Action Research Journal Indonesia (ARJI)
Volume 8 Number 4 Year 2026 | Pages 1342 -1360
E-ISSN : 2775-0787 | P-ISSN : 2774-9290 | DOI : 10.61227
Address : Tuesday Block No. 76 Rt/Rw 01/003 Jatitengah Village, Jatitujuh District, Majalengka Regency, West Java
e-mail : arjijournal@gmail.com
Url Web : https://journal.nahnuinisiatif.com/index.php/ARJI

Teachers' Instructional Strategies as Predictors of Pupils' Literacy Mastery in Public Primary Schools in Ubungo Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Article Information :
Articles Submitted : 2026-10-19
Articles Received : 2026-11-26
Published Articles : 2026-11-27

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Keywords:
Teachers' Instructional Strategies; Literacy Mastery; Phonics-Based Instruction; Reading Fluency and Collaborative Learning

Abstract : *This paper investigated how teachers' instructional strategies support pupils' literacy mastery in public primary schools in Ubungo Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Guided by Constructivist Learning Theory, the study employed a mixed-method approach with a descriptive survey design involving 50 respondents: 2 head teachers, 8 class teachers, and 40 Standard Two pupils from two public primary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, document reviews, and the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square analysis, and thematic analysis. Findings showed that teachers widely used literacy-focused strategies, including phonics instruction (87.5%), pair and group activities (85.0%), oral reading and fluency practice (87.5%), questioning, storytelling and discussion (85.0%), and corrective feedback (85.0%). However, the use of appropriate teaching and learning materials was comparatively lower (82.5%). Classroom observations confirmed the use of songs, modelling, repetition, oral reading, questioning, individual practice, and corrective feedback, although overcrowding, inadequate teaching aids, unequal participation, and limited instructional time constrained implementation. EGRA results showed that 47.5% of pupils attained the 80% oral comprehension benchmark, compared with 25% in non-word reading and 17.5% in oral reading fluency. The study concludes that instructional strategies contributed to pupils' literacy development, although their effectiveness was constrained by resource and classroom-related challenges. It recommends strengthening teacher professional development, improving literacy materials, managing class sizes, providing adequate instructional time, and sustaining evidence-based literacy strategies.*

Authors Contribution
Conceptualization: all authors
Methodology: all authors
Investigation: all authors
Writing original draft preparation: all authors
Writing review and editing : all authors
Visualization: all authors

Acknowledgments
All praise and gratitude to God for the successful completion of this article. The author expresses his gratitude to all parties involved and those who contributed to its preparation. Thanks to their constant prayers and support, this article was successfully completed.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy mastery is a fundamental outcome of primary education because it enables pupils to read, write, comprehend information, communicate effectively, and participate successfully in subsequent learning. The development of literacy skills depends not only on pupils' individual characteristics but also on the quality of classroom instruction and the strategies employed by teachers. Teachers may use strategies such as phonics instruction, guided reading, questioning, modelling, scaffolding, collaborative learning, storytelling, and repeated reading to provide pupils with opportunities to acquire and practise literacy competencies. Käsper, Uibu, and Mikk (2020) found that teachers' instructional strategies were associated with pupils' reading outcomes and reading interest, demonstrating the importance of classroom practices in literacy development. Similarly, Amani, Shukia, and Fussy (2025) identified modelling, interactive read-aloud, joint writing, scaffolding, prompts, and continuous assessment as important instructional techniques for developing foundational literacy skills.

Globally, literacy remains a major concern in education because enrolment in primary schools does not necessarily guarantee that pupils acquire the expected reading and comprehension competencies. Consequently, increasing attention has been directed toward improving the quality of classroom instruction and strengthening teachers' capacity to use evidence-based literacy strategies. Research has demonstrated that the combination of appropriate teaching strategies, teacher support, instructional materials, and continuous assessment can contribute to improved literacy outcomes. Käsper, Uibu, and Mikk (2020), for example, found that frequent use of teaching strategies in the early grades had a positive longitudinal relationship with pupils' later reading outcomes and interest in reading. In addition, Moussa et al. (2024) found that a structured literacy intervention in Madagascar that combined teacher training, coaching, scripted lessons, and pupil learning materials improved student reading, demonstrating the potential contribution of systematic instructional practices to literacy development.

In African schools, the challenge of ensuring that pupils acquire adequate foundational literacy skills is particularly important because many education systems continue to experience difficulties related to teacher preparation, instructional resources, classroom practices, and pupil engagement. Evidence from African countries suggests that strengthening teachers' instructional practices can improve the quality of literacy teaching and consequently support pupils' learning outcomes. Jukes et al. (2016), in a cluster randomized trial in Kenya, found that teacher professional development, semi-scripted lesson plans, and text-message support improved classroom literacy practices, including increased attention to written text, letters, and sounds. Similarly, Moussa et al. (2024) found that a teacher-focused literacy intervention in Madagascar, involving training, coaching, structured lessons, and learning materials, improved pupils' reading outcomes. These findings indicate that improving the strategies teachers employ during literacy instruction can be an important pathway for addressing literacy challenges in African primary schools.

