

Investigating the Reading Competence in English Among Junior Secondary School Students in Afikpo Urban of Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Reading is one of the most important sources of learning and acquisition of information. Reading, exposes one to new words, ideas, expressions and their various uses. Good reading enhances power of expression as it exposes one to a variety of styles employed by writers in their writings. Indeed, most people achieve language competence from good and effective reading. Reading inability deters a learner from achieving his learning objectives. This paper critically investigates the factors that affect reading competence in junior secondary school students in Afikpo urban of Ebonyi state. The investigation covers some aspects of reading. The main focus of the investigation is to find out the extent to which the junior secondary school students read, how the availability of reading materials or otherwise affect their reading ability and what they are interested in reading, having in mind that one of the objectives of the use of English is to equip the students with effective reading skills. Therefore, the investigation looked at the definition of reading by some renowned authorities, types of reading and how reading competence can be developed. In order to find out the nature of reading problems existent among junior secondary school students, efforts of teachers and parents in helping the students achieve reading competence, questionnaires were administered to four different junior secondary school in Afikpo urban for appropriate responses, using the terminal class, JSS III. The data were collected and analyzed, using simple percentage. Based on the results derived from the data, appropriate recommendations were made.

Keywords: Reading, reading materials, competence, investigation, information

Introduction

Reading plays a major part in education especially, in formal education. Reading is done in every sphere of human life. With the rapid increase in knowledge and constant acceleration of publication of information in all fields of human endeavour, reading has become more important not only as means of studying all the subjects, but also as means of accessing information from both print and electronic media as well as keeping up with the challenges individuals face in discharging their duties in the labour market. Reading, therefore, is the extraction of meaning from graphic symbols, written or printed matter. This implies that reading is a complex communication skill which an individual acquires through exposure and training in formal education.

Reading is an essential instrument for competence and proficiency. Any student who is unable to read or reads at a very slow rate or speed will be terribly limited in his learning, knowledge acquisition and skills. This is because most of the academic works students do either as individuals or group depend primarily on how effective they can read. The importance and dependence on reading for effective communication and interaction widen as a child develops and attains his/her educational status. It is this numerous importance attached to reading that made the term “reading competence” an interesting area of academic inquiry.

Reading competence is the ability of an individual to interpret effectively what the printed material is all about. In this study, reading competence is viewed with special emphasis on the speed with which an individual reads. That is, an attempt is made to find out the reading rate of an individual with the aim of finding out whether he is a slow or fast reader. Indeed, reading competence presupposes reading with comprehension. As the core of reading, comprehension cannot be divorced from reading. This is because, it has been argued that without reading for comprehension, words are basically a series of lifeless symbols which do not communicate. It is only by reading with comprehension or understanding that one can learn, interact with written words and meditate or reflect on each word or printed matter.

The various reasons or purposes of reading underscore its importance. For instance, people read for a number of reasons. One of such reasons for reading is for education or academic purpose. In fact, education forms the major reason for reading. As students, they read because they want to learn and be educated. The learner acquires new knowledge through reading done either in or outside the four walls of the classroom. People also read for news or information when they read newspapers, magazines and other dailies and even posters, etc. Another purpose for reading is for pleasure and entertainment. When reading is done in this regard, one sees people reading novels, short stories, certain columns on the newspaper and magazines.

Generally, people read for leisure, or pleasure. People also read to be up dated with event and incidents around them. Others read for professional information, for studies, for general and specific purposes such as studying an article or text for certain information, etc. Reading is however, not a mere looking at words in print or ‘a passive activity’, as Troyka (1990), asserts. According to her, it is an active activity, “a dynamic meaning-making encounter involving interaction of the page, eye and brain” (128). As a serious activity, reading makes a man what he is. It is a means of survival, an avenue of acquiring information and a vital source of edification. Life-long education is attained through reading. Viewed in the above perspective, reading becomes very vital to learners and students especially, students of junior secondary schools. Hence, the necessity to investigate the factors affecting its competence and the need to develop it.

