CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, we examined the reading problems of the second language learners of English in Baringo Secondary Schools. In the investigation it emerged that the learners lacked sufficient skills for efficient reading and that they exhibited poor reading ability in their work. They tended to spend too much time reading a text word for word, when the best skill would have been to read to get meaning from each paragraph and indeed the passage as a whole.

From the analysis of the data, it was observed that the learners tended to waste time trying to decode the meanings of individual lexis and structural items which are not germane to the essential message or idea of the writer and in the process miss out the main idea. This also slowed down their reading speed which is a very important factor in the reading process.

In our discussion of reading as a skill in chapters two and five, it was noted that structure and vocabulary in a text are very important if a reader has to achieve efficiency in reading. With these, a student is able to read and infer meaning from context. He is able to extract meaning of individual lexical items and more important, he will also have a clear idea about the overall rhetorical organization of the reading passage and thus read successfully. From the tests it was observed that the learners were weak in inference skills. This was further revealed in the analysis of the percentage errors in grouped structure and content words.

Similarly the study revealed low levels not only of the learners' vocabulary but also of their general language proficiency. These have had tremendous influence in their reading abilities. A further study of the problem showed that several allied pedagogical factors seem to have contributed in part to the reading problems of the
learners. For example, in the observation of the teaching of the skill, it was found that most of the teachers used teacher-centred methods of teaching. The learners were hardly given any opportunity to learn and practise the reading skill. In other words it was observed that in most of the schools there was minimal student participation in the teaching and learning process. In any educational programme, the students' interests and motivation are very important, and the only way these can be enhanced is by the use of student-centred methods of teaching. This is because they facilitate learning.

As discussed in chapter one, English is given a high premium in the Kenyan Society, and if one masters the subject and also passes the national examinations, then one's life-chances in employment increase. Therefore, it is essential that adequate attention is paid to instructional and organizational factors which contribute to achievement in reading English as a second language.

Teacher training and experience are essential aspects of the instructional factors. Responses to the teacher questionnaires and lesson observations showed that those teachers (in Kituro, Kapropita and Kabarnet) who made use of greater variety of techniques involving individualized student-centred instruction, group work, independent reading practice in speed reading and the use of improvised materials such as newspapers and magazines in order to supplement and enrich the reading lessons, had good test results in the Cloze and Comprehension tests.

Teachers' success in satisfying their students' needs and the extent to which they estimate that their teachers care about them and respect them are related to positive changes in students' behaviours in the classroom, and in their academic achievements. Moreover, supportive behaviour by teachers has been identified as an important factor in preventing secondary school students from dropping out of school. Overall, our findings allude to the high potential influence that teachers may and do have on their
students even beyond the domain of learning alone.

With regard to the administrative or organizational factors, the importance of relevant reading materials supplied in sufficient quantity cannot be over emphasized. Textbooks and supplementary readers are crucial. In the schools, adequate reading resources were lacking and these needed to be supplied if the teachers are to teach the language skills effectively. A supportive school administration is therefore very important. A school administration that is sensitive and responsive to both the needs of students and teachers is vital for the realization of the educational goals. In this study, this is one area which showed some gaps that needed enhancing. This will be discussed further in subsequent pages.

In the study we noted that the students had problems in inferring meaning from text because of their low vocabulary levels. This had the attendant effect of hampering their comprehension and overall reading skills. These reading problems would have been minimized if the teachers had adopted appropriate teaching methods which encouraged the learners to learn and practise the skills. It was further observed that one of the contributing factors to the learning or reading problems of the learners are the teachers themselves. On the one hand they were using inappropriate teacher-centred methods to teach and on the other, they were overloaded and also, their morale was low. These factors seem to have affected the teaching and learning of the English language in general and reading skills in particular.