In the case of East Africa, literacy development has remained a major educational priority, with countries implementing different approaches to improve early-grade reading and writing. Available evidence indicates that teacher practices, professional development, and the effective implementation of literacy-focused instructional strategies are important factors in determining pupils' learning outcomes. In Kenya, Jukes et al. (2016) demonstrated that

professional development combined with instructional support improved teachers' classroom literacy practices in government primary schools. In Tanzania, Kamanzi and Seni (2024) found that teachers' pedagogical knowledge and training influenced their implementation of phonics-based approaches for teaching reading in early grades. The Tanzanian study involved 25 public primary schools and revealed that insufficient teacher training in foundational reading approaches affected teachers' pedagogical knowledge and implementation of phonics instruction. Thus, evidence from the East African context suggests that the instructional approaches adopted by teachers and their capacity to implement those approaches effectively are important considerations in improving pupils' literacy mastery.

In Tanzania, literacy mastery has received increasing attention as the country seeks to improve foundational learning in primary schools. The effectiveness of literacy instruction is closely connected to teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, instructional strategies, and access to appropriate learning resources. Kamanzi and Seni (2024) found that teachers in Tanzanian public primary schools did not have sufficient training in the 3Rs and that this affected their pedagogical knowledge and implementation of phonics-based reading instruction. Similarly, Basil et al. (2024) examined the implementation of phonics-based literacy instruction among early-grade teachers in Tanzania and found limited evidence to guide effective implementation of phonics approaches, highlighting the importance of teacher professional experience and in-service training. These findings suggest that although Tanzania has adopted approaches intended to strengthen early-grade literacy, the strategies actually employed by teachers and their ability to implement them effectively remain important issues requiring empirical investigation.

At the local level, Ubungo Municipality provides an important context for examining teachers' instructional strategies and pupils' literacy mastery because literacy development is influenced by the instructional opportunities available to pupils within individual schools. Recent research conducted in Ubungo Municipality found that teachers played an important role in promoting pupils' reading habits by organizing reading sessions and encouraging pupils to borrow books for home reading. However, the study also identified inadequate reading materials as a challenge affecting the effectiveness of school libraries in promoting reading habits. More broadly, evidence from Tanzania demonstrates that literacy interventions involving structured instructional approaches, teacher support, assessment, and pupil engagement can improve literacy-related learning outcomes. Kadigi and Kasilima (2026), for instance, found that the Unlock Literacy intervention, which included teacher training, structured literacy lessons, instructional materials, and support for teachers, improved pupils' literacy outcomes in Handeni District.

The Research Problem

Literacy mastery is a fundamental outcome of primary education, yet inadequate reading, writing, vocabulary, and comprehension skills remain a concern among some primary school pupils. Despite efforts to improve literacy education through teacher training, curriculum reforms, instructional materials, and literacy programmes, challenges persist due to factors such as inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources, large classes, and ineffective instructional practices. In Tanzania, teachers employ various strategies to support literacy learning, but their effectiveness may depend on how appropriately and consistently

they are implemented. In Ubungo Municipality, limited empirical evidence exists on the extent to which teachers' instructional strategies predict pupils' literacy mastery in public primary schools. Therefore, this study examines teachers' instructional strategies as predictors of pupils' literacy mastery in public primary schools in Ubungo Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to provide evidence for improving classroom instruction and literacy outcomes.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical issues

The Constructivist Learning Theory, views learners as active participants who constantly construct knowledge through interaction with teachers, peers, learning materials, and their environment. Constructivism emphasizes use of learner-centred instructional strategies such as guided reading, modelling, questioning, storytelling, collaboration, and scaffolding, which can support pupils' literacy development. Although the theory may be constrained by existence of large classes, inadequate resources, and limited teacher preparation, it provides a useful framework for understanding how teachers' instructional strategies can support and predict pupils' literacy mastery by creating opportunities for active participation, practice, interaction, and meaningful engagement with literacy activities.

2. Empirical Review

Febiyanti et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative case study in Indonesia to examine teachers' strategies for introducing literacy among early childhood learners. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers. The findings showed that teachers used various instructional strategies, including role-play, rich teacher talk, big book reading, phonological awareness activities, and interactive storytelling. These approaches created stimulating literacy environments and supported children's early reading, vocabulary development, and communication skills. The study further revealed that teacher engagement, scaffolding, and creative teaching materials were important in promoting literacy development. However, the effectiveness of the strategies depended on teachers' ability to implement them consistently, highlighting the importance of teacher training and adequate instructional resources.

