

Reading Ability and Public Secondary School Students' Performance in English Language in Saki-West Local Government Area of Oyo State

Michael Olayinka Gbadegesin

Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

Abstract

The study investigated the effects of reading ability on the performance of 540 public secondary school students in English Language with a view to identifying the relationship between reading ability and academic performance. A standardised comprehension test, questionnaire and students' report cards were used for data collection from 12 public secondary schools in Saki-West local government area of Oyo State. The results showed that poor reading ability could affect the academic performance of the students; they also indicated that the lack of reading proficiency is a monumental problem among public secondary school students in Oyo State. Some of the factors responsible for this phenomenon were limiting the teaching of reading skills to elementary class students without any provision for the struggling readers who might have missed the opportunity when they were at that level; teacher's methodology; lack of reading materials, proliferation of social media and parental input were also attributed to the poor reading skill exhibited by the students. The study recommended a remediation programme as part of public secondary school programmes to achieve a better result in future.

Key words: Reading ability, Students' performance, English Language, Remediation

Introduction and Literature Consideration

Over the years, many studies on reading have centred on students' proficiency in the English language as a determinant of success in subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Technical Education, Mathematics, History and many more (Obameata, 1970; Fall, 1972; Fayehun, 1991). The scholars agree that proficiency in the English language as subject enhances students' performance in their respective areas of studies. This is supported by the study of Cromley (2009) among secondary school students on reading and science proficiency which reveals that there is a high correlation between reading comprehension and science proficiency.

The poor performance of students in external examinations such as West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) has always been a source of worry to a good number of people especially parents, guardians and other stakeholders in the education sector (Adepoju, 2002). However, the chief examiners' reports from these examination bodies always generate different reactions from concerned citizens at the end of marking exercise every year.

Several efforts have been geared towards inculcating the reading habit in students in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. A lot of comments and complaints have been made in respect of poor reading habits among Nigerian students, yet it seems as if we have not got to the root of the cause of poor academic performance among students, especially in public secondary schools. Many reasons ranging from mother tongue interference, loss of reading culture, lack of qualified teachers, lack of learning materials, population congestion to parental educational and economic status have been adduced to students' poor performance in

English Language in both internal and external examinations. However, there are few on reading ability and how it affects student's performance in English Language in secondary schools.

Enjoyment is deriving pleasure and satisfaction from a particular activity, and there is a high possibility of wanting to do anything that one enjoys over and over again. Reading, from this stand point, is a difficult and frustrating activity for many students in public secondary schools because they could not derive pleasure and satisfaction from it. There is a relationship between reading ability and students' academic performance; according to Cimmiyotti (2013), the relationship between reading ability and academic performance seems like a logical connection since textual information is prevalent in our society. The results of the study carried out by Espin and Deno (1993) show that a relationship exists between basic reading literacy and students' academic success.

The importance of reading ability cannot be overemphasised because, through it, we extract information necessary for good academic performance. The extent to which a student can personally and individually interact with printed materials and make meanings out of them will determine the level of their academic performance. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the effects of reading ability on students' performance.

One of the main factors responsible for students' academic success or failure is reading ability. Ojo (1993) attributes the poor performance of students in English Language and other school subjects to their inability to read and comprehend (Lack of effective reading). Reading ability requires a deliberate effort to cultivate; as such,

students as well as teachers should be ready to give it what it takes (Ajibola, 2006).

To a large extent, an aim of any reading promoting programme is to lay a strong foundation that can benefit students throughout their academic career (Adewole, 2001). Reading will help the students organise their thoughts and equip them to comprehend entire texts (Adigun and Oyelude, 2003). This will undoubtedly reflect in the performance of such students. Munro (1995, p. 1) identifies five levels of reading difficulties experienced by learners especially in an ESL situation. They are: difficulties at word, sentence, concept, topic and dispositional levels.

