



Original Article

Reading Abilities of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya

Vicky Cherobon^{1*} & Dr. Rose Atoni, PhD¹

¹ The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, P.O. Box 908 – 30100, Eldoret Kenya.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6063-131X> ; Email: cherobonvicky@gmail.com

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.5.2.655>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

10 May 2022 Reading is fundamental in the acquisition of language. It builds up an important foundation for the acquisition of other language skills and plays a vital role in the learning of other subjects. There is therefore a need for learners to acquire reading proficiency. The study sought to find out the reading abilities of learners in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. The study's research question was what are the reading abilities of learners in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya? The study sought to test the following hypotheses; There is no significant relationship between the gender of the learner and the reading ability of the learner in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya, and there is no significant relationship between the category of the school (rural or urban) and the reading abilities of learners in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. The study adopted a causal-comparative research design with data being collected from a sample size of 200 class six and seven learners in public primary schools in Nandi County. Data was collected using a pupils' reading test and an observation schedule. Stratified and simple random sampling was utilised as the sampling technique, and a comparison was drawn between the reading abilities of learners in rural public primary schools and those of urban public primary schools. A further comparison was drawn between the reading abilities of boys and those of girls. The study found that learners from urban primary schools performed better than those from rural public primary schools in Nandi County. The study further found out that boys performed slightly better than girls in reading.

APA CITATION

Cherobon, V. & Atoni, R. (2022). Reading Abilities of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 5(2), 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.5.2.655>.

CHICAGO CITATION

Cherobon, Vicky & Rose Atoni. 2022. "Reading Abilities of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya". *East African Journal of Education Studies* 5 (2), 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.5.2.655>.

HARVARD CITATION

Cherobon, V. & Atoni, R. (2022) "Reading Abilities of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya", *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 5(2), pp. 61-68. doi: 10.37284/eajes.5.2.655.

IEEE CITATION

V. Cherobon & R. Atoni. "Reading Abilities of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya", *EAJES*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 61-68, May. 2022.

MLA CITATION

Cherobon, Vicky & Rose Atoni. "Reading Abilities of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya". *East African Journal of Education Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 2, May. 2022, pp. 61-68, doi:10.37284/eajes.5.2.655

INTRODUCTION

According to Njabani (2017), reading ability is defined as one being able to read fluently, accurately, with the required speed and be able to comprehend the given text. The primary Education syllabus Kenya Institute of Education [KIE] (2002) noted that one of the objectives of lower primary English is that learners should acquire reading skills to be able to read and understand instructions, to read for information and for pleasure, and to develop vocabulary and sentence structures. Sustainable development goal number four seeks to ensure inclusive and quality education for all to promote lifelong learning. One of the targets of the goal is to ensure that by 2030, people of all genders would have acquired literacy and numeracy skills (UNESCO, 2016). In spite of the increased enrolment witnessed in schools in many developing countries, millions of children still lack basic literacy skills (World Bank, 2017). Gross (2009) pointed out that illiteracy leads to higher social costs in terms of employment, education, health, and crime. It is imperative that illiteracy levels be remedied at lower levels of education as it is less expensive than remedying the situation later. Chall (2000) pointed out that poor reading skills definitely lead to poor overall academic achievement. The author emphasised the importance of the acquisition of reading skills in the initial grades of learning at the primary school level.

International bodies such as the United Nations and other international declarations continue to emphasise the need for well-developed literacy levels (Mark, Clinton, & Margarete, 2008). The Ministry of Education in Kenya is also concerned about the levels of literacy in the country (Andiema

& Kisilu, 2016). Reading is a foundational skill that must be acquired in order for learning to take place. If reading is not well developed in a learner, it becomes difficult for learning to take place (Bartilol, 2017). Achievement in other subjects will greatly be affected and as a result, high dropout levels, poor academic achievements, and lack of transition to higher levels of education will be witnessed. This will negatively influence the economy.

Kaburi (2019) noted that there is a notion that certain subjects are more gender-friendly than others. Kaburi posited that girls were always deemed to be the better gender in the performance of languages while boys outperformed girls in mathematics and sciences. This notion has often been supported by research; however, the contrary idea has also been backed by research. This as most scholars note, is due to the fact that all learners have been given an equal chance in every sphere of education and as such has levelled the ground for competition (Andiema & Kisilu, 2016). According to Mwoma (2017), girls love reading more than boys and girls will always frequent places such as libraries which are rich in print material. A study in Iran by Asgarabadi et al. (2015) sought to find out whether there was a difference in reading comprehension between males and females. The study found that there was a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension of males and females. A study in Greece by Vlachos and Papadimitriou (2015) found that even though the mean score of boys on a reading test was slightly higher than those of girls, the difference was not statistically significant. Cekiso (2016) undertook a study on gender differences in reading in Eastern Cape, South Africa. The study found out that there

was a significant difference in the reading comprehension of boys and girls in the English reading test, while in the Isixhona test, there was no significant difference in their reading comprehension. A study by Wangeri and Mugambi (2014) in Kiambu County, Kenya, sought to find out whether there existed a difference in the reading fluency of standard three pupils based on their home, school, and learner gender. On gender, the study found that the girls were more fluent than the boys. The study found that there was a significant difference in the reading fluency of boys and girls.

