

Utilization of Interpretive Reading for achievement in Reading Skills in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Interpretive reading as an approach in teaching reading enhances the fluency and comprehension through using of expression, phrasing, reading rate and smoothness. Learners in Kisumu County have reflected incompetence in reading skills resulting in below average performance in English language examinations. This study sought to examine effect of interpretive reading on achievement in reading skills of secondary school learners. Using social constructivist theory, the study adopted quasi experimental pretest posttest design. To obtain the data, participants in experimental groups(n=205) and control groups(n=221) were administered a pretest and posttest, while 19 teachers were interviewed. Questionnaires were also administered and lessons observed. Multiple linear regression and T-test were used to analyse data. The study revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between interpretive reading and achievement in reading skills. However, reading rate with $p=0.86$ was found not a significant predictor on its own. The post test results revealed statistically significant differences at significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) due to intervention of interpretive reading which favoured the experimental groups' achievement in reading skills. In the light of the results, the study has implications on both teachers and learner's engagement in interpretive reading during reading skills instruction.

Introduction

Reading involves interactive processing where readers aim at comprehending and responding to concepts relayed in written materials. The effective utilization of reading strategies impacts on active reading instruction and enhances the learner's achievement in fluency and comprehension for supporting competence in reading skills. According to Judge (2013), the success in reading is exemplified by the learner's competence in decoding words, comprehension and interpretive reading. However, Kabita (2015), observed learners lack of word recognition and decoding skills affected fluency thus resulting in low achievement in reading skills. On the other hand, pthe proficiency in reading skills denotes learner's reading fluency and ability to construct meaning from literary texts. Pettersen (2013) asserts that improvement in reading skills is as a result of interpretive reading processing which brings elements in the story alive rather than making reading a product of reading comprehension. Thus, advocating for interpretive reading as a strategy in reading instruction will compel for fluency and comprehension among learners.

Interpretive reading necessitates successful transmission of ideas and opinions of a writer to a reader in class. By relaying ideas and opinions from the literary text, Sinambela (2017) posited that interpretive reading facilitates learners' accurate and automatic reading with the use of correct expression, speed, phrasing and smoothness resulting in comprehension. In support, Yildirim, Rasinski, and Kaya (2017) writing on the role of prosodic skills in

reading comprehension observed that voice inflection, stress and proper phrasing are correlated with fluency in reading. However, Piper, Shcroeder and Trudell (2016), observed learners in Kenya schools read fluently but failed to gain comprehension. On the other hand, Whalley (2017) attributed straining to read English among learners in secondary schools to inefficiency to practice interpretive reading. Ideally, interpretive reading initiates critical thinking whereby the reader ensures information portrayed in the text is relayed by using correct voice inflection, putting words in meaningful sentential units, adjusting speed and accuracy and automaticity in pronunciation. It was therefore necessary to examine influence of interpretive reading on achievement in reading skills.

Statement of the Problem

Instructional approaches used in teaching reading skills ought to enhance fluency and comprehension. Appropriate strategies would result in learner's automaticity and accuracy in reading for effective comprehension. As much as there is a connection between interpretive reading and learner's success in reading skills, secondary school learners have reflected incompetence in fluency and comprehension resulting in below average performance in English language examinations. Achievement in reading skills requires teachers to incorporate multiple strategies to enable proper voice inflection through expression, cluster words in meaningful units through phrasing, monitor comprehension by adjusting reading rate and accurate pronunciation of words. Based on this apprehension, the study examined influence of interpretive reading on achievement in reading skills among form three learners in secondary school.

