

An investigation into demographic factors influencing reading difficulties among primary three pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Alebiosu Yejide O¹, Onongha Grace I², Oyewale Nafisat³, & Jimoh Basit A³

¹Dept. of Guidance & Counselling, Osun State University, Nigeria, 00000002587379

^{2,3} Dept. of Guidance & Counselling, Osun State University, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: yejide.alebiosu@uniosun.edu.ng

Abstract

This study investigated reading difficulties among primary three pupils in the state of Osun, Nigeria. The survey design offered evidence from combined research literature. Two hypotheses were tested in the study. Twenty (20) primary schools were randomly selected from the three Senatorial districts in Osun State. Four pupils identified as having reading difficulties were purposively drawn from each of the twenty schools with the cooperation of the school teachers and head teachers. Total number of respondents was 80. Data was collected through a developed instrument titled Determinants of Reading Difficulties Questionnaire ($r=0.76$), and analysed with SPSS software using t-test and bi-variate analyses. Results showed that: teachers display low/no tolerance for reading errors in class; parents do not devote time to assist in reading texts and other school assignments; pupils' after-school activities do not give them time to improve their reading ability; students had no extra lesson for reading after school hours; students lacked the interest to improve on their reading; bad/poor vision and peer shaming are among the causes leading to reading complications among students in primary 3 classes. The findings confirmed: a significant difference between parental literacy status and reading difficulties; and relative influence of school type on reading difficulties among primary 3 pupils. It was recommended among others that primary school management should organise: competitions on spelling bees, vocabulary knowledge, rote learning activities to encourage student-centred learning through self-discovery, sensory play and peer interaction, incentives to motivate pupils who lag in reading skills.

Keywords: Reading difficulties, School type, Primary three, Parental literacy status

Introduction

Reading is an intricate, multifaceted-nature task needing fundamental skills of a diverse array which include cognitive, linguistic

and sociocultural dimensions. Webster's dictionary describes reading as a complicated effort of several features which include but not limited to identifying symbolic representation and understanding the message being conveyed by the authors. The conceptualisation of reading as given by Cremin, Hendry, Chamberlain and Hulston (2023), described it as the process of understanding the meaning of written symbols or text, through sight or touch, and a complex cognitive process that involves word recognition, fluency, spelling, comprehension, motivation, phonics and vocabulary development among others. Cremin et.al., (2023), also interpreted reading as an interactive process occurring while reading the text content, which is consequent upon previous experiences, information, knowledge, attitude, and language context, of the reader and requires continuous practice, development and refinement.

The Whole Language theory which had its base in the works of other language propounders like Piaget, Chomsky, and Vygotsky's work was founded by Goodman on the beliefs that naturally, humans are able to make progress in reading, thus they should be taught as a whole, while decoding and word recognition should be eschewed in favor of pursuing its meaning. Its perspective on literacy development goes beyond mastering phonetic and decoding skills, but the

development of reader interaction with the text and making good meaning out of the information being conveyed as well as encouraging critical thinking into deeper meanings of texts. This core assumption that learning should be taught as a whole was faulted as kids need phonics to learn to read, whereas whole language does not teach phonics.

The educational philosophy in the development of the whole language movement perceived reading as a comprehensive effort that links the content and context with the reader whilst also emphasising the significance of comprehension and ascribing meaning to the reading effort made. The publication by Ehri, in Reading Research Quarterly (2020), however revealed that learners who have been involved in whole language theory confirmed substantial progress of 30% in their reading grades, when measured alongside those exposed to the articulation method only. Ehri study was a combination of the articulation of phonetics and whole language methods.

Goodman (1967, in Main 2023), described reading as a primary learning process in which learners rely on the structure of language and the meaning of the words in a sentence. The study confirmed that attempts at reading are natural efforts which are achieved without any competency building efforts. Goodman's opinion on the process of reading observed that the reader goes through optical, perceptual, syntactic and meaning cycles before he can effectively make meaning out

of words. In Main's opinion, the concept of reading is an interplay of the content, context and the reader, thereby making it a complicated pursuit between the eyes and the mind which gives a translation and appraisal of the graphics or document.