In the questionnaire responses, it was revealed that the teachers preferred teaching certain skills over others. This means that perhaps they are not trained adequately. The teacher training institutions need to work in tandem with the K.I.E. so that while syllabuses are drafted, the colleges should also be informed and be aware of what the content and objectives of the syllabus or curriculum entail, and thus train the teachers appropriately. The current practice where the two institutions operate independently
without a joint collaboration is not good. If a close collaboration is forged, teacher training programmes will be more successful than it is now. The teachers would be adequately equipped with a repertoire of potentially useful pedagogical skills and behaviours, and also helped to develop the abilities to decide when to use which skills or behaviours in their classrooms.

What seems to emerge is the need for closer identification of teacher-related factors that might produce better classroom results and these could be altered through training. More crucial is the practical experience during training. The teachers need to be exposed to participatory and/or discovery teaching strategies where learner participation is supreme, as opposed to the teacher-centred approach. In college this should be given greater importance over other aspects of academic training.

In chapter two in the review of related literature, the various definitions of reading adduced, assumed that reading is an active process where more information is contributed by the reader than by the print in the page. That is, readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories. Skill in reading this depends on precise coordination of a number of special skills. Providing students with practice in these skills and helping them to develop consistent 'attack' strategies should therefore be the focus of any reading lesson.

The current practice where teachers are trained and posted to schools and then little follow-up is done as was shown by the absence of in-service, workshops or seminars, is a disservice not only to the students but also to the teachers. It is through such programmes that teachers polish their skills and hence become effective in class. Thus training remains an important area of concern and questions regarding its contents and the possible combinations of pre-and in-service training will continue to be raised. These should be given more emphasis than what is currently in place.
Indeed this seems not to be a case peculiar to Kenya alone, a recent comprehensive survey of performance in schools in England for example revealed that students “fail because of their teachers not because of their social background” (O'Reilly 1998:13). This is in resonance with the findings in our study in that what matters is the quality of teaching and other allied factors such as facilities, INSET and school leadership. Furthermore the changing motivations and attitudes of students is a powerful argument for a national system of continuing education for teachers.

A continuing education for teachers (sometimes referred to as in-service programme) should be introduced and it should concentrate on the methodologies of teaching Reading and other skills rather than the content. The programme should be planned in such a way that teachers in need of in-servicing in the majority of schools are reached. Secondly and equally important, the pre-service programmes should transmit the necessary methods of teaching for secondary school. If the teachers are not properly trained then they will have an inadequate mastery of the skills and thus be unable to transmit these skills in the classroom.

Help and advice to teachers in their schools is central to the success of syllabus implementation. The Ministry of Education, especially the inspectorate branch could do more to assist teachers in their places of work. This can be realised in various ways: by increasing investment in supervision, encouraging teachers’ workshops and seminars, developing teachers’ advisory centres (TAC). These centres could provide useful services. For example, they can run courses, workshops and discussion forums in the centres itself as well as in the schools. They can organise the production of locally produced aids and materials, pamphlets etc. They can offer a library service for teachers and workshop facilities for the making of aids. The centre staff could be at hand to offer advice to teachers. Finally there is need to strengthen the professional role of the headmaster in the schools.
Added to this is the need to establish strong links between the K.I.E., the teacher training colleges and the teachers' extension services in the field such as INSET. Once this is done then high calibre teachers equipped with the necessary skills to deal with any challenges both inside and outside the classroom in any school would hopefully be produced.

However, training is not enough, the teachers may be thoroughly trained, they may be highly specialized in their teaching subjects but if their enthusiasm and commitment to their work is lacking, then effective teaching may not be achieved. As noted in chapter five, their welfare needs to be improved. From their questionnaire responses it was revealed that most of the teachers have low motivation, they look at teaching as a routine job and many of them spend most of the time looking for other jobs or moonlighting thus leaving them with little time to prepare properly to teach. In situations like these the learners usually suffer and the only way to arrest the situation from a further downward trend is to positively review the terms and conditions of service.