Ordinarily, students in the junior secondary schools face various reading problems during studies and learning situations. For instance, the students at the junior secondary schools confront physiological reading problems such as brain defect or dyslexia which may obstruct reading competence. Dyslexia is a reading problem which affects reading and spelling, a situation which affects letters and words differentiation. (See *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2007:491). A student who is a victim of dyslexia may also suffer from poor vision.

Furthermore, there is also psychological problem which also affect reading competence such as anxiety, poor intelligence, lack of interest or motivation, fear and lack of self-confidence. Environmental problems can also affect reading competence. The home a child comes from plays prominent role in the child’s reading ability. In some homes, such reading materials as novels, texts, newspapers, magazines, story books, pictures and the likes that can expose the children to reading are non-existent. Indeed, lack of these important reading materials can affect reading competence.

Naturally, the above which are among the factors to be investigated will nevertheless, form the main thematic focus of this study. Since this study involves an empirical investigation, such

areas as statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, literature review, etc are inclusive.

Statement of the Problem

The relationship between reading and language has no clear cut demarcation in the junior secondary school curriculum. Thus, the researcher noticed that there is no provision for reading exercises on the time table. There is also, lack of reading materials in some of the urban junior secondary schools used as case study in Afikpo. The researcher is of the view that English language teachers have a responsibility to plan a programme that will help students improve their reading competence. This is necessary as reading is an excellent way of language learning and acquisition.

Purpose of the Study

This study will investigate:

1. The factors that affect reading competence in the junior secondary schools.
2. It will suggest some ways or solutions of improving the existing situation.

Research Questions

The researcher will be guided in this study by the following questions:

1. To what extent does availability of reading materials affect reading competence?
2. Do teachers actually teach reading in the classroom?
3. Does lack of interest of the students in reading materials affect their reading competence?

Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to knowledge in the field of teaching and learning of reading at the junior secondary school level. It will also, provide a useful information and source of material for students and researchers who may wish to carry out further research in this direction.

Scope of the study

This study is especially for the junior secondary school students in Afikpo urban in Ebonyi State. The study focused on the factors that affect reading competence. There are eight junior secondary schools in Afikpo urban. Out of these numbers, the researcher selected four schools for the purpose of the study: Government Junior Secondary School PWD/Ukpa, Sir Francis Ibiam Grammar Junior Secondary School, Mgbom/Unwana Road, Ehugbo Technical Junior Secondary School, Ndibe Beach Road and Amuro/Mgbom Junior Secondary School, Amuro/Mgbom. These schools were selected as representative of the others as they are strategically situated. During the investigation, it was found that two of the schools (which are pilot schools) have libraries, though poorly equipped, while the other two do not have any at all. This can account for differences in their reading culture and by extension, necessary variation in the students' performance during examination. It is also believed that this class can easily read, understand and respond to the questionnaire accordingly.

Literature Review

There are four language skills which an individual needs to acquire if he is to communicate and interact effectively in English. These skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills play very important roles in different learning situations as they contribute to learner's intellectual development. In fact, any meaningful progress in the field of academic revolves around these language skills.

In their hierarchical order, listening is the first language skill. This is followed by speaking. Nwaiwu and Obi write that in the field of education and communication, "listening and speaking are technically referred to as oracy skill of the language" as these are more complex than reading and writing "known as literacy skills" (70). They assert that listening and reading are on the other hand, known as "receptive language skills", just as speaking and writing are referred to as "productive language skills" (71).

What Reading Means

As receptive language skill, reading is very important. Reading may mean different things to different people. To a beginner, reading may simply be seen as the recognition of printed words and the conception of same to oneself. To some, reading deals with the ability to decode the encoded information in a text, written or printed materials. To others, it may be seen as the act of glancing through printed or written words with the aim of recognizing and understanding such words. Nwokeneme espouses that to a great extent, reading determines the success or failure of any student. Essentially, reading is of immense value to students as they acquire new knowledge and information which enable them to tackle academic problems. According to him, "meaningful reading is that which is motivated by an aim or objective with the desire to achieve a definite result" (18).

