

## **The influence of text type on senior secondary students' reading comprehension.**

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**Abstract:** *The study was designed to examine the influence of text type on senior secondary students' reading comprehension in selected secondary schools in Jos North and Jos South Local Government Areas of Plateau State. The study specifically sought to know the extent to which text type will affect students' ability to answer literal, inferential and critical questions. For the purpose of data collection, 200 students selected from four secondary schools were given two types of passages: a narrative and an expository to read and to answer three types of questions. Frequency count and simple percentages were used to analyze the data. The results showed that text type had influence on the students' ability to answer literal, inferential and critical questions. That is, the students performed better on the narrative than on the expository. These findings suggest the need to design instructional activities in such a way that will promote higher level thinking on the part of the students.*

**Keywords:** *Effect, text type, reading, comprehension.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Reading is fundamental to any learner's success in academic pursuit and even in career growth. However, a great number of students have serious difficulties in comprehending reading materials in school and even after their secondary education. Many studies have shown that students cannot succeed in their academic work without the ability to read with adequate comprehension. For instance, Agwu, (2005) says many students who fail the English Language papers in public examinations admit their poor performance in the comprehension section. The poor performance of students in public examination is also traced to minimal daily contact with the language (Oyetunde, 2003).

Many factors such as reader's physical and emotional state, self-image, style, layout, organization of the text, vocabulary density and presence or absence of illustrations charts or diagrams are responsible for students' lack of success in the comprehension of what they read. More important of these is lack of understanding of the nature of the reading process. For this reason, it is necessary for teachers of English and reading in particular to ensure that their students understand what reading is all about.

According to Akyol (2006) reading is a dynamic inferring process that makes communication between writer and reader essential. Reading skill means students' reading texts they encounter in their daily lives properly and fluently by using right methods (Ozbay, 2006).

Reading means a complex process that involves interaction or negotiation between the reader and the author. It also means obtaining information from print. It is a meaning getting process. While the view of correct pronunciation of words mentioned in the text as a precondition of comprehension was common previously, in recent years, all scientific studies show that comprehension is a complex process based on the interaction between the reader, the text and the learning environment (Akyol, 2006). It is also well accepted that there are several levels of comprehension and different question types designed to gauge each of these levels. Literal questions assess directly stated facts, ideas and details (Collins, 2004); inferential questions on the other hand require the reader to develop a situation model and integrate pieces of information presented in the text to each other or combining previous knowledge with the information from the passage. Critical questions test the learner's ability to apply information deduced from a text to solve higher cognitive problems.

Beyond the failure to understand the nature of the reading process and a host of other reader characteristics such as fluency, working memory, background knowledge and the use of reading strategy which have all been linked to reading comprehension, studies have been in consistent (Cuttings & Scarborough, 2006; Goff, Pratt & Ong, 2005; Samuelson & Braten, 2005).

While the above factors inhibit students' reading or comprehension level, it is also important to consider such factors as text types as it is also true that the type of text such as narrative, descriptive, argumentative or expository to some extent affect a reader's level of comprehension.

With regard to text types, studies have shown that most learning from reading, both in and outside of school, depends on the ability to read and understand expository texts. To support this view, Graesser (2011) said that starting in late elementary school, there is an increasing emphasis on independent reading as a primary means of presenting information in classes such as science and social studies. Thus expository passages become of

increasing importance. Although the empirical evidence is weak, experts contend that children generally have more difficulty reading expository than narrative text. Recently, however, some studies of reading have acknowledged that narrative and expository texts may place demands on different skills, suggesting that text types differ in how well children comprehend them. Narrative texts have been found to generally be easier than expository texts (Best, Floyd & McNamara, 2008; Diakidoy, Stylianou, Karefillidou & Papgeorgiou, 2004). A similar opinion has been expressed by many experts in Reading to corroborate the fact that text type actually affects students' comprehension of a text. For example, Best, Floyd & McNamara, (2008) observe differential demands of narrative and expository texts, such that word recognition was the strongest predictor for comprehension of narrative text while background knowledge contributed the largest amount of variances for comprehension of expository passages.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study was designed to ascertain the extent to which text type would determine the quality and quantity of information students can comprehend. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the extent to which text type will affect students' ability to answer literal, inferential and critical questions.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- 1 Does text type have any significant effect on senior secondary school students' ability to answer literal questions (in reading comprehension?)
- 2 Does text type have any significant effect on senior secondary students' ability to answer inferential questions (in reading comprehension?)
- 3 Does text type have any significant effect on senior secondary school students' ability to answer critical questions (in reading comprehension?)

