No more ‘baggage’ for learners as ministry takes e-readers to class

Education PS Godia says programme successfully tried in Nairobi, Kiambu and Nakuru counties, now piloting in Kisumu and its environs

By GEORGE ORIDO

The now common but troubling scene of children carrying behind them bags heavier than their own weight will soon be a thing of the past should the Ministry of Education roll out a successful trial of e-books, currently piloting in 60 schools in Kisumu and its environs.

Last Friday Education PS George Godia, USAID senior advisor for International Education Christie Vilsack and Director of the USAID-Kenya Office of Education and Youth Dwaine Lee met teachers and Class Two pupils participating in a randomised control trial of Information and Communication Technology interventions at Korwenje and Ongono primary schools in Kisumu to improve literacy.

It was a truly hopeful and joyful moment for the children all with a tablet that had all recommended textbooks for languages, sciences and humanities.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ICT

According to Prof Godia, the new Basic Education Act demands all children must transit through all levels and this has brought challenges of buying so many books for each child.

“We are currently transiting up to 70 per cent from primary to secondary but we want to upscale transition with quality and that is why classroom resources are key,” he said during the event.

In future, children will no longer have to carry huge rucksacks full of textbooks because all that will be in a tablet.

In the pilot project, the Government in collaboration with USAID are conducting a study of the effectiveness of ICT in the classroom and will share the findings of the research.

The fundamental question that Kisumu County ICT intervention study will answer is how and whether the ICT interventions make a difference on pupils’ achievement in class.

Each of the three different interventions are being studied in 20 schools, for a total of 60 Kisumu schools drawn from both rural and urban areas in the pilot.

In the 20 schools, 931 pupils are using e-readers loaded with content developed by USAID’s Primary Math and Reading Initiative.

The about Sh700 million ($8 million) initiative has been operating in Nairobi, Kiambu and Nakuru since 2011, and has already demonstrated measurable improvements in literacy in 500 pilot schools through improved books and teaching materials.

“The programme focuses on improving student achievement and conducting research to inform policy regarding rolling out learning improvements nationwide,” said Dr Lee.

He said the Kisumu pilot will answer three questions: Does technology improve achievement? How cost effective are the interventions? How do the interventions change learning to improve achievement?

THE LAPTOP PROMISE

The Primary Math and Reading Initiative is part of a Sh3.8 billion ($45 million) investment American people have made to improve early grade reading in Kenya.

The project is particularly exciting and put to focus Jubilee government’s promise on laptops for Class One pupils starting next year.

Many have questioned the priority pyramid of President Uhuru Kenyatta with respect to what is important when it comes to needs assessment in our classrooms. While some are excited, others say there is need to build classroom, fast-track rural electrification and feed children before giving them laptops.

But it is now clear, courtesy of the Education Ministry pilot project that what is required is an e-book or e-readers through the tablets and not laptops as sensationally announced during Jubilee rallies two months ago.

If successful publishers, who have been making a kill through the orange books, will be forced to adjust to a new business model, this will see school textbook distributors and printers seek for business elsewhere.