Corroborating Obiukwu opines that reading is an essential tool for the acquisition of all kinds of human knowledge. She cited Ola as saying that it "is a means whereby information stored in the books can be obtained and utilized for a variety of purposes" (44). For Otagburuagu et al as cited by Obiukwu, reading means "a process of reconstructing the writer's intended meaning". Accordingly, it "involves an interaction between three parties: the reader, the writer and the text". This source adds that reading is interactive in nature, involving the processor, the author and the text" (44). Invariably, Troyika asserts that "reading is not a passive activity. It involves more than looking at words. Reading is an active process- a dynamic meaning-making encounter involving the interaction of the page, eye and brain" (128). Mmaduekwe, like Troyka, views reading as "an activity in which the eyes, the mind and the brain interact in the process of perceiving, analyzing, reasoning, interpreting and integrating a problem" (123).

Readings, as defined by Greenwood and cited by Aiyewumi, involves two levels, the visual and the mechanical stages. According to her, in the mechanical stage, the symbols on the printed page are deciphered through the coordination of the eye and the brain and the cognitive tasks which involved the interpretation of the visual information. This, as Aiyewumi stresses, is the thinking skill stage where the reader constructs in his mind, the meaning the writer had in mind when he wrote the text. Perhaps, it is what *Conceptual Foundation of Teaching, Reading* meant when it categories reading into three capacities or abilities as "reading as saying, reading as understanding, and reading as (reflective) thinking" (59).

Similarly, in his own assessment of reading as active language skill, Grillet as cited by Bodunde writes that the activity could be viewed from two perspectives. In the first place, reading involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions. In the second place, reading can be viewed on its communicative functions. Both ways involve activities which keep the learners and indeed, readers working, practicing and being active. This view is in consonance with the position of Sannie on the subject. Accordingly, he observed that when a person reads, he/she is also thinking, predicting, questioning, evaluating, defining and redefining, simultaneously.

In fact, this is what Troyka means when she succinctly discloses that:

When you read, your brain actively makes connections between what you know already and what is new to you. You comprehend and learn new materials by associating it with materials you already know. [As] the key activity is making predictions, as you read, your brain is always involved in guessing what is coming next (128-129).

Comprehension is thus achieved by associating the new material with what is already known. The most important activity in reading is, therefore, making predictions. By making connections, guessing and predicting, the brain easily narrows its expectations to reasonable proportions. Further examining ways of improving reading performance, Aliyu opines that it “is a form of communication during which the contents, challenges and claims made by a writer are gone over by the reader who tries to capture the substance of the written material” (30).

Anyachonkeya who also looks at the opinions of some experts on reading cites Ajero (1996) as saying that it is the “process of utilizing textual elements and human experience together to achieve understanding of the message which the writer intended in the text” (26). He also refers to Francis Bacon who avers that “reading maketh a full man, conference, a ready man and writing an exact man”.

In addition to the above, the seventies saw a marked increase in positive researches on reading as a linguistic problem. Notable eminent scholars who carried out researches in this direction include such linguists as Eskey (1970, 71) Piece (1973) and Wilson (1973). Through such enduring efforts, “reading came to be seen, not only as a vehicle for language instruction, but also as a unique information processing skill” (141), as Aiyewumi declares. It is to be noted that by the 1990s, reading as a linguistic Phenomenon had been firmly rooted in the realism of linguistics. Researches are still going on with a view to understanding the interactive nature of reading in itself and other related academic concepts.

Modern approach to the study of reading as a linguistic unite suggests that the learner himself, the process through which he learns and the problem he may encounter in the over all reading process are the focal points on which scholars may hypothesize and synthesize the reading phenomenon. The modern approaches to reading suggests that in order to inculcate purposeful reading, questions on the material should be read first before a thorough reading of the text (pre-text) and questions after (post-text). The aim of this is to first prepare the students for and direct their attention to specifics and then to ensure that general comprehension is generated. The teacher is thus, expected to determine the type of reading matter that the students should be exposed to and to choose appropriate reading techniques so as to enable the students read with efficiency, the materials presented before them.