Sterna et al. (2024) evaluated the long-term effects of a structured pedagogy early-grade reading programme in South Africa using a longitudinal randomized design. The programme provided teachers with lesson plans, reading materials, and regular coaching in Grade 1 classrooms. The findings indicated that structured pedagogy significantly improved learners' reading fluency and comprehension over time. Teacher practices also improved when lesson plans and coaching were consistently implemented. The study emphasized that systematic instructional strategies combined with continuous professional support were important for achieving sustainable literacy gains. Nevertheless, variations in teacher competence and difficulties in maintaining programme fidelity across schools affected implementation. The findings therefore demonstrate that well-organized and supported instructional strategies can contribute substantially to pupils' literacy mastery.

M'amai et al. (2025) used a mixed-methods approach in Meru County, Kenya, to examine the influence of teachers' use of phonics instruction on Grade 1 learners' reading achievement. The study employed a quasi-experimental design supported by classroom observations,

learner assessments, and teacher interviews. The findings showed that phonics instruction was associated with improved reading fluency, letter-sound recognition, and decoding skills. Teacher training, confidence, and availability of instructional materials influenced the implementation of phonics strategies, while large classes and inadequate resources constrained effective instruction. Similarly, Weru and Otieno (2025), in a qualitative study conducted in Ikungi District, Tanzania, found that phonics instruction enhanced letter-sound recognition and reading fluency among primary school learners. However, limited teacher training, insufficient phonics materials, and large class sizes hindered effective implementation. Both studies suggest that systematic phonics instruction can strengthen foundational literacy when supported by adequate teacher preparation and teaching resources.

Basil et al. (2024) examined teachers' implementation of phonics-based literacy instruction in 50 public primary schools in Tanzania using classroom observations, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. The study found that although teachers attempted to implement phonics lessons, inadequate professional training, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient teaching resources limited the effectiveness of the strategies. Similarly, Kamanzi and Seni (2024) investigated teachers' understanding and implementation of the Phonics Instructional Approach among early-grade learners in Tanzania using questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Their findings indicated that the use of teaching aids, appropriate teacher-pupil ratios, and synthetic phonics were perceived as effective practices for literacy instruction. The researchers recommended improving classroom conditions and strengthening teacher training in the 3Rs. These findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of instructional strategies depends not only on the choice of teaching approach but also on teachers' pedagogical knowledge, classroom conditions, and availability of instructional materials.

Lasdya et al. (2022) investigated the use of word cards to improve Grade 1 pupils' reading skills in Indonesia through classroom action research involving 21 pupils. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and tests conducted across two cycles. The findings showed that pupils' reading mastery improved from an average of 61% in the first cycle to 85% in the second cycle after the use of word cards. This finding demonstrates the potential of simple and learner-centred instructional materials to improve early reading outcomes. Taken together, the reviewed studies indicate that instructional strategies such as phonics, storytelling, guided reading, questioning, role-play, structured pedagogy, and the use of teaching materials can enhance pupils' literacy mastery. However, their effectiveness is influenced by teacher competence, professional development, class size, availability of resources, and consistency of implementation. Despite evidence from other contexts and parts of Tanzania, limited empirical attention has specifically examined teachers' instructional strategies as predictors of pupils' overall literacy mastery in public primary schools in Dar es Salaam, including Ubungo. This gap provides justification for the present study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method approach and a descriptive survey design involving 50 respondents, comprising 2 head teachers, 8 subject teachers, and 40 Standard Two pupils from Upendo and Makabe public primary schools. Head teachers and teachers were purposively selected, while pupils were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were

conducted in two classes (standard two) followed by interviews of the teachers., Key syllabus and lesson plans were reviewed. The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) was administered, to 40 class two pupils which assessed pupils' decoding, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. The instrument's validity was established through content and face validation and piloting, while reliability was enhanced through Cronbach's Alpha, standardized EGRA procedures, and consistent observation procedures. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through descriptive statistics and Chi-square analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and use of data for academic purposes, were observed throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated teachers' instructional strategies as predictors of pupils' literacy mastery in public primary schools in Ubungo Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The main objective was addressed using quantitative data collected from 40 Standard two pupils through a structured questionnaire, complemented by qualitative data obtained from interviews with a subsample of teachers. The integration of quantitative questionnaire responses and qualitative [interview and observation] findings provided a comprehensive understanding of how instructional practices such as phonics-based instruction, collaborative learning, reading fluency practice, vocabulary and comprehension development, corrective feedback, and use of teaching materials contributed to pupils' literacy mastery. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with six statements describing their instructional strategies, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Teachers Report on Commonly Used Instructional Strategies: Distribution of Responses From 40 Teachers

