

Readability of the press releases of the Government of Ghana

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Abstract

Press releases are major channels through which governments communicate with the masses. Thus, press releases must be readable for effective communication. The aim of this paper was to determine the level of readability as well as the pattern of polysyllabic words in government of Ghana press releases. Sixty press releases from the ministry of communication of the government of Ghana were selected by convenience sampling. Flesch readability indexes were used to compute readability scores. Frequencies, measures of central tendencies, and one sample T-test using bootstrapping, were used to describe readability of the press releases. The results revealed that press releases by the government of Ghana, on the average, were 'difficult' to read (= 38.49; = 10.54) such that a person must have attained over 13 years of formal education in order to be able to read them (= 13.65; = 2.09). In addition, the press releases were above (more difficult) recommended reading ages (Mean Differences: Ease: = 21.52; Age: = 5.65) for public documents. Finally, majority of the press releases contained a proportion of about 15% polysyllabic words. It is recommended that government press releases be edited to use shorter words for effective public communication.

Key Words: Communication; Press Release; Readability; Readability Formula; Flesch Reading Ease; Political Communication

Introduction

Political communication, defined as government activities aimed at conveying information to the media and the public, is an essential government function with the potential to influence significantly citizens' perceptions of government performance (Hong, 2016). Communication takes place in every aspect of government, including the city, assemblies, state, and national levels. Researchers generally agree that political communication is an important function of political organizations (Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012). According to Larsson (2012), government communication, like any political communication, is to a large extent performed and disseminated via the media, and this has become more pervasive during the last two or three decades. However, there has been declining public trust in governments and increasing negative political coverage in the media. This situation further makes political communication important (Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997). Government communication exists to serve the information needs of a democracy, to help citizens make informed decisions, and to provide a mechanism for accountability of public agencies (Graber, 2003;

Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012). Various governments apply a vast array of tactics (press releases, stakeholder consultations, polling, branding, advertising) to achieve those objectives (Glenn, 2014). Amongst these, the fundamental tool in various governments' communication tools has been press releases (Fitch & Jack, 2012). The primary goal of press release is to convince reporters to do a story. As Berger (2005, p1) put it, "The purpose of a press release is to get the attention of a reporter who is looking for a story to write for a newspaper, television or radio program." Berger (2005, p1) adds that the primary audience of press release is 'a hungry, busy reporter who has a deadline and is searching for a piece to write. Think of this hungry reporter as you write your press release.' However, press release has evolved into a communication tool that is read by more than just mainstream media. Brown (2019) opined that bloggers, policy experts, even the public, rely on press releases for the basic – and often definitive – information on public policy. For this reason, communication professionals must consider all potential readers of this fundamental communication tool.

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Brown (2019) defined a press release as a 400 to 600-word news statement regarding your business, government or individual that is shared with the media to generate positive news coverage. Berger (2005) describes press release as a one-page statement about an aspect of an organization that is interesting, exciting or noteworthy. For press release to be effective, they are to “be retold as accurately as possible, preferably even verbatim, in news reporting” (van Dijk, 2006, p4). It has been indicated elsewhere that the fate of press releases is determined through the goodwill of journalists, and only if they could accept the style and content selected for publication by the company’s press release writer would the press release be published. In a fast-paced world, reporters need to review information quickly. A press release should tell a reporter in one or two sentences whether the story is worth pursuing. Therefore, the quality of writing is paramount. The quality of writing, depends on a number of things. Readability is one aspect. This defines how easy it is to read and comprehend a press release.

Despite the many readability studies that have been undertaken since the 1920’s, very few have been conducted on press releases (see Warren & Morton, 1991). The need to visit the readability of press release of Ghanaian governments is particularly important because of the many political interferences that hamper the smooth functioning of government appointees. A typical case in point is the IndependenceDay brochure ‘brouhaha’ that was not appropriately written for audience during the celebration of 2016 Independence Day. Although the government supposedly has a professional body with the responsibility of writing and editing documents from the government to the public (the information service department), political interference disrupted the process. The result was an error-ridden brochure which was a source of great embarrassment to the nation. Since nonprofessional hands can find their way into writing of governments documents (as in the case described), it implies that press release could possibly be written by non-professionals. The effect could be among other things, the writing of difficult to read press release.

