



Original Article

## Relationship between Early Grade Reading Programme Monitoring Systems and Pupils' Acquisition of Reading Skills in Public Primary Schools in Bungoma North Sub-County, Kenya

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Early grade,  
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Early grade reading skills are essential skills that shape the academic journey of children from primary schools to higher levels of education and later in life. This paper examines the effect of monitoring systems on the implementation of the early grade reading programme in public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. A total of 108 public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County were targeted, with the population involving head teachers, Grade 1 – 3 pupils and teachers. The paper was anchored on a descriptive survey research design. A sample size of 12 schools (Grade 1 – 3 classes), 104 teachers were selected using a stratified random sampling approach. The questionnaire schedule and Early Grade Reading Assessment [EGRA] reading task were used as instruments of data collection. Quantitative data analysis involved the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that there existed a significant positive effect of the monitoring system ( $r=0.221$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) of the Early Grade Reading programme and learners' acquisition of reading skills in public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County, Kenya. Some of the challenges that affected the undertaking of regular monitoring and supervision of EGRA reading programmes were inadequate curriculum support officers, a lack of feedback systems and low involvement of parents in following up and supporting their children's homework assignments. The paper has identified areas for improving EGRA implementation by suggesting the need to have a stronger engagement from parents and guardians in reading programmes, curriculum supervisors to regularly oversee the implementation of the programme in schools, adequate teacher training and head teachers to act as mentors in ensuring that teachers are well coached and supported in the implementation of EGRA in schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early grade reading skills is a fundamental pillar in children's longer academic development and professional success (Honorato-Errazuriz, Bastidas-Schade & Ramirez-Montoya, 2025). An investigation by Smith and Jones (2023) revealed that most children who receive intensive early grade reading programmes experience significant improvement in their reading comprehension than those who did not receive and they end up succeeding later at higher education levels. Research conducted in the United Kingdom confirms the significance of learners acquiring early grade reading skills and timely detection of children with reading challenges at an early age (Ferrer et al., 2023). This underscores the critical role that governments across the world have to play in introducing early grade reading programmes for children's education development and future professional success.

From this, the government in Kenya, with the support of development partners (FCDO, USAID & RTI International) in the year 2012 – 2014, launched the Primary Mathematics and Reading (PRIMR) initiative to enhance numeracy and literacy skills of lower primary schools' learners through the use of innovative teaching approaches (USAID, 2014). After the programme became successful in 1384 schools around the country, a

new programme was launched in the year 2014 called to Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA). The name 'Tusome' is from the Kiswahili word 'Let's read' was launched as an eight-year programme (2014 – 2022) targeting a total of 7.6 million in lower primary schools in Kenya (Grades 1, 2 & 3). The four focus of Tusome reading literacy outcomes was on: enhancing classroom instruction, expanding instructional support and supervision, improving access to learning materials and collaboration with system-level literacy players for systems strengthening. Therefore, one of the four focus areas is the expansion of instructional support and supervision. According to Tusome, teachers were given tablets and trained on how to use them to track learners' performance and give feedback. Also, the teachers had coaches who analysed pupils' learning in class to enable decision-making and strengthening of the implementation of the approaches. All this work was coordinated by curriculum support officers who monitored, observed, analysed and reported findings on the programme implementation. To effectively implement EGRA, it is important to have proper monitoring systems available for continuously assessing the programme.

Monitoring is the systematic and critical observation of programme activities as they are being implemented to make a formative evaluation of the programme in question. Monitoring is a key

element in curriculum implementation processes as it is the system through which the functioning and performance of an education programme is tracked, shortfalls detected and changes initiated for programme improvement (Bhatty, 2017). According to Tusome EGRA plan on monitoring, EGR specialists in cooperation with the Ministry of Education developed tablet-based instrument completed by coaches during every coaching visit to observe and support teachers' classroom performance (USAID, 2019). The data to be collected during monitoring was expected to give the overall picture of teachers' use of instructional interventions and schools' involvement in EGR activities. However, UNESCO observed that in many countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, monitoring systems for educational programmes is rather sporadic and unsystematic. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system for literacy and continuing education is lauded as essential in order to ensure an effective and efficient implementation of literacy education programmes like Tusome in Kenya.