The ongoing rancour between the teachers and the government (see chapter four section 4.27) over the improvement of terms and conditions of service in the teaching profession is indicative of a problem which if not solved will have far reaching consequences in the schools. In order to retain qualified staff in the teaching profession, the present terms and conditions of service should be improved so as to attract and motivate teachers to work harder in their jobs. Otherwise without attractive incentives qualified teachers will continue to be lost to the private sector where the terms and conditions of service are better. Teachers worthy of promotion should be promoted and left to work in the same school. This would serve as an incentive to other teachers. Indeed promotions in general should be streamlined and awarded only to deserving professionals and not on the basis of political patronage as was observed to be the trend.
In the study it was observed that the massive expansion of education in the country which has resulted in the huge increase in enrolment was not matched by an increase in budgetary allocation. Thus instructional materials such as reading texts were lacking in most of the sampled schools.

Worse still the results of the study revealed that the training the teachers receive seemed to be outdated, inadequate and irrelevant. From their responses and their classroom teaching, the training offered to them hinged heavily on content at the expense of professionalism. In their classes they teach and run their classes in a martial manner not conducive to learning. Students cannot ask questions unless required to, it was observed. This attitude does not augur well for effective learning. Learning should be enjoyable and interactive and the only way to achieve this is by encouraging students' participation in the learning process.

In view of what has emerged in the study, a radical re-orientation in the training of teachers should be made. Instead of emphasizing on content and theory in academics, focus should shift to the production of an all rounded professional capable of handling the classroom challenges and realities as they emerge now and in the future. Indeed a contemporary teacher should view himself/herself as a guide and not an instructor so that learners could be guided to practise skills such as reading on their own. The teacher training colleges therefore should strive to produce an innovative, flexible, adaptive and creative teaching professional who is able to guide students towards a later life whether in academics or trades equipped with the relevant skills.

Similarly, collaboration among teachers should be promoted and encouraged. More so because curriculum, syllabi, instructional manuals, plans etc come from one central unit (K.I.E.). When one school experiences a problem in its implementation, for example, it may seek help from a nearby school. Some form of increased
professional contact between teachers in various schools is therefore very important and should be encouraged. These contacts enable teachers to thrash out together problems they encounter. They can exchange ideas, instructional materials, tips etc which is very healthy.

While examining the compositions written by the students and marked by the teachers, it was observed that the teachers made too many corrections and that the students' work was full of the teacher's red ink. This may discourage the students. Perhaps a better way would have been to encourage the learners to mark each other's work with the teacher playing a guiding or supervisory role.

We should be quite clear however that, when we criticize a students' work at the end of a course we are criticizing a system that has failed to give him the necessary skills to function effectively. More trained teachers would have a better command of English if their training programmes had concentrated in perfecting their grasp of strictly limited areas of language rather than seeking to 'educate' them as it emerged from their responses in the questionnaires. What could be done perhaps is first to ensure that teachers have an active knowledge of all the lexis and structures in the textbooks they will be using to teach. A minimum standard of competence would be minimum only in its limitations, not in the quality of a student's performance: because one is only demanding that a teacher be able to use a limited area of language in which one can expect both perfection in the use of the language and a high standard of production. These essential skills might be covered in a term or in two years, depending on the curriculum and the teaching timetable. In other words there should be some time available in which to consolidate the teachers' knowledge of the language and widen their horizons. This helps them to teach effectively.

However, lack of consistency between what is taught in teacher training colleges and what actually happens in schools at times impairs the English language syllabus
implementation. Language teacher trainees are prepared for what should be rather than what is. There seems to be little conscious attempt to base the syllabus or its priorities on the task which teachers should undertake in the schools. If the curriculum/syllabus handed down to the schools by the central curriculum authority like the K.I.E. is to be implemented successfully in the various schools, syllabus used in the colleges to train teachers should be constantly revised to suit or reflect the realities in the schools.

In the study (see chapter four section 4.16) we noted that there were some teachers who indicated that they were professionally trained. One would have expected that because of their training they should be able to function in any school with less problems. Yet when they are posted to the schools to teach, we find that they are incapable of coping with the demands in the school and also of teaching the various English language skills. In order to produce teachers that are equipped enough to implement the syllabus, and to teach effectively, there ought to be concurrent syllabus reform, revision, or change in the colleges so as to train the teachers properly. These teachers will in turn be in a position to teach efficiently and effectively.