Reading Competence

Reading competence has to do with the ability to read written matters, materials or text with minimum time available and being able to understand what it is all about so as to interpret, comment or criticize it. In other words, reading competence is the ability of an individual to read effectively, written material with the aim of bringing out or making meaning therefrom. Perhaps, this is what this authoritative voice means when it asserts that “reading competence is the set of knowledge and skills that allow a person to select, understand and organize the information presented in printed (written) form and successfully use it for both personal and public purpose” (2). When reading competence is looked at in this way, the aim is to check the speed at which an individual reads. *Reading Competence ...European Proceedings*. The focus is thus to determine the reading rate of an individual. That is, whether a reader reads slow or fast. Reading competence, therefore, implies comprehension, an understanding resulting in the view as declared in *Reading Competence... Literacy Tasks*, that “reading comprehension

has the potential to lead to complication in text comprehension as a function of reading proficiency” (5).

Naturally, reading competence or efficiency connotes reading with flexibility and good comprehension. Slow and unsatisfactory reading result in inadequate comprehension skills and consequently, reading incompetence. Reading competence which by extension is reading for comprehension derives from three levels of reading, literal, inferential and evaluative meaning, according to Troyka (1990:133-135). While reading for literal meaning involves reading on the lines, inferential and evaluative reading levels call for reading between the lines and beyond the lines for hidden or connotative meaning or information. This takes this study to another aspect of reading for comprehension known as reading strategies or types of reading.

Reading Strategies

For effective understanding and competence in reading, consideration is made on the following reading strategies:

(a) Skimming (b) scanning (c) intensive (d) extensive (e) Normal Reading.

Skimming

This is a reading strategy which involves fast reading mainly for the purpose of acquiring the gist of the text or passage. It is used when one wants to locate the main idea. For instance, one can skim-read newspaper headlines, table of contents of textbook, titles, opening paragraphs, etc. Hellandendu cites Floyd as describing skimming as “flying over an unfamiliar country or town before exploring it on foot”. Nwokeneme who also cited Gartside posits that skimming may not be taken as a normal reading as it is a preliminary step which provides an overview of the subject matter before a close reading. Skimming, however, enables the student or reader to get prepared and attempt to establish his purpose for close reading. When there is no time, skimming can serve as a substitute for the main reading. Skimming thus enhances speed and understanding in reading.

Scanning

Scanning is a fast reading technique with the purpose of locating specific piece of information, facts or details. It is useful and can help the student or reader learn and master technical terms quicker, especially where secondary sources need to be consulted before each terms can be used. Like skimming, scanning differs slightly from close reading as it skips of parts of the text while searching for specific idea or information. It is part of reading process, a preliminary step before close or thorough reading. For instance, one involves himself in scanning when he reads announcements or uses dictionary to look for spelling of a word, meaning, parts of speech, usage or morphological inflection. Scanning can also help to enhance speed and understanding during close reading.

Intensive Reading

Intensive reading is a reading process that requires maximum concentration as the reader aims at extracting information that will enable him perform a given task, according to Njoku and Izuagba (2001). This study type involves slow and thoughtful reading. The main purpose of intensive reading is to enable the reader have a thorough grasp of the main idea and details in what is read.

Anyachonkeya and Anyachonkeya assert that intensive reading is a useful reading strategy as it allows the reader to learn to engage in “maximum concentration in order to understand and assimilate the reading selection” (30). The understanding that all reading materials do not have the same level of structural and contextual arrangement makes the need for flexible reading necessary so as to read and comprehend texts of varying levels of complexity.

The need for flexibility has resulted in variation in reading strategies. In the light of this, Shaibu writes that there have been many study methods used at one time or other. Among them are: SQ3R: Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review,

SQ4R: Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Write, Review;

PQRST: Preview, Question, Read, Summarize, Text

OK4R: Overview, keypoints, Read, Recall, Reflect, Review;

3S3R: Survey, Study- Read Speech-read, Recite, Review, Reflect.

