LLT Journal, e-ISSN 2579-9533, p-ISSN 1410-7201, Vol. 23, No. 1, April 2020, pp. 17-26

LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/LLT
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

INTEGRATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH READERS' THEATRE TECHNIQUE FOR READING COMPREHENSION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

Selina Alonya Kulo, Agnes Kibui, and Paul Odundo
University of Nairobi, Kenya
linakulo@yahoo.com, nyaguthii2010@gmail.com, and odundopaul@yahoo.com
correspondence: linakulo@yahoo.com

DOI: doi.org/10.24071/llt.2020.230102
received 24 December 2019; accepted 23 January 2020

Abstract

Proficiency in reading skills requires a multifaceted technique which incorporates all English language skills. Techniques such as readers' theatre assimilates other language skills through adapting and performing scripts which engages learners actively in the reading process for fluency and comprehension. The study explored influence of integrating English language skills to enhance comprehension among learners in secondary schools through an intervention of readers' theatre technique. The study adopted socio constructivism in a quasi-experimental pretest posttest design. 426 form three learners and 19 teachers in Kisumu country participated in the study conducted within eight weeks. Participants' achievement in reading comprehension was measured using reading skills achievement test to ascertain effect of the intervention. The findings of the study, based on statistical analysis of t-test revealed participants in experimental groups performed better than those in control groups. The study revealed that engaging learners in adapting and performing scripts promoted active interaction with the text resulting in effective comprehension. The study concluded that incorporating language skills in the reading process creates a learner centered class and would be beneficial for enhancing reading comprehension.

Keywords: Adapting scripts, integration of language skills, learner centered, performing scripts, reading comprehension

Introduction

Readers' theatre technique is a collaborative learning encounter which incorporates integration of other English language skills through adapting and performing scripts to enhance fluency and comprehension of subject matter. According to Pettersen (2013), readers' theatre technique facilitates readers to use prosody to make story elements real. Furthermore, Lopes, Silva, Moniz, and Speaar-Swerling (2015), posited that fluent readers access prosodic features in texts to aid in comprehension. Readers' theatre technique involves learners to read a text, adapt a script and perform the script to class members. Thus, incorporating language skills through writing and performance implies that learners are engaged in interactive reading strategies which involve progressive interaction of conversation at both lower levels and upper levels. However, Klinger, Urbach,

Golos, Brownell and Menon (2010), observed teachers placed a lot of emphasis on phonological awareness and decoding but little attention was put on strategies that would enhance comprehension. Ideally, proficiency in reading is attributed to learner's ability to read fluently and arrive at the author's intended meaning by utilizing appropriate strategies during instruction.

According to Rahman (2014), readers' theatre technique is collaborative and creates an active learning atmosphere. On the other hand, Young and Nageldinger (2014), assert that readers' theatre technique involves learners in dramatic reading of a script in groups during class activities. The script may either be adapted from a text or created from learners' own experiences. In conceptualizing readers' theatre technique to entail adapting and performing scripts, it should be perceived as engaging learners in varied reading strategies that would build fluency and comprehension. However, Piper, Shcroeder and Trudell (2016), observed learners were able to read fluently but failed to understand the information. Maingi (2015), attributes failure to achieve comprehension among learners to teachers not engaging learners in active reading strategies. On the other hand, Merga (2017), posited that utilization of appropriate strategies in the reading classroom facilitates effective comprehension. Effective strategies would enable activation of background knowledge, word recognition and decoding skills and comprehension. In essence, adapting scripts would present opportunities for deep interaction with the text to arrive at meaning and performing scripts would build fluency. This study explored influence of integrating English language skills through readers' theatre technique to enhance comprehension skills among learners in secondary schools.

Literature Review

Adapting Scripts

Adapting scripts from written material involves intensive reading, after which learners adapt a script. This provides an opportunity for learners to produce what has been read in own language through writing. Writing scripts in own words indicates proper understanding of language structures and information. On the other hand, it provides a purpose for reading which results in retention of information (Al-Haq& Al-Sobh, 2010). According to Adams, Farris, Patterson, Santiago and Secrist (2007), learners use metacognitive skills when adapting scripts. Utilizing higher levels of metacognition requires engagement in collaborative strategies such as brainstorming when learners question and monitor understanding of the text. This would enable activation of schemata which is essential in comprehension. Kabilan and Kamaruddin (2010), posited that brainstorming enables learners to envisage and integrate information as a result generating a better understanding of the text. In essence, adapting scripts as a classroom activity in the reading process would result in effective comprehension, because it provides learners with varied perceptive of interpreting information by group members.