Dadzie (2008 cited in Owusu & Acheaw, 2014), interpreted reading is the capacity to interpret documents for knowledge, personal growth and development. It was perceived as having significant connection with the imaginative, analytical and critical thought processes and the translation of letters into words, words into phrases, and phrases into sentences. Owusu-Acheaw identified word recognition and comprehension errors, as being related to reading problems, while unsuitable word grouping and misconstrued punctuations are related to reading complications commonly found among learners.

Alexander and Jarman (2018), emphasised reading as requiring not just the recognition of words or identifying a sound symbol, but the capacity to decode the message and connect it with relevant background knowledge towards building new understanding.

Another study by the National Institute for Literacy (2023), expressed that the most important skills for reading literacy include, the morphology of the language, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and phonics with each of these building on previous works to assist students in understanding and applying the knowledge of letter-sound patterns and relationships on each subject being learned. This created an improvement in reading skills in students taught phonics against those who were not, thereby confirming the efficacy of phonics in assisting a non-reader to be a reader as well as developing their understanding of a text. The theory undoubtedly centered on a comprehensive effort to the concept of reading and understanding its complexities.

According to Alexander et al. (2018), reading serves as a guide to improving illiteracy and fosters children's cognitive success. The study confirmed reading as a skill that cannot be compromised but is necessary to make informed decisions that will allow the individual to be prepared for a competitive participation internationally. This confirmed that the impact of effective reading instructions on student's comprehension and content literacy is flexible and interactive in various dimensions. It cannot be over-emphasized therefore, that the capability of an individual to read are vital in understanding and processing documented contents which unfortunately, some pupils in primary 3 upwards are still unable to get a grip on.

Efforts of Lone (2011) on reading pronounced it as undergoing activities ranging from interpreting written messages appropriately to understanding its content are germane in contributing to academic successes, molding the personality of an individual, and helping to acquire the needed reasoning towards innovative thoughts that are expected in primary pupils. The difficulty in reading evident in some children has been a point of concentration in many works with a focus on the probable and improbable causes of such

difficulty (Fletcher & Barnes, 2002; cited in Wekesa, Poipoi, Wanyama & Nyakwara, 2012). It is a state in which children are unable to engage in academic efforts that are chronologically commensurate with their ability levels due to intellectual inadequacies, evident in listening, oral, written or reading discrepancies (Wekesa, et al., 2012).

Difficulty in reading describes an unforeseen disruption in the ability to understand and decipher phonetical construction, which was vital to this study as it is being misconstrued that pupils with reading difficulties lack of intellectual ability or have sensory impairments, whereas, they may be of great relevance in other areas of strength. However, it is only unfortunate that Torgessen (2000); cited in Karanja (2021), noted that despite every necessary mediation at early stages, about 4-6% of these children still have the tendency to experience reading difficulties which may make them lag behind their peers, thereby lowering their self-esteem, experiencing limited opportunities for success in school, having their natural love for learning destroyed or bruised.

Statement of the problem

During consecutive yearly supervision of teachers-in-training practical sessions, the lead researcher identified that quite a number of pupils did not display competence during English comprehension/reading classes. It was further observed through questioning that these pupils either did not show any, or showed relatively small sign of intrinsic motivation or choice-led volitional reading except when such is influenced by nurturing through the teacher, peer or the school community.

Likewise, a sizeable number of JSS1 (similar to high school Year 1) students could neither conveniently read text passages, nor read literature novels as expected of their ages and educational level. These field experiences contradicted Piaget who theorised that at ages 7-11, a child who is in the concrete operational stage is an active learner with evidence of logical and critical reasoning abilities, and such a child should be able to read and most likely understand the content of the context read. The assertion of Ozernov-Palchik, Norton, Sideridis, Beach, Wolf and Gaab (2016), that students who experience reading complications are more at risk of unemployment or underemployment due to the likelihood of dropping out of school, it becomes essential to offer mediation that will ensure these students are able to meet up with the purpose for which the Nigerian government has consistently engaged professional teachers to achieve.

