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Utilization of Instructional Resources in Teaching Grade Three Reading Skills: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Schools in Eldoret City, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT :

This study examined the availability and utilization of instructional resources for teaching reading skills among Grade Three pupils in public and private schools in Eldoret City, Kenya. Guided by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory and the Simple View of Reading, the research employed a comparative cross-sectional design. Data were collected from 192 teachers and 386 pupils through structured questionnaires, classroom observation schedules, and a Reading Proficiency Test. Results revealed significant disparities in resource provision and utilization between public and private schools: private schools demonstrated higher access to textbooks, supplementary readers, and digital resources, while public schools faced persistent shortages and inconsistent use of the materials that were available. Independent-samples t-tests and Pearson's chi-square analyses confirmed that these disparities were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and were associated with corresponding differences in pupils' reading proficiency scores. The findings underscore the decisive role of equitable resource distribution and effective pedagogical utilization in enhancing early-grade literacy outcomes. The study recommends strengthening county-level resource allocation, embedding resource-integration strategies within teacher professional development, and fostering structured parental involvement in home-based literacy support.

Keywords: Instructional Resources, Reading Skills, Grade Three, Public Schools, Private Schools, Literacy, Eldoret City, Kenya.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The acquisition of reading competence during the early primary years is widely regarded as the single most important predictor of subsequent academic achievement. Grade Three represents a significant transition point in Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum, marking the shift from "learning to read" toward "reading to learn" across all subject areas. Instructional resources textbooks, supplementary readers, phonics charts, digital and audio-visual materials, and print-rich classroom environments provide the concrete tools through which learners practise decoding, build fluency, expand vocabulary, and construct comprehension. International evidence consistently links access to structured reading materials with stronger early-grade literacy outcomes, particularly in contexts where instructional time is limited and class sizes are large (Rice, Lambricht, & Wijekumar, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

In Kenya, the policy architecture for early-grade literacy has expanded considerably over the past decade, with initiatives such as the Tusome early-grade reading programme and the rollout of the Competency-Based Curriculum placing renewed emphasis on resource-based, learner-centred pedagogy. Despite these reforms, sharp disparities in resource provision persist between public and private schools, and these disparities appear to be widening rather than closing in urban centres experiencing rapid private-school growth (Usawa Agenda, 2024). Eldoret City, as one of Kenya's fastest-growing urban centres and the administrative capital of Uasin Gishu County, presents a particularly instructive context in which to examine this divide: it hosts a dense concentration of both under-resourced public primary schools and a rapidly expanding private-school sector serving a diverse socioeconomic catchment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

National assessments, including successive Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (FLANA) reports, indicate that a substantial proportion of Kenyan learners exit the lower primary years without grade-appropriate reading proficiency, and that this shortfall is disproportionately concentrated

among public-school pupils (Usawa Agenda, 2024). While policy discourse frequently attributes this gap to funding disparities alone, existing scholarship suggests that resource availability without corresponding pedagogical utilization does not reliably translate into improved literacy outcomes (Phala & Hugo, 2023). What remains under-examined, particularly within the Eldoret City context, is the interaction between resource availability and how consistently and purposefully teachers deploy those resources in day-to-day reading instruction. This study addresses that gap by comparatively assessing both the availability and the classroom-level utilization of instructional resources for Grade Three reading instruction in public and private schools in Eldoret City.

