

**INFLUENCE OF THE READING OF FICTION ON SECONDARY  
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH IN MBITINI DIVISION OF  
MAKUENI DISTRICT**

**BY**

**KANG'ETHE B. GITAU**

**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
EAST AFRICAN COLLECTION**

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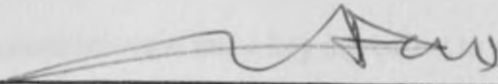


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## DECLARATION

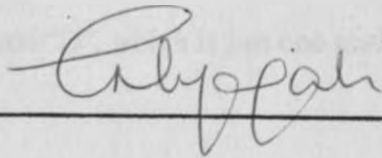
This research project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.



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**KANG'ETHE B. GITAU**

This research project report has been submitted for examination with my approval as university supervisor.



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**Dr. Grace Nyagah**

Lecturer, Department of Educational Administration and Planning, University of Nairobi.

## ABSTRACT

The importance of English both as a language and a subject studied in Kenyan schools cannot be over emphasized. Apart from being the official language it is also the language of instructions in schools. A minimum level of competence is a prerequisite to proper communication and a key ingredient to good performance in other subjects in national examinations.

This study was prompted by the observed poor performance in English by secondary school students in Mbitini Division of Makueni District. In the last five years secondary schools in this division have managed a paltry 4.08 mean score at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, out of a possible maximum of 12 points. This translates to a grade "D", which is just one grade above the absolute minimum score.

Among the possible explanations for this was the hunch that students in the division did not adequately read books of fiction. The study therefore set out to investigate if there was any correlation between the reading of fiction and performance of English. Towards this 250 out of 483 Form Four students were randomly selected from each of the ten secondary schools in the division. A questionnaire was administered, with questions on, for example, how many novels they read per term, the number of hours they devoted to the reading of fiction per week and also what their opinions were regarding the reading of fiction. The students' responses were compared to their performance in the year

2002 Makueni District Mock examination. This examination was administered to all Form Four students in the division, on the same day and under fairly similar conditions.

In addition interviews were carried out. One teacher of English in each school was interviewed. The interview covered the teachers' own observations concerning their students' reading of fiction and their opinions about the importance of fiction in the teaching of English.

The study found out that the reading of fiction was quite low in Mbitini Division. The research established that there was a significant relationship between the number of novels student read and performance in English. The Pearson Product Moment ( $r$ ) was significant at 0.64. It is important to note that the correlation observed, far from being spurious, indicated that the dearth of the reading of fiction in the division held substantial explanation to the poor performance of English not just in examinations but also in the actual functional usage of the language.

However, in spite of the lack of adequate books of fiction the students had very positive attitudes towards the reading of fiction and to the subject. Almost all of them seemed to appreciate the importance the reading of fiction has in helping one acquire proficiency or mastery of English.

Both teachers and students were agreed that the greatest challenge they faced in the pursuit of reading fiction was lack of adequate materials to read. The study established that students in the division did not have access to adequate, varied

and suitable reading materials. Teachers interviewed were positive that there was much benefit to be gained by the students if they read more books of fiction than they currently do.

Just like the students the teachers had valuable suggestions on ways of improving the reading of fiction and performance of English in their schools and also in the division. The study came up with several recommendations. Among them was the recommendation that more books of fiction should be bought and be provided to the students. The novels to be bought need not be the very expensive ones. It was also generally felt that allocation of more time to the subject would give teachers a chance to help students in their reading, especially of fiction. However providing the students with adequate books of fiction would be an excellent starting point.

The study also identified areas in which further research should be conducted. Research should be conducted on the levels of job satisfaction of teachers of English in the division and also on the effects of the integration of English and Literature in English.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

1.0

## **INTRODUCTION**

1.1

### **Background to the Study**

*Start*  
English is the official language in Kenya. Because of this it is a core subject in the curriculum and all students sitting for Kenya Certificate of Secondary School Education (K.C.S.E.) have to be tested on it, after four years of study. An ability to communicate effectively using the language is a valuable asset. English is the medium of instructions in Kenyan schools and colleges and apart from other language subjects, all examinations are in English. Thus, a student who is proficient in the language has a better chance of performing well in other subjects. In addition most courses of study at post secondary institutions require students to have attained a minimum grade in English before they can be considered for admission.

At the national level English is the official language of government and business in Kenya. Being handicapped in the use of the language is clearly not only a personal disadvantage to the student but is also a drawback in achieving the national goals of education in Kenya.

Among the factors identified by Stern (1996) that influence the acquisition and mastery of any language are the formal and informal second language learning experiences outside the classroom and the environmental context of language teaching and learning. These two factors stress the students' own input in learning a language and also on the material base upon which the learning of a language is undertaken.

According to the K.I.E (1987), the students' input include practicing to pronounce words correctly, vocabulary building exercises, expressing themselves confidently and intelligibly in the target language, correcting common mistakes in the target language and exercising acceptable communication habits. Other language activities that students can engage in include writing neatly and legibly, expressing ideas logically and coherently and developing and sustaining these ideas appropriately. In their writings students should use a sufficiently wide range of vocabulary, use correct sentence structures and also spell words correctly. In addition, the students should read either silently or aloud using the target language. Reading can be for getting the gist of the material being read. Reading can also be undertaken for detailed, selected and critical appreciation of a text.

The environment influences language learning by primarily providing a material base upon which learning can proceed. Learners require textbooks, newspapers, manuals, libraries, classrooms and stationery. It can be argued that the environment influences not just language learning but the entire curriculum.

There are four skills of language namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading is the most adaptable and can easily be combined with the others. For example, reading and writing, summarizing, mentioning what has been read in a letter, or note making; reading and writing, comparing an article and a news bulletin, using recorded information to solve a written problem and matching opinions and texts, reading and speaking, discussions, debates and appreciation.

Reading fiction plays a crucial linguistic role since it helps develop the learners' own use of language. Reading fiction does this by presenting language in context rather than in sterile linguistic odds, bits and ends that have little semblance to the way language is used in real life situations. Fiction also helps in the development of vocabulary by exposing the reader to a variety of words and how these words function in a given context. This in turn helps improve writing skills. Stories are also a basis for other language activities, especially speaking and creative written work.

The Kenya National Examination Council (K.N.E.C) recognizes the importance of reading fiction in acquiring proficiency in English. The K.N.E.C in its syllabus for Secondary school English course views the reading of fiction as an important aspect of language and literature since it develops students' knowledge of the structural and semantic aspects of English. The Kenya National Examination Council further recommends that students in the secondary school level should read individually a minimum of one reader per week and produce a book report on a regular basis.

As already mentioned the environment greatly influences the effectiveness of language learning. The environment here refers to the material base of the learning situation. One of the challenges in the pursuit of reading of fiction is access to meaningful and interesting reading material. Indeed the report of The National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (Republic of Kenya, 1976) otherwise known as the Gachathi Report noted that books and other educational materials are the basic tools for educational development and must therefore be available at the time they are required and at a cost the learner can afford. To a large extent this is the greatest challenge to reading fiction. Good books cost money. Schools in Mbitini Division appear to work on stringent budgets and the buying of books of fiction appears not to be on the priority list of administrators. For example, many of the schools in the division do not even have libraries and some do not even have an inventory of any books of fiction in their possession. Most schools appear to be content to buy several copies of the recommended K.I.E English language text books The Integrated English Books 1-4 and assume that by going through the exercises in these volumes, pupils will have mastered all the language skills. Where there are no books no reading can take place. The challenge then is to provide students with an adequate and varied supply of books of fiction.

A second challenge is one of attitude. Some students do not like reading fiction. It is not uncommon to meet students who have gone through four years of secondary school education having read no single work of fiction, apart from the

prescribed texts. This indicates a negative attitude towards reading more than anything else. The challenge is to interest learners in reading at an early age, probably as early as during the pre-school years. Exposing pupils to interesting and appropriate stories at an early age in their schooling can easily do this. As Smith (1988) notes, the kind of reading that would most familiarize children with written language is coherent stories ranging from items in the newspapers and magazines to traditional fairy tales, ghosts and adventure stories, history and myths (p 204). Smith further observes that not surprisingly, the more interest and knowledge we have of something, the easier it is to learn, understand, remember and think about it (p 263). Reading fiction thus clearly helps in the development and mastery of language skills. As the Kenya Institute of Education (1987) notes in A Handbook of English for Secondary School Teachers, reading helps learners improve their learning across the curriculum as well as improve their language skills. A person who is unable to read is handicapped. For this reason reading is an essential skill.

## 1.2

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students in Mbitini Division of Makueni District perform poorly in English at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E). Records at the Area Education Offices indicated that over the last four years the ten secondary schools in the Division had averaged a mean score of 4.03 on a 12-point scale, 12 being the highest and 1 the lowest. Below is a table showing the average

K.C.S.E. English mean scores by schools in Mbitini Division for the years 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Table 1

K.C.S.E English mean scores by school in Mbitini Division

SCHOOL/YEAR	1998	1999	2000	2001	1998-2001
NGOTO	4.43	4.42	4.77	4.88	4.63
MULALA	3.77	4.00	4.67	6.76	4.80
KYEMUNDU	3.67	4.42	4.24	3.92	4.06
NDUUNDUNE	3.37	4.72	4.16	3.70	3.99
MUAMBWANI	4.07	3.44	4.66	3.60	3.94
KYUMBUNI	3.52	3.83	4.69	3.69	3.93
BARAZANI	2.86	4.03	4.59	4.07	3.89
MBUTHANI	3.39	3.97	4.00	3.89	3.81
TUTINI	3.84	3.29	4.07	3.15	3.59
MUKAMENI	2.89	3.67	4.38	3.75	3.67
DIVISIONAL AVERAGE	3.58	3.98	4.42	4.14	4.03

The table above shows that performance of English in the division is quite low since a mean score of 4.03 translates to a D+ grade, which in K.C.S.E. parlance is the threshold of competence in any subject. Further evidence that the division performs lowly in English is provided by the fact that out of the sixteen educational divisions that make Makueni District performance of English is lowest in Mbitini, as table 2 shows. There are 135 secondary schools in Makueni District, which are divided into 16 educational divisions. Each division has an average of 10 schools. The average district K.C.S.E means score in English for years 2000 and 2001 stands at 4.68. Below is a table showing the average district K.C.S.E mean scores by division.

Table 2

Makueni District K.C.S.E. English mean scores by division for years 2000 and 2001

DIVISION/YEAR	2000	2001	MEAN
KAITI	4.43	4.80	4.62
KALAWA	4.76	4.84	4.80
KASIKEU	4.52	4.87	4.70
KATHONZWENI	4.59	4.49	4.54
KIBWEZI	4.77	4.42	4.60
KILOME	4.58	4.60	4.59
KILUNGU	5.07	5.30	5.19
KISAU	4.41	4.84	4.63
MAKINDU	4.80	4.86	4.83
MATILIKU	4.84	4.94	4.89
MBOONI	4.58	4.49	4.54
MBITINI	4.42	4.22	4.32
MTITO-ANDEI	4.50	4.52	4.51
NGUU	4.47	4.70	4.59
TULIMANI	4.56	4.65	4.61
WOTE	4.88	4.80	4.84
DISTRICT AVERAGE	4.64	4.71	4.68

A casual survey had revealed that many schools in the division did not have libraries and that those that did only had buildings that were scarcely stocked with old and unattractive novels donated by some agencies. Some of the books had the word 'DISCARDED' boldly stamped on them. There was also a smattering of titles by local and international popular writers. Casual talk with teachers and students from various schools indicated that by the time a majority of the students in the division sat for the final examination at form four they had only read a handful of books of fiction. Some apparently went through the entire



secondary school cycle without ever having read a single novel. This study investigated the extent to which students in the division read works of fiction and then related this with schools' performance in English at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which the reading of fiction affected students' performance in English in Mbitini Division. The study sought to determine how frequently students in the division read books of fiction and then related this frequency to performance in English.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The study set out to achieve the following five objectives.

- 1) To establish how schools in the division performed in English at K.C.S.E.
- 2) To establish whether students in the division had access to books of fiction, and if they did, how adequate these books were.
- 3) To determine how frequently students in the division read books of fiction.
- 4) To determine whether there was a relationship between the numbers of books of fiction students in each school read and performance in English at K.C.S.E.
- 5) To determine the students' attitudes in the division towards the reading of fiction and its impact on performance in English.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study set out to seek answers to the following questions.

- 1) How well stocked with books of fiction were the schools in the division?

- 2) How frequently did students in the division read books of fiction?
- 3) What were the attitudes of students in the division toward the reading of fiction?
- 4) Did the reading of fiction have any influence on the performance of students in the division in the subject?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study was justifiable on several grounds.