Statement		SA F(%)	A F (%)	N F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)
i.	I use phonics-based instruction to develop pupils' ability to recognise letters and their corresponding sounds.	22 (55.0%)	13 (32.5%)	3 (7.5%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)
ii.	I use pair and group activities to actively engage pupils in reading and literacy exercises.	19 (47.5%)	15 (37.5%)	4 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)
iii.	I provide pupils with regular opportunities to read aloud and practise reading fluently.	21 (52.5%)	14 (35.0%)	3 (7.5%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)

iv.	I use questioning, storytelling, and discussion to develop pupils' vocabulary and reading comprehension.	18 (45.0%)	16 (40.0%)	4 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)
v.	I provide immediate corrective feedback and additional support to pupils who experience difficulties in reading.	20 (50.0%)	14 (35.0%)	4 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)
vi.	I use appropriate literacy teaching and learning materials to support pupils' active participation and reading development.	17 (42.5%)	16 (40.0%)	4 (10.0%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: Questionnaire response Data (July 2026)

Table 1 presents teachers' responses regarding the instructional strategies they employed to promote pupils' literacy mastery. The findings generally reveal that teachers reported a strong and fairly consistent use of literacy-focused instructional strategies across all six practices examined. On phonics-based instruction, 87.5% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they used this approach to develop pupils' letter recognition and sound correspondence, against only 5.0% who disagreed. Regarding pair and group activities, 85.0% agreed or strongly agreed that they engaged pupils through collaborative reading exercises, while 5.0% disagreed. On opportunities for reading aloud and fluency practice, 87.5% agreed or strongly agreed, compared with 5.0% who disagreed. For questioning, storytelling, and discussion to build vocabulary and comprehension, 85.0% agreed or strongly agreed, while 5.0% disagreed. On the provision of immediate corrective feedback, 85.0% agreed or strongly agreed, against 5.0% who disagreed. Finally, regarding the use of appropriate teaching and learning materials, 82.5% agreed or strongly agreed, compared with 7.5% who disagreed. These findings suggest that teachers in Ubungo Municipality reported a generally strong orientation toward evidence-based literacy instructional strategies, although a small proportion of teachers indicated inconsistent or limited application of these practices.

Use of Phonics-Based Instruction in Developing Letter Recognition and Sound Correspondence

Table 1 indicates that 22 (55.0%) teachers strongly agreed and 13 (32.5%) agreed that they used phonics-based instruction to develop pupils' ability to recognise letters and their corresponding sounds, giving a combined agreement of 87.5%. Only 2 (5.0%) disagreed, while 3 (7.5%) were undecided, and none strongly disagreed. This indicates that the majority of teachers considered phonics instruction a central strategy in early literacy teaching. During interviews, teachers explained that phonics instruction formed the foundation of their literacy

lessons, particularly for pupils in the lower primary grades who were still learning to decode words. One of the teacher reported:

> *"I begin almost every literacy lesson by drilling letter sounds before moving to blending and word formation. Once pupils master the sounds, reading becomes much easier for them because they can decode unfamiliar words on their own rather than memorizing whole words."* (Teacher 1, June 2026)

The quotation suggests that these teachers regarded systematic sound instruction as a building block for independent decoding rather than rote memorization. This is consistent with the structure of the competence-based curriculum, which emphasized functional literacy skills that pupils can apply beyond the classroom. The finding is consistent with Mwakalinga et al. (2022), who found that structured phonics instruction significantly improved early grade reading outcomes among Tanzanian primary school pupils. Similarly Weru and Otieno (2025) observed that teachers who consistently applied systematic phonics approaches recorded higher pupil performance in letter-sound recognition tasks than those relying primarily on whole-word methods. USAID's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) initiatives implemented in Tanzania have similarly emphasized phonemic awareness and decoding as prerequisites for reading fluency. These findings suggest that phonics-based instruction plays a substantial role in shaping pupils' literacy mastery in Ubungo Municipality. Teachers need to sustain and further strengthen systematic sound-letter instruction, particularly for pupils who enter primary school with limited pre-literacy exposure, so that decoding skills are firmly established before pupils' progress to independent reading tasks.

