

Evaluating the Reading Proficiency of Pupils in Upper Classes of Primary Schools in Abeokuta Metropolis

Tolulope Ruth Adegioriolu

De Montfort University, England

Emmanuel Tobi Adegioriolu

North-West University, South Africa

Tshepang Jacob Moloi

Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

Abstract

Intellectual excellence in reading is fundamental and is a firm prerequisite for overall achievement in school. Hence, when no such solid provision is provided to the poor reader for the achievement of academic learning, that student is finally frustrated and deemed a failure. As many scholars claim, academic achievement in all courses requires this literary ability. Unfortunately, some of the pupils in the upper elementary school classes in Nigeria have been found to read exceptionally poorly, which means they might not be able to distinguish many words to the extent that they would be expected to. This study adopted the developmental survey design to employ the use of an interview questionnaire to collect primary data from a sample size of 40 teachers. A reading exercise was also carried out on 60 students in four schools within the Abeokuta Metropolis. The result of the study reveals that the reading proficiency of pupils in the upper classes of primary schools in Abeokuta Metropolis is fair. This is owing to the factors of mother tongue, class composition and size, standard of living of families of primary school pupils and teaching competence across all levels of primary school education.

Keywords: Reading, pupils, reading proficiency, reading ability

1. Introduction

According to Irkinovich and Izatullaevna (2022), proficiency in reading is not only an essential competency for elementary school students, but it also serves as the cornerstone of their academic path and a means of pursuing lifetime learning. Duke and Cartwright (2021) also assert that in addition to being crucial for managing the challenges of contemporary life, proficient reading and comprehension lay the foundation for scholastic achievement in all subject areas. Reading ability is essentially the ability to comprehend, analyse, and synthesise information in addition to the mechanical skill of word decoding as Andzayi and Ikwen (2014) posit. Thus, from Philomina's (2015) perspective, it is more than just reading letters and words on a page; it also involves drawing connections, analysing material critically, and extracting meaning from text. To that end, a strong reading ability provides students with the tools they need to investigate different views, engage with complicated ideas, and communicate effectively in a variety of circumstances (Bayraktar & Firat, 2020; Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

Reading proficiency also promotes empathy, creativity, and a lifetime love of learning—qualities that go beyond academic accomplishment (Gomes & Hirata, 2024). A study by Gomes and Hirata (2024) revealed that Brazilian primary school students excelled in reading when they were exposed to group training sessions and diversified reading techniques. Thus, the study asserts that teaching competence was vital to enable students to achieve good reading proficiency. A similar study by Lauermaun and Hagen (2021) also agrees with this assertion. Therefore, encouraging primary school students to improve their reading skills is not only necessary for their academic success but also serves as a catalyst for social improvement, intellectual enrichment, and personal development. This paper aims to assess the effect of mother tongue, environment and other factors on the reading proficiency of primary school pupils within Abeokuta Metropolis. It also suggests solutions to the problems identified and makes necessary recommendations for improvement.

2. Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the developmental survey design. This particular research design was employed for the purpose of gathering data and information for an interview. With this research design, reading passages were created by the researcher within the framework of this study to test the students' reading proficiency in upper classes of primary schools in the Abeokuta Metropolis. To that extent, four different primary schools in the Abeokuta Metropolis were used by the researcher for this investigation. Thus, pupils and teachers from these four primary schools constituted the study's population. The schools selected included St. Mary's Anglican Nursery and Primary School, Osiele, Abeokuta; Eminence Nursery and Primary School, Elewe-eran, Abeokuta; O.L.G. Primary School, Elewe-eran, Abeokuta; and F.C.E. Staff School Nursery and Primary School, Osiele, Abeokuta. In Abeokuta Metropolis, Ogun State, a total of 60 pupils and 40 teachers in primary 4, 5, and 6 were sampled for this study in each of the elementary schools.

Moreover, both male and female teachers were chosen at random to make up the study's sample population. This was as a result of the widespread homogeneity of the teachers' capacity across the study area. Short passages and structured interviews were the main methods or instruments used to gather data from both teachers and pupils for this particular study. The purpose of the interviews was to gain first-hand information from respondents on the variables that influence the reading proficiency of pupils in upper elementary classes in schools within the study area. The interviews were conducted with the sampled teachers for this study and shown to the head teachers of the selected primary schools for approval. Subsequently, the responses obtained through the interviews were sent to a specialist in the field of educational research for perusal and final approval.