Despite the unwavering efforts of the government to; encourage parental involvement, allocate more funds into the primary education system, attempt periodic reformation and review of primary educational curriculum, encourage remediation programmes through extra lessons in primary schools in order to foster and enhance reading culture among primary school pupils, there are pockets of evidences that the interventions have not been of remarkable success among primary school pupils. This informed the investigation into grade 3 (locally known as primary 3) pupils who are assumed to have attained the concrete operational stage of between 7-

11 years, and have been identified with reading difficulties in both private and public schools, as well as assessing the influences of these two school management types on pupils' reading difficulties.

Purpose of the study

Study specifically attempted to:

- 1) assess any significant difference in parental literacy status and reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria
- 2) ascertain the relative influence of school management type on reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses guided the study:

H01: There is no significant difference between parental literacy status and reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

H02: There is no significant relative influence of school management type on reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Literature Review

Literature was conceptually, theoretically and empirically reviewed

Conceptual review

Levy, Hall and Preece (2018), believed that before a child starts school, he would have been prepared to read by modelling observed in parents' and caregivers' on interactions around texts. The findings of Kucirkova and Littleton (2016); Nicholas and Paatsch (2021); and Strouse and Ganea (2017), which indicated variety in parents' reading practices observed that parents have preference for print texts, while the younger ones have digital preferences may accurately explain generation gap in why pupils experience difficulties in reading comprehension.

However, Bonanati, Hilkenmeier, Greiner, and Buhl (2018), observed that parents who exhibit interest in reading at home tend to shape their children's interest through role modelling. By engaging in activities like: libraries visitations, reading, singing rhymes, creating and discussing text connections with their children, parents would show the worth they attach to reading which the children can emulate and reflect in their own interest for reading texts. Findings of OECD (2021), noted and reported that significantly, children whose parents enjoy reading, are likely to model this activity, thereby enjoying reading than those whose parents do not model it, or cannot read due to illiteracy. Corroborating the above, the study of Anderson, Atkinson, Swaggerty, and O'Brien (2019), affirmed that support for such modelling has however been found to impact positively on families' reading practices and children's engagement.

In similar perspective, Wagner (2023), believed that a child's sense of himself as a reader could be developed by the voluntarily and/or, non- voluntarily literacy activities in which he engages in, whether at home, in school, or in the larger society, which are always influenced by his past and present

experiences with the classroom environment, parents, peers, teachers, personal characteristics and significant others. However, McFarland and Pals, (2005)'s, affirmation that social system has a strong influence on youth identities, and can inform their relationship with reading cannot be underestimated. Hence, a pupil whose influences come from an environment with little or no reading motivation may become less interested in imbibing a good reading culture because he is surrounded by peers with similar contexts and minds. Similarly, Arizpe et al. (2018); and Knoester and Plikuhn (2016), confirmed that social interactions with older siblings who exhibit positive disposition towards reading are perceived to support the sense of self and recreational reading of a young reader.

Theory of Self-Determination (SDT)

Ryan and Deci (2000); and Jang, Reeve and Deci (2010)'s discussion on self-determination theory highlighted it as a means of understanding young minds intrinsic reason to read bearing in mind that competence, autonomy and their relatedness are fundamental in human and these may be pursued simultaneously and independently. The theory suggests that teachers can only build classroom cultures that will encourage students to engage in various tasks, thus, supporting these fundamental needs in their students. It explains how self-determination impacts motivation and posits that people only feel inclined to take particular actions when they perceive that such will have an effect on the outcome, hence, a child completes his homework because he understands the value of responsibility.

