	43.6	37.2	100	79.2
2. Teaching words that sound the same eases pupils' ability to read letters with their correct sounds	F	2	10	0	44	22	78	3.95
	%	2.6	12.8	0	56.4	28.2	100	79.0
3. I use flash cards to help learners correspond the sounds of words	F	1	1	0	33	43	78	4.48
	%	1.3	1.3	0	42.3	55.1	100	89.6
4. Availability of letter charts in my class has enhanced pupils ability to read letters with their sounds correctly	F	2	2	3	29	42	78	4.37
	%	2.6	2.6	3.8	56.4	53.8	100	87.4
5. Pupils' in my class have the ability to correspond letters with names of animals, plants or objects	F	3	14	3	44	14	78	3.67
	%	3.8	17.9	3.8	56.4	17.9	100	73.4
6. Learners enjoy variation of various teaching methods enhancing their ability to correspond letters to their sounds	F	2	2	2	39	33	78	4.26
	%	2.6	2.6	2.6	50	42.3	100	85.2

*Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; UD =Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree;F=Frequency.*

As shown in Table 4.6, respondent teachers 34 (43.6%) agreed that learners transiting to class one have high ability of corresponding letters with their sounds and 29(37.2%) strongly agreed of the statement. Further 13(16.7%) disagreed with the statement, ‘learners transiting to class one have high ability of corresponding letters with their sounds’ and 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed.

Pupils were tested using the Early Grade Reading assessment tool basing on the objectives of the study. Particularly the researcher sought to test learner’s ability to correspond letters with their sounds in relation to performance of English reading in Standard one. The findings were as shown in Table 4.7;

**Table 4.7: Recognition of letter sounds**

Letter	Correct		Incorrect	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<b>m</b>	33	63.46	19	36.54
<b>n</b>	22	42.31	30	57.69
<b>r</b>	25	48.08	27	51.92
<b>p</b>	11	21.15	41	78.85
<b>t</b>	18	34.61	34	65.38

As shown in Table 4.7, it was established that 33 (63.46%) of pupils gave the correct letter sound corresponding to letter m. Further 19(36.54%) did not manage to recognize the letter sound /m/. As shown, 22(42.31%) recognized sound /n/ whereas 30(57.69%) did not sound it. It was realized that 25(48.08%) of pupil respondents could give the correct sound to letter r. However, 27(51.92%) did not recognize sound /r/. Further 11(21.15%) recognized sound /p/ whereas 41(78.85%) did not manage to recognize the sound. It was established that 18(34.61%) were able to recognize sound /t/ whereas



34(65.38%) did not manage to identify the sound of letter. From the pupils test it is established that learners find sound /m/ more familiar than sound /p/. Phonological awareness helps children to understand the relationship between spoken and written language, letter-sound knowledge is the key to applying this understanding to read and spell words. This finding is in agreement with Groff, (2014) who says that poorly developed knowledge of letter-sound correspondences has been found to be the most common cause of reading difficulty.

Findings of the study indicate that 44(56.4%) of teacher respondents agreed with the statement whereas 22(28.2%) strongly agreed that teaching words that sound the same eases pupils' ability to read letters with their correct sounds. Further 10(12.8%) disagreed with the statement that teaching words that sound the same eases pupils' ability to read letters with their correct sounds and 2(2.6%) of teachers strongly disagreed. It was established that majority of teachers identified English words which are learnt by phonic method thus by sight. Learners easily read them as they bear alliterative and rhyming sounds. The words therefore have a familiar sound that helps learners read other new words. This finding is in agreement with Adams, (2010) who asserts that teachers begin by children hearing rhymes and alliteration. Learners then need to be able to hear and discriminate different beginning, middle and ending sounds in words. Activities that reinforce these skills can be taught common word families which will assist learners in using these patterns to identify unknown words. The ability to hear, see and use rhymes as a reliable clue for reading new words and spelling words that sound alike offers learners a powerful insight into how English spelling works.

As shown in Table 4.6, it was established that 33 (42.3%) teachers agreed whereas 43(55.1%) strongly agreed that use of flash cards helps learners to correspond the sounds of words. Further 1(1.3%) teacher strongly disagreed with the statement, ‘use of flash cards helps learners to correspond the sounds of words’ and 1(1.3%) disagreed. This is in agreement with Tusome Programme, (2015) where teachers are to present letter tablets on a pocket chart to teach different sounds to Standard one and two pupils. These are flash cards bearing letter sounds that teachers use to form words on pocket charts.

As shown in Table 4.6, teachers 42 (53.8%) strongly agreed that availability of letter charts in their classes has enhanced pupil’s ability to read letters with their sounds correctly and 29(56.4%) agreed with the statement. Further 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed with the statement that availability of letter charts in their classes has enhanced pupils ability to read letters with their sounds correctly whereas 2(2.6%) disagreed. However, 3(3.8%) were undecided concerning the statement. This finding is in tandem with Tusome, (2015) initiative to ensure that Standard one and two pupils have letter charts in form of pocket charts for use in reinforcing sounds.

Findings of the study indicated that 44(56.4%) agreed that pupils in their class have the ability to correspond letters with names of animals, plants or objects and 14(17.9%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further 14(17.9%) disagreed that pupils in their class have the ability to correspond letters with names of animals, plants or objects whereas 3(3.8%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Mastery of letter-sound correspondences is essential for the accurate and efficient recognition of many words because skill in the

application of letter-sound knowledge leads children to develop rapid and accurate decoding of phonically regular words (Goswami and Bryant, 2010). This 'automatic' recall and application of letter-sound knowledge to decoding these words enables children to concentrate on text comprehension (Luria, 2010).

As shown in Table 4.6, there were teachers 39(50%) who agreed that their learners enjoy variation of various teaching methods enhancing their ability to correspond letters to their sounds whereas 33(42.3%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further, 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed that their learners enjoy variation of various teaching methods enhancing their ability to correspond letters to their sounds while 2(2.6%) disagreed. However, 2(2.6%) were undecided concerning the statement. Phonics instruction aims at helping children to be able to state the rules governing letter sound relationships. This is to get across the alphabetic principle; that there is a relationship between sounds and letters. Use of phonics then is a system of instruction used to teach children the connection between letters and sounds (Snow et al, 2004). Letter sound knowledge, as compared to letter names, is more relevant and useful to encode and decode words (Liberman and Shankweiler, 2015).

This finding implies that majority of the teachers (89.6%) use flash cards to help learners correspond the sounds of words. Most teachers (87.4%) agreed with the statement that availability of letter charts in their classes has enhanced pupil's ability to read letters with their sounds correctly while 85.2% agreed that learners enjoy variation of various teaching methods enhancing their ability to correspond letters to their sounds. Notably,

79.2% agreed that learners transiting to class one have high ability of corresponding letters with their sounds while 79% supported the statement that teaching words that sound the same eases pupils' ability to read letters with their correct sounds. Further 73.4% agreed to the statement that pupils in their class have the ability to correspond letters with names of animals, plants or objects. This study concurs with a study by Light et al, (2012) who explain that a high level of phonemic awareness makes learning to read easier and more successful.

