

## KINDERGARTEN READING: A PANACEA FOR LOW LITERACY AMONG NIGERIAN STUDENTS

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### Abstract

This study explores kindergarten reading as a panacea for low literacy among Nigerian students. To achieve the objective of this study two research questions were raised to include; What is the perception of teachers and parents about reading skills from kindergarten? What are the hinderances to developing reading skills from kindergarten? A qualitative method was used for the study. Data were collected through a semi structured interview. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. Twelve recorded voices were used for analysis. The analysis was done using qualitative content analysis. Findings revealed the perception of teachers and parents about reading skills from kindergarten as a panacea for improving the literacy level of students as follows: Boost Confidence Level and Boldness in Communication, Foundation for Sound Education, Stimulates Literacy Interest and Accelerates Learning Ability. Also, the study uncovers the following as factors hindering the development of reading skills from kindergarten namely: Aggressive behaviour, Low socio-economic status of parents, untrained teachers, Overcrowded classes and Lack of instructional materials. It is, therefore, recommended that parents and teachers should encourage reading at home and school by using a variety of strategies that will help children learn how to read thereby becoming successful readers in years to come.

**Keywords:** Early reading Skills, Kindergarten reading, Literacy, Cognitive development

### Introduction

Low literacy is a major cause of poor academic performance among students. Low literacy is the lack of vital literacy skills that holds a person back at every stage of academic life. Youth illiteracy of Nigeria increased from 5.19 million in 1991 to 9.43 million in 2015 growing at an average annual rate of 24.32%. This percentage is the total number of youths between ages 15 and 24 who cannot read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life (Knoema, 2020). Furthermore, of the estimated 212 million people living in Nigeria, 75 million do not have basic literacy skills. Additionally, there are 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria. The highest

number of out-of-school children in the world is 20 million (Vecchiarelli, 2018; Worldometers, 2021). This in no doubt is responsible for low academic performance in national examinations like West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), National Examination Council (NECO), and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations among Nigeria secondary school students (Udofia & Udoh, 2017; Alade, Kuku & Osoba, 2017; Ogundare, 2018). Besides low performance in national examinations, low literacy has other negative consequences such as examination malpractice (Akinselure, 2018), also a low level of literacy can negatively affect career opportunities/working life, social status and health knowledge (Low Literacy, 2010).

Most importantly, low literacy partly accounts for the low level of development in Nigeria, because the growth and development of any nation depend largely on the literacy level of all segments of its population including the young and growing population; and given the huge population of out-of-school children, it is, therefore, understandable the low level of development in Nigeria (This day Newspaper, 2019, Okeke, 2020).

Literacy on the other hand, is understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written text to participate in the society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential (Montoya, 2018). Academic literacy is, therefore, the ability to: understand a range of academic vocabulary in context; interpret and use metaphor and idiom, and perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity ... make meaning (e.g., of an academic text) beyond the level of the sentence; being proficient in reading and writing about academic subjects (CCBC Online, 2019; Tophat Glossary, 2019). Besides, academic literacy has a great impact on how people express and present themselves in a scholastic environment (MegaEssays.com, 2020). The skills to effectively read, write and critically think are skills that not only help a person in the scholastic environment, but also personal discovery. Through positive experiences with academic literacy, people do not only learn to improve their writing and other critical skills, but they also apply this toward learning about themselves and becoming more confident person in everything they do.

