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Effect of Readers Theatre Technique on achievement in Reading Skills of Secondary School Learners in Kisumu County Kenya

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Abstract

Readers theatre technique is an interactive learning experience which promotes fluency and comprehension amongst learners. In the same vein, effective reading skills equip learners with requisite competence for a successful academic life. The study explored the effect of Readers theatre technique on learner achievement in reading skills. Lev Vygotsky socio-constructivist theory which advocates for social interaction, scaffold and active learning anchored the study. Quasi experimental; pre test, post test control groups design was adopted in which eight sub county day public secondary schools in the peri-urban region of Kisumu County were purposively selected. Respondents were 426 learners of form three of which 205 were randomly assigned to experimental while 221 to control study groups and 19 teachers were purposively selected. Primary data was collected within eight weeks through reading skills assessment tests, questionnaires, teacher interviews and focus group discussions for learners. The results revealed that the experimental group participants realized higher scores reading skills than the control group with the weaker learners registering greater gains. Based on the findings, the study concluded that Readers theatre technique improved learner reading fluency and comprehension resulting to effective reading skills. Further research was suggested in other skills of English language.

Key Words: Comprehension, Fluency, Reading Difficulty, Readers Theatre Technique, Reading Skills

INTRODUCTION

Effective reading skills are necessary for understanding written material across the education curriculum, because most learning at school depends largely on reading. According to Judge, (2013) successful reading is exemplified when learners are competent in decoding words, reading comprehension and reading fluency. However, learners experience difficulty recognizing words which inhibits reading comprehension. As learners transit to institutions of higher learning, immense reading is inevitable because they have to search for information. As a result, stakeholders recognize the indispensability of reading in academics for members to fully function in society. Therefore proficiency in reading is necessary for curriculum processing (Kibui, 2017) for learners to attain academic success.

Reading skills can be realized through interactive reading strategies that employ both top -down and bottom -up reading processes for interpreting and inferring information at the same time recognize and decode words. Klinger, Urbach, Golos, Brownell and Menon (2010) reported that learners with reading difficulties were inclined to receive instruction that focused on skills associated with phonological awareness and decoding but

paid no attention to strategies that could enhance comprehension. However, struggling readers require more explicit instruction that activate background knowledge for obtaining both literal level information and inferential level information. Engaging learners with these reading strategies presents opportunities of responding to texts allowing identification of contextual cues and setting a purpose for reading resulting to effective reading.

According to Pettersen, (2013) Readers theatre technique is a staged reading activity where readers use interpretive voice to bring life to story elements. Two or more readers are required to perform an oral presentation of a script by articulating words correctly to portray meaning of the text through the characters' they present. First, learners read the story then change the story into a script involving several characters. The script is then rehearsed and performed to peers who are the intended audience. According to Black and Stave (2007), Readers theatre technique allows learners of different reading levels participate in friendly, controlled and prepared atmosphere which encompasses scaffold and modelling to enhance reading skills. On the other hand, Rahaman (2014) points out that Readers theatre technique establishes a purposeful reason for collaboration by incorporating cooperative learning and learner-centered teaching. Furthermore, Demircioglu, (2010) asserts that strategies that involve kinesthetic motivate and encourage practising of reading skills thereby contributing positively to learners who struggle to make meaning and connections with texts.

However, Chapman, Laird, Ifill and Kewal-Ramani, (2011) observed a high probability of drop outs of English language learners who read below the level of proficiency. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015) revealed 38% of grade four learners in the United States could not read materials at the elementary level. The position in United States is not different with literacy levels across Sub Saharan Africa as a report by UNESCO (2011) revealed low achievement in reading skills. Athimoolam and Kibui (2012) observed that many secondary school learners still struggle with reading in English despite prior exposure to English in primary school. Further, Ndiritu, Rugendo, Chandi, Keiyoro and Mbwesa (2013) observed learners in Kenya tertiary level manifest ineffective reading skills which resulted in poor academic performance. This observation was substantiated by Mwoma (2017) who reported that learners who did not acquire requisite reading skills in early grades of learning often struggled to acquire more advanced skills that are usually absorbed through reading. Consequently, learners should acquire requisite reading skills early in life or if not be remediated in order to be successful in academic life.

