

READABILITY LEVEL OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OBIO-AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

Dr. Abe, Ezinne Chidinma

University of Port Harcourt, Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology. Uniport. Rivers State, **NIGERIA**, Email: ezinneabe@gmail.com

&

Dr. Alfred, Dakoru Osomkume

University of Port Harcourt, Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology. Uniport. Rivers State, **NIGERIA**, Email: Osomkume1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper sought to investigate the readability level possessed by secondary school students as well as establishing a link between it and its causal factor, with a case study of selected secondary schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. To go about this, 3 objectives and research questions as well as 1 hypothesis were formulated for this. To digress further for better understanding of the variables, 3 concepts and 1 theory were reviewed in this study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study while a sample of 300 out of 1,500 population of random secondary school students was used for the study. A self-constructed questionnaire was employed for the gathering of data and the gathered data was analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Chi-squared statistical analysis. It was found out that most secondary school students do possess a moderate readability level. It was concluded that secondary school students do possess varying level of readability and these variations are simply hinged to the kind of foundational strength that each and every one of them is being exposed to at their early stage. It was recommended that parents, teachers, and other responsible bodies should endeavour to initiate a continuous good reading ability and skills in their wards from their early days to their later years. It was also recommended that students should endeavour to acclimatize themselves with materials that are relevant enough towards aiding their readability level.

Keywords: Readability and Readability Level.

INTRODUCTION

The comprehension of the material read depends largely upon the level of difficulty of the material. There can be as many levels of difficulty as there are readers. No reader is as good as others in the reading act. But for the sake of convenience the readers could be divided into three broad groups, namely, the average readers, the above-average readers and the below-average readers. This variation in the reading capacity of individuals is what is then termed as their readability level. Even with the presence of these variations as well as factors that may hinge the presence, reading is an ability that one cannot do without. This is because reading makes individuals truly free and protects them from ignorance and false beliefs (Ünal, 2010). Just as promptly quoted “it is what we know that actually works for us”. This is to say in essence that it is the amount of knowledge we assimilate and accommodate that works for us in our daily life. As knowledge is important, so does its acquisition process by which reading is one of them;

it can therefore be seen as the gateway to deriving useful and relevant information from numerous sources.

This therefore stresses how potent it is for individuals, most especially students regardless of the educational strata they belong to, to possess a good amount of readability level if they are to fully succeed in their academic endeavour and otherwise. Reading is not an activity that takes place individually but one that encompasses many events and situations (Ünal, 2010). Readability is the ease with which texts can be read and understood. It measures the ease with which someone reads understands texts or reading materials. Reading is a process of extracting meaning from a written or printed text or materials. It is the core of language learning. There is a direct correlation between reading habits of students and applications in the education system. It seems not possible to improve students' reading habits in an education system that leads students to memorise things that are taught to them. Students can improve their reading habits in a student-centred education system. In an education system like this, students not only develop their researching skills, but also they can approach events critically dealing both with himself/herself and their environment (Gömleksiz, 2004).

This is so because the more students are engaged in almost the entirety of an instructional activity, the more they are able to achieve more, thereby boosting the rate at which learning has actually taken place. And a high level of readability then qualifies these students to be placed in such position where they are needed to derive meaningful information for themselves. A student that has low level of readability cannot be seen to effectively function well in an educational institution setting or otherwise. This then set the course for this paper to investigate the readability level of students in secondary schools, with a myopic focus on selected secondary schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

There is an autonomous need for students to be highly proficient and sufficient enough to take on tasks that they may tend to encounter later in life since that is more like one of the major reason for education, and this cannot seem to be fully achieved if these students do not possess a good amount of skills that will enable them to achieve this feat and among these required skills is their readability level. But this is not forth sighted in most students thereby bringing about variations in the rate at which they learn and these variations in their readability cannot be fully ascertained as per each and every individual present in this cause and this is because each and every one of them have different factors that may tend to bring about their inability to possess a good amount of readability level. This is therefore what this study seeks to simplify through its course so as to ascertain the readability level of students in secondary schools through the linkage with the basic factor of exposure that may be responsible for this.