To address the adverse effects of low level of academic literacy, there have been some efforts by the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria to boost literacy level, with the setting up of strategic Institutions, Commissions and Centres for learning across the nation (This day Newspaper, 2019); implementing a mass literacy program to help youth and adults gain the literacy skills needed to improve their lives (Vecchiarelli, 2018). In addition, several studies

have been conducted and recommendations suggested aimed at improving the level of literacy in Nigeria; for instance, Akwara (2017), Abdullahi, Mlozi and Nzalayaimisi (2015) and Asikhia (2010) conducted studies on various method aimed at improving the performance of students at levels that consist of; Adopting free education in public schools, Eradication of inferiority complex between public and private schools, Adopting social-educative programs on the media, Funding of education by government, The use of new teaching aids and methods, Training and re-training of teachers, Adopting students mentor and welfare package, Feature parents prominently in educational reforms, Ensure parents and school administrators enlist children and appropriately placed them in the right class or academic level in order to promote academic excellence, Ensure that libraries in schools are adequately equipped with learning materials to assist students whose parents could not provide adequate learning materials. In spite of these studies aimed at improving the literacy level of students, the challenge of low literacy and low academic performance among students persist (Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012; Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015).

While there is no single strategy that can address the problem of low level of academic literacy among Nigerian secondary students, it is now increasingly recognized that learning to read at an early stage of a child's life is one strategy that can address this problem of low literacy and low academic performance. Therefore, to advance at improving the level of literacy of students in primary and post-primary schools, researchers stressed the need for the development of reading skills from kindergarten (Jung, 2016; Araújo & Costa 2015).

#### **Reading skills from nursery to kindergarten**

Reading skills from nursery to kindergarten is the ability of a child from 0-7 years to learn sign and label identification, spelling and letter name identification, common word identification, consonant sound identification and vowel sound

identification. When this ability is sustained, a child can in the long term comprehend the content of books at the different stages of subsequent grades and classes or academic level, apply this understanding to new situations based on background knowledge, enhanced vocabulary skills, reasoning and analytical skills, imagination, and judgment skills. Furthermore, engaging kindergarten in sign and label identification, spelling and letter name identification, common word identification, consonant sound identification and vowel sound identification will increase their ability to be good readers as well as encourage them to enjoy reading books (Jacobs & Crowley, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014).

Besides developing reading skills from kindergarten, reading clubs and book clubs are also important strategies that will improve academic performance in schools (National Library, New Zealand, 2020). It is important to highlight that lack of developing reading skills from kindergarten is a major factor for low literacy and poor academic performance among students which has resulted in a high level of out-of-school children, failure in national examinations in Nigeria. Therefore, to improve in the academic performance of students, there is the need to look at the problem of low literacy and poor academic performance from the perceptions of teachers and parents about developing reading skills from kindergarten through adolescence.

### **Cognitive Development and Learning Experience in Kindergarten**

Different cognitive development scholars speculate different age brackets for early cognitive development (ECD). However, most falls between ages 0-8 years. According to Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter, Strupp, and International Child Development Steering Group, 2007; Allen and Kelly, 2015; First Thing First, 2020, the early childhood period (age 0-6) has been viewed as

critical for intellectual development. Early childhood typically ranges from infancy to the age of 6 years old. During this period, development is significant, as many of life's milestones happen such as first words, learning to crawl, learning to walk and preschool activities. Also, in an earlier study, Bloom (1982) stated that fifty percent of a child's intellectual growth occurs during the first four years, before formal schooling is initiated. As a result of this rapid growth in intelligence in the early years, UNICEF, 2013; Allen and Kelly 2015; Housman, 2017; Oregon State University, 2020 stressed the importance of 'early learning experiences for healthy cognition, social and emotional development. To promote a child's cognition, the child must be actively engaged in quality interactions daily with his/her environment. One way this can be achieved is through being active in learning to identify alphabets/numbers, word formation, learning to read and reading aloud to a child and socializing with peers. The home and preschool environment has over the years proven to provides a child suitable atmosphere for interaction with his/her environment and learning to read (Dong, Wu, Dong, & Tang, 2020; Cheung, Dulay, Yang, Mohseni & McBride, 2021).

### **Early Reader: Activities in the Home Environment**

The early readers and activities in the home environment refers to activities undertaken by early readers aided by family members at home that relate to literacy learning (Arya, Mcclung, Maul & Cunningham, 2013; Marina, Charles, Lorna & Margaret, 2017). Also; literacy resources available at the home and parental attitudes toward literacy (Niklas, Wirth, Guffler, Drescher & Ehmig, 2020; Martini & Sénéchal, 2020). The home environment is an important setting for children and it appears to be most vital in the early years of a child and a major source for cognitive development, and an important contributor toward the formation of a positive attitude toward reading in kindergarten (Lee, & Yeo, 2014).

