Enhancing Students' Achievement in English Reading Comprehension through Effective Use of Questions and Instructional Materials

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' use of questions and instructional materials as correlates of achievement in English reading Comprehension in Osun State, Nigeria. The Participants were 1,462 students and 40 teachers, across 40 schools in Osun State. Instruments used were English Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (r = 0.87), Teachers' Use of Questions Scale(r = 0.77), and Use of Instructional Materials Scale (r = 0.84). Three research questions were answered. Data were analysed using descriptive statics and Pearson product moment at 0.05 level of significance. Majority of the teachers (64.5%) used open ended questions, while 58.7% used tests for assessment. Sixty-two percent of the students had high achievement in English Reading Comprehension. The use of questions (r = 0.12 and use of instructional materials (r = 0.16 had positive relationship with achievement. Based on these findings it is recommended that teachers of English language should take cognisance of the way they use questions and instructional materials for improved achievement in English reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, Use of questions, Instructional materials, Achievement

Introduction

Reading is a literacy skill which is paramount to academic and career success. Without reading, there can be no formal education and the attending benefits are lost. The ability to read is useful both within and outside the academic setting. The ability to read safeguards accidents on the road: reading road signs have gone a long way to protect and safeguard lives, adhering to prescriptions on drugs is enhanced through the ability to read. There are cases of the misuse of drugs, some of which are because patients cannot comprehend written prescriptions. In education, reading is needed by both the teachers and students because teachers cannot teach effectively without reading and students cannot acquire knowledge without reading. Reading is, therefore, an essential skill needed to cope with academic work.

The good proof of reading is the extent to which the reader is able to comprehend what the reader has read, which is measured as the ability to make meaning out of a written text (Fakeye, 2017). Comprehension

includes all the processes of deriving and constructing meaning from the written texts. Reading with comprehension as described by Snowling and Hume (2011) is one of the primary goals of education. It is the ability to wholly decode the meaning of printed texts(Ajala,2006). In the absence of comprehension, reading is nothing more than an exercise in futility and a waste of time. The good proof of reading is the extent to which the reader is able to comprehend what the reader has read, which is measured as the ability to make meaning out of a written text (Fakeye, 2017). Comprehension includes all the processes of deriving and constructing meaning from the written texts.

As important as reading comprehension is in education, reports have shown that students are not performing well at it, which in turn has led to failure in English Language as a subject. Poor comprehension skills affect students' performance in other school subjects because students who cannot comprehend cannot pass other school subjects like Economics, Geography, Mathematics, Civic Education, Agricultural Science and all others. Students' poor performance in English Language in Osun State is revealed in their West African Examination (WAEC) result analysis for three years from (2012-2014). In the 2012 May/June examination results, 24,311 candidates sat for the examination and 7,125 (29%) were eligible for admission to tertiary institutions. In the 2013 May/June examination results, 22,750 candidates sat for the examination, but only 4,605 (20%) credit passes, while in the 2014 out of the 19, 698 students who sat for the examination, only 1,957 (10%) did well.

The foregoing reveals an unbeatable poor English Language performance among Osun State secondary school students, of which those of the Osun West Senatorial District, chosen for the study, are not exceptions. For instance, in 2016, according to the statistics released by local education offices, only 473 candidates obtained credit passes in English Language in West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE) in all the 10 Local Government Areas making up Osun West Senatorial District. This figure was the lowest compared Osun East (589) and Osun Central (612). The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and other research bodies reveal that the low reading ability of students hinder their comprehension of reading materials in internal/external examinations. It was

reported in the WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports of 2010 and 2012 that students' failure in English is mainly due to their inability to perform effectively in reading comprehension. In fact, they are far from mastering the required reading skill.

Also, the WAEC Chief Examiners reports (2016) further reaffirmed this point, thus:

> candidates still find reading comprehension difficult. Many of them performed poorly in this section. They engaged in mindless lifting or copying of portions from the passage. Many of the candidates could not interpret the questions appropriately … teachers should pay attention to this aspect of English… p. 9.

This excerpt attests to the weakness in the art of reading comprehension exhibited by students at public examinations. Students were not able to interpret questions appropriately due to their inability to comprehend the text, which may be as a result of their poor vocabulary or their ignorance of significant concepts in the text. Many public school students are deficient in reading and this often incapacitates them from decoding the gist of the passage read. Linane (2014) identified language problems and wrong structuring of question as the main contributors to reading failures among students. Other factors that may have accounted for the poor culture of reading and the consequent poor performance in comprehension passages in English Language include factors relating to students, teachers, the school and the curriculum. Learners often exhibit poor vocabulary competence, poor linguistic background, low language proficiency (Jibowo, 2007), negative attitudes to reading and poor reading culture/habits (Kolawole, 2005; Maduabuchi, 2008; Adediran, 2014). Also, the non-exposure to the use of effective strategies and their wrong usage hinder students' performance in reading and in other language skill areas (Ezeokoli, 2005; Babalola, 2012; Salako, 2012). Teachers' content knowledge is another important factor affecting students' comprehension.

