

## **Relationship between Reading Attitudes and Reading Comprehension Performance of Secondary School Students in Kwara State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

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This paper examined the relationship between reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance of secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was a correlational type. Its sample comprised 800 Senior Secondary School II students sampled from 28 co-educational public secondary schools located in the three Senatorial Districts of the state. Two researcher-designed instruments were used: Reading Attitudes Questionnaire (RATQ), which measured learners' attitudes to three types of reading behaviour; and Reading Comprehension Performance Tests (RCPT), made up of two comprehension passages with 10 multiple choice tests, each. RATQ and RCPT had reliability indices of 0.721 and 0.850 respectively. The analysis was done with Percentages and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The findings revealed that a total of 65.75% of the students had a generally negative attitude towards reading: 61.13% of them performed well only at the literal level of reading; 38%; 60% and 65.87% at the inferential, evaluate and creative levels, respectively. Also, there was a very high, positive and significant relationship between the students' reading attitudes and their reading comprehension performance ( $r=.0835$  df 798  $P \leq 0.05$ ). These findings implied that negative attitudes to extensive reading could lead to students' poor performance in reading comprehension, which could in turn lead to poor performance in English language. Consequent upon these findings, it was recommended among others, that teachers should always strive to be efficient facilitators of reading, ensuring that learners maintain enhanced positive attitudes to extensive reading so that other stakeholders will be motivated into supporting the school system fully.

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**Keywords:** reading attitudes, reading comprehension performance, secondary school students

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## Introduction

Research evidence shows that secondary school learners who are the focus of this paper are not only deficient in reading skills but have also not cultivated the habits of reading widely (Unoh, 1983 and Lawal 2008). That is, there is the absence of the reading culture among the target learners. This is evident in the failure rates that are persuasive in the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) conducted yearly by internationally recognised examining bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO). These examining bodies often release to the general public the results of the SSCE that are usually written yearly between April and July and students' appalling poor performance has often been greeted with public indignation. For instance, the Chief Examiners' Reports as contained in WAEC (2000-2012) show that candidates have consistently performed poorly in English and Literature-in-English for a period spanning 12 years. The major reason given was that most candidates demonstrated lack of comprehension of the given passages.

The persuasive and consistent failure rate of learners in internal or public examination could be traced, largely, to the absence of a reading culture. The reading culture refers to a sustained regime of reading both textual and non-textual materials for the purpose of broadening one's horizons both in one's chosen field and outside. Individuals who focus mainly on reading for academic purpose alone will definitely be limited in imagination and consequently, be myopic in judgment.

As noted by Lawal (2008) the bedrock of the reading culture is the awareness of the tremendous values of reading in the modern world that is increasingly complex and insecure. The values inherent in reading extensively cannot be exhausted within the framework of this study. Suffice it to conclude that reading leads to emotional maturity, social awareness, intellectual vigour, and economic self-sufficiency. As Unoh (1983 and 1991, and Lawal, 2008) submit, learners who reads just to pass examinations have, in the first instance, a negative attitude towards reading and this has negative effect on reading comprehension performance, and ultimately the inculcation of healthy reading habits.

Attitude, a pertinent concept in this paper, like reading, is a complex phenomenon. Viewed primarily from social psychological perspective, attitude could either be a positive or negative evaluation, feeling or action of individuals towards people, objects, or things or issues in their environment (Mukherjee, 1979).

Attitude exerts a great influence on reading, language learning and general academic work (Blair, Jones and Simpson, 1975). The scholars maintain that if learners have a positive attitude about teachers and like school work, they will most likely experience some success and through reinforcement, will work more effectively and achieve more nearly to their capacity. Conversely, a negative attitude usually signifies that their interests and energies are aimed elsewhere.

Attitude, as it relates to reading is a state of mind accompanied by feelings and emotions which that make reading more or less probable (Smith 1990). The three main types of attitudes that are relative to reading behaviours as identified by Lawal (2008) are attitudes to intensive, literary, extensive reading behaviours.

Learners' attitudes to these types of reading behaviour must not be negative/ambivalent or lopsided. Rather they must have positive and balanced attitudes (Unoh, 1983 and Lawal, 2008). However, as these scholars revealed, most learners, particularly those at the secondary school levels have negative attitudes towards these reading behaviours. Majority of them focus on intensive reading which is carried out mainly for examination purpose. Hence, these scholars submit that the generality of learners and indeed, adults read only for the achievement of a desired objective—success in examination or job procurements.

