Since independence in 1963, the government of Kenya has emphasized improving reading instruction and reading ability (Kamau, 2000). Free primary education (Otieno, 2003) and adult literacy campaigns have been aimed at giving every Kenyan the right to read (Akhusama, 1984; Nyongesa, 1990). We propose that Kenya’s emphasis on reading is needed in part because when books were introduced, they were not promoted as something to derive pleasure from; in fact, people were forced to read (Chakava, 1982). In Okot p’Beke’s (1966) celebrated poem *Song of Lawino*, written in Acholi, Lawino blames her husband Ocol for having abandoned the ways of his people. She accuses him of burying himself in a forest of books and allowing his manhood to be crushed by large books. Investigations of the history of the book in Kenya seek to explain how negative attitudes toward reading developed and continue (Stroud, 2002). One explanation is that Kenyans were made to read mostly religious documents such as the Bible or other holy writings (Sifuna, 1980) that did not fit their indigenous ways of living. These readings directed them away from their rich cultural and religious heritage (Maina, 2003).

Generally, formal education was viewed as something to be endured and dispensed with as soon as the benefits could be realized. Most Africans do not read much beyond newspapers and religious texts once formal education is completed (Chakava, 1982). Rather, they prefer the pleasures of storytelling, singing, dancing, and simply talking rather than the private and individual preoccupation of reading a book (Chakava, 1984; Ng’ang’a, 1993).
An integrative review of teaching reading in Kenyan primary schools

This integrative review on the teaching of reading in Kenyan primary schools provides a foundation for the growing movement there to improve reading education. In gathering sources for this review, we took an inclusive historical stance. Thus, we did not dismiss research reports that lacked traditional indicators of quality such as being published in peer-reviewed journals. We used multiple methods to find relevant research and associated documents, including two trips to Kenya. The review is organized by six topics: (a) language of instruction, (b) reading instruction, (c) reading materials, (d) reading culture, (e) assessment, and (f) teacher development. The review concludes with six proposals for policymakers, educational researchers, and teacher educators for the development of reading instruction based on what we learned in reviewing the literature. The first proposals are intended specifically to address the teaching of reading in Kenya, but they may be relevant to other sub-Saharan nations. The final proposal encourages others to conduct similar reviews to make possible a handbook of reading in Africa.
Интегративный обзор литературы о практике обучения чтению в начальных классах

Настоящий обзор демонстрирует, насколько обоснована потребность в совершенствовании методов обучения чтению в кенийских начальных школах. Собирая данные для обзора, мы руководствовались исключительно историческим подходом. Поэтому мы принимали во внимание любые источники, в том числе те, которые не соответствуют классическим индикаторам качества (например, не опубликованы в научных журналах с системой анонимного рецензирования). В поисках значимых источников и связанных с ними документов мы использовали разнообразные методы, включая две поездки непосредственно в Кению. Обзор состоит из шести разделов: (a) язык обучения, (b) обучение чтению, (c) материалы для чтения, (d) культура чтения, (e) оценка, и (f) повышение квалификации учителей. В заключение приводятся пять идей о том, как улучшить обучение чтению. Они адресованы руководителям системы образования, ученым и преподавателям, работающим с учителями. Первые четыре идем связаны непосредственно с ситуацией в Кении, но могут быть уместны при формировании политики по обучению чтению в сопредельных странах в регионе пустыни Сахары. В заключение предлагается провести подобные обзоры в других странах региона, чтобы затем составить пособие по обучению чтению в Африке.

CETTE REVUE intégrative de l'enseignement de la lecture dans les écoles primaires au Kenya fournit une base au mouvement qui se développe dans ce pays en vue d'y améliorer l'enseignement de la lecture. En rassemblant les sources pour réaliser cette revue, nous avons adopté une approche historique. Donc, nous avons procédé de la même manière que dans le pays de Keny en faisant cette revue. Les quatre premières propositions sont relatives à l'enseignement de la lecture, (a) langue d'enseignement, (b) matériel pédagogique, (c) évaluation, et (d) formation des maîtres. Elle conclut par cinq propositions à l'intention des décideurs, des chercheurs et des instructeurs. Les quatre premières propositions concernent spécifiquement l'enseignement de la lecture au Kenya, mais peuvent être valables pour d'autres nations sub-sahariennes. La proposition finale encourage d'autres auteurs à effectuer des revues du même type afin de réaliser un manuel sur la lecture en Afrique.

ABSTRACTS

Кения как страна на стыке двух континентов представляет собой уникальный контекст для изучения вопросов образования. Настоящий обзор является первым в своем роде, который сосредоточен на аспектах обучения чтению в кенийских начальных школах.

CETTE REVUE intégrative de l'enseignement de la lecture dans les écoles primaires au Kenya fournit une base au mouvement qui se développe dans ce pays en vue d’y améliorer l’enseignement de la lecture. En rassemblant les sources pour réaliser cette revue, nous avons adopté une approche historique. Dans cette revue, nous avons adopté un point de vue historique inclusif. Ainsi, nous avons pris en compte les travaux de tous les chercheurs qui ont travaillé dans ce domaine. La revue est organisée en six thèmes : (a) langue d’enseignement ; (b) enseignement de la lecture ; (c) matériel pédagogique ; (d) évaluation ; (e) formation des maîtres. Elle conclue par cinq propositions à l’intention des décideurs, des chercheurs et des instructeurs. Les quatre premières propositions concernent spécifiquement l’enseignement de la lecture au Kenya, mais peuvent être valables pour d’autres nations sub-sahariennes. La proposition finale encourage d’autres auteurs à effectuer des revues du même type afin de réaliser un manuel sur la lecture en Afrique.
The Kenyan context

Kenya became a British colony in 1920, after being run as an East African protectorate by the British East Africa Company since 1890. Reading of the printed word, as well as formal education as we know it today, has a relatively short history in Kenya (Chakava, 1984). Reading print, like many other things Kenyan, is a product of colonialism and missionary work. The earliest missionaries credited with the establishment of formal education in Kenya are Johan Krapf and Johan Rebman, both of the Christian Missionary Society of the Church of England. The missionaries established presses at various centers, undertook the daunting task of translating the Bible into African languages, taught people how to read and write, and produced for them a wide range of simple reading materials, mostly religious. Needless to say, they also taught Africans their European languages and had Africans read materials that they considered suitable for them (Sifuna, 1990). With time, the missionaries expanded their activities, sometimes in conjunction with the colonial government, and together they ventured into publishing textbooks for schools.

Missionaries introduced elements such as grouping children in a classroom for daily lessons and stressed the significance of reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious instruction along with examinations and certificates (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992). The missionaries, more than any other agents, did the most to encourage and extend the practice of reading (Alwiny & Schech, 2004)—so much so that in many African languages the word for reader is synonymous with that for Christian (Sifuna, 1980). For instance, in the language of Ekegusii someone might ask, “Nsomote?” (“Are you a reader?”). This is the same as asking, “Are you a Christian?”

In 1909, a British government-sponsored study of education in East Africa known as the Frazer Report proposed that education should be stratified along racial lines (Mutua, 1975), with the Europeans at the top of the hierarchy, Asians in the middle, and the indigenous people at the bottom. Later, another system for native Swahili and Arab speakers was added. Education followed this four-system educational curricular until independence. There was education for (a) whites, (b) Asians, (c) Arabs and Waswahili, and (d) Africans who spoke a variety of indigenous languages (Eshiwani, 1993). Each of the groups received education according to its rung on the ladder of racial status. The European children received education to be the rulers and decision makers. The Asians, who were brought to build the Kenya–Uganda railway (1890–1901), were encouraged to settle in Kenya to provide services to the colonial government. Their education was mainly academic to prepare them for managerial, trade, and commerce positions. The indigenous Kenyans were minimally educated to keep them subservient to the colonialists (Mutua). Their education emphasized basic reading and catechism to train teachers, technicians, and clerks for the colonial administration.
By the 1920s, Kenyans began confronting colonial education as racially stratified and disadvantaging (Maina, 2003). Dissatisfaction with the missionary values that defined the curriculum content eventually resulted in new developments in Kenyan education. By 1930, some Kenyans had formed their own independent schools. The independent schools allowed traditional activities that were previously forbidden, such as female circumcision and polygamy, as well as providing academic skills to their youth. According to Sheffield (1973), “Every effort was made to build education upon the new African attitudes of independent thought” (p. 28). To sum up, the legacy of colonial education in Kenya was one of conflict, one that alienated people from their culture and created foreigners in their own country. Much of what was learned and experienced was a contradiction to the philosophies of indigenous Kenyan societies (Maina). “Neither the missionaries nor the colonial administration made any real attempts to link African education to African problems and African heritage” (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992, p. 15).

