

Reflections on the provision of Early Childhood Education among poor rural communities in developing countries: the Kajiado Experience

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Why Early Childhood Education?

- The first years of life are critical in laying the foundation for a child's life long learning and skill development.
- Indeed Early Childhood Education is the foundation for any country's sustainable development.
- And this has significant economic and social gains for the individual families and entire communities. (UNESCO, 2001a)
- However, this is depended on how this foundation is developed.

Status of Early Childhood Education : Rural Kajiado

- Access to education in Kajiado County is complicated by poor infrastructure, rural tradition and circles of poverty (NCPD 2017 report)
- Specifically, schools are inaccessible because:
 - they are very far and the roads are not motorable, hence children have to walk an average of 20 Kilometers to access the nearest school.
 - Vulnerability to dangers posed by wildlife for the young in the County (Mashuru Division) parents unwilling to let their children walk to school.
- Due to the high levels of poverty school infrastructure is inappropriate and inadequate for ECD children.

Kajiado County: a contextual brief

- Kajiado is an expansive County, designated as semi-arid and a hardship area, characterized by gross economic Challenges (a lack of basic systems and services such as water, sanitation, transportation and housing)
- Particularly more pronounced among the rural-based indigenous and semi-nomadic Maasai people whose livelihood is dependent on livestock keeping.
- Further, child labour is prevalent with many young people working in the fields or herding.
- Although the Masaai people are cattle herders, Kajiado is considered a food scarce area and some schools have feeding programmes while others do not.
- The majority of school going children speak their mother tongue (Maa language).

Status of Kajiado schools before intervention

- Lack of reading materials
- Lack of literacy and library skills by teachers
- Poor learning environment for the ECDE grades

Study framework

- Need for training in **reading strategies** and **library management skills**
- Need to investigate how provision of storybooks and training in reading strategies impacts literacy
- A 4-year project that aimed at increasing teachers', head teachers', education officers' and parents' capacities to support children's early reading.

Nature of classroom windows



BEFORE INTERVENTIONS

Teaching and learning – scanty tuition materials shared among many pupils



BEFORE INTERVENTIONS

Traditional read-aloud lessons in two different schools



Reading Kenya initiative

- Reading Kenya project through the partnership of the National Book Development Council of Kenya (NBDCK) and the Canadian overseas development through Education (CODE) set out to:
 - Capacity build teacher librarians, teacher-writers and other writers to produce local and culturally-relevant and engaging reading materials that could complement pupils' reading (mother tongue, English and Kiswahili)
 - Create of a pool of mentors for classroom instructional teacher support

Reading Kenya initiative (contd)

- Capacity build teachers on the comprehensive learner-friendly instructional methodologies **(teaching basic reading skills so as to create thoughtful, life-long and independent readers)**
 - Focusing on higher order comprehension and critical thinking skills.
- Enhance teachers' effective utilization of learning materials
- NBDCK did this through a close partnership with TSC and Ministry of Education

RKP Kajiado Teachers Engage in Workshops to develop stories and informational texts in Maa



Workshops to develop stories and informational texts in Maa



Methodology

- RKP covered a total of 70 (out of 390) public ECD & primary schools.
- All the schools from the 3 cohorts were provided with storybooks in English and Kiswahili and trained in child-centered comprehensive reading strategies
- Data was collected through classroom observation and interviews with teachers and parents
- Views of 114 teachers, 57 parents and 57 pupils' FGD groups of 7 each (constituted the baseline survey)
- Sample for interview: 10 schools from 3 zones.
- Pre-test, post-test results used

Key achievements from the intervention

- The Project trained 480 ECD and lower primary school teachers in learner-centred reading and writing instructional strategies in Kajiado County
- Produced (200 manuscripts of storybooks in three languages; English, Kiswahili and Maa.
- 23 titles were published and distributed to all the 70 schools
- Created a pool of mentors for continued classroom instructional support from among the school head teachers and education officials.
- Sensitised the school communities and County leadership on the need to provide additional instructional and infrastructural support more especially in the ECD for the attainment of quality