Wehmeyer and Palmer, (2003, cited in De Cesarei, 2014), conceived self-determination as giving individuals a right to choose what he wants, which may contribute to positive results in various areas of life like; education, employment, and improved quality of life. This aligns with the natural tendency of man to be active, growth-oriented, seek novel experiences, engage in activities that will enhance his competence, and ability to self-organise towards integration. The theory which focuses on human wellness, was developed by Deci and Ryan in response to the popular belief that reinforcing a behaviour with rewards is one of the best ways to get human beings to perform a task, as individuals believe their innate abilities and can be internally controlled to believe that their behaviour will influence outcomes.

Sociocultural Theories of Reading

Socio-cultural theories of reading, propounded by Lev Vygotsky developed on the Constructivist theory by incorporating culturally relevant texts and social interaction on the cognitive development of a child, with the reading process seen as a social practice influenced by cultural practices, values and norms, thus giving an emphasis on enhancing students reading and boosting their intrinsic reading motivation by creating social learning contexts that reflect the diversities of students whilst also building on students' prior knowledge and experiences.

The emphasis and essence of socio-cultural theories is to deviate from perceiving reading as a cognitive process but as

a socio-cultural dimension of obtaining understanding, thereby promoting literacy development. This aligned with Piaget's (1936) theory of cognitive development in Ansorge (2023), which suggested that as children grow, their intelligence level changes and that despite the relationship between cognitive development and knowledge acquisition, it is also relevant to developing an intellectual picture of a child's surrounding world through deductive reasoning and experimenting, which assist in information retention, comprehension and semantics.

Empirical review

The efforts of Quan-Hoang, Viet-Phuong, Thanh-Huyen, Minh-Hoang, Thu-Trang, Ha-My, and Manh-Toan (2021), on low reading culture in Vietnam, attribute students' reading attitudes with parents' involvement as much as gender and reading promotion activities. The study also found mutual reading efforts and other activities like book exhibitions, story-writing and telling competitions between parents and children as positive correlates of students reading habit. This is a pointer that except if a parent is able to read and write, he may not be able to impact positively or influence a child's reading culture.

Findings of Quan-Hoang, et al., (2021) found credence in Davisi, and Hesbon, (2021), whose study also indicated that 41% and above of parents agreed that their involvement in learning practices of their children through joint reading, going through their homework, purchasing recommended books offer reading incentives to the children, although a great percentage of them still do not engage in learning matters with the children, which is responsible for a huge percentage of students with poor reading culture. Some other scholars like Al-Badamas (2024)'s study reported that rather than prioritizing reading for general acquisition of knowledge, the Nigeria education system prioritizes reading for passing examinations and most pupils read to pass examination, such that a few minutes after exams they are not able to answer same questions. Al-Badamas confirmed that in primary schools: libraries are either unavailable or poorly stocked; librarians are unavailable; reading environment is inconducive; lack of teaching resources; and poor teaching methods on reading were the causes of poor reading habits.

Materials and Methodology

This section described the procedures and techniques used to explain the processes, selection of respondents, data collected and analysis of data.

Findings

Table 1: Mean Ranking Showing Factors Responsible for Reading Difficulties of Primary Three Pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Items	Total % response		Mean	Rank
	A	D		
Teachers display of low/no tolerance for reading errors in class	82.5	17.5	3.49	1st
Parents do not devote time to assist in reading texts and other school assignments.	87.5	12.5	3.32	2nd
Activities after school do not give me time to improve on my reading ability.	77.5	22.5	3.25	3rd

Research Design

A descriptive research design using quantitative approach to obtain relevant information from the respondents was adopted for the study.

Population, Sampling Procedure and Implementation

The population for this study comprised primary three pupils with reading difficulties in Osun State, Nigeria. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to select ten (10) private and ten (10) public primary schools within three senatorial districts which make up Osun State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select four pupils with reading difficulties from each of the twenty selected private and public primary schools. Total number of primary 3 pupils selected as respondents for the study was eighty (80).