Since independence, the Kenyan educational system has followed the 8–4–4 system taken from the British model. Primary school includes standards 1 to 8. Primary school is followed by four years of secondary education known as forms 1 to 4. The fortunate students go on to higher education in technical institutes, polytechnics, or a four-year university program. Postcolonial African governments were committed to the spread of education and the eradication or minimization of the colonial legacy in education and acted by setting up more new schools and expanding educational facilities for the young and launching adult literacy programs for adults (Mutua, 1975).

Kenya’s leadership has long recognized the need for both national identity and international participation and has fostered the use of the Kiswahili language for the former goal and English for the latter. Students are expected to learn to read in Kiswahili and English. The current language policy is bilingual (Willis, 1988), although the reality is that Kenyans are monolinguals (speaking only their mother tongues), bilinguals, or multilinguals (Michieka, 2005). The Asmara Declaration (2000) was issued at the conclusion of the historic conference of writers and scholars from all regions of Africa called “Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures Into the 21st Century” (www.outreach.psu.edu/C&I/AllOdds/declaration.html). It proclaimed that all African children have the unalienable right to attend school and learn their mother tongues and that every effort should be made to develop African languages at all levels of education. The significance of African languages was further linked to development of science and technology, democracy, equality, social justice, and decolonization.

Kiswahili is of Bantu origin, with words borrowed from other languages such as Arabic. It is a nontribal language, a lingua franca that allows for cross-ethnic communication. It is typically learned informally from other Kenyans. Kiswahili is used by politicians and government officials when interacting with members of the public. It is also used across the East and Central African regions (Musau, 2003). A version of Kiswahili becomes standardized through formal instruction at school. Mother tongue or the language of wider communication (such as Kiswahili) is used as the language of instruction in the first three years of primary schooling (standards 1–3) throughout the country, whereas English is taught as a subject. English becomes the language of instruction from standard 4 upward, while Kiswahili is taught as a subject (Report of the Presidential Working Party on the Second Public University in Kenya [MacKay Report], 1981).

In Kenya, teacher preparation for primary school teachers includes one course on the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Secondary school teacher training, however, does not explicitly emphasize the teaching of reading, because it is assumed that students have learned to read and can read to learn when they complete primary school. The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) provides instructional materials to primary schools outlining what is supposed to be taught for the four skills. Curriculum in Kenya can be described as being “narrow in scope and emphasizing the role of learning for passing national exams to acquire certificates” (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992, p. 30).

Kenya is an examination-oriented country (Otieno, 2003). Examinations play a decisive role in evaluating the success of students and teachers and all other stakeholders. The level of performance on public examinations is a deciding factor for an individual’s future in education and eventual participation in nation building (Agak, 1995). Students sit for written exams at the end of every year in order to graduate to the next grade level. The Kenya Certificate of Primary Education is the final exam at the end of standard 8, and those who pass and can afford school fees continue with secondary school. Eventually they will have to pass the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education at the end of
form 4 to be considered for a college or university education.

The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) was declared in February 2003 to reduce adult illiteracy by 2015 in every country (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004). Kenya is experiencing many literacy-related initiatives that are intended to emphasize the need for more reading education. We believe that those who are leading these initiatives might benefit from a review of teaching reading in Kenyan primary schools.

Method

Document collection

Educational research reports are not centrally archived or widely disseminated in Kenya (Makotsi, 2001). Many university libraries in Kenya are still in the process of computerizing their systems, which presents challenges in conducting a review of research reports not available in the United States. Studies of reading conducted in Kenya for university degrees in western universities and published in journals included in electronic databases were relatively easy to locate. Also, world organizations such as UNESCO and the Rockefeller Foundation sometimes put relevant reports on the Internet (e.g., unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001235/123540e.pdf).

We used multiple methods to find as many documents relevant to our topic as possible. In the United States we searched electronic databases through our library system. In Kenya we searched card catalogs and, when available, electronic holdings in libraries. Also, in Kenya we relied on key informants who in turn referred us to others known for their interest and work in reading or literature or libraries. This process is known in qualitative research as snowballing (Patton, 2002).

Key informants

We spent three weeks in July and August 2004 meeting key informants in Kenya. The process of finding them began with Jennifer Bowser at the International Reading Association’s headquarters. She gave us contact information for Margaret Makenzi, who served as the president of the local IRA council based at Egerton University in Njoro. She became our first key informant via electronic mail before we arrived in Kenya. Our informants were, more often than not, librarians and faculty at different universities. We would ask, “Who would be the best person to talk to in order to find studies of teaching reading?” Consistent with the snowball technique, we accumulated more documents and found more people to interview. In most cases, a few key names were mentioned repeatedly as valuable. They were Henry Chakava, a renowned publisher and chief executive officer of East African Educational Publishers (EAEP); Ruth Makotsi, executive secretary of the East Africa Book Development Association (EABDA); Pamela Kola, chairperson of Reading Association of Kenya (RAK); and Agnes Gathumbi of Kenyatta University.

Library visits

In 2003 Hellen searched the libraries at Kenyatta University and the University of Nairobi for relevant documents. In 2004 we both went to Kenya where we revisited four universities (Kenyatta, Nairobi, Egerton, and Moi) because they offer advanced degrees in education, linguistics, literature, and library sciences. Thus, they are likely places to find research papers, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations on reading.

In conversation with lecturers and librarians, we learned that some completed theses were kept within the offices of different departments rather than at the main libraries. We encountered difficulty in obtaining those research studies that were deemed particularly promising for publication or further research. It is understandable that Kenyans may be cautious about sharing knowledge, given the practice of outsiders appropriating knowledge for their own professional or commercial benefit. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has noted, in writing about decolonizing methodologies, research can be “a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other” (p. 2). Although Hellen is herself a Kenyan, she was at the time a doctoral student in the United States, which positioned her as a privileged Kenyan who might unwittingly be serving the goals and interests of outsiders.

After visiting libraries, we returned to Nairobi where one can find most of the textbooks used to teach the national curriculum. For reference purposes we purchased three English instruction pupil books for standard 1 (Gimoi, Kodeng, & Mathenge, 2003; Kariuki, Muitung’u, Muutu, Ndua, & Hurst, 2003; Ongeri, Birgen, & Mutiso, 2003). We also purchased the teacher’s guides (Birgen, Mutiso, & Ongeri, 2002; Gimoi, Kodeng, & Mathenge, 2002; Kariuki et al., 2003). We asked a saleswoman which of the textbooks for teachers’ colleges was most
sought after or used for training primary school teachers. She directed us to Williams’s (1996) text on teaching English in primary schools.

**Electronic searches**

From our library system we searched four databases: (a) Dissertation Abstracts International, (b) Education Abstracts Full Text, (c) ERIC, and (d) International Political Science Abstracts. We searched using the terms Reading and Kenya; Teaching reading in Kenya; Literacy in Kenya; Reading and writing in Kenya; Primary education in Kenya; Reading and literacy in Kenya; and Kenya and reading (or literacy).

**Document analysis**

The research documents relevant to our review of teaching reading in Kenyan primary schools included:

- Unpublished postgraduate diploma theses (Gakunga, 1982)
- Unpublished dissertations (Agak, 1995; Ingule, 1983; Mutuku, 2000; Willis, 1988)
- Unpublished thesis (Makotsi, 2001)
- Conference papers (Kitonga, 1984; Schroeder, 2005)
- Reports for government or organizations (Nzomo et al., 2001)
- Book chapters (Mwanycky & Bugembe, 1990; Ondini, 2000)
- Books (Makotsi & Nyariki, 1997; Muthwii, 2002; Mutua, 1975)

In addition, we reviewed a variety of nonempirical, popular literature, including the following:

- Books (Eshiwani, 1993; Makotsi & Nyariki, 1997; Mutua, 1975; Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Shiundu & Omulando, 1992; Sifuna, 1980, 1990)
- Journal articles (Buchmann, 1999; Bunyi, 1999; Kembo, 1993; Kiarie, 2004; Michieka, 2005; Muthwii, 2004b; Muthwii & Kioko, 2003)
- Newspapers (Orieno, 2003; Oyaro, 2005)
- Unpublished papers (Maina, 2003; Ng’ang’a, 1993)

We read these documents to identify major topics of interest. Six topics were identified: (a) language of instruction, (b) reading instruction, (c) reading materials, (d) reading culture, (e) assessment, and (f) teacher development. Within these topics we further classified the literature according to language or languages (Kiswahili, English, mother tongue, or not specified). We settled on these topics based on our analysis of what the primary focus was of each research report. There were some research reports that addressed more than one of these topics.