Reading ability is demonstrated by fluency which is the combination of three related but separate skills – reading rate, content comprehension and reading accuracy. Before a reader could be described as a fluent reader, they should possess an ability to read and understand the content of the text without unhealthy hesitation (Harris and Hedges, 1995, p. 85). The reading ability of a reader is described by Samuel (2002) as the ability of such a reader to identify the words of a text in their grammatical meaningful unit; this according to him is one of the fundamental processes to becoming a fluent reader. As text comprehension is not enough to describe a reader as having good reading ability, reading rate also is not enough rather it should be the combination of the three; hence, effective reading is the combination of reading rate, content understanding and accuracy. It is in support of this that Yamashita and Ichikwa (2010) argue that fluent readers are readers who can comprehend the meaning of a text smoothly and effortlessly at an appropriate reading rate (p. 264). A good reader exhibits some skills among which are the ability to

decode accurately, the ability to recognise words automatically and the ability to use prosodic features appropriately (Kuhn and Stahl, 2003, p. 416).

Where there is no comprehension, reading is reduced to a mere tracking of symbols with eyes and trying to sound them out (Marshall, 2008). Comprehension takes place when one understands what is being read. Reading ability of a reader is made manifest in their level of understanding or comprehension of the text read. Therefore, it is one of the most essential of reading activities (Montgomery, 2016).

A good reading ability will make a reader to stand at a vantage position to be motivated to read and learn because they are making meanings from the printed text. Learners who possess a good reading ability will also be active during reading task (Baumann and Duffy, 1997). This presupposes that poor readers may neither be motivated to read nor be active during reading activities. This may be because it will be frustrating, boring and hard as no pleasure or satisfaction will be derived from it.

The results of the study of Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola and Nurmi (2008) on the relationship between students' ability to solve math word problems and students' text comprehension skills show that the better the student's reading comprehension skills, the better their performance in solving mathematical word problems. They submit further that both reading and solving mathematical word problems are technical.

Students' academic performance is the only immediate and available assessment to determine the effectiveness of an educational system. The better they perform, the more the system is taken to be effective (Philius and Wanjobi, 2011). Students' performance also is one of the parameters used to measure the

effectiveness of a school system (Alimi *et al*, 2012). The rate of poor academic performance of students in Nigeria has resulted to economic and social wastages which have become a great concern to all stakeholders in the education sector. Aina et al. (2013, p. 355) conclude that

The importance of English language for enhancing educational attainment through improved communicative ability can never be over emphasized. Students who have so much difficulties with their communication skill in English language may not function effectively, not only in English language but in their academic.

Students' behaviour in school and their attitude towards education are sometimes the resultant effect of their reading ability. Therefore, poor reading ability can be said to have negative effects on students' academic, emotional and social life.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the level of reading proficiency among SS3 public secondary school students;
- ii. identify factors responsible for poor reading ability; and
- iii. assess the effects of reading ability on student's academic performance.

Methodology and Procedure

The study is a survey type and it employed mixed methodology to achieve the objectives. The data used in this study were collected from five hundred and forty

(540) senior secondary school students who were in their third year from twelve selected public secondary schools in Saki-West local government area of Oyo State. 45 students were randomly selected from each school for the administration of the designed questionnaire and their average scores in their second year were also obtained. All the subjects had spent four academic terms in senior secondary school and they were in their fifth term preparing for Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire, a standardised comprehension test and their past academic records. The standardised comprehension test was selected from WAEC past questions. The questionnaire was administered to 540 students while the standardised test was written by 1 of 5, hence 108. The questionnaire was used to elicit information on their background, attitude to reading, awareness of reading problem, factors responsible for reading problems, place of reading in the teaching and learning process and academic performance. Also, SS2 average scores in English Language of the selected students were requested from the school authorities as this allowed the reading ability of the students to be compared with their academic performance in English Language. The collected data were statistically analysed and discussed.