Literature Review

Expression and Reading Skills

Expression as a strategy is realized when learners use correct voice inflection to make reading sound like normal speech. This is based on the understanding that expression will convey writers intended meaning by representing character's emotions and feelings. In practice, accurate and automatic voice inflection enables learners replicate the actual emotions and feelings of characters in literary texts. In support of this argument, Lopes, Silva, Moniz and Speaar-Swerling (2015), asserted that oral reading expression and comprehension are correlated because words are put together into phrases that are meaningful with proper intonation which makes reading sensible. This indicates that fluent reading reveals ability to focus on words, punctuation and sentence meaning. Conceding the key role of interpretive reading on comprehension, Kim, Park and Wagner (2014), proposed that fluency requires learners to counteract lack of prosodic notions in literary texts. This indicates that fluent readers retrieve prosodic elements in literary texts to portray the character's voice by incorporating supra segmental text features to relay meaning. Yildirim et al. (2017), explicitly revealed that learners who read with significant voice inflection were expected to have a higher level of comprehension. Taking into consideration the assertions by both Lopes et al. (2015) and Yildirim et al. (2017), teachers modeling reading during instruction plays a significant role in enhancing fluency and comprehension.

Phrasing and Reading Skills

Phrasing requires knowledge of syntactic structures and ability to use those structures practically. According to Chang and Millett (2015), simultaneous reading and listening is advantageous to learners since it is compatible with oral and written form when a reader puts phrases together to enable listeners shift from individual word reading. Therefore, learners ought to use knowledge of syntactic structures at the same time practice reading in order to promote comprehension of literary texts. However, Lovett, Lacerenza, De Palma and Frijters (2012), observed that learners rarely practiced phrasing when reading literary texts. Similarly, Jeon and Lee (2013), observed that learners who were unable to break up sentences into expressive phrases had trouble understanding the text despite capability of recognizing particular words. Nishida (2013), reported that learners group words into chunks at phrase or sentence level in order to cope with complete sentences. On the other hand, Karanja (2015), observed learners missed out on comprehension due to inaccurate phrasing. In practice learners who struggle with reading pause on words or skip demanding words completely or sometimes hesitate or/and regress on words or sentences which distorts the smooth processing of information in secondary school's

comprehension class. Inability to correctly divide significant parts of a sentence is considered one of the causes for deficiency in reading fluency (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014). Ideally, employing syntactic structures skills facilitates distinguishing phrases in sentences (Nishida, 2013) a factor key in comprehension and fluency, because there is optimal voice inflection as signal markers in every phrase. In essence, phrasing indicates that the reader is conscious of where clauses and sentences end by marking distinct boundaries for effective understanding of literary texts.

Reading Rate and Reading Skills

Reading rate is signified by steadiness and rhythm of reading literary texts (Rasinski, 2012). According to DeVries (2008), skilful readers slow down when the passage is difficult but speed up when the text is easy to comprehend. In support, Lekwilai (2014), asserted that good readers regulate and maintain speed appropriately in accordance with concerns of particular literary text. In addition, Lekwilai (2014), observed that reading very fast, presented experiences of inappropriate phrasing which interfered with comprehension. Consequently, inappropriate reading speed may display fixation and regression a factor of weak word recognition skills. However much reading rate plays a role in reading, Paige, Rupley, Smith, Rasinski, Nichols and Magpuri-Lavell (2017) observed reading rate not to be a statistically significant predictor to comprehension. In regard to views of Paige et al. (2017), it can be argued that teachers should not put emphasis on the speed of reading, but rather guide learners to monitor speed for the purpose of attaining meaning. While there are other factors besides level of text, such as learner reading experience, background knowledge and reading purpose which may affect the rate of reading and comprehension level, this study considered monitoring the rate of reading a strategy of interpretive reading to enhance fluency and comprehension.