More than half of the empirical studies we located were unpublished theses or dissertations. The publication dates span a 23-year period (1982–2005). We are aware that readers may question the quality and relevance of a review that includes such a diverse literature during a relatively long period. Some readers will wonder about the quality of the research in unpublished theses or dissertations, because standards imposed by university faculty committees vary both within and between institutions. Some readers will wonder if findings from studies published in the 1980s are relevant to reading education today in Kenya. Although we agree with and understand the significance of these concerns, we offer that our purpose here is pragmatic and archival. Our review is pragmatic in that the goal is to take stock of whatever has been researched on reading in order to motivate action focused on improving reading education in Kenya (see Kvale, 1995, for more on pragmatic validity). Our review is archival in that this is the first effort to look across the research conducted that might be of interest to those working in the area of reading education in Kenya. We do not claim that this review is the real or only truth about reading in Kenyan primary schools. Those who read the review are responsible for deciding what is useful, particularly toward improving reading education in Kenya.

In our second phase we used writing as our method of analysis. Although writing as a method of inquiry has been proposed for qualitative researchers (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), it has yet to be defended as useful or important in an analytic process for writing an integrative literature review. Yet, writing was what we did to think, to prioritize and to organize all the information we had collected in the form of empirical and nonempirical documents. We wrote about what we knew, what was ambiguous, or
what was unknown with regard to each topical category. This writing understandably led us back to rereading, rethinking, and rewriting what was important in approximately 200 pages of analysis.

In the third phase of our analysis, we asked Margaret Makenzi, a senior librarian at Egerton University who serves as president of the local International Reading Association council, to read and comment on a longer version of the review. Being in Kenya, she is closer to the day-to-day realities of reading education through her work with students, teachers, schools, and the Reading Tent project, explained in a subsequent section of this report. She provided investigator triangulation (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). When researchers with varied knowledge and experiential backgrounds participate in a review such as the present one, such triangulation provides a check on the interpretations and further the credibility of the findings.

The review

**Language of instruction**

In Kenya there are controversies about the teaching of languages and the primary language of instruction. The language policy specifies the use of mother tongue in primary standards 1–3. This mother tongue could be Kiswahili or another African language of the region. English becomes the language of instruction from standard 4 through university.

The controversies are many. For example, it has been argued that primary school teachers are not prepared to teach in languages other than Kiswahili and English (Kiari, 2004). The prevailing assumption is that a teacher can transfer methods for teaching English and Kiswahili to teach other languages. Although many teachers do attempt to take this approach, it may not necessarily be done effectively (Musau, 2003). All language teachers, whether of English or African languages, need education in general language teaching methodologies as well as methodologies for teaching specific languages (Kiari). Furthermore, the teachers need proficiency in several languages, yet researchers have found teachers with insufficient or poor language skills (Owino, 1987). When the teachers are not fluent in English and Kiswahili, they make mistakes in teaching reading.

In upper primary school, teachers are, according to policy, supposed to teach in English. More often, teachers translate content into the region's mother tongue or Kiswahili (Muthwii, 2004a; Nzomo et al., 2001). Muthwii found that teaching with translation was the strategy teachers used when there was an important issue to be addressed or to emphasize to those who might not understand what was being said in English. Teachers recognize local African languages or Kiswahili as being instructionally important for communication. The practice of teaching in more than one language in school is strategic and pragmatic. Teachers use whatever language is most likely to facilitate understanding.

In fact, speaking in more than one language is a communication strategy used by educated Kenyans, and in some situations it is the expected mode of communication (Abdulaziz, 1982; Kembo-Sure, 2003). For example, a teacher talking to a colleague without switching to Kiswahili or some other local language would be uncharacteristic. This multilingual competence is becoming the norm in political speeches in Kenya today. The most politically significant pronouncements will be delivered in Kiswahili, while the other parts of a speech will be delivered in English.

Muthwii’s (2002) study examined the extent to which language policy and the concomitant language practices encouraged or hampered the acquisition of expected learning competencies thereby determining potential problems associated with the language policies in Kenya and Uganda. Findings differed depending on whether a school was monolingual, multilingual, rural, or urban. Children in rural multilingual and rural multilingual schools reported being most comfortable learning in their mother tongue or Kiswahili. Although in Kenya’s urban schools the children from underprivileged areas preferred Kiswahili, those in privileged schools preferred both English and Kiswahili. Mutuku (2000) cautioned that if the sociolinguistic backgrounds differ significantly from the official language of instruction, then testing students in that language creates inequities (see also Stroud, 2002). Mutuku compared the effects of early childhood experiences on students’ KCPE and found that students who achieved high scores in English were also likely to perform significantly better in the content areas that were tested in English. The median score on the KCPE was 78.41 on English for urban schools, whereas it was only 50.14 for rural students.

Currently, no provision is made for students taking the KCPE examination who have had limited exposure to English, Kiswahili, or both. The urban students typically have eight years of instruction in addition to home experiences where they communicate in both English and Kiswahili. Their counterparts
in the rural areas have only five years of instruction in English (Mutuku, 2000). Too often, the rural school experience is characterized by poor teaching strategies and excessive use of the mother tongue by the teachers. Moreover, their instruction in English typically lacks meaningful interactive use in meaningful contexts. These disparities are not considered in traditional testing methodologies based on English reading and writing fluency.

There are schools that choose English as the language of instruction from standard 1, and this presumably gives their students a testing advantage over those students whose schools begin with mother tongue or Kiswahili (Muthwii, 2004a). Yet teaching in English can also pose problems when children learn it by rote, and there is no enabling environment to practice it. Children must hear language used correctly in authentic situations if they are going to learn to speak the language purposefully. Difficulties arise as well in the teaching of both Kiswahili and English because some teachers have not passed their own school exams in those languages (Ikumi, 1985; Nyongesa, 1990).

Onyamwaro (1990) reported that 86% of teachers in Kisii municipality thought teaching reading in Kiswahili was easier than teaching reading in English. This stance is because Kiswahili is linguistically related to many other indigenous languages spoken in Kenya. Teaching in the mother tongue is not without challenges. Munyeki (1997), in studying 32 preschool teachers, found that they were not motivated to use the students' mother tongue. Yet, using the mother tongue is of utmost importance because it facilitates children's development of concepts that enables them to acquire knowledge in a second or third language and to further expose the children to the cultures of their community (Schroeder, 2005; Sifuna, 1980; UNESCO, 2003; Willis, 1988).

Mother tongue is the language a learner needs to rely on as an emergent reader in standard 1 (Schroeder, 2001) even though literacy in English is the ultimate objective. Most children think in mother tongue and then attempt to translate/articulate their thoughts in English. Munyeki claimed that some teachers failed to realize the multiple purposes when the first language of instruction is mother tongue or Kiswahili. Primary teachers in standards 1–8 need to teach reading and writing as well as speaking and listening in this first language of instruction. One reason the use of mother tongue does not necessarily succeed in teaching the curriculum is because teachers may come from other language communities. Furthermore, when future prospects depend on English acquisition and proficiency, this reality overshadows any serious emphasis on teaching students to read in their mother tongue (Muthwii, 2002, 2004a).

At the Fourth Pan-African Reading Conference, Schroeder (2005) gave an update of her work with the Tharaka of Central Kenya. She has been investigating for six years how a language arts curriculum using the language of Tharaka affected children's cognitive and, therefore, academic development (Schroeder, 2001, 2005). Through collaborations with school district personnel, she developed a mother-tongue, early-childhood reading curriculum that covered 10 areas: letter and sight-word recognition; categorization; picture interpretation and description; story sequencing; listening to sounds (auditory discrimination, placement of sound in a word, vowel length); grammar and spelling exercises; creative writing development; vocabulary development as part of the reading lessons; exposure to a wide variety of literature; and comprehension exercises. The lessons and texts are used to develop new vocabulary and concepts through comparisons and categorizations thus enabling children to assimilate new information into their existing schemas or world views. Oral and written literatures in the mother tongue are used to develop students' vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and comprehension. Schroeder's (2001) approach to mother-tongue, primary-school programs (standards 1–3) is an exemplar of what is possible when educators and policymakers agree to intervene in sustaining mother-tongue education.

We conclude this section on language policy and practices by emphasizing that, in education, the medium of instruction is the means by which learners come to access and understand information that ultimately leads to their further acquisition of life skills (Schroeder, 2005; Stroud, 2002; UNESCO, 2003). Teachers and students are faced with a host of complexities with regard to the language of instruction. A teacher often uses English to teach the official curriculum and Kiswahili or another vernacular to further explain what was delivered in English. Yet students are expected to respond only in English because it is the official language of instruction (Muthwii, 2002, 2004b; Mutuku, 2000). Use of more than one language is viewed as unacceptable for the students because most Kenyans view English as the language of globalization. Thus, although the language policy specifies monolingual instruction in English outside of school, code-switching is the norm for Kenyans (Kembo-Sure, 2003).