#### **4.4 Influence of Learner's ability to recognize a familiar word on performance of English reading in Standard one**

The null hypothesis stated that there exists no significant relationship between the learner's ability to recognize a familiar word and performance of English reading in Standard one. To be able to test this hypothesis, it was necessary to obtain responses from teachers. Responses from teachers with respect to influence of learner's ability to recognize a familiar word on performance of English reading in Standard one were rated using a 5 point likert scale. Particularly, the teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements about learner's ability to recognize a familiar word on performance of English reading in Standard one. These responses were then analyzed in terms of the extent to which they agreed with them, and so tapping into their cognitive and affective components of their knowledge on the learner's ability to recognize and read a familiar word on performance of English reading in Standard one. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8: Learner’s ability to recognize a familiar word**

Statement		SD	D	UD	A	SA	Total	Mean
1. Learners transiting to class one have high ability to recognizing their names	F	5	6	1	42	24	78	3.94
	%	6.4	7.7	1.3	53.8	30.8	100	78.8
2. Learners in my class have high ability of recognizing simple words in English like “cat” and “dog”.	F	2	9	1	33	33	78	4.10
	%	2.6	11.5	1.3	42.3	42.3	100	82.0
3. Learners in my class are motivated to recognizing simple words using flashcards	F	2	4	4	46	23	78	4.08
	%	2.6	5.1	3.8	59.0	29.5	100	81.6
4. Learners are able to remember meaning of familiar words upon looking at the spelling	F	3	11	0	44	20	78	3.86
	%	3.8	14.1	0	56.4	25.6	100	77.2
5. A learner in my class has high ability to identify letters that make up his or her name	F	3	10	0	50	15	78	3.82
	%	3.8	12.8	0	64.1	19.2	100	76.4
6. Most learners in my class understand only mother tongue and Swahili language	F	2	37	0	0	39	78	4.42
	%	2.6	47.4	0	0	50.0	100	88.4

*Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; UD =Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree=Frequency.*

It was established that 42(53.8%) of the teachers agreed that learners transiting to class one have high ability of recognizing their names and 24(30.8%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further 6(7.7%) disagreed that learners transiting to class one have high ability of recognizing their names whereas 5(6.4%) strongly agreed. However, 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. As shown in Table 4.8, teachers 33(42.3%) agreed that learners in their class have high ability of recognizing simple words in English like ‘cat’ and ‘dog’ and 33(42.3%) strongly agreed. Further, 9(11.5%) disagreed with the statement and 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed that learners in their class have high ability of recognizing simple words in English like “cat” and “dog”. However, 1(1.3%) was

undecided. Pupils were tested using the Early Grade Reading assessment tool basing on the objectives of the study. Particularly the study sought to test learner's ability to recognize a familiar word in relation to performance of English reading in Standard one. The findings were as shown in Table 4.9;

**Table 4.9 Familiar Word Recognition**

Familiar Word	Correct		Incorrect	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<b>First name</b>	35	67.31	17	32.69
<b>Second name</b>	21	40.38	31	59.62
<b>man</b>	41	78.85	11	21.15
<b>pan</b>	36	69.23	16	30.77
<b>clip</b>	19	36.54	33	63.46

As shown in Table 4.9, 35(67.31%) of pupils were able to read their first name whereas 17(32.69%). Notably 21(40.38%) were able to read the second name whereas 31(59.62%) were not able to read their second name. It was established that 41(78.85%) of pupils were able to read the word 'man' whereas 11(21.15%) could not read out the word. Another 36(69.23%) of pupils had the ability to read the word 'pan' whereas 16(30.77%) were not able to read the word. Pupils who were able to read the word 'clip' were 19(36.54%) whereas 33(63.46%) could not decode the word. This finding was contrary to teachers' opinion that learners transiting to class one have high ability of recognizing their names. It was established that pupils memorize their names instead of mastering the letters that make up their names. When a learner followed with a finger reading two names on the first name, it was evident that there were learners who memorize words instead of understanding letters making up the words. Majority of teacher-respondents agreed that learners memorize words instead of mastering the sounds making up the word. Teachers suggested mastery of letter sounds as a remedy to the challenge.

Repetition of sound models was also cited as an activity to aid learners read with letter sound rather than memorizing words by pupils. However, there were teachers who indicated they had not witnessed memorization of words.

This finding agreed with Adams (2010) who explained that for beginning readers, the very process of decoding a word leaves a trace in memory that connects the letters of its spelling with the matching components of its pronunciation. Phonemic sensitivity grows as the same letter maps to and clarifies the same sound in many words while the pronunciation of each word will come to be represented in terms of its phonemes as defined by its spelling. As children interact with print rich environment they build up a network of connections, letter sequences, letter patterns and associations between more meaningful readings.

Findings indicate that 46(59%) of teachers agreed and 23(29.5%) strongly agreed that learners in their class were motivated to recognize simple words using flashcards. Further 4(5.1%) of teachers disagreed whereas 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed that learners in their class were motivated to recognize simple words using flashcards. However 3(3.8%) of teachers were undecided concerning the statement. Bhattacharya and Ehri, (2004) argued that pairing graphics and word labels also lead to associations which help young children to realize that symbols stand for real objects and actions. They want to learn these symbols so as to find what they need and identify what is theirs. Toddlers enjoy exploring and playing with a wide variety of blocks with letters on them. Some of them see their belongings labeled with their personal symbol and 'their' letters and see that together

those letters make up their name. In this very natural way, letters become familiar part of a toddler's world. Use of grade appropriate knowledge of letter sound relationships, children sound out regularly spelt, unfamiliar words in text when writing. Therefore flashcards enabled learners to associate the phoneme knowledge they have acquired with the letters put together on a card thus decoding and encoding the correct word.

It was established that 44 (56.4%) of teachers agreed and 20(25.6%) strongly agreed that learners are able to remember meaning of familiar words upon looking at the spelling. Further 11(14.1%) of teachers disagreed with the statement whereas 3(3.8%) of teachers strongly disagreed that learners are able to remember meaning of familiar words upon looking at the spelling. Look and say method and demonstration were cited by respondent teachers to really help learners internalize meaning of new words. Through look and say method a teacher presents a picture or diagram and pupil identifies it. A picture or diagram is given the correct name whose spelling is written on chalkboard. The learner will then associate picture, diagram or action with word given. This meant that children truly associate objects and actions to the word introduced. Teachers indicated they were familiar with activities that help learners internalize new words. Picture reading was suggested as the best activity to help learners internalize meaning of new words. By use of look and say method, teachers present pictures on charts or flash cards and pupils are able to remember names of objects or animals and this is through associations. By demonstrating an action the learners understand the verb used and can read out after the teacher's model. Role play also help children in early years as the dramatize actions of



adults and bring out meaning in the words they speak. Presenting real objects to a class enables learners to internalize meaning of new words.

Children who are 4 and 5 years of age, given tasks such as ‘moving word tasks’ should be able to display symbolism. During these tasks, children are presented with a word card bearing a word such as *dog*, the card is placed beside a toy dog. The card is then placed next to a toy car. Under these two contexts of card placement, the child is asked what is written on card. If they understand that print is symbolic, they will know that the card read ‘dog’ no matter where it is placed. When children ‘read’ environmental print, they are actually reading the graphic cues around the print. When contextual cues are withdrawn, children have great difficulty identifying environmental print (Bialystok & Martin, 2003).

The study finding indicate that 50(64.1%) agreed that learners in their classes have high ability to identify letters that make up their names and 15 (19.2%) strongly agreed. Further 10(12.8%) disagreed with the statement whereas 3(3.8%) of teachers strongly disagreed that learners in their classes have high ability to identify letters that make up their names. This study finding agreed with Clay, (2011) who explained that learning to recognize the letters in their name and to write their name provides children with a personal connection to writing. Within everyday routines, children are frequently exposed to their written name, providing them with multiple learning opportunities to connect with their name. Having children write their name is an important step toward literacy.

The ability to write their name means they already can recognize the letters making up their names.

It was also established that 39(50%) of teachers strongly agreed that learners in their classes understand only mother tongue and Swahili whereas 37(47.4%) disagreed with the statement. However 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed that learners in their classes understand only mother tongue and Swahili. This finding concurs with Gathumbi, (2008) who points out that children in schools that use English as the medium of instruction right from Standard one strive to success in reading while children in schools that use mother tongue or Swahili have a harder pathway to trek in their struggle to attain English literacy. This is because their access to the English language in school is not as high as that of other children.