Consequently, Floyd (1984) is of the opinion that SQ3R is the oldest and probably the best known of the five methods outlined above. It has been widely used and adopted in many countries. Some authors such as Troyka (1990) and Banjo and Bisong (1985) are of the view that SQ3R stand for survey, question, Read, Recite and Revise. What is important to note here, however, is that SQ3R is a useful study strategy.

Extensive Reading

In this reading strategy, the reader reads to obtain general information. Extensive reading is often outside one's discipline as it is extra-curricular. It is thus, done at the reader's pleasure, formally or informally. This reading strategy is not imposed by an external authority or influence. It is usually voluntary and comes as a result of self discipline or habit. It is the kind of reading that broadens the individual's frontier of knowledge. Generally, the mood of the extensive reader is pleasant and light.

Invariably, an extensive reader or learner reads very fast to gain the general idea. He does this in a very short time. This type of reading helps to increase competence in communication. Word power is enhanced and ability to weigh ideas heightened. Extensive reading demands the provision of reading materials, careful planning and encouragement from the teacher. Izuagba and Njoku (2001) and Agwu (2008) cite Aboderin who asserts that the "pleasure comes from sharing various experiences from the incidental learning that comes as a result of the reader's appreciation of various episodes".

Reading is essential for the development of the personality in the students. Students attainment of higher education is dependent on the extent to which they read. Students in the junior secondary schools have a lot of hindrances which affect their reading competence. Some of these problems include nonchallant attitude, environmental factors, administrative and language factors.

Normal Reading Rate

The emphasis on normal reading rate is usually on the speed of the reader. The speed is medium, slow or average. This is employed to get the main ideas and their related details. It enables the reader to appreciate the style that has been adopted by the writer.

Factors Militating against Reading Competence

Beginners and learners who use English as second language are often faced with various factors that militate against reading competence. Thus, many students and learners come to the higher institution with so many reading problems they had encountered at the previous levels of education. This part of study aims at highlighting some of these problems and factors that impede efficient reading and militate against its competence.

Among these factors are anxiety, tension, poor study skills as well as low reading rate. The learner who is a product of two languages and cultures without mastering any is in a pitiable state. The outcome of such a situation is that the quality of his intellectual experience suffers deficiency. There is also deficiency in the level of vocabulary, knowledge and grammar. All these problems militate against reading competence.

Other factors which militate against reading competence include word pointing, vocalization, sub-vocalization, poor vocabulary, repression, head movement, inflexibility, loss of interest, poor visual perception, among others. (See Abe, 1981 and N. Anyachonkeya and C. Agwu edited, 2008).

Commenting on reading problems, Andzayi further points out similar other factors in this regard. He succinctly enumerates poor methodology, lack of qualified teachers, inadequate materials and books, lack of interest, home background, inadequate library facilities in schools,

lack of rich-print environment by parents, among others as major reading factors militating against reading competence.

One of the most common problems that hinder reading competence is the problem emanating from students' attitude to reading. Students have non-challant attitude towards reading. Some students do not show any hunger, need or motivation for reading. They lack interest and confidence when reading any materials. They have fear and this affects reading competence.

The environment is another factor that militates against reading competence. Generally, the home background of the reader comes into the picture. Home background has been seen to contribute immensely to the factors militating against reading competence. Students who are highest in reading and language achievement have homes with greatest amount of reading materials. Research has shown as Lawal discloses that most Nigerian children often grow in homes without books or even where they have, it is just the school prescribed books. This makes the home of the Nigerian child non-supportive to reading.

Again, many Nigerian children may not be exposed to print materials until they get to school. In a home where a child is not provided books or novels and other necessary reading materials that expose the child to reading culture, that child will be terribly handicapped. Ayodele observed that the richer home background, the better for the promotion of language efficiency. Ekpumobi sees home as the first place where the child is exposed to the language he will use throughout his life. This means that lack of facilities to expose the child to the language he will use in school may lead to reading problems when the child starts school.