According to Wang et al. (2018), the gap in rural-urban academic achievement is often a result of the parent's level of education and the availability of reading resources and materials in the home. Sullivan *et al.* (2018) affirmed that, indeed, disparities in academic achievement between rural and urban populations exist in many countries of the world and that there is a need to reduce the gap. They noted that those countries that have managed to bridge the gap, the countries have put in place policies that have led to that. Studies have been undertaken to find out whether rural and urban locations have an influence on the learner's reading ability. A study by Sullivan et al. (2018) compared the performance of rural and urban students in three countries: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The study found that rural students were more disadvantaged in Australia than they were in Canada and New Zealand. This was determined by looking at the reading mean scores of the three countries. The study found out that learners from villages performed the lowest in reading as compared to those in the cities. A study by Wang *et al.* (2018) in China sought to examine the gap in literacy that existed between students in rural and in urban China. The study found that the students in urban Chinese schools outperformed students in rural Chinese schools in literacy achievement and in how their parents were involved in their attainment of literacy. A study that was carried out in Ekiti State, Nigeria by Akinwumi (2017) found that learners from urban schools outperformed their counterparts from rural schools in reading comprehension. The study, therefore, concluded that there was a statistically significant difference in the performance of learners from rural and urban areas in reading comprehension. A study that was carried out in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya by Atoni

(2018) found out that grade 1 learners in Uasin Gishu had a low reading ability. The study further found out that learners from urban schools that took part in the study had a better reading ability than those from rural schools. It is against this background that the study sought to find out the reading abilities of learners in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. The study looked at the reading abilities of learners according to the location of their schools, whether urban or rural and according to the learners' gender.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Nandi County, which is county number 29 of the 47 counties in Kenya. The target population of this study was learners from 723 public primary schools in Nandi County. The study opted for representativeness as a way of determining the sample size of the schools to be used; therefore, a sample of 50 schools from Nandi County was utilised with Tindiret, Nandi South, Nandi North, and Nandi East sub-counties having 8 of their schools taking part in the study while Nandi Central and Chesumei had 9 of their schools taking part in the study. The pupils who took part in the study were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure an equal number of boys and girls and later followed up with simple random sampling. A sample size of 200 pupils was selected from the sample of 50 schools. This meant that 100 boys and 100 girls took part in the study. A pupils' reading test and an observation schedule were used to collect data on the reading abilities of learners. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilised in data analysis. Percentages, frequencies, and means were the descriptive statistics that were used. Quantitative data were presented in frequency tables, bar graphs, and pie charts. The study's hypotheses were tested using an independent T-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Data was collected from class 6 and 7 pupils in Nandi County. The study sought to find out the learners' gender, class, and category/location of the school, whether urban or rural. The results are summarised in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of Class six and seven Learners

Demographic Characteristics (n= 200)		(f)	%
Gender	Boys	100	50
	Girls	100	50
Class	6 (Tusome intervention class)	100	50
	7 (No Tusome intervention)	100	50
Learners per Category of School	Urban	12	6
	Rural	188	94