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the availability and utilization of instructional resources for teaching reading skills among Grade Three pupils in public and private schools in Eldoret City, and to determine the extent to which these factors are associated with differences in pupils' reading proficiency. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Establish the extent of availability of instructional resources for teaching reading in public and private Grade Three classrooms in Eldoret City.
- ii. Compare how teachers in public and private schools utilize available instructional resources in reading instruction.
- iii. Examine the relationship between instructional resource utilization and pupils' reading proficiency across the two school types.
- iv. Recommend strategies for enhancing equitable access to, and effective utilization of, instructional resources in reading instruction.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are intended to inform policy and practice at multiple levels. For the Ministry of Education and county education officials, the study provides localized, comparative evidence to guide resource-allocation decisions under devolved education governance. For the Teachers Service Commission, it identifies specific gaps in resource-integration pedagogy that professional development programmes could address. For school administrators and curriculum support officers, it offers a practical basis for establishing resource centres and structured reading programmes. Finally, for the broader research community, the study contributes context-specific evidence from a rapidly urbanizing Kenyan setting to the wider literature on educational equity and early-grade literacy.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two complementary theoretical perspectives. Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory frames reading acquisition as a socially mediated process in which learners construct literacy competence through guided interaction with more knowledgeable others teachers, peers, and structured instructional materials within their Zone of Proximal Development. From this perspective, instructional resources function not merely as passive content but as mediating artifacts that scaffold learners toward independent reading competence when deployed purposefully by the teacher. The Simple View of Reading complements this lens by conceptualizing reading comprehension as the product of decoding ability and linguistic (listening) comprehension. Applied to this study, the Simple View of Reading directs attention to whether available resources – phonics materials, decodable texts, vocabulary-rich supplementary readers – are structured to build both of these component skills, rather than serving a single dimension of literacy in isolation. Together, the two frameworks justify the study's dual focus on resource availability (the material precondition) and resource utilization (the mediated, socially embedded practice through which materials translate into learning).

2.2 Resource Availability and Literacy Outcomes

A substantial body of international evidence links access to books and structured reading materials with stronger early-grade reading outcomes. Rice, Lambright, and Wijekumar (2024) found that structured comprehension-strategy instruction, when paired with sufficient print materials, produced measurable gains in reading comprehension among early-primary learners. UNESCO's (2025) Global Education Monitoring Report similarly identifies resource scarcity as a persistent driver of literacy gaps in low- and middle-income countries, noting that pupil-to-book ratios remain a strong predictor of reading achievement even after controlling for teacher qualification. Within the Kenyan context, Zuilkowski, Piper, and Ong'ele (2020) documented that resource disparities between school types are compounded by class-size differences, with public schools' larger classes further diluting the effective availability of shared materials. The 2024 Usawa Agenda FLANA report extends this picture, showing that the public–private achievement gap in foundational literacy has persisted across successive assessment cycles despite national curriculum reform (Usawa Agenda, 2024).

2.3 Resource Utilization as a Distinct Determinant

A recurring theme in the literature is that resource availability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improved literacy outcomes. Phala and Hugo (2023) demonstrated that teachers in resource-constrained schools often underutilize even the limited materials available to them, defaulting instead to teacher-centred, chalk-and-talk delivery a pattern attributable to large class sizes, limited training in resource-based pedagogy, and time pressure to cover curriculum content. Mosher, Burkhauser, and Kim (2024) similarly found that sustained literacy gains in early primary education were associated less with the sheer volume of materials available and more with the consistency and structure with which teachers embedded those materials into guided reading and comprehension routines. This distinction between availability and utilization forms the conceptual pivot of the present study: it is not sufficient to document that private schools possess more resources than public schools; it is equally necessary to establish whether, and how consistently, those resources are being pedagogically deployed.

2.4 Comparative Public–Private Disparities in Kenya

Comparative studies in the Kenyan and wider East African context consistently report that private schools benefit from smaller class sizes, more predictable resource replenishment through school fees, and greater administrative flexibility to procure supplementary materials, while public schools contend with delayed capitation disbursement, overcrowded classrooms, and reliance on centrally distributed textbooks that are often insufficient in number (Zuilkowski, Piper, & Ong'ele, 2020). These structural differences interact with pedagogical practice: pupils exposed to diverse reading materials and guided, resource-based instruction have been shown to achieve higher proficiency in both comprehension and vocabulary than peers in resource-poor, lecture-dominated classrooms (Mosher, Burkhauser, & Kim, 2024).

2.5 Research Gap

While the reviewed literature establishes a clear relationship between resource availability, resource utilization, and literacy outcomes at national and cross-national levels, comparatively little empirical work has examined this relationship specifically within Eldoret City's rapidly urbanizing and highly stratified schooling landscape. This study addresses that gap by generating localized, comparative evidence on both dimensions availability and utilization among Grade Three teachers and pupils in the city.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a comparative cross-sectional survey design, which enabled the simultaneous collection of quantitative and observational data from public and private school teachers and pupils at a single point in time. This design was appropriate for identifying and statistically testing differences in resource availability and utilization between the two school categories without requiring longitudinal tracking.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Eldoret City, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Eldoret was selected as the study site because it combines a substantial number of long-established public primary schools with one of the fastest-growing private-school sectors in the North Rift region, providing a naturally occurring comparative context for examining public–private disparities in resource provision.