Smoothness and Reading Skills

Smoothness occurs when reading is without hesitations or regressions to reflect fluency. Basaran (2013), observed learners who read with smoothness realized higher levels of comprehension. On the other hand, Lovett et al. (2012), observed that learners who struggled with reading would occasionally skip demanding words completely. In practice learners pausing or skipping challenging words display difficulty in comprehension as far as reading smoothly is concerned. Karanja (2015), observed high academic achievement on learners with fewer word substitution, omission mispronunciation and addition implying they had arrived at automaticity and accuracy. The fact that when learners concentrate on reading results into smoothness, informed this study's design which exposed one group to repeated treatment, with the supposition that a lot of practice may explain learners' growth in oral fluency skills such as fluidity or smoothness. Basaran (2013) study utilized recorded narrative passages in a repeated reading activity while the present study adapted scripts from literary texts which were read aloud to members of the class.

Theoretical Perspective

The study was anchored on social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1896-1934), which advocates for social interaction and active learning to examine influence of interpretive reading on learner achievement in reading skills in secondary schools. The null hypothesis, there is no statistically significant relationship between interpretive reading and achievement in reading skills was tested. Interpretive reading class activities are interactive in nature when teachers model accurate reading and learners' practice to be competent in voice inflection, phrasing, reading speed and smoothness. Active participation will enable learners attain automaticity and accuracy in reading for effective comprehension as envisaged in Figure 1.

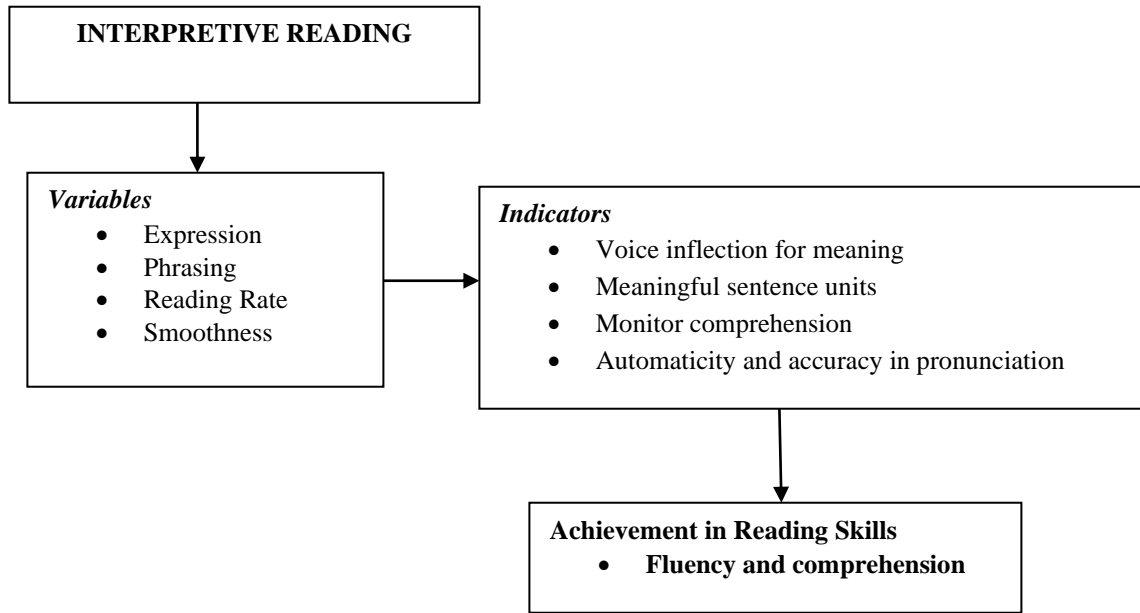


Figure 1: Perceived framework of interpretive reading and achievement in reading skills

Method

Participants

The study targeted form three learners and teachers of English in mixed day public sub county secondary schools. Using purposive sampling, eight schools situated within the confines of Kisumu city in Kenya were selected to ensure homogeneity. Four schools, randomly assigned to experimental study groups had 205 learners while four randomly assigned in control groups had 221 learners. 19 teachers were purposively selected to conduct the study since they were the English teachers in the selected schools.