Source: Field data, 2021

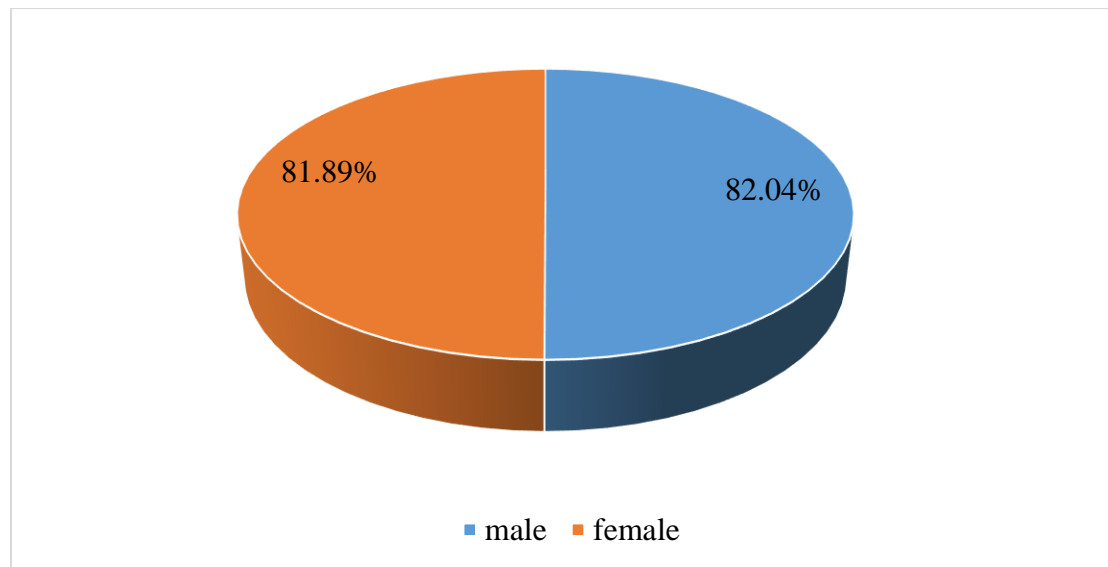
The findings displayed in Table 1 revealed that 100 (50%) of the learners who took part in the study were girls while 100 (50%) were boys, and in the same way, 100 (50%) were class 6 who had experienced the intervention while 100 (50%) were class 7 who did not go through Tusome. This equal representation in class and gender ensured bias-free findings since the study utilised stratified random sampling to ensure that both boys and girls took part in the study. The findings also showed that 12 (6%) of the pupils who took part in the study were from urban schools, while 188 (94%) of the pupils were from rural schools. This implied that most of the population in Nandi County resides in rural areas.

This finding also had the implication that there were more schools in the rural areas than they were in the urban areas. This was also evident in Atoni (2018), who established that there were more schools located in the rural areas than in the urban areas.

Gender and Learners’ Reading Ability in Public Primary Schools

The study sought to find out if a learner’s gender influenced their reading abilities. The study utilised stratified random sampling to ensure that an equal number of boys and girls took part in the study. The findings are summarised in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: Reading Mean Scores Per Learners Gender



Source: Field data, 2021

The study findings presented in figure 1 show that the mean score of boys was 82.04% which was slightly higher than that of the girls, who had a mean score of 81.89%. This implied that the slight

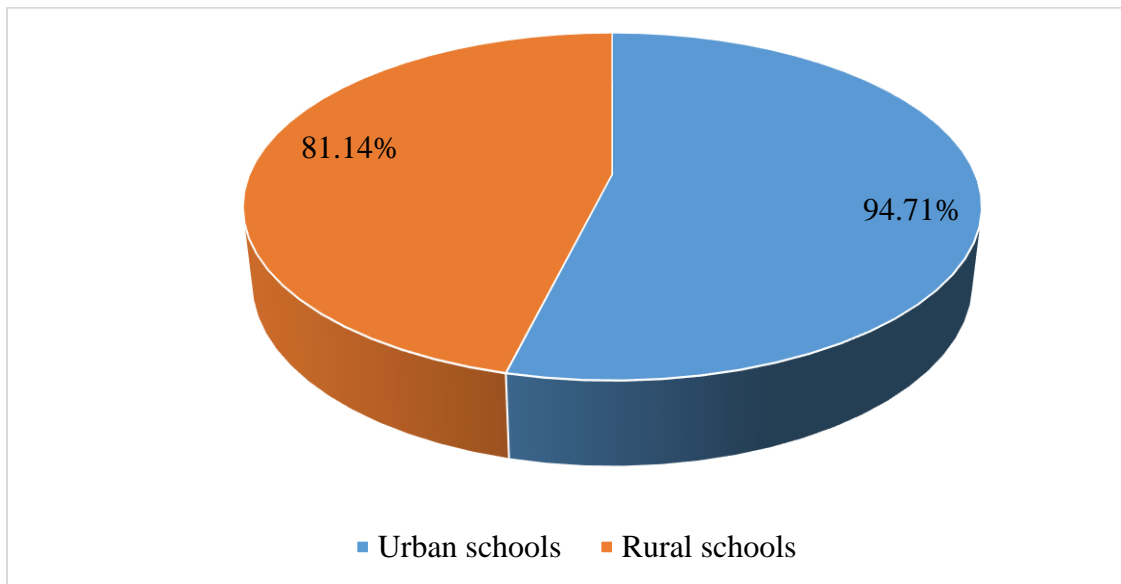
difference in mean reading scores could be attributed to the fact that both boys and girls were accorded equal opportunity in the learning of reading. According to Asgarabadi et al. (2015), the

lack of significant difference in the reading ability of males and females could be attributed to the fact that both males and females were at the same developmental level and both genders of learners were given the same opportunities in the learning of reading. This finding was in agreement with those of Vlachos and Papadimitriou (2015), who established that the mean scores of boys were slightly higher than those of girls in reading skills. The study tested the null hypothesis