Since reading is a complex activity, some theories of reading have been put up in order to understand the complexity involved. We have the bottom-up, top-down and the interactive models. Each of this has implication for reading pedagogy, that is, teachers of reading should take cognizance of this and apply approximate approaches when teaching. For example Manzo and Manzo (1993) maintain that an understanding of the nature of reading will help teachers more accurately to identify causes of reading problems and better diagnosis.

Apart from the complexity in understanding the nature of reading, there are further complexities for second language learners. The cognitive ability required for a given text varies and it is in hierarchical degree of difficulty (Adebileje, 2001, Lawal 2008 and Schmitt 2010). From the lowest in the hierarchy we have the literal, inferential, evaluative and the highest, being the creative level. The literal reading is regarded as the lower-order skill while the last three are the higher-order reading skills which are mostly needed for academic development.

Learners who are not equipped with the higher-order skills usually have reading problems which invariably lead to the development of negative attitude towards extensive reading through which learners develop intellectually. It is imperative for teachers at the primary and secondary school to know the systematic patterning in the reading skills classification so as to use them to enhance learners' reading development as they ascend different academic ladder.

Today, most Nigerian adolescent learners face lots of distractions that compete with the zeal (if any) to read. This is occasioned by the astronomical advancement in digital literacy which no doubt, has its gains and attendant drawback. The television, computer, home video games, and particularly, the Global System of Mobile (GSM) communication which can be used for diverse social networking on the internet contest with the love for reading books. The home, which is the first teacher that child is exposed to and the school system, have unfortunately not been able to successfully supervise the use of these electronic related devices. One could safely conclude that these agencies of education and of course the society at large, which should all partner to support the reading culture, are not fully alert to their responsibilities. It appears that the digital technology is gradually taking over every aspect of human endeavours while reading is gradually disappearing to the horizon. Invariably, performance in reading and English language continues to be at the lowest ebb and the benchmark of literacy for all becomes a mere rhetoric.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Different research evidence has revealed that Nigerian secondary school learners demonstrate poor comprehension and that good performance in reading comprehension is highly dependent on learners' right attitude to extensive reading behaviour which engenders rich vocabulary acquisition required for performance in reading (Unoh, 1991, Olajide, 1998, and Lawal, 2008 and Tunde-Awe,2009).

Learners who performance poorly in reading usually develop negative attitude towards reading, (particularly extensive reading) and invariably the development of undesirable reading habits. This study therefore, investigates the relationship between reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance of secondary school students in the three senatorial districts of Kwara State.

This becomes imperative because despite past research efforts, poor performance in reading still persists among Nigerian secondary school learners and again, as far as the researcher is aware, there is hardly any literature that has holistically revealed how learners' reading attitudes and their reading comprehension performance can interact either positively or negatively.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper purposefully examines the relationship between reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance of secondary school students in Kwara state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated:

1. The general reading attitudes of secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria;
2. The performance level in reading comprehension of the respondents;
3. The relationship between their reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance;

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the general reading attitudes of secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. What is the performance level in reading comprehension of the respondents?
3. What is the relationship between the students' reading attitudes and their reading comprehension performance?

### **Research Hypothesis**

Ho<sub>1</sub>. There is no significant relationship between secondary school students' reading attitudes and their reading comprehension performance.

### **Methodology**

The correlational research type was adopted for this study. The population comprised all the public secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria while the target population was the SSS II students.

Eight hundred (800) students were selected through the stratified random sampling technique from 28 co-educational schools in the three senatorial districts of the state (North, South and Central).

The two researcher-designed instruments used for the study were: Reading Attitudes Questionnaire (RATQ) on four point Likert Scale which contained eighteen statements that measured the three types of attitudes towards reading behaviour. Positive attitudes were determined by a combination of responses from Strongly Agree and Agree while negative attitudes were determined by a combination of responses from Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The Reading Comprehension Performance Tests (RCPT) is made up of two comprehension passages. Each passage featured ten multiple choice questions that tested students' comprehension skills of the identified four skills. Three test items were set for each of the skills except the creative skill which had only one test item. The last three levels which are considered the most essential skills that respondents must acquire to perform well in reading task had the highest marks allotted to them. Respondents' performance level was based on the following criteria: high, average and low performance. Scores within the range of 24-34 were taken as high performance; 12-23, average performance; and 0-11, low performance.