In chapter four, section 4.26, it emerged that those schools that did not perform well in the tests also had cases of class attendance problems or absenteeism amongst their learners due to lack of school fees. In view of this, the present system of not allowing students who have not paid their school fees to attend classes should be done away with. Instead they should be allowed to attend lessons and required to pay the fees after the end of each term. This is because not all parents can afford the huge sums of money required for fees in one instalment. They should be given time to look for the money while the student is attending school. A bursary scheme for helping needy students from very poor families should be developed and encouraged throughout the schools. In this way the students would be able to attend classes regularly. Hence
their chances of both mastering the reading skill and their chances to achieve in their overall studies would increase.

From the foregoing therefore, there is need to strive to increase the internal efficiency, delivery and accountability of formal education with a view to making it appropriate to the needs of the poor. The burdensome cost of education can be squarely attributed to Government policies and the economic recession. The increasing cost of education has had a direct impact on reducing enrolment, increasing repetition and drop-out rates thereby undermining the efficiency of the school system. As costs rise, many parents can only pay intermittently and are forced to end up questioning the value of their investments since they see few tangible benefits. The Government should reactivate its commitment to genuine and relevant education accessible and affordable to all strata of society.

Since the schools are government maintained, the government should also take over the building, stocking and maintenance of school libraries. Alternatively a special fund for the building or improvement of libraries should be allocated to each school. This is because as it was shown in chapter four, table 10, the schools are not uniformly endowed with good libraries. In fact it was observed that many of them had poor libraries, and if this facility is to perform its role properly it should be funded well. If the money is not enough for each school, then the possibility of starting a mobile library should be explored.

In chapter four, section 4.7 table 2, we noted that the teachers in the schools have a heavy workload and also that the English language is allocated little time in the timetable. This is because the curriculum is overloaded. Overloading of school curricula, particularly at the secondary school level is certainly not a new phenomenon. But the proportions it assumes at the present time is alarming. The sub-system is now expected to take responsibility for an assorted range of new subjects.
Teachers have no more been trained to deal with such material, than have methods and techniques of teaching it been developed (see tables 6 and 7, chapter four). The outcome as we saw in chapter four is an overloading of an already saturated curriculum, with a school day that cannot be extended further. The result, as revealed in chapter four tables 8a and b, is that the teacher who with just cause is concerned with getting through the syllabus, deals with the new material rapidly and superficially, and the student is thus faced with a host of complex ideas, skills etc which he has little time to assimilate. Consequently the increasing failures as revealed in tables 18a, 18b and 19. The limited number of contact hours that are now allocated to reading, and indeed the English language in general is untenable. Sufficient time should be allocated to the teaching of reading skills, more so if we consider the important role it plays even in other sectors of education. Not only should more time be provided in form three but also in the lower classes as well. In this way the learners will hopefully learn successfully.

There is also need to improve the teachers’ workload to ensure his efficiency. No figures however are available for comparison, but records show that in Kenya the average teacher-student ratio is 1:60 (GOK 1996). The situation is worsening as student enrolment increases (as we saw in chapter one) without a concomitant growth in the number of teachers due to shortage of funds for training, and for paying teachers' salaries. While student numbers increase, the government should also increase teacher training and recruitment so as to reduce the teacher-student ratio to a manageable level.

English language is very important not only as a language of instruction but also as a subject. Therefore, the curriculum planners should reduce the 'crowding' in the curriculum by making the other subjects optional and thus giving space and time for the adequate teaching of the various skills such as reading in the syllabus.
As noted in chapters four and five, the students' difficulties are those of structure, vocabulary, inference and style as well as content. Such students need to be convinced that with a little application these difficulties can be overcome. This could be achieved by encouraging the students to make a careful study of a single text, although this will not serve to accustom them to the variety of styles used in a text. A number of extracts, each of a few pages in length, are better suited to this purpose because they can be studied intensively, so that the student not only assimilates the grammar and vocabulary and becomes used to a variety of styles, but also acquires some familiarity with a skill or some aspect of it. On completion of each passage therefore, he should have some sense of achievement. In this way then, the student not only strengthens his knowledge of the language, but also acquires confidence as he goes along.