Prior to this, the face and content validity of the constructed questionnaire titled Determinants of Reading Difficulties Questionnaire (DRDq) were established by the researchers. The instrument was subjected to test re-test over a period of two weeks to ascertain its reliability with copies of the instrument administered on only fifteen (15) pupils who were not part of the study sample, and who were not in the same schools as the selected sample. The respondents were not particularly large due to the peculiarity of the special population. The reliability coefficient was 0.76. The questionnaire which was based on a four-likert scale of response: Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3), Disagree (2); and Strongly Disagree (1), was divided into two sections. Section A comprised information on students' biodata while Section B extracted information on causes of reading difficulties.

Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the test administration, the researcher had gone round the selected schools to obtain permission from the head teachers who are the head of management in each school. These contact points had assigned some class teachers to assist in identifying students who belonged to the category of study. The head teachers were requested to seek the consent of parents since they are minors. On arrival at the schools, the teachers explained the reason for the study to the selected students who eventually consented to being a part of the study after which the questionnaire administration was done with the assistance of the primary school class teachers who identified pupils with this challenge. Data was collected within two weeks of administration and analysed using SPSS software. Analysis was done in descriptive statistics of frequency count, inferential analysis and ANOVA.

No extra lesson to assist reading activities after school hours.	73.8	26.2	3.05	4th
Lack of interest.	76.3	23.7	3.05	5th
Bad/poor vision	71.3	28.7	2.96	6th

The mean score in Table 1 ranked teachers' display of low/no tolerance for reading errors; parents not devoting time to assist in reading texts and other school assignments; after school activities do not give time to improve reading ability, in that order, as the topmost among the factors causing reading difficulties in primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria.

H01: There is no significant difference between parental literacy status and reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Table 2: Analysis of Variance showing significant difference between parental literacy status and reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Parental literacy	N	X	SD	t-cal	Sig (2-tailed)
Literate	50	3.06	.9127	2.076*	0.041
Illiterate	30	2.63	.2633		

*Difference between means is significant at 5% alpha level; df =78; Critical t-value = 1.655

The result obtained as shown in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t-value of 2.076 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.655 at 5% level of significance and that the probability value of 0.041 is lower than 5% (0.05) significance level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

H02: There is no relative influence of school type on reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Table 2: showing summary of Analysis of Variance on relative influence of school management type on reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State, Nigeria

Independent variable	Coefficients		
	B	B	t-value
School type	0.106	0.044	2.383*
Test results			
F- value	5.677*		
R	0.260		
R ²	0.068		
Constant	1.099		8.642*

*Significant at 0.05 significance level; probability value = 0.020; Critical F-ratio = 3.87

Result obtained in Table 3 on the second hypothesis indicated that the probability value of 0.020 is lower than 5% significance level, and the calculated F-ratio of 5.677 is greater than the critical F-ratio of 3.87, thereby affirming a relative influence of school type on reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Ede, Osun State and rejecting the **null hypothesis**.

Discussions

The result obtained as shown in Table 2 revealed that since calculated t-value is greater than the critical t-value, there is a

significant difference between parental literacy status and reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun state ($t=2.076$, $df=78$, $p<0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implied that literate parents positively influence early literacy development in a child. In the same vein, families with literate parents are more likely to provide more enriched literacy experiences at home, thereby potentially impacting a child's ability to experience positive reading engagements. Hence, families with literate parents contribute to a literacy-rich home environment which exposes children to various language stimuli, books, and educational activities.

Literate parents are more likely to engage their children in activities that promote language development, such as reading books, engaging in conversations, providing educational games, as well as going beyond literacy to provide emotional and social development. This exposure enhances a child's vocabulary, comprehension skills, and overall language proficiency. Parents with literacy skills are better equipped to provide effective educational support and assist with homework, thus guiding their children through reading assignments, helping them comprehend texts and develop essential reading strategies. To buttress this assumption, Inoue, Georgiou, Parrila, and Kirby (2018), constructed a longitudinal association model between parental home teaching and children's literacy skills, and concluded that parental teaching could impact children's reading performance from kindergarten to school age.