Abdelaal and Sase (2014), argued that during adapting scripts, critical thinking is triggered which enables learners relate and discover information in the text. According to Visser (2013), relating with the text involves activation of

background knowledge to understand events, characters' emotions and roles represented in the text. This would be successful if the teacher facilitated appropriate activities in the classroom such as discussion in groups. Holt (2015), established that activating background knowledge was enhanced by discussions in the classrooms. In the same vein, author (2019), observed that discussions enabled learners participate freely in class which enhanced comprehension through sharing of ideas. During discussions, learners bring own experiences to relate with events in the text. Therefore, teacher support for learner's active involvement in the reading process would connect learners' personal experiences with events in the text for effective comprehension.

Performing Scripts

Performing scripts as an activity in reading instruction classroom builds fluency through the several rehearsals when teachers model correct intonation in sentences and pronunciation of words. According to Sinambela (2017), reading with prosody which is characterized by voice inflection, appropriate speed and phrasing facilitates accuracy and automaticity in reading. In agreement with Sinambela (2017), Yildirim, Rasinski, and Kaya (2017), asserted that voice inflection and proper phrasing correlated with fluency in reading. Performance of scripts requires accurate clustering of words into meaningful phrases and proper voice inflection for meaning. According to Kabilan and Kamaruddin (2010), using correct intonation and phrasing while reading, brings thoughts and emotions of characters alive through the reader and subsequently enabling the listener follow the discourse. In essence, performing scripts makes reading sound like everyday conversation which facilitates effective comprehension.

Jeon and Lee (2013), observed that inability to cluster phrases into meaningful units interfered with comprehension during reading. In the same vein, Karanja (2015), revealed that inappropriate phrasing while reading contributed to low comprehension. Practically, weak readers skip or regress on difficult words or sentences misrepresenting the information to listeners during read aloud. However, good readers ought to read the same print severally in order to familiarize themselves with words and phrasing for effective comprehension through repeated reading. Read aloud would ensure proper voice inflection when learners endeavour to articulate words correctly. On the other hand, Tsou (2011), asserted that performing scripts as a group activity provides interest in reading. In support, Karabag (2015), observed that secondary school learners enjoyed participating in performing scripts adapted from texts because of the cooperative nature of classmates. This is attributed to the fact that performing scripts is a group activity and therefore a learner is not burdened with reading a whole paragraph alone but rather a line assigned to individuals. The fact that reading is shared makes the whole activity pleasurable for the learners. Besides, the lines are not memorized which could be an extra burden. According to Protacio (2012), group reading activities should integrate other language skills such as speaking and listening with reading and writing. Shared reading which is a group reading activity enhances comprehension when teacher guide learners on appropriate strategies that integrate all language skills.

Statement of the Problem

Instructional strategies for teaching reading skills ought to integrate other language skills to ensure active participation of learners for effective fluency at the same time support comprehension. Reading instruction has been observed to be a hurried activity whereby learners are not engaged actively in the reading process. On the other hand, reading instruction should not be an isolated activity but rather other language skills such as oral and writing should be incorporated to process reading at both higher level and lower level. Oral skills would guarantee reading fluency through performing scripts and writing skills would enable learners delve deep in the text by understanding information. Based on this, the study investigated influence of adapting and performing skills as an integrated approach to enhance comprehension among learners in secondary schools in Kisumu country, Kenya.

Theoretical Perception

The study was anchored on social constructivism theory. Social constructivism espouses on engaging learners actively in the learning instruction through social interaction. Adapting and performing scripts as classroom group activities is interactive and socialized in nature when teachers guide learners to interact deep with the text for meaning. Adapting scripts would enable learners discuss and brainstorm which activates background knowledge. On the other hand, learners act as scaffold for one another when they share reading while performing scripts. It was perceived that performing scripts would build fluency through proper voice inflection, and phrasing practiced through repeated reading and read aloud strategies.