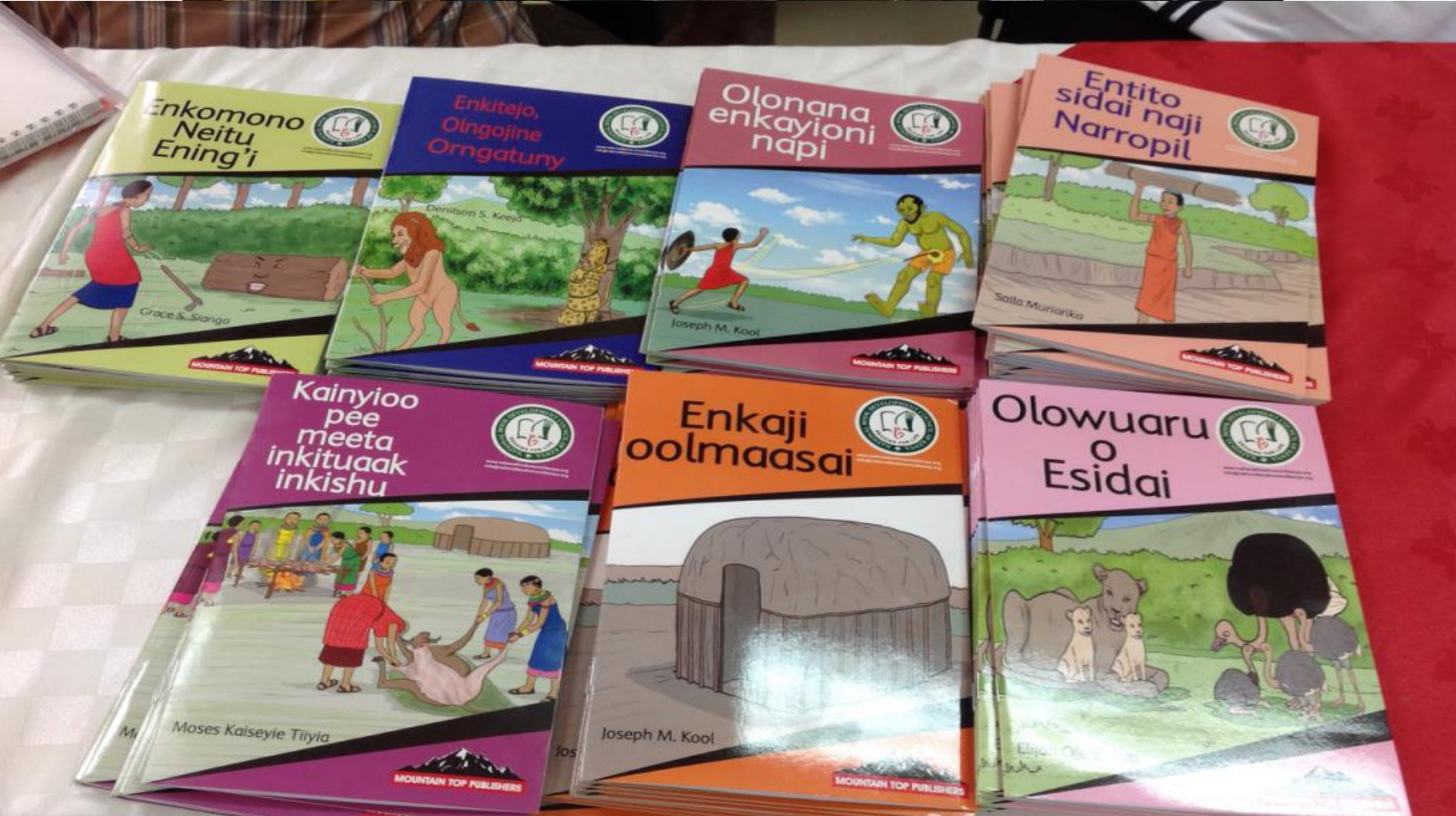
Interactive Read Aloud Lesson at Endonyo Sidai Primary School



