

**INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING ON
THE READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE OF SENIOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CROSS RIVER STATE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Reading comprehension remains a subject of prime interest globally. This is because achievement in various subject content areas is often heavily predicated on reading comprehension. This study therefore explored the influence of teacher's assessment of learning on reading comprehension performance of senior secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria. The ex-post facto research design was employed to elicit information from 1485 respondents. Teacher assessment of learning on reading comprehension questionnaire and a test on reading comprehension for performance score were instruments used in the study. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). ANOVA and Tukey Test for pairwise comparison of the mean of students' performance scores and assessment of learning. The respondents were grouped based on the sum of the scores for the variables which was subsequently categorized as low, moderate or high. Results show that those that rated their teacher's assessment as high had the highest mean score of 20.32. The result of the ANOVA implies that teacher's assessment of students' learning influences reading comprehension performance with the major source of variation as indicated by the Tukey test seen in the high category. This study thus underscores the importance of continuous assessment of student's learning for better understanding of the actual reading comprehension abilities.

Keywords: *Secondary School Education, Reading Comprehension, Assessment of Learning*

Introduction

Education remains the instrument through which nations of the globe strive for development. It has become an axiom that no nation can rise above the educational programmes offered to her citizens. Hence, any factor that makes for better leaning should be emphasized. One of the basic objectives of Post Basic Education as it concerns secondary level is to “provide holders of the Basic Education Certificate with opportunity for education of higher level, irrespective of the gender, social status, religious or ethnic background” (FGN,2008:27). This means that teaching and learning should be intensified for the students to be equipped with the needed knowledge that will enable them move from secondary level to higher institutions. Suffice it to say that at this secondary level of education, reading comprehension is of paramount importance for quality learning to occur among the students for up-word progression to higher institutions.

Reading comprehension is an exercise a reader engages in to extract meaning out of a text. According to Hennesy (2020), it is the ability to read text, process it and understand its meaning. It relies on two interconnected abilities: word reading (being able to decode the symbols on the page) and language comprehension (being able to understand the meaning of the words and sentences). Simply put, it is reading with understanding.

Reading comprehension has been a subject of prime interest worldwide. Many theorists and professionals in the field have explored and written widely on this same subject. Oczkus (2003), Zwiers (2004), Avit, (2020), Weber, (2022) and Lastiri, (2022) have given valuable exposition on this. Their exploration ranges from the meaning of reading comprehension, the process of reading comprehension, hindrances to reading comprehension, to facilitators of reading comprehension.

Among other reasons for its prime importance is the fact that reading comprehension is not an English language phenomenon per se. Every learning experience at each level of education and at secondary school in particular relies, at one time or the other on reading comprehension for achievement in content areas. In other words, for every subject offered in secondary school, students are at one point or the other required to make sense of textual information. This agrees with Fuentes (1998) who in discussing reading comprehension in Mathematics concludes that for students to attain their potentials as mathematicians, they must learn to comprehend mathematics

texts. In addition, though reading comprehension seems to be a topic in English language, its utility transcends the English syllabus. Any short fall in students' performance in reading comprehension reverberates through the entire school curriculum.

At the same time, one may wonder why the researcher is using English Language as the yardstick for measuring reading comprehension. Though English Language no doubt demands a lot of reading comprehension, the core reason is that English language is the official language and the language of the school curriculum in Nigeria. Apart from the indigenous languages and other approved foreign languages studied in Nigerian secondary schools, every other text used in secondary school education is written in English language. If students perform poorly in the language of the school curriculum, one will naturally assume that it will definitely affect their understanding of other subjects.

Unfortunately reading comprehension has constituted a huge problem which has made it to be a subject of prime interest worldwide especially in English as second Language (ESL) situation. It has been observed that students' performance in reading comprehension has been generally poor just like Oczkus (2003) observes. According to the author, although students can decode words, they have difficulty understanding what they read.

In Nigeria, there is a general consensus by various investigators that reading comprehension is a problem (Eakle & Garber, 2004, Obiegbu, 2018). Over forty years ago, Unoh (1980) and Oba (1987) assert that Nigerian secondary school students exhibit among other disabilities in reading, poor reading comprehension as they cannot distinguish main ideas from secondary ones. They also lack the ability to separate relevant from irrelevant details, extract the gist of the passage, read between and beyond the lines. Today, the story has not changed (Obiegbu, 2018). This has huge negative implications for intellectual development of the nation of Nigeria.