The respondents for the interview sessions were sampled at about 40 teachers, while the short paragraphs employed to test the reading proficiency of pupils were given to the sampled pupils to read. Their reading was then evaluated by the researcher against a grading system developed for this study. The interviews administered to the teachers consisted of two major parts. The interviewee's personal data and information was the main focus of the first part of the interview; thus, the name of the interviewee, the gender, interviewee's age and additional personal data were some of the details required, whereas, part B of the interview was solely made up of questions that were intended to solicit responses to topics and variables related to the evaluation of pupils' reading skills in the upper classes of primary schools in Abeokuta Metropolis.

To analyse the data collected effectively, simple percentages and other descriptive statistics were adopted within the study framework. Thus, responses from sampled teachers were weighted on a 'Yes' and 'No' basis, while pupils' reading performances were measured and placed on a three–

point grade system (poor, average and excellent). Moreover, the pupils' reading speeds across all the four selected schools were categorised as either slow, average or fast.

3. Major Findings and Results

The study collected data from four primary schools located in the Abeokuta Metropolis, with selected instructors and pupils from each school participating.

Evaluation of Pupils' Reading Proficiency

Table A contains a breakdown of the number of pupils whose reading proficiency was evaluated and measured within the four selected schools:

Table A: Number of Pupils Evaluated Across Selected Primary Schools

S/ N	SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF PUPILS ACROSS CLASSES			
		Pry 4	Pry 5	Pry 6	Total
1	St. Mary's Anglican Nursery and Primary School, Osiele, Abeokuta	5	5	5	15
2	F.C.E. Staff School Nursery and Primary School, Osiele, Abeokuta	5	5	5	15
3	Eminence Nursery and Primary School, Elewe-eran, Abeokuta.	5	5	5	15
4	O.L.G. Primary School, Elewe-eran, Abeokuta.	5	5	5	15

Table B shows the sentences that were used for the evaluation of the reading ability and reading proficiency of pupils from two primary schools within the selected primary schools as well as the results from the evaluation. These schools include Eminence Nursery and Primary School, Elewe-eran, and O.L.G Primary School, Elewe-eran, Abeokuta.

Table B: Evaluation of Reading Proficiency in Eminence Nursery and Primary School, Elewe-eran

S/ N	SENTENCES	SCALE					No. of Students
		Sub Pupils	Slow	Average	Fast	Class	
1	I am travelling to Lagos tomorrow.	A B C D E	3.30 Secs	2.55 secs 3 secs	2 secs 2.02 secs	Pry 4	5 students
2	Segun and Damola have been best of friends since their primary school days.	A B C D E	8 secs 8.20 Secs	6 secs	4 secs 5 secs	Pry 5	5 students
3	Mr. Coker had observed that Mohammed was likely to be chosen as the sports captain to lead the school team to the Enugu Games to be held next December, but he too had recently joined the students who were grumbling about the new regulations.	A B C D E	18 secs	17 secs 17.20 secs 16.45 secs	16.01 secs	Pry 6	5 students
	Total Students Evaluated						15 students

Table C: Evaluation of Reading Proficiency in O.L.G Primary School, Elewe-eran

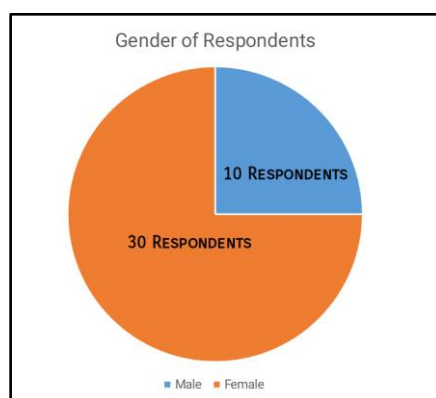
This table shows the results of the reading exercise that was conducted among selected primary 4, 5 and 6 pupils of O.L.G Primary School, Elewe-eran to determine proficiency.

S/N	SENTENCES	SCALE					No. of Students
		Sub Pupils	Slow	Average	Fast	Class	
1	I am travelling to Lagos tomorrow.	A B C D E	3.20 secs 3.56 secs	3.01 secs	2 secs 3 secs	Pry 4	6 students
2	Segun and Damola have been best of friends since their primary school days.	A B C D E	6 secs 6.17 secs	5 secs 5.30 secs		Pry 5	4 students
3	Mr. Coker had observed that Mohammed was likely to be chosen as the sports captain to lead the school team to the Enugu Games to be held next December, but he too had recently joined the students who were grumbling about the new regulations.	A B C D E	25 secs 23 secs	19 secs 18 secs	17 secs	Pry 6	5 students
	Total Students Evaluated						15 students

According to the results presented in Table C above, 23% of the students were classified as average readers, 21% as slow readers, and 16% as quick readers. Thus, the results of this investigation revealed that teachers still have a great deal of work to do in terms of students' reading skills. If teachers in the selected schools could implement all of the researcher's recommendations, it would improve the reading ability of students in the upper grades of elementary schools within the study area.

