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NURTURING READERSHIP SKILLS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CONTRIBUTIONS OF
THE READING TENT PROJECT IN NJORO, KENYA

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The Reading Tent Project (RTP) was instituted in November 1999 as an outreach
programme of the Research and Extension Division at Egerton University in Njoro,
Kenya. The project, which is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, aims at
promoting a lifetime reading culture and improving pupils' reading skills. A control
group of 1561 pupils currently in classes 4 and 5 from ten selected rural primary
schools within Njoro Division was closely monitored for three consecutive years. R. T. P events
involved teaching elementary reading skills interspersed with educational
games, modelling, drawing and painting. The project supplemented reading activities
with introduction to information technology (IT) involving computers with associated
accessories, assorted educational CD-ROM "talking books ", email and the Internet.

Through guided exploratory sessions, improvement in the reading habits of the pupils
was manifested. Moreover, through the project, some pupils established electronic
links to friends abroad to share scarce educational resources. This paper exemplifies
a case that developing countries can use to prepare their young citizens for an
information-intensive future, thus bridging the digital divide.

KEYWORDS/DESCRIPTORS: Reading Tent Project; Egerton University;
Elementary reading skills; Information technology skills; Computers and leisure
reading. Rural primary schools; Njoro Division, Kenya.