Analysis and Discussion

Level of Reading Proficiency

Table 1 Students Response on Level of Reading Proficiency

S/N	Subject	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	540	I can read English very and	127	23.51	413	76.48

		understand the content.				
2	540	I can read English fairly well without understanding the majority of the content.	328	60.74	212	39.25
3	540	I cannot read very well.	89	16.48	451	83.51

Source: Field Survey Nov. 2018

Table 1 above shows that many of the public secondary school students are aware of their various reading problems. Only 127 SS3 students accounting for 23% of the total sample agreed that they could read fluently while 60% agreed that they were not fluent readers and 16% confirmed that they could not read at all.

The students' inability to read effectively defeats the real purpose of reading because, before a reader could be described as a fluent, he or she should possess the ability to read and understand the content of the text without hesitation (Harris and Hedges, 1995:85). Reading ability is importance to the academic success of students In a nutshell, the level of reading proficiency of the population studied was very low; this in no small measure affected their academic performance. This supports the view of Adewole (2001) that one of the main aims of any reading promoting programme is to lay a strong foundation that can benefit students throughout their academic career; and that of Adigun and Oyelude (2003) that reading will help the students organise their thoughts and equip them to comprehend entire texts.

Factors Responsible for Poor Reading Ability

Some of the factors responsible for the menace of poor reading ability from the students' perspectives investigated in this study are:

- i. Teacher's methodology
- ii. Learning materials
- iii. Exposure to the English language outside the school
- iv. Parental influence
- v. Place of reading in the school programme
- vi. Provision for struggling readers

Table 2 Factors Responsible for Poor Reading Ability

S/N	Subject	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	540	My teacher's method of teaching comprehension does not help me to improve upon reading ability.	317	58.70	223	41.29
	540	The lack of learning materials affects my reading ability.	178	32.96	262	67.03
2	540	The lack of exposure to English Language after school affects my reading ability.	397	73.51	143	26.48
3	540	The lack of	382	70.74	158	29.25

		parental input affects my reading ability.				
4	540	Reading is specially taught in my school.	25	4.62	515	95.37
5	540	A special reading class is organised for the struggling readers.	-	-	540	100

Source: Field Survey Nov. 2018

Table 2 reveals that 317 (58.7%) of the selected students believed that teachers' method of teaching reading did not help them develop or improve their reading skills. Also, 67% of the students did not agree that the lack of learning materials is responsible for poor reading ability. A further analysis showed that all the students without reading difficulties have learning materials while only about 40% of the struggling readers have textbooks for English Language. This means that the lack of reading materials (textbooks for English Language) affects the reading ability of the students in Oyo State public secondary schools. In the same vein, 73% of the students who participated in this study agreed that they had exposures to the English language only in school while 26% of the sampled students claimed to have constant exposures to the language after school hours. The results of the parental input showed that only 29% of the respondents enjoyed parental input while over 70% of the total population of the study stated that they did not enjoy any parental input in their process of developing reading skills when they were at the critical state; they

agreed that this, in no small measures, affected their ability to read effectively. The results also showed that 95% of all the public secondary schools under study had not paid any special attention to reading problems apart from summary and comprehension that were deliberately taught by teachers.

The place of methodology in the teaching and learning of a second language cannot be overemphasised. Effective ESL teaching and learning is dependent on appropriate methodology and efficient delivery. A teacher may know what to teach but lack how to teach it. Lack of exposure to the English language outside the school setting affects the reading ability of students in Oyo State public secondary schools. This might be as a result of the educational background of their parents and the fact that many of the students from the selected schools were learning one vocation or the other after the school hours.