Falling below basic reading level not only affects learners' academic performance, but also limits success beyond classroom. Learners who cannot decode words experience reading an intimidating exercise as much time is spend on recognizing words. Consequently, such learners are unable to construct meaning from text yet this is the ultimate goal of reading. Reading difficulties that start at the beginning of instruction persist across grades as learners transit to subsequent tiers of education without having acquired requisite reading skills for effective learning. Hausheer, Hansen and Dumas (2011) argue that learners with weak reading skills should receive interventions to impact on successful academic life. The present study borrowed from the views of Huddle (2014) which propose that influential reading intercessions would increase reading achievement for adolescents struggling with reading. The purpose of the study was therefore to establish achievement in reading skills of secondary school learners who participated in Readers theatre technique and those who did not. The study tested the H_0 : There is no statistically significant difference in achievement in reading skills of secondary school learners who participate in Readers theatre technique and those who do not.

METHODS

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group design which manipulated Readers theatre technique to determine its influence on achievement in reading skills (Orodho, Nzabalirwa, Odundo, Waweru & Ndayambaje, 2016). The target population was form three learners and teachers of English in secondary schools because learners were preparing to sit for National examination in form four and needed to be competent in reading skills. On the other hand, teachers were considered to be knowledgeable in the subject area. Purposive sampling was used to arrive at eight public sub county secondary schools situated in the peri-urban

area in Kisumu County to ensure homogeneity. Four schools were assigned randomly to experimental and other four to control study groups. The experimental groups used a 40- minute designed lesson plan, four lessons in a week for a period of eight weeks and participants worked in groups assigned by their teachers. The teachers in the experimental groups guided on reading strategies and modelled reading; aspects controlled in the control study groups.

The study triangulated collection of data as a way to strengthen validity and reliability (Mugenda, 2009). The research instruments were designed, developed and piloted and verified for reliability before actual data collection. The instruments included: Reading skills achievement tests (RSAT) for learners (pre test and post test), two sets of questionnaire: one for teachers and the other for learners, semi structured interview for teachers, focus group discussions (FGD) for learners. The RSAT had three sections: Section A had items on comprehension skills which were literal, interpretive and inferential. Areas tested were on identifying main ideas, and understanding of content and intention of the writer. Section B had items on linguistic ability of learners. Five items were on multiple choice vocabularies, five on multiple choices on rephrasing sentences to assess knowledge of language structure and another item on cloze test to assess understanding of language structures and word recognition. Section C had items on prosodic use of language. Five items were on multiple choices on correct punctuation at phrasal unit, five items on stressing at word level and five on identifying appropriate intonation at sentence level. The score for each section was 20 giving a total of 60 marks.

Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The RSAT generated quantitative data which produced descriptive statistics presented in frequency and percentages, mean score and standard deviation. Thematic interpretations from the interviews, FGD and open -ended questions in the questionnaires was discussed in the emerging areas guided by the study objectives and verbatim extracts from participants were used to support specific arguments. Inferential statistics by use of independent t-test was used to test the study hypothesis at α at 0.05 significant level. Research ethics was considered by first seeking permission to conduct research from the National commission of science, technology and innovation and informing the county director of education (Kisumu County) about the study. Before commencement of the study participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of anonymity, willingness to participate and confidentiality of data collected.

RESULTS

Findings and Discussions

Readers Theatre Technique and Achievement in Reading Skills.

The study sought to establish if learners who participated in Readers theatre technique performed better than those who did not. Data from scores of the pre-test and post- test in RSAT was used for analysis.