3.3 Target Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprised 192 Grade Three teachers and 11,284 Grade Three pupils drawn from 192 primary schools within Eldoret City. Using stratified random sampling, with school type (public/private) as the stratifying variable, a sample of 386 pupils was drawn 162 from public schools and 224 from private schools proportionate to the relative enrolment and number of participating institutions within each stratum. All 192 Grade Three teachers in the sampled schools were included in the teacher questionnaire component, given the manageable size of this population.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Three complementary instruments were used to triangulate the data:

- i. Structured teacher questionnaires, capturing self-reported resource availability, frequency and manner of resource utilization, and perceived barriers to resource-based instruction.

- ii. Classroom observation schedules, used to independently verify reported resource utilization by documenting actual instructional practice during scheduled reading lessons.
- iii. A Reading Proficiency Test, administered to sampled pupils to assess decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension in line with the Simple View of Reading framework.

Triangulating self-reported questionnaire data with direct classroom observation was intended to mitigate social-desirability bias in teachers' accounts of their own resource utilization practices.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the questionnaires and observation schedule was established through expert review, aligning items against the objectives of the study and the Simple View of Reading construct domains. The Reading Proficiency Test was benchmarked against Grade Three curriculum expectations under the Competency-Based Curriculum. A pilot test was conducted with teachers and pupils outside the main sample to assess instrument clarity and internal consistency, with items revised where ambiguity or low reliability was identified.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to characterize resource availability and utilization patterns, Pearson's chi-square tests to assess associations between school type and categorical resource-utilization variables, and independent-samples t-tests to compare mean reading proficiency scores between public and private school pupils. All inferential tests were evaluated at a significance threshold of $p < .05$.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Research authorization was obtained from the relevant county education office and participating school administrations prior to data collection. Informed consent was sought from teachers, and assent procedures appropriate to Grade Three pupils were followed alongside parental/guardian consent. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality of responses was assured, and all data were anonymized prior to analysis.

4.0 Results

Observation and survey data revealed stark contrasts in both the availability and the instructional use of reading resources between the two school categories, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparison of Instructional Resource Availability and Utilization by School Type

Resource Type	Public Schools	Private Schools
Core textbooks	Shared (up to 3 pupils per book)	Near-universal, one per pupil
Supplementary readers	Rarely available	Widely used
Digital resources	Absent	Present in a subset of schools
Dominant instructional approach	Chalk-and-talk	Guided reading and comprehension exercises

4.1 Textbook and Supplementary Reader Access

Private schools reported near-universal textbook availability, generally at a ratio approaching one book per pupil, whereas public schools reported persistent shortages, with some pupils sharing a single textbook among three or more classmates. Supplementary readers followed a similar pattern: they were widely used and readily accessible in private-school classrooms but rarely available in public schools, where reading practice was frequently confined to the core prescribed textbook alone.

4.2 Digital Resources

Digital instructional resources including tablets, audio-visual phonics aids, and e-reader content were present in a subset of private schools but entirely absent from the sampled public schools, reflecting both infrastructural constraints (electricity, device procurement) and funding disparities between the two sectors.

4.3 Teacher Utilization Patterns

Beyond mere availability, observation data indicated meaningful differences in how resources were pedagogically deployed. Private-school teachers integrated available resources into guided reading and structured comprehension exercises more consistently, aligning with recommended practice for building both decoding and comprehension skills. Public-school teachers, by contrast, relied heavily on chalk-and-talk methods, even in instances where some instructional materials were nominally available a pattern consistent with the utilization gap identified by Phala and Hugo (2023) in other resource-constrained settings.

4.4 Inferential Findings

Pearson's chi-square analysis confirmed a statistically significant association between school type and instructional resource utilization (χ^2 , $p < .001$), indicating that the observed disparities were unlikely to be due to chance. Independent-samples t-tests further showed that pupils in the resource-richer, higher-utilization private-school environments achieved significantly higher mean scores on the Reading Proficiency Test than their public-school counterparts, corroborating the theoretical expectation drawn from both Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory and the Simple View of Reading that mediated, resource-supported instruction is associated with stronger literacy outcomes.