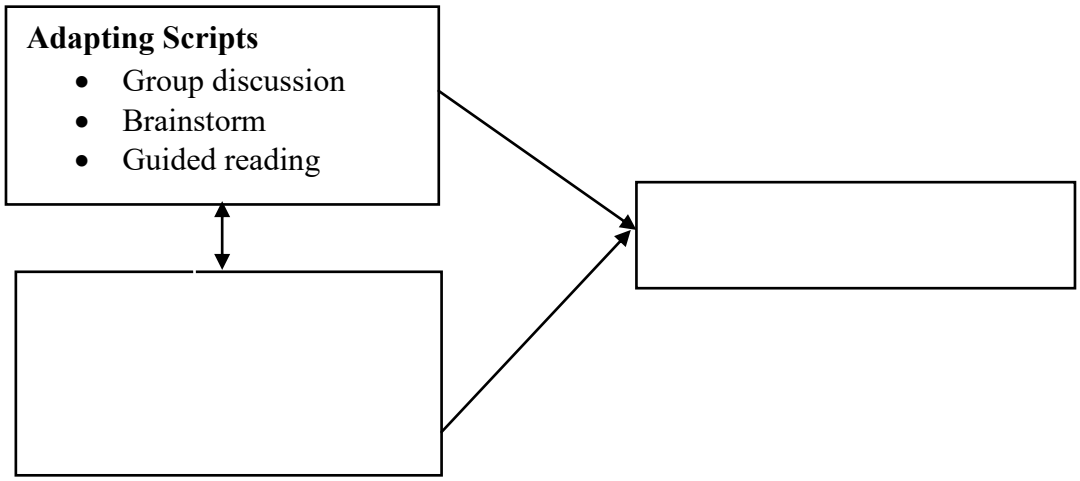


Figure 1. Adapting and performing scripts for comprehension

Method

The study implemented quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group design. Form three secondary school learners in four schools with a sample of 221 participants were randomly assigned to control groups and four other schools with a sample of 205 participants to experimental study groups. The participants in experimental study groups were engaged in adapting and performing scripts during reading instruction for a period of eight weeks. Group discussion, brainstorming, repeated and shared reading were controlled in the control study groups. Participants in experimental groups worked in groups after reading the text to adapt scripts and perform them. During rehearsals of script reading, repeated reading was practiced as the teacher modelled prosody. Both the study groups were subjected to a pretest and a post test.

The reading skills achievement test had three sections, section one was comprehension skills with items on literal, identifying main ideas and inferencing, the second section tested vocabulary on words and phrase level, and third had items on prosodic features which included intonation at sentence and word level, and punctuation on phrases. The pretest was conducted before the intervention and the post test in the last week of the intervention. Teachers filled self-administered questionnaires that had both close and open items on usage and importance of adapting and performing scripts. The teachers made use of the novel Blossoms of the Savannah (2017), a class text used by form three learners in secondary schools in Kenya as the instructional text during the study period. The study ensured ethics in research was observed by acquiring a research permit, and informed consent was sought before the intervention. Participants were also informed of the purpose of the study.

Findings and Discussion

Adapting Scripts and reading comprehension

The study sought to establish if teachers used adapting script strategy during reading instruction. The findings are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers rating of use of adapting scripts

Strategy	Occasionally	Frequently
Group discussion	2 (10.53%)	17 (89.47%)
Brainstorm	1 (5.26%)	18 (94. 75%)
Guided reading	6 (31.58%)	13 (68.42%)

The study findings in Table 1 show 89.47% (n=17) teachers frequently engaged learners in group discussion during reading instruction. On the other hand, 95.75% (n=18) engaged learners in brainstorming and 68.42% (n=13) guided learners on appropriate strategies. The findings indicate that comprehension was achieved when learners were engaged in group discussion,

brainstorm and when teachers guided on appropriate strategies. The findings are supported by the teachers who reported that adapting scripts was interactive and enabled learners understand varied sentence structures. This participant echoed the views of many other teachers.

TEG 4: ‘‘I think adapting scripts is a good way of making the students read and get to understand the text. Since they are expected to come up with their own script, then it means they will be more keen on getting the details of the text. Writing these scripts also helps them learn how to write a variety of sentences because they have to rephrase the sentences in the novel and put them in dialogue form.’’

Group discussions facilitate active interaction and cooperation among learners when they bring varied experiences to what is written in the text. As learners discuss on what areas to adapt the script, they engage in deep interaction with the text which enables effective comprehension. This enabled activation of background knowledge and experiences which enabled them relate with information in the text. Similar results were observed by Alshehri (2014), who excelled in comprehension by connecting own experiences with events in the text. The findings of the study are in tandem with Mwoma (2017), who acknowledged the importance of discussions.

On the other hand, brainstorming on the text being discussed facilitated active interaction as learners were able to monitor comprehension from various points of views. Guided reading enabled participants remain active in all the three phases of reading when teachers provided appropriate activities. The findings reveal that learners applied appropriate strategies at pre reading, while reading and post reading stage for effective comprehension. Similar findings were observed by Sattar and Salehi (2014), who observed proficiency in reading comprehension when participants were exposed to specific strategies. Therefore, explicit strategies if executed well during reading instruction would facilitate effective comprehension.