Most Nigerian students read poorly as they read with only one aim in view, to pass examination. Thus, they do not read for pleasure (Emenyonu, 1982, Unoh, 1983, Ekpumobi, 1990). This apparent lack of interest in reading may deter one from developing the skills necessary for extensive reading. Fast and extensive reading will enhance reading competence which a student will require for reading comprehension both at school and later on his life.

Another factor that affects reading competence is administrative problem. This has to do with the curriculum planning. Lack of specific time table for reading and exercise affect students reading competence as they have limited time in the school for reading. Thus, Ade-Ajayi observed that "... absence of reading period on a school time table was due to no knowledge of proper teaching techniques, overcrowded classrooms and inappropriate techniques in teacher training college" (29). Ojo stressed that even in schools where English is taught, the amount of time allotted to reading in the school time table is inadequate. This inevitably affect reading habit of students and by extension, reading competence.

Language level used in the textbook is a very important factor that militate against student reading competence. When the language is above the reader's level, the reader will not understand the content of the materials. This makes reading difficult and uninteresting for the child.

Factors Facilitating Reading Competence

A number of factors can facilitate reading competence. Among these are environmental factors, self confidence and method of teaching.

The home environment has a great effect on the development of pre-reading skills. The foundation laid for a child in the home is very important in the upbringing of that child. In a home where a child has access to reading materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, short stories, novels, etc, the child is highly stimulated and so the hunger to read is aroused at the early stage in life.

Generally, the aim of instilling in young children, pre-reading skills at an early stage is to establish and reinforce the child's understanding of the relationship between print and spoken words. It is aimed at finding out about the child's awareness of the task of reading. Umolu suggests that parents need to recognize that children learn more from what they do than what they say. She asserts that "if children see you reading in the home, they will grow up with the concept that reading is important, and they will not need any one to lecture them later on the nature and value of learning to read.

Self confidence facilitates reading competence. When a reader has confidence in himself, he reads better. This is beneficial because the more a child reads, the more his brain is sharpened. This makes him to gradually develop himself as an excellent reader.

Another important factor that can facilitate reading competence is the method of teaching. The teacher indeed, plays an important role in the life and development of a child. There is the need for the teacher to engage the children or learners in reading exercises in the classroom and even outside the classroom by giving them comprehension passages to read and answer the questions that follow. When they do this many times, they gradually develop good reading skills and become efficient readers.

Reading is necessary for education to succeed. It makes an individual to function effectively in the society. As an individual reads widely and voraciously, he acquires the ability to communicate effectively. Moreover, the individual becomes enlightened intellectually and socially.

Methodology

The present study employed descriptive survey design method. Population of the study comprised all secondary schools in Afikpo urban. The study adopted purposive sampling technique in the selection of sampled schools in Afikpo urban (due to their strategic locations), whereas random sampling method was used in the selection of the respondents in each school. Data for the study were collected through a structured questionnaire which were administered to the respondents. A total of 720 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents out of which 710 copies were returned in usable form. The qualitative data obtained were analyzed, using frequency account and simply percentage.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Below are the data presentation and analysis. The data will be presented first, then followed by the analysis.

Research I: Do teachers actually teach reading in the classroom?

Table showing students responses on whether they were taught reading at school.

S/No	Question Item	Yes		No		Total
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Does your teacher teach reading in the classroom?	130	19%	580	81%	710
2.	Does your teacher often read story book to you in the classroom?	210	30%	500	70%	710
3.	Does your teacher often ask you to read aloud in the classroom?	250	35.4%	460	64.6%	710
4.	Does your teacher often give you drilling on silent reading?	230	32.4%	480	67.6%	710
5.	Does your teacher often ask you to read fast in the classroom?	300	42.2%	410	57.8%	710

Source: Field Survey 2026

In question item 1, table 1, 130 respondents, representing 19% of the population said that their teacher taught them reading in the classroom. However, 580 or 81% of the respondents did not agree that their teacher taught them reading in the classroom. Similarly, in question items 2 and 3, while 210 and 250 respondents, representing 30% and 35.4% of the population respectively, not only agreed that their teachers often read story books to them and often asked them to read

aloud in the classroom, 500 and 460, representing 70% and 64.6% of the population responded that their teachers neither read story books to them nor asked them to read aloud in the classroom. On the same hand, while 300, representing 42.2% of the population agreed that their teacher often asked them to read fast in the classroom, 410, or 57.8% gave negative answers.