One of the content areas where the reading comprehension problem is very visible is in the secondary school students' performance in English language. An excerpt of the West African Examination Council Chief Examiner's Report May/June (2003:5) on English Language shows that the subject matters of the comprehension passages tested were familiar to the candidates in their category. The summary passage in like manner discussed a familiar subject matter. However, despite efforts made to simplify the candidate's task, a good

percentage of the candidate's scored marks that were below the average expectation. In recent times the story has not changed. West African Examination Council Chief Examiner's Report May/June (2021) has it that poor performance in comprehension passages in English/French/ literature in English was a source of worry to chief examiner. It is equally important to note that comprehension section in WAEC English language examination controls approximately about 30% out the 100%. Poor performance in this section of English language may be a pointer to general poor performance in English language WAEC year after year as articulated below.

From 1997 to 2017, the average percentage credit pass In WAEC English language examination is 30.27%. This is not encouraging. In more recent times, there is some significant changes though fluctuating. From 2018-2022 WAEC English language results, the credit pass percentages are as follows: 2018 (49.98%), 2019 (26.08), 2020 (65.24%) ,2021(81.7%) and in 2022 (76.36). Though some level of improvement is recorded, it is still not so satisfying since the result has not stabilized. Therefore, there is need for the investigation.

The recognition of the huge negative implications of this problem to the intellectual development of the nation of Nigeria prompted the Federal Government to set up a committee to promote reading culture for the Nigerian populace (Oyereku, 1984). Therefore, all these and the researcher's first-hand experience of this phenomenon in the classroom have spearheaded the renaissance of interest in this study. Thus, the necessity to look into the possible cause of poor performance in reading comprehension among SS3 students.

Many factors have been raised as responsible for poor performance in reading comprehension among SS3 students in Nigeria. This has been suggested to be partly due to poor reading culture found among Nigerian students (Obiegbu, 2018). Since reading comprehension is achieved by interaction of many factors, teachers' factors too cannot be excluded.

At whatever level of education, teachers play pivotal roles in ensuring that learning occurs as they carefully interface their pedagogical principles (challenging, explaining, modelling, engaging in deliberate practice, questioning and giving feedback) with other teacher factors that have bearing on teaching and learning. One of the ways by which a teacher can validate that

learning has occurred in the student is by students' ability to certify verbally or by writing the veracity of the teacher's expected response from the taught content area. If the feedback from the students is poor, many factors could be responsible, of which reading comprehension is often queried. If it is reading comprehension issue, what factors are responsible? Teachers, students, parents etc.? For this current study, the researchers are interested in teacher factor: Teacher's assessment of learning, hence, the investigation into the influence of teacher's assessment of learning and reading comprehension of senior secondary students in Cross River state, Nigeria. The cardinal question here is: does teacher's assessment of learning influence reading comprehension?

Teacher's assessment of learning and reading comprehension according to Duncan and Dunn (1992) is the process of gathering information:- a) by teacher in the classroom about their pupils, b) by teacher about their teaching; and c) by pupils about their progress. This means that this process is very important to both the teacher and the students alike. As the teacher tries to find out how far the students are progressing and the effectiveness of his teaching, the students equally monitor their academic progress. For example, Duncan and Dunn (1992) had identified five areas a teacher can assess the students. They are: 1) the acquisition of knowledge of concepts, of principles; 2) the ability to apply concepts and principles to new situations, 3) the ability to communicate; 4) the ability to solve problems and 5) attitude to learning.

For Dundas, Henderson and Moriss (1997) and Oyinloye and Imenda (2019) these assessments of learning in the classroom are basically for formative purposes. Through these assessments, a teacher will be able to find out whether or not a child has learnt what is recently taught. When this is done, the teacher gathers information on the pupils' progress (strengths and weaknesses). Generally, a teacher assesses the pupils learning by giving assignments regularly, giving tests, making sure corrections are done with the students and providing correct answers when marking. When these are done and information is gathered, the teacher is equally ready to attend to individual students' problems or may start all over again in case the progress is not satisfactory. The aim of the whole exercise is to foster comprehension.

In reading comprehension, assessment is very important. For Zhang (2018) assessment of reading comprehension at every point is the key to students' ability to comprehension. Teachers have to assess their students' knowledge of the strategies and their meta-cognition in an informal one – on –one interview by asking those questions that will further clarify issues. For

instance, a teacher may have the students respond to either verbally or written questions as these: (a) which of the strategies taught would you like to talk about? (b) define the strategy and (c) explain how you use the strategy to help you understand what you read. The students' response will enable the teacher gather information on the students' progress. For example, if a student has difficulty defining a particular strategy or telling how that strategy helps him or her read, then the teacher will reassess his or her own teaching and find ways of providing mini-lessons on that strategy. The same process of assessment will be done until desired result is achieved.

Assessing students' works as at when due helps them to know their strengths and weaknesses. According to Taut, Valencia, Palacios, Santelices, Jimenez &Manzi (2014) it activates their desire to learn. When assessment is done and the result is there with them, they see the area they are strong and where they are weak. This in turn may influence learning. For Hoover (1997) of all the psychological principles of learning, knowledge of result seems to be the most basic in keeping students motivated. Immediate, specific knowledge of result, in addition to providing needed feedback for improved performance, has the advantage of providing an incentive toward increased effort. Furthermore, such feedback enables one to use his time more productively by minimizing needless rehearsal of that which is already known.