Early reading needs to be intentional and purposeful for it to achieve the desired goal. Unlike learning to reading, children normally learn to speak at a very young' age and with very little effort. This occurs because language is a basic means for communication of basic needs, and because children are immersed in a rich verbal environment in which they live, speaking the dominant language comes with ease (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Connell, 2014; Aussie Deaf Kid, 2015). On the flip side, reading is not essential for young children to express their feelings or respond to queries, also, children are not usually immersed in an environment rich with print materials that can aid reading at an early age. It is then necessary that parents being a child's first educator, deliberately provide a literacy-rich environment that can aid early reading. Parents' attitudes and thoughts about early reading are of great importance in children's literary development and children are influenced by how literacy is perceived within the family (Lee, & Yeo, 2014).

Even though, reading encompasses the acquisition of the multiple acts, skills, and knowledge that enable individuals to comprehend the meaning of the text, pre-reading activities and interactions with print in the home can stimulate the process for competence in reading. First and foremost is to have a large number of reading materials available for the child at home based on the age. These include alphabet and number boards for alphabets, easy to read story books. Also, reading to the child is the most powerful thing a parent can do to prepare a child to become a great reader; teaching the child sound recognition e.g., sound that different animals make and the name of the animal. This is further reinforced by labelling the pictures of animals at the child's eye level at home. Other strategies for early reading at home include; inviting the child to read to the parents. This step involves reading simple and not too complex words. One

other strategy to develop reading is through computer-aided reading facilities. Even though, not all parents can afford this, however, it has great potential for improving the reading skills of kindergarten. Above all parents should be enthusiastic about reading themselves. This is the only way a child can be motivated to read. Parents who enjoy reading tend to pass these attitudes on to their children. Hence, the more parents are involved in pre-reading activities, the greater a child's academic gains later on.

### **Early Readers: Learning Environment outside the Home**

What some children missed out from the home environment, can be gained outside the home with shared diligence and determination. While the home is the first important setting for the reading skills development during the preschool years, children that missed out are able to learn from facilities provided outside the home environment e.g., Daycare and Nursery Schools, Sunday schools, extra-moral lessons and interaction with peers outside the home environment. This early childhood centres provide an atmosphere for developing verbal, vocabulary, reading, and math skills among kindergarten (Butin & Woolums, 2009). Furthermore, the learning to read activities at daycare and nursery schools reinforces the learning at home. Moreover, the steps instructors outside the home take are not accidental or random but are rooted in the well-formulated curriculum about how children should learn and how they will effectively teach the early readers (Broström, 2006; Albert Shanker Institute, 2009). These curriculums contain schedules and routines that best support an effective child's development and learning process. Examples are Oral language, literacy, science, and mathematics skills. Others are Outdoor time, Large-Group activities and Small-group activities. These learning programmes have the capacity for a positive effect on the vocabulary development of children. According to Strickland and Riley-Ayers, 2006; Wasik, Bond, Hindman, 2006,

children's early experiences with language and literacy has a propensity for a positive effect on their overall education. Ultimately, the journey towards reading is not an easy one. The support system at home, and exposure to literacy experiences during preschool are complementary, which in turn has a great impact on a child's self-esteem and shape the course for early readers. This article, seeks to explore answers to the following questions.

1. What is the perception of teachers and parents about reading skills from kindergarten as a panacea for improving the literacy level of students in primary and post-primary levels?
2. What are the hinderances to developing reading skills from kindergarten?