The validated instruments had reliability co-efficient of 0.721 and 0.694 for RATQ and RCPT respectively. The instruments were administered to the subjects and the scores were collated and coded for analysis with the SPSS software package. Percentages were used to answer research questions 1 and 2 while the single null hypothesis was tested with Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic. The results are as shown in tables 1-3.

## Results

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by School Locale and Class level**

No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Senatorial District		
	Kwara North	112	14%
	Kwara South	222	27.73%
	Kwara Central	466	58.26%
2.	Class Level	SSS II	100%

Table 1 shows that a total of 112 (14%), 222 (27.73%) and 466 (58.26%) SSS II students were sampled from Kwara North, South and Central Senatorial Districts respectively. The total sample was 800 students.

Research Question 1: What are the General Reading Attitudes of Secondary School Students in Kwara State, Nigeria?

**Table 2: The General Reading Attitudes of Secondary School Students in Kwara State Nigeria**

Reading Attitudes	Agree	Disagree
Intensive	726 (90.75%)	74 (9.25%)
Literary	545 (68.13%)	325 (31.87%)
Extensive	308 (38.5%)	492 (61.5%)
General	526 (65.75%)	274 (34.25%)
Total	800 (100%)	800 (100%)

Table 4 shows that out of 800 students 726 (90.75%) agreed that they engaged in intensive reading (reading for examination purposes). A total of 545 (68.13%) students agreed that they read literary texts (also mainly for examination purposes) while 308 (38.5%) students agreed that they engaged in intensive reading (for [pleasure]). Generally, a larger number of the students, (526 constituting 65.75%) agreed that they engaged in intensive reading. This implies that the students sampled had a negative attitude towards reading, particularly, extensive reading.

Research Question 2: What is the Performance Level of the Students in Reading Comprehension?

**Table 3: Performance Level of Students in Reading Comprehension Tests**

Reading Comprehension Tests	Academic Performance			Total
	High	Average	Low	
Literal	489(61.13%)	170(21.25%)	141 (17.62%)	800
Inferential	185 (23.12%)	311 (38.88%)	304 (38.00%)	800
Evaluative	101 (12.63%)	219 (27.38%)	480 (60.0%)	800
Creative	108 (13.5%)	165 (20.63%)	527(65.87%)	800
General	220(27.53%)	250 (31.25%)	330 (41.25%)	800

Table 3 shows the four levels of reading comprehension and the three levels of academic performance. Out of 800 students sampled, 489 (61.13%), 185(23.12%), 101 (12.63%) and 108 (13.5%) had high scores at the literal, inferential, evaluative and creative levels respectively. Also a total of 170 (21.25%) 311 (38.88%) 219 (27.38 %) and 165 (20.63%) students had average score at each of the four levels of reading skills. Also, 141(17.62%), 304 (38.00%), 408(60%) and 527(65.87%) had low scores in each of the four levels. Generally, 220 (27.53 %) of the students sampled had high scores, a total of 250 (31.25%) had average scores, while 330 (41.25%) had low scores in the reading comprehension tests that were administered. Thus, it can be seen from the table that majority of the students, (489:61.13%) had high scores in the literal level of reading comprehension skills.

### Testing of Hypothesis

The result of the single null hypothesis generated for the paper is presented as follows:

Hypothesis One. There is no Significant Relationship between Students' ReadingAttitudes and their Reading Comprehension Performance.



**Table 4: Summary of Pearson 'r' Analysis of the Relationship between Students' Reading Attitudes and their Reading Comprehension Performance**

Variables	No	Mean	Std	df	Cal r-val	Cri r-val	Decision
Reading Attitudes	800	12.9980	1.17541	798	.836xx	.062	<b>S.</b>
Reading Comprehension	800	11.8980	.83190				

**S**=Significant

Table 4 shows that the calculated r-value is .836 which is greater than the critical r-value of .062 at 0.05 significance level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a very high and positive significant relationship between reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance.

## Discussion

The study revealed that majority of the students sampled had negative attitudes towards reading. This finding implies that extensive reading attracted less positive attitudes from the students than intensive and literary reading. The finding is in line with the outcome of the studies of scholars of reading like Unoh (1983), Emenyonu (1993), Omojuwa (1997) and Lawal (2008) who reported that most learners at the different levels of education in Nigeria particularly the secondary school have negative attitude towards reading. Learners' main focus is on intensive reading which is carried out essentially for academic purposes. This tendency is summed in what Unoh (1983) refers to as the "Reluctant Reading and Learning Syndrome" among Nigerians. That is their reading and learning is limited to what is specifically required for the achievement of their limited objectives such as success in examination or procurement of jobs. Also Lawal (2008) maintains that generally, the reading culture does not thrive in Nigeria and that the social institutions like the home (the first school of the child), school and the society do not encourage the reading attitude. The literature has revealed that learners' attitude to the three types of reading behaviour identified must be positive and balanced rather than being negative/ambivalent or lopsided.