### **Problem Statement**

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) was introduced to improve learners' acquisition of skills and competencies, including literacy skills. Despite ongoing reforms in Kenya's education sector, literacy levels among early-grade learners remain a significant concern. Research by Wawire and Zuilkowski (2020) indicates that many learners in early grades continue to read below expected levels, even after years of schooling. Whereas the government, together with development partners, introduced EGRA through the Tusome programme to improve literacy skills, the performance of learners in English written tasks, especially in lower primary schools' level (Grades 1 – 3) in Bungoma North Sub-County, is low. Data from the Education Office (2024) shows that learners' academic performance in English reading tasks for the past three years has been below average (recent years illustrate this trend: the average (Approaching

Expectation). These declining or stagnating scores are concerning, particularly because English is not only a subject but also the medium through which other subjects such as English, Mathematics, Religious Education, Environmental Activities and Creative Activities are assessed. Consequently, learners who struggle with reading comprehension in English often perform poorly across multiple disciplines. One of the focus areas of the Tusome programme was on monitoring and supervision of the programme by coaches and curriculum support officers to ensure that the programme runs well and any areas for improvement are noted early and changes made. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the relationship between EGRA monitoring systems and learners' acquisition of reading skills in the English language from public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County, Kenya.

### **Objective of the Paper**

The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between EGRA monitoring systems and learners' acquisition of reading skills in English in public lower primary school classes (Grades 1 to 3) in Bungoma North Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Effective early grade reading assessment (EGRA) interventions extend beyond initial teacher training to include ongoing monitoring, feedback, and in-classroom coaching. These components are critical to ensure that instructional practices learned in training are sustained and implemented with fidelity. Research shows that without continuous support, teachers often struggle to retain and apply new knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ahmed & Nayyar, 2022). In contrast, instructional coaching, particularly when it includes classroom modelling and real-time feedback, has been shown to significantly improve teacher adherence to evidence-based practices (Mitchell et al., 2024; Arkorful & Osei-Poku, 2023). Kim et al. (2016)

emphasise that coaching embedded within the school context enables teachers to contextualise instructional strategies and receive targeted feedback, which enhances their confidence and effectiveness. More recent meta-analyses confirm that coaching leads to greater gains in student literacy outcomes when compared to standalone workshops (Zhao & Reardon, 2022).

Assessment plays a parallel role in supporting both instruction and accountability. Because literacy development follows a sequential pattern, teachers must know where each student is on the developmental continuum to adjust instruction accordingly (Gelfuso, 2018). Ongoing formative assessment enables teachers to identify gaps and provide differentiated support. EGRA programs must therefore train teachers not only in reading pedagogy but also in assessment literacy, how to collect, interpret, and use student performance data to inform instruction (Mugo et al., 2023). Assessments are also critical for strengthening accountability mechanisms within education systems. Verger et al. (2024) argue that effective systems are those that balance autonomy, assessment, and accountability, enabling schools to better respond to the needs of their learners. Transparent reporting of assessment results allows for collaboration between teachers, parents, and school leaders, fostering shared responsibility for students' reading development (Levy-Feldman, 2025). When implemented correctly, such systems result in more instructional time, improved teacher preparation, and more focused teaching (Rufina, 2020).

The World Bank (2020) evaluated two low-cost randomised interventions in Tonga aimed at improving early grade reading. One focused on direct reading instruction and yielded gains of 0.3 to 0.7 standard deviations in reading outcomes, depending on the domain assessed. The second intervention, which involved community-based play activities, also produced measurable gains in school readiness and literacy, although to a lesser

extent (approximately 0.2 SD). These findings suggest that both classroom-focused interventions and community engagement can be effective when monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to guide improvement. In Nigeria, RTI International (2015) evaluated the Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA) using a randomised controlled trial across eight Local Government Authorities. The intervention, comprising teacher training, monitoring, and feedback, led to significant improvements in teachers' instructional practices and student reading outcomes in Hausa. Learners in treatment schools showed marked progress in phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency, while control groups showed minimal gains. These results underscore the effectiveness of integrated EGRA systems that combine training, coaching, and performance tracking.