**Methods**

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth insight on the views and perceptions of teachers and parents about reading skills from kindergarten through adolescence, as a panacea for improving the literacy level of students in primary and post-primary level in Nigerian schools. The greatest advantage of a qualitative case study is that it

gives researchers the opportunity to understand the problem under investigation from the views of participants (Mohammed & Molepo, 2017). The researchers purposefully selected six teachers and six parents in Jos for the study with the assurance that they are those who possess the required characteristics needed for the study. Based on the researchers' knowledge of the teachers' and parents' experiences at school and home respectively, they should be able to give a good judgment on the study problem. Furthermore, the reasons for the selection of these teachers and parents for the study was that they are those actively involved with the pupils at school and home.

**Data Collection**

Through an in-depth, semi-structured interviews; the words of the participants were recorded on an audio tape recorder and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using thematic content analysis. All transcripts of the interviews were read and examined for phrases and sentences that form patterns that are consistent with the objectives of the study. Using the analytic inductive process described by Creswell, 2013, these patterns were grouped into sub-categories; subsequently themes emerged. The themes are presented in Table 1 and 2.

**Data Analysis and presentation**

Four themes emerged from the narratives of the participants of this study under research question 1 as presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

<b>The Perception of Teachers and Parents About Reading Skills from Kindergarten as a Panacea for Improving the Literacy Level of Students in Primary and Post Primary Level</b>
4 Major Findings (Themes)

Boost Confidence Level and Boldness in Communication	Foundation for Sound Education	Stimulates Literacy Interest	Accelerates Learning Ability
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Five themes emerged from the narratives of the participants of this study under research question 2 as presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

<b>Hinderances to Developing Reading Skills from Kindergarten</b>				
5 Major Findings (Themes)				
Aggressive behaviour	Low socio-economic status of parent	Untrained teachers	Overcrowded class	Lack of instructional materials

**Discussion**

**The Perception of Teachers and Parents about Reading Skills from Kindergarten**

The findings from research question 1 reveals the perception of teachers and parents about reading skills from kindergarten as a panacea for improving the literacy level of students in primary and post-primary level. Amongst which are Boost Confidence Level and Boldness in Communication, Foundation for Sound Education, Stimulates Literacy Interest and Accelerates Learning Ability.

**Boost Confidence Level and Boldness in Communication**

Parents and teachers’ perception about reading skills from kindergarten is that reading skills from kindergarten boost confidence level and boldness in the communication of students. This is echoed when Participant 6 narrated thus *...early reading culture improves a pupil at the primary and the post-primary level... a child that is used to reading from kindergarten will boost his confidence and boldness when it comes to communication skills. When such pupil eventually gained admission into primary and post primary school, he/she will not find it burdensome to read his/her subjects because of the reading skill he/she had gained while in kindergarten.* In the same vein, Participant 11 commented that *...If children*

*can read at an early age, it will boost every aspect of their learning so...if they know how to read, they will be motivated in learning...*This finding shows that reading perfects the oratory skills of a pupil; teaches new words and perspectives; helps strengthen language and sharpens sentence structure and gives a pupil better command over the spoken language. In line with this finding, Mart (2012) asserted that there is an increasingly high relationship between readings and speaking skills, people who develop large reading vocabularies tend to develop large speaking vocabularies. Supporting the above assertion, Norbaevna and Yuldashevna (2019) affirmed that reading is the most significant influence on oral communication ability. Students who read a lot are more likely to speak well; thorough reading, will develop both fluency and accuracy of expression in their speaking. Consequently, an effective way for students to improve in communicative skills is to start developing reading skills from kindergarten. Reading will enable them to develop vocabulary and grammar knowledge which will effectively contribute to their speaking skills.