Aim and Objectives

To further digress on the investigation to ascertain the readability level of secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The purpose of this research is to find out the readability level of students and the acquisition of reading skills with the aim of bringing to focus the act and importance of reading in their academic pursuit. The following objectives were slated for this study:

1. Ascertain the current readability level of secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

2. Investigate the foundational strength of secondary school students towards their ability to read comprehensibly.
3. Determine the influence of the foundational strength of secondary school students towards reading on their readability level.

Research Questions

The following questions were drafted for this study:

1. What is the current readability level of secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?
2. What is the foundational strength of secondary school students towards their ability to read comprehensibly?
3. What is the influence of the foundational strength of secondary school students towards reading on their readability level?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were designed for this study:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between the foundational strength of students towards reading and their readability level

Literature Review

Some literatures are to be reviewed to further expand knowledge on the significance of having certain level of readability skills by students.

Theoretical Framework

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory

Transactional theory, as it applies to literary criticism and the teaching of literature, suggests a "reciprocal, mutually defining relationship" (Rosenblatt, 1986) between the reader and the literary text. Rosenblatt argues that the term "interaction" conjures a picture of separate objects encountering one another but remaining essentially unchanged, like billiard balls bouncing off one another, and thus is an inadequate and misleading label for the mutually shaping exchange between reader and text. That exchange--a transaction--is more accurately characterized by Annie Dillard's metaphor. She writes, "The mind fits the world and shapes it as a river fits and shapes its own banks" (1982). Transactional theory proposes that the relationship between reader and text is much like that between the river and its banks, each working its effects upon the other, each contributing to the shape of the poem.

A teacher who applies transactional theory will not view a literary experience as identical with the text from which it emerges. Rosenblatt argues for a redefinition of terms, suggesting that it is misleading to speak of the text as "poem" (which will serve here as a general term for any literary work). The text is simply ink on paper until a reader comes along. The "poem," on the other hand, is what happens when the text is brought into the reader's mind and the words begin to function symbolically, evoking, in the transaction, images, emotions, and concepts. That symbolic functioning can happen only in the reader's mind. It does not take place on the page, in the text, but in the act of reading. As Wolfgang Iser (1978) describes it, "Literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves." The text in the absence of a reader is simply print--it does not become a poem until the act of reading makes it one.

Transactional theory thus places a great deal of emphasis on the role of the reader. If meaning resides not in the text but rather in the enactment by the reader, then the discussion of literature demands consideration of the mind of the individual reader or groups of readers. It requires us

"...to see the reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as part of the on-going life of the individual and the group" (Rosenblatt, 1985).

Such a conception affirms the significance of the unique reader, suggesting that reading should not be submission to the text or an effort to suppress the personal and idiosyncratic in a search for a purified reading, uncontaminated by the reader's individuality. Transactional theory insists that the reader's individuality must be respected and considered; that readers initially understand a work only on the basis of prior experience. They cannot make sense of a text except by seeing it in the light of other experiences, other texts. The reader's background, the feelings, memories, and associations called forth by the reading, are not only relevant, they are the foundation upon which understanding of a text is built. And so transactional theory invites the reader to reflect upon what she brings to any reading, and to acknowledge and examine the responses it evokes.

Readability Level

Reading is one of the skills acquired through the teaching and learning process. It is a complex skill, which involves important perceptual components in the initial stages of learning, which in reference to this study is the comprehension and composition ability of learners. According to Omiko (2011), reading is more than being able to say the words represented by the texts because deriving meaning from the words requires that the learner understands the structure of the sentence and is also able to assign function to words within that structure. Adetunji (2007) described reading as the act of translating symbols or letters into word or sentences that have meaning to an individual. It is also the understanding of what is seen in a text, which is the ability of reader to take incoming visual information, process that information and obtain meaning from it.