As shown in Table 4.8, majority of the teachers 88.4% agreed that most learners in their class understand only mother tongue and Swahili while 82.0% reiterated that learners in their class have high ability of recognizing simple words in English like “cat” and “dog” Further 81.6% of teachers agreed that learners in their class are motivated to recognize simple words using flashcards and 78.8% agreed that learners transiting to class one have high ability of recognizing their names whereas 77.2% of teachers agreed that learners are able to remember meaning of familiar words upon looking at the spelling. However 76.4% reiterated that learners in their classes have high ability to identify letters that make up his or her name.

The finding of this study was consistent with a study conducted by Adams, (2010) who argues that as children interact with print rich environment they build up a network of connections of letter sequences, letter patterns and associations between more meaningful readings. Particularly this study supports the view that, when children learn sight words and can make connections between letters in written words and the corresponding sounds in speech, they are deemed to have reached full alphabetic phase, according to as envisaged by Ehri, (2010). Particularly, this study supports the premise that in the full alphabetic phase, children use mainly grapheme phoneme connections correspondences to identify words. Sight word reading applies to what is already stored in memory. Words become sight words once they have been read several times. Connections are created that link the written word with the sound, and meaning. These findings concur with a study by (Ehri, 2003) who reiterates that early readers access spelling sound, meaning and context of a familiar word and fluency. If a word is known to the reader; its meaning is accessed automatically in the visual word form area.

#### **4.5 Influence of learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English Reading in Standard one**

The null hypothesis stated that there exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to read text in left-right, top bottom progression and performance of English reading in Standard one. To be able to test this hypothesis, it was necessary to obtain responses from teachers. Responses from teachers with respect to the influence of learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English Reading in Standard one were rated using a 5 point likert scale. Particularly, the teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements about the influence of learner's

ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English reading in Standard one. These response were then analyzed in terms of the extent to which they agreed with them, and so tapping into their cognitive and affective components of their knowledge on the influence of learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English reading in Standard one. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10: Influence of learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English Reading in Standard one**

Statement		SD	D	UD	A	SA	Total	Mean
1. Learners in my class are able to hold a book with the spine on the left, top cover facing up	F	2	13	3	42	18	78	3.78
	%	2.6	16.7	3.8	53.8	23.1	100	75.6
2. Learners in my class are able to read words from a page in a left-right, top bottom progression	F	7	14	1	40	16	78	3.56
	%	9.0	17.9	1.3	51.3	20.5	100	71.2
3. Learners in my class have the ability to recognize the spaces within words	F	7	19	6	40	6	78	3.24
	%	9.0	24.4	7.7	51.3	7.7	100	64.8
4. Learner's ability to enter school with alphabet knowledge is influenced by their family's socio-economic status	F	2	9	1	42	24	78	3.94
	%	2.6	11.5	1.3	53.8	30.8	100	79.6
5. Learners in my class can write in between lines in an exercise book	F	7	7	3	47	14	78	3.9
	%	9	9	3.8	60.3	17.9	100	73.8
6. Adult-child shared reading provide children opportunities to interact with print concepts	F	3	6	10	51	8	78	3.71
	%	3.8	7.7	12.8	65.4	10.3	100	74.2

*Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; UD =Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree;F=Frequency.*

As shown in Table 4.10, it was established that 42(53.8%) teachers agreed that learners in their classes are able to hold books with the spine on the left, top cover facing up and

18(23.1%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further teachers who disagreed that learners in their classes are able to hold books with the spine on the left, top cover facing up, were 13(16.7%) whereas 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed. However, 3(3.8%) were undecided concerning the statement. This finding agreed with Snow et al, (1998) that children who have interacted with a print rich environment will be able to hold a book with spine on the left and cover facing up and they are able to recognize the letters in words.

Findings in Table 4.10 indicate that 40(51.3%) of teachers agreed and 16(20.5%) strongly agreed that learners in their class are able to read words from a page in left, right top bottom progression. Further 14(17.9%) disagreed whereas 7(9%) of teachers strongly disagreed that learners in their class are able to read words from a page in left, right top bottom progression. However 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. Pupils were tested using the Early Grade Reading assessment tool basing on the objectives of the study. Particularly the researcher sought to test a learner's ability to read text in left right, top bottom progression in relation to performance of English reading in Standard one. The findings supported the teacher's responses as shown in Table 4.11;

**Table 4.11 Reading Progression**

Oral Questions	Correct		Incorrect	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Which is the first word to read?	44	86.62	8	15.38
Show me with your finger, which words follow as you read?	31	59.62	21	40.38
When you reach the end of the sentence, where do you read next?	23	44.23	29	55.77

As shown in Table 4.11, it was clear that majority 44(86.62%) of pupils assessed were able to point out where to begin reading whereas 8(15.38%) were not able to point out the first word. Further 31(59.62%) were able to follow ahead of the sentence by the finger in left to right direction whereas 21(40.38%) pointed out the wrong directions. However it was a challenge to pupils assessed on where next to read at the end of a line or sentence as 29(55.77%) were not aware of continuity of text to next line or next page. Only 23(55.77%) were aware of continuity of text. This finding was in tandem with Denckla, (2013) who put forward that ability to read in left right top bottom progression has been identified as a critical stage of reading development because children can, without help, read unfamiliar texts. Children benefit on gaining steady eye movement by interacting with print. This includes knowing that books are organized from left to right; the words are read from left to right, and top to bottom (Justice and Kaderavek, 2002). Exposure to print rich environment and scaffolding activities help learners to realize continuity of text in left- right top- bottom progression.

It was established that 40(51.3%) agreed that learners in their classes have the ability to recognize the spaces within word whereas 19(24.4%) disagreed with the statement. Further 7(9%) of teachers strongly disagreed and 6(7.7%) strongly agree that learners in their classes have the ability to recognize the spaces within words. However, 6(7.7%) were undecided concerning the statement. Githinji and Wanjohi (2009) observe that a child with a problem noticing space will combine words which are not supposed to be combined in reading and writing and will not utilize the space between lines in a meaningful way.

As shown in Table 4.10, it was established that 42(53.8%) of teachers agreed and 24(30.8%) strongly agreed that learners ability to enter school with print awareness is influenced by their family's socio-economic status. Further teachers who disagreed were 9(11.5%) whereas 2(2.6%) strongly disagreed that learners ability to enter school with print awareness is influenced by their family's socio-economic status. However 1(1.3%) was undecided. Liberman and Shankweile, (2015) provide a compelling case for schemas and their usefulness for recalling information about stories. Well-read to children internalize vocabulary and a set of expectations of how stories are told which enhances their understanding. This begins from the home environment. Frith (2011), points out that exposure to instruction in letter names was a strong predictor of children's knowledge of print conventions. This further endorses the view that unlike speech development, learning to read is not innate, and if supposedly advanced 'early talkers' from literate households require instruction in alphabet knowledge in order to read and spell, children with limited print awareness will need immediate support when they begin school.

Although the children were considered verbally prepared as they join preschool, they did not demonstrate readiness in reading.

Findings indicate that 47(60.3%) of teachers agreed that learners in their class can write in between lines in an exercise book and 14(17.9%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further 7(9%) strongly disagreed that learners in their class can write in between lines in an exercise book and 7(9%) disagreed with the statement. However, 3(3.8%) were undecided concerning the statement. This finding concurs with Githinji and Wanjohi (2009), who explain that spatial perception has to do with the ability to recognize the spaces within printed information, notice the difference between items, objects, letters, words, lines and paragraph and be able to remember the spaces when it comes to reading and writing. This will include activities such as eye-brain coordination and left right movement of eyes.