Policy-makers especially curriculum developers may find this study useful in redesigning an English course of study for secondary school students. Currently the Kenya National Examinations Council (K.N.E.C.) regulations and syllabus, while recognizing the importance of reading fiction in the acquisition of proficiency in English nevertheless lays emphasis on speaking and writing as the more critical language skills. Likewise the Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E) which is the body charged with the overall responsibility for developing curriculum in Kenyan schools stresses the same two skills and in a similar way, only acknowledges the importance of reading fiction, as a rather leisurely activity out of which some linguistic benefits may accrue. There probably are valid reasons for this. However the findings of this study may help the two bodies make innovations in the secondary school English curriculum and incorporate more of reading as a language skill than they presently do.

In addition to this the findings of this study may compel policy-makers at both the national and local levels to adjust the allocation of resources with more funds being devoted to the acquisition of reading materials, such as novels, than is currently the case.

Teachers of English should also benefit. It is hoped that they will now be more focused in their teaching and will have a better understanding of the challenges they face in their work. The study may enable teachers of English to clearly see the link between the reading of books of fiction and performance in English. It is hoped that teachers will then try to encourage their students to read extensively with the ultimate aim of improving their performance in English.

Teachers Training Colleges and institutions of higher learning such as universities where teachers of English are trained should also benefit from the research findings of this study. Ultimately the study will benefit the whole country. Over the years the national average performance in English has been below average. For example, according to the year 2000 Kenya National Examination Council Newsletter on K.C.S.E. Performance the mean score in English for 1999 was 32%. This was a marked improvement, for over the previous years the mean score had been well below 30%. This study may provide insights, ideas and innovations that may be applied not just in Mbitini Division but also anywhere else in the rest of the country where chronic under-performance in the subject may exist. As Stern (1996) notes, second language teaching, like any other educational expense, represents an investment in human and financial resources.

## **1.7 Delimitations of the Study**

Nyagah (1995) defines delimitation of a study as “a purposeful and conscious action in order to make the research manageable”.

The most important delimitation of the study was that only one language skill, reading, was investigated. There are three other skills of language namely, speaking, listening and writing. Each one of them plays a crucial role in helping a second-language learner acquire proficiency in the target language. In addition a marked competence in any of these skills may be taken to indicate proficiency in the language. For example a fluent speaker of a second language might conceal grammatical, vocabulary and or syntactical weaknesses by exhibiting eloquent speech. Notwithstanding such weaknesses such a speaker can still communicate *effectively* since spoken language does not rely entirely on, for example, correctness of grammar, to be effective but it can fall back on what Omondi (1999), refers to as supra- segmentals. These include gestures, facial expressions, pitch and tonal variation, among others, that though not linguistic in nature, nevertheless invariably accompany speech and contribute greatly toward overall communication. However, important as the other skills of language are, the study only considered how the exercising of the reading skill had impacted on performance of English in the division. Only the reading of books of fiction was considered. Students in Mbitini Division do read textbooks for various subjects, lesson notes given in class by their teachers, letters, prescribed literary books, and various guidebooks for these prescribed works. The study presumed that the reading of these genres constituted neither an adequate nor an appropriate menu to sufficiently equip the student with satisfactory linguistic competencies and they were therefore excluded from the study.

The study was survey research, which sets out, according to Borg (1998), to determine the opinions, attitudes, preferences and perceptions of persons of interest to the researcher. Because of this the study considered only the physical factors contributing to inadequate reading of fiction in the division. The emphasis was on provision, availability and accessibility of adequate and appropriate materials.

Many other factors contribute to poor reading. Moyle (1982) identifies at least eight sources of reading difficulties. These include: low intelligence, dyslexia (a condition that is considered by some authorities to be rooted in some dysfunction of the brain due to damage at birth or through illness), physiological conditions of the students, difficulties with visual and aural discrimination, language difficulties, personality and emotional factors and environmental and school related factors. To investigate all these would have required a broader and longer study as well as a different approach other than a survey research. Therefore as much as they are pertinent to reading these factors were excluded from the study. This study involved only form four students in the target area. It was the considered opinion of the researcher that the inclusion of students in other classes would not have added significantly to the research findings.

Only teachers of English were included in the study; other non-language teachers in the school do play an important role in shaping the reading habits of students and also in the acquisition and improvement of language skills, but they were excluded.

Finally the study was conducted in schools within Mbitini Educational Division. Performance in English in the other divisions of Makueni District is not particularly any better than in Mbitini as Table 2 above indicates. In fact some, like Nguu and Mtito-Andei Divisions, recorded more or less similar scores. The implication is that a district wide study was indicated. However the constraints of time and finances ruled against such a venture. In spite of this however Mbitini Division is a fair microcosm of the entire District, what goes on in schools here is likely to be replicated in the majority of schools in the rest of the district.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted with students who had not yet sat for their K.C.S.E and whose performance in English had not yet been established. The prevalence of reading of fiction and the grades obtained in previous years may not have had any direct correlation since the students being investigated were different from those who had sat for their examinations. To resolve this problem the students' scores in English in the 2002 Makueni District K.C.S.E. Mocks were used in data analysis, especially in relating the students' frequency of reading books of fiction and performance in English. It was presumed that the district mock, which was taken by candidates a few months prior to K.C.S.E. proper, fairly mirrored the final examination. Teachers who had already been interviewed on this seemed to concur that the grades students obtain in the mocks are quite similar to what they eventually score in the final

examination. For the purposes of this study the mocks were considered valid and reliable tests of competence in the subject. All candidates in the division were examined using identical tests, under fairly similar conditions and practically at the same time. These further enhanced the reliability of the tests.

Another possible limitation was the data collection method used. The reliability of the data was dependent on the responses given by both teachers of English and students. There was a likelihood of the subjects giving biased data especially if they felt that their true reading habits were deficient. In a bid to create a favourable impression about themselves and their institutions subjects may have been tempted to give incorrect information that might have distorted the research findings. Care was taken to assure the subjects that the information they gave would be treated confidentially and that the specific information they gave would be used only for the purposes of the study and for nothing else.

Finally the study could have been limited by the actual language skills of the subjects. Some of the subjects, especially the students, might have possessed such poor English language skills that they may not clearly have comprehended the questions they were required to answer, especially where they had to put their answers down in writing. The researcher took time to explain thoroughly to the subjects what the questions required, and clarified where ambiguities might have existed.

The following assumptions were adopted in the study

1. The first assumption of this study was that the Kenya Certificate of Education (K.C.S.E), or its equivalent examination, is a fair test of proficiency in English. This was a basic assumption since it is apparent that there are other parameters of gauging language proficiency. For example, the K.C.S.E does not test *oral* performance of English; yet speaking is clearly the most basic of language skills. It is conceivable that a learner could have mastered the language in its spoken form and can communicate excellently in spite of scoring low marks in the formal examination. In addition native speakers of the language do not have to sit for any examinations in order to be considered proficient in the language. The assumption was that performance in the K.C.S.E is an adequate measure of competence in the language.

2. This study also assumed that the other language skills, namely listening, speaking and writing were practiced equally in all schools in the division and could therefore not affect the research findings.

3. The quality of teachers in individual schools may influence performance in English. The assumption in this study was that all teachers of English in the division have similar or comparable qualifications. Records at the Area Education Offices indicated that of the 14 teachers of English 13 of them are graduates of Kenyan public universities while the only non-graduate is a diploma



holder of long standing who is nevertheless classified as an approved graduate teacher.

4. The methodology teachers employ in teaching the language may also influence performance.

This study assumed that teachers in the division employed basically the same methods in their teaching of the subject. That all schools in the division relied heavily on identical course books, that is The Integrated English course book volume 1-4 by the K.I.E, seemed to validate this assumption.

### **1.10 Definition of significant terms**

Some of the terms used in the research were operationally used to mean the follow

**ATTITUDE:** way of thinking or behaving towards an object, person or thing; either liking or disliking.

**COMPETENCE:** Degree of having the necessary ability, authority, skill or knowledge about a subject, profession, field of study or art.

**FICTION:** Type of literature such as novels, stories, plays and biographies generally describing imaginary events and people though sometimes based on real life experiences or real people.

**FIRST LANGUAGE:** The first system of sounds, words and patterns that a person acquires to communicate thoughts and feelings; mother tongue, native language.

**GRADE:** Marks given in an examination or for schoolwork.

**LIBRARY:** Collection of books for reading or for borrowing or room or building where these books are kept.

**LISTENING SKILLS:** The skill or ability to alertly and attentively try to hear what is being said.

**MEAN SCORE:** A candidate's average score. This score can also be computed for a school, subject, country or region based on a particular examination.

**PERFORMANCE:** Achievement in an examination.

**POOR PERFORMANCE:** Achievement in an examination which is not good or adequate, especially in contrast with what is usual or expected; of low quality or deficient.

**READER:** A reading book, usually a story book for use in a classroom.

**READING/READING SKILLS:** the ability or skill to understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols.

**SECOND LANGUAGE:** The language one acquires after the first or native language or mother tongue; a foreign language.

**SKILL:** Ability to do something well.

**SPEAKING SKILLS:** The ability to use words in an ordinary voice; to utter in a comprehensible way; to communicate using spoken words.

**VOCABULARY:** Total number of words that make up a language or body of words known to a person or words one can recognize and use.

**WRITING SKILLS:** The ability or skills to make letters or other symbols on a surface, usually paper; to communicate comprehensively using such symbols.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E) (1987) in A Handbook for Teachers of English in Secondary Schools stresses reading as the most important component in the acquisition of competence in a second language. Through both intensive and extensive reading learners are exposed to applied language. This also provides a good springboard from which to launch out into Literature learning and teaching. Reading plays a pivotal role without which the integration of language and literature becomes impossible. A lot of quality reading must therefore be undertaken and sustained throughout the course. (K.I.E., 1987).

Omulando (1979) in a study of factors influencing language proficiency in Kenya's primary schools identifies the supply of equipment and teaching materials as important for enhancing performance in English. In this study Omulando posits that well stocked libraries can help improve performance in the subject. However, his study is not concerned with the reading of fiction *per se* and he recommends that further research should be done along this line. In addition Omulando's study is concerned with performance in primary schools and not in secondary schools. Nevertheless some of the points raised in that study apply to secondary schools as well. For example his opinion that reading of storybooks

helps primary school pupils improve their language skills also applies to secondary school students. Proceeding from there this study set out to investigate the influence of reading of fiction on performance of English in secondary schools in the target area. However, before delving into the study proper it is necessary to first consider the functions that the reading of fiction play in facilitating acquisition of mastery of a second language by a learner.

## **2.1 Functions of Fiction in Teaching English**

Proficiency in reading skills improves learning across the curriculum. The reading of fiction as contrasted with the reading of subject textbooks is especially effective in facilitating the acquisition of proficiency in language skills by students. Odero (1995) in A Study of Teachers' Perceptions of the Extent of Utilization of Children's Literature to Teach English in Kenyan Primary Schools, observes that literature provides the instance and opportunity for a rich language environment and the more we utilize it the more we are likely to increase the linguistic competence of children (p3).

### **Reading and speaking**

Reading helps learners improve their speaking skills. Indeed as Smith (1998) observes, students who read more also tend to have larger vocabularies. This in turn equips the learner with a wide reservoir of words to choose from in any conversational situation. Reading also assists in the pronunciation of words. Reading provides the learner with a graphic (orthographic) representation of a particular word. The morphology or the internal structure of the form of a word is

demonstrated visually rather than acoustically. This enables the learner to break a word into its constituent syllables and pronounce each distinctly and separately. In addition to acquainting the learner to words with unconventional orthography reading also provides the learner with a chance to practice on such words. Examples of unconventionally spelled words are *knife*, *cognac* and *psychic*. In addition, reading motivates the learner to periodically consult a dictionary especially when a word either difficult to pronounce or whose meaning is unknown is encountered. Most dictionaries used by secondary school students have phonetic transcriptions of words listed in them. Although phonetics is generally not taught in secondary schools, the annotations included in most dictionaries about the use of phonetics are more than sufficient to enable the learner derive a fair pronunciation of a word. In this way reading also helps learners improve their listening skills since practicing speaking is, by extension, practising listening.

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Although Odero's study targets primary schools and takes a broader perspective since her subject of study, literature, encompasses both oral and written genres, nevertheless the observation she makes holds true for secondary schools. In a loose sense literature and fiction are synonymous. Reading fiction plays the following roles in language and literature teaching.