Data collection

The data was collected from respondents by using reading skills achievement tests, questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussions and lesson observation. The tools were tested for validity and reliability measured. The tests had three sections, the first on comprehension skills, second on vocabulary and third on prosodic awareness. Pretest and teachers' questionnaires were administered before the intervention and a post test and learners' questionnaire in the last week of the intervention. A 40-minute designed lesson plan was used in experimental groups for a period of eight weeks with four lessons in a week. The lessons included teachers modelling reading and learners practice interpretive reading during rehearsals of adapted scripts. The scripts were adapted from a novel Blossoms of the Savannah (2017) a class text recommended for form three learners by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. In the course of the study, lessons were observed and interviews and focus group discussions conducted.

Study Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group design based on a mixed method approach. The qualitative approach enabled collection and analysis of data by interpreting information, while quantitative data explained relationship of variables in frequency and distributions. Random assignment was used to group participants in either control or experimental groups. However, this was done as intact groups at school level.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics generated frequency tables and means while thematic interpretations from qualitative data were discussed in emerging areas guided by the study objectives. Inferential statistics was used to test the study hypotheses by use of multiple regressions, at $\alpha = 0.05$ significant level to establish how each variable predicted achievement in reading skills and determine significance level. T-test was used to establish significant differences between the two groups. Research ethics was considered by acquiring a permit and informed consent sought from participants and confidentiality observed. Only data for participants who did both the pretest and posttest and filled questionnaires was used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Effectiveness of Interpretive Reading on Achievement in Reading Skills

The study sought to examine influence of interpretive reading on learner achievement in reading skills in secondary schools. The study determined interpretive reading through expression, phrasing, reading rate and smoothness among secondary school learners.

Expression and achievement in Reading Skills

The study sought to establish if teachers engaged learners in expressive reading. The findings revealed that majority of the teachers, (73.68%) occasionally engaged learners in expressive reading during reading instruction, while n=5 (26.32%) frequently used the strategy. This indicated that teachers occasionally engaged learners in expressive reading which resulted in learners not mastering requisite skills to inflect their voice during oral reading for meaning. The findings are supported with results in the pre-test on items of prosody where majority of the participants were not able to indicate the correct intonation on sentences and the right syllable to be stressed on words. Inappropriate intonation implies that there is no effective communication of information being relayed to the listeners. Additional findings from teachers revealed that expression was a common practice during teaching of oral skills. Teachers reported that they concentrated more on literary analysis when teaching the novel and not expression which was associated with the teaching of oral skills. Furthermore, worth noting was teachers report on inadequate resource materials to enhance English native-like expression.

However, additional findings from learner's questionnaire indicated that 93.17% (n=191) learners as illustrated in Figure 2 benefited from practicing reading with expression after having been exposed to treatment of interpretive reading. This was supported by reports from the focus groups where learners reported that reading with correct intonation enabled other listeners understand the information read. In support, teachers in experimental groups confessed that by practicing expression, fluent reading was supported which resulted in effective comprehension. Similar observations were revealed in the classrooms as learners read scripts adapted from the novel with expression while teachers modelled correct prosody. The findings implied that learners used varied tone and pitch enabling them depict lexical and supra-segmental features of the text hence interpreting information correctly. The findings in this study are in tandem with Lopes et al. (2015) who observed participants improved in the areas of expression after prosodic reading instruction. Employing correct tonal variation during oral reading implies that the reader uses prosody to relay the text into normal speech while having in mind the authors intended meaning to be recreated to the listener. Figure 2 illustrates learners' response on effectiveness of use of expression.