Category of School and Learner’s Reading Ability

The study also sought to find out if the location of the learner’s school (rural or urban school) had an influence on their reading abilities. Since the number of urban primary schools was few in number, all urban public primary schools within Kapsabet, Nandi hills and Mosoriot town took part in the study. The findings are summarised in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: Reading Mean Scores between Urban and Rural Schools



Source: Field data, 2021

According to the information displayed in figure 2, learners from urban schools had a mean reading score of 94.71%, which was higher than that of learners from rural schools who had a mean reading score of 81.14%. The findings meant that learners in urban schools had better reading abilities than those from rural schools. This finding agreed with that of Amadi et al. (2018) in Nigeria, who found out that school location greatly influenced the learners reading abilities, with learners from urban schools performing better than learners from rural schools. This implied that learners from urban schools had sufficient time to read since they did not undertake a lot of household chores after school like their rural counterparts. The finding also implied that learners from urban schools were exposed to more reading material and other reading resources (storybooks

and class readers) than their counterparts from rural schools did. This finding agreed with that of Sullivan et al. (2018), which found that learners from urban schools outperformed learners from rural. The study attributed this to urban schools having quality resources and a higher number of teachers.

Tests of Hypothesis

The study sought to test two hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean reading scores of boys and that of girls in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya

H₀₂: There was no significant difference in the mean reading scores between learners from urban schools and those from rural schools in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya

girls in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya, was tested using an independent samples t-test; the comparison was drawn between boys and girls from both the intervention class and the class that did not experience the intervention. The t – value and the p-value are displayed in *Table 2*.

The hypothesis there is no significant difference between the mean reading scores of boys and that of

Table 2: Independent Samples T-test for Differences between Mean Reading Ability of Male Learners and of Female Learners

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Err Diff	95% CI Dif.	
									Lower	Upper
Reading Indicators Overall score	Equal variances assumed	.935	.335	.128	198	.899	.1558	1.222	-2.2543	2.566
	Equal variances not assumed			.128	197.5	.899	.1558	1.221	-2.2511	2.563

Source: Field data, 2021

The results in Table 15 show that the study reported a t-value of .13 and a 2-tailed p-value of .89. The p-value was found to be greater than the standard alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis; therefore, there was no significant difference between the mean reading scores of boys and that of girls in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. The implication of the finding was that the Tusome reading programme influenced the reading ability of both genders equally and that both genders performed almost the same in reading. All the learners were accorded similar chances and opportunities and both genders were motivated to read. The finding was in line with The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (2018), which established that in America that the reading score of females versus that of males was not statistically different. Valchos and Papadimitriou (2015) also reported that there was no statistically significant

difference in the reading abilities of boys and girls. These findings, however differed from those of Ouko (2015), who found out that there was a statistically significant difference in the achievement of literacy between boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys in literacy.

The null hypothesis was that there was no significant difference in the mean reading scores between learners from urban schools and those from rural schools in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya, which was tested using an independent sample T-test. The comparison was drawn between the reading mean scores of learners from rural public primary schools and those of learners from urban public primary schools in Nandi County. The findings are presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3: Independent Sample T-test for Differences between Mean Reading Ability of Urban and Rural Schools

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Err Diff	95% CI Diff.	
									Lower	Upper
Reading Indicators	Equal variances assumed	.074	.025	5.69	198	.000	13.562	2.383	8.861	8.263
Overall score	Equal variances not assumed			10.78	18.23	.000	13.562	1.257	10.922	6.203

Source: Field data, 2021

According to the results presented in Table 3, the study reported a t-value of 5.69 and a 2-tailed p-value of .00. This was considered a significant result as the p-value is lower than the standard alpha level of .05. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference in the mean reading scores between learners from Urban schools and those from rural schools in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. Therefore, there was a significant difference in the mean reading scores between learners from Urban schools and those from rural schools in public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. This implied that the location of the learner's school greatly influenced their reading abilities because learners from urban schools had more reading materials, an adequate number of teachers, better home literacy environment than those from rural schools. According to Wang et al. (2018), the home environment and the parental involvement in reading in learners from urban schools is high and this positively influences their reading outcomes. These findings are in line with those of Atoni (2018), who found out that there was a statistically significant difference in the reading competency of learners from urban from those in rural areas. Amadi (2018) also found that the location of a school greatly influenced their reading outcomes, unlike those of rural areas.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is paramount that every nation in the world ensures equality in the achievement of reading skills and, consequently, the literacy of her people. The results of this study show that there was no

difference in the reading abilities of boys and girls. This study credited to the fact that both boys and girls were accorded equal chances and opportunities in the learning of reading. The study's findings also indicated that learners in urban public primary schools performed better in reading than learners from rural public primary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. Based on these findings, the study recommends that there is a need to provide adequate resources and a sufficient number of teachers to both rural and urban schools in order to bridge the gap in literacy between their learners.