### **Fiction and writing**

It is in writing skills that reading plays the greatest influence. Smith (1998) opines that it is only through reading that one can learn to write. The only possible way

to learn all the conventions of spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and even grammar and style is through reading. Odero (1995) makes similar observation when she points out that among the roles Literature plays in language learning in primary schools is developing listening and speaking skills. This study took the view that likewise secondary school students are likely to improve their speaking skills from exercising wide reading of fiction. In this regard therefore this study set out to establish whether indeed this is the case in Mbitini Division. One of the principles of language teaching postulated by Stern (1996) contends that isolating features of a language distorts them to some extent because in real life they interact with other features. The language teacher wishes to teach language as a whole – not just sounds, words or sentences. Reading helps avoid this distortion by presenting the target language to the learner in whole and in context. Echoing a similar opinion Omondi (1999) in an inaugural lecture focusing on the Kenyan linguistic experience contends that the English learners acquire will naturally be essentially that from books and formal teaching. In the Kenyan context testing for proficiency in English is basically done through written examinations. A student with superior writing skills will almost certainly perform better not just in English but in other subjects as well. Omondi (1999) further observes that in Kenya, on the ground, English as a second language is learned almost invariably from the formal school system. In order to facilitate this learning then wide reading especially of books of fiction is a prerequisite. This point is further enhanced by the fact that to the greatest majority of students of English in Kenya and to *all* the

subjects in this study English is a second language. The nearest they can ever come across the language in its context is when they read works of fiction. In investigating the frequency of reading of fiction in the division this study in reality considered the complete linguistic experience of which writing is but a part.

### **Fiction and motivation**

Okwany (1993) in A Study of the Attitudes of Kenyan High School Students Toward the Learning of Kiswahili identifies motivation as central to the learning of a language. She notes that learning is likely to become a life-long endeavor only when it is associated with pleasurable experience. Protherough (1986) argues that reading fiction entertains the reader. There is enjoyment, pleasure, and relaxation in reading a well-crafted story. For example, the Moses series of books by Barbara Kimenye though perhaps not very strong on thematics nevertheless are great entertainers primarily because of the simplicity of their plots, humour and setting. Fiction develops positive attitudes towards reading. Once a student has been initiated into the joys of reading fiction it is hard to break the "addiction". Reading is its own reward. As Smith (1988) puts it, the more we read, the more we are able to read . . . experience in reading leads to more knowledge about reading itself. Not surprisingly students who read a lot tend to read better. They do not need to read better in order to read a lot, but the more they read, the more they learn about reading. As in Okwany's study this research adopted the premise that just as important motivation is in the learning of



Kiswahili so it is in the learning of English. In that regard this study attempted to verify whether or not this indeed was the case in Mbitini Division as far as the learning of English was concerned.

### **Fiction and creativity**

Reading fiction helps develop the imagination. One device almost always employed by authors is suspense. Suspense is created by either withholding some information in the story from the reader and revealing bits of it as the narrative progresses, or by introducing what in literary circles are known as *deus ex machinas* (contrivances). This exercises the imagination in that the reader has to constantly guess of the possible conclusions to the story. Authors frequently “lay ambush” on readers by ending their stories in completely different situations. For example in Orwell’s (1948) Animal Farm the reader is initially made to believe that the animals’ lot will improve once Man has been chased out of Manor farm but in the end the animals are worse off than before. Fiction extends experience and knowledge of life (broadens the mind and widen the horizon), by introducing the learners to other kinds of people, places, periods and situations. In other words reading fiction creates surrogate or vicarious contact between one socio-cultural setting and that of the reader. This is important in language development, especially where it is impractical to establish meaningful personal contact between the second language learners and the native speakers of the target language. Fiction also carries over into other subjects through thematic or topic work. For example a reading of Ngugi wa Thiongo’s (1993) Weep Not Child ,

A Grain of Wheat (1994), The River Between, (1995) or Chinua Achebe's, (1960) Things Fall Apart provide very informative insights into contemporary African History, especially colonialism, independence and the emergence of new nation – states in the continent. Odera (1995) underscores this point when she points out that Literature enhances the learners' cultural experience. In support of this Omondi (1999) posits that the social cultural exposure is essential to the natural process of child language acquisition.

### **Fiction and literary criticism**

Reading fiction strengthens interest in literature since books enjoyed make more demanding works available to the reader. In Kenya Literature is taught as an integrated part of English language. Students must excel in the Literature paper of the English examination if they are to be considered to have passed in the subject. Wide reading of fiction then helps learners to deepen literary appreciation of forms and structures used in Literature. The literary menu on offer for the Literature paper is rather inadequate since it consists of only one novel, one play, an anthology of short stories, elementary poetry and Oral Literature. These are supposed to be studied over a period of two years. These can hardly be enough to make passable literary critics out of the students.

Some aspects of criticism cannot be taught in any appreciable way other than by exposing the learner to the aspect itself. For example the subtleties, nuances and connotations of speech or written dialogue are impossible to teach in isolation. Ingenious stylistic devices such as foregrounding, motifs, humour,

allusions and even irony cannot really be taught but must be experienced and mastered through extensive reading of fiction. Odero (1995) alludes to this in her study when she notes that one of the roles of Literature in language teaching and learning in primary schools is what she calls “aesthetic experiences”. If even at the lower levels of education, literature, of which fiction is a central part, plays an important role in acquisition of proficiency in English then fiction must play an even greater role in secondary schools towards the same. This point is further heightened by the fact that at K.C.S.E. the Literature paper, which is combined with the language paper, to arrive at the aggregate score in English, carries 40% of the marks.

Reading fiction enables the reader to discriminate and evaluate on a wider base. Almost all themes in literature are recurring. However each author will treat a theme differently from another. Indeed even the same author will almost always treat a theme differently in a sequel. For example the earlier writings of Meja Mwangi such as Going Down River Road (1994), The Cockroach Dance (1992) and Kill Me Quick (1990), all deal with similar themes. However each novel treats the themes slightly differently and one cannot say that having read one of them it is not necessary to read the others. It is only by reading extensively that one can learn to be discriminative of, for example, authors point of views, biases and sympathies. Reading fiction also helps students establish an understanding of the nature of Literature and the course of literary history. Reading pop fiction is the best introduction ever to the more serious Literature and the

classics. As Smith (1988) puts it a learner's fund of knowledge and confidence should be constantly developed, but this will only occur as a consequence of reading.

Researchers and writers of textbooks on languages, and on English in particular appear to have a bias towards the other three skills of language, namely speaking (phonetics and phonology), listening and writing. Renowned linguists such as John Lyons, Noam Chomsky and Michael Halliday, among others, devote extensive time and space to the phonological and syntactical aspects of English, and language in general, but barely mention reading as an important skill in the acquisition of proficiency. In the Kenyan context most of the research on languages investigate either the three skills of language mentioned above especially speaking, or supra-linguistic factors of language such as motivation to learn and attitudes of either or both learners and teachers toward a specific language. Most of the research is directed at primary schools, for example Omulando's and Odero's. However this is not to say that that there are no books written about reading. Neither is it say that there is no research done concerning secondary schools. The point is that the influence of reading of fiction on performance of English in secondary schools is an area not fully researched on. This study then attempted to provide insights into this area and has, hopefully, contributed, however modestly, into filling this lacuna.

## 2.2 Criteria of selecting books for reading for pleasure

Having considered the role of reading fiction in acquisition of language proficiency it is imperative to consider what parameters to apply in selecting books of fiction for students.

The K.I.E (1987) identifies some criteria for selecting books for reading for pleasure. These are:

- The book should be worth reading. It should have a major character with whom young readers can readily identify. The plot of the story should get underway swiftly and appeal to learner's curiosity and sense of anticipation. The motivation of the protagonist in his or her actions should be at the level of the learner's understanding and psychosocial development especially from a moral perspective.
- The book should be popular. Children prefer what they themselves have chosen.
- The book should be useful. It should be one that is divided into episodes, is presented effectively and is linked with other activities.
- The book should be suitable for the learners. This should be in terms of the relative difficulty of the text, the likely emotional impact, the attitudes conveyed in the book, the clarity or otherwise of the storyline, whether the chronology is straightforward, or the time scale is differently handled, the management of viewpoints, the variety of narrative voices in which the story is told, and the extent to which the events *are* the story as opposed to

having sub- textual significance (in other words authorial intrusion should be minimal).

Odero (1995) in her study also identifies similar criteria. She argues that a book should be chosen on the bases of its educative nature, ease of reading, appropriateness of language, sensitivity to morals, aesthetic appeal, recommendations from the ministry and, where applicable, attractiveness of illustrations.

In conclusion of this part, suffice it to say that reading is a core activity and exercise in the acquisition of a second language. To acquire proficiency in the target language the learner should have access to a wide range of reading materials. In a school setting, materials such as books should be readily available in the schools libraries, public libraries, context area textbooks, newspapers and magazines. Where these are not readily available it is as good as futile to teach the learners the grammar of the target language. This is because in such a situation, essentially the learner will be studying an abstraction of rules governing a language he or she hardly comprehends. A poor performance in the subject is almost inevitable.

Moyle (1982) defines reading as turning the collection of symbols seen upon a piece of paper into "talk" or in case of silent reading, into an image of speech sounds. However reading involves much more than merely decoding orthographic notations into speech sounds. Reading calls upon the reader to mentally respond to the context of what is read, to understand the message of the author, reflect upon it and to evaluate its value in relation to previously learned concepts. The Oxford advanced learners' Dictionary defines fiction as type of literature such as novels and stories describing imaginary events and people. However for literary purposes the reading material need not be entirely fictitious. Biographies, autobiographies and real life stories and experiences can serve just as well.

Stern (1996) describes a good learner of language as some one, who among other things, employs a social learning strategy, which implies seeking communicative contacts with target language users and the target language community either in person or vicariously through writings, media, role-playing or immersion. In the Kenyan context as is clearly exemplified by the situation in Mbitini Division it is not very practical to expect learners to establish meaningful personal contact with native speakers of English. This is where good books of fiction step in to create the much needed vicarious, or surrogate, contact with English. Works of fiction do this very well because as Smith (1988) notes the power that reading provides is enormous, not only in giving access to people far

distant and long dead, but also in allowing entry into worlds which might otherwise not exist. Reading enables us to manipulate time itself, to involve our selves in ideas or events at a rate and in a sequence of our choosing quite independently of the manner in which the text was produced or printed. Most linguists give primacy to the speaking skills in their study of language learning and language proficiency. Tidyman, Smith and Butterfield (1989) argue that speaking and listening are the first language experiences of a child. They provide basic patterns of expression and they lay a foundation in abilities and skills for later language development. Lyons (1991), in support of this notes that the contemporary linguist maintains that the spoken language is primary and that writing is essentially a means of representing speech in another medium.

Moreover, in typical situations in which the written language is used there is no direct face- to- face confrontation of writer and reader; information which might be carried by the gestures and facial expressions accompanying speech must therefore be conveyed verbally. This clearly explains the case for the primacy of phonology, morphology and syntax, in linguistic studies.

Reading can be viewed as an advanced form of language. Lyons (1991) indeed posits that the written form of a language is almost an entirely different language from the spoken form of that language. Reading, according to Tidyman, *et al* (1989) implies grasping meaning from the printed symbols on the page that involves comprehending, judging and reacting to the ideas presented. This study adopted the theory that reading, especially of imaginative literature or fiction,



plays a central role in equipping learners, especially those to whom the target language is a second –language, with proficiency in that language. More precisely, from the perspective of this study reading fiction should help students improve their performance in English at K.C.S.E.

The basis for this theory is that reading impacts on all aspects and skills of language. For example the K.I.E. (1987) notes some of the major reading tasks for students such as training in reading for such purposes as noting details, skimming for specific tasks, drawing conclusions or influences, detecting authors' mood and purposes, evaluating reading or critical analysis which involves the weighing of facts opinions generalisations and analogies. Another task is reading for extension of word recognition skills or vocabulary. This involves phonic and structural analysis with emphasis on use of prefixes and suffixes in word formation and inflection. Yet another reading task is the development of all communication skills through integrating, listening, composition and organization of data from reading. Finally there is the reading task for broadening interests and reading tastes meant to build a foundation for recreational reading and cultivating appreciation of poetry and good Literature. According to Stern (1996) knowing a language, competence or proficiency in the first or second language can be summarized as the intuitive mastery of the forms of the language, the intuitive mastery of the cognitive, affective and socio-cultural meanings expressed by the language forms, the capacity to use the language with maximum attention to

communication and minimum attention to form, and the creativity of language use (p.346).

In simple terms this study was based on the theory that extensive reading of fiction leads to improved listening skills, improved speaking skills, improved writing skills and better literary appreciation. In turn all these lead to enhanced acquisition of proficiency in the target language and, in the context of this investigation to better performance in English at national examinations. To quote Tidyman, *et al* (1989), reading material, particularly imaginative literature, suitable in context and vocabulary to the maturity of the children is a rich source of ideas and words. From reading, both oral and silent, the children get ideas and also words for expressing them. Noticing new words, particularly well-turned and beautiful expressions, adds to the enjoyment and understanding of literature and provides a limitless source of fresh ideas for use in various language experiences. Okwany (1993) in her study expresses a similar opinion when she states that language learning is likely to become a life-long endeavour only when it is associated with pleasurable experience. Reading fiction provides that pleasurable experience.