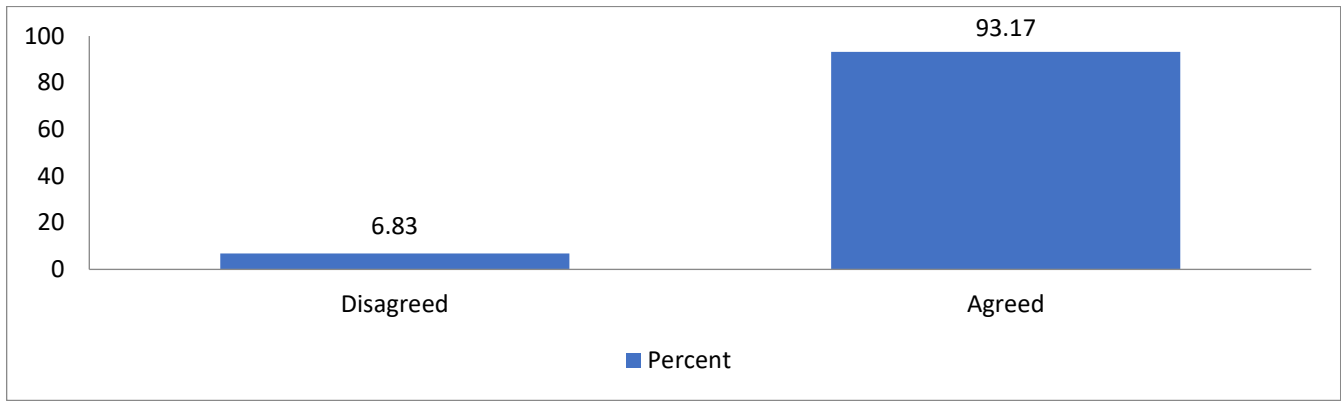


Figure 2 Learners' rating of expression

Phrasing and achievement in Reading Skills

The study sought to establish whether teachers instructed learners on phrasing at clause and sentence level. Study findings indicated that 57.89 % (n =11) teachers occasionally engaged learners in phrasing instruction as compared to 42.11 % (n=8) who frequently used phrasing instruction. The findings imply that learners occasionally practiced to chunk words into meaningful units thus limiting reading fluency and effective comprehension. The findings are supported with results in the pre-test on items of prosody where majority of the participants were not able to identify the correctly punctuated sentences from the choices given. However, findings after the treatment revealed that learners agreed that phrasing instruction enhanced reading skills as depicted in Figure 3.