Commenting on the importance of immediate feedback to the students, Beaver (2001) and Fyfe &Rittle-Johnson (2016) opines that work which is returned two or three weeks after it is turned in has little appreciable impact on motivation. An even less acceptable practice is that of merely showing a letter grade. Mistakes, if they are to be avoided in the future, must be pointed out along with some indication of why they were made. Ideally, such feedback should be managed within a single class period. The implication of this is that such knowledge tends to make one to have complete knowledge of his or her past performance. This is the healthiest known form of competition.

Assessment in form of test plays important role in learning. According Pham and Renshaw (2015b), one of the most fundamental features of the individualized learning experiences is the systematic use of tests. These tests can be administered as a placement test, pre-test, self-assessment test and posttest. In other words, a teacher through administration of tests systematically, will be in a better position to understand the true position of each student academically.

For instance, the placement test is usually of a general nature. Its purpose is to determine at what level the students' learning is to be initiated. A pre-test administered just prior to the learning experience is designed to measure achievement of particular skill needed for attainment of unit objective.

Furthermore, the self-assessment test according to Hacker (2002) provides the learners with the check points which enable them to evaluate progress as they proceed through the unit. Self- assessment test is composed of such items as explaining topic sentences or giving example of topic out line etc. The students periodically refer to self- assessment items as they progress through the unit. Similar to pre-test, post-test determines if a satisfactory level of performance has been attained. If the established minimum level of performance is achieved, the students are then re-tested for an indication of further achievement. They do not progress to the next unit until the established minimum level of achievement has been attained.

Therefore, all these and the researchers' first-hand experience of this phenomenon in the classroom have spearheaded the renaissance of interest in this area and thus, the necessity to look into the possible causes of poor performance in reading comprehension among SS3 students. Consequently, this paper examined the teachers' assessment of learning viz-a'-vis reading comprehension performance of senior secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Method

The research design employed for this study is the ex-post facto design. A thousand five hundred (1500) Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students were randomly selected from 30 secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria were initially administered the questionnaire but only 1485 with complete data set were analyzed. Data were collected using Teacher assessment of learning on reading comprehension questionnaire and a test on reading comprehension for performance score were instruments used in the study. The survey elicited data on teacher variables which focused on teacher's assessment of learning.

For face validity of the instruments, three experts in Educational Test and Measurement examined the questionnaire and the reading comprehension tests, which were constructed using a table of blue print. Further-more, the test of reading comprehension was scrutinized by three English Language teachers, seasoned WAEC examiners to ascertain whether the items in the

instruments are: stated in an ambiguous way, as precise as possible, relevant to the variable under measurement, free from grammatical errors.

Moreover, the reading comprehension readability was tested using computer Microsoft Word package. This package is for testing the readability of English Language passages for second language (L2) users. The two passages have Flesch reading ease of 51.9 percent and Flesch–Kincaid level of grade 9. That is to say that the comprehension texts match the level of students in grade 9 or SS 3. Therefore, the passages were appropriate for SS3 students.

Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The respondents were grouped based on the sum of their scores of the variables in focus. The respondents' ratings were categorized as 'Low' if the scores were 1 – 8, 'Moderate' 9 – 16 and 'High' 17 – 24. The question below guided the analysis; "How does teacher's assessment of learning influence reading comprehension performance of SS3 students? One-way ANOVA and Tukey Test for pairwise comparison of the mean of students' performance scores and assessment of learning were employed. P-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

The independent variable is teachers' assessment of learning (in three groups) while reading comprehension is the dependent variable. The statistical analyses used in testing this hypothesis were One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey test. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the influence of teacher's assessment of learning on reading comprehension performance of SS3 students

Assessment of learning	N	X	SD
Low	429	6.56	1.89
Moderate	392	13.99	2.95
High	657	20.32	2.25

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	F-Critical
Between group	49352.72	2	24676.36	4415.78*	3.00
Within group	8242.63	1475	5.59		
Total	57595.35	1477			

***Significant at 0.05 level of significance**

- SS = Sum of squares.
- df = Degree of freedom.
- MS = Mean square.
- F = Symbol for ANOVA test.

The result of the data analysis showed that those students who rated their teacher’s assessment of learning as low had a mean score of 6.56, while those who rated it as moderate and high had mean scores of 13.99 and 20.32 respectively. This result implies that teacher’s assessment of students’ learning influences SS3 reading comprehension performance. Further analysis using Tukey test was employed to determine the group with major variance. The result of the Tukey test is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pairwise comparison of the mean of students’ performance scores and assessment of learning using Tukey test.