Yet, no study has yet given attention to this possibility.

In attempting to fill the information gap, the following research questions will therefore guide this study:

1. What is the level of reading comprehension difficulties of government press releases in Ghana when measured in terms of Flesch readability index?

2. What is the pattern of polysyllabic words in government press release in Ghana?

Readability and readability indexes

A comprehensive discussion of readability and related indexes have been documented by Bailinand Grafstein (2016) and many other authors. In brief, readability relates to the text’s inherent capability of being read quickly and easily (Schroeder & Gibson, 1990). It also inherently involves the ability to understand the read text easily. Yet, the concept of text comprehension is not an easy construct to measure. Hence, readability formulas have been developed as proxies for this purpose. A readability formula is a mathematical expression on a text, based primarily on sentence and word length, and results in a numerical score which is used to measure the corresponding readability. Readability formulas have been applied in a variety of technical reports in areas such as education, medicine, communication, politics, and law. Their implementation is not only simple, quick, and inexpensive (Curtis, 1986) but passive which means reader participation is not required (Jones, 1988). Most formulas are based on two variables—a word (semantic variable) and a sentence (syntactic variable)—that predict how readable a text will be (Curtis, 1998). The resulting scores can be interpreted against a scale of difficulty (Jones, 1988), and some formulas provide information about the level of education that the reader should have for easy reading (Schroeder & Gibson, 1990).

While more than 200 readability formulas exist to assess the readability of texts (Nordquist, 2016), some are favoured by researchers and commentators over others. These include the Dale–Chall formula, the Flesch formula, the Flesch–Kincaid formula, the Fog formula and the Cloze procedure (Curtis, 1986; Schroeder & Gibson, 1990; Leavy et al., 2011). Although others are not so much popular and used by researchers, these seemingly unknown indices have used different approaches of measurement. These include the automatic readability index (ARI), Coleman-Liau index, among others. These formulas use other features of a sentence such as number of characters per word instead of syllable per word. In all, however, the Flesch Reading Ease and related grade level are among the simplest and most accurate measures of language difficulty (DuBay, 2007) used in studies in different fields.

Empirical studies

Readability of Newspapers

Press releases in general, and in the context of political communication, has received little attention. However, many studies have dealt with the readability of the eventual destination of press releases – newspapers. Warren and Morton (1991) have listed, in chronological order, nine studies on the readability of newspapers. On average, the readability of the nine newspapers were suitable for 12th graders (see Warren & Morton, 1991). Similarly, Hart (1993) points out that many newspaper stories have readability scores of 13 or higher, and these scores exceed the reading ability of the average U.S. adult. Likewise, Bodle (1996) compared the readability levels of a sample of student newspapers with a sample of private-sector papers. He found that the private-sector dailies had a higher score than the students' papers. A point noteworthy is that, because of the different legal and economic conditions between countries, the results of previous studies in other countries cannot be generalized to different contexts (Moreno & Araceli, 2015).

With this in mind, Fosu (2014) investigated the readability and comprehensibility of English language newspapers in Ghana. His study attempted to discover the extent to which Ghanaian readers find the language of the newspapers easy or difficult to comprehend. He established that the language used to communicate socio-political news to readers is complex and difficult for a significant proportion of readers across the educational categories of the country. With just a handful of studies on readability within the political communication context, additional studies are necessitated.

