

Assessment of Senior Secondary School Students' Comprehension and Retention of Economics Texts in Offa Nigeria

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Abstract: The ability of students to learn, comprehend and retain texts varies according to several factors. Studies have indicated that this is partly due to students' lack of knowledge of the contents of the texts. Evidence abounds in literature indicating that students performed poorly in the comprehension aspect of English language. Therefore, this study assessed the senior secondary school students' comprehension and retention of Economics texts in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The objectives of this study were to assess: (i) the general level of senior secondary school students' comprehension and retention of Economics texts (ii) the difference in the senior secondary school students' comprehension and retention of Economics texts based on gender, subjects offered and school proprietorship. The researcher employed descriptive research of the survey type for the study. The sample consisted of 320 SS II students from eight (8) selected schools in Offa. The instrument used for the study was a researcher–designed questionnaire on Test of Comprehension of Economics Texts (TCET). The instrument yielded a test-retest reliability value of 0.76 using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation procedure. The data collected were analysed using the percentage, independent sample t-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Duncan Post-Hoc test to locate the direction of the observed differences. Findings of the study showed that: (i) the level of comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa was high while their retention was average; (ii) there was no significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender; (iii) there was a significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subjects offered and based on school proprietorship in favour of private schools. The study concluded that students had a fairly high level of comprehension of Economics texts and average retention level. Gender had no influence on students' comprehension of Economics texts, while subjects offered, and school proprietorship influenced students' comprehension and retention of Economics texts. It was recommended among others, that English and Economics teachers should collaborate in devising better innovative methodologies that can help the students comprehend the content learnt effectively.

Keywords: Assessment, Comprehension, Text, Retention, Economics, Proprietorship

1. Introduction

Education is the mainstay of development in any nation. This is probably why the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) defined education as an instrument for effecting overall national development. As

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noted by Fafunwa (2004), education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a person develops ability, attitude, and other forms of positive values in the society in which he lives. The Federal Government of Nigeria, in the National Policy on Education (2004), described education as an instrument per excellence for effective national development.

The senior secondary education is, therefore, a vital section of education especially as the graduates of this section go on to influence the socio-economic and political situations in the country. Consequently, what children learn at the senior secondary school level is vital. Several subjects are offered by students at the secondary school level. These are grouped under Arts, Social Sciences/Commercial and Science subjects. Economics is one of the major subjects in the social sciences. The subject has been recognised as a special area of study for over a century, and due to its relevance in all spheres of life and professions, it has become a subject offered by most students in secondary schools (Emmeth, 1996).

Comprehension is a key variable in the teaching and learning of languages. Reading, as a learning medium requires comprehension on the part of the learners for the success of the process. This is probably the reason why reading comprehension is recognised as a sub-skill of the secondary school English language curriculum. As observed by Okoye (1983), reading has great impact and effect on the students' power of thinking and cognitive development. Bamigbose (1987) also sees it as one of the most important skills in language learning.

Retention is a key variable in the teaching and learning of languages. Reading, as a learning medium requires comprehension and retention on the part of the learners for the success of the process. This is probably the reason why reading comprehension is recognised as a sub-skill of the secondary school English Language curriculum. As observed by Okoye (1983), reading has great impact and effect on the students' power of thinking and cognitive development. Bamigbose (1987) also sees it as one of the most important skills in language learning.

As noted by Lawal (1991), reading is a tool that is used in the learning of other school subjects, such as History, Geography, Economics, Literature-in-English, Government, and so on. Most importantly, it helps in the development of language skills, especially speaking and writing. It helps the reader to communicate with the writer without seeing each other physically. Unoh (1976) claimed that reading is not only a linguistic process but also a psycholinguistic one which involves both the mastery and application of the mechanics and structure, essentials of language the interaction of language, thought and the perceptual-cognitive abilities of the reader.

The view of reading as a linguistic and a psycholinguistic process, implies that comprehension depends on how well one uses concepts or meanings gained through experience when attached to words or group of words as symbols of their meaning (Onyeagu, 1992). The role of intellectual and retentive abilities of the learners in the process of comprehension should therefore be emphasised as the ultimate goal of any reading exercise is comprehension which entails mental reconstruction using knowledge of language and the world. According to Lawal (1993), this involves thinking, judging, imagining, problem-solving and even intelligent guessing.