Teachers' Interviews

Chart A: Gender of Respondents (Teachers)



For the interview sessions with the teachers from the selected primary schools, the following questions were asked to a total of 40 teachers in order to collect data:

Question 1: Does class size affect the reading ability in primary schools?

Question 2: Does reading ability contribute to the academic performance of pupils?

Question 3: Can poor background influence or affect pupils' reading ability?

Question 4: Can incompetence on teachers' part contribute to pupils' reading skills?

Question 5: Can the quality of students' reading materials or textbooks have an effect on students' reading skills?

Question 11: Do pupils' in private primary schools read better than pupils in public primary schools?

Question 6: Is it true that pupils' mother tongue can affect their reading skills?

Question 7: Does regular evaluation play a vital role in deciding what the teachers teach in schools?

Question 8: Do students who read have higher IQs than students who do not?

Question 9: Can pupils' reading ability be evaluated through their writing skills?

Question 10: Do pupils' compilations of new words and teachers' systematic way of scoring contribute to their reading ability?

Table D - Question 1: Does class population affect the reading ability in primary schools?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	24	60	16	40

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 24 teachers (60%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 16 teachers (40%)

According to Table D, 60% of respondents in public schools believe that class size influences reading ability in elementary schools. However, 40% of the respondents who are also teachers disagree because in some cases where reading proficiency is low, class sizes are even smaller. As a result, it is accepted that class population has a greater impact on reading ability or proficiency.

Table E - Question 2: Does reading ability contribute to the academic performance of pupils?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	30	75	10	25

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 30 teachers (75%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 10 teachers (25%)

According to the data in Table E, 75% of respondents believe that reading ability improves students' academic success, while 25% disagreed. As a result, it is clear that reading has a significant impact on the development of elementary school students. Therefore, it should not be taken lightly.

Table F - Question 3: Can poor background influence or affect pupils' reading ability?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	20	50	20	50

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 20 teachers (50%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 20 teachers (50%)

From the results presented above, 50% of the respondents agreed that poor background influences or affects students' reading ability, especially in public schools, whereas 50% of the respondents disagreed, possibly because students in private schools do not lack in the areas of financial status and parental care. This demonstrates that students' backgrounds play a significant role in the reading process.

Table G - Question 4: Can incompetence on teachers' part contribute to pupils' poor reading skills?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	36	90	4	10

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 36 teachers (90%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 4 teachers (10%)

As indicated in Table G, the number of 'Yes' responses (90%) exceeds the number of 'No' responses (10%), indicating that teachers' competence is important when it comes to students' reading abilities.

Table H - Question 5: Can the quality of students' reading materials or textbooks have an effect on students' reading skills?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	37	92.5	3	7.5

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 37 teachers (92.5%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 3 teachers (7.5%)

From Table H, 92.5% of respondents believed that pupils' reading materials have an impact on their reading abilities, whereas 7.5% disagreed.

Table I - Question 6: Is it true that pupils' mother tongue can affect their reading skills?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	25	62.5	15	37.5

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 25 teachers (62.5%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 15 teachers (37.5%)

The majority of respondents felt that a child's mother tongue affects his or her reading development in public schools but not in private schools where most students are exposed to good English language usage. However, this is not the case in public schools.

Table J - Question 7: Does regular evaluation play a vital role in deciding what the teachers teach in schools?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	30	75	10	25

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 30 teachers (75%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 10 teachers (25%)

According to Table J, evaluation plays a critical role in determining what teachers teach in schools. We can infer that 75% of the teachers agreed and 25% disagreed with this notion.

Table K - Question 8: Do students who read have higher IQs than students who do not?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	35	87.5	5	12.5

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 35 teachers (87.5%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 5 teachers (12.5%)

The majority (87.5%) of teachers believed that children who participate in reading activities have higher IQ scores than those who do not. Reading aids mental development and allows pupils to obtain a broad range of knowledge and ideas.

Table L - Question 9: Can pupils' reading ability be evaluated through their writing skills?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	22	55	18	45

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 22 teachers (55%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 18 teachers (45%)

The results in Table L clearly show that 55% of teachers agree that writing skills help in evaluating students' reading ability, with 45% disagreeing.