Readability of Press Releases

Press release is a reliable information source from an organization, government or individual for media organization as well as the public in general. Mantovani, Crovato, Pinto, Mascarello, Cortelazzo and Ravarotto (2017) posit that press releases issued by official sources represent the product of information or communication before it becomes a news story; that is, the "first-hand" information directed at the media before it is processed and adapted for use by the public. Hence, Mantovani et al. (2017) defined press release as informative texts that are constructed according to specific editorial and stylistic criteria with the purpose of providing all the necessary information about a given event in a complete, clear, and exhaustive manner to ensure that the content is effectively understood by a specific audience. In terms of the sources of press releases,

Mantovani et al. (2017) asserted that press releases are typically sent by public or private organizations to the news media with the aim of informing the general public. The authors added that press releases can serve institutional or commercial purposes, and their goal is to reach a specific target of users.

Schwartz, Woloshin, Andrews, and Stukel (2012) asserted that independent news rating website concluded that up to a third of health news stories relied enormously on press release. Therefore, Schwartz et al. (2012) investigated how the quality of press release in health journals affect the quality of news stories on health issues in newspapers. Schwartz et al. (2012) discovered that press releases issued by medical journals were associated with higher quality reporting in subsequent newspaper stories. In a detail manner, Schwartz et al. (2012) found that when medical journals contain basic information such as absolute risk, harms, and limitations in medical journal press release; the possibility of reporters capturing that in their stories is higher than when such information was missing from the press release or if no press release was issued at all. Also, the authors discovered that poor quality press release were worse than no press release being issued because they lacked basic information that can improve the quality of news stories. Schwartz et al. (2012) concluded that high quality press releases are a simple way for medical journals to increase the chance of newspapers receiving key information.

In as much as Schwartz et al.'s (2012) work revealed the quality relationship between news stories and medical press releases, the authors did not define what make a poor medical press release. Even though a poor-quality press release in their study context will be a release that lack basic health information, there is no guarantee that if that information is not readable it will be useful to the media. Therefore, the current study takes the study on press release further from content of press releases to the readability of the content that is in the press release.

As argued by Woloshin and Schwartz (2010), press releases are the primary means through which journals communicate with journalists. The co-authors studied press releases of nine medical journals and found that 23% of the press releases mentioned study limitations and 65% quantified study results, but 22% of the press releases stated the facts. The authors, therefore, concluded that the findings of medical journals' press releases are what journalist based on to inform the public on health issues. This means that press releases are valuable sources of information for the media to

compose credible information. Therefore, improving the readability of press releases will make the press releases very readable and useful to the journalist and consequently the public. The researchers (Schwartz et al., 2012; Woloshin & Schwartz, 2012 etc) in the area of press releases on health issues did not explore how the technical words, medical jargons as well as sentence structures of the medical press release could affect understanding of journalist and respectively the news stories of the journalist. In general perspective, the linguistic complexity of press releases rising from the sentence and word length as well as other linguistic features could affect the general public readership and understanding of government of press release. The current study delves into the readability of government press release.

In this light, Mantovani et al. (2017) conducted an analysis of the descriptive demographic features, stylistic and editorial variables and then lexicographic analysis of the textual variables of veterinarians press releases. The authors discovered that press releases were found to have a moderate level of readability due to the use of scientific and technical terms. Mantovani et al. (2017) concluded that there is the need to improve training activities to develop effective risk communication, especially in terms of the language used, in order to facilitate interactions among veterinarians, mass media, and citizens. While the work of the co-authors did only textual analysis to arrive at the conclusion that the press releases were moderately readable, the current study uses reliable readability metrics to determine the readability of press releases of government.

According to Smith (2017) 'press releases, in particular, are the lifeblood of the industry. Smith added that press releases are official statements organizations distribute to the media about past or upcoming events, issues or changes. To the author, PR professionals must do everything in their power to ensure their press releases are published and read. One area that Smith (2017) recommends PR professionals to focus on is the readability of the press release. To him, the readability of the documents must be matched with the target audience reading grades in order to aid readers in understanding the press release. In suggesting ways to make press releases readable, the author states that public relations professionals who write press releases should use both long and short sentences, edit the grammar, ensure good content and write in a feature style. To the author, these variables improves the readability of a press releases accordingly. Even though the author did not recommend using readability metrics to

determine readability of press releases, the assertion of sentence structures as a way to improve readability sync with traditional notion of sentence structures as major course of reading difficulty. As relevant as the Smith's (2017) study is to area of readability of press release, there is still a chunk of government press releases with their readability not being investigated. This study is a maiden study on readability of government of Ghana press releases.