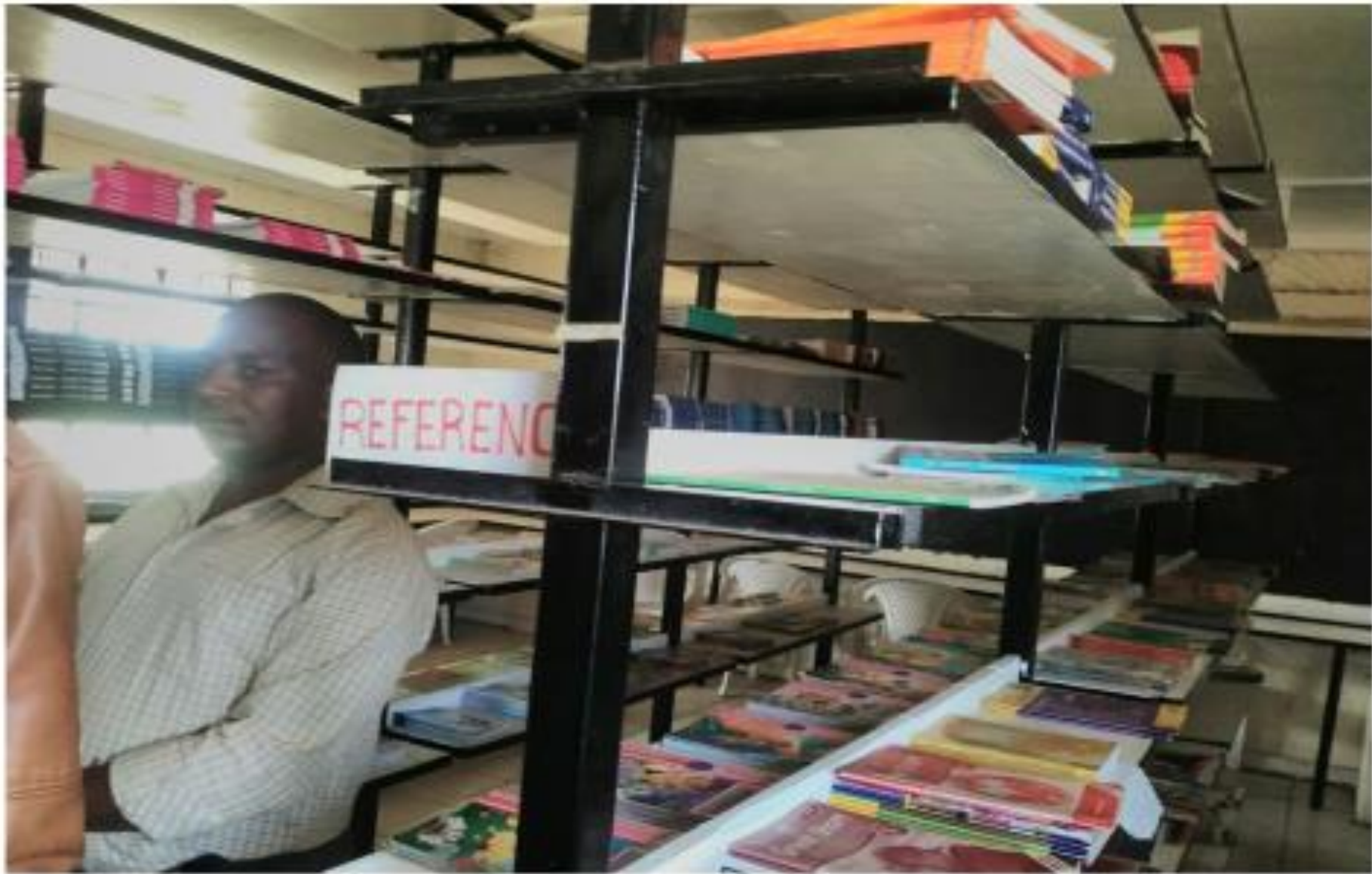
Response activities following story reading Dramatisation & singing