Research Question II: To what extent does the availability of reading materials affect reading competence?

Table showing students responses on the availability of reading materials.

S/N	Question Item	Yes		No		Total
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Do you have school library in your school?	355	50%	355	50%	710
2.	Do you often go to the library for private reading?	460	64.7%	250	35.3%	710
3.	Do your parents encourage you to read?	600	84.5%	110	15.5%	710
4.	Are you provided relevant reading materials at school?	463	65.2%	247	34.8%	710
5.	Have you ever been to Afikpo public library for your personal reading?	384	54%	226	45.9%	710

Source: Field Survey 2026

Question numbers 1, 2 and 3 of table 2, where 355, 460 and 600 respondents, representing 50%, 64.7% and 84.5% said that they have library in the school, often go there for their private reading as well as being encouraged by their parents to read, 355, 250 and 110 others, representing 50%, 35.3% and 15.5% answered in the negative. Whereas question numbers 4 and 5 where 463 and 384, representing 65.2% and 54% of the population replied that they were provided reading materials at school and that they have been to the public library for personal reading, 247 and 226 others, representing 34.8% and 45.9%, respectively, said no.

Research Question III: Does lack of interest of the students in reading materials affect their reading competence?

Table showing students' responses on whether lack of interest in reading materials affect their reading competence.

S/No	Question Item	Yes		No		Total
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Do you lose interest in reading in the classroom due to anxiety and tension?	531	74.7%	179	25.3%	710
2.	Do you feel discouraged to read due to unfamiliar language of the textbook?	431	60.7%	279	39.3%	710
3.	Does unconducive reading environment affect your interest in reading?	95	13.3%	615	86.7%	710
4.	Does time factor affect your interest in reading?	300	42.3%	410	57.7%	710
5.	Do you enjoy reading at all?	555	78.1%	155	21.9%	710

6.	Do you often read for pleasure?	500	70.5%	210	29.5%	710
7.	Have you ever been given any material reward by your teacher or parents for reading?	474	66.7%	236	33.3%	710

Source: Field Survey 2026

Question numbers 1, 2 and 3 of table 3 with 531, 431 and 95 respondents, representing 74.7%, 60.7% and 13.3%. on the one hand, showed those who lose interest in reading in the classroom due to anxiety and tension, felt discouraged to read due to unfamiliar language of the textbook and unconducive reading environment affect their interest in reading, 179, 279 and 615, representing or 25.3%, 39.3% and 86.7%, on the other hand, depicted those who did not lose interest in reading in the classroom due to anxiety and tension, did not feel discouraged to read due to unfamiliar language of the textbook and whose interest in reading were not affected by unconducive environment. Whereas 300 and 555 representing 42.3% and 78.1% affirmed that time factor affect their interest in reading and that they enjoyed reading, respectively, 410 and 155 others, representing 57.7% and 21.9% were not affected by time factor and did not enjoy reading at all.

Finally, the figures 500 and 474, representing 70.5% and 66.7% said that they often read for pleasure and been given material rewards for reading, the other 210 and 236 or 29.5% and 33.3% respondents gave negative answers.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher investigated the “Factors Affecting Reading Competence in English Among Junior Secondary School Students in Afikpo Urban, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. To enhance this, five research questions were drawn to guide the study. Judging from the responses from the questionnaires above, it was established that something needs to be done in order to facilitate reading competence.