In much close to the current study, Gyasi (2017) studied the readability of press releases of two major political parties in Ghana, thus National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party. The author asserted that press releases are used by political parties as effective communication tool to defend against misinformation as well as provide credible information for the public. In terms of readability, the Flesch reading ease analysis of the 70 sampled press releases of the two political parties by the researcher revealed that the press releases were difficult to read. With regards to how the grade level required by readers to find press releases readable and understandable, Gyasi (2017) discovered that the NPP press releases required readers to have attained 12 years (Final year in secondary school) of formal education while the NDC press releases required readers to have attained 13 years (first year in University) of formal education. The author concluded that the readability of the press of the two major political parties were not statistically different hence each of the parties needed to work on their press releases to make them readable.

The current study moved from political parties to government press releases readability. While political parties press releases are emanating from political parties' secretariat or PR unit; the government press releases are mostly issued by PR unit or PR professionals of government departments in the country. Unlike political parties press releases which may be politically inclined and motivated; the government press releases are public inclined and motivated in order words government press releases seek the public interest. It is therefore, vital that such press releases be readable and understandable since they are the basis for the public to make decisions.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Aristotle's theory of rhetoric as a theoretical framework. The meaning of the theory, its modes and the possible application of the theory is considered below.

Meaning of Aristotle's theory of rhetoric

Aristotle informed modern day public speaking speeches and the area of rhetoric. He was a researcher, politician and great contributor to politics. Aristotle theory of rhetoric is based on the idea that a good persuasion requires a proper mixture of reasons, emotions and ethics (McCormack, 2014). Aristotle divided persuasive discourse into three categories: logical argument (logos), emotional arguments (pathos), and ethical appeal or credibility (ethos). These three categories have since been commonly referred to as Aristotle's three modes of proof. In organizational communication, audiences are interested in listening to something worthwhile. A communication that is not a product of this modes of persuasion may fail to appeal to publics leading to ineffective communication. As already established by Gyasi (2017), press releases are effective communication tool for political parties and for that matter organizations. Aristotle's theory has been used in law, politics, psychology among others (McCormack, 2014), it has proved to be useful in communication especially organizational communication. A good knowledge of the modes, thus logos, ethos and pathos, is relevant in understanding the theory and its use.

Modes of Persuasion

A good theory usually come with concepts that help to decipher the phenomenon the theory seeks to explain. The concepts help to understand the scope of the theory. Aristotle used the concepts of Logos, Ethos and Pathos to describe the concept of rhetoric. Logos is a Greek word which means knowledge, ethos is also a Greek word meaning moral or character, and lastly pathos is Greek word meaning emotions. According to Jamar (2002), **Logos** seems to be the most widely promoted, accepted, and sought-after mode of persuasion in most fields. As argued by McCormack (2014) that stemming from the emphasis on logical appeals that has saturated the legal profession, some legal theorists have argued that legal rhetoric has transcended classical rhetoric in favor of a more logical, rationality-based form of discourse. Logos is based on the use of reasons, figures, facts, explanations, illustration and many other ways of credible information to persuade audience. Logos involves presenting information in a logical and organized manner that is devoid of credibility issues. In organizational communication, an organization can achieve logos by researching on a topic, providing enough evidence to back up claims and avoiding fallacious argument. While the aspect of providing adequate content to achieve logos is well thought out, the issue

presenting the content in a much readable and understandable fashion is equally essential to readability studies. It is therefore important to see the communicative component of using logos which is to present credible and concrete information in a very simple and intelligible manner for audience. Ensuring logos in organizational communication is a best way to improve communication in order to achieve effective communication with the public, however, how effective will the logos in the communication be if the content is not readable?