In summary then reading fiction is a worthwhile exercise for all language learners. Fiction broadens the mind and widens the horizon by making it possible to vicariously relive the experiences of others. For non-native speakers of English reading fiction is perhaps the only practical contact they can have with the language in its context. Such contact, surrogate as it might be, helps the language

learner develop as close as possible an intuitive understanding of the language. Otherwise studying the grammar of a language without a basic functional mastery of the target language is an exercise in futility; it is a waste of time and resources. Clearly then adequate, appropriate and meaningful reading of fiction is crucial in the study of a language. As long as students do not extensively and intensively read fiction they will most probably continue scoring low grades in English, not only in Mbitini Division but also in the rest of the district and the country at large.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.0**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter contains a discussion of the research design adopted for the study, the target population and the sampling procedures followed. There is also a discussion of the instruments used in collecting data. The section ends with a discussion of how the data collected in the field was analysed.

### **3.1**

#### **The Research Design**

The design adopted in this study was a survey research design. According to Abagi (1995) a survey collects data about variables or subjects as they are found in a social system or society. Generally survey deals with the incidence, distributions and relationships of educational variables. Dalen (1979) adds that the units of analysis are often people, but they may be countries, government agencies, books, teachers, unions or other units. A survey sets out to determine the opinions, attitudes, preferences and perceptions of persons of interest to the researcher (Borg, 1998). A survey research was considered the best design for this study because answers sought to such questions as to whether schools in the division have libraries, what titles are available in the schools, and how many there are, what the book-student ratio is, what the student preferences for fiction

are, what their reading frequency is and what are the students' attitudes towards the reading of fiction.

From the teachers of English answers were sought on whether or not they incorporated the reading of fiction in their teaching and if they did, how they did it and with what levels of relative success in their teaching. If they did not answers were to be sought on why and on what they did as substitute to the reading of fiction. Clearly then a survey research was indicated. Best and Kahn (2001) note that the survey is an important type of study, which must not be confused with mere clerical routine of gathering and tabulating figures. It involves a clearly defined problem and definite objectives. It requires expert and imaginative planning, careful analysis and interpretation of the data gathered and logical and skillful reporting of the findings.

### **3.2 Target Population**

Population refers to the target subjects or universe to be considered in the study. The population comprised form four students in the ten secondary schools in Mbitini Division. There are twelve secondary schools but two of them, Manooni and Ndwaani, which were new and are yet to present candidates for the K.C.S.E, were outside the ambit of this study.

The average class size was about 40 students. Two schools, Ngoto and Mbuthani were double-streamed. This gave a population of 483 students. Also included in the study were the teachers of English. Each stream had one teacher of English so this gave a population of 14 teachers. However, the two teachers in the

two schools excluded from this survey were not part of the research. This yielded a population of 12 teachers.

The ten schools involved in the study and their status are as shown in the table below.

**Table 3**  
Secondary schools in Mbitini Division and their categories

SCHOOL	CATEGORY	STREAMS	NO. OF FORM FOUR STUDENTS
BARAZANI	GIRLS BOARDING	1	39
KYEMUNDU	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	1	52
MBUTHANI	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	2	67
KYUMBUNI	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	1	41
MUAMBWANI	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	1	45
MUKAMENI	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	1	38
MULALA	GIRLS/BOARDING	1	41
NDUUNDUNE	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	1	48
NGOTO	BOYS BOARDING/DAY	2	75
TUTINI	MIXED/DAY/BOARDING	1	37
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>483</b>

### 3.3 Sample and sampling procedures

Nyagah (1995) argues that it is not necessary or even advisable to use all of the subjects in a population for the study. A sample therefore is used in order to make an estimate of the characteristics being investigated within the entire population. Random sampling was done in order to handle the students. At a confidence level of 85% and a sampling error of 3%, 250 pupils were considered for the study. Since there are twelve classes in total, this translated to about 21 subjects per class.

For the purposes of this study the gender of the students was disregarded as a significant variable. However, where the schools were mixed care was taken to ensure that there was as near as possible a proportional representation of gender in the study. This was done in order to neutralize the possible influence of gender as an extraneous variable to the research findings.

The total population of teachers in the schools that were included in the study was 12. One teacher *per school* was considered sufficient. This gave a total sample of ten teachers. There seemed to be a uniformity of performance in English in all schools in the division, suggesting that all schools experienced the same problems in the teaching of the subject. Proceeding from this point simple random sampling method was used to determine who the 21 subjects per class were. Random numbers method was used.

### 3.4

#### Instrumentation

For this study three instruments of data collection were used. These were the following:

##### Students' Questionnaires

A questionnaire, which is a list of questions aimed at getting specific information on a variety of subjects, was used to collect information from the learners. The information that the questionnaires sought to gather, *inter alia*, included:



- Frequency of reading fiction outside the prescribed texts.
- Approximate time per week students set aside for reading fiction.
- Number of books of fiction read in one term.
- Extent to which subjects enjoy reading fiction.
- Books of fiction students would like to read but had not yet accessed them.
- Whether students buy books of fiction.

The questionnaire used in the field is shown in Appendix 1.

### **Teachers' interview schedule**

Interviews involve the collection of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals (Borg, 1998). One advantage of the interview as an instrument of data collection is that it makes it possible to elicit personal and confidential information and to gain knowledge about motivations, feelings, attitudes and beliefs. From teachers the interview gathered such information as how much time in the week is allocated to the reading of fiction, if teachers employed class readers, how often they got new books of fiction, who decided when and what books of fiction to buy. Teachers were also interviewed on what steps they took to encourage the reading of fiction to their students and with what levels of relative success and also what they thought should be done to encourage the reading of fiction in their schools. The suggestions teachers had on ways of improving performance in English in their respective schools and in the division

as a whole were sought after. The interview schedule used in the field is shown in Appendix 2.

### **Observation schedule**

According to Dalen (1979) in observational studies researchers collect data on the current status of entities by watching them and listening to them rather than asking questions about them. Observation may be controlled or uncontrolled, scheduled or unscheduled, visible or concealed, participant or non-participant. One objective of this study was to establish whether or not learners in the division had access to relevant, interesting and adequate reading materials. The resources, which, for the purposes of this study, were considered appropriate, were novels by local writers, with appropriate language and a variety of literary styles. One outstanding resource was the availability of a library in a school. Through observation the researcher sought to establish whether a school had a library or not. The researcher also looked over the titles available on the shelves and from the numbers, estimated the student /book ratio in order to deduce the adequacy or inadequacy of the books vis-à-vis the number of students in a school.

**Validity**

According to Best and Kahn (2001) validity is that quality of a data gathering instrument or procedure that enables it to measure what it is supposed to measure

Content validity refers to the degree to which the test actually measures, or is specifically related to, the traits for which it was designed. For both the questionnaire and interview schedules care was taken to ensure that the items they contained were derived from the objectives of this study. In turn the objectives generally had been derived from subject syllabus and textbooks. A pilot study was carried out in three schools in the neighbouring Ithumba Division. These schools were: Good shepherd Girls Boarding, Kikumini Boys Boarding and Mwerni Mixed Day and Boarding Secondary Schools.

One of the purposes of the piloting was to meet subject specialists-teachers who not only helped the researcher to refine the research instruments but also provided useful insights into additional items that needed to be included in the instruments. In addition to this the researcher sought the kind and expert opinion of the supervisor on the validity of the research instruments.

Construct validity is the degree to which scores on a test can be accounted for by the explanatory constructs of a sound theory. A construct is a quality or characteristic that cannot be seen, heard or felt but can be inferred by phenomena such as test scores or by observed physical behaviour or physiological responses

of subjects. In this study construct validity was ensured by basing the instruments of research on the established and generally accepted theory that reading, especially of fictional materials greatly helps in the learning and acquisition of a second language. Such bodies as the Kenya Institute of Education and the Kenya National Examinations Council (as already mentioned)) consider the reading of fiction to be a prerequisite for the acquisition of mastery of English. The questionnaire as well as the interview had all the items either directly or implicitly derived from this theory. In order to ensure that the questionnaire was valid there was a conscious effort to ensure that the right questions, phrased in the least ambiguous way were asked. The first step was to ensure that the language the questions were framed in was simple and clear.

For the interview the researcher strived to establish rapport with the interviewees by adopting an amiable atmosphere during the interview session. As Best and Kahn (2001) note the key to effective interviewing is establishing rapport. The purpose of doing this was to elicit responses as truthful as possible from the subjects

### Reliability

Best and Kahn (2001) consider the reliability of instruments to be the degree of consistency that the instrument or procedure demonstrates: whatever it is measuring, it does so consistently. In this study reliability of the research instruments was tested using the split-halves method. The questionnaire items

were split into two halves by grouping them into odd and even numbered items. The next step was to correlate the scores from the two halves using the Pearson product moment coefficient ( $r$ ). A high correlation of the results indicated reliability of the research instrument. This was done with data realized from the questionnaire. It is generally accepted that this method yields lower correlations because of the reduction in size to two tests of half the number of the items. This was corrected by applying the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula.

The formula is:

$$R_c = \frac{2r}{1+r}$$

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The questionnaire contained very many items all of which gave different levels of correlation once the split-halves method of determining validity was used. These ranged to a very high of 0.99, suggesting near perfect correlation, to a low of 0.68. The average figure stood at 0.80, which was significant correlation. This in turn strongly suggested that the research instrument used was quite valid.

### 3.6

#### Data collection

The data analysed here was collected over a period of two weeks. This involved the researcher going to each school personally. In each station the researcher would introduce himself to the school authorities, explain his mission and request to carry out the research among form four students and also to interview teachers of English.

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the students and also gave guidance, where necessary, to filling it in. After the subject students had filled it in, the

researcher personally collected the questionnaires and proceeded to analyze the responses.

The interviews were on a face-to-face basis where the researcher personally interviewed the teachers. There was a provision for probing questions incase answers given by the interviewees were not clearly explained or if they in turn opened more avenues for probing further.

For observation the researcher requested, from the school authorities, for a tour of the school library, where one existed. If there was no library in a particular school, the researcher considered any other place where books of fiction may be kept. Where there was no such place or no such books the observation was redundant. However this in itself was an observation and constituted part of the data collected. For document analysis the researcher personally perused and analyzed any document relevant to the study.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Having collected the data the next step was to analyse and derive inferences from it. The following are some of the methods used in analysing the data.

#### **Frequency distribution**

This was used to summarise the data collected in the field. This is the very basic statistical analysis and was supplemented with frequency distribution tables,

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histographs and bar graphs to present, for example, the number of students who in a given period had read so many novels, the number of hours students devoted to reading fiction, tables showing average mean grades per school over the number of years under consideration and also the relative popularity or attractiveness of reading fiction compared to other activities.

### **Mean**

This is practically the arithmetic average of scores in a distribution frequency. For instance the number of students who depended on one library or the average distribution of available novels per student was expressed in terms of the mean. Where for example, one novel was on average shared by so many learners inferences were made as to whether such a book/student ratio was practical and adequate or was not.

### **Correlation**

This evaluates the direction and degree of relationship between the scores in two distributions. Correlational statistics was used to determine whether there was a positive correlation between the reading of fiction and performance in English or whether the vice-versa was the case. The study involved computing the average term reading rates of each school and then correlating that with the average mean marks of each school. Average term reading rates simply means the number of novels or books of fiction that on average each student reads in one school term. This helped establish whether there was a relationship between



reading of fiction and performance in English and what that relationship was. The Pearson Product- Moment correlation was the one employed in this study.

Some of the data collected was qualitative in nature, especially data from the interviews of teachers of English. Such data was treated as essentially descriptive of the problem and was useful in forming a realistic impression of the status of reading of fiction in the division.

The reading frequency of students was determined by collecting data from the students on the number of books of fiction they read per term. This information was obtained through the questionnaire. For each school the number of books the students read was averaged and then compared with the recommended rate of one book per week. The researcher correlated the results for each school with performance in English. A high correlation indicated a strong relationship between the reading of fiction and performance in English.

Through observations and estimates based on information generated from both the questionnaires and interview of teachers the researcher as reasonably as possible approximated the number of storybooks in each school and in the division as a whole. From this the researcher computed the book/student ratio. If a student were to read one novel per week he or she would require 208 different titles during the four years spent in secondary school. A ratio of 2 novels per student should be the minimum so that in a single stream school with 40 students per class about 320 different titles should suffice; but only as a minimum. In this study a benchmark figure of 320 storybooks was adopted for each stream as the minimum number of books for a school to be considered to have a sufficient supply of books of fiction. This then helped answer the second research question about the adequacy of books in the division. This also helped answer the third

research question about the variety of books of fiction since it was possible to verify what was available in each school.