Use of Pair and Group Activities to Engage Pupils in Reading and Literacy Exercises

Table 1 also indicates that 19 (47.5%) teachers strongly agreed and 15 (37.5%) agreed that they used pair and group activities to actively engage pupils in reading and literacy exercises, giving a combined agreement of 85.0%. In contrast, 2 (5.0%) disagreed, while 4 (10.0%) were undecided, and none strongly disagreed. Interview findings elaborated on this practice. Teachers reported that collaborative reading activities allowed pupils to support one another, particularly those who struggled with reading independently. One of the teachers explained this as follows:

> *"When pupils read in pairs or small groups, stronger readers often help weaker ones without me having to intervene directly. This peer support builds confidence in pupils who would otherwise be too shy to read aloud in front of the whole class."*(Teacher 2, June 2026)

The response suggests that collaborative structures reduce the anxiety associated with individual performance and create a more supportive literacy learning environment. However, effective use of such activities requires deliberate grouping and monitoring to ensure that weaker readers are not merely passive participants. The finding is supported by Ngonyani et al. (2025), who found that group reading and collaborative discussions facilitated peer modelling, shared learning, pupil participation, confidence, and reading comprehension among Standard Six pupils in public primary schools in Kongwa District, Tanzania. Similarly, the RTI

International Tusome Pamoja programme documentation has highlighted paired reading and peer tutoring as strategies for supporting early grade literacy development. The findings therefore demonstrate that collaborative reading strategies are widely applied and perceived as beneficial in Ubungo Municipality. Teachers should continue structuring pair and group activities deliberately, ensuring balanced groupings and clear roles, so that literacy gains from peer interaction are maximized for pupils at different reading levels.

Provision of Regular Opportunities for Reading Aloud and Reading Fluency Practice

Table 1 also reveals that 21 (52.5%) teachers strongly agreed and 14 (35.0%) agreed that they provided pupils with regular opportunities to read aloud and practice reading fluently, resulting in a combined agreement of 87.5%. However, 2 (5.0%) disagreed, while 3 (7.5%) remained undecided, and none strongly disagreed. This was among the highest levels of agreement recorded across the six statements. During the interviews, teachers explained that reading aloud sessions served both instructional and diagnostic purposes, allowing them to identify pupils who required additional support. During interview, one teacher explained this as follows:

> *"I make sure that every pupil reads aloud at least once during the week, even if only a short passage. This helps me notice pronunciation errors, hesitation, and word recognition problems early, so I can address them before they affect the pupil's overall reading progress."* (Teacher 3, June 2026)

This response indicates that the reading aloud practice functioned as an ongoing formative assessment tool rather than a routine classroom activity. Regular oral reading enabled teachers to monitor fluency development and intervene promptly when difficulties emerged. The findings align with Weru and Otieno (2025), who found a strong positive association between frequency of oral reading practice and pupils' reading fluency scores in Tanzanian primary schools. This is also consistent with global EGRA-based literacy research, which identifies oral reading fluency as one of the most reliable predictors of overall reading comprehension in early grades. These findings suggest that consistent reading aloud practice is a strong contributor to pupils' literacy mastery in the studied schools. Teachers should continue prioritizing structured oral reading opportunities for every pupil, supported by systematic tracking of individual reading progress, to ensure that fluency gaps are identified and addressed in a timely manner.

Use of Questioning, Storytelling, and Discussion to Develop Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

Table 1 further indicates that 18 (45.0%) teachers strongly agreed and 16 (40.0%) agreed that they used questioning, storytelling, and discussion to develop pupils' vocabulary and reading comprehension, giving a combined agreement of 85.0%. Meanwhile, 2 (5.0%) disagreed, and 4 (10.0%) were undecided, with none strongly disagreeing. Interview responses provided further context. Teachers noted that storytelling in particular captured pupils' interest and created opportunities to introduce and reinforce new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. One of the. teachers explained this as follows:

> *"I use stories related to pupils' everyday experiences because they pay closer attention and ask questions naturally. After telling a story, I ask comprehension questions and encourage pupils to retell parts of it in their own words, which helps them practice new vocabulary*."(Teacher 4, June 2026)

This response suggests that contextualized, discussion-based approaches supported both vocabulary acquisition and comprehension monitoring simultaneously. Storytelling appeared to function as a bridge between oral language skills, which many pupils bring from home, and the more formal comprehension skills required for independent reading. The finding is consistent with sterna et al. (2024), who found that interactive read-aloud and discussion-based methods significantly enhanced vocabulary development and comprehension among lower primary pupils in Tanzania. Similarly, UNESCO's guidance on early literacy pedagogy emphasizes dialogic reading and questioning techniques as effective strategies for building comprehension skills that extend beyond decoding. The findings therefore imply that questioning and storytelling-based instruction meaningfully support pupils' comprehension development in Ubungo Municipality. Teachers should continue to integrate storytelling and structured questioning into literacy lessons, while ensuring that comprehension questions progress from simple recall to more analytical levels as pupils' reading skills mature.