Looking at the responses from research questionnaire 1-5 which test whether the teachers taught reading and various reading methods or rate used, on the one hand, and how he helped the students to develop reading competence, on the other hand, the following are imperative. While 130, 210 and 250 representing 19%, 30% and 35.4% of the population said their teachers taught reading to them, often read story book to them and often asked them to read aloud in the classroom, the other 580, 500 and 460 or 81%, 70% and 64.6% did not. Again, 230 and 300 which represent 32.4% and 42.2% declared that their teachers often asked them to read silently and fast in the classroom, respectively, 480 and 410 which represent 67.6% and 57.8% of the entire population respondent negatively. None of the responses above measured up to half of the entire population under investigation. Consequently, this portrays that the teachers were not really helping the students to develop their talents in reading competence. The teachers should, therefore, help to encourage the students to develop their talents in reading by teaching them the various skills in the classroom. The responses arising from questionnaire items of table two test how the existence of library or otherwise affect reading competence. The 50%, 50% responses from the first questionnaire item depict that half of the population has libraries in the schools, the other half do not. The implications is that the unavailability of libraries in some schools will inevitably cause dearth in reading materials and consequently, affect reading competence. However, the various responses emanating from questionnaire items 2-5 of the some table which test whether students go to the libraries for private reading, parents encouragement to read, availability of reading materials and ever been to Afikpo public library for personal reading, though there were variation in answers, the affirmative responses were significant. Thus, we have 64.7% and 35.3%, 84.5% and 15.5%, 65.2% and 34.8% and 54.1% and 45.9%, respectively. Altogether, the affirmative responses emphasize certain urge and

interest to read, on the one hand, and availability of reading materials on the other hand which consequently portray reading culture and thus, enhance reading competence.

The responses from questionnaire items 1-7 of table three which variously test what constitute lack of interest in reading, and the incentive given to encourage interest in reading, the following responses were available. Whereas 74.7% and 60.7% of the respondents affirmed that they lose interest in reading due to tension and unfamiliar language of the textbooks, and other 179 and 279, representing 25.3% and 39.3% others did not. Conversely, while 13.3% and 42.3% or 95 and 300 less number of the entire population agreed that uncondusive environments and time factors affect their interest in reading, the other 86.7% and 57.7% or 615 and 410 of the entire population were not. Thus, this indicate that more number of students are adaptive to language and environmental factors to reading and positively influence reading competence. Nonetheless, in questionnaire items 5-6 where students interests for reading at all or reading for pleasure were tested, positive responses were received. While 78.1% and 70.5% or 555 and 500 which portrayed about 75 percent of the population and relatively greater number affirmed, 21.9% and 29.5% others did not. These responses encouraged interest in reading which lead to reading competence. Finally, in questionnaire item 7 which enquired whether teachers or parents encouraged reading through material rewards, the responses were in the affirmative, attracting 66.7% more and 33,3% less number of the population or 474 and 236, respectively. This goes a long way to emphasize teachers and parents roles in encouraging reading culture and reading competence.

Summary

Having examined the factors affecting reading competence in Junior Secondary School Students with specific reference to Afikpo Urban of Ebonyi State, Nigeria, the researcher summarizes as follows: Reading should state early in every child. Seminars on reading should be organized in junior secondary schools to improve reading and reading habit. Students should develop interest in reading.

Conclusion

The need for reading in our junior secondary schools should not be over emphasized. Reading is one of the major ways of knowing the thoughts and experiences of other people which results in the acquisition of knowledge. Reading is very essential for the development of the personality in the students. Students should have this in mind especially, students of Urban Secondary Schools in Afikpo of Ebonyi State as their quest for academic attainment depends largely on the extent to which they read.

Recommendations

Bearing in mind that the importance of reading is the key to achieving higher academic goals and excellence, the researcher makes the following recommendations arising from the findings.

1. There should be constant administration of summary and comprehension exercises in the classroom to enable the students learn how to read.
2. The school authorities should include reading as a separate subject in the school time table so as to enable students see reading as a serious examinable subject. This will help to improve students' acquisition of the skills involved in reading.
3. The government should properly equip libraries in the schools to expose the students to wide range of reading.
4. The Ministry of Education should ensure that teachers employed to teach reading in schools are well trained.
5. Students should be made to take reading practices very serious, considering the fact that their effectiveness in the society depends on their ability to be proficient readers which enhance their expressiveness.

6. Parents should encourage their children by providing them with the necessary textbooks.

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