The answers students gave in the questionnaire about reading of fiction in improving performance in English helped answer the fourth question about their attitudes to reading fiction. A Likert-Scale was used to arrive at the students' attitudes regarding various issues in Language and Literature teaching and learning. Some of the items covered were the relative importance students attached to reading of fiction in helping one acquire mastery in the subject and the conceived ease or difficulty of studying the subject. By making their responses from "Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree" on the various items, the students' attitudes were ascertained and interpretations made as to whether they had positive or negative attitudes towards the reading of fiction and the subject in general. There were five possible responses to each item to which each was assigned a scale value thus:

Strongly agree	SA	5
Agree	A	4
Undecided	U	3
Disagree	D	2
Strongly Disagree	SD	1

Half of the eighteen items were stated positively. For the negatively expressed items the values were reversed thus:

Strongly Agree	SA	1
Agree	A	2
Undecided	U	3
Disagree	D	4
Strongly Disagree	SD	5

For each statement the maximum possible scores was 5 while the lowest was 1

For the 18 items the scoring adopted was:

$18 \times 5 = 90$  Most favourable response

possible.

$18 \times 3 = 54$  A neutral attitude.

$18 \times 1 = 18$  Most unfavourable attitude

The average score in each item would fall between 18 and 90, above 54 if opinions tended to be favourable to the given point of view and below 54 if opinion tended to be unfavourable.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## 4.0

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the data collected, analyses the same data and interprets it in relation to the research questions. The four research questions are answered in this chapter. The chapter also includes a discussion of the responses given by teachers during the interviews. The chapter ends with a brief overview of the suggestions the students made on ways of improving performance of English in the division.

The questionnaire return rate was 100%. The basic explanation for this was that the researcher was the one who actually distributed the questionnaires and also supervised the students when they were filling them in. At the end of the exercise the researcher again was the one who collected the papers from the students. All the same however the students appeared genuinely interested in the exercise. Also in all the schools' the administrators were very cooperative and this certainly also contributed to the very high return rate.

## 4.1

### Availability of libraries

Only half of the schools in the division have libraries. Table four below shows the number of books in each school that had a library and average number of books per student.

Table 4  
Number of books in schools with Libraries

SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF BOOKS	ENROLMENT	BOOKS PER STUDENT
Mulala	200	230	0.87
Kyumbuni	120	112	1.07
Nduundune	60	166	0.36
Barazani	90	162	0.56
Ngoto	200	350	0.57
Total	670	1020	3.43
Mean	134	204	0.66

Library in this context meant not just a room where books are kept and students can read from but also any other place where books of fiction were kept and students could borrow from. In the schools categorized as having no libraries, invariably there was a shelf either in the principal's or deputy principal's office or in the office of a teacher in charge of textbooks in the school. In these shelves were between five and ten past Literature set books. During interviews all teachers in schools without libraries confirmed that there was no policy at all of students borrowing novels since there was practically nothing to borrow.

Of the schools with libraries only two, Mulala and Kyumbuni, had stocks approaching adequate books of fiction in terms of different titles and absolute number of novels. Mulala had about 200 titles. There were even a few comics such as *Asterix* and *Tintin*. Kyumbuni had an estimated collection of 120 against a total of 112 pupils. Kyumbuni also had the added advantage of being the school nearest to the only public library in Makeni District, The Kenya National Library Services library at Mutumbua, which is quite well stocked with books of fiction, among others. The rest of the schools, even though designated as having libraries are not so well endowed. For example, Nduundune, though with a classroom size building for its library nevertheless had about 60 novels for its 166 pupils. There was, however, an abundance of old religious tracts, magazines and pamphlets, which, according to the teacher of English in the school, were not popular with students. Barazani had about 90 novels for its 162 pupils while Ngoto had about 200 storybooks for its 350 pupils. From the schools without libraries there were about 10 novels each. These would add the total to 720 novels in the division. The five schools with libraries had a combined total of about 670 books. The total enrolment for the five schools with libraries was 1020 pupils and for the entire division there were 1870 pupils. For the schools with libraries there was 0.66 of a book for each pupil and for the entire division there was 0.40 of a book for each pupil. As already mentioned the minimum should be 2 novels per student for there to be a sufficient supply of books of fiction. As can be seen from the figures the

books of fiction available in the division are woefully inadequate. In reality there cannot be a fraction of a book since books are discrete in nature. For the same reason there cannot be a fraction of a person. From a statistical point of view however the figures plainly show the inadequacy of books of fiction in the division. From a different point of view the figures suggest that in the division about three students share one novel. Even then this would be a best-case scenario because there was no inter school exchange of books of fiction.

The opinions of the pupils in schools with libraries generally reflected this state of affairs. Asked their opinions regarding the adequacy of books of fiction in their libraries 76% of the students thought there were less than enough or extremely insufficient books in the libraries.

Mention has been made of a public library in the division. The library has a wide collection of storybooks and novels and in large numbers. The librarian estimated a collection of 1500 copies and 700 titles. This should be a major boost to the pool of books available to students in the division. However the facility was located in a remote area, which is practically inaccessible to the majority of students in the division. Not surprisingly only a few students had ever borrowed books from this facility. Over 65% of those interviewed had never visited the facility, 27% had borrowed 4 or less books while just about 8% had ever borrowed 5 or more books from the public library.

The figures strongly suggest that the reading of fiction by students in the division is quite limited. The lack of adequate books of fiction almost certainly contributes greatly to the limited reading of books of fiction.

## 4.2

### Reading Patterns

The reading of fiction is quite low in the division. Table five below shows the number of books read in a term per school.

The table indicates that the average student reads only about 3 novels per term.

Out of those involved in the study 74.4% of the respondents read 3 novels or less per term while almost 10% read nothing at all. Students in schools with libraries read more books than those from schools without libraries. The average readership for Mulala, Nduundune, Kyumbuni, Barazani and Ngoto, schools that have libraries, was 3 books per term. For Tutini, Mbuthani, Muambwani, Kyemundu and Mukameni, which do not have libraries, the average was only about 2 novels per term.



Table 5

Number of books of fiction read in a term

SCHOOL	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	MEAN
KYUMBUNI	3	0	4	3	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	4.27
MULALA	0	2	4	7	6	1	0	0	3	0	0	3.65
MUKAMENI	0	2	5	5	6	4	3	0	0	0	0	3.56
NDUUNDUNE	0	1	8	2	9	2	1	0	0	0	0	3.26
BARAZANI	1	5	7	4	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	2.72
MUAMBWANI	3	7	3	7	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	2.13
KYEMUNDU	6	9	12	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2.11
NGOTO	4	6	4	4	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1.95
MBUTHANI	2	13	8	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1.80
TUTINI	4	10	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.50
TOTAL	23	55	62	46	34	11	8	2	4	1	4	3.00
PERCENT	9.2	22	24.8	18.4	13.6	4.4	3.2	0.8	1.6	0.4	1.6	

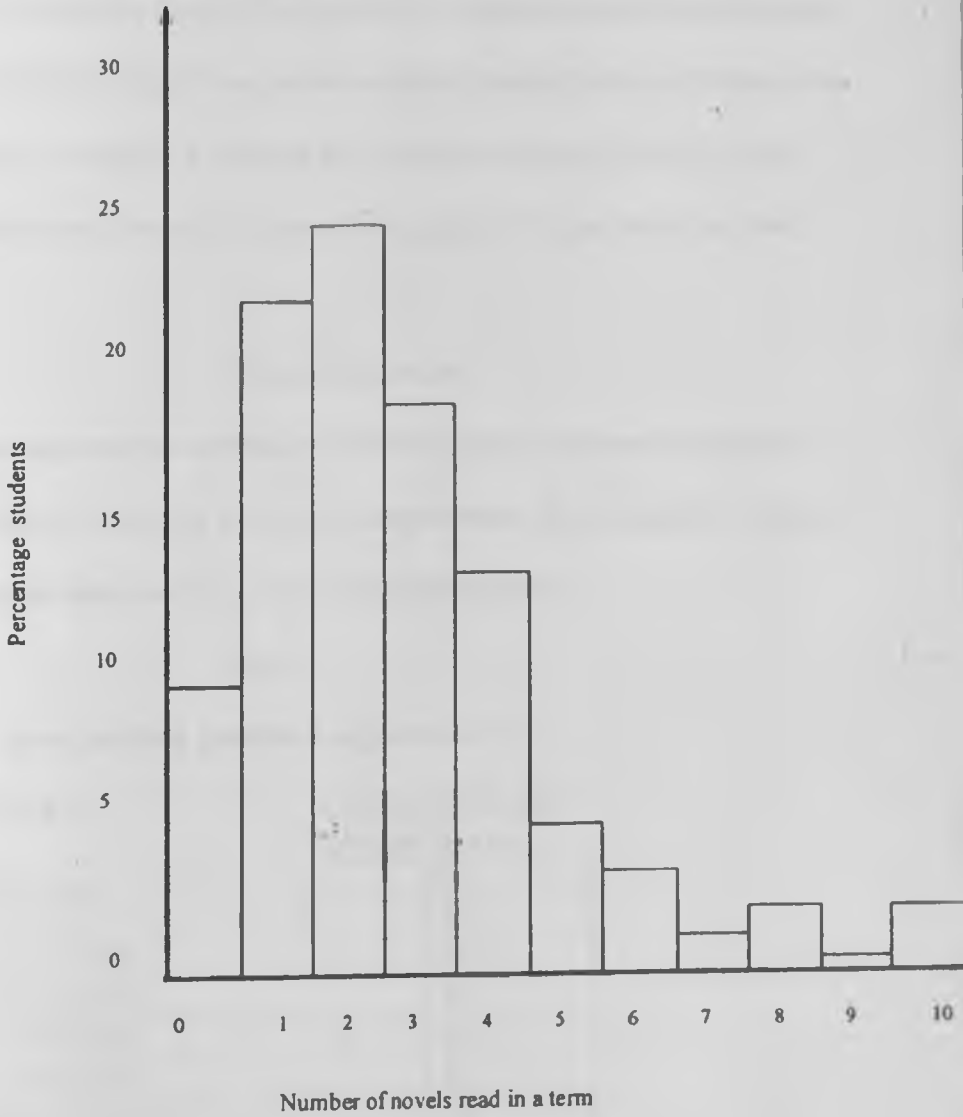
These figures compare very poorly with the K.N.E C and K.I.E. recommendations of a student reading one storybook per week, which translates to 12 novels per term.

Only 7.6% of the students read at least 6 novels per term (half the recommended reading)

The reading of fiction shown in the table is presented in the histogram below.

Figure 1.

Percentage of students against number of novels read in a term.



### 4.3

### Studying habits

This section describes how students in the division employed time in their studies. The section looks at the average number of hours students in each school devoted to private studies, how much time was set aside for reading books of fiction, how recently prior to the study the students had completed reading a storybook and whether students could recall the name of the author of the last book they had read.

#### Time distribution

On average students in Mbitini Division spend 3 hours and 30 minutes per day studying on their own. Below is a table showing the average time students spend studying on their own for each school in the division.

Table 6

Hours students spent studying on their own

SCHOOL	AVERAGE STUDY TIME IN HOURS
MULALA	4.00
NGOTO	3.45
BARAZANI	3.45
MUKAMENI	3.30
KYUMBUNI	3.30
KYEMUNDU	3.30
NDUUNDUNE	3.30
MBUTHANI	3.20
TUTINI	3.20
MUAMBWANI	2.20

Not surprisingly schools which are full boarding or have a majority of their students boarding recorded the highest number of hours spent by students studying on their own. Mulala, Ngoto and Barazani, which comprise the highest three in terms of hours of study are either full boarding or nearly full boarding. The lowest three, Mbuthani, Tutini and Muambwani have the least of boarders. The interpretation here, as may be expected, is that students in boarding schools have more time to study than their counter parts in day schools.

#### **Time for reading fiction**

That the reading of fiction is low in the division is further demonstrated by the students' relatively scanty allocation of time to the reading of fiction. Of those involved in the study only 42% indicated that they did set aside time to read storybooks. Table 7 below shows the percentage number of students in each school who set aside time to read fiction against the percentage that did not. That a majority of the students do not set aside time for reading fiction suggests that either students in the division do not consider the reading of fiction to be an important educational activity or that there is so little reading material that it does not make sense to budget time for an activity for which the basic essentials are missing. The data in this section is consistent with the findings about the actual time per week students in the division spend reading storybooks. The average student spent only 2 hours and 15 minutes per week reading fiction. The study revealed that 16.8% of the students spent no time at all reading fiction.

Table 7

Percentage responses to time set aside for reading fiction.

