

## **ABSTRACT**

The significance of reading skills in the development of English as a second language cannot be underrated. The Kenyan secondary schools curriculum for English requires a student to have developed competence in reading skills by the time they sit for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations at form four. However, some students do not meet the standards which are required by the Kenyan secondary schools English curriculum even though they have done the fourth form final examinations. A good number of studies have been done in the primary schools. This study assessed reading skills development from a psycholinguistic perspective in selected public secondary schools in Emuhaya Sub-County in Western Province. The specific objectives were to: describe fluency, decoding and comprehension strategies used by teachers in developing reading skills of learners ; determine the effectiveness of the strategies used by teachers in the development of learners' reading skills ; assess the effectiveness of fluency, decoding and comprehension strategies used by learners and examine the reading skills preferences the learners make. The study assessed the reading skills within the framework of applied linguistics and used Psycholinguistics theory. The study used a descriptive survey design. Ten secondary schools which formed a third of the total 29 schools in the district were picked based on the noticed performance in English from 2009 and 2010 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. The performances of the schools were placed in the following strata: very good, good, average, poor, very poor. For the students' and the teachers' population, disproportionate random sampling was used. Five students were picked from each school which amounted to 50 out of a population of 1,017 form four students. One teacher of English language was purposively selected from each of the ten selected secondary schools to represent the 53 teachers in the district. The study was mainly interested in the linguistic behaviors of the students as they engaged in the process of reading skills development. Research instruments were structured questionnaires and observation schedules which were used to get information from the 10 teachers of English language and the 50 form four students. In addition, reading tasks were administered to the 50 students to assess how much of the comprehension skills had been acquired by the form four students. Data was collected and the content was analyzed in reference to the tenets of the psycholinguistic theory. The skills which were used by the teachers and learners were described and their effectiveness discussed. The study found out that intensive teaching of the psycholinguistic skills improved academic performance. In addition, well utilized metacognitive strategies boosted learners' comprehension skills. Therefore, this study recommends that more time should be allocated to intensive and extensive reading in secondary schools to enable students interact effectively with the texts. The study will benefit applied linguists, students, teachers, curriculum developers and other stakeholders.