Provision of Immediate Corrective Feedback and Additional Support to Struggling Readers

Table 1 also indicates that 20 (50.0%) teachers strongly agreed and 14 (35.0%) agreed that they provided immediate corrective feedback and additional support to pupils experiencing difficulties in reading, giving a combined agreement of 85.0%. In contrast, 2 (5.0%) disagreed, while 4 (10.0%) were undecided, and none strongly disagreed. During interviews, teachers described corrective feedback as an ongoing process embedded within daily lessons rather than a separate remedial activity. One teacher explained this thus:

> *"Whenever a pupil mispronounces a word or struggles to read a sentence, I correct them immediately and ask them to repeat it correctly. For pupils who continue to struggle, I set aside extra time after class or during break to work with them individually."* (Teacher 5, June 2026)

The quotation suggests that immediate, in-lesson correction was combined with targeted individual support outside regular instructional time for pupils with persistent difficulties. This layered approach reflects an understanding that literacy difficulties require both prompt correction and sustained follow-up. The finding is supported by Ngonyani et al. (2025), who found that timely corrective feedback combined with individualised remedial support was associated with measurable improvements in struggling readers' decoding accuracy. This is also consistent with response-to-intervention frameworks commonly referenced in early grade reading programmes, which emphasise prompt identification and support for at-risk readers as central to preventing literacy gaps from widening. These findings imply that responsive, individualised support constitutes an important instructional strategy for addressing literacy difficulties in the studied schools. Teachers should be supported with manageable class sizes and diagnostic tools that allow them to sustain timely corrective

feedback, particularly given the additional time demands that individualised remedial support places on already heavily loaded teaching schedules.

Use of Appropriate Literacy Teaching and Learning Materials

Table 1 reveal that 17 (42.5%) teachers strongly agreed and 16 (40.0%) agreed that they used appropriate literacy teaching and learning materials to support pupils' active participation and reading development, giving a combined agreement of 82.5%. However, 3 (7.5%) disagreed, while 4 (10.0%) were undecided, and none strongly disagreed. This statement recorded the lowest, though still substantial, level of agreement among the six practices examined. Interview findings shed light on this comparatively lower agreement. Teachers explained that while they recognised the value of varied teaching and learning materials, availability constraints sometimes limited what they could use in practice. One teacher explained:

> *"We are supposed to use flashcards, picture charts, and supplementary readers to make literacy lessons more engaging, but some of these materials are limited or shared across several classes. When materials are not available, I improvise using the chalkboard or objects found in the classroom."*(Teacher 6, June 2026)

This response indicates that teachers' commitment to using literacy materials was sometimes constrained by resource availability rather than a lack of instructional intention. The reliance on improvisation suggests resilience among teachers but also points to a structural gap that could limit the consistency and quality of materials-based instruction. The finding is consistent with Seni (2026), who reported that inadequate teaching and learning materials remained a persistent challenge affecting the implementation of literacy-focused instructional strategies in Tanzanian primary schools, despite teachers' positive attitudes toward using such materials. This is also echoed in Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) reports on competence-based curriculum implementation, which have identified insufficient supplementary reading materials as a constraint on literacy instruction in public primary schools. The findings therefore suggest that although most teachers reported using appropriate materials to support literacy instruction, resource limitations may constrain the consistency of this practice. School management and relevant education authorities should prioritise the provision and equitable distribution of literacy teaching and learning materials, including low-cost, locally producible resources, to ensure that materials-based instruction is not dependent on individual teachers' improvisation.

Therefore, the findings indicate that teachers' instructional strategies played a substantial and largely consistent role in promoting pupils' literacy mastery in public primary schools in Ubungo Municipality. Across all six statements, agreement exceeded 80%, with the strongest endorsement recorded for phonics-based instruction and reading aloud practice, and comparatively lower, though still high, endorsement for the use of teaching and learning materials. This pattern suggests that teachers' instructional intentions and classroom practices were generally well aligned with recognised evidence-based literacy strategies, while material resource constraints represented the most notable limiting factor.

The findings are consistent with recent literature on early grade literacy in Tanzania and the wider East African region. Seni (2026) drew attention to persistent resource constraints affecting the consistent application of literacy-focused instructional strategies despite teachers'

favorable attitudes and intentions. Consequently, the findings imply that strengthening pupils' literacy mastery in Ubungo Municipality requires sustaining teachers' existing instructional strengths, particularly in phonics instruction, collaborative reading, oral fluency practice, and corrective feedback, while deliberately addressing gaps in the availability of literacy teaching and learning materials. Continuous professional development, adequate instructional time, and equitable resource provision would enable teachers to apply these instructional strategies more consistently, thereby strengthening their predictive contribution to pupils' overall literacy mastery. This conclusion is consistent with the broader literacy pedagogy literature, which views pupils' reading mastery as an outcome of deliberate, well-resourced, and consistently applied instructional practice rather than of any single teaching method in isolation.