SCHOOL	PERCENT
MULALA	74
MUAMBWANI	62
MUKAMENI	56
NGOTO	55
NDUUNDUNE	47
BARAZANI	40
KYUMBUNI	33
KYEMUNDU	30
MBUTHANI	23
TUTINI	11
Overall	42

Below is another table showing the number of hours students in each school spent reading fiction per week.

Table 8

Number of hours students in each school spent reading fiction per week.

SCHOOL	HOURS PER WEEK SPENT READING FICTION						MEAN
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
NGOTO	1	5	4	1	4	5	3.00
TUTINI	1	3	12	1	2	7	2.45
BARAZANI	1	4	8	4	3	5	2.45
MUAMBWANI	3	6	5	4	2	4	2.30
KYUMBUNI	5	5	2	0	0	6	2.15
MULALA	2	6	7	5	2	1	2.00
NDUUNDUNE	3	4	10	2	4	0	2.00
MUKAMENI	10	1	6	2	2	4	2.00
KYEMUNDU	8	9	11	1	2	5	1.45
MBUTHANI	8	10	5	1	2	4	1.45
TOTAL STUDENTS	42	53	70	21	23	41	2.15
Percent	16.8	21.2	28	8.4	9.2	16.4	

Further evidence of the low and infrequent reading of fiction is provided by the students' inability to recall the names of authors of the most recently read book. Of those involved in the study 76% could not give the name of the author of the latest novel they had read. Of the remaining 24% although they claimed they could recall the name of the author about half gave the wrong name. This implies very infrequent reading of fiction in the division. An ability to recall the name of an author of novel in itself does not necessarily point at either low or poor reading. However, it does imply that there is casualness in the whole exercise. This is because individual authors tend to write in unique ways. A reader intrigued by the writing of one author will almost always wish to read more books by the same author. Some authors of popular fiction are so successful that their names or pseudonyms are synonymous with their writings, irrespective of the various titles they may have produced. Writers such as Robert Ludlum, James Hadley Chase or even literary writers such as William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens are famous not so much for a particular work of art but more for a particular genre of writing.

The questionnaire also requested the subjects to indicate when they last read a book of fiction.

The table and the histogram below strongly indicated that reading fiction is not an activity very popular with the students. In the previous two months prior to the study 57.2 % of the students had not read any storybooks. Only a paltry 4.4% had read a novel or storybook during the week the study was conducted, 36.8% of the students who, in reality, were in the modal class had not read a single novel in the term. If the responses of those who indicated they had read a storybook three months prior to the study is added the figure jumps to 44%. This is conclusive evidence that the reading of fiction is quite low in the division.

Table 9

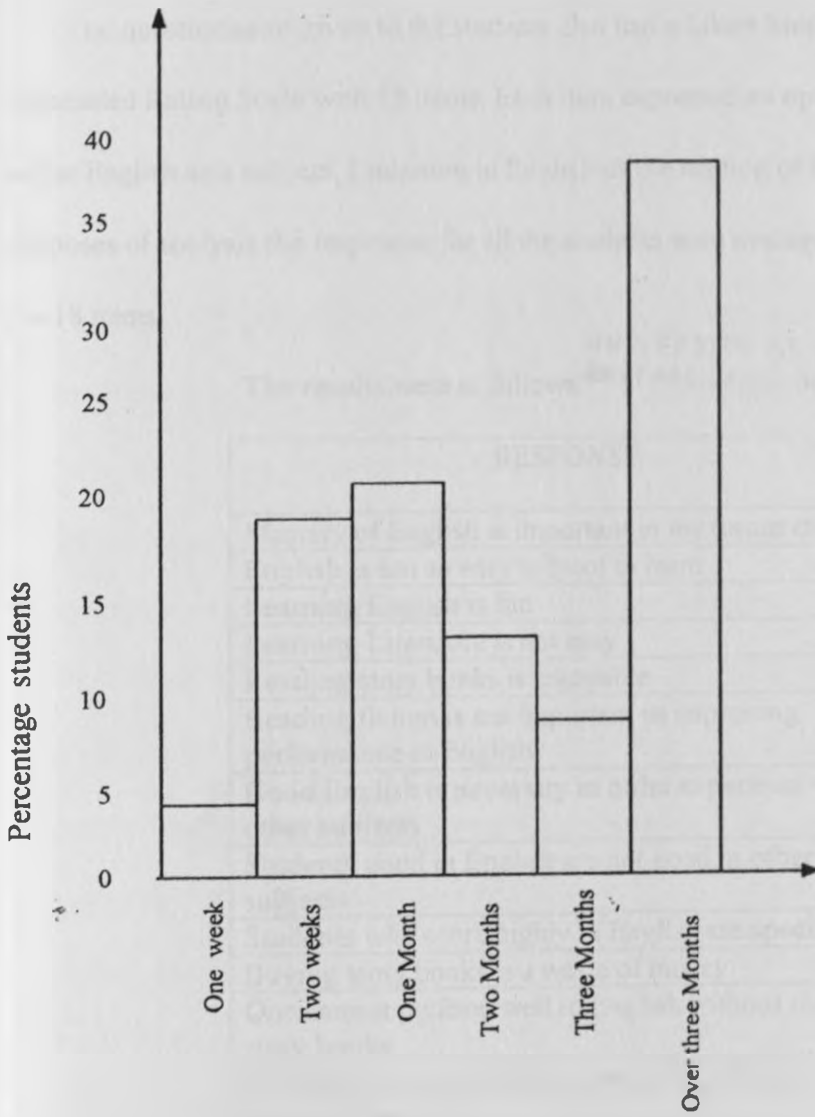
Latest time students read books of fiction in each school.

	This Week	Two Weeks Ago	One Month Ago	Two Months Ago	Three Months Ago	More Than Three Months Ago
SCHOOL						
MULALA	17	4	39	22	14	14
MUKAMENI	16	28	8	4	8	36
BARAZANI	4	12	24	16	4	40
MUAMBWANI	4	8	8	0	0	80
NDUUNDUNE	0	43	17	13	0	27
TUTINI	4	35	19	8	8	26
KYEMUNDU	0	11	19	11	11	44
NGOTO	0	20	25	15	10	30
MBUTHANI	0	7	23	23	3	44
KYUMBUNI	0	17	22	22	17	22
TOTAL RESPONES	11	45	51	33	18	92
PERCENT	4.4	18	20.4	13.2	7.2	36.8

The average percentage for the division against how recently the respondents read a novel can be presented in a histogram as shown below.

Figure 2

Percentage of students against time they last read a novel.



Length of time since students read a novel



## 4.4

## Analysis of attitudes

The questionnaire given to the students also had a Likert Method of Summated Rating Scale with 18 items. Each item expressed an opinion about either English as a subject, Literature in English or the reading of fiction. For the purposes of analysis the responses for all the students were averaged for each of the 18 items,

The results were as follows.

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

RESPONSE	Mean score
Mastery of English is important in my future career	5
English is not an easy subject to learn	3
Learning English is fun	4
Learning Literature is not easy	3
Reading story books is enjoyable	5
Reading fiction is not important in improving performance in English	4
Good English is necessary in order to perform well in other subjects	5
Students good in English are not good in other subjects	4
Students who score highly in English are special	2
Buying story books is a waste of money	2
One cannot perform well in English without reading story books	4
Reading story books helps one in acquiring a wide range of vocabulary	5
English does not help foster understanding among different people	3
Literature is important in my daily experiences	4
English is not an important subject	3
Literature helps a person think critically	4
I would like to read story books but they are not available in my school	4
Reading story books does not help one write better	1
TOTAL	65

Since the average score in each item would fall between 18 and 90 (above 54 if opinions tended to be favourable to the given point of view and below 54 if opinion tended to be unfavourable) the score obtained from the Likert Scale indicated a positive attitude towards both the subject and also the reading of fiction. The students appeared to appreciate the importance of English in their future careers. The students perceived both English and Literature in English as subjects that are relatively easy and enjoyable to learn. The responses to the statements in the Likert scale also indicated that the students saw a connection between the reading of fiction and performance of English, which in turn influenced performance in other subjects. The responses also suggested that the students enjoyed reading storybooks, at least when they got chance to read any storybooks. That the readership of fiction was low in the division appeared to emanate not from a lack of interest in reading but from an inadequate supply of reading materials. Otherwise from the responses the students appeared to be aware of the benefits of reading fiction such as the acquisition of a wide range of vocabulary, improved writing skills and enhanced communication.

## 4.5 Correlation between reading of fiction and performance of English

The students' performance in English was based on the 2002 Makueni District Mock K.C.S.E examination administered in July 2002. The examination was fairly similar to the final K.C.S.E. It contained three papers. Paper One tested composition writing skills, Paper Two tested summary writing, comprehension and language skills while Paper Three tested literary critical appreciation based on a study of three set books, poetry and Oral literature. All form four students were given the same examination, at nearly identical times and under very similar conditions.

In correlating performance with reading of fiction the average *percentage* marks for each school were used.

### Correlation between reading fiction and performance

The schools performed in the manner shown below.

School	Percentage
Mulala	47
Ngoto	36
Kyemundu	38
Mukameni	41
Mbuthani	35
Muambwani	37
Nduundune	42
Kyumbuni	38
Barazani	30
Tutini	28

The performance was correlated with each school's average number of books read in one term. The Pearson Product Moment correlation (r) method was used. The formula is:

$$r = \frac{N\sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{N\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2} \sqrt{N\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}}$$

Where x= Percentage score in the examination  
y = Books read in a term

Schools	%	Books per term			
	x	y	x <sup>2</sup>	y <sup>2</sup>	xy
Mulala	47	3.65	2209	13.32	171.55
Ngoto	36	1.95	1296	3.80	70.20
Kyemundu	38	2.11	1444	4.45	80.18
Mukameni	41	3.56	1681	12.67	145.96
Mbuthani	35	1.80	1225	3.24	63.00
Muambwani	37	2.13	1369	4.54	78.81
Nduundune	42	3.26	1764	10.63	136.92
Kyumbuni	38	4.27	1444	18.23	162.26
Barazani	30	2.72	900	7.40	81.60
Tutini	<u>28</u>	<u>1.50</u>	<u>784</u>	<u>2.25</u>	<u>42.00</u>
Total	372	26.95	14116	80.53	1032.48

Applying the formula:

$$r = \frac{10(1032.48) - (372 \times 26.95)}{\sqrt{10(14116) - (372)^2} \times \sqrt{10(80.53) - (26.95)^2}}$$

$$= \underline{0.64}$$

The correlation was quite substantial at 0.64. This implies that the reading of fiction does positively influence performance in English. That the correlation is

only moderate to moderately substantial is an indicator that whereas the reading of fiction does positively influence performance of English there are other factors that also influence performance.

#### **4.6 Analysis of Interviews**

Teachers of English in the division were interviewed. Those who participated in the exercise were very cooperative, friendly and quite forthright in the answers that they gave. The teachers had especially well thought out suggestions on ways of improving performance of English in their individual schools as well as in the division. The following are the research findings based on the interview of the teachers.

##### **1. General impression of students performance**

All the teachers interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of their students. The general consensus was that the students had not realized their full potential as far as the subject is concerned and that they had a long way to go before they students could be considered to have acquired mastery of the English language.

Statistically this is clearly demonstrated by the low scores obtained in the district mock where the students averaged a paltry mean of 37.2% or a mean grade of D-

##### **2. Opinion about student's interest in reading fiction**

The general observation by the teachers was that the students do not seem to be interested in reading fiction. However although this was the general observation

the teachers were quick to point out that the general lack of books of fiction in their schools was the reason for the observed dearth in the reading of fiction. For example some teachers said they had never seen any of their students reading novels outside the prescribed literary texts. Others opined that the students did not seem interested in reading storybooks and this was attributed to overload in the curriculum. Others, while expressing similar sentiments, attributed the lack of interest to laziness on the part of the students. The students themselves expressed the opinion that the low readership was as a result of an inadequate supply of reading materials. However, all were agreed that the reading of fiction was very low and that something should be done to improve on this.

### 3. Storybooks that seem to interest students

Most of the teachers had no response to this question. However, a few, 30%, presented some general characteristics of some few novels they had seen some of their students with. They talked about adventure stories, crime based stories, stories based on travel and a bit of romantic novels. Novels considered literary were not so popular as those with a light touch or the so-called popular fiction. Novels by John Kiriamiti such as My Life in Crime, Barbara Kimenye's Moses series and David Karanja's The Girl was Mine, were frequently mentioned. The teachers' observations were vindicated by the students' own responses in the questionnaires about the type of storybooks they would like to read. In the Appendix section is given a list of the titles the students indicated they would like to read if only they were available in their schools.

4.