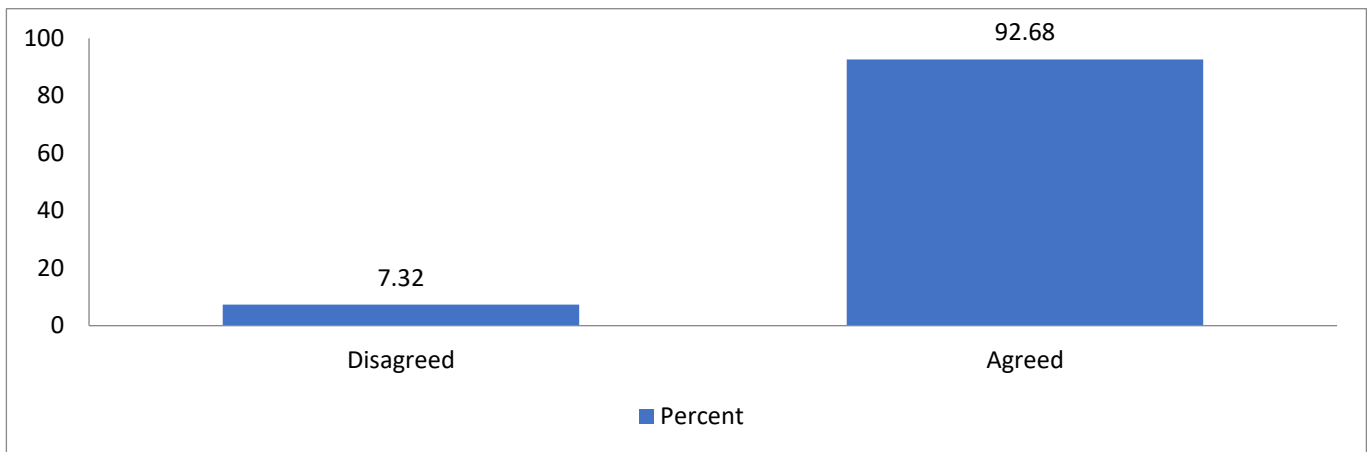


Figure 3 Learners' rating of phrasing

Findings in Figure 3 reveal that 92. 68% (n= 190) learners agreed that instruction on phrasing enhanced achievement in reading skills. This indicated that participants observed phrasal markers while reading. These findings were supported by classroom observation where participants practiced reading scripts while paying attention to punctuation marks. In addition, views from participants confirmed that reading without chunking words into meaningful units distorted comprehension, while phrasing instruction enabled learners improve on reading with proper pausing, which in turn resulted in effective fluency and comprehension. The findings corroborate with Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2011) observation that errors reduced after participants were exposed to continuous instructions on chunking approaches and syntactic structures. Similarly, Nishida (2013) revealed that phrase reading enabled learners link parts of texts during comprehension. This is due to the fact that when learners phrase read, they employ their knowledge of syntactic structures and use it to chunk words into groups which facilitates processing on phrases and sentences as a whole.

Reading Rate and achievement in Reading Skills

The study sought to establish whether teachers engaged learners in reading rate instruction. The findings revealed that 68.42 % (n=13) teachers occasionally engaged learners in reading rate instruction, while 31.58% (n=6) frequently engaged learners. In addition, teachers expressed reading speed depended on individual learner reading level because classes had learners with different linguistic ability. The findings are in tandem with DeVries (2008) observation on learners achieving comprehension by adjusting speed according to the linguistic level of the text. The findings indicate that participants had different reading ability and were to be treated at own individual level; however, reading rate should be monitored so that readers are neither too fast nor too slow to affect comprehension. Additional study findings from learner's questionnaire revealed that 88.78% (n=182) learners acknowledged effectiveness of reading rate after having been exposed to the treatment because it enhanced achievement in reading skills as illustrated in Figure 4. On the other hand, learners expressed frustrations received when someone read too slowly or too fast which interfered with comprehension of the text. Learners expressed that reading should be at moderate speed especially if one is reading aloud for others in class. These findings were supported by lesson observed where participants read at moderate pace which demonstrated automaticity and accuracy in word recognition.

