

Using the Tent to Inculcate Good Reading Habits Among Children in Kajiado County Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Children's Reading Tent (CRT) activities focus on lower primary school level based on the fact that good reading habits and skills inculcated among children in their formative years equip them to nurture to maturity a love for reading. Due to poor reading culture in Kenya, there is need to organize reading tents, which enhance reading skills amongst children. The moves towards reading tents are to promote reading and enhance literacy in both rural and urban communities. The objective of the CRTs were to: develop an interest in reading amongst children; to nature reading skills in children; build and support an interest in books amongst children; improve writing and creative skills among the children; equip teachers with skills necessary for promoting a reading culture, avail a wide variety of books to the children and train teachers on basic skills of running CRTs. Participants for the children reading tent was drawn from five primary schools within Kajiado County with children from classes one (1), two (2) and three (3) and one (1) teacher from each of the participating schools. Local facilitators from the community where the event was held were involved. The CRT objectives were achieved through sharing of reading ideas, insha writing, composition, dictation, poems reciting, drawing, storytelling, reading aloud, translation of stories, silent reading and itranslating into mother tongue and games. The study recommended that one day allocated for the children's activities is not enough, a budget allocation for presents for the best performers and all participating children, a one-day workshop for the teachers before conducting CRT, a whole class should be involved and similar activities should be organized in Migori and Kakamega counties in Kenya.

Key words: Children's Reading Tent, reading habits, reading for leisure, mobile library

DOI: 10.7176/IKM/15-1-06

Publication date: May 31st 2025

1.0 Introduction

Research shows that strong reading habits among children are crucial for self development and learning (Alford, 2015; Zaheer, 2020). Reading boosts their intellectual development and wellbeing, fosters their critical thinking, builds language skills and encourages love for reading (Tlou & Snyman 2020). Today's children live in an era that is characterized with social media with a wide range of technologies that influence their perception on reading for leisure. Although we cannot change this by banging their heads with books, reading needs to be given a priority. This can be achieved through creating a conducive reading environment that can encourage reading. Studies reveal that children's reading tents provide an opportunity for children, parents and teachers to celebrate the importance of reading. Due to poor reading culture in Kenya, there is need to organize reading tents, which enhance reading skills amongst children. The events are carried out through participation in a range of reading activities. The moves towards Reading Tents are to promote reading and enhance literacy in both rural urban communities. It focuses mainly on promoting reading for pleasure among the children and making books and other materials accessible in areas that lack library services (Merga, 2017; Tlou & Snyman, 2020). A tent is portable making it a mobile library. It is a form of mobile library that is accessible to many readers, simple, convenient and easy to pitch. They provide adequate shelter for both the readers and the reading materials bringing out the aspect of relaxation. Given that children cannot concentrate for a long time on reading alone, it is important to engage them in other educational activities.

Dictation is one of the children's activities that can take place in the reading tent. It boosts language skills, speaking, listening, reading and writing skill. It also enhances grammar, spelling and pronunciation (Robinson-Kooi & Hammond, 2020; Saragih, 2022). Through composition writing, children express their motions, ideas which eventually improve their emergent literary skills. Improved communication skills and developed writing ideas have been appreciated through composition writing (Beji, 2016; Llauro & Dockrell, 2019). Story telling fosters imagination among the children and also enhances language skills. It boosts memory recall, promotes social emotional development, promotes brain development, supports early literacy and builds their confidence.

Enhanced visualization of spoken words and imagination is also achieved through story telling (Phillips, 2000; Yabe et al., 2018)

Studies add that poem recitals and translation are amongst activities that children can engage in the reading tents. Poems improve memorization, enhance reading skills, boost self esteem, enrich educational exposure develop natural rhythms while translation allows different cultures to connect, spread ideas from one language to another and connects culture (Mohammad & Aminzadeh. 2016; Telci1.& Çoban; 2017; Merga, & Roni 2018; Eghbaria-Ghanamah, et al., 2020). Drawing and coloring as a reading tent activity enhances creativity, boosts concentration, promotes emotional expressions, boosts language development and encourages colour development (Alford 2015; Lima & Lima 2020).)

The objectives of the reading tents were to:

- develop an interest in reading among children
- nature reading skills in children
- build an interest in books amongst younger children
- improve writing and creative skills among the children
- equip teachers with skills necessary skills for promoting a reading culture.

2.0 Literature review

Studies show that when children read oftenly and widely, their brain is exercised. Reading strengthens their concentration making them perfect in what they do. It helps them to develop empathy and start feeling in that situation as they develop. Other benefits that come as a result of reading include expanding children's vocabulary making them better at it, helps in building independence and self-confidence for they learn to no longer rely on their parents or teachers. Reading keeps children safe because it helps them make sense of the world around them.