Teachers with their students are basically on their own to "sort out the acquisition of the new skills of reading and writing in at least three different
languages, simultaneously" (Muthwii, 2004, p. 28). The battle among languages is so competitive that the language with least support in terms of resources inevitably gets left behind or bows out (Abdulaziz, 1982). When that happens, resolving the complexities with regard to the language of instruction does not necessarily consider the benefits of bilingual/multilingual education (see Stroud, 2002, for a comprehensive analysis of how to implement bilingual and mother-tongue education). In teachers' struggles to sort out at least three languages of instruction, they need better teacher preparation and ongoing opportunities for professional learning.

**Reading instruction**

Reading instruction occurs for both English and Kiswahili, so it is useful for readers not familiar with Kiswahili to understand some basic differences between the two languages. Kiswahili words are regularly spelled and therefore decodable, whereas a significant percentage of English words are irregularly spelled and cannot be decoded by following phonics generalizations. Another difference between English and Kiswahili are vowel sounds. Whereas Kiswahili has five vowel phonemes represented graphically as a, e, i, o, and u, their pronunciation approximates those in Spanish or Italian. Grammatically the noun is the building block of a sentence, because speakers add verbs and adjectives using the same prefix of the subject. Swahili has a few cognates that are helpful to speakers of European Romance languages, but it is knowledge of Arabic that is most helpful. Swahili ranks seventh among the most widely spoken languages in the world, with somewhere between 45 and 100 million people using it as their first or second language (for more on the differences between Swahili and English see the Kamusi Project sponsored by Yale University at <www.yale.edu/swahili>). Reading instruction depends, in part, on a teacher's knowledge and effective use of instructional methods (Owino, 1987). Across the documents we reviewed, a variety of methods of instruction were mentioned for teaching reading. Onyamwaro (1990) surveyed lower primary school teachers in the Kisii municipality to find out if they used methods from textbooks (Duffy & Sherman, 1977; Friedman & Rowls, 1980; Hafner & Jolly, 1982) to teach reading in Kiswahili. He included two approaches to the teaching of reading—the “analytical” and “synthetic.” The analytical approach emphasizes the teaching of reading through emphasis on the elements of the words and their sounds to identify words. Specifically, he asked teachers about the alphabetic,

phonic, and syllabic methods. The teachers were also surveyed on their familiarity with word-attack skills such as context and phonics clues.

The synthetic approach focuses on sentences and stories placing the emphasis on reading comprehension. Specifically teachers were surveyed on their use of whole-word, look-and-say, or the sentence-and-story method that is based on the premise that a sentence rather than a word or phrase is the more meaningful unit of language expression for learning to read words. An extension of the sentence method is the story method where a sequence of sentences that form a story is used as the basis of instruction.

Onyamwaro (1990) found that most of the 30 teachers (97%) used at least one of the methods included on his questionnaire. Although there were teachers who were not familiar with all the methods included, the 29 responses from teachers showed that almost half of the teacher knew and preferred the syllabic as opposed to the phonic, whole-word, or story method. This finding may be explained by the fact that Kiswahili words are formed from 150 possible syllables (Wanyoike, 1982). Teaching letter–sound correspondences (the phonic method) makes sense in English, but it is less effective for Kiswahili because decoding depends on knowing syllables, that is, consonants in combination with vowels such as baba (father), dada (sister), kaka (brother). Yet there were 24% of the teachers who said they preferred the phonic method. Onyamwaro's results did not reveal why some teachers preferred a method that focused on individual letter–sound relationships to teach Kiswahili.

Only one third of the 30 teachers indicated knowledge of a variety of word-attack skills on the survey questionnaire. Yet in classroom observations Onyamwaro (1990) saw more than one third of the teachers using context clues and phonics. This finding suggests that teachers may not have the declarative knowledge of specific reading methods when responding to survey questionnaires or during interviews, but they may be observed using the methods when teaching reading.

Beginning with the assumption that years of experience would result in knowledge of teaching reading in English, Owino (1987) surveyed teachers in four primary schools in Bondo Division, Siaya District. He found that years of experience did not necessarily increase a teacher’s awareness of reading instruction methods. In his study of 30 teachers (4 of whom had taught for 16 or more years), Owino found that teachers did not have knowledge of the methods of teaching reading found in textbooks.
School reading instruction is sometimes supported by the involvement of parents in the teaching of reading at home. Obondo (1984) investigated the cooperation between teachers and parents in three Nairobi schools. Through interviews with teachers, parents, and their children in standard 1, Obondo found that most teachers and parents recognized the potential benefits of cooperating with teachers in the development of beginning readers. The children told Obondo that they liked reading to their parents, but this activity was sometimes limited because taking books home from school was prohibited. With regard to parents assisting their children's reading, teachers said that they could buy recommended books; listen to their child read; encourage storytelling; and help with phonics, spelling, and drawing. Unfortunately this advice was not often or consistently shared with parents. For some parents this advice would be difficult, because of limited literacy skills and economic hardships. Obondo recommended that more communication occur between teachers and parents to further cooperation in teaching reading both at school and home.

A strong foundation in beginning reading is needed for students to be ready for instruction in intensive and extensive reading (Kembo, 1993) as they move into upper primary school. Intensive refers to reading a particular text to understand both surface and deeper meanings, whereas extensive reading refers to students reading a variety of texts for their own purposes and for whatever understanding fits those purposes. Onyamwaro (1990) and Nyongesa (1990) both report that intensive and extensive reading were implemented simply as reading and answering questions. Teachers did not call upon those students who were not proficient in oral reading and made no provision for silent reading (Onyamwaro). Owino (1987) found that the comprehension exercises teachers used did not present reading to the students as a pleasurable activity and, consequently, they were not motivated to read. Some teachers of reading in English said that they used reading comprehension questions to occupy students' time. Munyeki (1997) found that teachers did not take into account students' reading abilities and that too much information was covered within a short period of time.

Government policy emphasizes that no single method should be used in the teaching of reading (MOEST, 2001). Whatever the methods, they should be used strategically to meet the learning objectives set for reading and individual students' learning needs (Onyamwaro, 1990). Mutuku (2000) went beyond the idea of using a mix of instructional methods by advocating for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching reading and writing across school subjects (what is called content area reading elsewhere).

Reading materials

With the introduction of Free Primary Education for all in 2003, the government faced the challenge of ensuring that all schools had appropriate resources including basic materials for teaching and learning (Otieno, 2003). Research prior to the introduction of free primary education showed that there were inadequate instructional materials in schools (Akhusama, 1984; Kamau, 2000; Kararu, 1992; Munyeki, 1997; Nyongesa, 1990; Obondo, 1984; Odero, 1995; Onyamwaro, 1990; Oriedo, 1988). Since the first book policy (i.e., The National Policy on Textbook Publication, Procurement and Supply for Primary Schools on September 1, 1998) the government has promised that schools would have books of quality and relevance for the primary school curriculum. Yet the government did not provide sufficient funds for this initiative, although it did get the assistance of donors to provide textbooks to arid and semi-arid land areas and Pockets of Poverty areas (Nzomo et al., 2001). The lack of resources is a perennial problem, as explained in Buchmann's (1999) historical examination of state and schooling in Kenya. Three decades after independence, the educational system was failing due to the economic decline that began in the 1980s, leaving the Kenyan government with a massive debt of US$6.8 billion in 1990.

Schools that are in more economically stable areas are more likely to have the government-mandated learning and teaching resources. The construction of classrooms and provision of school furniture is also the responsibility of parents and communities, and therefore the levels of provision in schools may be a reflection of the socioeconomic status of the school catchment areas. For that reason, the government cannot enforce benchmark standards when it does not contribute to basic school facilities, and parents are limited in what they can afford to contribute to their children's school. Thus, there is a deficiency in the provision of basic teaching and learning materials and notable variations in provisions such as chalk, pencils, paper, textbooks, and furniture across provinces. Without basic learning materials such as textbooks, exercise books, notebooks, and pens or pencils, students are disadvantaged. According to a UNESCO study (Nzomo et al., 2001), 76% of standard 6 pupils lack their own textbook for learning across subjects in...
English, approximately 10% of children did not have a pencil, 22% did not have a ruler, 32% did not have an eraser, and 11% did not have a pen. One third of all standard 6 students had a classroom library, but as many as 60% had no school library. In the schools with a library, only 29% of standard 6 students were allowed to borrow books to take home. Obondo (1984) also found that although teachers wanted standard 1 students to practice their reading at home, they were not allowed to take home any books.