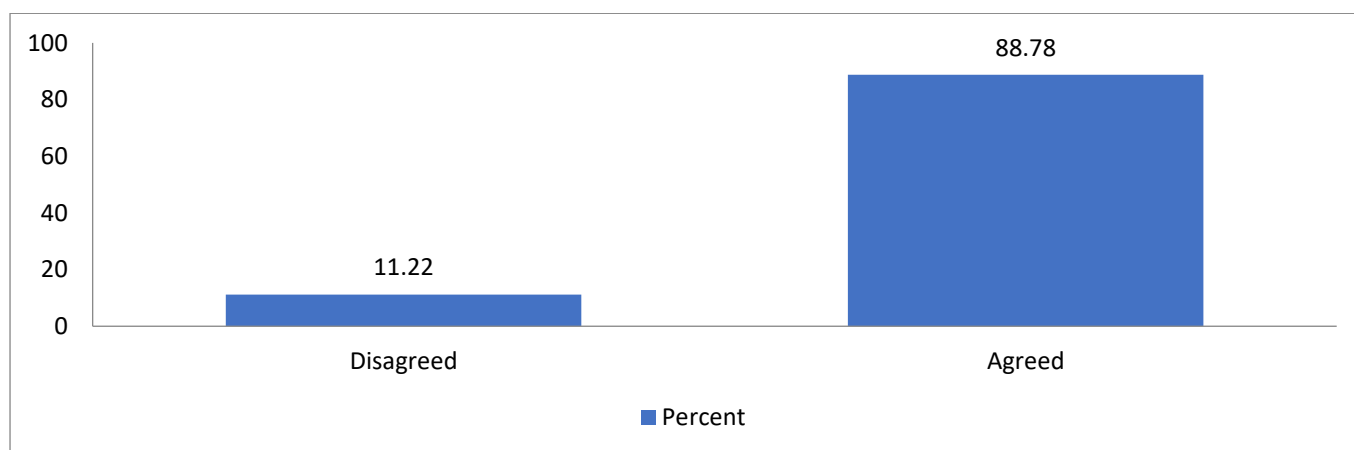


Figure 4 Learners' rating of reading rate

The findings in Figure 4 indicate that learners were able to adjust speed according to text level for comprehension. The findings confirm Dalton (2013), revelations that intervention successfully resulted in fluency and comprehension after learners improved in reading rate when the text was at the learners' reading level resulting in fluency and comprehension. This is an indication that reading materials introduced in the classroom should be at the reading level of learners because reading speed determines fluency which affects comprehension.

Smoothness and achievement in Reading Skills

The study sought to establish if teachers engaged learners in reading smoothly. The findings revealed that 57.89% (n=11) of teachers occasionally engaged learners in fluent reading activities, while 42.11 % (n=8) frequently used. However, findings from learners' questionnaire revealed that majority 90.24% (n=185) agreed that practicing to read with smoothness during interpretive reading treatment had a positive effect on achievement in reading skills, while 9.76 % (n=20) did not agree as shown in Figure 5. The findings portrayed that participants were able to pronounce words accurately which resulted in effective comprehension. Supporting these findings, reports from the field revealed that participants were able to improve in pronouncing words accurately through the frequent rehearsals of scripts and subsequent enactment which enhanced fluency in reading. Through frequent rehearsals of the scripts and teacher modelling correct reading observed in class enabled learners achieve automaticity and accuracy in reading. The findings were also supported by participant's reports who expressed that instruction on smoothness enhanced learner's fluency resulting in effective comprehension. The findings

corroborate with Basaran (2013), who observed that as smoothness increased, comprehension level of learners also improved. Figure 5 illustrates learners results on effectiveness of smoothness.

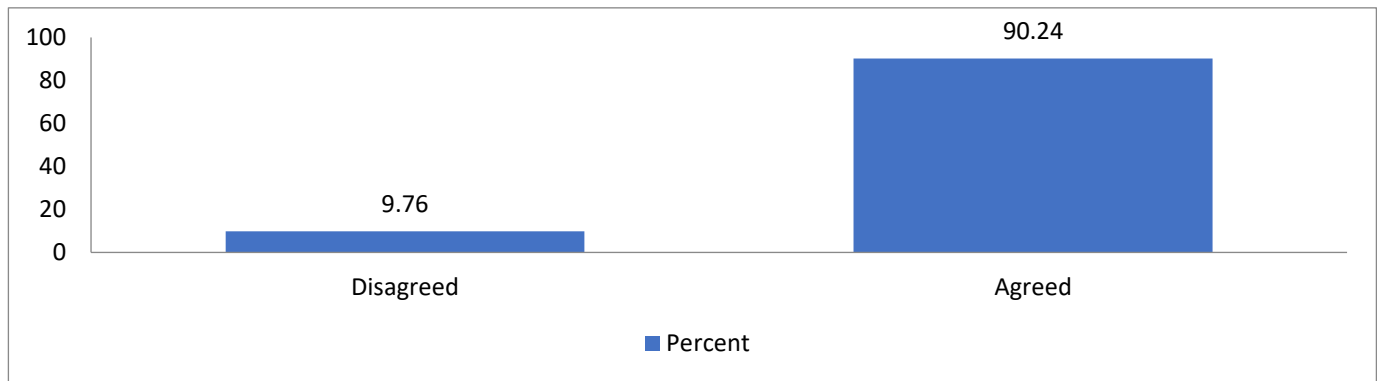


Figure 5 Learners’ rating of Smoothness

Relationship between Interpretive Reading and achievement in reading skills

To test the null hypothesis, there is no statistically significant relationship between interpretive reading and achievement in reading skills, multiple linear regression was run to predict reading skills from expression, phrasing, reading rate and smoothness as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Regression Analysis of Interpretive Reading