Similarly the teacher while teaching reading must pay particular attention to differences in background knowledge and should help the students prepare for a passage by providing relevant background information. This assists the reader derive meaning from the text. Also for pedagogical purposes the teacher should bear in mind in the L2 classroom the distinction between 'language processing difficulties and information processing difficulties' and guide the students accordingly by choosing materials that reflect this distinction and therefore strive to teach and/or assist the learners overcome them and thereby learn various language skills.

The study has revealed a yawning gap in our curriculum policy. We need to have a policy perspective on language teaching and indeed on education in general, which emphasizes the need for the shifting of the focus from teaching to learning, from what is taught to how it is learned, and what is really learnt is only the ability to learn and apply the skills correctly. Developing the capacity to learn would be more important than what is learnt. The emphasis has been on imparting facts not developing skills. There is need therefore to radically re-orient teacher training in the country to reflect
contemporary global thinking where language acquisition is viewed as a process of acquiring skills rather than a body of knowledge. The current teacher training syllabus in the country seems to be faulty and it needs to be changed to make it responsive to changing norms and values.

The English language syllabus in teacher training colleges should thus include practical components for the teacher trainees to tackle. It should also have further suggestions on how to handle the preliminary vocabulary, improve reading efficiency and handle or test or assess the learners. Therefore there is need to shift emphasis from reading as an exercise to reading for meaning, with the accent being on comprehension and enjoyment of the story or message in the text. The teachers should also be trained on how to build the learner's vocabulary. Learning vocabulary is a very important part of learning English. The learners must imbibe the fact that good English means having a good if not a big vocabulary.

In our study of the students' composition, we noted that they lacked mechanical accuracy in their work - their spelling, punctuation, tenses, use of articles, singulairs and plurals were faulty, and above all their work showed a poor grasp of the rules of grammar. The teachers should always inculcate all these to the students by encouraging regular practice. Once this is done the numerous errors highlighted and discussed in chapter four, section 4.26, would be minimized. Also emphasis should be placed on the continued interrelation of the language activities of speaking, reading and writing. For instance, although vocabulary development is relegated in the current syllabus to reading skills, it also belongs to writing. This is because one of the important marks of a good writer is the effective use of an expanding vocabulary. The student who has an inadequate or under-developed vocabulary will, therefore, fail not only in reading assignments but in writing as well. Teachers should take this fact into consideration at all times when teaching so that reading skills should not be restricted to the reading passages only, rather even in learning other skills such as
writing, vocabulary development and use which is an off-shoot of reading, should be learned by the student.

While observing the teaching of reading in the classes, it was noted that the learners were often asked to look up meanings of difficult words in the dictionary. This discourages the learners and thus they are unable to get the gist of the text from their reading thereby missing the meaning of words or phrases. In order to solve this problem, perhaps the teachers could divide the students into small groups and ask them to list down the words likely to be difficult in the passage together with their synonyms or dictionary entries. This could be referred to during the 'homework reading' or in class if necessary. This activity may also be very helpful for developing the students' dictionary skills.

In the study it emerged that the sampled schools relied heavily on the K.I.E. prescribed English language textbooks. The test results showed that this is not enough for the students to further develop their vocabulary, learn the correct use of phrases, idioms, understand unstated implications in sentences, inferences and other discourse markers. They should be encouraged to read other materials such as graded readers. At the moment the K.I.E. does not provide any list of readers for the schools to use. To fill this gap, it is recommended that the novels, novelettes, short stories and plays of the African writers series could be used for this purpose. Alternatively experts or writers could be commissioned to developed graded readers with comprehension questions suitable for specific classes to be used for teaching reading. If these are diligently used with the teachers closely supervising their students, they will greatly improve their language proficiency. This would also serve to nurture a reading culture among the learners. Indeed if we are to make our society resourceful, we must cultivate a reading culture, and the place to start nurturing this is in our secondary schools. A similar project has been undertaken recently in the United States.
of America and has been discovered to yield astounding results.\(^1\)