#### **Students reading speed**

Most of the teachers rated their students, on the average, slow readers. Whereas their observations were not based on timed reading but on class based observations during the reading of comprehension passages and other activities that required reading aloud, they were nevertheless valid observations in that it is the teachers who were best placed to make them. In all the schools the response was near unanimity that the reading speed of the students was low. The teachers could not give a definite speed in terms of words per minute. However the consensus was that the average student took about three weeks to complete reading a novel of 150-200 pages. However because the observations were rather haphazard not much reliance could be placed on the responses. All in all however the impression created is that the students' reading speed is low.

#### **5. Opinion on how reading of fiction affects performance of English.**

All teachers of the subject concurred that the reading of fiction does greatly influence performance of English in a positive way. They expressed it as a given that the more students read books of fiction the better their performance become.

On further probing the argument by all teachers, of course expressed differently, was that reading fiction acquaints the learners with the language in context. One teacher illustrated this point by pointing out that it would be impossible to teach vocabulary and spelling in any way other than exposing the students to wide reading. The alternative, he opined, would be to have "dictionary" sessions where

the class studied entries under "A" through to entries under "Z", which apart from being impractical, does not constitute study of language.

To those teachers who had observed any reading among their students the question was posed as to whether there was a difference in the observed proficiency in the language and also in performance in various school examinations, from those who did not read any fiction or only read scantily. The answers were affirmative. For example, one teacher reported that the proficiency and performance of those students she had observed to be keen readers of fiction, were superior to those of students who did not seem to be keen readers and added that the handful of students she had occasionally found reading storybooks had better performance in exams and also their expressions, both oral and written, were grammatically superior to those of students who rarely or never read storybooks.

## **6. Encouraging reading of fiction**

All the teachers of English asserted that they encouraged their students to read as many storybooks as possible. The most common method used by the teachers was to lecture the students in class on the importance of reading fiction. This did not appear to work because the teachers confessed that this did not lead to any improved readership. However, all the teachers were quick to add that the scarcity of reading materials in their schools contributed



immensely towards the lack of success in encouraging more reading. In one school students were required to read novels especially during school holidays and then write reports on what they had read. The reports were then marked and graded as part of continuous assessment of the students.

Another method teachers favoured in encouraging reading of fiction was to direct the students to novels from which the comprehension passages met in class work were extracted from. Most of the teachers mentioned that the K.I.E. Integrated English course book for forms 1 to 4, which is the principal book used to teach grammar in all school in the division, has numerous extracts from a wide range of authors. Another method was to highlight the other works of authors being studied for literature, and then ask the students to compare the works. This was done informally in all schools and no reports were expected to be written by the students. The underlying point is that all the teachers did make attempts to encourage their students to read fiction though with varying levels of success.

## **7. Innovations in teaching language and literature**

The teachers seemed to be generally behaved to the traditional methods of teaching language. In this case it meant religiously following the recommended textbooks, in this case the Integrated English course book by K.I.E. For the teaching of literature, the greatest majority of the teachers explained that they either lectured or dictated to the students the analyses they themselves had made of the texts. One teacher reported that in teaching literature he sometimes divided

the class into groups and assigned to each group either a question to answer or a topic on which to research on their own and then to report to the rest of the students. This is akin to tutorials. The teachers generally expressed the opinion that as much as they would have liked to try out innovations they were constrained by workloads and also curriculum overload. The teachers pointed out that they had workloads of between 25 and 30 lessons per week, which forced them to go for the most efficient, if not always effective, ways of handling the lessons.

#### **8. School policy on acquisition of books of fiction**

In no school was there found to be a comprehensive or even a formal policy concerning the acquisition of books of fiction. All teachers of English stated that they were not aware of any policy in their schools on acquisition of books of fiction. For the schools that had no libraries and which really had no books of fiction there was a total lack of policy on this issue. One principal even seemed surprised that the reading of novels could be important in improving performance not only in English but also in other subjects. He was quite frank that the buying of novels had not been part of the school budget since his posting to that school nine years ago and that it was not likely to be included in the near future.

Although he pledged to talk to the Languages Head of Department with a view to starting a small-scale library his views underlined the general opinions held by principals in the division in regard to the acquisition of fiction. Another principal, while conceding that the reading of fiction is important, opined that acquiring

adequate books of fiction was not a priority, especially seen against more pressing financial obligations such as accommodation for students, salaries for support staff, stationery and other recurrent expenses. As she put it, "there is always something cropping up that surpasses the buying of novels as a priority." Yet another principal was worried about declining enrolment, fees defaulting, acquiring sufficient foodstuff for the students and staff establishment to have any time to worry about the lack of books of fiction in his school. Although it was not possible to interview the principals in all schools the scenario could not be any different.

For the few schools that appeared to have a modicum of a policy the teachers of English expressed dissatisfaction with the policy. For example one teacher described the policy in her school as haphazard, and as a one off affair. She was not involved in the purchasing of the storybooks whenever any, which she described as rare anyway, were bought. She did not know who actually did the buying but suspected it was the principal.

#### **9. Teachers' suggestions on other ways of improving performance of English in their schools.**

Teachers of the subject in the division had very similar suggestions on ways of improving performance in the division. Table 10 below presents the suggestions teachers had on alternative ways that should be explored in order to improve performance of English in their schools as well as in the division.

Table 10.

Suggestions made by teachers on ways of improving performance.  
N=10 teachers

Suggestions	Respondents
Speaking English while in school	10
Debates in school	7
Visits to National and other theatres	4
Production of plays by the students	3
Reduction in work loads	9
Remedial teaching	10
More teachers of English to be employed	8
Debates among schools	8

All the teachers suggested that students should be required as a school policy to communicate all the time in English (and may be Kiswahili). Most of the schools have large percentages of day scholars, and some in fact are full day. There is a lot of influence of the local language, Kikamba, and since the majority of the students come from within the area the *lingua franca* also happens to be Kikamba. Apart from Mulala the other schools do not have a coherent language policy so that amongst themselves students freely use their first language. Majority of the teachers are also from the environs of the school and they too freely communicate amongst themselves in the language, even in the hearing of their protégés. An established way of acquiring proficiency in any language is constantly practising speaking it. As a suggestion the teachers do have a point, that requiring the students to practice speaking English will help improve performance.

Another suggestion the teachers had was to encourage language activities such as debates between and among different schools. In their opinion this would expose the students to wider language experiences and would also challenge them to express themselves creatively and logically.

There was also a suggestion that the students should be regularly taken to the Kenya National Theatre or any other theatres to watch live performances of plays. In addition they should be encouraged to actively participate in drama and produce their own plays, which could be staged in their own schools or could even be taken to other schools.

The teachers also suggested that a reduction in the workload could free more time that could be devoted to more individualized teaching targeting the weaker students. In other words the teachers opined that there was need for extra or remedial teaching. However their current workload was such that there was just no time for such an exercise

Towards this the most frequent suggestion made was that more teachers of English should be employed to relieve the workload pressure.

The following are some of the suggestions made by students on ways of improving performance of English in the division.

- Students should read more books of fiction. Towards this the school should prioritize the buying of storybooks, so that the students have access to novels.
- Schools should adopt a policy of requiring students to speak English at least while in school.
- Students should be trained on examination techniques. Students often fail to make a mark not because they do not understand the concept being tested but because they fall foul of examination techniques.
- Participating in intra and Inter school debates.
- Holding Symposiums among different schools where literary texts, especially, are publicly discussed.
- Visits to theatres to watch live performances of prescribed drama books and stage adaptations of prescribed novels.
- More grammar textbooks should be availed to the students so that they can practice more frequently.
- More teachers of English should be employed to relieve the workload pressure of the current teachers. In this way teachers can devote relatively more time per student.

- Introduction of an English contest for all schools in the division This suggestion was probably inspired by the existence of a similar mathematics contest held every year in the division.
- More time allocation to the subject
- Separation of English language from Literature in English and each to be taught by different teachers.

The suggestions and the number of students making them are given in the table below.

Table 11

Students' suggestions on ways of improving performance of English

SUGGESTIONS	%STUDENTS
Reading more storybooks	80
Visits to theatres	28
Symposiums	24
Examination drills	21
Debates	20
Separation of English from Literature	20
More teachers of English	15
Speaking English in school	14
More grammar text books	13
English contest	8
More time allocation to English	6

## Summary

In this chapter the data collected was analyzed and interpretations drawn about the research findings.

The research found out that schools in the division had inadequate books of fiction, with each book being shared, on average, by 3 students. Only half of the schools had libraries and even these had less than one novel per student. Students read very few books of fiction per term, in fact less than three novels. This compared poorly with the K.N.E.C and K I E recommendations of one novel per week or about twelve per term.

A majority of the students did not set aside time for reading fiction and those that did spared only two hours per week for this exercise. In the two months prior to the study almost 60% of the students had not read a storybook. Apparently some of the students went a whole term or even a year without reading a single novel, save for the prescribed literary textbooks.

In spite of all these however, the students had a very positive attitude towards the English language as a subject of study, Literature in English, and also towards the reading of fiction. It is a pity that the positive attitudes had not been translated to more readership of fiction or even better performance in examinations.

The research also found a significant correlation between the reading of fiction and performance of English. There was a correlation of 0.64, which was quite high. That it was not higher than this is an indicator that there are other factors apart from the reading of fiction that contribute to the performance of English.



The teachers' interviews produced information that was consistent with the findings obtained from the students. The teachers also gave valuable suggestions on ways of improving performance of English in their schools as well as in the division at large. Likewise the students also provided suggestions on how performance of English can be improved in their schools as well as in the division. Notably the suggestions were very similar. All were agreed, however, that performance was low and something needed to be done in order to improve it.

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# CHAPTER FIVE

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter deals with the summary of the research and the research findings. There is also a brief discussion of the conclusions that were derived from the research. The chapter ends with recommendations and suggestions of related areas in which further research should give more insights into the reading of fiction and performance of English.

### **5.1 Summary**

This study was prompted by the observed poor performance in English by secondary school students in Mbitini Division. There were many possible explanations as to why this was the case. Among the possible explanations was the feeling that students in the division did not adequately read books of fiction. The study therefore set out to investigate if there was any correlation between the reading of fiction and performance of English. If indeed there was correlation the research set out to establish how significant that correlation was. The purpose of the study was to establish if there was a link between the reading of fiction and performance of English in Mbitini Division. Towards this 250 form four students were proportionally and randomly selected from each of the ten secondary schools in the division. A questionnaire was given to each of the selected students

where they answered questions on, for example, how many novels they read per term, the number of hours they devoted to the reading of fiction per week and also what their opinions were regarding English as a language, Literature in English, the reading of fiction and other closely related issues regarding the subject. The students' responses were compared to their performance in the year 2002 Makueni District Mock examination. This examination was administered to all form four students in the division, on the same day and under fairly similar conditions.

One teacher of English in each school was interviewed. The interview covered the teachers' own observations concerning their students' reading of fiction, their opinions about the importance of fiction in the teaching of English and also what suggestions they had on improving performance of English in their schools and in the division as a whole.

The study found out that the reading of fiction was quite low in Mbitini Division. The performance of English in the district mocks was also low. The research established that there was a considerable correlation between the number of novels student read and performance in English. The correlation was significant at 0.64 (using the Pearson Product Moment of Correlation). Whereas it is important to caution that the observed substantial or significant correlation does not necessarily point at a causal relationship between the reading of fiction and performance of English it is equally important to note that the correlation observed, far from being spurious, indicated that the dearth of the reading of

fiction in the division held substantial explanation to the poor performance of English not just in examinations but also in the actual functional usage of the language.

In spite of all the challenges, however, the students had very positive attitudes towards the subject, and also to the reading of fiction. Almost all of them seemed to recognize the importance of English not only in their academic work but also in their future careers. They also seemed to appreciate the importance of reading fiction in helping one acquire proficiency or mastery of English.

## 5.2 Conclusions

This study found out that schools in the Mbitini Division of Makueni District have very few books of fiction. What is available is far less than the total number of students. This offers one explanation as to why the reading of fiction is so low. Undoubtedly where there are no books to read, little reading can take place. Likewise the performance of English in the division was found to be quite low. Whereas Mbitini Division is well endowed with highly qualified teachers of English (almost all of them graduates) performance in the subject is still poor. Perhaps this can be explained by the premise that in their study of the English language the students in reality study the grammar of a language whose basic functional proficiency they have not yet mastered. In order to properly study the grammar of the English language (indeed the grammar of any language) the

students require to first acquire a basic functional mastery of the language. Not being native speakers of the language the reading of fiction presents the next best alternative in equipping the learner with the essentials of the language in its context.

### 5.3

### Recommendations

The following are the recommendations that the research came up with.