Table M - Question 10: Do pupils' compilations of new words and teachers' systematic way of scoring contribute to their reading ability?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	18	45	22	55

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 18 teachers (45%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 22 teachers (55%)

In this aspect of study, 55% of teachers were dissatisfied with students' collections of new words and teachers' systematic scoring methods, asserting that these do not contribute to their reading ability. However, 45% thought that it contributed to pupils' reading abilities.

Table N - Question 11: Do pupils' in private primary schools read better than pupils in public primary schools do?

No. of Respondents	'Yes' Response	%	'No' Response	%
40	29	72.5	11	27.5

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'Yes' = 29 teachers (72.5%)

Number and percentage of respondents who said 'No' = 11 teachers (27.5%)

From Table N, the results show that 72.5% of respondents agree with the fact that pupils' in private primary schools read better than pupils in public primary schools. However, 27.5% of the teachers of the interviewed population disagreed with this notion.

4. Discussions Of Major Findings

According to the study's findings, the reading ability of primary school pupils across the study area can be graded on average as being low. In fact, as results have shown, pupils' reading ability and proficiency in the four selected schools are low and this inference can be generalised across primary schools within the study area, with the exception of those in private schools, who performed averagely. This suggests clearly that teachers in these public primary schools must exert greater effort and do their best to improve the reading abilities and proficiency of their pupils. From the interviews conducted on the 40 teachers from the selected primary schools, the study found that the majority of teachers support the notion that regular evaluation plays an important role in assessing pupils' academic performance, particularly in the aspect of reading.

Within the framework of this study, several issues were identified as impeding upper primary school pupils' reading skills. Some of these issues which the study identified included physiological, psychological and environmental barriers, as well as the background status of the pupils, all of which have an impact, whether favourable or not. The study further observed that students at private schools outperformed those in public schools with regard to reading. The reason for this was that most teachers in public primary schools did not always encourage their students to speak good English, which made it difficult for these students to read effectively in English.

As the results in Table D show, class composition and size had a significant impact on the reading proficiency and ability of pupils within the selected primary schools. Thus, government and educational agencies could enhance reading ability and proficiency by reducing the number of students per class and possibly having a limit of about 30 students per class. As shown in Table F, the standard of living of families of primary school pupils has a significant impact on their overall academic performance, more specifically on their reading proficiency. Thus, pupils from relatively stable family backgrounds may have a higher level of reading proficiency than students from poor family backgrounds. Moreover, results from the interviews and evaluation indicate to a great extent that the competency of teachers and the adequacy of learning materials have a close correlation with the reading proficiency of their pupils.

Hence, having teachers who are competent, together with adequate learning materials in primary schools will translate to producing pupils who have a very high reading ability or level of proficiency. This is in line with the studies by Gomes and Hirata (2024) and Lauermaann and Hagen (2021) which suggest that there is a correlation between teachers' competencies and pupils' reading proficiency. Lastly, the research has highlighted the fact that writing is, to a great extent, a prerequisite for developing a good reading culture among children of primary school level. Moreover, writing helps students improve their reading during the writing process because

the teacher might ask the student to read what he or she has written. This helps these pupils improve their reading abilities.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations to increase the reading abilities of the pupils, making learning more engaging and meaningful:

1. First and foremost, the Ogun State government should build language laboratories with audio-lingual aids in primary schools since pronunciation is difficult and frequently differs from the written form of a word.
2. The government can also raise the standard of living, which will improve pupils' reading comprehension and, consequently, their academic achievement.
3. There should also be provision for resilient, trained and qualified teachers, effective reading facilities, proper application of technique, student motivation as well as sessions for the utilisation of instructional materials.
4. The government should also build enough classrooms to accommodate teachers and pupils, or reduce class size to at most 30 pupils.
5. Reading activities should be planned and overseen by teachers on a regular basis. Teachers should make an effort to ensure that they pronounce words correctly as pupils will aspire to copy their teachers' pronunciation of words in any language.
6. Teachers also need to raise awareness of the value of reading to pupils' education. Additionally, teachers should stress to students the need for using dictionaries constantly. In that way they may improve their vocabulary and learn proper grammar and pronunciation as well as sentence construction skills.
7. Primary school pupils should be exposed to television and radio shows that incorporate reading exercises and pronunciation, such as news broadcasts and other educational and informational content, which can help them become better readers.
8. Primary school educators ought to assist pupils in choosing their own appropriate books. Additionally, the students' lists of new vocabulary are helpful, as well as the teachers' methodical documentation of each student's development.

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Teacher's Interview Questionnaire

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