On the other hand, children raised by parents with limited or no formal education are at increased risk of encountering reading difficulty which supported Agyei's (2019), study of the illiteracy status of parents causing reading difficulties among class six pupils of Wa Basic School Complex. Agyei further added deficiency in reading as exhibited in pupils are evident in their unwilling attitude towards reading texts like; magazines, novels and newspapers, lack of enjoyment of reading test outside classroom work, non-provision of reading materials by parents, constant engagement in play times by pupils during their leisure time, lack of encouragement to develop the habit of reading at early age, lack of guidance on pupil's reading from parents, huge number of parental illiteracy, lack of guidance by teachers on pupils reading, no proper method of reading taught by teachers in classroom, lack of instructional materials for teaching reading in school and parents negative attitude toward reading, as causes of reading difficulties among in pupils class six in Wa Basic School

Results obtained in Table 3 indicated that school management type has a relative influence on the reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in Osun State ($F = 5.677$, $p<0.05$). This difference in the reading habits of children in public and

private schools could be founded on the premise that private school provide more reading materials which are easily accessible to their pupils, and this contributes to their pupils exhibiting better attitude to reading. Private schools often have greater financial resources which allow them to invest in better infrastructure, educational materials, and qualified teachers. This resource advantage can positively influence the learning environment and potentially mitigate reading difficulties compared to public schools.

The above assertions were evident in the study of Epstein (2011), who identified that private schools emphasise strong partnerships with parents, encouraging increased parental involvement and literacy support at home as crucial factors in addressing reading difficulties. These were also buttressed by the observation of the researcher that private schools tend to have smaller class sizes, more flexible in adopting student-centred strategies, enable teachers to provide individualised attention to students, which contributes to early identification and intervention for pupils experiencing reading difficulties, thereby fostering a supportive learning environment.

Conclusion

Consequent upon the results in this study on school types and reading difficulties among primary three pupils in Osun State, it was concluded that teachers' display of low/no tolerance for reading errors in class, parents not devoting time to assist in reading texts and other school assignments, pupils activities after school does not give them time to improve on their reading ability, no extra lesson for reading after school hours, lack of interest and bad/poor vision are among the causes of reading difficulties among primary 3 students in Osun State. The findings confirmed a significant difference between parental literacy status and reading difficulties. It affirmed a relative influence of school management type on reading difficulties, while also suggesting no joint influence of school management type on reading difficulties of primary 3 pupils in the State

Recommendations

Based on the above, these recommendations were made:

- 1) School administration must ensure organising competitions like spelling bees, vocabulary knowledge, and rote learning activities in primary schools, as these will encourage discovery learning, sensory play and peer interaction
- 2) Teachers should engage participatory reading in the classroom in all subjects by encouraging reading in small groups
- 3) Subject teachers must give assignments on reading texts which will be followed by practical reading efforts in class and questions should be drawn from such texts
- 4) Incentives should be provided to motivate pupils especially those who lag in reading skills
- 5) Pupils who are proficient in reading should be awarded prizes, to serve as motivation and reinforce reading habit

- 6) Student-centred learning which includes reading should be encouraged especially in the formative years of every child
- 7) Parents should attach more importance to early development of reading habits and create favorable reading environment in their homes
- 8) Every primary school must have a library, stocked with books and facilities that will motivate students engagement in voluntary reading, which in turn will improve their reading skills and competencies.
- 9) The school must avail pupils the opportunity to lend story books and other reading materials should be made
- 10) Readership promotion programmes should be organised in school libraries from time to time
- 11) Specific time must be stated in the school timetable for reading in the library
- 12) If possible, the three levels of government should make primary education compulsory for every citizen as this would significantly curb illiteracy and improve the culture of reading in homes and the society at large.

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