In his own contribution, Adegboye (2015) posited that, Economics at whatever level that it is introduced

and with whatever range of students, its concern is to satisfy three criteria:

1. it must seek to develop the knowledge and understanding of the economic dimension of the environment in terms of the basic concepts of the subject.
2. it must seek to develop the capacity to think clearly or vividly and as objectively as possible about economic problems, drawing conclusion logically from an informed analysis of the factual and the descriptive materials of the subject; and
3. it must seek to achieve economic literacy and numeracy i.e., the capacity to use precision and clarity for the purpose of effective communication of economic ideas, for example, total revenue (TR) – total cost (TC) equals profit (π), simply written as $\pi=TR-TC$.

The impact of students' variables such as gender, area of specialisation and school proprietorship on the comprehension of texts cannot be neglected. These variables have been noted to determine the ability of students to comprehend and retain what is being taught in the class. In the light of this, gender difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students need to also be examined. Capraro and Wiggins (2000) observed that gender is a co-factor which influences the performance of students in a standardised test. Obayan (1985) stated that though teaching and learning is not a sexist process, gender factor cannot be ignored in the process.

Another variable that determines students' level of comprehension is school proprietorship. According to Peter (2002), public school students who constitute the majority of students in Nigeria tend to demonstrate poorer comprehension and retention ability than their private school counterparts. This is probably due to the efficiency and dedication to service that characterised the running and operation of most private schools in Nigeria. In addition, subject combination of students does influence their level of comprehension and retention of texts. Students offering arts-related subjects have been noted to demonstrate good comprehension and retention skills than those offering science-related subjects (Ekpeyong, 1990; Bello, 2004).

2. Statement of the Problem

The ability of students to learn, comprehend and retain texts varies according to several factors. Some of these include personal ability of the students, family background, the school environment, the texts available, the study time, to mention but a few. Each of these factors reduces the capability and capacity of students to understand, retain and reproduce salient Economics terms when they are examined (Adekanye, 2004). The impacts of these factors have, over the years, been the main concerns of authors in Economics texts. It is noteworthy that research findings have shown that there is a reading crisis in Nigerian secondary schools. Adegbileje (2001) found that poor reading habit still persists at the secondary school level.

From the foregoing, it could be seen that, one of the serious problems confronting Nigerian education system is the dearth of reading culture. To prove this, a lot of research efforts have been made in the aspects of reading comprehension and retention. Muslimi (2002) examined the relative effects of instruction in outlining and mapping on Polytechnic students' comprehension and retention of specialised texts. In addition, Bello (2004) analysed oral reading and comprehension performance of junior secondary

schools' students in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria, but a critical review of most of these studies shows that the researchers based their studies on what they assumed that the learners know. However, there may be no indication to suggest that the students have acquired the study skills when tested. Most importantly, comprehension and retention of main points by the students have been assessed as low. This study therefore intends to fill part of this knowledge gap by assessing the senior secondary school students' comprehension and retention of Economics texts in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria.

3. Objective of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. assess the general level of comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students.
2. assess the difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by the senior secondary schools' students based on gender.
3. evaluate the difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by the senior secondary school students based on subjects offered (Science, Art, and Commercial subjects); and
4. examine the difference in comprehension and retention of Economics texts by the senior secondary school students based on school proprietorship.

4. Research Questions

Four research questions were answered in this study:

1. What is the general level of comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students?
2. Is there any difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary schools' students based on gender?
3. Is there any difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary schools' students based on subject offered?
4. Is there any difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary schools' students based on school proprietorship?

5. Research Hypotheses

Based on the research purpose, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students based on gender.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary schools' students based on subjects offered; and

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary schools' students based on school proprietorship.

6. Research Methodology

This study is a descriptive survey. Survey method was used since it is the best method for describing the characteristics of a large population. The target population included all the SS 2 students in eight (8) selected senior secondary schools in Offa. The sample comprised three hundred and twenty (320) students from the eight (8) selected senior secondary schools, which is made up of one hundred and sixty (160) students from four (4) private and one hundred and sixty (160) students from four (4) public senior secondary schools in Offa, using stratified random sampling technique.