**Foundation for Sound Education**

Parents and teachers’ perception about reading skills from kindergarten is that reading skills from kindergarten is the Foundation for Sound

Education. This theme is captured from the expression by Participant 3 *...kindergarten is the bedrock of education... if a child can read at that particular age, the sky is the limit of that child, because every subject depends on the ability to read and write either mathematics, physics, chemistry etc.... the child must know how to read first before he will be able to study these subjects.* Also; Participant 4 said *...I am of the opinion that it is good for children to start reading from kindergarten because the foundation laid at a young age will be built upon subsequently...the knowledge the child got in kindergarten as he proceeds to a higher class will help in his future learning.* Similarly, Participant 5 has this to say *...kindergarten reading is the foundation to success for every child. If a child learns how to read at an early age, it will go a long way to help the child succeed in future.* Lastly, participant 7 said *...Kindergarten reading is the gateway to all other knowledge and a building block to knowledge acquisition...* This finding shows that early reading skills provide a solid base for learning and puts a student on the path to success. Ward-Cameron (2013) stated that ninety percent of a typical child's brain is developed by the age of 5, putting early childhood educators and parents on the frontline of building that foundation. Their success (or failure) determines how successful a child will be in school and in life. School and reading readiness translate to life readiness. Backing this finding, Ward-Cameron (2013) stressed that early literacy is the foundation on which all learning occurs. Children who enter kindergarten with a strong vocabulary and possess language skills to express their thoughts and feelings to others; who have knowledge of the alphabet and the sounds of letters are well on their way to being successful in school and in life. In addition, Brown (2014) affirms that through active engagement in the reading process, children learn ways to use their growing knowledge and skills flexibly and in combination with all

domains of development. The skills and behaviours that develop early serve as the base for later competence and proficiency. These, therefore, underscore the importance of early literacy in establishing the foundation for future learning and academic success.

### **Stimulates Literacy Interest**

Parents and teachers' perception about reading skills from kindergarten is that it stimulates literacy interest. This was reiterated by Participant 6 thus; *...the pupil will fall in love with the reading of his/her subjects.* Participant 7 expressed the same view *...children who are able to read at an early age are likely to exhibit greater interest in reading at later age...children who have good reading habits excel in life...* This discovery demonstrates that children who are driven by interest in reading from early reading skills are likely to devote more time and effort to reading tasks and often feel more competent as readers. Walgermo et al; (2018) defines literacy interest as the enjoyment of literacy activities both in school and at home that students bring with them into learning situations that will exert an influence on their performance. Similarly, Save the Children US Department of Education and Child Development (2013) said that reading interest predicts the amount of future reading a child will do, which in turn predicts future reading skills. Children are much more likely to develop strong interest in and motivation for reading as well as a positive attitude towards books. Hence, early interactions with books and print not only support future reading skills but also frame lifelong attitudes towards reading and writing. If these interactions are positive, fun and enjoyable, children are much more likely to develop robust interest in and inspiration for reading as well as a positive attitude towards books in general.

### **Accelerates Learning Ability**

Reading skills from kindergarten, according to parents and teachers, improve learning ability. This is highlighted from the narratives of Participant 1...*it will be like a leverage or a*

*springboard unto the child... Also, a child learns faster when he/she learns to read at an early age. You cannot compare such children to the ones in the remote villages that do not have access to early reading facilities, so it has a very positive effect because the level of understanding will move at geometric ratio.* In addition, Participant 2 viewed that *...reading skills from kindergarten will help the child in his/her educational progression. Reading skills from kindergarten ...will improve the literacy level of students in primary and post primary level... also it has effect on answering examination questions...* Participant 12 also explained by saying *.... I believe once a good reading skill is inculcated at an early age, illiteracy will be greatly reduced.* These finding proves that children can only experience profound learning in any academic discipline with reading skills. Gregory and Burkman (2005) said that without a focus on literacy, it is hard to imagine the acceleration of learning needed to demonstrate increased scores on high-stakes tests, let alone other worthy accomplishments appropriate for success in the twenty-first century. In the same manner, the American Pediatrics Association reports that reading when young; even infants being read to by their parents, increases academic success down the road (Merrimack College, 2020). It's noteworthy to say, therefore, that reading from kindergarten will help students develop higher levels of focus and concentration, develop better critical and analytical skills, and memory retention skills.

### **Hinderances to Developing Reading Skills from Kindergarten**

This study also uncovers five themes from the narratives of the participants for research question 2 namely; Aggressive behaviour, Low socio-economic status of parents, Untrained teachers, Overcrowded class and Lack of instructional materials.