This definitions can best be likened with the ability of learners to be able to not only comprehend what they have read but also capable of composing new words or grammatical syntax with it and that is what readability level is all about. At this juncture, it is then worthwhile to define readability level as the capacity with which an individual is able to assimilate and accommodate information from a given material, be it printed or otherwise. It can as well be said to be the extent to which one can decode and encode information from a given material. This definition is supported by Klare(1984) cited in Najafi (2010) who said that readability is the ease to understand or comprehend due to the style of writing adopted.

Relevance of Good Readability Level to Secondary School Students

Both reading and reading habits seems to be almost the same, but they are a bit contradictory in terms of one determining the efficacy of the other. The reading habit an individual possesses tends to determine the extent to which he/she is willing to go so as to acquire more knowledge through the process of reading. So therefore, one must seeks to first develop a good habit of reading before one can then proceed towards obtaining a good amount of readability level. Having a reading habit in students is very necessary, because one of the most important factors of education is the ability to read,

understand and critically apprehend the text (Hetting& Knapp 2001). Reading can be seen as the absorbing of information by decoding written printed symbols, in learning to read, one has to imbibe to perceive and interpret accurately all the various symbols and signs patterns that are involved in written language and to build skills that function automatically, permitting rapid absorption of sense from the printed word. The incentive to read does not depend entirely on the reader alone but on whats happening around that influences their attitude. Reading being a pre requisite to learning, needs to be engaged in constantly, this leads to the development of reading habits. Reading should be encouraged in order to foster the development of good reading habit

According to Okoro (2004) who emphasized the importance of introducing children to reading very early in life even before the child steps into school so that children can see reading as a means of enjoyment, self-development, love of literature and learning, it is widely believed that enterprise of developing reading habit has to start at the early part of one's life and that these should be a conducive reading environment to stimulate lifelong reading. This is deemed necessary because interest for a particular venture is best built at the stage when the mind is still tender. Once the interest is built, then one can gradually improve on the readability level that can be obtainable. Different types of reading were identified as reading for vocabulary development, extensive reading in any particular discipline to expand ones knowledge, intensive reading aimed at grasping the idea of a piece of work mainly for examination purposes and skimming which is searching for ideas, scanning that brings out the gist in particular parts of a work.

The readability level of an individual can be improved upon and this is hinged on the innate desire of the said individual to actually put himself/herself in the position of actually achieving this feat. The ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning and that it is an art capable of transforming life and society (Tella & Akande, 2007). Every individual is expected to possess a little idea on how to decode and encode information from any given materials because it can be seen to cut-across our everyday living. To further buttress the importance of a good amount of readability level, Yani (2003) stressed that the concept of reading habits should not be relegated to the background and this is because through reading, human beings get better informed and understanding of the universe they live on.

Reading fires children's imagination and encourages quick learning as well as widens their views, expands their horizons and helps readers learn about present times. He further stressed that reading encourages imaginations, curiosity and the ability to handle complex ideas (Potter, 2012). More so, reading makes ways for better understanding of one's own experience and can be an exciting voyage of self-discovery. Moreover, a child that forms the habit of reading is always different from his peer group at school because he becomes more knowledgeable than them and understands better than his colleagues what they are being taught in class. This is so because he/she has exposed or has been exposed to vast amount of knowledge that if carefully decoded, can serve more beneficial to him/her in the long-run. Just as the popular quote, "knowledge is power", so does the individual who places himself/herself right in the midst of relevant information is powerful, for whoever is informed seeks not to be deformed.