A researcher-designed questionnaire which was content and face validated was designed and administered to the selected students to elicit information from the respondents. The questionnaire was grouped into sections A and B. Section A was based on background information of the students and school related ones. It was designed to get demographic information about the students' gender, class of specialization and school type, while Section B was used for comprehension passages to test the students' level of comprehension of Economics texts.

Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer research questions 1. The t-test was used to test hypotheses 1 and 3, while the One-Way ANOVA was used for hypothesis 2, all at 0.05 significance level.

7. Data Analysis and Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of comprehension and retention of Economics text by senior secondary school students in Offa?

Table 1: Level of comprehension of economics text by senior secondary school students in Offa

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S. D
Source	22	90	62.71	10.18

Result in Table 1 shows the level of comprehension of Economics text by senior secondary school students in Offa. As shown in the table, the level of comprehension of Economics text by senior secondary school students in Offa was high was a Mean score of 62.71% considering the average benchmark of 50%.

Table 2: Level of retention of economics text by senior secondary school students in Offa

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S. D
Source	26	84	56.99	9.61

Result in Table 2 shows the level of retention of Economics text by senior secondary school students in Offa. As shown in the table, the level of retention of Economics text senior secondary school students in Offa was average with a Mean score of 56.99% considering the average benchmark of 50%. This means that retention has dropped from immediate recall score of 62.71% to 56.99% after three weeks of learning.

8. Hypotheses Testing

Three hypotheses were tested in this study

8.1 Hypothesis One

There is no significance difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender.

Table 3: Independent t-test on difference in the comprehension of economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender

Gender	No	Mean	Std.	t-value	Df	p-value	Remark
Male	179	61.70	10.97	1.88	358	0.06	Not significant
Female	181	63.71	9.25				

Result in Table 3 shows a t-value of 1.88 and p-value of 0.06 which is greater than 0.05 ($0.06 > 0.05$). Since 0.06 is greater than 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that there was no significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender.

b: There is no significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender.

Table 4: Independence t-test on difference in the retention of economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender

Gender	No	Mean	Std.	t-value	Df	p-value	Remark
Male	179	55.99	10.12	1.97	358	0.05	Significant
Female	181	57.97	8.99				

Results in Table 4 show a t-value of 1.97 and p-value of 0.05 which is equal to 0.05 ($0.05 = 0.05$). Since 0.05 is equal to 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was a significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on gender in favour of female students.

8.2 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subject offered.

Table 5: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) on difference in the comprehension of economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subject offered

Sources	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between groups	2093.413	2	1546.71	16.21	0.00
Within groups	34074.118	357	95.45		
Total	37167.531	359			

Result in Table 5 shows f-value of 16.21 and p-value of 0.00 which is less than 0.05 ($0.00 < 0.05$). Since 0.00 is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was a significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subject offered. To ascertain where the difference lies, post hoc analysis was performed using Duncan multiple tests. The result is reported in Table 6.

Table 6: Duncan multiple test of homogeneous means on comprehension of economics texts by senior secondary school students

Subject Offered	N	Subset for alpha = 0.06		
		1	2	3
Arts	120	59.04	62.83	66.16
Commercial	116			
Science	124			
Sig.		1.00	1.00	1.00

As shown in Table 6, the significant difference noticed in Table 5 was majorly contributed by those offering Science subjects who had the highest Mean score of 66.16 followed by those offering Commercial subjects with the Mean score of 62.83, while those offering Arts subjects had the least Mean Score which was 59.04.

b: There is no significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subject offered.

Table 7: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) on difference in the retention of economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subject offered

Sources	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	2705.997	2	1352.998	15.85	0.00
Within Groups	30464.934	357	85.336		
Total	33170.931	359			

Results in Table 7 show F-value of 15.85 and p-value of 0.00 which is less than 0.06 ($0.00 < 0.05$). Since 0.00 is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there

was a significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on subject offered. To ascertain where the difference lies, post hoc analysis was performed using Duncan multiple tests. The result is reported in Table 8.

Table 8: Duncan multiple test of homogeneous means on retention of economics texts by senior secondary school students

Subject Offered	N	Subset for alpha = 0.06		
		1	2	3
Arts	120	52.28		
Commercial	116		56.84	
Science	124			60.78
Sig.		1.00	1.00	1.00

As shown in Table 8, the significant difference noticed in table 9 was majorly contributed by those offering Science subjects who had the highest Mean score of 60.78 followed by those offering Commercial subjects with the Mean score of 56.84, while those offering Arts subjects had the least Mean score which was 53.28.