REFERENCES

- Akinwumi, J. O. (2017). Effects of Gender and school location on the Ekiti State secondary school students' achievement in Reading comprehension in the English language. *Journal of Education and practice*, 8(5), 50-55.
- Amadi, E. A. (2019). Gender differences and interest in reading. Examining the literacy acquisition of Nigerian learners of English as a second language. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 4(3), 115-124.
- Amadi, E. A., Nnamani, P. A & Ukoha, E. O. (2018). School location as a predictor of achievement in reading among Nigerian learners of English as a second language. *Covenant Journal of language studies*, 6(2), 65-73.
- Andiema, N.C. & Kisilu M. K. (2016). Utilisation of Child-Centered Approaches in Teaching and Learning of Language Activities in Pre-School

- Centres in Kenya. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 4(7), 197 – 214.
- Asgarabadi, Y. H, Roubi, A., Jafarigohar, M. (2015). Learners gender, Reading Comprehension, and Reading strategies in Descriptive and Macro-genres. *Theory and Practice in Language studies*, 5(12), 2557-2564.
- Atoni, R. (2018). Effect of Oral skills interactive approaches on reading abilities of class one pupils in public primary schools in Uasin Gichu County. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. CUEA
- Bartilol, S. (2017). Teachers' Perception' on the Level of Preparedness in Implementing Early Grade Reading Programme in Kenya Public Primary Schools. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 6(6), 375 – 381.
- Cekiso, M. (2016). Gender differences in the reading comprehension of grade three learners in South Africa. *International Journal of Education Science*, 13(2), 247-254.
- Chall, J. S. (2000). Socioeconomic and learning difference effects. The academic achievement challenge what really works in classrooms? New York: The Guilford Press.
- Gross, N. (2009). A pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms. *American Sociological Review*, 74 (3) 358-379.
- Kaburi, M. (2019). The Relationship between self – Efficacy and academic performance in Mathematics and English language among secondary school students in Nyamira County, Kenya. *Africa Journal of Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, 4(1), 221-231.
- Kenya Institute of Education. (2002). *The Primary Education syllabus*. Nairobi: KIE
- Mark, R., Clinton, R., &Margarete, S-I. (2008). The Global literacy challenge: a profile of youth and adult literacy at the mid-point of the United Nations Decade 2003-2012. Geneva: UNESCO.
- Mwoma T. (2017). Children's reading ability in early primary schooling: Challenges for a Kenyan rural community. *Issues in Educational Research*, 27(2), 347-364.
- Njabani, E. K. (2017). Reading abilities of class four learners of English in four selected schools in Tharaka- Nithi County, Kenya. Kenyatta University Unpublished Med thesis.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – OECD (2018). *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 Report*. Retrieved online from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results.htm>
- Ouko, H. O (2015). *Determinants of standard one pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy in Gucha District, Kisii County, Kenya*. Kenyatta university: unpublished doctoral thesis. <http://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/13328>.
- Sullivan, K., McConney, A. & Perry, L. B. (2018). A Comparison of Rural Educational disadvantages in Australia, Canada and New Zealand using OECDs PISA. *SAGE OPEN* (2018), 1-12.
- UNESCO. (2016). Global education monitoring report, 2016: place inclusive and sustainable cities. Global monitoring Report team (677). UNESCO.
- Vlachos, F. & Papadimitriou, S. (2015). Effect of age and gender on children's reading performance: The possible neural Underpinnings. *Cogent Psychology*, 2(2015) 10045224.
- Wang, J., Li, H. & Wang, D. (2018). Bridging the Rural-Urban Literacy Gap in China: A mediation Analysis of Family Effects. *Journal of Research in childhood Education*, 32(1), 119-134.
- Wangeri, T. & Mugambi, D. (2014). Home, school and Gender differences in Early Reading Fluency among standard Three pupils in primary schools in Kiuu sub location, Kiambu County, Kenya. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 2(10), 932-941,
- World Bank (2017). *World Development report: Learning to realise education*. Washington DC: World Bank.