Factors influencing the Readability Level of Secondary School Students

The inability of students not forming a habit of reading, thereby having low readability level, could be linked to some factors. As highlighted by Nssein (2007), some of the

factors leading to low reading habit ranges from slow comprehensive rate, slow reading rate, difficulty in distinguishing main ideas from relevant details, inadequate vocabulary, inadequate reading interests, on availability of reading materials to distractions from Television, and other viewing gadgets, with each of these factors having their respective amount of influences on not just the habitual reading capabilities of individuals but also on the rate at which they tend to improve on their readability level, but the most gruesome of them all, which is not quite stated here, is the purpose to which an individual attaches to his/her reading prowess.

According to a survey carried out by Book aid international (2003) in Sonaike (2004) revealed that children in developed country reads for relaxation, while majority of children in developing countries read only for passing exams. Therefore, it is wise to state that every individual should be coerced to imbibe the system of extensive reading. This is because it has been found out to be the most effective way of developing reading skill and habit among youth in the sense that each reader will have a choice of what to read and they have more scope following their own interest: this will definitely reduce the teachers control and encourages learning to occur outside the class. This is also necessary in order to curb the deterioration of the readability level of any individual, which does not pose a good standing to such individual.

This is so because according to Fosudo (2010) in his bid to emphasize the influence of poor reading skill, said that it can make a child develop a poor attitude toward school and can create self-esteem problems later in life. However, some problems attached to the poor reading habits includes; mass failure, poverty, loss of self-esteem, and above all illiteracy. Also secondary school students must often associate reading with academic task and not for knowledge and pleasure: this does not enable the students who have the reading skill to maximize the activity for self and social development.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey design to investigate the readability level of secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population of the study consists of 1,500 students present in 4 secondary schools that were randomly selected. A sample of 300 secondary school students was selected randomly from the population with the aid of a sampling technique known as Simple Random Sampling Technique. The instrument employed for data collection was a self-designed scale of measurement. The scale was titled Readability Level of Secondary School Students Scale (RLSSSS), whose validity was determined by experts and reliability through Cronbach Alpha statistics with reliability index of 0.67. All research questions were answered with Mean and Standard Deviation statistical analysis while the hypotheses were tested for with the aid of Chi-squared at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the current readability level of secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1: Students Responses on their current readability level

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Remark
1	I can efficiently read any wordings, whether properly written or not	75	105	75	45	2.7	1.01	Accepted
2	I have quite an efficient and proactive rate of reading.	115	125	45	15	3.13	0.85	Accepted
3	I can read and comprehend information present in materials, regardless of the form in which they appear	105	135	35	25	3.07	0.89	Accepted
4	I have a strong vocabulary syntax that aid my reading ability	110	120	50	20	3.07	0.89	Accepted

Table 1 above shows students' responses on their current readability level. From the analysis done in the table, it can be seen that all the items with mean scores of 2.7, 3.13, 3.07, and 3.07 respectively were accepted because their mean scores are above the criterion-mean score of 2.5. From this result, it can be deduced that most secondary school students do possess a moderate level of readability. The items have standard deviation scores of 1.01, 0.85, 0.89, and 0.89 respectively.

Research Question 2: What is the foundational strength of secondary school students towards their ability to read comprehensibly?

Table 2: Students Responses on their foundational strength towards their ability to read comprehensibly

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Remark
1	I am well exposed to mainly printed materials for reading by my parents, teachers, and peers.	85	115	65	35	2.83	0.96	Accepted
2	I am well exposed to mainly non-printed materials for reading by my parents, teachers, and peers.	70	95	85	50	2.62	1.02	Accepted
3	I am well exposed to both printed and non-printed materials for reading by my parents, teachers, and peers.	95	125	50	30	2.95	0.94	Accepted
4	I develop my vocabulary skills by reading both relevant and irrelevant materials available.	115	145	25	15	3.2	0.79	Accepted

Table 2 above shows students' responses on their foundational strength towards their ability to read comprehensibly. From the analysis done in the table, it can be seen that

all the items with mean scores of 2.83, 2.62, 2.95, and 3.2 respectively were accepted because their mean scores are above the criterion-mean score of 2.5. From this result, it can be deduced that the foundational strength of secondary school students towards reading is at a moderate level. The items have standard deviation scores of 0.96, 1.02, 0.94, and 0.79 respectively.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of the foundational strength of secondary school students towards reading on their readability level?