While a child is at the critical stage of developing his or her ability to read, the parental role is crucial. The duty of teaching children to read at this stage should not be left entirely in the hands of the teachers. This is because, if a child misses the opportunity at the appropriate time, it could lead to a stigma he or she would fight for the rest of his or her academic career. The reason for low parental input may be partly because many of the parents are not literate and partly because of harsh economy that is biting hard on many homes in the study area. One of the studies conducted in Britain looked at reading development in children with unemployed mothers and found out that there was a negative correlation between unemployed mothers with low educational qualifications and their children's first year reading ability (Verropoulou and Joshi, 2009). On the other hand, Yetis-Bayraktar and Tomaskovic-Devey

(2013) submit that having an educated mother is significantly associated with higher child reading and mathematics scores

The results showed that none of the selected schools organised any special reading class for the struggling readers throughout their period of study in the secondary school. As important as reading ability is to the overall academic success of students, it was gathered that almost all the struggling readers in secondary schools were left to their fate. There is no remediation programme in place to combat the problem of poor reading skills among secondary school students. Effective remediation directly builds necessary skills; so the student acquires the necessary skills and can advance. All the respondents disagreed to the assertion that a special remediation class was organised for the struggling readers. It is therefore obvious that reading is not given a prominent place in the teaching and learning of the English language in public secondary schools in Oyo State in view of the fact that the majority of the students were struggling readers.

At various stages of education in the United States of America where struggling readers are identified, a special intervention programme is organised for them with special professionals deployed to rescue or remedy the situation (Cimmiyotti, 2013:16). It is an abnormal situation for an SS3 student who could not read very well; it therefore requires an abnormal solution. Since reading seems to be one of the worst nightmares in Oyo State public secondary schools as it is in many other states across the country, a more proactive steps should have been taken to put in place programmes specifically designed to tackle it headlong. This study recommends strongly the introduction of remediation programmes for

all the struggling readers in all public secondary schools in Oyo State from the junior category to the senior category.

Effects of the Level of Reading Proficiency

Table 3 Effects of the Level of Reading Proficiency

S/N	Subjects	Item	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
1	540	Inability to read and understand the English language makes me develop a negative attitude towards my studies.	288	53.33	252	46.66
2	540	I hate attending classes because of the fear of being called to read because I cannot read very well.	207	38.33	333	61.66
3	540	I am interested in reading but always frustrated when I do not understand what I am reading.	335	62.03	205	37.96

4	540	I am always interested in reading because I understand what I read.	132	24.44	408	75.55
---	-----	---	-----	-------	-----	-------

Source: Field Survey Nov. 2018

Table 3 above shows that 53% of the respondents had developed a negative attitude to their studies as a result of their poor reading ability while 38% of them had given in to truancy because of their reading challenges. About 76% of them had lost interest in academic pursuit because they lacked basic reading skills while only 24% were interested in studying because they possessed good reading skills. Also, the results revealed that 62% of the students were frustrated as a result of their poor reading ability.

There are so many effects of the level of reading proficiency on the overall academic success of a student especially at the secondary school level. Apart from affecting the performance, it affects attitude and self-esteem. It makes students lose confidence in themselves. This corroborates the submission of Cimmiyotti (2013) that lower performing readers have a lower interest in reading while higher performing readers have a greater interest in reading.

The results lend credence to the study of Maguin, Loeber and LeMahieu (1993) which shows that boys and girls with antisocial behaviours at age nine are predicted to have poorer reading literacy; and poor reading ability leads to antisocial behaviour even at age fifteen and above.

The Result of the Standardised Test
Table 4 showing comprehension

Mark Obtainable =20	Frequency	%
Mark Obtained		
0-3	14	12.96
4-6	37	34.25
7-9	27	25
10-12	17	15.74
13-15	9	8.33
16-18	4	3.70
19-20	-	-
Total	108	99.98

Source: Researcher's Standardised Test Nov., 2018

One out of five participants that filled the questionnaire was randomly selected; hence, 108 participants proceeded to the standardised test stage. The reading ability of the participants was tested through their level of understanding of the passage read. Table 4 above shows that only 30 (27%) respondents scored 10 marks and above in the standardised test while 70 respondents accounting for 64.81% of the respondents scored below 10 marks. The finding corroborates the arguments of Yamashita and Ichikwa (2010, p. 264) that fluent readers are readers who can comprehend a text's meaning smoothly and effortlessly at an appropriate reading rate; and exhibits some skills which are the ability to decode accurately, the ability to recognise words automatically and the ability to use prosodic features appropriately (Kuhn and Stahl 2003, p. 414).

