

## ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' FACTORS IMPEDING READING COMPREHENSION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The study analysed perceptions of students' and teachers' factors impeding reading comprehension of public secondary school students in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. With a focus on identification and analysis of these inhibitive factors, the study answered four research questions and adopted a survey design using Stratified Fisher's formula to select a sample of three hundred and eighty-six penultimate secondary school students (SSII) in Government-funded (public) secondary schools (colleges) across the six Area Councils of Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which is administratively divided. Responses were sought through a researcher-designed four Likert scale structured questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using the mean scores. The study found that lazy reading attitude, inadequate vocabulary knowledge, poor motivation, and lack of diversity in instructional strategy are major inhibitors to students' reading comprehension. The study, therefore, recommends, amongst others, adequate provision of reading materials, decongestion of classroom population, and use of diversified instructional strategies by teachers to make learning exciting and enhance students' reading comprehension.*

**Key words:** *Comprehension, Factors, Impede, Reading, Vocabulary*

### INTRODUCTION

Reading involves thinking, learning, and broadening a reader's knowledge and perspectives. It has to do with enriching prior learning, mastering new material, and engaging the minds. It is a vital form of communication that facilitates the acquisition of knowledge in a variety of contexts, including social and academic development. Readers create meaning through engagement with the text by drawing on their own experiences and other information they bring to it.

The phases of reading comprehension include the reader constructing meaning from the text and integrating this newly constructed information into her repository of information/knowledge (Barreyro, 2021). The ability to comprehend text well is essential as it provides access to new knowledge (Rouet, 2020). According to Harris and Graham (2007), the act of constructing meaning through reading comprehension involves combining a variety of complex processes, including word reading, sentence

comprehension, background knowledge, and fluency.

The process of understanding words, phrases, and complete texts encompasses more than just depending on one's linguistic expertise. To interpret written words, each piece of information is systematically compared to a known structure, and ensuring all the parts of that structure match up perfectly with the new information (Ahmad, 2020). This notion gives rise to bottom-up and top-down information processing that includes identifying words, recognising grammatical notation of words, minding groups of words that make meaning, linking linguistic to non-linguistic cues, and bringing worldview to make meaning (Iliyas, 2022).

Reading comprehension is important, and public secondary school students, in particular, should master reading as one of the four language skills in the classroom for lifelong literacy (Damte, 2023). In the course of teaching and learning reading, students are expected to be able to comprehend the texts they read well (Sariakin, 2020). This is in line with the objective of public secondary school reading instruction, which is to enhance students' reading skills (Rizka, 2020). The extent to which students in public secondary schools in the FCT realise this objective is quite contestable.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is the persistent problem of some secondary school students in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, who find reading comprehension a herculean task. Like every human phenomenon, certainly, some factors lead to this unhealthy reading disability, which is an open barrier to attaining proficiency in the English language and learning, generally. The issue of poor reading comprehension is a very serious challenge deserving urgent attention because all of the subjects besides the indigenous and foreign languages are taught in

English. This study, therefore, sought to identify and analyse how students' and teachers' factors constitute impediments to reading comprehension at the secondary school level.

Actions on the findings of this study will be a bold step in working out informed strategies towards addressing students' inability to attain meaningful comprehension from reading. This move will include actionable measures government, parents, Non-governmental Organisations, schools, and teachers need to take and adjustments required of students for improved effective reading comprehension.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the factors impeding the reading comprehension of secondary school students in the FCT?
2. What are the teachers' factors impeding the reading comprehension of secondary school students?
3. Are there differences in the factors impeding reading comprehension of secondary school students in the FCT based on the gender of students as male and female?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Reading is one of the four language skills that Hilary (2021) submitted captures various activities, including eye movement, word recognition, and bringing appropriate meaning to sounds and vocabulary encountered in texts. According to Raahman (2007), reading is the cognitive process of acquiring linguistic information through the medium of printed text that enables effective access to meaningful information from written materials. Reading comprehension is a means to language learning, communication, and dissemination of information and ideas (Roseman, 2021).

Widdowson (2007) perceives reading as an interactive dialogue between the reader and the text. Reading, in this perspective, bears resemblance to the act of verbal communication between the speaker and the listener, where the writer endeavours to transmit messages to a recipient/reader situated at the receiving end.