Performing Scripts and reading comprehension

The study established if teachers engaged learners in performing scripts adapted from the text to build fluency for effective comprehension. The findings are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers’ rating of use of performing scripts

Strategy	Occasionally	Frequently
Shared reading	7 (36.84%)	12 (63.16%)
Read aloud	5 (26.32%)	14 (73.68%)
Repeated reading	4 (21.06%)	15 (78.94%)

The findings show 63.16% (n=13) teachers frequently engaged learners in shared reading, 73.68% (n=14) frequently engaged learners in read aloud and 78.94% (n=15) frequently engaged learners in repeated reading. The findings reveal that participants were able to recognize and decode words when engaged in

read aloud. On the other hand, fluency was perfected through repeated reading and comprehension supported when engaged in shared reading. The findings are in tandem with what teachers reported that prosodic reading would build fluency, however, sentiments from teachers also revealed lack of teaching resources. The following were views from the teachers.

TEG 9: "For students to read fluently, they must know how to vary their voices for meaning. Correct expression helps so much in building fluency and general understanding of what is being read. However, more exposure to proper intonation can be realized if we have relevant resource materials.. like audio tapes...videos... you know, they get to grasp the proper intonation on sentences and words. Or maybe if we had language labs in resource centers for practice."

TEG4: "When students pronounce words correctly, it means they have achieved reading fluency. And this means that the students have to engage in a lot of practice to know how to pronounce words correctly. Some students have difficulty in putting stress on the right syllable in words to convey meaning, and encouraging them to practice reading when they rehearse scripts has really helped in the area of pronunciation."

Read aloud strategy promotes active listening and speaking skills because learners listen attentively to information being read resulting in comprehension. Moreover, fluency is developed when learners verbalize words. Read aloud shows relationship between printed words and meaning when proper pronunciation relates to sounds represented. In tandem with the findings of this study, Yildrim et.al, (2017), found learners who had developed word recognition skills arrived at comprehension. Word recognition skills are crucial in developing fluency in reading which enhances comprehension because learners do not regress on words or phrases.

When learners rehearse scripts to be performed in the classroom, repeated reading is frequently used resulting in proper inflection in sentences and words. In addition, learners practice to phrase read and pause appropriately for meaning. Exposure to same reading several times enables learners familiarize with words and sentence structures resulting in fluency. Similar results were observed by Chang and Millett (2013), whereby learners achieved comprehension due to increase in fluency. Furthermore, comprehension is enhanced when learners share reading during performance and teachers model accurate reading. Shared reading facilitates development of fluency because learners repeat what has been observed in other similar readings. Furthermore, comprehension is achieved when teacher models reading and provide appropriate reading strategies. Provision of reading strategies enable learners activate background knowledge. The findings support observations by Karabag (2015), when learners arrived at comprehension because they enjoyed group reading of scripts. This implied that learners developed interest reading which was not a hindrance to understanding information relayed by the author.

Reading Skills Achievement Test Results

The study established pre-test and post test results in descriptive statistics illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for pre-test and post test

	Pre-test				Post test			
	Mean	Std. deviation	95% confidence interval level for mean		Mean	Std. deviation	95% confidence interval level for mean	
			Lower	Upper			Lower	Upper
Experimental	38.6	10.625	18	68	46.0	7.226	32	70
Control	37.8	10.141	15	67	43.3	7.833	26	66

The study findings illustrated in Table 3 reveal that the experimental group scored a mean M= 38.61 % (n=205), in the pre-test and M= 46.0 (n=205) in the post test. On the other hand, the control groups scored a men M= 37.87% (n=221), and a M= 43.3 (n=221) in the post test. Since the mean for experimental groups was higher than control groups, the study further sought to establish significant differences among the two study groups by conducting a t test. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. T-Test for Posttest

		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

The t test results revealed a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups. The null hypothesis was rejected because t (424) =3.738, p= 0.00 portraying that adapting and performing scripts enhanced comprehension.

Conclusion

The study revealed a statistically significant difference in the post test scores indicating adapting and performing scripts contributed to the better scores in the post test. Integration of English language skills such as oral and writing skills during reading instruction should be viewed as a valuable strategy. Adapting scripts triggers active learning when learners read deep in the text to come up with the information to be written in scripts. Interacting deep with the text guarantees comprehension. On the other hand, fluency is enhanced when scripts are performed because of repeated reading from teacher modelling. These activities facilitate a learner centered class through active engagement in the reading process. In agreement with the findings of the study, adapting and performing scripts integrates language skills in the reading classroom and should be practiced to enhance comprehension among secondary school learners. Besides curriculum developers

should provide adequate materials for building fluency during reading instruction. Furthermore, a similar study may be conducted to establish other language skills strategies to be integrated with reading skills during instruction.