Odero (1995) investigated teachers’ perceptions of using children’s literature to teach English in lower level primary schools in rural Kenya. She found that teachers endorsed a literature-based approach regardless of whether the schools had a library or not. It was evident, however, that children’s literature was not widely used. Even teachers with libraries did not use literature on a regular basis. It appears that availability of instructional materials and resources does not, in itself, guarantee utilization. Owino (1987) found no attempt being made to improvise and make up for the scarcity of resources. This finding seems to concur with Kamau (2000) and Karanu (1992), who indicated that teachers lacked initiative or were not skilled in finding and using a variety of resources. Several researchers (e.g., Kamau; Karanu; Willis, 1988) suggested teachers must supplement the Ministry of Education and Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) mandated curriculum and materials with local text materials. Mwuneki (1997) suggested that “teachers should involve the pupils and their parents in the preparation of [mother tongue] instructional materials” (p. 66).

The general trend in Kenya is to publish school textbooks, which is estimated to be about 90% of all book businesses (Chakava, 1992, p. 128). A summary of new publications in English, Kiswahili, and vernacular from 1985 through 1989 showed that of 1,045 new titles that had been published, 74% were in English, while 21% were in Kiswahili. New titles in other Kenyan languages accounted for 3%, with the remaining 2% in foreign languages (Chakava, 1992). Musau (2003) reported that “in a country with over 40 languages, instructional materials have so far been developed only for 22 languages” (p. 158). Yet Musau further judged that even when learning materials were available in African languages, they were “inadequate for sustaining literacy development in these languages” (p. 158).

The Council for the Promotion of Children’s Science Publications initiated a project with the objective of promoting science publications for children (Mwanycky & Bugembe, 1990). The review focused on identifying reading materials on science for primary-school children (ages 2–14). The researchers analyzed 1,138 texts to examine the science subjects included, grade levels covered, costs, authors’ names, location of publishers, and language used. They collected texts from supermarkets, street vendors, book fairs, book exhibitions, publishers, public libraries, schools, and bookshops. Information on texts was also collected through survey questionnaires and interviews during personal visits. The results showed that there was a lack of varied materials for all primary school grade levels. Less than 2% of books they surveyed were written in Kiswahili, with the remainder in English. Many students, especially those in areas where the population speaks languages other than Kiswahili or English, are disadvantaged in the learning of science concepts by the instructional materials (Thomson, 2002, 2003; Thomson & Jepkorir, 2002). The instructional materials are not written in the languages most familiar to the children and do not draw upon the children’s daily life experiences.

Too many reading materials and resources currently fail to capture the important cultural aspects of many communities in Kenya and do not borrow from indigenous African education (Eisemon et al., 1986; Lauglo & Narman, 1987; Shiundu & Omulando, 1992; Sifuna, 1990). For instance, in alphabet books for children, the word *apple* is typically used to teach letter *a*. But apples are not common in Kenya, and they are rarely seen in rural areas (Makotsi & Nyariki, 1997). Eisemon and colleagues conducted a comparative analysis between Kenyan folk tales and stories in school texts with regard to the narrative structures, use of characters, and forms of dramatization. They found little in the school texts that preserves the characteristics of African storytelling beyond the use of African names, places, and subject matter.

The use of locally available materials was emphasized in several studies (Kamau, 2000; Karanu, 1992; Makotsi & Nyariki, 1997; Mutuku, 2000; Odero, 1995; Onyamwaro, 1990). For example, materials (food packages/wrappers, billboard advertisements) found in the local environments can be valid sources of instructional materials and resources. There is no limit to the number of instructional materials teachers can readily make use of if they are willing to go beyond the textbooks and the chalkboard provided by the government as their only resources (Onyamwaro; Owino, 1987). Makotsi and Nyariki emphasized the importance of encouraging local writers and publishers to develop...
instructional materials based on local languages and cultural practices.

Other factors that adversely affect the availability of instructional materials and resources are the low socioeconomic status of some children's parents. Even if there were high-quality reading materials in the market, they could not afford to purchase them. One study found that on average there are 38 books in the homes of standard 6 pupils (Nzomo et al., 2001). In the North Eastern Province there are on average only 25 books per home, whereas in the Nairobi urban homes the average climbs to 59.4 books. In the same study, standard 6 students were asked if they had the following possessions at home: daily newspaper, magazine subscriptions, radio, television set, videocassette recorder, cassette player, telephone, refrigerator, car, motorcycle, electricity, piped water, and a table to write on. The average for the country was 5.4 possessions. Nairobi students were more materially advantaged, with an average of 8.5 possessions in the home, while students in the North Eastern Province had on average of 3.5 possessions.

**Reading culture**

Given the relationship found between voluntary reading and academic achievement (Agak, 1995; Mutuku, 2000), there is considerable interest in promoting a culture of reading in Kenya (Chakava, 1984; Makotsi, 2001). Agak analyzed results from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s (IEA) Reading Literacy Test and the KCPE to examine the relation of reading habits to academic achievement among 14-year-old students in Kenya. Agak found that students who engaged in voluntary reading were more likely to do better on academic reading and other school subjects. Yet there is concern that African students do not engage in enough voluntary reading. Ingule (1983) found that African children valued reading first and foremost for its usefulness. Usefulness, in this study, referred to passing examinations and securing certain kinds of employment. That purpose may not necessarily encourage the voluntary reading Agak found contributed to academic achievement. The question then becomes “What can be done to encourage voluntary reading?”

Willis (1988) suggested teachers read aloud to their students, and there is evidence that this approach stimulates students to become interested in books (MOEST, 2001). Willis further recommended that teachers should talk with students about the text to prepare them for independent reading. This approach requires teachers who are engaged readers themselves and who can authentically share their interest in and curiosity for reading (Kembo, 1993). Yet researchers have reported that teachers of reading in Kiswahili and English considered the teaching of reading difficult (Akhusama, 1984; Onyamwaro, 1990; Owino, 1987). Teacher attitudes influence both overt behaviors and perceptions (Kiboss et al., 2002). Student respect for their teachers continues to be a deeply held cultural value that originates out of Africans’ respect for tradition and authority (Fuller & Clarke, 1994). It is incumbent, therefore, for teachers to develop and demonstrate reading effectiveness and to share their passion for reading with their students. MOEST (2001) provides a variety of ways for encouraging students to read, including setting aside time each week to be used for reading in class; specifying the amount of reading to be done out of class and keeping a record to track the reading that the pupil has done; asking students to give oral reports of what they are reading; using resource persons to read to the pupils, modeling how they want the pupils to read; and rewarding effort made to read. Kembo’s (1993) conclusions concur with MOEST and suggest that students’ interest and curiosity can be ignited by reading interesting parts of library books to pupils and by encouraging short questions and discussions about the pieces or pinning text excerpts on display boards. Kembo claimed that she used these methods with technical, secondary school classes in Nairobi with great success and that students’ curiosity and need to read the texts increased.

There is some evidence from the nonempirical literature that teachers are realizing the importance of voluntary reading. In a newspaper article titled “Is Anyone Reading?” Oyaro (2005) interviewed two primary school teachers from Nairobi on the topic of reading. Florence Wangari Charagua, a teacher at Moi Airbase Primary School, said teachers in her school are encouraging children to read in class during the English lesson. The students are even encouraged to tell stories they have read to their classmates. This approach combines oral and print literacy. Kennedy Njoguwa, a teacher at City Primary School, concurred, saying that teachers in his school are also trying to make reading enjoyable by getting their pupils to read in a friendly environment and that they make their library lesson interesting by allowing the children to read outside, under the trees. He asserted that reading is for enjoyment and relaxation, so the students look forward to the library lesson, as they will be doing something different from being in the classroom.
Ellen Kitonga (1984) presented a paper on children’s literature in Kenya at the International Federation of Library Associations General Conference that indicated reading for pleasure or even for general knowledge was a low priority for many families and that it was rare for children to be able to indulge in reading outside of school. Students primarily read for utilitarian purposes or achievement (Ng’ang’a, 1993). Kembo (1993) noted that the situation is changing, and an increasing number of people, especially the young, are reading for pleasure. Oyaro (2005) reported that books are becoming a bigger part of children’s lives, at least in Nairobi. With the reduction of curricular subjects using formal examinations from seven to five in the primary school curriculum in 2003, students have more time to read in and out of school. Oyaro interviewed eight schoolchildren attending The National Book Week, held from September 19–24, 2005, at the Sarit Center in Westlands Nairobi, to discover what they thought of reading. The children’s responses revealed that encouragement from parents and teachers influenced their interest in reading. The children liked to read a variety of genres within the broad categories of fiction and nonfiction. They said reading on their own improved their spelling, grammar, dictionary skills, and writing abilities. Some of the children preferred reading to playing with friends or doing their homework. They also liked exchanging or sharing books with friends.