Added to this is the need for a balanced activities approach to the teaching of the English language. The language teacher should not, as observed, stick to the teaching of one skill, for example, reading comprehension in one lesson but rather he/she should ensure that students are engaged in a variety of activities which can foster acquisition and learning. In one lesson, for example, the teacher could use one passage to teach the learners, reading skills, vocabulary and inference skills. The learners could also be asked to construct their own sentences using the difficult words learned from a reading text. In this way the students would practise writing as a skill and at the same time be able to demonstrate their vocabulary skills. This should be the standard practice in every lesson.

A balanced activities approach to teaching reading, for example, has the added advantage of capturing the learner's motivation. By presenting students with a variety of activities, we can ensure their continued interest in the language programme. Classes which continually have the same activities such as the ones observed in the schools are not likely to sustain interest particularly where the students have no extrinsic motivation and do not perceive clear long term goals. A programme however, that presents a variety of activities is far more likely to continually engage the students' interest, more so if the teacher regularly promotes and encourages students' participation in the learning process. Creativity on the part of the teacher and his ability to be flexible and sensitive to the changing needs of the learners as the lesson progresses is therefore very important.

\(^1\) Advantage Learning Systems Inc. Wisconsin, has been successfully grading readers for use by learners in a systematic way to improve their language proficiency. The students use reading texts of the right difficulty level and move on from one set of readers to another. Grading of readers in this way was found to encourage learners to do extra reading and thus develop their reading skills which come in handy in understanding their course texts.
In chapter four, section 4.12, it was observed that the teachers tended to place much emphasis on writing, speaking and examination skills in their teaching. It was further revealed in the data analysis that the teachers tended to emphasize on the communicative aspects in their teaching and thus in the process reading as a skill is not given due emphasis. It is very often true that one skill cannot be performed without another. Indeed it is impossible to speak in a conversation if you do not listen as well and people seldom write without reading. The idea of integrating skills is therefore very important and teachers should always do this. After all, the K.I.E. emphasizes this in the prescribed English language integrated syllabus.

The study has shown the central role played by the various factors in influencing or affecting the teaching of reading, and also raised questions thereof about the curriculum/syllabus, pedagogy and the relationship between society and the school. While it is recommended that in order to minimize the reading problems of the students, teachers should be equipped with better methods of teaching reading, their remuneration needs to be improved and facilities in the schools increased. All these cannot on their own transform the students into mastering the reading skill. We cannot ignore the role of the education officers, school administration, students, parents and the community at large in supporting the schools to attain their educational goals. A systems approach involving all these facets should therefore be encouraged and sustained if success is to be achieved.

Finally, the purpose of the study was to investigate the reading problems of secondary school learners and the teaching of English language in general and to suggest remedial measures. The teaching of Reading is a well researched area in language teaching and learning. However, research in this area, particularly in secondary school classrooms, is a relatively new field in Kenya. The study has tried to bring to the fore not only the reading problems, but also the factors that contributed to these problems that are unique to the Kenyan situation. In the study these factors were looked at and
how they have impacted on the teaching of language especially Reading. In chapter two of the study, it was indicated that studies in Kenya on the subject focused on primary and lower secondary schools. The findings of this study have shown the reading problems of learners, and what goes on in the teaching and learning of Reading in the higher classes (form three) of Kenyan secondary schools. This is what makes the study and its findings different from those that have been carried out in the area in the past. In the light of these findings, suggestions were made on how this can be improved. It is hoped that the findings of the study will go a long way in creating awareness to the policy makers, education authorities, curriculum planners, administrators and teachers, an awareness that can guide them arrive at decisions concerning education that would hopefully make teaching and learning more efficient and effective.