Also, ethos is another mode of persuasion proposed by Aristotle. According to Frost (1994), Aristotle recognized the inherent truth that we believe good men more fully and more readily than others. As Mootz (1998) reechoed that this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. To researchers, therefore, in a case where there is no definite logical outcome, or even in the case where there may or may not be such an outcome, the audience's perception of the credibility of the persuader plays a key role in whether persuasion is achieved (Mootz, 1998). Ethos, therefore, involves the credibility of the speaker. How the speaker is perceived can influence the message of the organization. Personality, therefore, communicates in every business communication. Frost (1994) opined that audience move beyond the message to the person behind the message.

Also, ethics involve establishing sound use of moral logic. It involves using ethical principles such as duties, religious principles and many more to inform argument or communication. An organization can, therefore, have a logos, but if ethics of the message is missing the message effectiveness will be mild. As observed by Kadoch (2000) that theorists have emphasized the importance and superiority of logic and rationality in a communication setting. Kadoch (2000) making reference to Aristotle's words presents that, "it is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses." Therefore, achieving ethos in communication is sure way to have effective communication with publics. Though ethos bothers on organization's image, there is a possibility that an organization that communicates in a clear, logical and readable fashion can win the hearts of publics to the organization's communication than organizations that communicate otherwise.

Again, Aristotle identified pathos as a mode of persuasion. As stated by McCormack (2014), "Our everyday experiences leave little doubt that our emotions can influence the decisions we make, much as the outcome of our decisions can influence the emotions we experience. Citing Mitchell (2002), McCormack asserted that Aristotle recognized this fact, noting, while introducing the pathos mode of proof, that "persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgments when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile." It is clear from these sentences that persuasion is not without emotional touch. Emotions express our inner state of mind and thought. A serious communication that does not include the expressing of emotion and the use of emotional inclusive language may fail to appeal to publics (Dan, 1999). Lack of emotions may strip communication of its credibility and authenticity. With emotions, publics are brought to the organization's point of view easily, they are made to understand the feeling behind the logos and ethos. Therefore, using emotions in communication to achieve effectiveness is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of skillfulness in the use language for effective communication.

As much as Aristotle's theory of rhetoric is applicable in various domains such as legal, public speaking and many others, the present study situates the theory in political communication. First, in its application for effective communication in government, Aristotle's theory of rhetoric demands that message have the logos. This means that political communication that seeks to end in the minds of publics and make impact should be logically presented with facts, figures, illustrations and explanations. However, the facts, figures, illustrations are variables that can impact readability if not properly handled. Second, the theory is a guide to the researcher in making sense of how readability of government press releases can affect Aristotle's logos mode. Also, the theory is relevant to guide the researcher in understanding how press releases as part of the promotional mix of government organization can employ the modes of persuasion with readability in mind to achieve effective communication.

Method of Study

The aim of this paper was to evaluate readability in descriptive terms. Descriptive design was used because descriptive study does not establish associations between variables (Blessing & Amaresh, 2009); rather, it seeks to describe the phenomenon of study to enhance understanding

and draw recommendations. Descriptive research involves identification of attributes of a particular phenomenon based on an observational basis (Skovsmose & Marcelli, 2004). Since the current study used readability index, Flesch reading ease as the analytical tool, the authors decided to adopt quantitative measures such as graphs, tables to help present the readability scores for easy presentation and interpretation of results. This made the study non-experimental descriptive study which used quantitative tools to interpret data and explain the phenomenon of study.

The target population consisted of all press releases of the government of Ghana. This allowed for press releases from different ministries under the same government. This introduced some variability in the press release, and thus helped to draw balanced conclusions from the results. Convenience sampling technique was employed as the sampling procedure for this study. A convenience sample is a sample that uses individuals or sample units that are readily available rather than those that are selected to be representative or selected via a probabilistic mechanism (Li, 2008). The choice of convenience sampling procedure was informed due to the fact that the sample frame is very large (all press releases of government). There is no evidence that all press releases by the government are readily available to researchers. Hence, not all press releases from the government were available for inclusion if probability sampling procedure was to be used. In all, 60 press releases were obtained as the sample size for this study. This offered current data which helped to draw valid conclusions.