Outside of formal education there are efforts aimed at promoting reading. Nongovernmental organizations are actively involved in promoting reading and access to reading materials. For instance, in 1996, the first book week festival was held in Kenya. One of the outcomes was the establishment in 1997 of the National Book Development Council of Kenya (NBDC-K; Makotsi, 2001). The Kenya Children’s Book Project, which is under NBDC-K, received funding to support book donations to rural schools and libraries. Its book donation project purchases and distributes books from indigenous Kenyan publishers such as East Africa Publishing Company. For a newspaper article, Oyaro (2005) interviewed Atieno Okundo, the director of the NBDC-K. Okundo claimed that a culture of reading exists and that there were concerted efforts around the country to encourage children to read. The council organizes children’s reading tents throughout the year where children are introduced to books and their teachers are shown how to care for new books donated to their schools. Okundo reported that in the year 2004, through the support of the Rockefeller Foundation and SIDA, her organization established 232 libraries with donated books. The council’s objective is to promote reading in the youngest of children with the aim of developing lifelong readers.

Makenzi et al. (2003) described the second phase of an innovative project to promote reading interest and ability, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. The Reading Tent Project (RTP) was instituted in November 1999 as an outreach program of the Research and Extension Division at Egerton University in Njoro, Kenya. One of the assumptions RTP held was that if a society of readers is to be nurtured in Kenya, then children had to be placed at the forefront so that good reading habits and skills are inculcated while they are still in their formative years. The Reading Tent Project has also made use of technology in promoting a culture of reading. The project included computers to listen to talking books, read from the Internet, and to write electronic mail messages. Makenzi and her colleagues followed a group of 1,567 students in standards 4 and 5 from 10 rural primary schools within Njoro Division for three consecutive years. The RTP events they attended involved teaching elementary reading skills through educational games, drawing, and painting. The Reading Tent “creatively repackaged and attractively presented [traditional print] in partnership with new and emerging information and communication technologies...to meet the demands of modern life” (Makenzi et al., p. 212).

RTP raised a new level of awareness and hope among pupils and teachers. The students showed evidence of reading with greater zeal and developed a love of exchanging storybooks and discussing stories read. Emanating from this development, most of the schools proceeded to establish their own libraries using portable carton boxes placed in classrooms without shelves.

Assessment

Assessment is an inevitable and necessary area of concern in the teaching of reading. Literacy and other basic skills, especially in developing countries, have been recognized as critical to judging the quality of educational programs (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004). Performance on examinations is a deciding factor for an individual’s future in education and eventual participation in nation building (Agak, 1995). Most students in primary school want to score high enough on the KCPE to gain access to a government secondary school (Buchmann, 1999). The importance of the KCPE is why many teachers hold the view that this end-of-primary-school
examination is the sole determinant of what should be taught (Kiboss et al., 2002).

The KCPE examination of English and Kiswahili consists of a cloze passage to test grammar, sentence structure, and reading comprehension through two comprehension passages, one fiction and the other nonfiction. However, performance on the KCPE has been declining for approximately a decade. The national mean scores in all subjects on KCPE have fallen below 50% as reported by a private research and development firm (OWN & Associates, 2004). In 1999, the mean score in English was 53.48, whereas it was 42.20 in 2002 (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004). The decline in KCPE scores was a part of a downward trend in education after the success of the first three decades following independence in 1963 (Bedi et al., 2002). The World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s structural adjustment programs instituted in the 1980s drastically reduced the buying power of the state and households (Assié-Lumumba, 2005), which negatively affected the production and availability of literacy learning materials for the 80% of children attending rural schools. These factors may account for the decline.

The Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) conducted a large-scale assessment project that is informative about reading literacy (Nzomo et al., 2001). The project investigated five general areas, and two of these areas were related to reading: (a) What is the level of reading achievement for standard 6 pupils? and (b) Which educational inputs to primary schools have most impact upon reading achievement of standard 6 pupils? (Nzomo et al.). A reading test was designed to conform to the reading syllabi for standard 6 students. Standard 6 was chosen because in most of the 14 SACMEQ member countries it is the penultimate class for primary examination (although in Kenya it is standard 8). Reading literacy was operationally defined as “[t]he ability to understand and use written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual” (p. 9). Writing ability was deliberately excluded from the definition, and only minimum writing ability was required of pupils throughout the test. A multiple-choice test covering three domains of reading (narrative, expository, and documents) was accepted after trial testing. A national sample of 185 schools was drawn. Within each school, a random sample of 20 pupils from standard 6 was drawn to evaluate the reading achievement for all students.

On the basis of the test results and their associated standard errors, Nzomo et al. (2001) concluded with 95% confidence that “about 35 percent of students did not reach the designated minimum mastery level of reading and about 77 percent did not reach the desirable level of reading” (p. 75). Across Kenya there were performance clusters. At the high end came Nairobi, next there were four provinces with similar percentages (Coast, Central, Eastern, and Rift Valley), and then another two provinces were at the bottom (Western and North Eastern). Overall, the authors of the report concluded “that the reading-literacy levels of standard-six pupils in Kenya in 1998 were poor when judged against the mastery standards set down by the Ministry’s own experts. Within this overall performance, moderate levels of success were evident in Nairobi whereas extremely poor levels of success were found in Nyanza” (p. 67). Analyses for subgroups of test takers showed that gender was not a major factor, with girls performing slightly better than boys at the mastery level. The factors that did affect performance were socioeconomic level and geographic location.

The School Based Teacher Development unit under MOEST (2001) has considered why students have problems reading English. Other than physiological factors (vision and hearing problems), some students lack reading experience and may not be effectively using the three main cueing systems: anticipating and predicting the meanings of words (semantic knowledge), using word order to make sense of reading (syntactic knowledge), and understanding the letter–sound relationships to pronounce words (phonological knowledge). MOEST emphasized that students having difficulties in any of these areas will be handicapped in all other subjects and will continue to do poorly until they can strategically make use of the three cueing systems.

Mutuku (2000) studied the effects of early childhood experiences on students’ KCPE scores and found that English and mathematics scores were positively correlated. Students who achieved high scores in English were also likely to perform better in the content areas, which are written in English. KCPE is a high-stakes competitive examination, and the results are used for entrance to secondary school. A critical examination of the validity of these high-stakes examinations might indicate that they are unfair assessments, because they rest on the fundamental assumption that those tested have had similar opportunities to learn the skills, facts, principles, and procedural methods that are tested. Furthermore, Mutuku argued that a single measure taken at a single point in time can never capture the complexity of what we must know about the whole
child and how the educational program affects each student’s overall development.

Assessment should identify what a child can or cannot do in order to inform instruction in addition to measuring reading achievement, which is the current focus of testing. Mutuku (2000) recommended structured observational protocols, projects, and other performance-oriented methods to gauge what the learner can actually do in authentic situations. According to Mutuku, more naturalistic sources of information must be developed about how peoples around the world acquire skills that are important in their lives. This conclusion coincides with Owino’s (1987) earlier study, which did not find a holistic continuous approach to reading assessment in a survey of the teaching of reading in English in four primary schools in Bondo division, Siaya District.

Teachers typically did not assess students’ ability to comprehend what was being taught as the lessons progressed. No records were kept of pupils’ progress or instructional needs. In Onyamwaro’s (1990) study on factors that affect the teaching of reading in Kiswahili in lower primary classes in Kisii Municipality, it was recommended that teachers use more informal assessment procedures and methods, and individual assessment of pupils’ progress should be preferred to group assessment. Individualized assessment would enable the teacher to identify and to plan for the different learning styles and reading abilities of his or her pupils.

Assessment can inform the teaching of language generally and reading specifically. The task of the primary school educator is thus not a simple matter of teaching children to read (if such a task can be considered in any way “simple”). Teachers need to find out what each child has achieved and where instruction is needed (Munyeki, 1997). Furthermore, attention to assessment seems critical because of evidence that there are children in Kenya struggling to read and who would benefit from remediation or other methods of instruction (Gakunga, 1982; UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004; Wanyoike, 1978). Children who fail or fall behind in the acquisition of reading are limited because they face the difficult task of operating, with limited means, in a linguistic and cognitive world of increasingly abstract and intentional sophistication (Willis, 1988).

It is thus incumbent upon teachers to identify where students are struggling so that instruction focuses on those strategies that can lead to reading with confidence (MOEST, 2001). The module for teachers on teaching English in the primary classroom recommends that teachers consider these assessment questions: “Can they read aloud well?; How is their silent reading?; How are their word attack skills?; How fast can they read?; Do they have any bad reading habits?; and Can they skim and scan?” (MOEST, p. 280). A meeting on “New Definitions of Literacy: Implications for Assessment and Instruction” claimed that such classroom-based assessment of reading is lacking in Kenya (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004). Participants in that meeting, held in September 2004, suggested that assessments should target learners’ developmental strengths and needs. Models of strategic thinking involved in word identification and text comprehension should be taught for reading both English and Kiswahili.