When a child is able to read he can progress through school by following the instructions on the test and being able to even understand or answer the questions, their imagination is enhanced and they can create their own little world. Reading improves their grammar, communication skills, writing skills, vocabulary, Llaurado & Dockrell, 2019). Generally, reading helps children with everything in life starting with cooking, driving and to just getting through school. It is important to start at an early age and teach children the value of reading so they will grow to practice it often and value their ability to do so. They need to be supported by providing a rich reading environment with books where they can read for pleasure and make reading a fun (Alford, 2015; Beji, 2016; Tlou & Snyman, 2020).

2.1 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

The study adopted the simple view formular theory of reading developed by Phillip Gough and William Tunmer which explains the importance of early reading and comprehension as a product of decoding skills and language comprehension. The emphasis is that when children recognize and pronounce words, they understand, become better readers and lovers of reading. The Simple View formula demonstrates that student with excellent decoding skills and strong language comprehension in the subject area of the text achieve a strong reading comprehension score. Further, student with both decoding (D) and language comprehension (LC) equal to 100%, the reading comprehension (RC) score will be 100,% demonstrated as $RC = D \times LC$ where RC is 1.0, D 1.0 and LC 1.0 thus $1.0 = 1.0 \times 1.0$ (Merga, 2018). The study was conceptualized by figure 1.

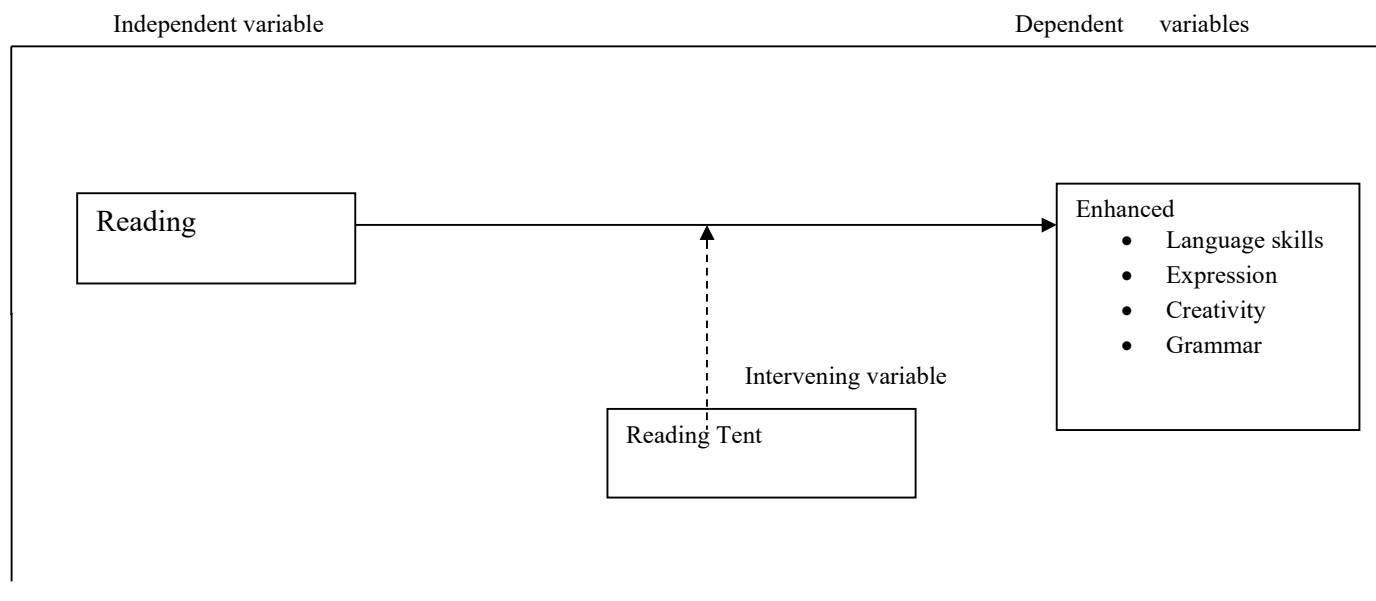


Figure 1: A conceptual framework for reading amongst children

The figure demonstrates that when children are exposed to reading, they build their language skills. It exposes them to vocabulary expansion which eventually enhances their grammar. The framework also demonstrates that mastering language skills, expression and creativity are products of reading leisurely and widely. Leisure reading can be carried out in an atmosphere that freely exposes children to free choice of reading materials in a relaxed environment which the a tent can provide

3.0 Materials and Methods

The programme was organized by National Book Development Council of Kenya while staff consultants facilitated the CRT. Participants for the children reading tent was drawn from fifteen primary schools within Kajiado County but only four participated. The pupils mainly included children from classes one (1), two (2) and three (3). Invited also were one (1) teacher from each of the participating schools. Kajiado is predominantly a semi-arid area and worse of are the interior areas like Oloosuyan primary school. School dropout rate is high due to early marriages and their performance in National Examinations is poor. The reading tent activities were expected to boost interest in reading hence good performance in the National Examinations. The targeted groups were reached and the turnout was 80%. The CRT activities were carried out concurrently in order for the programme to be covered.