References

Abdelaal, N. M., & Sase, A.l. S. (2014). Relationship between prior knowledge and reading comprehension. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *5*(6)125-131.

Adams, T., Farris, W., Patterson, R., Santiago, C. & Secrist, J. (2007). The effect of reader's theater on the comprehension and fluency of Spanish language learners whose first language is English: A short case study in the san Bernardino city unified school district. Retrieved on 20 July 2016 from http://www.emunllo.org

Al-Haq, F., & Al-Sobh, A. (2010). The effect of a web-based writing instructional EFL program on enhancing the performance of Jordanian secondary students. *ALT CALL*, *6*(3), 189–218

Alshehri, M. (2014). Improving reading comprehension for Saudi students by using the reading aloud strategy. Retrieved on 14 April 2016 from http://www.dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu

Chang, C-S., & Millett, S. (2013). Improving reading rates and comprehension through timed repeated reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *25*(2), 126–148.

Holt, K.R. (2015). Connection of reading motivation and comprehension: elementary teachers' beliefs and perceptions. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin.

Jeon, M. J., & Lee, D. (2013). The effects of using creative readers' theater scripts on primary English education. *Primary English Education*, 31-56.

Kabilan, M., & Kamaruddin, F. (2010). Engaging learners' comprehension, interest and motivation to learn literature using the reader's theatre. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *9*(3), 132-159.

Karabag, G. S. (2015). Secondary school students' opinions about readers' theatre. *European Journal of Eucational Research*, 14-21.

Karanja, W. (2015). Effects of reading difficulties on academic performance among form three students in public secondary schools, Kiambu County, Kenya. Unpublished MED thesis, Kenyatta University.

Klinger, J., Urbach, J., Golos, D., Brownell, M., & Menon, S. (2010). Teaching reading in the 21st century: A glimpse at how special education teachers promote reading comprehension. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *33*(2), 59-74.

Lopes, J., Silva, M. M., Moniz, A., Spear-Swerling, L., & Zibulsky, J. (2015). Prosody growth and reading comprehension: A longitudinal study from 2nd through the end of 3rd grade. *Revista de Psicodidactica, 20*(1), 5–23. doi: 10.1387/RevPsicodidact.11196

Maingi, J. M. (2015). Language teachers' perceptions and practices in enhancing learners' strategy use for reading proficiency in selected secondary schools in

Kenya. Doctoral dissertation, Kenyatta University. Retrieved from https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke

Merga, M. (2017). Interactive reading opportunities beyond the early years: What educators need to consider. *Australian Journal of Education, 61*(3) , 328–343.

Mwoma, T. (2017). Children's reading ability in early primary schooling: Challenges for a Kenyan rural community. *Issues in Educational Research, 27*(2), 347- 364.

Pettersen, S. R. (2013). A case study of a content-based readers theatre project in an 8th grade EFL class in Norway, MED Thesis. Retrieved on May 2016, from brage.bibsys.no/.../148009.

Piper, B.,Schroeder.,& Trudell.B. (2016). Oral reading fluency and comprehension in Kenya: Reading acquisition in a multilingual environment. *Journal of Research in Reading, 39*(2), 133–152.

Protacio, M.S., (2012). Reading motivation: A focus on English learners. international literacy association. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.01092

Rahman, A. (2014). Reading comprehension through group work activities in an EFL classroom: An action research report. *Working Papers on Culture, Education and Human Development, 10*(2), 1-8.

Sattar, S., & Salehi, H. (2014). The role of teaching reading strategies in enhancing reading comprehension. *International Journal of Current Life Sciences , 4*(11), 10922-10928.

Sinambela, S. (2017). Prosody as a tool for assessing reading fluency of adult ESL students. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *8*(6), 83-87.

Tsou, W. (2011). The application of readers theatre to FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools) reading and writing. *Foreign Language Annals, 44*(4), 727- 748.

Visser, T. E., & Edge, C. (2013). The effect of reader's theater on the reading comprehension, fluency and motivation of the elementary English language learning student. Northern Michigan University: Unpublished Master Thesis. Retrieved on 14 May 2016 from http://www.Northern Michigan University files

Yildirim, K., Rasinski, T., & Kaya, D. (2017). Fluency and comprehension of expository texts in Turkish students in grades four through eight. *Educational and Science (Egitim ve Bilim), 42*(192) , 1-12.

Young, C. & Nageldinger, J. (2014). Considering the context and texts for fluency: Performance, reader's theatre, and poetry. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 7*(1), 47–56.