## **II. Research Methodology**

The research design adopted was descriptive survey. The population for this study comprised all SS2 students in both public and private secondary schools in Jos North and South Local Government Areas of Plateau State. Sample for the study was made up of 200 randomly selected from four schools. The two stages simple random sampling technique was used first to randomly sample the 4 schools. This was done using the hat and draw sampling technique. The names of all the schools were written on pieces of paper, folded and put in a container. The papers were reshuffled by shaking the container at each time a paper was picked. This was done to give all the schools equal chances of being selected. The same strategy was used to sample the 50 students from each of the 4 schools giving a total of 200 students.

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

The instrument used for the collection of data for this study a two-comprehension-passages in-one-instrument (Expository and Narrative) named Text Type and Reading Comprehension Test (TTRCT). The expository passage discusses efficient reading, its meaning, factors that enhance efficient reading and factors that impede it. The passage was chosen to give the students ideas about the organizational pattern of expository type of text.

The second passage is a narrative that dwells on Oliha the protagonist, who went home to see his sick father and was greeted by the level of underdevelopment of his community even after staying away from the village for years among others. The passage was chosen to give the children knowledge of story line (plot) from the gradual unraveling of events to the climax. Six comprehension questions covering factual (3), inferential (2) and critical (1) levels were drawn from each passage.

The two passages were carefully selected from West African Examinations Council/Senior Secondary Certificate Examination past questions. These questions were drawn based on the Senior Secondary School English language syllabus. The expository passage is about three hundred and eighty five words while the narrative passage is about three hundred and fifty words in length. It is a standardized test developed by experts in test and measurement. However, the content validity and reliability of the instruments were sought before application.

The initial drafts of the instruments were given to a seasoned senior lecturer and a reading expert in the English Unit of the Department of Arts and Social Science Education of the University of Jos to determine the adequacy of the instrument and content coverage. The corrections, suggestions and recommendations were used to produce the final copy of the instrument.

Though, outside the proposed sample of study, Kuder Richardson 20 Method of reliability was used to establish the reliability of the instrument and the result yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.72. This indicates high reliability which in turn shows that the instrument is good and highly reliable. The reliability also lends credence to the content validity.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The instruments were directly administered to students in each of the schools after permission was granted by the authorities with the assistance of some English Language teachers. The test consisted of two type written passages; one expository and the other narrative. Each respondent was given copies of the two passages to facilitate independent study by the respondents and to enhance concentration.

## METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected for this study were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentage.

### III. Results

The results of the data analyses are presented under the following sub headings:

- (a) Text type and students' ability to answer literal questions.
- (a) Text type and students' ability to answer inferential questions.
- (c) Text type and students' ability to answer critical questions.

#### TEXT TYPE AND ABILITY TO ANSWER LITERAL QUESTIONS

**Table 1**

Text type	Level of Performance			Total
	Poor (0-49%)	Average (50-59%)	Good (60%+)	
Narrative	44(22%)	-	156(78%)	200
Expository	119(59.5%)	-	81(40.5%)	200

Table1 shows that 78% of the respondents scored between 60%-100% in the narrative passage while 22% of them scored below 50%. On the other hand 59.5% of the respondents scored below 50% with only 40.5% of them scoring 60% and above. This reveals that the students performed better on narrative than on the expository passage.