As shown in Table 4.10, teachers who agreed that adult-child shared reading provide children opportunities to interact with print concepts were 51(65.4%) whereas 10(12.8%) were undecided concerning the statement. Further 8(10.3%) strongly agreed that adult-child shared reading provide children opportunities to interact with print concepts, 6(7.7%) disagreed while 3(3.8%) strongly disagreed. On usefulness of story books in Early Childhood lessons, respondents stated that story books arouse learner interest in learning to read and promotes the reading culture. In Early Childhood, stories are told through pictures and learners begin to associate new words with the pictures or diagrams within the story. This enhances word retention and therefore better understanding.



Respondents also outlined development of basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing through interacting with story books. Pupils build up vocabulary as they read frequently Bakeman, (2002) indicated that adult- child shared story book reading experiences that involve discussion about print increases children's knowledge of important print concepts like reading in left- right top bottom progression. Print awareness is developed through daily adult child interactions with print in the child's environment and through shared reading experiences.

As shown in Table 4.10, majority of the teachers 79.6% reiterated that learners ability to join school with alphabet knowledge is influenced by family's socio- economic status while 75.6% agreed that learners in their classes are able to hold books with the spine on the left, top cover facing up while 74.2% agreed that adult-child shared reading provide children opportunities to interact with print concepts. Further, 73.8% reiterated that learners in their classes can write in between lines in an exercise book whereas 71.2% agreed that learners in their class are able to read words from a page in left, right top bottom progression and 64.8% assert that learners in their classes have the ability to recognize the spaces within words. This finding concurs with a study by Justice and Ezell, (2001) who argues that, as children develop print awareness, they begin to understand the connection between oral and written language. Particularly, a child with well-developed print concepts knows several essential points that are necessary to reading acquisition and that when developing print awareness children learn that print has meaning and is organized in a specific way. Further, print awareness is a necessary foundational skill that children must possess in order to become proficient readers. Print

awareness is developed through daily adult child interactions with print in the child's environment and through shared reading experiences. Print awareness can be increased with structured adult-child shared reading that includes an explicit focus on print using both verbal and non-verbal cues. Shared reading accelerates pre reading skills. This helps learners who would otherwise been at risk for later reading difficulties. Use of consistent and sustained print referencing during shared reading is a prerequisite to later reading.

#### **4.6 English Reading Performance Indicators**

Responses from teachers with respect to the English reading performance in Standard one were rated using a 5 point likert scale. Particularly, the teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements about performance of English reading. These responses were then analyzed in terms of the extent to which they agreed with them, and so tapping into their cognitive and affective components of their knowledge on English reading performance. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12 English Reading Performance Indicators**

Statement		SD	D	UD	A	SA	Total	Mean
1. A learner is promoted to Standard one with the ability to read his or her name.	F	0	2	1	42	33	78	4.36
	%	0	2.6	1.3	53.8	42.3	100	87.2
2. Learners transiting to Standard one have high ability to read regularly spelt words	F	1	4	1	35	37	78	4.32
	%	1.3	5.1	1.3	44.9	47.4	100	86.4
3. A pupil joining Standard one has high ability to read and answer a written test without help of the teacher	F	9	21	1	32	15	78	3.29
	%	11.5	26.9	1.3	41.0	19.2	100	65.8
4. A learner joining Standard one can read a short story and answer questions	F	18	44	1	3	12	78	2.32
	%	23.07	56.41	1.3	3.84	15.38	100	46.4
5. A learner joining Standard one has high ability to read a picture story having simple words	F	0	4	1	52	21	78	4.15
	%	0	5.1	1.3	66.7	26.9	100	83.0
6. Learners have high ability to answer oral questions compared to written questions	F	0	3	2	29	44	78	4.46
	%	0	3.85	2.56	37.18	56.41	100	89.2

*Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; UD =Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree;F=Frequency.*

As shown in Table 4.12 teachers who agreed that a learner is promoted to Standard one with the ability to read his or her name were 42(53.8%) and 33(42.3%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further, 2(2.6%) disagreed that a learner is promoted to Standard one with the ability to read his or her name. However 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. Cunningham and Stanovich, (2010) identified name reading as an indicator related to later reading ability, name reading appears to be based on the alphabetic principle. Clay, (2011) found children's skills in naming letters and writing their name at

five years was linked with their reading skills at age seven years. Pupils' ability to read familiar words is interwoven with their ability to write letters and words (Chard and Dickson, 2011). This is because grapheme phoneme associations lead to phoneme blending and therefore proper pronunciation of words.

The study findings indicate that 37(47.4%) of teachers strongly agreed that learners transiting to Standard one have high ability to read regularly spelt words while 35(44.9%) agreed with the statement. Further 4(5.1%) disagreed with the statement whereas 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. Regular words are defined in the first instance as any word in which each letter represents its respective, most common sound (Gilbertson and Bramlett, 2011). Thus to a beginning reader, with limited knowledge of letter-sound combinations many words will be classified as 'irregular'. However as an individual's knowledge of letter-sounds, letter combinations and orthographic rules increases, a greater number of words may be systematically analyzed, converted to sound and pronounced. Irregular words, at the early stage of literacy acquisition, are defined as 'any word in which one or more letters does not represent its most common sound' (Goodman, 2010).

As shown in Table 4.12, it was established that 32(41%) teachers agreed that a pupil joining Standard one has high ability read and answer a written test without help of the teacher whereas 21(26.9%) disagreed with the statement. Further 15(19.2%) strongly agreed that a pupil joining Standard one has high ability to read and answer a written test without help of the teacher whereas 9(11.5%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

However, 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. Phonemic awareness helps in acquisition of other literacy skills such as comprehension and spelling. For children to understand what they are reading, they must be able to read words fluently and accurately. By so doing, fluency frees learners from the decoding process and allows them to attend to meaning of the text (Put Reading First, 2003). Teacher respondents were to state challenges that affect reading in early years and the leading factor was inadequate teaching and learning resources. Teachers reported that there were not enough reading materials to support children's language development. Other challenges included pupil's individual ability where they may be slow, the issue of inadequate time to handle large classes due to high enrolment and absenteeism was also featured perhaps due to problems of pupil's health or truancy. There were reasons enumerated by teachers such as learners being able to read while comprehension is lacking, poor mastery of letter sounds, the irregularly spelt words are a challenge, bias in reading opportunities where teachers pick only a few competent learners to read leaving out those who have no confidence in reading and poor foundational skills on reading progression.

It was established that 44(56.41%) of teachers disagreed that a learner joining Standard one can read a short story and answer questions and 18(23.07%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Further 12(15.38%) of teachers strongly disagreed that a learner joining Standard one can read a short story and answer questions and 3(3.84%) agreed with the statement. However, 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. If the phonological representation of the identified word is not sustained in working memory,

the comprehension processes will not have the raw materials to operate efficiently and thus understanding of the text will be impaired (Bergeron, 2010).

As shown in Table 4.12, it was established that 52(66.7%) agreed that a learner joining Standard one has high ability to read a picture story having simple words and 21(26.9%) strongly agreed with the statement. Further, 4(5.1%) disagreed with the statement that a learner joining Standard one has high ability to read a picture story having simple words while 1(1.3%) was undecided concerning the statement. There is a distinction between print and picture and this is important because it establishes a separate identity for print and allows children to begin learning about its function and structure (Christie, Enz & Vukelich, 2003)

It was established that 44(56.41%) of teachers strongly agreed that learners have high ability to answer oral questions compared to written questions and 29(37.18%) agreed with the statement. Further 3(3.85%) disagreed that learners have high ability to answer oral questions compared to written questions while 2(2.56%) were undecided concerning included pupil's intellectual abilities where some are slow at grasping concepts, age of learners the statement. Phonological awareness helps children to understand the relationship between spoken and written language, letter-sound knowledge is the key to applying this understanding to read and spell words. Poorly developed knowledge of letter-sound correspondences has been found to be the most common cause of reading difficulty (Groff, 2014). The study also sought to find out reasons for difficulty in reading in early years and respondents gave responses which were varied; It was established that

majority of teachers attributed reading difficulties to failure to master the sounds of alphabetical letters which make up words upon blending, some respondents blamed it on inadequate teaching learning resources, while others attributed reading difficulty to absenteeism of pupils due to health problems and lack of parental support on finances needed for feeding programmes in Early Childhood. Other challenges where as young as two year olds are admitted to ECDE centers, high enrolment in relation to teacher- pupil ratio was cited as a challenge, teacher competence and attitude on order of introducing letter sound and letter names were also mentioned by respondents.