Day and Bamford (2016) refer to reading comprehension as the reader's ability to establish connections between the information presented in text and their prior knowledge to derive meaning or achieve understanding. According to Eskey (2005), reading is the purposeful search for new knowledge or information hidden in the letters of written text. Reading can thus be conceptualised as a process that entails establishing a dynamic connection with symbols and a means to effective communication between the writer and the reader.

In general, reading is commonly viewed as a means of acquiring supplementary knowledge through comprehension. It is an enriched experience that not only facilitates comprehension but also fosters personal growth and expands one's perspective on current matters, but is of fundamental value to all forms of classroom engagement for progressive learning (Iliyas, Lawal, and Sheriff, 2011).

Nuttall (1996) states that reading, when mastered appropriately, helps readers to develop mental skills and improve their command of language. In another vein, Rosenblatt (2007) describes reading for information as an experience commonly employed to elicit information from written materials. The four major reading comprehension techniques that students need to be made aware of are intensive reading, extensive reading, skimming, and scanning (Iliyas, 2013). Astan (2014) points to three

levels of comprehension of literal, inferential, and evaluative levels; while Lawal (2016) adds critical and creative reading.

Scholars (Feryal, 200; Daniel, 2013; Wittrock, Marks, and Docrow, 2015; Chinwe, 2016; Faluke, 2017 and Ibrahim, 2023) have identified a wide range of inhibitions to reading comprehension that include unfamiliar text theme, strange vocabulary, inauthentic reading instructions, deficient knowledge of grammar and inappropriate use of strategy in facilitating reading comprehension. Others, they submit, include lack of reading materials, paucity of library services, and attitudinal problems to reading common among the students. Ibrahim (2023) pointedly adds, there is also the prevailing factor of untrained teachers of the English language at the secondary school level, and unsupportive learning environments, according to Feinstein (2003), that also have a detrimental impact on the development of linguistic capability in children.

The range of inhibitions to reading comprehension differs from biological, visual processing systems as well as non-biological issues, including basic literacy level, encoding and retrieval issues, learning and memory problems, and so on (Bolandifar, 2013). However, several others have suggested ways to improve students' attitude and interest in reading and deepen the rate of effective comprehension (Yusuf, 2013; Sani, 2017). Some of their suggestions include teachers' continuous re-training to be able to diversify strategies to facilitate reading comprehension in students and teaching of reading in context. Others include due diligence needs analysis before text recommendation, stimulating students' interest in reading, making the home the base of reading activity through a support system in terms of provision of a wide range of reading materials, a functional school library facility, and promotion of school-wide-based groups and activities that will promote reading.

Appropriate use of instructional strategies can remedy many inhibitions to reading comprehension, including some that are biological, like hearing defects and dyslexia (Bintang, 2021). Olutola, Iliyas, and Abdulsalam (2017) recommend pair discussion in reading comprehension class, like open-ended collaborative exchange of ideas, which may be among students or may involve the teacher, can increase students' level of thinking, understanding, and literary appreciation.

Schemata capture the different forms of engagements, activities, and events that serve to bring to working memory related information or knowledge existing in a reader about the theme read. The activation of schema has been suggested to have a significant impact on several cognitive processes, including comprehension, inference generation, attention allocation, and memory encoding of textual information. The activation of schemata can also be inspired by such anecdotes, like the title of the text, choice of words, illustrations, and other cues read in the new text. So, a book primarily serves as a guide for readers, instructing them on the process of extracting or constructing meaning by utilising their pre-existing knowledge (Iliyas, 2013).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study is a survey research design. The design was considered appropriate for this research as it involves the collection of information from a sample of the entire population through the use of a questionnaire. Survey design is used to gather perception, opinions, and experiences from respondents that revolve around cognitive transfer of sensory stimulus to background information, or practice that (Iliyas and Olanipekun, 2024) affirm is apt for studies in domains of language. The population of this study consists

of 30,977 students in public Secondary Schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. Samples for the study are 386 public secondary School students in the penultimate class across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was used to select one school from each of the six Area Councils by wrapping the names of the schools in each of the six Area Councils separately and putting them in a small container, from which one was picked from the groups: Abaji, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Municipal Area Councils. A questionnaire constitutes the instrument used to gather data from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A sought students' demographic information, while Section B was on the possible factors that may impede reading comprehension of public secondary school students in Abuja, Nigeria.

The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and validated through the input of two professors, one in English language Education and the other in Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument's reliability was determined in a non-participatory public senior secondary school students Class II, in neighbouring Suleja, Niger State, where thirty students filled the questionnaire in a test-retest of a week's interval. The collated data of the test re-test was analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. A correlation Coefficient of  $r = 0.82$  was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable.