Table 3: Students Responses on the influence of their foundational strength towards their ability to read comprehensibly

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Remark
1	Due to my constant exposure to printed materials for reading, my confidence level and ability to read efficiently has improved drastically	95	125	55	25	2.97	0.91	Accepted
2	Due to my constant exposure to non-printed materials, my proficiency level at reading has been improved upon	105	115	45	35	2.97	0.98	Accepted
3	Due to my constant exposure to both printed and non-printed materials, my confidence on my reading proficiency has improved drastically	115	135	30	20	3.15	0.85	Accepted
4	Due to regular development of my vocabulary with the aid of relevant and irrelevant materials, I have no problem with my reading proficiency.	120	150	15	15	3.25	0.77	Accepted

Table 3 above show students' responses the influence of their foundational strength towards their ability to read comprehensibly. From the analysis done in the table, it can be seen that all the items with mean scores of 2.97, 2.97, 3.15, and 3.25 respectively were accepted because their mean scores are above the criterion-mean score of 2.5. From this result, it can be deduced that the foundational strength of the students towards reading do have a strong influence on their readability level. The items have standard deviation scores of 0.91, 0.98, 0.85, and 0.77 respectively.

Hypothesis Ho₁: There is no relationship between the foundational strength of students towards reading and their readability level

Table 4: Chi-square statistical analysis showing the correlational statistics between the foundational strength of students towards reading and their readability level

Variables	n	Df	X ² -cal	X ² -tab	Remark
Foundational Strength of Students on Reading Vs Readability Level of Students	300	9	43.0415	16.919	Reject Ho ₁

Table 4 shows the result of the correlational relationship between the foundational strength of students towards reading and their readability level. From the hypothesis testing done through Chi-square, it can be seen that X^2 -cal. is greater than X^2 -tab, thereby implying that the null hypothesis will be rejected. This therefore shows that there is a significant relationship between the foundational strength of students towards reading and their readability level.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Current Readability Level of Secondary School Students

Every student is expected to possess an amount of readability level so as to enable them function properly as students that they are being termed as. This is because with sufficient readability level, each and every student can gain access to relevant information through effective decoding as well as transmit that information properly to needed situations through encoding. This process cannot be possible if such student does not have the pre-requisite knowledge of reading and comprehending. From the analysis done in table 1, it was deduced that majority of secondary school students do possess a good amount of the ability to read and comprehend information from any given material due to higher rate of exposure. With this in place, the students can then be able to go through every activity that they tend to face without much stress in proffering solutions to them. This assertion was concurred with by Hetting and Knapp (2001) who emphasized on the need for students to have a reading habit because one of the most important factors of education is the ability to read, understand and critically apprehend the text. The implication of this is that good readability level brings about more proficiency in the students and so therefore must be duly encouraged.

Foundational Strength of Secondary School Students towards their ability to Read Comprehensibly

With the rate of significance of a good readability level to be possessed by the students duly discussed above, there should normally be no reason why there should be any form of deterioration in the readability level of each students but that does not seem to be the case. As it can be seen in most of our secondary schools today, there are variations in the readability level of each and every students in the sense that as we have fast readers and learners, so do we have slow readers and learners and this variations can be accrued to the kind of foundational strength of each and every student towards reading comprehensibly. From the analysis done in table 2, it was deduced that majority of secondary school students in the said area do have a moderate foundational strength towards reading. This is necessary to have because the shaping of the mind early brings about the needed and required change in any individual. This assertion was supported by Yani (2003) who stressed that the concept of reading habits should not be relegated to the background and this is because through reading, human beings get better informed and understanding of the universe they live on. The implication of this is that with the right foundational strength towards reading, every student is bound to be capable of high level of proficiency when dealing with matters, whether personal or otherwise.