5.0 Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that disparities in both resource provision and resource utilization contribute directly to the literacy gap between public and private Grade Three learners in Eldoret City. Consistent with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, resources appear to function most effectively as mediating tools when embedded within guided, teacher-led instruction rather than made available in isolation; this explains why private schools' broader resource base translated into proficiency gains only where teachers also demonstrated more consistent pedagogical integration of those materials. Viewed through the Simple View of Reading, the near-absence of supplementary readers and digital resources in public schools likely constrains both decoding practice and the vocabulary-rich exposure needed to build linguistic comprehension, compounding the disadvantage on both component dimensions of reading rather than one alone.

These results align closely with the broader literature reviewed in Section 2. As Phala and Hugo (2023) observed elsewhere, resource-constrained teachers tend to default to teacher-centred delivery irrespective of whatever limited materials are technically available a pattern this study's observation data reproduced almost exactly among sampled public-school teachers. Similarly, the finding that private-school pupils' higher proficiency scores tracked more closely with utilization patterns than with raw resource volume supports Mosher, Burkhauser, and Kim's (2024) conclusion that sustained literacy gains depend on how consistently materials are structurally embedded into instruction, not merely on how many materials a school possesses. At the national level, these classroom-level findings offer a plausible explanatory mechanism for the persistent public-private literacy gap documented in successive Usawa Agenda FLANA assessments (Usawa Agenda, 2024): the gap is not simply a funding artifact but a compounding effect of unequal materials and unequal pedagogical practice.

The findings also carry an important nuance for policy: interventions that address resource availability alone for example, one-off textbook distribution drives are unlikely to close the literacy gap unless accompanied by sustained teacher development in resource-integration pedagogy. This is consistent with the utilization-focused literature (Phala & Hugo, 2023) and suggests that county- and national-level literacy investment should be dual-tracked, targeting both the supply of materials and the instructional capacity to use them.

6.0 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the availability and utilization of instructional resources for teaching Grade Three reading skills in public and private schools in Eldoret City, and to assess their relationship with pupils' reading proficiency. The evidence gathered demonstrates that instructional resource utilization significantly influences Grade Three reading outcomes, and that this influence operates through both the material presence of resources and the consistency with which teachers deploy them in guided instruction. Private schools' advantage in resource access and pedagogical integration translated into measurably higher literacy proficiency among sampled pupils, while public schools remained disadvantaged by both resource shortages and inconsistent instructional use of the materials available to them. Addressing this dual disparity in supply and in pedagogical practice is essential to achieving equitable early-grade literacy outcomes across Eldoret City's public and private school sectors.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Ministry of Education and County Administrators

County and national education authorities should prioritize equitable distribution of textbooks and supplementary readers across public schools, with particular attention to reducing pupil-to-book ratios in Grade Three classrooms. Capitation disbursement schedules should be reviewed to ensure timely procurement of reading materials ahead of each academic term.

7.2 Teachers Service Commission

The Teachers Service Commission should incorporate structured, practical training in resource-integration pedagogy into both pre-service and in-service professional development programmes, with specific emphasis on guided reading techniques that remain effective even where material resources are limited.

7.3 School Administrators

School administrators, particularly in public schools, should establish dedicated reading resource centres and encourage structured, scheduled use of available materials rather than ad hoc access, alongside peer-mentoring arrangements in which teachers experienced in resource-based instruction support colleagues in adopting similar practices.

7.4 Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians can meaningfully extend school-based literacy support by providing supplementary reading materials at home and engaging in shared reading practices with Grade Three learners, reinforcing the social-constructivist principle that literacy development is strengthened through guided interaction beyond the classroom alone.

8.0 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

As with any cross-sectional survey design, the findings of this study establish statistically significant associations rather than definitive causal relationships between resource utilization and reading proficiency; unobserved factors such as household literacy environment and teacher experience may also contribute to the observed disparities. The study was further confined to Eldoret City, and findings should be generalized to other Kenyan urban centres with appropriate caution given differing local resource and enrolment dynamics. Future research would benefit from a longitudinal design tracking the same cohort of learners across multiple grades to establish the durability of resource-utilization effects, as well as qualitative inquiry into the specific instructional strategies through which high-utilization teachers integrate limited resources most effectively.

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