Attendee at the “New Definitions” meeting (from Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, Kenya Institute of Education, university lecturers from Kenya and the United States, Kenya National Examination Council, and International Reading Association members from the United States and Kenya) agreed that reading assessment in Kenya does not inform teachers of individual learners’ needs. The participants questioned the system of assessment, which to them has undermined the spirit of reading, led to high levels of dropouts at both primary and secondary school levels, and contributed to the lack of creativity in learners (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004). During the meeting, it was postulated that the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), which is the major examining body for primary and secondary education, has yet to create assessments that inform reading instruction at the classroom level. Given the present primary school pupil population of about 7 million in more than 18,000 schools, creating such assessment would require resources that KNEC does not have at present (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA). KNEC has tried conducting school-based assessments in the past but failed due to financial and material resources constraints as well as factors related to nepotism, tribalism, and corruption.

Assessment techniques need to be culturally and linguistically sensitive in determining the academic achievement and potential of diverse students (Carter et al., 2005) if they are to contribute to the aims of a democratic society within a system of public education (Musau, 2003; Stroud, 2002). To create culturally relevant assessments those involved need to know enough to distinguish between behaviors, beliefs, perceptions, institutions, and technologies that are culturally particular versus those that are culturally variable (Carter et al.). The degree to which assessments reflect the goals set for individuals in a specific cultural context affects the ecological validity of the assessment (Mishra, 1997). Eviatar (2000) argued that culture should be considered a
variable, similar to age or sex, that can be crucial in defining the manner in which higher cognitive processes, such as language, are related to brain organization.

Carter et al.’s (2005) study reviewed literature on cross-cultural assessments to identify major issues in the development and adaptation of speech and language assessments for children. They were (a) familiarity with the testing situation, (b) the effect of formal education, (c) language issues, and (d) picture recognition. The review delineated a list of 10 guidelines regarding the importance of collaboration with mother-tongue speakers. A researcher or practitioner must also be careful not to miss the different styles of nonverbal communication, such as gestures and eye movements, used by children to augment their oral communication. Formal assessments should be complemented by other measures of the social efficacy of the child’s communication abilities at home and in the community before concluding the child has reading problems based on language or speech difficulties. Greater awareness of cultural variation and bias are needed to develop and administer culturally appropriate assessment tools to make decisions about instructional intervention approaches (Carter et al.).

The literature on assessment consistently advocates that teachers be given special preparation with regard to formative and summative assessment (Agak, 1995; Mutea, 2000; Nzomo et al., 2001). A variety of assessments need to be used in conjunction with KCPE for comprehensive and valid appraisals of children’s language abilities (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004). Other suggestions include improving the knowledge base of school inspectors and increasing the frequency of their school visits (Nzomo et al.). School inspectors sent from the Ministry of Education use such occasions to give professional guidance to teachers on how best to use assessment to identify students’ strengths and needs, much like literacy coaches are doing in the United States. Local schools need to take more responsibility as well, because the government does not have the capacity to test all skills in reading achievement.

We reiterate here that due to cultural variation in Kenya and the potential for cultural bias, new assessment tools need to be developed, or existing tools require adaptation in order to improve diagnostic accuracy and treatment outcomes of students with reading difficulties in Kenya. It is critical to operationalize equitable and fair assessments within the context of cultural diversity (Gay, 1997; Musau, 2003; Thompson, 1981), and perhaps the Ministry of Education should consider whether or not traditional and alternative approaches to testing could co-exist to serve the diverse needs in their classrooms more effectively. In any event, we agree with those who call for assessment in Kenya to include informal assessments of decoding, orthography, fluency, and text comprehension in order to differentiate instruction (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004).

**Teacher development and placement**

In Kenya, preservice and inservice reading education is not given sufficient emphasis (Nzomo et al., 2001). The primary-teacher education curriculum is general and broad without concentrations or specializations. Any graduate from a teacher training college theoretically is prepared to teach all subjects at any grade level in the primary school. Mutuku (2000) proposed that preservice primary teachers need more preparation in the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Further, Mutea (2000) concluded that secondary teachers need more preparation to integrate the teaching of English as a language with reading literature in English. In addition, there is a need for an advanced educational program or degree for the preparation of reading specialists.

Educators in Africa have argued that the key to educational quality is the quality of the teaching force; no educational system can be stronger than its teachers (Mutuku, 2000). A teacher’s academic and professional qualifications are important predictors of the quality of teaching because the “essence of effective teaching lies in the ability of the teacher to set up desired outcomes” (Muthwii, 2002, p. 44). The government of Kenya, therefore, takes seriously the preparation of its teachers and provides three teacher training options: (a) two-year residential course; (b) three-year inservice programs, with the option of residential or distance education; and, more recently, (c) a university bachelor’s degree in education. To be certified as a primary school teacher, one has to complete one of these three programs (Nzomo et al., 2001).

Yet, the studies we reviewed document that many of those who are preparing to be teachers had performed poorly in English on the KCSE examination (Onyamwaro, 1990). This limitation then denies them opportunities to pursue careers other than teaching. Too often primary school teaching is someone’s final option for a professional career. That situation explains in part why primary teachers need better teacher education in reading to develop their own language skills so they are better prepared to teach and conduct needs-based instruction (UNESCO Nairobi/IRA, 2004).
There is no clear policy for ongoing teacher development in teaching reading through inservice or short courses. Nzomo and colleagues (2001) suggested that the Ministry of Education should revisit the current policy of inservice training programs and revise it so that all teachers in all provinces receive regular updating of their professional skills through such programs. According to Nzomo and colleagues, few teachers attend inservice courses once they graduate from teacher training colleges. In their study, teachers were asked to specify the number of inservice courses they had attended during their teaching careers. The national average was 3.4, but in the North Eastern Province the mean was 0.9. It should be noted that when answering the question it is possible that some teachers might have indicated that they had attended an inservice course while, in actual fact, it was the inservice course for the initial teacher training that they had attended.

Onyamwaro’s (1990) study found that 21 of 30 teachers had never attended a course since graduating. In all the research studies we reviewed it was recommended that teachers needed inservice courses on effective reading and language instruction. Onyamwaro suggested that inservice courses were needed to keep teachers abreast of new developments in teaching the four language skills. Other researchers promoted the idea of teachers engaging in creative activities such as writing books and developing reading programs (Kamau, 2000; Munyeki, 1997; Nyongesa, 1990). The formation of professional language organizations was also suggested (Nyongesa).

Another concern is the placement of effective teachers and reading programs in schools. A major challenge facing the government is staffing schools throughout Kenya to rectify imbalances, with some areas being overstaffed while others are understaffed. This imbalance is a thorny issue because teachers from certain ethnic groups are not accepted in some areas, and redeploying them to such areas might actually present a security risk (Nzomo et al., 2001). Teacher redeployment is therefore not always a feasible approach for correcting these staffing inequities. This problem has led the government to review its approach to teacher preparation so that it is demand driven, as opposed to the previous practice of recruiting teacher trainees to fill the 21 public teacher training colleges with guaranteed employment. Commencing in 1999, the government has been recruiting preservice teachers from those ethnic regions where there is need for teachers, in order to post them to their home areas (Nzomo et al.).

Concluding proposals

This integrative review has allowed us to discover what has been written about teaching reading in Kenyan primary schools. Our pragmatic approach led us to consider as many relevant documents as we could locate both in Kenya and from searching electronic databases in the United States. Based on what we have learned, we offer the following proposals for those concerned about and working on reading education in Kenya. It is also possible that these proposals will be useful to others working in multiethnic, multilingual settings.

We propose a multitheoretic approach to teaching reading

In our review of empirical studies and other documents we find that the teaching of reading currently emphasizes the acquisition of functional literacy. From the perspective of UNESCO “people are literate if they can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in their group and also for enabling them to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for their own and the community’s development” (Muthwii, 2004b, p. 40). We did not find any indication that reading is being taught from other perspectives such as construction of meaning, a sociocultural approach (Muthwii), or a critical literacy approach appropriate to postcolonial Africa (Prinsloo & Janks, 2002). This finding leads us to propose that policymakers, researchers, and educators explore ways of teaching reading that draw from several theoretical views of reading. This change is needed if reading education is going to teach children to be functional in local, national, and international settings by constructing meaning within differing sociocultural contexts while also engaging in critical analysis.

We propose more attention to the child in reading education

In 2003, the Kenyan government abolished school fees for primary education, and 1.3 million poor children entered school for the first time (UNESCO, 2006). The typical primary school teacher has 40 to 50 students in his or her classroom (Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2005). How can the needs of children as individuals be given more attention? The research we found focused on methods, materials, and teachers. The importance of children’s
literacy learning was assumed, but we believe that an emphasis on the best reading method or materials can inadvertently overlook the children themselves. Each child is an individual with abilities and needs that differ from others in the same classroom. The quality of teacher–student interaction is of central importance, according to research done in the West. For example, it is viewed as the most important factor, accounting for large differences in outcome measures when the same curriculum materials and purportedly the same teaching methods are used (Akers & Hardman, 2001).