Influence of the Foundational Strength of Secondary School Students towards Reading on their Readability Level

As formerly discussed, the background upbringing of an individual towards the idea of reading matters a lot towards the shaping of their readability level that enables them to attain a high level of proficiency in handling matters that pertains to them or otherwise,

either in education or the society at large. The higher the readability level of an individual is, the higher he/she is towards being competent and proficient enough to tackle life-challenging problems. Since proffering solution to problems requires the adequate deciphering of the information about the particular problem which is interrelated with readability level. From the analysis done in table 3, it can be duly deduced that high foundational strength towards reading brings about high readability level in the students. When this is duly and effectively achieved, these students are then capable of contributing their quota towards the solving of life-problems through effective decoding and encoding of information. This claim is in-line with that of Potter, (2012) who stressed that reading at an early age encourages imaginations, curiosity and the ability to handle complex ideas. The implication of this is that with the right foundational strength accorded to the students towards reading, there is bound to be an increased level of readability imbibed in them

CONCLUSION

From what has been done thus far, it is worthy then to conclude that secondary school students do possess varying level of readability and these variations are simply hinged to the kind of foundational strength that each and every one of them is being exposed to at their early stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings made, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents, teachers, and other responsible bodies should endeavour to initiate a continuous good reading ability and skills in their wards from their early days to their later years.
2. Students should endeavour to acclimatize themselves with materials that are relevant enough towards aiding their readability level.
3. School authorities, Government, and NGOs should ensure the creation of accessible standard facilities that will support the zeal of these students towards boosting their readability level.

REFERENCES

- Adetunji, A. (2007), "Assessment of library automation by the staff in some selected first generation university libraries in Nigeria", *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3): 455-459.
- Gömleksiz, M.N. (2004).
Kitapokumaalışkanlığınmailişkinbirtutumölçeğiningeçerlikvegüvenirligi.*FıratÜniversitesiSosyalBilimlerDergisi*, 2(14), 185-195.
- Fosudo, S. (2010). "Reading as part to success" A Lecture delivered at the College Library Day, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto/Ijanikin, Lagos on February 24th.
- Henry, P. (2004) "Children reading habits and their use of media: exhaustive suggestions on encouraging reading habits among children".
- Hetting H.R. & Knapp, N.F. (2001). Supporting underachieving readers in the elementary classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(1): 27.
- Klare, G.R. (1984). *Readability*. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 681-744). New York: Longman.

- Najafi, F. (2010). *The comparative study of the readability of Persian translation of English literary texts for children and literary texts written for them in Persian*. Unpublished M.A Thesis. Azad University Tehran central Branch, Iran.
- Nssien, F.U. (2007). Reading Habits and Skills. In Etim, F.E. ,&Nssien, F.U. (Eds.) Information Literacy for library search. Uyo; Abaam Publishing 90-105.
- Okoro, C.C (2004). My People are Destroyed: the Effects of lack of knowledge on Academic performance of Nigeria Children. *Owena Journal of Library and Information Science*, 1(1): 13-17.
- Omiko, A. (2011). *Evaluation of Chemistry textbooks in use in Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State of Nigeria*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, presented to Department of Science Education, Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki.
- Potter, J. (2012). Re-reading Discourse and social psychology: Transforming social psychology. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 51(3): 436-455.
- Sonaike, S.A. (2004), The Internet and the dilemma of Africa's development. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 66(6).
- Tella, A., &Akande, S. (2007). Children's reading habits and availability of books in Botswana primary schools: Implications for achieving quality education. *The Reading Matrix*, 7 (2).
- Ünal, E. (2010). An analysis of the reading attitudes of elementary school fourth and fifth grade students. *The New Educational Review*, 22(3-4): 117-127.
- Yani, S. (2003). Reading habits of senior secondary school students in Zaria local government area. *Zaria Journal of Librarianship*, 6(1&2):30