#### **4.7 Multiple Regression Results for English Reading Readiness Skills and Performance of English Reading.**

The study adopted the regression model to evaluate how each of the independent variables; learners' ability to recognize letters, learners' ability to correspond letters with their correct sound, learners' ability to recognize a familiar word and learners' ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression relate to the dependent variable (performance of English Reading in Standard one). The results are illustrated in Table 4.13.

**Table 4.13 English Reading Readiness Skills and Performance of English Reading (Regression Model)**

<b>Model Summary</b>					
<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>	<b>Durbin Watson</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>.620<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.884</b>	<b>0.361</b>	<b>0.51393</b>	<b>0.715</b>

**a. Predictors: (Constant), Recognition of letters, Corresponding letters with their sound, Recognition of familiar words and Reading text in correct progression**

**Source: (Data analysis, 2014)**

The correlation statistics ( $R=0.620$ ) indicates that there exists a correlation between Reading Readiness skills and English reading. About 88% of the data could be accounted for in the regression model ( $R^2 = 0.884$ ). The Durbin Watson test indicated a value of 0.715 to indicate that there was a positive autocorrelation.

**Table 4.14 English Reading Readiness Skills and Performance of English reading (Correlation coefficients).**

<b>Coefficients</b>					
<b>Model</b>	UnStandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>1</b> (Constant)	.822	.543		1.513	.133
learners' ability to recognize letters	.059	.078	.061	.754	.453
learners' ability to correspond letters with their correct sound	.391	.086	.403	4.536	.000
learners' ability to recognize a familiar word and learners	.360	.095	.335	3.781	.000
learners' ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression	.082	.081	.077	1.005	.317

(Source: Data analysis, 2016)

### Multiple Regression Equation

Performance in English = 0.822(Constant) + 0.403 (Ability to correspond letters with correct sound) + 0.335 (Ability to recognize a familiar word) + 0.077 (ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression) + 0.061 (Ability to recognize letters) + 0.543 (Error Margin).



The regression results in table 4.14 indicates that ability to correspond letters with their correct sound has the strongest significant relationship ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta=0.403$ ) with performance in English reading.

The regression results in Table 4.14 indicates that there was no significant relationship between ability to recite and recognize letters and performance of English reading in Standard one ( $p=0.453$ ,  $\beta= 0.61$ ).

The regression results in Table 4.14 indicates a significant relationship between learners ability to recognize a familiar word and English reading performance with ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta=0.335$ ).

The regression results in table 4.14 shows no significant relationship between learners' ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression and performance in English reading with ( $p >0.005$ ,  $\beta=0.077$ ).

#### **4.8 Hypothesis Testing using Multiple Regression Model**

From the regression model computed in Table 4.14 above, the research hypotheses were tested using the significance level of the coefficients; the research tested the hypothesis with an aim of accepting whether there was any influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading in Standard one. The research hypothesis for the study included;

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There exists no significant relationship between learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English reading in Standard one.

The research results accepted the null hypothesis which stated that there exists no significant relationship between learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English reading in Standard one. The regression results in Table 4.14 shows no significant relationship between learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English reading in Standard one with a beta coefficient of 0.061, the influence is not significant at ( $p=0.453$ ). This was interpreted to mean that though it was important to teach letter names and shapes of the alphabet, it does not necessarily impact on reading ability of a child. This concurs with Light et al, (2008) who point out that alphabet instruction should start by teaching of sounds of letters not their names. Knowing the names of letters is not necessary to read and write.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound and performance of English reading in Standard one.

The research results rejected the null hypothesis which stated that there exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound and performance of English reading in Standard one.

The results in Table 4.14 indicated that there was a strong significant relationship ( $p= 0.000$ ) between a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound and performance of English reading in Standard one. This was interpreted to mean that pupils need to be taught letter sound correspondences as it will improve their ability to read English. These finding concur with Goswami, (2010) who held that mastery of letter-

sound correspondences is essential for the accurate and efficient recognition of many words because skill in the application of letter-sound knowledge leads children to develop rapid and accurate decoding of phonically regular words.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There exists no significant relationship between the learner's ability to recognize a familiar word and performance of English reading in Standard one.

The research results rejected the null hypothesis which stated that; there exists no significant relationship between the learner's ability to recognize a familiar word and performance of English reading in Standard one. The regression results in Table 4.14 indicates a significant relationship between learners ability to recognize a familiar word and English reading performance with ( $p = 0.000$ ). This was interpreted to mean that being able to read a familiar word such as one's own name indicates emerging knowledge of the recognition of sight words. The finding is in tandem with Badenhop,( 2013) who begins his review chapter on word recognition in the first volume of the *Handbook of Reading Research* with a positioning statement that familiar word recognition is the foundation of the reading process.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to read text in left-right, top bottom progression and performance of English reading in Standard one.

The research results accepted the null hypothesis which stated that; there exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to read text in left-right, top bottom progression and performance of English reading in Standard one.

The finding in Table 4.14 shows no significant relationship between a learner's ability to read text in left-right, top bottom progression and performance of English reading in Standard one. This was interpreted to mean that knowledge of reading progression does not influence reading of English in Standard one. This finding deviates with the study by Gillet and Temple (2010), identified a set of conventions that could be understood without being able to read. These conventions included, among others, the directionality of print in a book (left-to-right, top-to-bottom, front-to-back), differences between pictures and print, uses of punctuation, and definitional characteristics of a letter and a word. Knowing these conventions, she found, helped in the process of learning to read.

## **4.9 Discussions**

### **4.9.1 Learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet**

As shown in Table 4.4, most teachers agreed that pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize all alphabetic letters. These findings are consistent with a study by Ehri, (2003) who asserts that without a firm knowledge of letters, children will have difficulty with all other aspects of early literacy. Children who have already learned to recognize most letters as Pre- scholars will have easier time learning upon Primary school entry and that those learners whose knowledge of letters is not well developed when they start school, require organized instruction and practice that will help them learn how to identify, name and write letters.

In view of this study's findings regarding learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet, this study argues that, letter recognition is a critical factor in learning to read, as letters are the most basic units of written languages. Knowledge of the alphabet letters is a strong predictor of reading success. Its influence on later reading is not about knowing the letter names; the learning of letter names prepares learners towards the ability to remember the sounds associated with the letters. Teachers enumerated activities that help reinforce letter recognition; they included tracing letters, colouring the letter shapes, modeling, joining dots to form letters, writing letters in the air and letter fishing games. Most of the teachers reiterated that pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize all alphabetic letters, contrary to assessment finding where there were pupils who confused letter P for number 9. Beginning readers cannot become skilled readers if they do not understand the alphabet. Pairing up uppercase and lowercase letters on a chart will promote better understanding of letters of the alphabet. Learners should realize that both upper and lowercase letters bear the same name. Basing on this, ECDE teachers should emphasize on teaching letter names and letter shapes while the upper and lowercase are paired up. Learning all alphabetical letter names offer cues towards learning letter shapes. This study was to find out if learners are able to recognize letters of the alphabet by their names at the beginning of Standard one.