Despite the success of such programs in countries like Nigeria and Tonga, there is limited empirical evidence from Kenya regarding how ongoing monitoring systems affect learners' reading acquisition. While several donor-funded programs have introduced EGRA initiatives in Kenya, robust research that isolates the impact of monitoring mechanisms such as coaching frequency, feedback quality, and use of assessment data on student reading outcomes remains sparse. This represents a significant gap in the literature and justifies the current study's focus on the Kenyan context.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive surveys are particularly useful in answering questions such as what, how, why, when, where, and who, which aligns well with the objectives of the current study. Specifically, this study sought to determine how the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) programme monitoring systems has influenced the acquisition of reading skills among pupils in lower primary classes in public primary schools. This study targeted public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County, located in Bungoma County, Kenya.

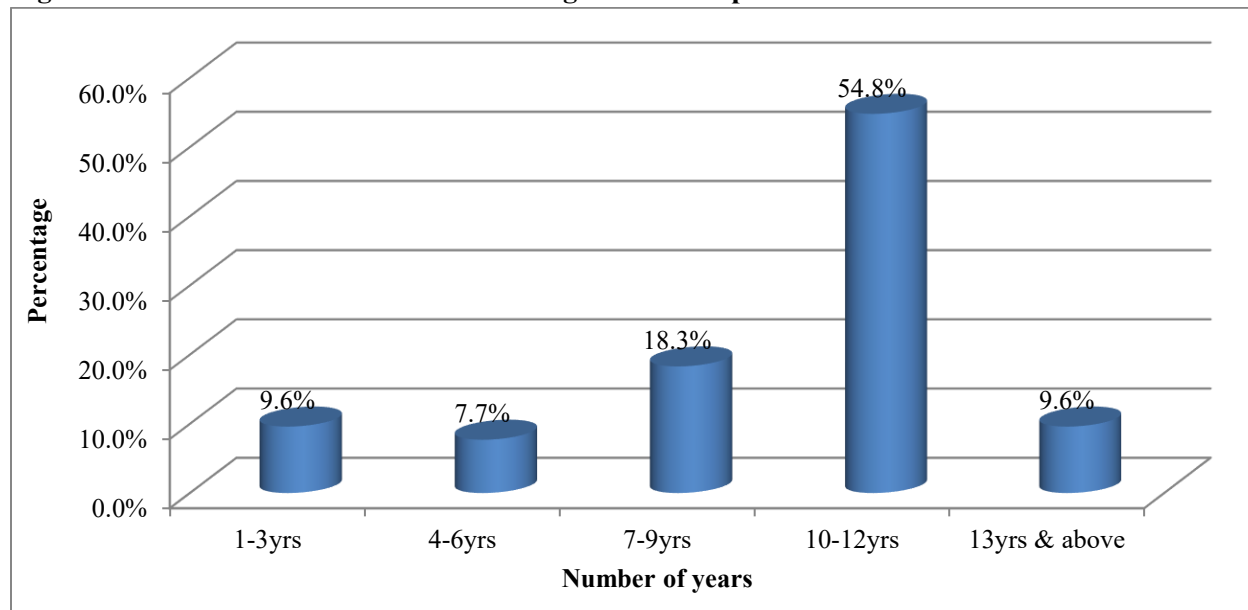
The primary respondents included 108 head teachers, one from each public primary school and 346 lower primary school teachers, specifically those teaching Grades 1 to 3 and Grade 1-3 learners from 108 schools. In selecting the sample for the study, 30% of the 346 lower primary teachers were selected, resulting in a sample of approximately 104 teachers. For Grade 1 – 3 learners who were involved in data collection (through EGRA reading assessments/tasks), 11.1% of schools to act as the sample size for conducting EGRA reading tasks. A stratified random sampling approach was used in the selection of respondents for the study. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires and early grade reading tasks to measure learners' level of reading skills in the English language. All ethical considerations measures pertaining to getting approval from relevant authorities, respondents' consent, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity were fully observed during the study. Quantitative