Also, it was gathered from the results of the standardised test that the selected public secondary

school students in Oyo State manifest reading difficulties at five different levels as identified by Munro (1995); the levels are:

- a. Word level
- b. Sentence level
- c. Concept level
- d. Topic level and
- e. Disposition level

Academic Performance

Table 5 SS2 Average Score in English Language

SS2 Average Score in English Language		
Score %	Frequency	%
0-20	92	17
21-39	151	28
40-49	139	25.7
50-59	78	14.4
60-69	65	12.
70 & above	15	2.8
Total	540	100

Source: School Records, Nov., 2018

Though the plan was to get the results of the English Language examination of the students for a whole session (first term to third term), only first and second terms' results were available in the schools. This was because the state government conducted a joint promotion examination for SSS2 students going to SSS3 across the state. Table 5 shows that 82 with 70.74% of the participants scored below 50% on the average in English Language in SS2. Only 15 (2.7% of the respondents) scored 70 and above. 12% and 14% of the respondents scored 60-69 and 50-59 respectively. Taking 50% as the pass mark, only 158 out of 540

(29.2%) passed English Language in SS2. This is closely related to 23.51% of the participants that claimed that they could read fluently. This result corroborates the WAEC report of 21.67% pass recorded in Oyo State in 2015 and 19% in 2014 as reported by *Nigerian Tribune* of September 8, 2015 and *Daily Post* in August 2014 respectively.

From the foregoing, one of the monumental challenges found by this study is that many final year secondary school students were still learning to read when they were supposed to be reading to learn. The results of the study revealed among other things that, although summary and comprehension are taught in public secondary schools, no deliberate effort is being made to help the struggling readers rather concentration is on the few ones who can read well in the class. Very often than not, the struggling reader has potential to perform well academically if he or she is helped to overcome his or her reading challenges.

In all public secondary schools in Oyo State, no remediation programme has been put in place for the struggling readers as the teachers assume they have acquired reading skills from their elementary classes. Among factors traceable to poor reading skills as found out in the study are teacher's methodology, lack of parental involvement, lack of reading materials, and lack of exposure to the language outside the school.

This study reveals that poor reading skills affect students academically, emotionally and socially. Poor reading ability discourages students. Many students lost their morale as a result of poor reading ability. Some of the students with anti-social behaviours were found to be struggling readers. It is either they cannot read at all or they are unable to make meanings from what they read.

The study therefore concludes that reading proficiency level of the students determines their academic performance. The reading ability of students affects their attitude to their performance and their attitude towards their studies. Reading remediation is not given a prominent place in the teaching of the English language in public secondary schools. Among the factors responsible for poor reading ability are teacher's methodology, lack of parental input, lack of a specially organised class for struggling readers, lack of exposure to the target language after the school hours and lack of learning materials to interact with from elementary classes.

The study also recommends that in order to get to the root of the challenges of reading problems, some factors responsible for the worrisome state should be considered. It is recommended that a special remediation class be integrated into the school programme for the struggling readers. The method of teaching summary and comprehension should go beyond the teacher reading the passage or selecting few students who can read to read so that the teacher will be able to carry all the students along. Reading speed, reading accuracy and content comprehension should all be given desired attention.

References

- Adepoju, T. L. (2002). Locational Factors as Correlates of Private cost and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Oyo State, Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan.
- Adepoju, T. L. (2003). Locational Factors and Academic Performances of Students in Senior School Certificate Examinations: Oyo State as a case