1. More books of fiction should be bought and be provided to the students. The novels to be bought need not be the very expensive ones. The Moses series by Barbara Kimenye, for example, are fairly priced. Macmillan Pacesetters series are also fairly priced. In addition there are occasional book fairs where prices of books are substantially reduced. Schools can take advantage of such fairs. Again some publishers occasionally offer books sales during promotions where they reduce the prices drastically. Schools can also explore the possibility of buying second hand books, at least in the initial stages. Once every student has got a storybook schools can devote minimal funds to the buying of fiction but now targeting specific and new titles.
2. More time should be allocated to the teaching of English and Literature in English. Both teachers and students expressed the need for remedial teaching. The implication here was that the time scheduled for the teaching of the subject was inadequate. Programming more time for the subject would mean that

teachers covered the syllabus in good time and also that they can give more exercises to the students and have time to mark the given exercises. More time allocation to the subject would also give teachers a chance to help students in their reading, especially of fiction.

3. Teachers also complained of heavy workloads. To solve this problem more teachers of English should be employed in order to alleviate the pressure teachers feel in their teaching. The minimum workload for teachers was found to be 28 lessons per week. This implied that one teacher had about 6 lessons per day, which left little time for remedial teaching. The employment of more teachers could help bring the workloads down to manageable levels. A maximum of 20 lessons per week would be ideal. This should give teachers enough time to prepare their lessons, mark students' work, get time to do remedial teaching for students who may be slow in learning some concepts and also enable the teacher to have time for his or her own time for reading fiction as well as time to read reports, for example, written by students based on their *own* reading of fiction.

4. There should be more integration of students from different language backgrounds. In the Kenyan context 85% of students attend secondary schools in their home districts. This implies that the majority of the students spend their school lives within their home districts where a local language prevails. The students get along very well without having to use English or Kiswahili, the national language. But if students were to undertake their secondary school education away from their homes circumstances would force them to speak

English (or Kiswahili). Yet the reading of fiction offers a good starting point in this integration. Fiction captures the curiosity of readers by presenting the reader with a vicarious “taste” of the cultural and social experiences of another community. This in turn should make the young reader eager to have a first hand experience of the life that he or she has only experienced in books.

### **Recommendations for further research**

1. An area in which further research should be conducted is on the motivation of teachers of English and the levels of their job satisfaction. A number of the teachers appeared to have an axe to grind with their schools' administration, which could have been a pointer at low motivation or dissatisfaction with their jobs. A research should be conducted to establish how motivated the teachers are and how much satisfaction they derive from their jobs. Perhaps lack of job satisfaction frustrates teachers so much that they have no inclination or motivation to devise innovations that can make their students like reading fiction or even inspire them to write their own stories

2. In the course of this research it emerged that both teachers and students were dissatisfied with the integration of English language and Literature in English. This is one area in which further research is recommended in order to establish how effective the integration of the two subjects has been. It would also be important to establish what actually causes the dissatisfaction of both teachers and students with the integration of the two subjects. The integration might have contributed to the dearth of the reading of fiction in that students have been

exposed only to the “serious” or literary writings, which are not always enjoyable, especially if one has not been at least inducted to the ways of studying such a work of art. In fact a few years ago, Kenyan students were supposed to study one play by Shakespeare in its original, archaic English. Most probably not many liked reading Romeo and Juliet, not because the narrative is complex but because the language and style employed make the story inaccessible to many. The same can probably be said for many a literary work, at least from the perspective of the student.



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## APPENDIX 1

### STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

#### INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire has been prepared with the intention of getting information about the reading of storybooks. The information you provide will assist in finding ways of improving reading in our schools and improving performance in English. The information will be treated confidentially and will be used only for the purpose of this study above. Please read the questions carefully and answer them as accurately as possible.

NOTE: This is not an examination; no marks will be awarded and there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, just be honest in the answers you give.

In your answers please DISREGARD the Literature set books.

#### **PART A**

#### **Personal information**

1. NAME (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

2.. GENDER (Tick one) MALE \_\_\_\_\_ FEMALE \_\_\_\_\_

4. NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

**PART B. Availability and use of library**

1. Is there a library in your school (Tick one) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If there is no library in your school go to question 4.

IMPORTANT: The following questions are to be answered only by those who are in a school with a library.

2. How many books can you borrow at a time? (Tick one)

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. How often do you borrow storybooks from the library? (Tick One)

Once a week \_\_\_\_\_

Twice a week \_\_\_\_\_

More than twice a week \_\_\_\_\_

Once in 2 weeks \_\_\_\_\_

Once in 3 weeks \_\_\_\_\_

Once a Month \_\_\_\_\_

Once a term \_\_\_\_\_

Others (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4 (A). Do you read storybooks obtained from other sources (Tick one)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4(B) If you answered, "YES" above specify source of storybooks.

(Tick relevant one/s,)

(even if it is more than once)

Buy own copies \_\_\_\_\_

Borrow from friends \_\_\_\_\_

Borrow from public library \_\_\_\_\_

Member of book club \_\_\_\_\_

Others (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many storybooks do you generally read in one term? (Tick one)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

If more than ten, Specify \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your opinion about the number of story books in the school library?

(Tick one)

More than enough \_\_\_\_\_

Enough \_\_\_\_\_

Almost enough \_\_\_\_\_

Less than enough \_\_\_\_\_

Extremely Insufficient \_\_\_\_\_

3. List any story book/s that you would like to read but is / are not available in your school library.

A \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

D \_\_\_\_\_

**PART C. Reading patterns**

1. How many hours per day do you spend studying on your own? (Tick one)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
----	----	----	----	----

If more than five specify \_\_\_\_\_

2. During school holidays how many hours per day do you spend studying on your own (Tick one)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

If more than five specify \_\_\_\_\_

3. How many hours per week do you study either English or Literature? (Tick one)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
----	----	----	----	----

If more than five specify \_\_\_\_\_

4. During school holidays how many hours per week do you study either English or Literature? (Tick one)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

If more than five specify \_\_\_\_\_

5. In your personal study timetable do you set aside time specifically for reading storybooks? (Tick one)

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO. \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many hours per week do you spend reading storybooks? (Tick one)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

If more than 10, specify \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many times have you visited a public library? (Tick one)

Never \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5 and over \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you ever-borrowed storybooks from a public library? (Tick one)

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many storybooks have you ever borrowed from a public library?

6. Less than 5

7. 5-10 \_\_\_\_\_

8. 11-20 \_\_\_\_\_

9. More than 20 \_\_\_\_\_

10. Which storybook did you read last?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you remember the name of the Author?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

12. If you answered YES above, give the name of the author?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. How many pages did the storybook have? (Tick one)

a. Below 50 \_\_\_\_\_

b. 50-100 \_\_\_\_\_

c. 101-150 \_\_\_\_\_

d. 151-200 \_\_\_\_\_

e. 201-300 \_\_\_\_\_

f. 301-400 \_\_\_\_\_

g. Over 400 \_\_\_\_\_

14. How many days did it take you to finish reading the storybook? (Tick one)

Days:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	More than 10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	--------------

15. When did you finish reading the storybook? (Tick one)



1. This week \_\_\_\_\_
2. Two weeks ago \_\_\_\_\_
3. One month ago \_\_\_\_\_
4. Two months ago \_\_\_\_\_
5. Three months ago \_\_\_\_\_
6. More than 3 months ago \_\_\_\_\_

16. The following statements represent opinions about English, Literature in English and the reading of fiction by students. On the grid provided tick what your feelings are about each statement. Use the following key

STRONGLY AGREE	SA
AGREE	A
UN DECIDED	U
DISAGREE	D
STRONGLY DISAGREE	SD

STATEMENT	S.A	A	U	D	S.D
Mastery of English is important in my future career					
English is not an easy subject to learn					
Learning English is fun					
Learning Literature is not easy					
Reading story books is enjoyable					
Reading fiction is not important in improving performance in English					
Good English is necessary in order to perform well in other subjects					
Students good in English are not good in other subjects					
Students who score highly in English are special					
Buying story books is a waste of money					
One cannot perform well in English without reading story books					
Reading story books helps one in acquiring a wide					

range of vocabulary					
English does not help foster understanding among different people					
Literature is important in my daily experiences					
English is not an important subject					
Literature helps a person think critically					
I would like to read story books but they are not available in my school					
Reading story books does not help one write better					

What do you think should be done to encourage more reading of storybooks in your school?

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Thank you.

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## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS:

#### GENERAL:

1. Name of the interviewee.
2. Gender of interviewee
3. How long have you taught in this school? Have you taught elsewhere before?
4. What is your general impression of students' performance in English in the school?
5. In your opinion do you think students in your school are interested in reading fiction?
6. What types of storybooks seem to interest the students?
7. How do you rate the students reading speed?
8. What type of books do you recommend for the students and why?
9. What is your opinion on how reading fiction affects performance of English?
10. Do you actively encourage the reading of fiction by the students? Exactly what steps do you take to encourage reading?
11. Do you incorporate reading of fiction in teaching language skills in the classroom, and how?
12. Have you ever tried other innovations to improve performance and with what relative success?
13. What is your opinion about the policy of the buying of books of fiction in the school?
14. What is the school policy on acquisition of books of fiction?
15. Who decides what books are to be bought and who actually does the buying?
16. What importance does the school attach to the buying of fiction?
17. Do you think there are other ways of improving performance of English in the school?

## APPENDIX 3

### OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

#### Availability of library

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

#### Type of library

Separate building \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom \_\_\_\_\_

Cupboard \_\_\_\_\_

Books of fiction available in the school  
NUMBER

TYPE

Novels \_\_\_\_\_

Drama \_\_\_\_\_

Anthologies of short stories \_\_\_\_\_

Biographies \_\_\_\_\_

Collection of oral narratives \_\_\_\_\_

Anthologies of poetry \_\_\_\_\_

LIST OF NOVELS STUDENTS WOULD LIKE TO READ

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>
1. Across the Bridge	Mwangi Gicheru
2. The Adventures of Thiga	N. Njururi.
3. After 4.30	D.G Maillu
4. Anna the Air Hostess.	-----
5. Arrow of God	Chinua Achebe
6. The Ayah	D.G Maillu
7. Bambi (Series)	-----
8. The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born	Ayi Kwei Armah
9. The Birds OF Kamiti	B.G Bunde
10. A Brief Assignment	Ayub Ndi
11. Captured by Raiders.	-----
12. Carcass for Hounds	Meja Mwangi.
13. Chameleon's Second Delivery	K.I.E
14. Children of the Forest.	-----
15. Colour of Carnation	-----
16. The Cruel Burden	-----
17. The Concubine	Elechi Amadi.

18. Dar -es-Salaam by Night	B. Mtobwa
19. Days and Times of a Jail-bird	_____
20. Devil on the Cross	Ngugi wa Thion'go
21. Facing Mount Kenya	Jomo Kenyatta
22. The Famous Five	Blynton
23. The Floods	John Rugada
24. Gifted Hands	Carson
25. The Girl From Uganda	Teggio Urrio
26. The Girl Was Mine	David Karanja
27. Girls At War	Chinua Achebe
28. Give the Devil His Due	_____
29. The Government Inspector	Nikolai Gogol
30. Horn of My Love	Okot P.Bitek
31. Is It Possible	Ole Kulet
32. Judy the Nun	P.M Waweru
33. Kanina and I	Charles Mangua
34. Kill Me Quick	Meja Mwangi
35. The Love Root	Mwangi Ruheni
36. Mine Boy	Peter Abrahams
37. The Minister's Daughter	Mwangi Ruheni
38. Mission to Kala	Mongo Beti
39. Moses (series)	Barbara Kimenye

40. My Life in Crime	John Kiriamiti
41. My Life With a Criminal	John Kiriamiti
42. Never Say Die	Wanyiri Kihoro
43. No Easy Walk to Freedom	Nelson Mandela
44. No Longer at Ease	Chinua Achebe
45. One Man One Wife	_____
46. The Operator	Chrispine Mwangi
47. The Poor Child	_____
48. The Price of Living	Yusuf K.Dawood
49. Prison is no Holiday Camp	J.K.Kimani
50. The Promised Land	Grace Ogot
51. The Return to Paradise	Yusuf K.Dawood
52. The River Between	Ngugi wa Thiong'o
53. Round the World in Eighty Days	Jules Verne
54. Soldier' s Wife	P.Ngurukie
55. Son of Fate	John Kiriamiti
56. Son of Woman	Charles Mangua
57. The Strange Bride	Grace Ogot
58. Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achebe
59. Think Big	Carson
60. To Become a Man	Ole Kulet

61. Tom Sawyer	Mark Twain
62. Tough Choices	P. Ngurukie
63. Treasure Island	R.L Stevenson
64. Truphena the Student Nurse	_____
65. A Walk in the Night	Alex La Guma
66. Weep not Child	Ngugi wa Thiong'o
67. When the Stars are Scattered	Sam Kahiga
68. Why are We So Blest?	Ayi Kwei Armah
69. A Worm in the Head	Charles K Githae
70. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow	Yusuf K.Dawood