#### **Aggressive behaviour**

Findings in this study indicate that aggressive behaviour of teachers and other pupils towards a 'Learning to read Pupil' can hamper the learning process of the child. This is seen from

the narrative by Participant 6...*the issue of bully... if a child is being bullied at school or at home, such an act can cause the child to withdraw instead of opening up to embrace reading. Also, when a child is laughed at by the teacher and other pupils when he commits an error in class while trying to pronounce a word...* Participant 11 also added that *...if a teacher is harsh the child will not like to be associated with reading...* Aggressive behaviour includes non-verbal expression like giggling, turning heads or body away when a child is speaking or reading, making offensive gestures and facial expressions. Victims of aggressive behaviour may become passive or dormant when learning is ongoing. Prior research suggests that exposure to elementary classrooms characterized by a high level of aggression may contribute to less academic improvement in a child due to fear of standing out. According to Juvonen (2010), students who experience aggressive behaviour such as bullying repeatedly, "receive poorer grades and participate less in class discussions. These students get mislabeled as low achievers because they do not want to speak up in class for fear of getting bullied". Juvonen also remarked that "Once students get labelled as 'dumb,' they get picked on and perform even worse". However, a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable, valued and socially accepted in a climate based on support, mutual respect and trust will enhance reading and learning. Two principal elements that constitute this positive environment at school as enumerated by Estévez, Inglés, and Martínez-Monteagudo (2013) are support and respect from teachers, and enjoyment of relationships with peers in the class.

#### **Low socio-economic status of parent**

Teachers and parents consider the low socio-economic status of parents as a limiting factor in developing reading skills from kindergarten. Participant 2 narrated thus *...poverty contributes a lot in slowing down the ability of the child in reading skills; for instance, if a*



parent cannot afford to put the child in school early, or cannot pay the child's school fees promptly, buy books, uniform etc., it can affect a child's educational progression. Alongside, Participant 5 opined that ... *financial status of the parent of a pupil can deter the performance of that pupil in learning how to read. When a parent could not pay the school fee of a child and he is sent out of school on a regular basis, this will affect the overall performance of the child ...another limitation is when the pupil is not properly fed at home or probably did not bring food to the school, and due to the duration of time they spend in school, the child will be hungry and will loss concentration.* This reveals that children from low-income families are less likely to develop reading skills due to a lack of resources to help the learning process. Orr, 2003 (as cited in Soharwardi, Arooj, Nazir and Firdous, 2020) stated that parents from the low socioeconomic status groups may be powerless to meet the expense of resources such as books, computers, or tutors to produce a helpful literacy environment for children hence such children are not able to develop the appropriate mindset, motivation, and self-discipline needed during the learning process. According to Barbarin & Aikens (2015), social and economic status of parents can contribute significantly to student success at educational institutes. Families from the low socio-economic status group are less likely to have economic resources or time available to provide due academic support to their children. Also, because of the limitation of family resources, parents of poor families usually are not able to invest sufficiently in their children's education, which affects their children's academic achievement (Becker, 1964, as cited in Li and Qiu 2018). However, children from lower socio-economic background can find academic success if both the school and the family understand how best to support their needs.

#### **Untrained teachers**

Untrained teachers are cited by the participants as one of the factors limiting learning reading skills from kindergarten. This was recapped by

Participant 4...*a teacher that is not well trained will not know the rudiments of teaching and can pose problem for the pupils.* Untrained teachers are those who do not possess the prescribed teaching qualifications but who, however, may possess such educational qualifications as may be approved under the Teaching Act (TRCN, 2008) of Nigeria. Such teachers may have an underdeveloped understanding of teaching literacy and also have a negative attitude towards teaching pupils reading strategies. According to Botha et al., 2008 (as cited by Mohammed and Amponsah 2018) one of the complex factors resulting in pupils' poor reading, learning and achievement are the teachers because most of them are not trained to teach basic reading. The employment of unqualified language teachers has had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning of reading subjects in schools. In addition to the reasons for pupils' poor reading abilities in schools, Moats and Tolman, 2011 (as cited by Mohammed and Amponsah, 2018) assert that the majority of pupils who are poor readers and poor spellers have weak phonological processing skills as a result of teacher's incompetency and the poor teaching methodology used to teach reading in the classroom. The challenge, however, is for school proprietors to employ qualified teachers who have the requisite knowledge of effective language teaching.