The percentage and mean were used to analyse the data gathered. In taking a decision, the four-point Likert scale structured questionnaire of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) used for the study indicates  $4+3+2+1=10/4 = 2.5$ . Hence, any item with a mean score of 2.5 and above is considered accepted, while a mean score on

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 any item below 2.5 is, therefore, rejected. Acceptance of any of the factors indicates that such impedes the reading comprehension of public secondary school students.

## RESULTS

### Analysis of Respondents' Demographic Data

The data in Table 1 shows the demographic data of the respondents on gender.

**Table 1:** Summary of the Population of Students According to Area Councils

S/N	Area Councils	No. of Schools	Male	Female	Total No. of Students
1.	Abaji	8	773	960	1733
2.	Bwari	13	3120	4268	7388
3.	Gwagwalada	12	2895	3137	6032
4.	Kuje	11	1426	1404	2830
5.	Kwali	6	1151	953	2104
6.	Municipal	27	4872	6018	10890
	<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>14237</b>	<b>16740</b>	<b>30977</b>

**Source:** FCT Secondary School Education Board

**Table 2:** Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	193	50.0
Female	193	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to gender. Out of 386 respondents sampled, 193 (50%) students were male and 193 (50%) students were female. This shows equal representation of respondents based on gender.

**Research Question 1:** What are the factors impeding the reading comprehension of secondary school students in the FCT?

**Table 3:** Analysis of the Students' Factors Impeding Reading Comprehension among Public Secondary Students

S/N	Impeding Factors	Mean	Decision
1.	Peer Group Pressure	2.26	Rejected
2.	Laziness to Reading	2.76	Accepted
3.	Vocabulary Knowledge	2.58	Accepted
4.	Low Attention Span	2.56	Accepted

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows the responses of the respondents on students' factors impeding reading comprehension among public secondary school students. It is revealed that only peer group pressure is rejected as a non-hindrance to students' comprehension, with the mean score 2.26 (less than 2.5 acceptance benchmark) recorded. Others have a mean score above the 2.5 threshold. However, laziness to reading, vocabulary knowledge, and low attention span constitute the major factors impeding secondary school students' reading comprehension to the analysis. These findings might have resulted from English language being a Second Language (ESL) in Nigeria, where, due to inadequate reading materials provision and overcrowded classrooms, many students might have become reluctant readers with limited vocabulary mastery and pay less attention to reading comprehension.

**Research Question 2:** What are the teachers' factors impeding reading comprehension of secondary school students in the FCT, Nigeria?

**Table 4:** Analysis of Teachers' Factors Impeding Reading Comprehension of Secondary School Students

S/N	Impeding Factors	Mean	Decision
1.	Use of Instructional Materials	2.48	Rejected
2.	Instructional Strategies	2.68	Accepted
3.	Teacher as Models	2.40	Rejected
4.	Motivation by Teachers	2.71	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 shows that the analysis of teachers' factors impeding reading comprehension among secondary school students is inadequate use of different reading teaching

strategies and a paucity of motivation by teachers.

The two challenges identified in the analysis may be due to the huge classroom population in most public schools that tends to limit strategies realistically applicable in such a learning environment, and the rare in-service training offered for the teachers that could expose them to and update their skills on contemporary teaching strategies and motivation for students.

**Research question 3:** What is the mean score difference in the factors impeding reading comprehension of secondary school students based on gender

**Table 5:** Analysis of the Mean Score Difference of Secondary School Students' Factors Impeding Reading Comprehension Based on Gender

S/N	Impeding Factors	Male		Female	
		Mean	Decision	Mean	Decision
1.	Peer group pressure	2.34	Rejected	2.18	Rejected
2.	Laziness to read	2.83	Accepted	2.69	Accepted
3.	Vocabulary Knowledge	2.63	Accepted	2.53	Accepted
4.	Low attention span	2.49	Rejected	2.63	Accepted
5.	Motivation by Teachers	2.90	Accepted	2.52	Accepted
6.	Inappropriate Use of Instructional Strategies	2.79	Accepted	2.57	Accepted
7.	Use of Instructional Materials	2.60	Accepted	2.36	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 shows the analysis of factors impeding reading comprehension among public secondary school students based on gender. It thus implies, by the analysis, that gender-related factors are impeding the reading comprehension of public secondary school students. Item 6 on the use of instructional materials is interesting, with its contradictory findings between male and female respondents. While male participants accepted that it is inadequately used, hence it hindered their reading comprehension, the female respondents perceived it otherwise. The reason for this may not be unconnected to the possibility of the female students using more metacognitive

skills to derive comprehension, while the male respondents seek tangible elements to tie their comprehension to (meta-cognitive) However, both male and female respondents agreed that laziness in reading, limited vocabulary, and paucity of motivation by teachers hinder students' reading comprehension. Reasons for the presence of those challenges could be owing to inadequate mastery of the English language, thereby curtailing respondents' interest in reading, excessive time on social media apps, and poor teachers' incentives, which dampen their excitement for real classroom teaching.

## DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Findings of the study revealed that students' factors that impede reading comprehension as peer pressure is not a major impeding factor facing students during reading comprehension. However, laziness to reading, limited vocabulary, and low attention span constitute major impediments to secondary school students' reading comprehension. Rahman (2007) and Arnold (1999) highlight peer group pressure, lack of language exposure, laziness, emotional issues, level of intelligence, poor or insufficient schema, and lack of concentration. On the contrary, Greenwood (1998) and Arnold (1999) highlight self-esteem, anxiety, inhibition, personality, and emotional factors, including empathy, classroom communication, and cross-cultural awareness as student-related factors that hinder reading comprehension among public secondary students. Findings of this study resonate with (Wutthisingchai's, 2015; Lan, 2023; Agustin and Belarmino, 2024) findings of learning preferences, motivation, and attitude; limited vocabulary and lack of related knowledge of the theme as directly or indirectly learner-related challenges, inhibiting students' reading comprehension. Nevertheless, learning preference, personality, and emotional factors were not considered in this study.

Chen's (2017) posited that tense classrooms environment, teachers' aggression, impromptu reading comprehension assessments, and a lack of instructional materials during reading lessons and teachers' need to identify reading strategies that could improve students' reading comprehension, while Razak and Yunus (2016) point to poor vocabulary and the use of inappropriate instructional strategies as major hindrances to teaching reading comprehension in public secondary schools in Nigeria. Scholars like Yusuf (2017); Hijazin (2021); and Hamzadayi & Batmaz (2022) identified unqualified teachers, teachers' lack of enthusiasm, and inadequate use of a variety of

strategies as major hindrances to students' reading comprehension, especially in an ESL context. They emphasise the huge impact teachers of reading can bring to students' reading comprehension. Alkhawaldeh (2012) points to school environmental challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, which are not covered in this study.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the indisputable pre-eminence of reading comprehension as key to the learning of the tool subject English language, access to new, complex, and advanced knowledge, and as central to maximising the utility of literacy, views are unanimous over the dire need to improve the attainment of effective and meaningful reading comprehension. A first step towards making students very effective readers, therefore, is the identification of impediments to it from the perception of secondary school students. This study has uncovered so many of the impediments and has also proffered findings inspired solutions. Coordinated complementary efforts of the school, teachers, students, and parents will undoubtedly fill the void and lead to the attainment of genuine reading comprehension, drive improved attention to reading, and inspire literacy capable of stimulating knowledge and propel development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Deriving from the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. Coordinated attention should be focused on the provision of reading materials like books, literary texts, and well-stocked and updated reading rooms in schools, public places, and at home by the government, Non-Governmental Organisations, and parents to inspire curiosity in learners to read;

2. Government and public-spirited groups and individuals should make it a soul-saving rescue by building more classrooms to decongest and make for a teachable population in the public schools. This will encourage teachers to use a variety and interesting teaching strategies, have one-on-one opportunities to motivate students, and genuinely monitor their progress in reading comprehension;
3. The Ministry of Education, Educational zones, and school management should initiate multi-cadre in-service training for teachers by collaborating with subject professional bodies and resource persons to re-train and update the skills of the teachers on contemporary reading teaching strategies, and push consistently for improved teachers' welfare from the government to spur greater commitment to teaching reading comprehension;
4. Concerted efforts should continuously be made to enhance general students' mastery of the English language, though a second language, as the only medium of instruction in almost all the school subjects and its other fundamental applications, including reading comprehension across the school curriculum;
5. Very stringent measures must be taken by both the school authority and the parents to control secondary school students' use of social media apps for their distractive and time-wasting potential, so students can have time for reading and general study of school materials; and
6. An attempt should be made to create gender gender-balanced classroom environment through careful book selections and tasks on reading by teachers involving students. This will

promote inclusivity and excite students across genders to read more.

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