#### **4.9.2 Learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound**

As shown in Table 4.6, majority of the teachers agreed that there were pupils who memorize words rather than decoding. They suggested mastery of letter sounds as a remedy as blending and segmentation is helpful to success in reading. It was observed that most pupils mention letter names where letter sound is required. This meant that

letter sounds are not reinforced in early years. These findings deviate from a study by Light et al, (2008) who asserts that teachers begin by children hearing rhymes and alliteration. This study argues that learners need to be able to hear and discriminate different beginning, middle and ending sounds. Activities that reinforce these skills can include common word families which will assist learners in using these patterns to identify unknown words. The ability to hear, see and use rhymes as a reliable clue for reading new words and spelling words that sound alike offers learners a powerful insight into how English spelling works. This understanding is also supported by a study with Armbruster (2003), who argues that phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet and when instruction focuses on only one or two rather than several types of phoneme manipulation. Poorly developed knowledge of letter-sound correspondences has been found to be the most common cause of reading difficulty (Groff, 2014). The study finding indicated that letter sound correspondence leads to reading achievement. Therefore, it is important to start teaching letter sounds to pre scholars before introducing letter names and shapes.

#### **4.9.3 Influence of learner's ability to recognize a familiar word on performance of English reading in Standard one**

As shown in Table 4.8, majority of the teachers emphasized that learners in their classes had high ability to recognizing simple words in English like 'cat' and 'dog'. Teachers suggested use of 'look and say' method and demonstration to help learners internalize meaning of words. This is in agreement with Ehri, (2003) who asserts, that if a word is

known to the reader; its meaning is accessed automatically in the visual word form area which is characterized by slow and effortful letter-to-sound processing. Upon assessment, most learners failed to recognize their names as they have memorized instead of mastering the sounds of letters making up their names. Children were presented with both names on a card and asked to read; a pupil points on first name while already saying the second name. This finding deviates from Clay, (2011) who points out that learning to recognize the letters in their name and to write their name provides children with a personal connection to writing. Within everyday routines, children are frequently exposed to their written name, providing them with multiple learning opportunities to connect with their name. Having children write and read their name is an important step toward literacy.

The present study argues that exposure to reading materials like picture books provide opportunities for teachers to help children to learn sight words. Furthermore, if children cannot recognize a word by the letters making it up, they may with difficulty memorize it but they will not have a real understanding of what they are learning basing on the vocabulary they acquire. Therefore, the simplest way of noticing familiar word reading is by presenting the child's own name to see if they know the letters making up the name. Blending of phoneme and word segmentation will also work best in reinforcing word recognition. This will enable learners to transit to Standard one with reading ability.

#### **4.9.4 Influence of learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English Reading in Standard one**

As shown in Table 4.10, Majority of the teachers indicate that learners in their classes are able to hold books with the spine on the left, top cover facing up and that print awareness is a necessary foundational skill that children must possess in order to become proficient readers. They also agreed that learners in their class are able to read words in left right, top- bottom progression. Upon assessment, most pupils were actually aware of reading directionality, this was important to ascertain children's interaction with print. This finding concurs with a study by Adams, (2010) who argued that print awareness is a necessary foundational skill that children must possess in order to become proficient readers. Print awareness is developed through daily adult child interactions with print in the child's environment and through shared reading experiences. As such, this study confirmed that print awareness can be increased with structured adult-child shared reading that includes an explicit focus on print using both verbal and non-verbal cues.

This study points out that shared reading accelerates pre reading skills. This helps learners who would otherwise been at risk for later reading difficulties. Use of consistent and sustained print referencing during shared reading is a prerequisite to later reading. Preschool learners whose teachers use shared reading with explicit print references demonstrate high achievement in Kindergarten and Standard one compared to those learners whose teachers used a more traditional approach to shared reading. By embedding explicit referencing within preschool curriculum, teachers are able to significantly reduce risk for later reading difficulties. Using explicit print referencing during shared reading is a particularly powerful strategy for increasing children's pre



reading skills because it requires few resources and can be easily embedded in existing instruction. Print awareness is developed through daily adult child interactions with print in the child's environment and through shared reading experiences.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings, the conclusions and the recommendations of this study.

#### 5.2 Summary of Findings

The correlation statistics ( $R=0.620$ ) indicates that there exists a correlation between Reading Readiness skills and English reading. About 88% of the data could be accounted for in the regression model. Therefore, Reading Readiness skills should be reinforced in early years so as to promote success of English reading.

On the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet, respondent teachers indicated that most learners upon entry to Standard one are able to recognize all letters of the alphabet. However it was established on observation that not all pupils can recognize the letters of the alphabet. The research results accepted the null hypothesis which stated that there existed no significant relationship between learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English reading in Standard one. The regression results show no significant relationship between learner's ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and performance of English reading in Standard one with a beta coefficient of -0.61, the influence is not significant at ( $p=0.453$ ).

On the learner's ability to correspond letters with their sounds, majority of teachers agreed that they use flash cards to help learners correspond the sounds in words with the letters making up the word. It was established upon assessment of learners that pupils are not exposed to rhymes and alliteration which would otherwise offer clues to spelling of new words. The research results rejected the null hypothesis which stated that there exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound and performance of English reading in Standard one. It was indicated that there was a strong significant relationship ( $p= 0.000$ ) between a learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound and performance of English reading in Standard one. This finding is in line with Vygotsky's theory on scaffolding where learners will be able to correspond sound with a particular letter if there is a more knowledgeable person to provide the correct model on letter sounds.

On learner's ability to recognize a familiar word, most teachers agreed that learners in their class had high ability to recognize simple words that are familiar. It was established however from assessment of learners that some pupils memorize their names instead of learning letters making up their names. The research results rejected the null hypothesis which stated that; there exists no significant relationship between the learner's ability to recognize a familiar word and performance of English reading in Standard one. The regression results indicated a significant relationship between learners ability to recognize a familiar word and English reading performance with ( $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore according to Vygotsky it is important to help learners to associate sounds of letters to those forming a word. Picture labeling plays a big role as a scaffolding activity.

On learner's ability to read text in left right top bottom progression, teachers agreed that learners are able to hold books with spine on the left, top cover facing up and are able to read in correct progression. It was established that pupils in Standard one are aware of reading progression. The research results accepted the null hypothesis which stated that; there exists no significant relationship between a learner's ability to read text in left-right, top bottom progression and performance of English reading in Standard one. The finding indicated no significant relationship between a learner's ability to read text in left-right, top bottom progression and performance of English reading in Standard one.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of Reading Readiness Skills on Performance of English Reading among Standard one pupils, in regards to learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet, this study found out that a child with automatic, accurate recognition of letters will have easier time learning about letters and learning about letter sounds and word spellings than a child who does not know the letters of the alphabet. Accordingly, the entry behavior to Standard one should include ability to recognize and name upper and lower case letters as envisaged by Adams, (2010). Particularly, the findings of this study indicated that without a good knowledge of letters, children will have difficulties with all other aspects of early literacy. Children who have already learned to recognize most letters as Pre scholars will have easier time learning upon formal school entry. Letter recognition is, therefore, a critical factor in learning to read, as letters are the most basic units of written languages. However, though

it is important to teach letter names and shapes of the alphabet, the study established that it does not necessarily impact on reading ability of a child.

With regard to learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sounds, this study has established that learners need to be able to hear and discriminate different beginning, middle and ending sounds. Learners can be taught common word families which will assist them in using these patterns to identify unknown words. The ability to hear, see and use rhymes as a reliable clue for reading new words and spelling words that sound alike offers learners a powerful insight into how English spelling works. The study finding was that letter-sound knowledge is a strong predictor of English reading. Therefore, teachers of Early Childhood should focus on introducing letter sounds to learners upon Preschool entry even before introduction of letter names and letter shapes.