8.3 Hypothesis Three

a: There is no significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on school proprietorship.

Table 9: Independent t-test on difference in the comprehension of economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on school proprietorship

School proprietorship	No	Mean	Std.	t-value	Df	P-value	Remark
Public	180	61.39	12.44				
Private	180	64.03	7.02	2.48	358	0.01	Significant

Results in Table 9 show a t-value of 2.48 and p-value of 0.01 which is less than 0.05 ($0.01 < 0.05$). Since 0.01 is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was a significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on school proprietorship in favour of private schools.

b: There is no significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on school proprietorship.

Table 10: Independence t-test on difference in the retention of economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on school proprietorship

School proprietorship	No	Mean	Std.	t-value	Df	p-value	Remark
Public	180	55.08	11.39				
Private	180	58.89	6.95	3.84	358	0.00	Significant

Results in Table 10 show a t-value of 3.84 and p-value of 0.00 which is less than 0.05 ($0.00 < 0.05$). Since 0.00 is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

This means that there was a significant difference in the retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students in Offa based on school proprietorship in favour of private schools.

9. Discussion of Findings

Based on the findings of this study according to the research questions raised and answered in collaboration with the formulated and tested research hypotheses, the discussion of the findings of the study were presented in sectional sub-headings according to the research questions and findings.

9.1 Comprehension and Retention of Economics Texts by the Students

Based on the findings of this study as observed from the analysis carried out, the results of the study revealed that the level of comprehension of Economics tests by senior secondary school students was high while their retention was on average. This might have been that the availability of qualified teachers in the selected schools had influence on the students which brought about the high level of comprehension of Economics text by the students.

9.2 Gender Difference in the Students' Comprehension and Retention of Economics Texts

The findings of this study also revealed that there was no significant difference in the comprehension of Economics texts by senior secondary school students based on gender while a significant difference exists in the retention of Economics texts. This indicates that gender of a student does not determine his/her academic performance. Individual students perform based on his/her academic ability and not as a result of his/her gender. This finding corroborates the findings of Capraro, Capraro and Wagins (2000) who stated that the verbal-numerical-educational ability and practical-mechanical-spatial-physical ability of a person depend on his/her inborn potentials, temperature and cultural opportunities.

9.3 Difference in the Students' Comprehension and Retention of Economics Texts Based on Subjects Offered

The result of this study showed that there was a significant difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students based on subjects offered. The results further showed that Science students performed best followed by the Commercial students and Arts students respectively. This finding was against the submission of Ekpeyoung (1990) and Bello (2004) who stated

that students offering Arts-related subjects have been noted to demonstrate good comprehension and retention skill than those offering Science-related subjects.

9.4 Difference in Students' Comprehension and Retention of Economics Texts Based on School Proprietorship

The findings from this study revealed a significant difference in the comprehension and retention of Economics texts by senior secondary school students based on school proprietorship in favour of private schools. This implies that the students in private schools performed significantly better than their counterparts in public schools. This was in line with Bello (2004) who observed that too little attention was being given to the needs of public schools; the author found in his study that students in private school performance better than their public students' counterparts.

10. Conclusion

The senior secondary school students had a fairly high level of comprehension of Economics texts with average level of retention, while gender has no influence on students' comprehension of Economics texts. Both subjects offered and school proprietorship had influence on students' comprehension and retention of Economics texts.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

Teachers: There is need for English and Economics teachers to employ effective teaching strategies that will bridge the gap that exists among the students in Science, Commercial and Arts classes.

Government: Both the State and Federal Governments need to make the public-school environments conducive for effective learning in order to encourage the students to learn and in turn enhance students' better academic performance.

Professional Bodies: English Teachers' Association of Nigeria (ETAN) and the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) should organize workshops/seminars for English and content area teachers on how to improve the teaching and learning of comprehension for students' better academic performance.

12. Future Researchers

Based on the limitation of the study, future researchers can carry out further studies on students' comprehension and retention of other subjects such as Geography, Commerce, Accounting, History among other subjects in different other Local Government Areas and State in the Federation.

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