TEACHERS' PUBLISHED MAA BOOKS



**AFTER INTERVENTIONS:
RKP Developed Library: Kipeto Primary School**



Children select books for independent reading in P. J. Dave Primary School - an RKP Initiative



Results from Pupils' Assessment a year after interventions

- A mid-term pre-test on oral reading administered on a sample of 360 pupils revealed a marked difference in performance between pupils (cohort 1) who had gone through the intervention and those yet to (cohort 2).
- The difference in performance was observed in all the three languages:
 - English
 - Kiswahili
 - Maa

Figure 1: Class 1 Mean Performance in English Test Items per Cohort

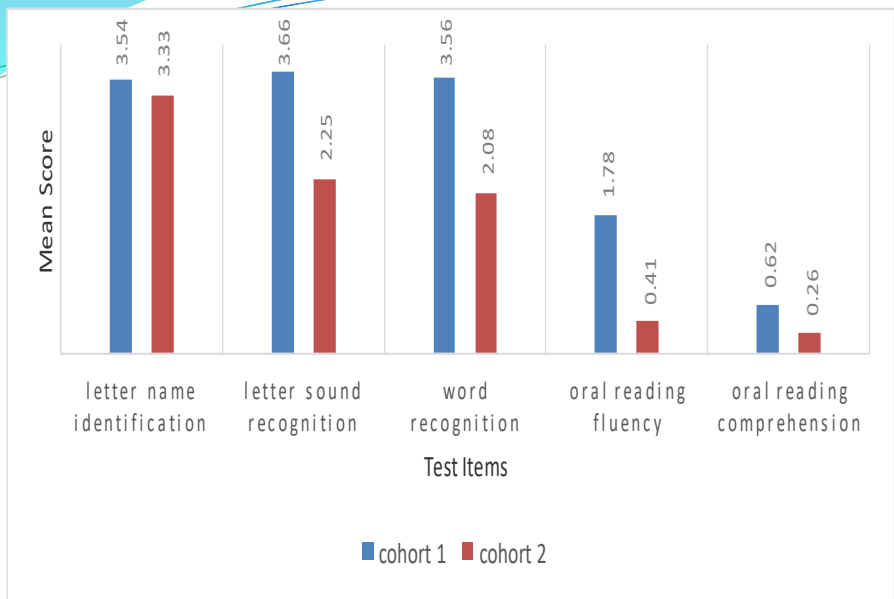


Figure 2: Class 1 Mean Performance in Kiswahili Test Items per Cohort

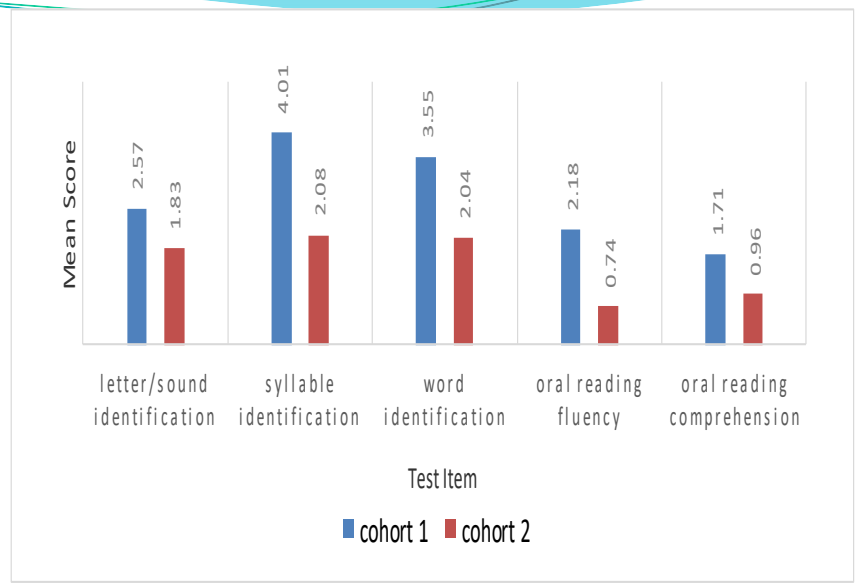
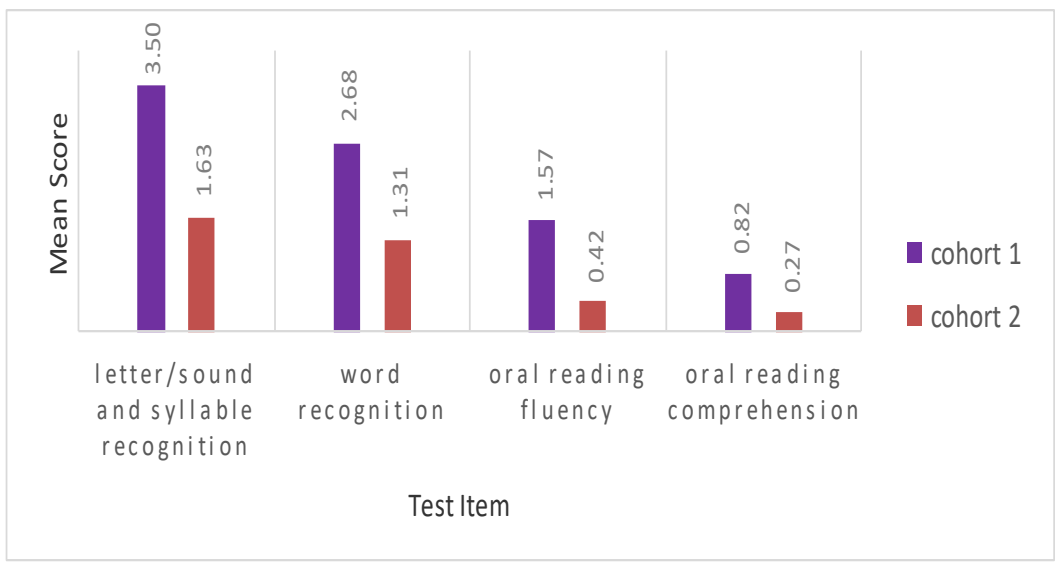
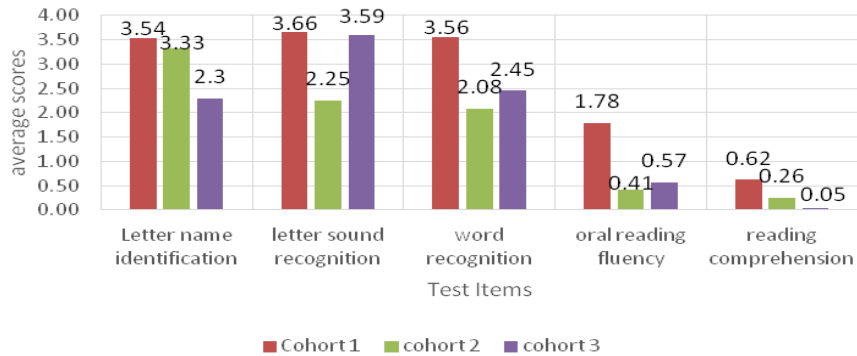


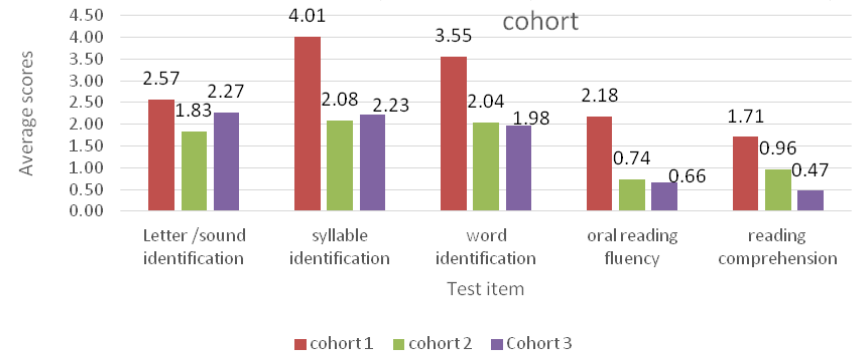
Figure 3: Class 1 Mean Performance in Maa Test Items per Cohort