Electronic copies (PDF) of 60 press releases were obtained from the ministry of communication. The text within each press release were then copied into an online readability calculator to calculate its readability (www.usingenglish.com). This online calculator was used because it is very accurate and popular. Microsoft's Word processor was not used to compute the readability scores because of its inability to compute Flesch Reading Ease (FRE) beyond 12.

Flesch reading ease and Flesch-Kincaid grade level (FKGL) were used to calculate readability scores. The FRE and FKGL were used because they are among the most popular, reliable and recommended indices for grading the readability of written materials (DuBay, 2004). In addition, earlier studies on readability of news releases used the FRE and FKGL. Hence, for comparison purposes, the FRE and FKGL have been employed.

With the help of IBM Statistical Products and Services Solutions (SPSS) version 23.0, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to describe readability, and the number of years required to read the press releases of the government press releases (Research question 1 & 2). In addition, one sample T-test using bootstrapping technique was used to determine whether there were differences in the reading ease and the school years required to read, compared to standard scores (Research question 1).

Bootstrapping is an efficient way to ensure that analytical models are reliable and will produce accurate results, and was employed in both the one-sample and independent sample t-tests. It can be used to test the stability of analytical models and procedures found throughout the SPSS Statistics product family, including descriptive, means, and many others. For the one sample t-test, bootstrapping was performed for samples of 1000 to ensure robust estimates of significant or p-value, standard errors and the confident intervals (Tabachnick&Fidell, 2013), when t-test, was significant. This was to ensure robust estimates for the mean differences and significant test. To achieve this, Bias corrected and accelerated (BCa) intervals were used since it ensures adjusted intervals that are more accurate (IBM, 2013). Mersenne Twister Random Number Generator was set to replicate a sequence of random numbers. This helped to preserve the original state of the random number generator and restore that state after the analysis was completed. The stratified method was used during the bootstrapping resampling with replacement.

Results and Discussion

Research question 1: *What is the level of reading comprehension difficulties of government press releases in Ghana?*

The sampled sixty (60) press releases were run in online readability software to generate the Flesch reading ease scores and Flesch Kincaid grade level scores. This is because the Flesch reading ease scores are interpreted on the basis that the higher the score the easier the text is to read, and the lower the score the difficult the text is to read and understand. Therefore, considering the press releases on the Flesch Reading scale, they were all 'difficult' to read, on the average (= 38.49; = 10.54). The easiest to read was graded as 'fairly difficult'. This finding is consistent with several other studies that have been reviewed by (Warren & Morton, 1991).

According to DuBay (2004), a flesch reading ease score of 60 to 70 is considered as standard and appropriate for the public but a score below

fifty (50) is difficult to read. From the results, it was clear that none of the press releases scored a standard Flesch reading score. This implies that the press releases were not appropriate for public readership. Even though the press releases contained vital information, the readability of the press releases can negatively affect the readers' understanding. According to Aristotle's theory of Rhetoric, the logos which is the reasons and facts must be enough to persuade the audience. In this case, even though the press releases were content wise adequate, the readability of the content can affect readers' understanding of the content. This is possible in that studies of health press releases have shown that when the press releases are not readable, the readers tend to find it difficult to understand the text (Mantovani et al., 2017). Also, previous study on press releases by Gyasi (2017) revealed that difficult to read press releases are not easily intelligible to readers. Therefore, the current study posits that the readability of the press releases can affect the use of the press releases as government communication tool to reach the public.