data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of SPSS Version 25.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise and describe the features of the dataset. These included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. For inferential statistics, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the degree of relationship between the independent variables (monitoring dimensions of the Early Grade Reading programme implementation) and the dependent variable (learners' acquisition of reading skills). The results are presented in tables.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The teachers were asked to provide information regarding the number of years they have been teaching in primary schools. Their responses are summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Teachers According to Work Experience**



Findings show that 10 teachers (9.6%) had taught for 1–3 years, 8 teachers (7.7%) for 4–6 years, 19 teachers (18.3%) for 7–9 years, 57 teachers (54.8%) for 10–12 years, and 10 teachers (9.6%) had taught for 13 years and above. These results indicate that the majority of lower primary teachers have

accumulated substantial teaching experience. As a result, they are likely to have a solid understanding of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) programme and the factors influencing learners' acquisition of reading skills in the classroom.

The objective of the study sought to examine the effect of monitoring systems on learners' acquisition of reading skills through the Early Grade Reading assessment (EGRA) programme in Bungoma North Sub-County. To achieve this, data were collected from lower primary school teachers through questionnaires. Teachers were asked to

indicate the frequency with which monitoring activities were conducted during the implementation of the EGRA programme in their schools. A five-point Likert scale was used, with the following descriptors: very high (5), high (4), average (3), low (2), and very low (1). The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Monitoring System on EGRA**

Monitoring system	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	M	SD
Receiving feedback from curriculum support officers	19 (18.3%)	29 (27.9%)	13 (12.5%)	17 (16.3%)	26 (25.0%)	3.0192	1.4812
Assessment by curriculum support officers	12 (11.5%)	25 (24.0%)	29 (27.9%)	10 (9.6%)	28 (26.9%)	3.1635	1.3661
Coaching by curriculum support officers (modelling)	22 (21.2%)	23 (22.1%)	12 (11.5%)	11 (10.6%)	36 (34.6%)	3.1538	1.5996
Involving parents in assessment	36 (34.6%)	21 (20.2%)	17 (16.3%)	18 (17.3%)	12 (11.5%)	2.5096	1.4142
<b>Average</b>						2.9615	1.4653

Results in Table 1 show that 19 (18.3%) of the teachers reported never receiving feedback from Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs), while 29 (27.9%) said they rarely received such feedback. Additionally, 13 (12.5%) indicated they sometimes received feedback, 17 (16.3%) reported often receiving it, and 26 (25.0%) stated they always received feedback. These findings suggest that, on average, teachers only sometimes received feedback (M = 3.01, SD = 1.48) regarding the implementation of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) programme. The irregularity in feedback provision may hinder instructional improvement, as teachers may be unaware of the specific areas requiring enhancement following monitoring or assessment.

(27.9%) were sometimes assessed, 10 (9.6%) were often assessed, and 28 (26.9%) reported always being assessed. These findings suggest that assessments by CSOs were conducted only occasionally (M = 3.16, SD = 1.36). Infrequent assessment may impact the fidelity of curriculum delivery in classrooms, as teachers may not receive sufficient guidance on improving their instructional practices. This was evident from Nairobi, where Wafula (2024) found out that, whereas the supervision of curriculum implementation happened, its occurrence was not well coordinated by the curriculum support office, and therefore, teachers failed to receive appropriate professional guidance and corrections in curriculum implementation.

Secondly, the results indicate that 12 (11.5%) of the teachers had never been assessed by CSOs on the implementation of the EGRA programme, while 25 (24.0%) were rarely assessed. Additionally, 29

Regarding coaching, 22 (21.2%) of the teachers reported never receiving coaching from CSOs, 23 (22.1%) were rarely coached, 12 (11.5%) were sometimes coached, 11 (10.6%) were often

coached, and 36 (34.6%) were always coached. These findings suggest that coaching was moderately implemented ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). Effective coaching can significantly enhance teacher confidence, skill development, and instructional delivery, underscoring the importance of regular mentorship.