Again, many students have not been provided with up-to-date library facilities and this has negatively affected their comprehension. Eric and Kind (2004) posit that there is the need for textbooks to sustain the reading interests of students. Peterson (2004) notes also that producing enough books to sustain the reading interest of our new readers would go a long way in enhancing their academic progress. The poor teaching and learning in schools is

another school factor hindering students' comprehension. Concerning curriculum matters, reading is not isolated as a school subject on the timetable, whereas it should be due to its importance. The implications of the poor performance in the English language are enormous. For instance, many candidates would not qualify for admission into tertiary institutions. The consequences of not gaining admission into tertiary institutions as a result of failure to obtain credit pass in English Language is that the majority of the candidates would lose out in their bid to become professionals in their dream careers.

Efforts to address the problem of poor reading comprehension have led researchers to experiment with various teaching strategies (Adegbite, 2014; Akinsowon 2016; Bateye, 2017) Although the foregoing strategies provide interactive activities in the teaching and learning of reading, none of them takes into consideration other variables that could make or mar effective classroom practices The teaching strategy adopted by the teacher is only one variable of teachers' classroom practice. Therefore, the inability of these previous studies to fully explore the teachers use of questions and instructional materials has necessitated this study.

Central to teachers' classroom practices is teachers' questioning behaviour. This is the way the teacher deploys questions in teaching/learning processes. It also has to do with teachers' interaction patterns. Teachers' questioning behaviour is the various uses into which questions are put in class by the teacher and the style of doing it in the course of a lesson (Aiyede, 2017). Teachers' questioning behaviour refers to the ways teachers ask questions, the variety of questions and the distribution of the questions asked in the classroom (Falade, 2010). Questioning is an important feature of the teacher's classroom instruction. Good questions, effectively delivered, facilitate students' learning and thinking as they serve to motivate and focus students' attention, provide opportunities for practice, and provide teachers the opportunity to assess how well students are mastering lesson contents. An important aspect of classroom interaction is use of questions in class by the teacher and the style of doing it in the course of a lesson (Fakeye, 2007). Teachers' use of interpretative and probing questions often enhances students' understanding of the concepts taught (Fakeye, 2007). Akandi (2009) also affirms that questioning has a potential for influencing students' learning.

This means that the way teachers ask questions affect students' performance either positively or negatively.

Another variable in this study is a teacher's resource utilisation. Resources are essential facilities needed for effective teaching and learning to improve students' performance (Olayinka, 2016). They make learning more interesting, practical, realistic and appealing. They also enable both the teacher and the students to participate actively and effectively during lesson sessions. They give room for the acquisition of skills and knowledge and the development of self-confidence and self-actualisation (Olayinka, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

English reading comprehension is indispensable to academic activities because of the role it plays in the overall success of learners. Success in all school subjects is largely predicated on the ability of students to read and comprehend notes and textbooks in various school subjects. However, reports have shown that Senior Secondary students are deficient in reading comprehension and this partly accounts for the poor results recorded at public examinations. Previous studies largely focused on teaching strategies and teacher-student factors influencing reading comprehension, with little emphasis on teacher' classroom-practice variables such as: teacher use of questions, and use of instructional materials. Therefore, this study was carried out to investigate teachers' use of questions and instructional materials as correlates of students learning achievement in English reading comprehension in Osun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What types of questions do teachers use predominantly in reading comprehension class?
2. What is students' level of achievement in English reading comprehension?
3. What relationship exists between teachers' use of questions and students' achievement in English reading comprehension?
4. What relationship exists between teachers' use of instructional materials and students' achievement in English reading comprehension?

Scope of the Study

This study investigated teachers' teachers' use of questions and instructional materials as correlates of students' achievement in English reading comprehension. The study covered 40 senior secondary schools in

Osun West Senatorial Districts of Osun State. The English Reading comprehension test used as a dependent measure was taken from *NOSEC for Senior Secondary School* Two which is a textbook different from the one they were using in the schools .

Significance of the study

The results revealed the relationship between teachers use of questions and instructional materials and achievement in English reading comprehension thereby helping to identify factors that could improve achievement in reading comprehension. The study has established the important roles played by teachers' classroom practices variables questions and instructional materials in instructional process and their impact on learning outcomes in English reading comprehension. It would add to the pool of research on the ways of addressing the lingering problem of poor student performance in English reading comprehension.

Methodology

This study adopted the correlational research design.The Participants were 1,462 students and 40 teachers, across 40 schools in Osun State. Instruments used were English Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (r = 0.87), Teachers' Use of Questions Scale(r = 0.77), and Use of Instructional Materials Scale (r = 0.84). Three research questions were answered. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statics and Pearson product moment at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What type of questions predominates in English comprehension class?