In regards to influence of learner's ability to recognize a familiar word on performance of English reading in Standard one, this study suggests that exposure to reading materials like picture books provide opportunities for teachers to help children to learn sight words. This will enable learners to transit to Standard one with reading abilities thus provides opportunities for acquisition of English Reading. Furthermore, if children cannot recognize a word by the letters making it up, they may with difficulty memorize it but they will not have a real understanding of what they are learning basing on the vocabulary they acquire. Therefore, the simplest way of noticing a familiar word is by presenting the child's own name to see if they know the letters making up the name.

With regard to influence of learner's ability to read text in left- right, top- bottom progression on performance of English reading in Standard one, this study found out that learners have to be given opportunities to interact with books and be able to realize that text is read in left- right, top - bottom progression. Teaching in ECDE classrooms require use of pointers on chalkboard to show the reading directionality and ensure children's eye movement in the right direction while reading simple sentences. Children are to be helped to acquire spatial perception where white spaces are meant to separate words. Reading in left right, top bottom progression helps learners to realize continuity of text.

This study further concludes that, exposure to print rich environment is encouraged right from home to school environment. This is important as it promotes Reading Readiness Skills necessary for English Reading Performance. With regard to Education qualifications of teachers handling ECDE, a Diploma qualification is appropriate for adequately preparing learners since Kenya's National and County governments are committed to ensuring access to quality Pre- primary Education as enshrined in Basic Education Act, 2012 and County Pre-primary Education Bill, 2015.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In view of the study findings, this study proposes to the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) through the Ministry of Education (M o E) that, pupils should be introduced to letter sounds as soon as they join preschool since this is a Reading Readiness skill that is a critical underpinning to Performance of English Reading. As learners progress in their Preschool years, they learn the letter names and letter shapes with the upper case paired with the lower case alphabetic letters as follows ; Aa Bb Cc

Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz. Instruction should then involve visual materials with colour variations to capture young minds' attention.

This study recommends that teachers should not ask learners to write their names even before they are able to sound out the letters making up their names. Pre-school children should engage in activities that direct their attention to sounds in words, such as rhyming and alliteration games. They should be taught to segment words and blend phonemes so as to realize letter-sound relationships. Teachers should label objects in classroom and provide the correct model of pronunciation to the learners. Labeling objects promote familiar word recognition. Learners in Preschool are at a symbolic stage and should be helped to make associations between graphics and words.

In the case of Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), it should provide schools with relevant Early Childhood story books that will help children interact with print materials early enough while in preschool. This will go along way with helping Preschool children to acquire print awareness. The M o E in collaboration with USAID (2015) rolled out a pilot program entitled, 'The Early Grade Literacy' which offered books with short stories for Standards one and two. This is in agreement with this study as learners will develop fluency and comprehension skills which are needed as learners progress into proficient readers.

The government should invest in ECDE Teacher Training to ensure most current pedagogical practices are implemented. It should consider providing laptops to Early Childhood centers with tailor-made computer programs that will offer correct letter sound models

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies**

Since this research was limited to influence of Reading Readiness on performance of English reading, it was concerned with four readiness skills. The researcher therefore feels obliged to make recommendations for further research on the following:

1. Influence of parental involvement in introducing print concepts.
2. The role of picture stories in Early Childhood and Reading.
3. Influence of mother tongue in second language acquisition.
4. The study should also be replicated in other sub counties to further verify the relationship of Reading Readiness Skills and performance of English Reading.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I:

#### INTRODUCTORY LETTER



P.O. Box 1125-30100, ELDORET, Kenya  
Tel: 053-2063111 Ext. 242  
Fax No. 20-2141257

#### SCHOOL OF EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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TO  
THE COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION,  
ELGEYO MARAKWET COUNTY  
P. O. BOX 214  
ITEN

THROUGH,  
SUB-COUNTY DIRECTOR,  
KEIYO SUB-COUNTY  
P. O. BOX 214  
ITEN

THE AEO,  
TAMBACH DIVISION

**RE: AGNES CHEPCHUMBA - REG NO: EDU/PGEC/1005/13**

The above named is a Master of Philosophy Student pursuing Early Childhood and Primary Education.

Being at the initial stages of Proposal Writing, would wish to obtain information that will prepare for intended research in your Division.

Kindly accord her necessary assistance.

Thanks in advance.

**DR. K.M KITAINGE**  
**HEAD, TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION DEPT**

## APPENDIX II

### INFORMED CONSENT

In signing this document, I am giving my consent to be part of the research of Agnes Chepchumba that will focus on, **"Influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading in Standard one in Kenya: A case of Keiyo Sub county, Elgeyo Marakwet County."**I shall be assured of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality and that I will be given the option to refuse participation and a right to withdraw my participation any time.

I have been informed that the research is voluntary and that the results will be given to me if I ask for.

Initials: .....

Date: .....

**APPENDIX III**  
**TRANSMITTAL LETTER**

**Dear Sir/ Madam,**

I am Agnes Chepchumba, a pupil **undertaking** a Master of Education in Early Childhood and Primary Education at the University of Eldoret. Currently pursuing a research entitled, **“Influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading in Standard one in Kenya: A case of Keiyo Sub county, Elgeyo Marakwet County.”**

In view of this empirical investigation, may I request you to be part of this study by responding to the questionnaire; rest assured that the information that you provide shall be kept with utmost confidentiality and will be used for academic purposes only.

**Thank you in advance**

**Yours Faithfully,**

**Agnes Chepchumba**

**APPENDIX IV:**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS**

**Dear Sir/ Madam,**

I am Agnes Chepchumba, a student undertaking a Master of Education in Early Childhood and Primary Education at the University of Eldoret. Currently pursuing a research entitled, **“Influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading in Standard one: A case of Keiyo Sub County, Kenya.”** In view of this empirical investigation, may I request you to be part of this study by responding to the questionnaire; rest assured that the information that you provide shall be kept with utmost confidentiality and will be used for academic purposes only.

**Thank you in advance**

The following statements seek your opinion on the status of Reading Readiness in your class. By agreeing or disagreeing with the statement, you show the influence of Reading Readiness skills on performance of English reading in Standard one.

**Note:** Please tick the most appropriate answer.

**SECTION A: Background of the Study**

1. What is your gender?

(i) Male  (ii) Female

2. What is your highest level of education?

i) O level  ii) A level

iii) Certificate  iv) Diploma

v) Bachelors Degree  vi) Masters

vii) any other (specify) .....

3. Please indicate your teaching experience

i) Below 5 years  (ii) 6 – 10 years

(iii) 11 – 15 years  (iv) 16 – 20 years

(v) Over 21 years

4. Indicate your language of instruction

(i) English (ii)Swahili (iii)Keiyo/ Marakwet .....

**Section B: Learners' ability to recognize letters of the alphabet**

**Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; UD =Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree**

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA
5. Pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize all alphabetic letters					
6. Teachers have adequate teaching and learning materials enhancing learners ability to recite all alphabetic letters					
7. Pupils transiting to class one are able to recognize letters and form simple sentences in English					
8. Teaching of letters beginning with letter names followed by letter sounds enable learners to easily recognize letters					
9. A learner at onset of Standard one is helped to recognize letters of the alphabet					
10. Uppercase letters are introduced to learners before the lowercase letters					

11. What could be the reason for difficulty in reading in your class?

.....

.....

.....

12. Learners who cannot recognize letters of the alphabet at onset of Standard one can be helped through activities such as (mention 4 activities)

.....

.....

.....