Pre-test achievement in Reading Skills

Data from scores of the pre-test was used to evaluate learners' pre-treatment achievement in reading skills and establish any variances between the two study groups before commencing treatment. The descriptive statistics of the findings in terms of total number of participants (n), minimum (max) and maximum (min) score, mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Pre-test achievement in reading skills

	Pre-test	
	Experimental	Pre-test Control
n	205	221
Min score	18	15
Max score	68	67
Mean	38.61	37.87
Std deviation	10.625	10.141

Table 1 indicates that the experimental groups had a mean score of 38.61(n=205), standard deviation 10.625, while the control groups had a mean score of 37.87(n=221), standard deviation 10.141. While the experimental groups registered a maximum percentage score of 68 and a minimum of 18, the control groups realized a maximum percentage score of 67 and a minimum of 15. The findings revealed that although the experimental study groups realized a higher mean score than the control study groups, there was a marginal mean score difference of 0.741. However, there was need to establish if the variance was significant by conducting a t-test.

T-Test Results for Pre- Test achievement in Reading Skills

An independent t-test conducted to establish variance in pre-test performance obtained a p-value of 0.462 revealing that there was no statistically significant variances between the experimental and control study groups' pre -test mean achievement in reading skills. The results indicated the two study groups had almost the same characteristics and were considered suitable for the study. Table 2 illustrates the independent T- test results.

Table 2 T-Test Results for Pre-Test achievement in reading skills

		t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	Equal variances assumed	0.737	424	0.462	0.741	1.006

Further analysis from teachers' questionnaires revealed that 82.2% (n=16) rated that they were dissatisfied while 15.8 % (n=3) rated as satisfied. The findings portray that teachers were not satisfied with learners' performance in reading skills. On the other hand, learners indicated their regular average scores in reading skills as follows: 71 (16.7%) rated at an average score of 50-74 percent, 327(76.7 %) rated at 25-49 percent and 28 (6.6 %) rated an average score of 0-24 percent. Table 3 illustrates participants' rating on average ability in reading skills.

Table 3 Experimental groups rating on Reading Ability

		Rating on Reading Skills %			
		0-24	25-49	50-74	Total
Gender	Male	9	158	30	197
	Female	19	169	41	229
Total		28	327	71	426

Based on the findings, the study observed that majority of the participants performed below the expected average score of 40%. An indication that learners had minimal ability in reading skills and there was need for an intervention to improve in reading skills. Similar views were held by Allor and Chard (2011) who advocated for an intervention when realizing reading difficulty may affect other areas of learning if not remediated in time.

In an effort to examine the reason behind the below average performance in the pre-test, teachers attributed the minimal scores on poor reading culture of learners, while learners reported that the passage had difficult words which affected the general understanding of the passage. More findings revealed that learners were not equipped with appropriate strategies to activate relevant schema to relate with the text at each phase of reading for effective comprehension. One participant expressed views of other teachers.

TE5: *'My students do not have a reading culture which makes it difficult for them to concentrate when reading passages. It beats logic if they cannot get the answers which are clearly right in the same passage.'*

The results conform to the Kenya National Examination Council (2016) report which revealed that candidates did not perform well due to poor mastery of content and low linguistic ability. Basing on pre tests scores, it was prudent to conclude that an intervention was necessary to enhance ability in reading skills.

Post –test achievement in Reading Skills

The study sought to establish post- test achievement in reading skills to establish if the treatment was effective. The descriptive statistics of the post- test for the two study groups is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4 Post- test achievement in reading skills

	Post-test	
	Experimental	Post-test Control
n	205	221
Min score	32	20
Max score	70	66
Mean	46.08	43.33
Std deviation	7.226	7.833

Table 4 show that the experimental study groups had a mean of 46.08 (n=205) and standard deviation 7.226 with a minimum mark of 32% and a maximum of 70%. On the other hand, the control study groups had a mean of 43.33 with standard deviation 7.833, minimum mark 20% and maximum 66%. The analysis indicated that the experimental study groups performed better than the alternative groups revealing that the treatment was effective and should be adopted to enhance achievement in reading skills. Similar results were observed by Kariuki and Rhymer (2012) where learners in the experimental study group performed better in comprehension in comparison to the control study group. However, Kariuki and Rhymer engaged learners in 6th grade. The findings confirm that Readers theatre technique is suitable for instruction of reading skills by learners at varying levels of learning(Lewis& Feng, 2014).