Table 1: Predominant Questions

Types of Question	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Closed Ended Questions	142	35.5
Open Ended Questions	258	64.5
Total	400	100%

Table 1 shows that out of a total of 400 questions asked in all the lessons observed , 258(64.5%) questions were open ended, while 142(35.5%) were close ended. This implies that majority of the teachers used open ended questions.

Research Question 2: What are students; level of achievement in English reading comprehension?

Table 2: Level of Achievement of students in English Reading Comprehension

Students' Achievement in English Reading comprehension	**Frequency**	Percentage
Low	285	19.5
Medium	270	18.5
High	907	62.0
Total	1462	100.0

Table 2 shows that 285 (19.5%) of the respondents are in the low group, 270(18.5%) are in the average group while 907(62.0%) are in the high group in the English Reading Comprehension Achievement test. This shows that students' performance in English Reading Comprehension skill was generally high.

Research Question 3: What relationship exists between teachers' use of questions and instructional materials on the one hand and students' achievement in reading comprehension?

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of the Relationship between Teachers' use of questions and instructional materials and Students' Achievement in English Reading Comprehension

	Achievement	Use of questions	Use of Instructional Materials	$\bar{x}$	S.D
Achievement in Reading Comprehension	1			13.30	12.46
Use of questions	.122** (.000)	1		39.00	4.13
Use of Instructional Materials	.157** (.000)	.610** (.000)	1	22.88	2.09

** Sig. at .05 level

Table 3 showed that there were positive significant relationships between Students' Achievement in English Reading Comprehension, teachers' use of questioning r (r= .122) and use of Instructional Materials (r= .157).

Discussion of Findings

Teachers' Classroom Practice Variables and Achievement in English Reading Comprehension

The findings of this study showed a positive relationship between teachers' use of questions, instructional materials and students' achievement in English Reading Comprehension. This finding might be due to the fact that the use of questions and use of instructional materials constitute the core of pedagogical practices that play vital roles in classrooms. It, therefore, stands to reason that the level of expertise exhibited by these teacher variables would influence the quality and quantity of learning among the students. For example, questioning is an important feature of the teacher's classroom instruction. Good questions, effectively delivered would facilitate students' learning and thinking as they serve to motivate and focus students' attention, provide opportunities for practice, and provide teachers the opportunity to assess how well students are mastering lesson contents. Questioning is a core function of both learning and teaching; question can stimulate students to think at higher cognitive levels.

What determines the effectiveness of the question is the content of the question and the manner in which the teacher asks them. Some teachers make mistake of asking range questions during the question and answer process. For examples what do you think of the passage that we have just read? When questions such as the one mention are asked, students usually do not known how to respond and may answer the questions incorrectly. Therefore, their inability to give answers to them, may make them passive in the class which may evoke negative attitudes towards learning and hinder the creation of a supportive classroom environment.

Types of questions are the procedural, recall/ process and closed/open questions. Procedural questions are used as the part of teacher language in giving instructions in classroom. They are simply for teacher-students cooperation. The recall question largely focuses on retrieving knowledge and checking whether the learner has mastered the previous lessons. This type of question enhances the application of student's high cognitive capacity, since it provides particular information learnt. Process questions, however, require learners to go through more complex mental processes because the teacher would ask them to make

a decision to voice out their opinions, as well as to justify or evaluate any given statement or situation, which stimulates their thinking and motivates them to deal with the matter. Answers to closed questions are very narrow, given in few words or a short sentence. This type of question encourages learners to find out the facts or to present their knowledge, there are three types: alternative questions, yes/no questions and identification questions. Open questions requires all possible answers therefore, they provide learners with more opportunities of interactions at advanced level of thinking and encourage learners to participate actively in their learning for producing more language output.

This finding agrees with those of Olayinka (2016) and Aiyede (2017) who, in separate studies, found that there was significant relationship between teachers' classroom practices and students' academic performance. However, the finding is inconsistent with Akandi, (2009) and Falade (2010) who reported that teachers' questioning style and use of instructional materials were not significant correlates of students' achievement in Social Studies and English grammar respectively. The disparity between the findings of this study and those of Akandi and Falade could be due to different contexts and socio-cultural climate of the participants. While this study was conducted among senior secondary students in Osun State, Nigeria, Akandi and Falade conducted theirs in Rivers and Ondo States respectively with different classroom conditions.

Conclusion

The study investigated teachers' classroom teachers' use of resource utilisation, as correlates of students' achievement in English comprehension in Osun state, Nigeria. The independent variables were found to correlate with students' achievement in English reading comprehension Therefore, it can be concluded from this study that when teachers' use of questions and instructional materials are improved upon, students achievement in English reading comprehension would improve.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Teachers of English should be exposed to regular training, workshops, seminars and conferences in order to improve their use of questions and instructional materials.

2. Teachers should also use adequate instructional materials such as, dramatization, recording passages in CD, and use of projector in teaching English reading comprehension so as to improve students' academic achievement in the subject.

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