Also, the researcher used the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL) readability formular in order to find out the number of years of formal education readers require in order to find the press releases readable. Table 1 describes FKGL scores of 60 press releases of government of Ghana. The readability was measured using the FKGL readability index. FKGL readability index measures the number of years of formal education a reader requires to find a text readable. This prediction is based on translation of the text difficult to read level from the Flesch reading ease to grade level score. The FKGL assigns 1 to 20 with the highest score demanding high number of years of formal education. Based on the FKGL, a person must have attained, on the average, over 13 years of formal education in order to be able to read and understand the press releases of government (= 13.65; = 2.09). The least difficult press release required 9th graders (JHS leavers) to find it difficult to read. The most difficult press release required roughly 17th graders (college graduates). Cutts (2013) recommended that the readability level of news items for the public should be 7 to 8 years of education. Anything above 12 is considered too hard for most people to read. The results thus indicate that the news releases of the Government of Ghana are apparently beyond standards. Inferring from Aristotle's modes of persuasion, it is very possible that such press releases are most likely to be inappropriate as communication tool to persuade the public on government initiatives or stand on

key issues in the nation. The researcher therefore, argues that for the press releases to achieve their

information role, there is the need for government to consider the readability of the content.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics of readability scores of news releases of NPP and NDC.*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FRE	60	23.37	58.36	38.49	10.54
FKGL	60	9.81	16.94	13.65	2.09

To further understand the statistics of the readability of the press releases, Table 2 presents a one sample T-test to compare readability of the news releases to the ‘standard’ level recommended elsewhere (FRE = 8; FKGL = 60) (see Cutts, 2013). The results showed that the press releases of government were above recommended reading

ages (Mean Differences: FRE: = 21.52; FKGL: = 5.65). The effect size for FRE was found to be ‘large’ for both FRE (effect size = 0.8) and FKGL (0.8). These findings corroborate what has been found by earlier researchers (see Warren & Morton, 1991).

Table 2: *Bootstrapped for one sample T-test for readability of news releases of NPP and NDC.*

Readability Index											
FGKL						FRE					
MD	Bias	Std. Error	Sig.	95% CI		MD	Bias	Std. Error	Sig.	95% CI	
				Lower	Upper					Lower	Upper
5.65	-.62	.26	.0001	5.14	6.16	-21.52	-.06	1.29	.0009	-24.03	-18.88

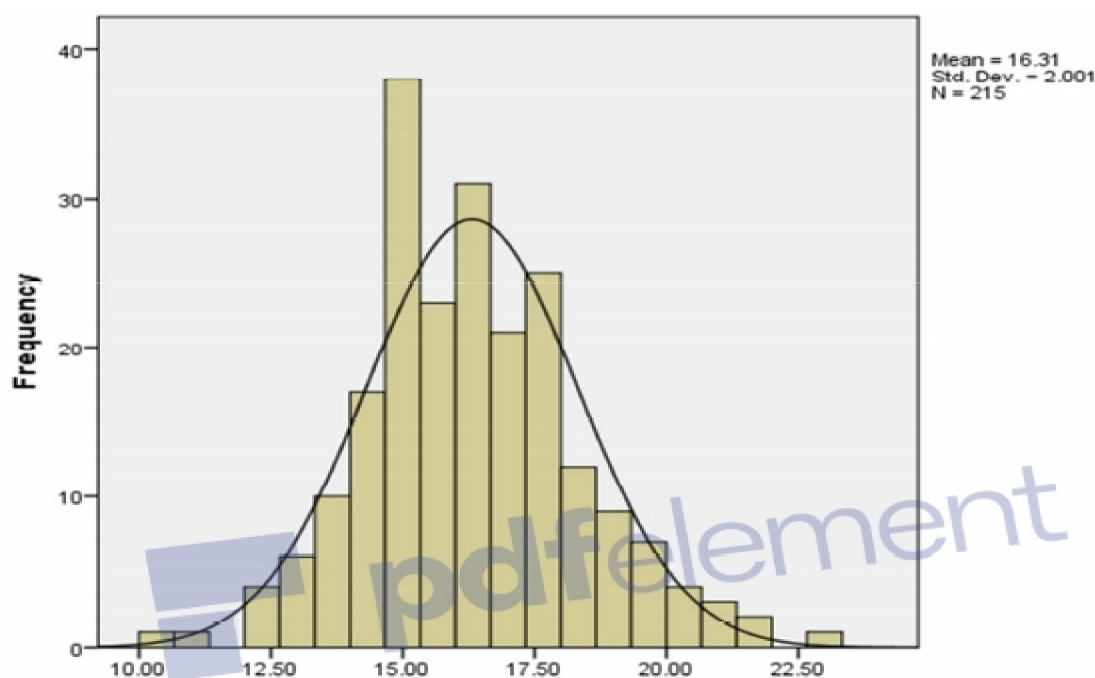
The findings from the one sample t-test confirmed that the readability of press releases by the government of Ghana were above the standard level for most of the populace to read. The likelihood that the masses will understand, even in the event that the mass media publishes these releases, is doubtful. In the UK and US, where majority of the populace are educated, it is indicated that the reading level of majority is at 8th grade (Cutts, 2013). In Ghana, the education demography shows a smaller number of people are educated. Most probably then, the reading level of majority will fall below 8th grade. Hence, for these parties to pitch their press releases on an average of around 13th graders defeat the purpose for which they are disseminated.