#### **Overcrowded class**

Parents and teachers cited overcrowded classes as one of the factors limiting learning reading skills from kindergarten. This is expressed in the narration by Participant 3...*overcrowded or large number of pupils in one class affects children learning ability. When there are too many pupils in one class, the teacher will not be able to give them adequate attention and this will slow down the ability of the pupils to learn faster.* The view of Participant 4 is as follows...*some schools overcrowd the pupils in a class unmindful of the aftermath of this effect both in learning skills and health of the*

*child*. An overcrowded class is a place where learners exceeded the recommended capacity for which the class is designed (The National center for education statics, 2000). In an ideal world, class sizes would be capped at 15 to 20. Unfortunately, many classrooms now regularly exceed 30 students (Meador, 2019). Consequently, teaching in an overcrowded classroom can be frustrating, overwhelming and stressful. An overcrowded classroom presents challenges that are nearly impossible to overcome, even to the most effective teachers. Kewaza and Welch, (2013) emphasized that, reading is one of the most effective means of language learning. It expands one's proficiency in the use of the language. It also gives the skills necessary to acquire more knowledge. However, these skills are difficult to achieve in the big class sizes commonly found in Kampala Central Municipality primary schools. The reason is that in a big class, the teacher may find it impossible to provide each child with the needed attention and appropriate learning materials. In addition, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 1997 (as cited by Kewaza and Welch, 2013) pointed out that parents see the problem of high pupil-teacher ratio from the perspective of teachers not being able to control the class; teachers being overloaded and so unable to give individual attention to a class of over 100 pupils or more. This viewpoint seems to suggest that high pupil-teacher ratios affect the teaching of reading skills.

#### **Lack of instructional materials**

Parents and teachers referred to lack of instructional materials as a factor that limits reading skills acquisition from kindergarten. Participant 4 stated that *...lack of instructional materials like educative toys and placards is another limitation, also, non-provision of adequate textbook and notebooks by the parents*. This finding showed that lack of instructional materials hinders effective teaching and learning of reading skills from

kindergarten. Instructional materials, also known as teaching/learning aids, are any collection of materials including animate and inanimate objects and human and non-human resources that a teacher may use in teaching and learning situations to help achieve desired learning objectives; these include; Print, Audio, Visual, Audiovisual, Electronic Interactive (Global Dictionary, 2019). One of the goals of primary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) is to inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate fluently. The presence of instructional materials in schools would facilitate the communication skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Each of these skills is developed through the use of instructional media. The continuous contact with devices such as textbooks, pictures, charts, posters, television, video-tapes, audio tapes and players, computers would enable pupils to interact well (Anigbogu, 2012). While there are many factors that can contribute to a good performance of learners, instructional materials and physical facilities are important factors that cannot be ignored; a lack of these to use during the teaching and learning process negatively affects effective teaching (Matimbe 2014, as cited in Mupa & Chinooneka 2015)

#### **Conclusion**

Excellent performance and good grades in different subjects rest on children's ability to read. Thus, teaching children how to read at an early age is critical in promoting learning to read. More advanced skills needed at later years of learning depend on early age reading experience. So, children who do not acquire these reading skills in an early ages struggle to acquire more advanced skills required for further studies. It is, therefore, recommended that parents and teachers should encourage reading at home and school by using a variety of strategies that will help children learn how to read thereby becoming a successful reader in years to come. Also, educative materials

that will enable children learn faster should be made available at home and school.

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