Pair	Mean difference	SE	Q	q critical	Conclusion
High Vs Low	13.76	0.147	93.61	3.314	Significant
High Vs Moderate	6.33	0.151	41.92	3.314	Significant
Moderate Vs Low	7.43	0.165	45.03	3.314	Significant

***Significant at 0.05 level of significance**

- SS = Sum of squares.
- df = Degree of freedom.
- MS = Mean square.
- F = Symbol for ANOVA test

A comparison of high and low groups showed q value of 93.61 that is greater than the q critical of 3.314. This showed that the mean of the students who rated their teacher’s assessment of learning as high (20.32) was significantly higher than the mean of those students who rated their teacher’s assessment of learning as low (6.56). Comparison of high and moderate groups showed a q of 41.92 which is greater than the critical q of 3.318. This showed that the

mean of the students who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as high (20.32) was significantly higher than the mean of those students who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as moderate (13.99). Comparison of moderate and low groups showed a q value of 43.03 which is greater than the critical q value of 3.318. This showed that the mean of the students who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as moderate (13.99) was significantly higher than the mean of those students who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as low (6.56). The Tukey test showed that the major source of variation was the group of those students who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as high. It can therefore be said that those students who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as high tended to perform better in reading comprehension than those students who rated their teacher's Assessment of learning as moderate and low. Those who rated their teacher's assessment of learning as low tended to be least in performance in reading comprehension.

Discussion

The result showed that teacher's assessment of students' learning influences SS3 students reading comprehension performance. The result indicated that students in each category of rating performed significantly different. The implication of this research finding is that the level of assessment the teacher engages in assessing students' learning influences students' reading comprehension performance. The result of the hypothesis tested is consistent with studies such as Beaver (2001), Duncan and Dunn (1992) and Zhang (2018) Oyinloye and Imenda (2019). For example, Duncan and Dunn (1992), Dundas, Henderson and Moriss (1997) and Oyinloye and Imenda (2019) made it clear that teacher's assessment of students' learning occupies a vital position in gathering information about the learner which in turn serves as the bedrock of improving students' reading comprehension performance score. In the same vein, the result is in agreement with Hoover (1997) and Taut, et al., (2014) who found out that among all the psychological principles of learning, students' knowledge of their result due to teacher's assessment of their learning seem to be the most basic principle in keeping students motivated. Considering this research finding, this seems to suggest that increase in reading comprehension performance recorded with students who perceived their teacher's engagement in assessment of learning as high could be associated with motivation.

Apart from the motivating effect of this, the reviewed literature indicates that teacher's assessment of students' learning activates their desire to learn. For

Fyfe and Rittle-Johnson (2016), a desire to learn by students is pivotal to improving reading comprehension performance. This agrees with the observation of Hoover, (1977) and Pham and Renshaw (2015b), To them when learning assessment is done as at when due, it helps students to come to terms with their strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, students' desire to improve is stirred up. This in turn gives rise to positive increase in reading comprehension performance as indicated in the finding of the study.

Pham and Renshaw (2015b,) pointed out that one of the important objectives of assessment of students' learning is for formative purpose. He indicated that a teacher needs to know the entry point of each student. As this is determined, the teacher will administer the correct learning experience to the students. This will in turn influence students' reading comprehension performance since it is generally believed that how much knowledge a student has in a particular subject area is linked to what he or she is exposed to in that particular area. Hence this lays credence to the finding in this study of the level of influence of teachers' assessment of students' learning on Students' reading comprehension performance.

In addition, this study revealed that teacher's assessment of students' learning is the nucleus of improvement in reading comprehension performance of students. This finding corroborates Oczkus' (2003) assertion that assessment of reading comprehension at every point is the key to students' ability to comprehend. This can be attributed to the fact that teachers and students alike are aware of the true position of the reading comprehension performance. For the teacher, he or she is well informed about students' reading comprehension ability which makes him or her teach what is commensurate to the level of the students. Students on their part are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. This being the case students are motivated to study for a better performance. Thus, reading comprehension performance increases as indicated in the result of the hypothesis tested.

Conclusion

Reading comprehension is plays a vital role in preparing the students for future navigation in academic performance. Teachers have a great part to play in helping the students to achieve this fit. The findings of the study show clearly that teacher's assessment of students' learning influences SS3 student' reading comprehension performance positively especially, with diagnostic and formative assessment.

Recommendations

Considering these findings, it is recommended that teachers should form the habit of continuously assessing students' learning. By so doing the teachers will have a better understanding of the actual reading comprehension abilities of the students while offering the students the opportunity of knowing their progress in reading comprehension performance.

As this exercise strengthens teacher effectiveness, it is highly recommended that it should be the major teaching technique in the classroom. This is because the teacher is well informed about students' reading comprehension ability which makes him or her teach what is commensurate to the level of the students.

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