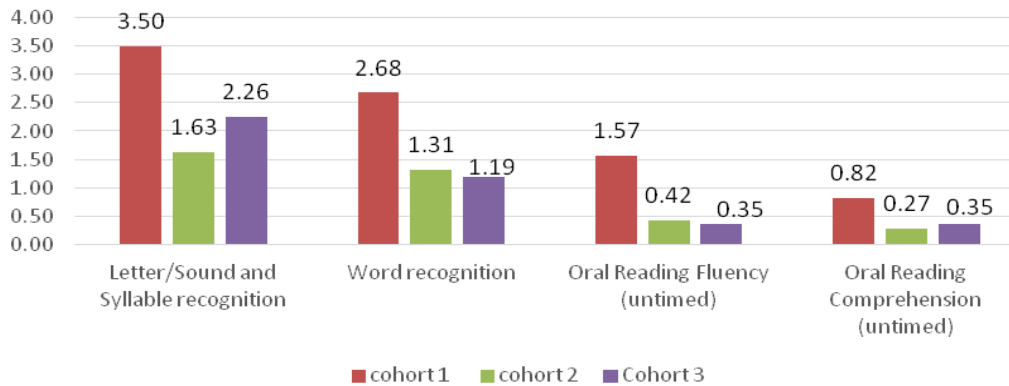
Class 1 Mean performance in English per cohort



Class 1 mean performance per test item in Kiswahili per cohort



Class 1 mean performance per test item in Maa per cohort



Lessons learnt

- It is possible for teachers to create, develop and translate reading materials for children in their familiar language - this is essential in the literacy crusade.
- Children need engaging, relevant, varied reading materials that will inspire imagination/ curiosity that helps them to develop the love of reading
- Stories in familiar language (Maa) can go a long way to support reading & learning confidence/ competence.
- For pupils' learning outcomes to improve, learners must be taught & tested in a familiar language in early grades
- Education officers and school heads have a critical role to play in mentoring ECDE teachers as an attempt towards attainment of quality learning

Lessons learnt cont-ued

- Parents play a critical role in supporting school instructional practices, but their participation should be guided
- To enhance children's learning outcomes, continued teacher professional development is extremely important
- Familiarity of materials: Books created by local writers and artists allow children to recognize themselves and their surroundings through familiar experiences
- Partnerships with host communities can have great impact in boosting early grade learning outcomes among marginalized communities

Conclusions

- Children learn to read by reading, and having accessible to sufficient numbers of engaging books
- Textbooks, when available, are much less useful if learners have difficulty reading them. If many pupils cannot read the alphabet & simple texts at their level, it may be difficult for them to comprehend the little they are able to read.
- Assessment revealed the importance of teacher training and provision of supporting multi-lingual materials to improve the literacy and learning experience of children.
- The teachers trained in Reading Kenya have positively influenced, the teaching of basic literacy skills.

Recommendations

- Increase and emphasise use of Kiswahili and Maa language storybooks
- Development of teachers' guides on the use story books as a good practice for early language development in the ECD grades
- There is need to harness local initiatives in the development of good reading practices
- Children should be supported to develop autonomy through self-motivated and self-directed learning.
- To achieve quality there is a need for more reading materials that are created by local writers and artists - books that allow children to recognize themselves and their surroundings and feel at home with the practice of reading

Recommendations

- Provide training for the untrained ECD teachers.
- Create more advocacy to ensure the ECD teacher training attract more qualified candidates (Fight the narrative of inferiority)



**Thank you
ASANTE/
ASHE' OLENG**