In terms of parental involvement, 36 (34.6%) of the teachers reported never involving parents in the assessment of their children’s reading skills, 21 (20.2%) rarely involved parents, 17 (16.3%) sometimes involved them, 18 (17.3%) often involved them, and only 12 (11.5%) always involved parents. These results show that most teachers rarely involve parents ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ), which is inconsistent with curriculum expectations that encourage parental participation in learners’ academic development. This lack of involvement may undermine the effectiveness of the EGRA programme and limit its intended impact. The findings are supported by Kulwenzza's (2021) research from Uganda, which found that there was

no parental involvement in the monitoring of learners’ reading capacities in schools, thereby recommending that parents need to be encouraged to be part and parcel of their children’s education.

Composite data indicate that the overall performance of the monitoring system in the EGRA programme was moderate ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) across lower primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County. This implies that monitoring activities such as feedback provision, assessment, coaching, and parental engagement are not conducted regularly. As a result, the implementation and effectiveness of the EGRA programme may be compromised, as timely data collection and dissemination of monitoring outcomes to teachers are lacking.

To examine the relationship between the EGRA programme’s monitoring system on learners’ acquisition of reading skills, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Monitoring Systems on EGRA and Learners’ Acquisition of Reading Skills**

		Monitoring System	Learners' Acquisition of Reading Skills
<b>Monitoring System</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.221*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.024
	N	104	104
<b>Learners’ Acquisition of Reading Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.221*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	
	N	104	104

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data reveal a statistically significant positive effect of the monitoring system of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) programme and learners’ acquisition of reading skills in Bungoma North Sub-County ( $r = 0.221$ ,  $p=0.024$ ). From the data, there is a statistical significant relationship between EGR monitoring systems on learners’ acquisition of reading skills in public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County. This finding suggests that regular and systematic

monitoring of the EGRA programme plays a crucial role in enhancing learners' reading competencies. Therefore, consistent monitoring and feedback mechanisms should be strengthened to support effective implementation and improve learning outcomes in early literacy.

**DISCUSSION**

Monitoring of the EGRA programme was found to be inconsistent ( $M=2.96$ ,  $SD=1.46$ ). Teachers

reported limited visits from curriculum support officers and a lack of feedback mechanisms. Correlation ( $r=0.221$ ) between monitoring and reading outcomes was the weakest among all four variables. This contrasts sharply with the Tusome model, where monthly coaching visits by trained instructional coaches and real-time feedback via tablets contributed to improved reading outcomes across Kenyan counties (Piper et al., 2018). In Bungoma North, however, irregular visits and weak communication systems diluted the potential impact of monitoring. Additionally, the study revealed that parents were not involved in monitoring a concern also flagged in work by Osabinyi (2023), who found that parental engagement was a significant predictor of reading proficiency in early learners. The absence of this stakeholder, therefore, highlights a missed component in holistic programme implementation. Correlation showed that there was a significant positive relationship between EGR monitoring systems and learners' acquisition of reading skills in English in public primary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The monitoring and evaluation of the EGRA programme emerged as the weakest aspect of implementation. Teachers reported infrequent visits by curriculum support officers, limited feedback from observations, and minimal parental involvement. Although monitoring showed a statistically significant positive correlation with reading outcomes ( $r = 0.221$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ), the low effect size revealed that current monitoring practices are inadequate. This finding is in contrast with more robust models such as Kenya's Tusome initiative, which used regular, structured, data-driven monitoring to achieve stronger literacy gains. The paper recommends that the monitoring and evaluation framework for the EGRA programme must be strengthened. This can be achieved by increasing the number of curriculum support officers, ensuring that school visits are frequent and systematic, and providing timely, constructive

feedback to teachers. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged and trained to engage parents in monitoring their children's reading progress through regular communication, home reading activities, and school-based literacy events.

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