This is especially serious since majority of the populace of Ghana are uneducated or very less educated individuals. As a result, it is likely that majority of the populace will fall on commentaries by radio analyst of political talk shows to understand what is put in the public domain by these government institutions. Unfortunately, several of the political commentators, even so-called moderators, of political talk shows have their own political leanings. Especially for radio

stations that broadcast such political commentaries in the vernacular languages, exaggerations and even outright falsehood are churned out. Mostly, radio stations broadcasting their talk shows in English are relatively balanced in their reportage. Since majority of Ghanaians cannot read, especially at an advance level, these press release will most probably cause a challenge. Hence, the intent of news releases by any of these parties could easily be misconstrued and carried to the public domain. This necessitates that the press releases of government are edited for readability before been put into the public domain.

Research question 2: *What is the pattern of polysyllabic words in government press release in Ghana?*

Polysyllabic words reduce readability of a text. This is based on the assumption that the longer a word, the more complex the word is likely to be. Therefore, readability formulae estimate the number of polysyllabic words in order to predict the reading difficulty level of a sampled text. The histogram following presents the frequency distribution of polysyllabic words in the sampled data.



Polysyllabic Words Percentage

Figure 1 shows percentage of polysyllabic words frequency distribution for the 60 press releases of government of Ghana. It is observed that the distribution of frequency of percentage of polysyllabic words per press release exhibited trimodality. That is, three conspicuous 'peaks' are observed in the histogram. The first was on the 15% multisyllabic words. This had the highest modal class, suggesting that majority of the press releases contained a proportion of about 15% polysyllabic words. The second modal class was recorded on the 16.5% mark, and a third one on the 17.5% polysyllabic components. However, a close inspection (suggested by Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) of the histogram (see fig 1) suggest a normal distribution. Hence, it is concluded that the distribution of the polysyllabic words was normally distributed.

The mean percent polysyllabic words of the 60 press releases were somewhat small ($M = 16.31$, $SD = 2.001$). Probably then, the percentage of multisyllabic words in the press release was not a major determining factor of the 'difficulty' of the press release in general. Since FRE and FKGL scores are dependent on sentence length, long unending sentences will still score low marks (difficult readability) even with single syllabic words used throughout.

Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to determine the level of reading comprehension difficulties of

government press releases in Ghana, as well as the pattern of polysyllabic words in government press release in Ghana. It was found that the press releases were 'difficult' to read, on average. In addition, the distribution of polysyllabic words followed the normal distribution curve, with no skewness nor kurtosis. The researcher also discovered that the press releases were written above the standard grade level. The researcher argued that the readability of press releases can impact negatively the logos mode of persuasion in Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. Therefore, the researcher adds that for a press releases to accomplish their communicative role, there is the need to consider the readability of the content in order to make the logos mode more appealing to the readers. The researcher recommends the revision of the government press releases in order to make them readable to majority of the public.

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