Instructional Environment and Classroom Conditions

The classroom observation examined how teachers implemented literacy instructional strategies and how pupils participated in reading activities. The observed lesson demonstrated the use of learner-centred strategies, including songs, teacher modelling, repetition, oral reading, questioning, individual practice, and immediate corrective feedback. Pupils actively participated in singing, syllable identification, word reading, and individual reading exercises. These strategies created opportunities for repeated practice and supported pupils' word recognition, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. The lesson observed was a standard two Kiswahili reading lesson that started at 10:00 am on 17 th July 2026 at school B. The observation focused on how the teacher taught the lesson and the extent to which he engaged the pupils in activities to promote reading competence as reflected in Figure 1.

Lesson Stage	Teacher's Activities	Learners' Activities	Time (Minutes)	Remarks
Introduction	The teacher introduced the lesson by singing a reading-related song containing words such as *chai* and *dada*.	Learners participated in the song and practised reading the words, including *mama*, *dada*, and *chai*.	5	Learners actively participated through singing and reading words.
Presentation of the New Topic	The teacher introduced and demonstrated the reading materials/words and guided learners through the reading activity.	Learners read and practised the syllables twa–twa.	10	Learners read the syllables step by step and practised combining them to form words.
Practice/Consolidation	The teacher guided learners to read words formed from the taught syllables and provided further reading exercises.	Learners practised forming and reading words from the syllables.	7	The teacher provided opportunities for learners to practise reading and combining syllables.
Conclusion	The teacher asked questions to review the lesson and gave learners an opportunity to respond.	Learners responded to the teacher's questions and demonstrated what they had learned.	8	The lesson was concluded through a brief review of the reading activity.

Figure 1. Classroom Observation During a Standard Two Kiswahili Reading Lesson at school B 17/7/2026

***Source**: Researcher, 2026*

Classroom observation showed that the teacher employed various learner-centred instructional strategies to support pupils' literacy development. The lesson began with a reading song, which encouraged pupils to participate actively and created a motivating atmosphere for learning. During the presentation, the teacher displayed words on the chalkboard and guided pupils to read syllables and words repeatedly through modelling and pronunciation. The repeated oral reading enabled pupils to recognise syllables and words more accurately, while continuous teacher guidance increased their confidence in pronouncing unfamiliar words. During knowledge construction, pupils identified syllables, combined them to form words, and practised reading independently while the teacher provided immediate correction. By the end of the lesson, most pupils were able to read the target words (twiga,

twanga, and twende) without assistance, indicating improved phonemic awareness, word recognition, and reading fluency.

Generally, the observation demonstrated that teacher modelling, repetition, oral reading, questioning, songs, active participation, and immediate corrective feedback created meaningful opportunities for literacy practice and mastery. These strategies supported pupils' reading accuracy, fluency, and confidence and provided concrete classroom evidence that complemented the quantitative findings on the contribution of learner-centred instructional strategies to literacy mastery. The observation therefore suggests that consistent opportunities for guided practice, active participation, and timely feedback are important for strengthening pupils' acquisition of early reading skills. Furthermore, to evaluate the relationship between instructional strategies and pupils' literacy mastery, observation of classroom instruction was conducted to establish the extent to which teachers implemented instructional strategies during literacy lessons. The findings of the classroom observation are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2.
Classroom Teaching Quality Assessment

Quality assessed	Rating	Key observation
Teacher competence in lesson delivery	Very good	Teacher demonstrated competence in lesson delivery.
Pupils' engagement and participation	Good	Pupils at the front participated more actively than those at the back.
Use of teaching aids	Satisfactory	Use was moderate because of inadequate teaching aids.
Exercises and activities provided	Satisfactory	Activities were constrained by overcrowding.
Time management	Satisfactory	Sessions were limited to approximately 30 minutes.

***Source**: Researcher, 2026*

The findings in Table 2 indicate that teachers demonstrated very good competence in lesson delivery, suggesting adequate pedagogical knowledge and ability to present literacy content in ways that pupils could understand. However, pupils' engagement was rated good, with those seated at the front participating more actively than those at the back, indicating that classroom organisation influenced opportunities for participation and feedback. The use of teaching aids and provision of exercises and activities were rated satisfactory, mainly because of inadequate teaching and learning materials and overcrowded classrooms. The overcrowding, with 307 pupils in School A and 378 in School B, limited opportunities for individual reading practice, assessment, feedback, group activities, and question-and-answer exercises. In addition, instructional sessions were limited to 30 minutes, restricting opportunities for adequate explanation, practice, assessment, and feedback.