### Section C: Learner's ability to correspond letters with their correct sound

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA
13. Learners transiting to class one have high ability of corresponding letters with their sounds					
14. Teaching words that sound the same eases pupils' ability to read letters with their correct sounds					
15. I use flash cards to help learners correspond the letters and their sounds					
16. Availability of letter charts in my class has enhanced pupils ability to read letters with their sounds correctly					
17. Pupils' in my class have the ability to correspond letters with names of animals, plants or objects					
18. Learners enjoy variation of various teaching methods enhancing their ability to correspond letters to their sounds					

19. Are there learners who memorize words instead of understanding the letters making up the word? If yes, how do you help them?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

20. Sight words enable learners to relate familiar word with new words? (for example night, fight, sight). Give 4 other words that sound the same

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Section D: Influence of Learner's ability to recognize and read a familiar word on performance of English Reading in Standard one**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
21. Learners transiting to class one have high ability of recognizing and reading their names					
22. Learners in my class have high ability of recognizing simple words in English like CAT, DOG etc					
23. Learners in my class are motivated to recognizing simple words using flashcards					
24. Learners are able to remember meaning of familiar words upon looking at the spelling					
21 A learner in my class has high ability to identify letters that make up his or her name					
22 Most learners in my class understand only mother tongue and Swahili language					

23 Which teaching methods do you use to help learners internalize new words?

.....  
 .....

24. Which teaching/ learning activities do you use to help learners understand meaning of words.....



**Section E: Influence of learner's ability to read a text in left right, top bottom progression on performance of English Reading in Standard one**

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA
25. A learner is able to hold the book with the spine on the left, top cover facing up					
26. Learners in my class are able to read words from a page in a left-right, top-bottom progression					
27. Learners in my class have the ability to recognize the spaces within words					
28. Learners ability to enter school with alphabet knowledge is influenced by family's socio economic status					
29. Learners in my class can write in between lines in an exercise book					
30. Adult-child shared reading provide children opportunities to interact with print concepts					

31. Reading lessons help learners improve in reading abilities. What are the challenges that affect reading lessons in your class?

.....  
 .....

32. Story books should be available for reading lessons in Early Childhood. How useful are they?.....

.....

### Section F: English Reading Performance Indicators

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA
33. A learner is promoted to Standard one with the ability to read his or her name.					
34. Learners transiting to Standard one have high ability to read regularly spelt words					
35. A pupil joining Standard one has high ability to read and answer a written test without help of the teacher					
36. A learner joining Standard one can read a short story and answer questions					
37. A learner joining Standard one has high ability to read a picture story having simple words					
38. Learners have high ability to answer oral questions compared to written questions					

**APPENDIX V:**  
**Early Grade Reading Assessment Subtasks**

			<b>Comments</b>
	Letter recognition	Q P S M L	
	Letter –sound correspondence	m n r q t –give the sounds man, pan, clip -read these words	
	Familiar word reading	- Show flash card with his or her two names. Is learner able read both names?	
	Print Awareness	a) Which is the first word to read on this page? b) Show me with your finger, which words follow as you read? c) When you reach the end of the line, where do you read next?	

**APPENDIX VI**  
**CONFIRMATION LETTER**



P.O. Box 1125-30100,  
ELDORET, Kenya  
Tel: 053-2063111 Ext. 242  
Fax No. 20-2141257

**Our Ref: UOE/SOE/CIM/02**

15<sup>th</sup> December, 2015

The Executive Secretary,  
National Council for Science Technology & Innovation  
P.O. Box 30623-00100,  
**NAIROBI.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: RESEARCH PERMIT FOR - AGNES CHEPCHUMBA REG NO:  
EDU/PGEC/1005/13**

This is to confirm that the above named Post Graduate Student has completed Course work of her Masters of Philosophy in Early Childhood and Primary Education

She is currently preparing for a field research work on her thesis entitled: ***"Influence of reading readiness skills on performance of English Reading in Standard one in Kenya. A Case of Tambach Division, Elgeyo Marakwet County"***. The proposal has been approved by this Institution.

Any assistance accorded her to facilitate successful conduct of the research and the publication will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

**Head of Department  
Curriculum & Instruction  
UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET**

**DR. JACOB LOLELEA NETADE**  
**HOD, CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION /**  
**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**Copy to:** Permanent Secretary,  
Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Technology,  
P.O. Box 9583-00200  
**NAIROBI**



## APPENDIX VIII

## LETTER OF AUHORIZATION



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,  
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,  
2241349, 310571, 2219420  
Fax: +254-20-318245, 318249  
Email: secretary@nacosti.go.ke  
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke  
When replying please quote

9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Utalii House  
Uhuru Highway  
P.O. Box 30623-00100  
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref: No. **NACOSTI/P/16/29278/9167**

Date:

**29<sup>th</sup> January, 2016**

Agnes Chepchumba Korir  
University of Eldoret  
P.O. Box 1125-30100  
**ELDORET.**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following your application for authority to carry out research on *“Influence of reading readiness skills on performance of english reading in standard one in Kenya: A case of Tambach Division, Elgeyo Marakwet County,”* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Elgeyo Marakwet County** for a period ending **27<sup>th</sup> January, 2017**.

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Elgeyo Marakwet County** before embarking on the research project.

On completion of the research, you are expected to submit **two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf** of the research report/thesis to our office.

*Said Hussein*  
**SAID HUSSEIN**  
**FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The County Commissioner  
Elgeyo Marakwet County.

The County Director of Education  
Elgeyo Marakwet County.



## APPENDIX IX

## CLEARANCE FORM FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR & COORDINATION OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Telegrams: "DISTRICTER" Iten  
Telephone: (053) 42007  
Fax : (053) 42289  
E-mail: ccelgeyomarakwet@yahoo.com  
ccelgeyomarakwet@gmail.com  
When replying please quote

COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE,  
ELGEYO-MARAKWET COUNTY,  
P.O. BOX 200-30700  
ITEN

PUB/CC/24/2 VOL.1/162  
Ref. ....

8<sup>th</sup> March, 2016  
Date .....

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN****AGNES CHEPCHUMBA KORIR**

This is to confirm that the above named has been authorized to carry out a research on *"Influence of reading readiness skills on performance of English reading in standard one in Kenya"* in the County for the period ending on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2017.

Please accord him the necessary assistance.

  
FREDRICK NDAMBUKI  
COUNTY COMMISSIONER  
**ELGEYO MARAKWET COUNTY**

FN/sjk

## APPENDIX X

## CLEARANCE FROM COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

 MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
 STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TELEGRAM:.....  
 TELEPHONE NO: 0534142207  
 WHEN REPLYING PLEASE QUOTE OUR REFERENCE  
 EMAIL: [cdeelgeyomarakwet@gmail.com](mailto:cdeelgeyomarakwet@gmail.com)

COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION,  
 ELGEYO MARAKWET COUNTY,  
 P.O. BOX 214-30700,  
ITEN.

DATE: 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2016

REF No: CDE/EMC/R/26/VOL.I/ (180)

✓ Agnes Chepchumba Korir  
 University of Eldoret  
 P.o. Box 1125-30100,  
**ELDORET.**

**RE: FORMAL RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION:**

Following the authorization by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) to carry out research in **Elgeyo Marakwet County** vide Authority letter **Ref. No. NCST/P/16/29278/9167** dated **29<sup>th</sup> January, 2016**, you are hereby formally granted authority by this office to proceed with your study on “**Influence of reading readiness skills on performance of English reading in standard one in Kenya: A case study of Keiyo-North Sub County, Elgeyo Marakwet County**” for a period ending, **27<sup>th</sup> January, 2017**.

You are further required to report to the Sub-County Director of Education –**Keiyo North Sub County** before you embark on your research.

By copy of this letter, the Sub-County Director of Education- **Keiyo North** is requested to accord you the necessary assistance.

**Rose C. Boiyo.**  
 For: County Director of Education,  
**ELGEYO MARAKWET.**

Copy to:

1. The Sub-County Director of Education – Keiyo North
2. The Director General/CEO -NACOSTI





# APPENDIX XI

## MAP OF KEIYO SUB-COUNTY