Experimental groups' achievement in reading skills

The study further sought to establish effect of the treatment by comparing pre-test scores and post-test scores in the experimental study groups. The findings are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5 Experimental groups' achievement in reading skills

	Pre-test	Post-test
	Experimental	Experimental
n	205	205
Min score	18%	32%
Max score	68%	70%
Mean	38.61	46.08

The results in Table 5 show that participants the experimental groups improved from 38.61 in the pre-test and 46.08 in the post-test confirming that the treatment was effective in enhancing reading skills of learners. Similarly, Nopa and Leni (2017) observed improvement in reading skills of 4th semester students at University who realized higher scores in the post test after Readers theatre technique treatment. The results also portray that the minimum mark improved from 18% to 32%, while the maximum mark improved slightly from 68% to 70%. The findings indicate the treatment had a greater impact on low achievers than high achievers thus should be considered suitable for learners struggling with reading to enhance reading skills. The findings are in tandem with Jeon and Lee (2013) who observed low level learners had a more significant progress in comprehension and fluency after using Readers theatre technique. However, Jeon and Lee used interviews and written reports from the 25 learners in grade six and teaching journals to collect data and did not have a control group. Based on the findings, it is practical to construe that Readers theatre technique is more significant on low achievers who are struggling with reading.

On the other hand, both teachers and learners attributed the improved performance to collaborative learning where both teachers and learners scaffold, the reading process. One participant stated on how working in groups offered support to arrive at comprehension.

SE27: *'When we read together in groups, some members of the group explain to me areas that I do not understand.'*

The participants' sentiments were confirmed with findings from field notes in the experimental study groups where learners worked in groups in class at the 'during reading' and 'after reading' phases. However, this was not observed in the control study groups. Working in groups make learners remain active participants through discussions and sharing ideas from their own interpretation of texts in order to arrive at the intended meaning. From this finding, it can be deduced that Readers theatre technique supports collaborative learning and should be embraced to enhance achievement in reading skills.

In addition, teachers revealed that, Readers theatre technique was viewed to be engaging; making learners active participants in the reading class. Active learning ensures retention of information by the learners because they are involved in the activity going on. The view of the following teacher reflects many others.

TE9: *'The fact that the students have to write a script makes them to read the text in order to get the required information. At the beginning it seemed taxing but with time, they learnt how to extract the main points.'*

The implication is that participants were able to interact deep with texts in order to identify important and relevant information to be included in the scripts. The findings are similar to Haughey (2015) who observed a significant difference in the growth of engagement of learners who participated in Readers theatre technique.

Control groups' achievement in reading skills

The study further sought to establish the control groups' achievement in reading skills by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores. The results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6 Control groups' achievement in reading skills

	Pre-test Control	Post-test Control
n	221	221
Min score	15	20
Max score	67	66
Mean	37.87	43.33

Table 6 show that the control study groups improved from a mean of 37.87 at pre-test to 43.33 in post-test. The results portray the minimum mark improved from 15% to 20%, while the maximum mark dropped slightly from 67% to 66%. The improvement in mean may have been due to the fact that the teachers in participating schools aimed at improving learner' performance for own satisfaction and development after the introduction of the Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development Tool (TPAD) by their employer.

However, a teacher strongly argued that learners only took learning seriously while at school, but relaxed during school holidays as observed in performance of examinations administered at the beginning of the term. One teacher reported:

TC8: *'I have always observed that the students perform better in Exam 2 compared to Exam 1 which we administer a week after they open.'*

This indicated that the presence of a learning environment provided learners with opportunity to concentrate on learning because it creates a social setting where learners develop their cognition by sharing knowledge and experiences.