This will enable them become efficient readers and develop intellectually and as well be functionally literate. However as Lawal (2008) opines an individual who lack the awareness of the values of reading cannot develop positive attitude to reading. In the same vein Petscher (2010) and Seitz (2010) corroborate the assertion that learners' positive attitude to reading are highly critical sign for their high scores in reading comprehension performance.

The findings also showed that the general performance level of the students as follows: students with high scores were 220 (27.53%); average score 250 (30.25%) and low scores 330 (41.25%). Thus we can see that majority of the students fall with low scores. The marking grid also showed their performance level in each of the 4 reading skills. This finding agrees with those of Olajide (1998), Adebileje (2001) and Tunde-Awe (2009) who revealed that most Nigerian Secondary School learners and those at the tertiary levels had understanding of only the literal meaning of what they read. That is their performance level is higher at the literal level while they often perform poorly at the other three levels. The literature reviewed has emphasized that is crucial for learners at all levels of education to be adequately equipped with the latter two which are regarded as the higher order-reading skills and we are mostly required for academic development. Learners who fail to acquire them will have reading problems that a common feature in Nigerian Secondary Schools. It follows naturally that learners who have reading problems will avoid a reading task (that is engaging in any form of reading) which will enable them acquire rich vocabulary (Unoh 1983, Petscher 2010, Olajide 1998, Seitz, 2010). The refusal will invariably prevent them from performing well in reading comprehensive tests

Finally, the outcome of the study showed that a very high and positive significant relationship existed between reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance of the students. This is in consonance with the studies of reading scholars like Lawal (2008), Petscher (2010) who posit that students need to be equipped with rich vocabulary which engenders good performance in reading comprehension task. These reading scholars have also established that learners who are slow at comprehension will almost possibly develop a feeling of dislike for books and this will most likely prevent them from having adequate practice in reading. This will invariably result in poor standards of reading. It naturally follows then that less than the one with positive attitude. By implication too, he is not likely to perform well in reading comprehension task. The essence of the thesis is that positive attitude toward reading are highly crucial for reading comprehension performance as revealed in this study.

In addition to the acquiring of rich vocabulary the learner gets acquainted with the strategies required for decoding meaning and invariably he becomes proficient in language use. There is hardly any doubt that it is proficiency in language use that enables learners to read, comprehend and consequently develop intellectually. In sum, the finding implies that positive attitude to reading is a foundation for reading comprehension performance and indeed, other language skills and general academic achievement.

## **Conclusion**

1. Secondary school students have negative attitude towards reading and so they have not been performing well in reading comprehension
2. The performance level of the students in reading comprehension was low. Majority of them had low scores at the higher-order skills of reading comprehension while they had high scores at the literal level.
3. Reading attitude correlated significantly, both positively and highly with reading comprehension performance of the students.

## **Recommendations**

1. Teachers of English should themselves develop the habit of reading extensively and thus serve as role models for learners. They should know the inter-relationships of intensive, literal and extensive reading behaviour as this will enable them to assist learners to develop a balanced rather than a lopsided attitude towards them. Above all they should always strive to be efficient facilitators of reading, ensuring that the learners maintain enhanced positive attitudes to reading comprehension so that other stakeholders will be motivated into supporting the school system fully.
2. Teachers Trainers such as colleges of Education and Faculty of Education in Universities should equip the service of teachers with the knowledge and skills required for teaching the three types of reading behaviour and reading comprehension in secondary schools.
3. Parents especially the literate ones, should be sensitive to their role as role models in recreational reading. They should exhibit positive attitude to recreational reading and encourage their children to read beyond prescribed school texts.

4. Education Policy Makers, school authorities and other stakeholders in education industry should appraise the importance of reading in the school curriculum and reflect this in their policies. Public and private schools in both rural and urban centers should be adequately stocked with materials that will serve the reading interest of learners. Partnership between education planners and teachers is crucial for effective teaching and learning in schools.

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