- study. A paper presented at the WAEC monthly seminar, Lagos (28th March)
- Adewole, A. O. (2001). What reading skills do student need to comprehend literature? *Ibadan Journal of Education Studies* 1(1): 66-79.
- Adigun, M. & Oyelude, A. (2003). Libraries as tools for development: Survey of users of Oyo State Public Library. *Nigerian Libraries* 37 (2), 78.
- Aina, J. K., Ogundele, A. G. & Olanipekun, S. S. (2013). Students' proficiency in English language relationship with academic performance in Science and Technical Education. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 19, 355-358.
- Ajibola, A. (2006). A practical guide to purposeful reading for students. *School Panorama*, 1 (2), 1-9.
- Akande, T. (2009). Some aspects of the pronunciation problems in the spoken English of some undergraduates. *Papers in English and Linguistics*, 10, 56-69.
- Baumann, J. F. & Duffy, A. M. (1997). *Engaged reading for pleasure and learning: A report from the National Reading Research Centre*. Athens, GA: National Reading Research Centre.
- Cimmiyotti, C. B. (2013). *Impact of reading ability on academic performance at the primary level, Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects*. Retrieved from <https://scholar.dominican.edu/masters-theses/127>
- Cromley, J. (2009). Reading achievement and science proficiency: International comparisons from the programme on international student assessment. *Reading Psychology*, 30, 89-118.

- Duru, A. & Koklu, O. (2011). Middle school students' reading comprehension of mathematical texts and algebraic equations. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 42(4), 447-468.
- Espin, C., & Deno, S. (1993). Performance in reading from content area text as an indicator of achievement. *Remedial & Special Education*, 14(6), 47.
- Fall, A. (1972). Relationship between performance in English Language and Chemistry. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 14(1).
- Fayehun, M. I. (1991). *Relationship between students' level of attainment in English and their performance in other subject areas at the secondary school level*. An unpublished M. Ed Thesis.
- Grimm, K. (2008). Longitudinal associations between reading and mathematics achievement. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 33(3), 419-420.
- Kuhn, M. R., & Stahl, S. (2003). Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial strategies. *The Journal of Educational Psychology*. 95,1-19.
- Maguin, E., Loeber, R., & LeMahieu, P. (1993). Does the relationship between poor reading and delinquency hold for males of different ages and ethnic groups? *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 1(2), 96.
- Munro, M., Flege, J., & MacKay, I. (1995). The effect of age of second language learning on the production of English vowels, *Appl. Psycholinguist.* (In press).
- Obameata, A. S. (1970). *The influence of First Language on verbal intelligence test performance* (An unpublished Ph.D. Thesis). University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

- Ojo, O. I. (2003). Narrative descriptive, argumentative, conversational and dialogic speech types. In A. O. Alabi, (Ed.). *New Perspectives in English Language Skills*. Oyo: Immaculate City Publisher.
- Philias, O. Y. & Wanjobi, W. C. (2011). Performance determinants of Kenya certificate of secondary education (KCSE) in Mathematics of secondary schools in Nyamaiya Division, Kenya. *Asian Social Science*, 7(2), 107-11.
- Sheila, W. (1994). Reading attainment and juvenile delinquency. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 35(3), 450-463.
- Soneye, O. T. (2009) CH Digraph in English: Pattern and Proposition for ESL Pedagogy *Papers in English and Linguistics*, 10, 9-20.
- Verropoulou, G., & Joshi, H. (2009). Does mother's employment conflict with child development? Multilevel employment conflict with child development? Multilevel analysis of British mothers born in 1958. *Journal of Population Economics*.
- Vilenius-Tuohimaa, P. M., Aunola, K. and Nurmi, J. E., (2008). The association between mathematical word problems and reading comprehension. *Educational Psychology*, 28(4), 409-426.
- Yamashita, J., & Ichikawa, S. (2010). Examining Reading Fluency in a Foreign Language: Effects of Text Segmentation on L2 Readers. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 22, 263-283.
- Yetis-Bayraktar, A., Buddig, M., & Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2013). From the shop floor to the kitchen floor: Maternal occupational complexity and children's reading and math skills. *Work and Occupation*, 40(1), 37-64.

<https://tribuneonline.ng.com/110196/>

<https://dailypost.ng/2014/08/29/2014-wassce-statistics-show-states-highest-percentage-pass-possible-cause-mass-failudre/>