Moreover, the observation revealed that although teachers possessed good competence in literacy lesson delivery and employed instructional strategies, their contribution to pupils' literacy mastery was constrained by the instructional environment. Inadequate teaching aids, overcrowding, unequal pupil engagement, insufficient activities, and limited instructional time

reduced opportunities for pupils to participate fully and practise literacy skills. The findings therefore indicate that improving teachers' instructional competence needs to be accompanied by adequate teaching and learning resources, sufficient instructional time, manageable classroom conditions, and opportunities for all pupils to participate actively in literacy activities.

Furthermore, the researcher assessed the pupils' oral comprehension to determine their ability to comprehend and interpret the meaning of text read. Reading comprehension is an important literacy skill because it enables pupils to interpret and explain what they read accurately. The benchmark for oral comprehension was 80% correct answers. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Oral Comprehension Score

Performance Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Scored 100% (Excellent)	12	30.0
Scored 80–99% (Met benchmark)	7	17.5
Scored below 80% (Below benchmark)	21	52.5
Total	40	100.0

***Source**: Researcher 2026*

The assessment of pupils' oral reading comprehension showed that 12 pupils (30.0%) achieved a perfect score of 100%, while 7 pupils (17.5%) scored between 80–99%, meeting the established benchmark of 80%. Overall, 19 pupils (47.5%) attained the expected comprehension standard, whereas 21 pupils (52.5%) scored below the benchmark. The findings indicate that although almost half of the pupils could identify and interpret information from the texts they read, slightly more than half experienced difficulties in comprehending the passages and responding correctly to the questions.

Compared with the other literacy assessments, oral reading comprehension recorded relatively better performance, with 47.5% of pupils meeting the benchmark compared with 25% for non-word reading and 17.5% for oral reading fluency. This suggests that some pupils were able to extract meaning from texts even when their decoding and fluency skills were not fully developed. The relatively higher comprehension performance may be associated with teachers' use of learner-participation strategies, including pair work, questioning, storytelling, and classroom discussions, which provided opportunities for pupils to interact with texts, discuss ideas, and explain words and phrases. However, the fact that 52.5% remained below the benchmark indicates continuing challenges in vocabulary, decoding, oral fluency, and reading practice.

The findings therefore suggest that improving comprehension requires an integrated approach that connects phonics and decoding with guided reading, vocabulary development, questioning, prediction, discussion, and regular reading practice. This interpretation is consistent with Basil et al. (2024), who identified large classes, inadequate resources, and insufficient teacher preparation as constraints to effective literacy instruction in Tanzanian public primary schools. Similarly, Kamanzi and Seni (2024) emphasised the importance of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, teaching materials, teacher–pupil ratios, and systematic phonics instruction in achieving literacy proficiency. Thus, while pupils

demonstrated comparatively stronger comprehension performance, sustained improvement requires strengthening decoding and fluency alongside comprehension instruction and addressing classroom and resource conditions that constrain effective literacy teaching.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teachers in public primary schools in Ubungo Municipality employed a broad range of literacy-focused instructional strategies, including phonics-based instruction, collaborative learning, oral reading and fluency practice, questioning and storytelling, and immediate corrective feedback, with all six reported strategies receiving more than 80% agreement. Classroom observation confirmed that these strategies were implemented through teacher modelling, repetition, songs, questioning, guided and individual reading, and immediate correction, and that pupils demonstrated improved participation, word recognition, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence during the observed lesson. However, the observed contribution of these strategies was constrained by inadequate teaching aids, overcrowding, unequal pupil participation, insufficient activities, and limited instructional time. The pupils' performance also showed that only 47.5% met the 80% oral comprehension benchmark, while 52.5% remained below it, despite comprehension being relatively stronger than non-word reading (25%) and oral reading fluency (17.5%). Overall, the findings indicate that literacy mastery requires more than teachers' use of appropriate instructional strategies; it also depends on adequate instructional resources, manageable classroom conditions, sufficient time for practice, active participation of all pupils, and systematic development of decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that education authorities and school management strengthen continuous professional development for teachers in systematic phonics, guided and repeated reading, collaborative learning, questioning, storytelling, vocabulary development, and immediate corrective feedback, while ensuring that these strategies are supported by adequate instructional time and appropriate classroom conditions. Schools should priorities the provision and equitable distribution of literacy teaching and learning materials, including textbooks, supplementary readers, flashcards, charts, word cards, and locally produced resources, to reduce reliance on teacher improvisation. Measures should also be taken to address overcrowding and improve pupil participation so that learners seated at the back receive comparable opportunities for reading practice, interaction, assessment, and feedback. In addition, teachers should use regular diagnostic and formative assessment to identify pupils with weaknesses in decoding and fluency and provide targeted support that connects phonics and word recognition with vocabulary, guided reading, questioning, discussion, prediction, and comprehension activities, given that 52.5% of pupils did not attain the oral comprehension benchmark.

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