Model	Multiple weights		Regression			Correlation with Reading skills
	B	Std Error	Beta	T	Sig.	
Constant	12.379	2.871		4.312	0.000	
Expression	4.346	0.728	0.372	5.970	0.000	0.557
Phrasing	2.179	0.759	0.190	2.870	0.005	0.491
Reading rate	1.097	0.636	0.103	1.726	0.086	0.363
Smoothness	2.302	0.708	0.198	3.249	0.001	0.426

Notes $R^2 = .422, (p < .05)$

The findings in Table 1 disclose a positive and linear relationship between reading skills and expression, phrasing, reading rate and smoothness was also established. A significant regression was found, $F(4,200) = 36.564, p < 0.000$, $R^2 = 0.422$. Participants predicted reading skills: $12.379 + 4.346(\text{expression}) + 2.179(\text{phrasing}) + 1.097(\text{reading rate}) + 2.302(\text{smoothness})$. The R-square statistic was 0.422 which implied that the variables explained 42.2% of the reading skills scores. The findings revealed that all the four variables added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < 0.05$ and had a statistically significant positive linear regression weights, however, reading rate was found not to be a significant predictor of reading skills on its own as ($p = 0.86$) but in joint statistical analysis the variable is significant. The findings concur with Paige et al. (2017) observation that reading rate was not a significant predictor of comprehension. On the other hand, Lopes et al. (2015) observed that reading rate explained a considerable fraction of the variance in reading comprehension. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Pretest and Post test results

The study established the results from pre-test. The experimental groups achieved a mean $M = 38.61\%$ ($n=205$), standard deviation 10.625, while control groups had a mean $M = 37.87\%$ ($n=221$), standard deviation 10.141. The findings reveal a marginal mean score difference of 0.741. A t-test revealed a p-value of 0.462 at 0.05 level of significance an indication that two groups were of equal ability and thus considered suitable for the study. The findings are illustrated in Table 2.

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

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

Additional results from the post test revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The experimental groups achieved a mean $M = 46.08\%$ ($n=205$) with standard deviation 7.226, while control groups had a mean $M = 43.33\%$ with standard deviation 7.833 as illustrated in Table 3. Results from computed independent t-test showed that intervention of interpretive reading significantly improved achievement in reading skills. Similar findings were observed by Jeon and Lee (2013) whereby participants registered remarkable improvement when teachers were committed to the intervention.

Table 3 T-Test Results for Posttest in Reading Skills

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

Notes $p = .05$

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study determined that achievement in reading skills necessitated effective utilization of reading strategies during reading instruction among form three learners. Teacher's rated mean coefficient, $M = 2.23$ implied that teachers occasionally used interpretive reading during reading instruction. On the other hand, 91.21% learners agreed that interpretive reading had a positive impact on achievement in reading skills. This was an indication that emphasis placed on interpretive reading during class activities enabled transmission of the author's intended meaning in the text. Testing hypothesis revealed that all variables had statistically significant positive relationship with learner achievement in reading skills at $p < 0.05$. The study concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between interpretive reading and learner achievement in reading skills and improvement in achievement in experimental groups posttest was due to treatment of interpretive reading. In regard to findings of the study, teachers should utilize interpretive reading as a strategy during reading instruction to ensure learners practice and portray lexical and supra-segmental features in the text in order to achieve fluency and understand the intended meaning of the writer. In line with the findings the study recommends curriculum planners and the government to be inspired to create and provide instructional materials that would facilitate teaching interpretive reading. In the same vein teachers should embrace interpretive reading during reading instruction as a way to enhance automaticity and accuracy in reading for proficiency in reading skills to be attained by learners.

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