T-Test Results for Post- Test achievement in Reading Skills

A t-test was computed in an effort to test the hypothesis: H_01 : There is no statistically significant difference in mean score achievement in reading skills of secondary school learners who participate in Readers theatre technique and those who did not participate. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 T-Test Results for Post test Scores in Reading Skills

		t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	Equal variances assumed					
Post- test		3.738	424	0.000	2.743	0.732

Table 7 revealed a p value of ($p < .000$) which indicated a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control study groups. The results disclose that Readers theatre technique significantly improved reading skills of learners and can be used to enhance performance in learners struggling with reading. However, in a departure from this finding, Smith (2011) found no significant differences between the treatment and alternative groups. Therefore, interventions should be executed with commitment for considerable improvement to be realized.

Relationship between Readers theatre technique and Reading Skills

In an effort to establish the relationship between Readers theatre technique and reading skills, a multiple regression was run to predict reading skills through comprehension skills, vocabulary and prosody. The findings in the multiple regression model in Table 8a and Table 8b show the three variables statistically significantly predicted achievement in reading skills, $F(3,201) = 1110.062$ $p < 0.05$, R square = 0.943.

Table 8a Computed Model of Reading Skills

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.971	0.943	0.942	1.040

The R-square statistic that measures the strength of the input variable in influencing the output in Table 9a show that the model with input appropriateness score explained 94.3% of the reading skills scores.

Table 8b F Statistics for Reading Skills

Model		Sums of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
	Regression	3603.876	3	1201.292	1110.062	.0000
	Residual	217.519	201	1.082		
	Total	3821.395	204			

The study established a statistically significant relationship between Readers theatre technique and achievement in reading skills since $p < 0.05$. The regression model computed from the analysis in Table 8c was found a good fit because it statistically significantly predicted achievement scores in reading skills. The model equation was computed as $y = 1.458 + (0.966x \text{ prosody}) + (0.899x \text{ vocabulary}) + (0.959x \text{ comprehension skills})$.

Table 8c Regression analysis of Readers Theatre technique

Model	Multiple Regression Weights					Correlation with Reading Skills
	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.	
Constant	1.458	0.460		3.171	0.002	
Prosody	0.966	0.030	0.565	32.512	0.000	0.728
Vocabulary	0.899	0.035	0.443	25.907	0.000	0.573
Comprehension	0.959	0.036	0.461	26.884	0.000	0.603

The findings in Table 8c revealed that all the three variables had a statistically significant positive regression weights which implied that if learners had higher scores in prosody, vocabulary and comprehension skills then they were expected to have higher scores in reading skills. The regression analysis in Table 9c revealed that prosody, explained 96.6%; comprehension explained 95.9% and vocabulary explained 89.9% of the variances in reading skills. The findings support results by Paige et al. (2014), who established a great correlation between prosody among other variables. Therefore for learners to perform better in reading skills they are expected to be competent in prosody, vocabulary and comprehension skills and teachers should endeavour to model effective reading, scaffold on reading strategies and building vocabulary for effective competence in reading skills.

Conclusions

Teaching methods that utilize interactive reading employ both bottom up and top down processing that execute word recognition skills at the same time comprehension skills. On the other hand, developing word recognition and decoding skills builds fluency which is critical to effective reading comprehension. Furthermore, a conducive classroom for reading where learners collaborate in groups and receive scaffolding from teachers is beneficial in enhancing effective reading skills. The study established a statistically significant difference between learners who were exposed to Readers theatre technique and those who were not($p=0.000$). In addition, a statistically significant relationship was established between Readers theatre technique and achievement in reading skills because it explained 94.2% of variances in reading skills in the areas of comprehension skills, vocabulary and prosody. Based on the findings, the study concluded that Readers theatre technique is effective in improving learner achievement in reading skills and should be employed to assist learners who struggle with reading.

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