Organizers included school management boards so that they understand the activity in order to support it afterwards. Teachers were the adjudicators, parents as potential purchasers of the storybooks were present, ministry of education office was represented and local leaders as potential financers of the construction of libraries and other resources for the activity. Their involvement was meant to give the community a chance to appreciate the importance of reading and ownership.

The venue for each day was identified the number of participants agreed upon. The number of facilitators and their role of each was defined. The date of the event and the activities were spelt out together with the duration of the entire CRT activity. The organizers identified areas for competition and the aspects to be assessed. The event was publicized tents hired in advance,

On the first day, there were four schools namely Iseuri Esokota, Oloosoyian and Iltareto primary schools. The venue was Iseuri primary school. Three schools brought eighteen (18) children each except one which had twenty two (22) totaling to seventy six (76). The second day had Ngatataek, Eluanata, Noontoto and Mailwa primary schools with eighteen children each totaling to seventy two (72) while the third day had three schools; Lenkishon Primary Lele and Mopia with eighteen children totaling to fifty four (54). Day four had four schools Enkasurai, Esilale, Olenarau and Inkinye each with eighteen children totaling to 72. On each day, the children were divided into specific groups of activities that included free reading, dictation, composition, insha reading

aloud, story telling, drawing and colouring. Each group was allocated a place to carry on their activities. During break time the children were given drinks and snacks while at lunch hour they were given formal meal. The children enjoyed reading books in the tent and having guests who included facilitators, teachers from different schools reading stories and interpreting for them.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Marking of the competitions was done by the teachers and winners of different categories were classified as per table 1

Table 1: Average scores of all activities according to classes in percentages

Class es	Dictation	Composition	Drawing	Reading	Translation
1.	60	65	80	70	70
2.	55	62	75	85	80
3.	76	62	75	80	80

Table 1 shows that the children performed over average; 64 in dictation, 63 composition, 77 drawing, 75 reading and 77 in translation in percentages. Dictation was at 60 percent for standard 1, 55 for standard two and 76 for standard three while the average score in all activities was 69, 71 and 75 in percentages for standard one, two and three respectively. The aspects that were tested were pronunciation, speaking, and writing. This confirms the findings of earlier studies (Robinson-Kooi & Hammond, 2020; Saragih, 2022) that exposure to dictation boosts language skills, speaking, listening, reading, spelling and writing. Standard one got the least score in dictation. Standard one scored an average of 69 in all activities confirming that they had less exposure to reading materials compared to standard two and three.

Free reading in the tent exposed the children to a variety of story books, at their own leisure. This was supposed to foster creativity, imagination and critical thinking among children. It builds language skills, expanding knowledge and learning and eventually developing love for reading in line with (Tlou & Snyman 2020). Reading aloud which scored 75% was done in order to build confidence among the children, helping them to pronounce new words and learn vocabulary. Reading a loud provided space for the children to share ideas as apinded by (Ahmad, Zaheer, 2020).

Based on simple view formular theory of reading the results on reading confirmed that reading comprehension $RC = D \times LC$ thus $70 = 1 \times 70$, $80 = 1 \times 80$ and $80 = 1 \times 80$ for standard one, two and three respectively as affirmed by (Tlou & Snyman 2020). The children did not attain 100% meaning there is room for improvement only if they more exposed to reading

The event created an opportunity for children from the invited schools to interact and compete in an exciting environment and for them to share their artistic talents as was earlier noted by studies (Merga, 2017; Yabe et al. 2018). The CRT purpose was achieved through the following activities, sharing of reading ideas, Insha writing competitions, Composition Competitions, Dictation Competitions, Poems reciting, Drawing Competitions, Storytelling, Reading aloud translation of stories silent reading and interpreting into Mother tongue, Games e.g. playing with balls, skipping ropes and tug of war, short thematic skits and dance as the children progressively aimed to outdo themselves and impress their peer.

5.0 Conclusion

Children can be sensitized on the importance of reading whose culture can be inculcated among the children at early age by encouraging leisure time, enhanced reading, writing and creative skills through the reading tents.

6.0 Recommendations

1. The one day allocated for the children's' activities is not enough. Children need at least two days in order to make a greater impact.

2. It is important to have one-day workshop for the teachers before conducting CRT because the short time with the teachers before the start of the event is not sufficient for them to understand all that was required of them to assist in the running of the CRT.
3. Similar activities should be organized for the upper classes as well.

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