Heneveld and Craig (1996) suggested that research on teacher–student interactions will be crucial in developing countries and pointed to the gap in research generally, and in sub-Saharan Africa specifically. A recent study of Kenyan primary school teachers’ discourse found that teacher-led recitation dominated with little attention given to soliciting students’ thinking (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005). It is common knowledge that rote memorization and repetition prevail in large classes.

Much of curriculum development in reading should continue to focus on the introduction of new methodologies that move away from rote learning and teacher-centered procedures and toward activity and discovery, child-centered procedures. Many years ago, Thompson (1981) recommended this move for other subject areas in Kenya. Large class sizes coupled with insufficient basic resources such as textbooks, paper, and pencils make it difficult for teachers to move away from lecturing as the primary mode of instruction.

**We propose more emphasis on multilingualism in reading education**

Because language embodies the cultural values of a people, when subject matter is presented in the English language to students in Kenya it perpetuates an outsider, colonial cultural heritage based on the values of Western English speakers’ identity, knowledge, skills, history, traditions, behavior, and belief systems (Maina, 2003). In other words, Kenyans have been denied their own culture when schools overemphasize the use of English. Denying or deemphasizing mother tongues ignores the cultural roots of students (Makotsi & Nyariki, 1997), resulting in what Schroeder (2001) calls “cognitive hijacking.” Cognitive hijacking contributes to cultural hijacking. We believe that children’s home languages (i.e., their mother tongues) are rich cultural reservoirs, and the very essence of education in Kenya should be cultural preservation.

On the basis of our review, we conclude that the current language policy in Kenya is fraught with problems, which are unlikely to be solved without research that investigates how to teach children who live in a multilingual society to acquire and to maintain multiple languages both in and out of school. English will continue to be used in schools because of the reality that it provides access to certain kinds of employment and further educational opportunity (Muthwii, 2003, 2004a). Policies that recognize and specify the role of all languages used in the country and their potential in the realization of the aspirations of their users are recommended. These aspirations might include the ability to read and write in their languages; accessing information and knowledge in them; and participating in the political, economic, and judicial systems of Kenya in these languages (Agak, 1995; Odini, 2000). To ensure full participation of the masses in democratic practices, efforts to increase literacy in multiple languages must be tangible, rigorous, and deliberate. These efforts will, undoubtedly, also require “deep-seated commitment among the elite and the policymakers in particular” (Musau, 2003, p. 162) while presenting huge financial challenges.

The transfer of literacy skills across languages is an underutilized learner competence (Kembo-Sure, 2003). In exploring this issue, the goal should be to make African indigenous languages translatable with other languages suitable as vehicles of modern discourse (Musau, 2003). Technology could play a role in realizing this goal because there is computer software that provides translations between languages. These programs may not be perfected enough now but are likely to improve with time, and African languages should be included. Other avenues that offer realistic and positive possibilities to promote these efforts, such as the Internet, must be explored too. Schools in Kenya should not only recognize the cultural and language differences of the children, but also make these differences the basis of educating the different population by incorporating different cultural contents, achievements, and perspectives with the school curriculum and teaching strategies (Ogbru, 1990). Consistent with what Bunyi (1999) proposed, it is our position that, if Kenyans are to function both at the local and at the international level, fluency should be retained in both speaking and reading in the home language and culture as well as an acquired fluency in English. Further research might explore ways in which formal education insti-
We propose reading materials that are culturally relevant and accessible.

Culture is expressed through language and action. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) explained, "Language as communication and as culture are products of each other. ... Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world. ... Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world." (pp. 15–16)

Language is indeed the soil, the seedbed, of meaning (Birkerts, 1994). The literature by Kenyan authors is an important cultural resource for education. Yet textbooks have been the most important teaching resource available (Barasa, 1984; Chakava, 1992; Makotsi, 2001; Musau, 2003). Students’ ability to learn from reading books cannot be assumed. Purchasing Kenyan or any other literature is costly, thus out of reach for many Kenyan children and households. We propose a broader concept of school reading materials be adopted that would include, for example, environmental print and teacher- and student-generated print, to provide reading materials for students across socioeconomic strata.

Studies we reviewed indicated that there are too few locally produced and culturally appropriate books (Makotsi, 2001). So, alongside the teaching of reading skills, the quality of the reading materials should be assessed and improved. Readability indices of books are important to identify potential reading problems which students are likely to face and to better match the text and the reader. We concur with Barasa (1984) that teachers need to have a clear conception of text–reader compatibility if learning is to be guaranteed. Meaningful material is learned more rapidly and remembered longer whereas incomprehensible material is of little educational value (Barasa). Given that availability of books or texts of some kind are essential if children are to improve their reading comprehension, it is incumbent on the educational authorities to ensure that children have access to a variety of texts either through school or mobile libraries. This will help especially in Western and North Eastern Provinces (Nzomo et al., 2001). Recommendations and suggestions are made for further research toward developing a clearer understanding of the interaction between young readers in Kenya and their reading materials (Barasa, 1984). Publishing houses have a long history in Kenya. They mushroomed alongside missionary work in the 1890s (Chakava, 1984). Today, efforts by publishers, such as Chakava, are producing texts in indigenous languages. Through book development associations such as East Africa Book Development Association (EABDA), cross-border trade in books can be strengthened, and a culture of reading may become more firmly entrenched among Kenyans. More research might inquire into efforts to make those texts accessible to a wider population of Kenyans, especially in the rural areas. For instance, the Reading Tent Project mounts reading activities in different parts of Nakuru.

Africans are an oral and a practical people; thus, education that focuses mainly on written texts...
(particularly in a foreign language) tends to disadvantage children, especially those in rural areas. It is critical, therefore, that as Kenya plans to transform its education system it takes into account and returns to some ideas from African Indigenous Education (Lauglo & Narman, 1987; Shiundu & Omulando, 1992; Sifuna, 1990, 2001). Global education should not be a replacement of indigenous values at whatever cost. We would like to see educational reform that will not perpetuate cognitive and cultural hijacking. Kenyan education needs to provide students with a firm foundation and deep roots in their own environment and mix of cultures, while still providing a global education (Stroud, 2002).

**We propose capacity building in reading education**

The documents we reviewed support the need to improve the quality and quantity of teachers who are both interested in teaching reading and qualified to teach in that area. Further, schools should have at least one reading specialist who can work with children and their classroom teachers. Veteran and new teachers would benefit from inservice courses in reading instruction and assessment. Such efforts would bring teachers together to learn from one another and from those who have studied reading education in other countries, strategies that will prepare all Kenyans to read at a level that will enable them to accomplish their day-to-day tasks in life. Teacher preparation and professional development must also address and situate reading within the larger sociocultural and historical realities of education in Kenya.

In our review, many teachers mainly used teacher-directed methods for instruction. Teachers’ conservatism in teaching styles may result from the images of teaching that are culturally transmitted and deeply internalized (Sifuna, 1990). Teachers may therefore find it difficult to imagine that knowledge, information, and skills could possibly be transmitted in any way other than through teacher-led recitation (Akers & Hardman, 2001). Sifuna argued that these socializing factors have a greater influence in the Kenyan primary school contexts, where over 30% of teachers are untrained. Given these powerful cultural influences, it is therefore not surprising that Kenyan primary teachers, particularly those with less preparation, would draw upon such implicit knowledge, especially when faced with the problem of managing large numbers of pupils in the classroom (Akers & Hardman). This area needs to be explored through further research.

Collaborative efforts between universities and other agencies, such as United Bible Societies (www.forministry.com/KECORPORATE/Translation.dsp), interested in the teaching and promotion of mother tongues should be encouraged. Perhaps a secretariat in the Ministry of Education that deals with reading could be established. Such a body could promote research and professional development on reading instruction suited to Kenyan contexts.

**We propose more reviews be undertaken on reading in African countries**

A valued resource for reading researchers in the United States and elsewhere are the three volumes of the *Handbook of Reading Research* (Barr, Kamil, Mosenthal, & Pearson, 1991; Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2000; Pearson, Barr, Kamil, & Mosenthal, 1984). All of the research reviewed within those volumes was undertaken outside of Africa. We find that far less research on reading education has been done in Africa. Nevertheless, research on reading, and more broadly literacy, has been undertaken and will be easier to find in the coming years through the Internet and because of the biannual Pan-African Reading Conference. We encourage others to follow our example and to locate all pertinent literature and to conduct a review of the state of reading education in each of the African countries so that the first *Handbook of Reading in Africa* can be published for the benefit of all of us who are working to promote and improve reading on the African continent.

There are enough similarities across nations with regard to linguistic diversity, economic hardships, and schooling and assessment practices that research results in one nation on reading may be important to those in other nations on the continent.

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