#### TEXT TYPE AND ABILITY TO ANSWER INFERENTIAL QUESTIONS

**Table 2**

Text type and comprehension of inferential questions

Text type	Level of Performance			Total
	Poor (0-49%)	Average (50-60)%	Good (60%) +	
Narrative	182(91%)	18(9%)	0(0%)	200
Expository	164(82%)	32(16%)	4(2%)	200

Table 2 indicates that only 9% of the respondents were able to answer the inferential questions of the narrative text while a whopping 91% could not. Similarly, 20% of the respondents were able to answer the inferential questions of the expository text with 80% Of them scoring below the average mark. The implication of the above information is that a high percentage of the respondents found inferential questions difficult to answer whether they are narrative or expository passages.

#### TEXT TYPE AND ABILITY TO ANSWER CRITICAL QUESTIONS

**Table 3**

Text type and comprehension of critical questions

Text type	Level of Performance			Total
	Poor (0-49%)	Average (50-59%)	Good (60%+)	
Narrative	196(98%)	-	4(2%)	200
Expository	50(25%)	-	150(75%)	200

Table 3 shows that 75% of the respondents scored above 60% with only 25% failing the critical questions on the expository passage. Conversely 98% failure rate with 2% passes in the narrative text was recorded. This implies that the students find it difficult to answer critical questions on the narrative passage. Surprisingly however, 75% of the respondents scored 60% and above in the critical questions of the expository passage. This performance appears controversial or inconsistent with normal situation.

#### **IV. Discussion**

The study sought to know if text type would have any influence on secondary school students' reading comprehension. The results obtained from the analysis of the data collected will be discussed under the following subheadings: literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and critical comprehension.

##### **Literal comprehension**

The study showed that the students answered the literal questions of the narrative text better than those of expository. Because, over 78% of the students scored between 60%-100% in the literal questions of the narrative passage whereas in the expository, only 40.5% of the students scored between 60% -100%. The above statistics indicate that the students performed better in narrative than in expository text because the narrative passage contained information about an event that had to do with their daily experiences as opposed to the strange and new information on which the expository passage dwelt. This confirms what Babara and Samuels (1983) observed that readers find it more difficult recalling information from expository than narrative. In order words, when recall from narrative is contrasted with expository materials, students are less successful with expository.

Furthermore, the students performed better in the narrative than the expository because they were more used to the structure or organization of ideas in the narrative than in the expository passage. This is perhaps because they read, hear or even watch stories which use the same organizational patterns of ideas as in the narrative passage more often than they do to expository thus giving them an edge in their understanding of the narrative text. This lends credence to some of the studies which say that sensitivity to the organization of ideas in a text and hence to the relative importance of information is related to comprehension and memory (Best, Floyd & McNamara, 2008; McGee & Ischgel , 1982).

##### **Inferential comprehension**

On the other hand, the study revealed that the students did not answer the inferential questions well as 82% of the respondents failed as they scored between 0-49% in the expository passage while 91% of the students failed the inferential questions on the narrative. This is a worrisome development that our teachers need to take a second look at as this perhaps accounts for the massive failure we witness in English Language at both local and national examinations.

##### **Critical comprehension**

Surprisingly, the result of the students' performance in the critical questions of the expository appears very controversial. Whereas 75% of the students scored above 60% in the expository passage, 98% of them scored below 50% in the narrative. Perhaps the instrument used for the expository was simpler and hence made the students to do better in the expository that is considered more technical than in the narrative. This inconsistent pattern of performance will create problems in an effort to proffer solutions to this situation.

#### **V. Conclusion**

From the findings of the research, it can be concluded that: text type has influence on the quality and quantity of information recalled by students as more students performed better in the narrative text than in the expository.

The students answered literal questions better in both narrative and expository texts. This reflected in the fact that a high percentage of the students answered the literal questions in both texts correctly with good scores.

That the students did not answer inferential questions well irrespective of the type of text. This was shown in the fact that most of the students failed in their responses to the inferential questions in both texts.

#### **Recommendations**

Based on the above findings the following recommendations were made:

- 1 The students should be taught the various text types and their organizational patterns as this will help the students to appreciate each text type on the basis of its principles.
- 2 Teachers should also expose students to different forms of stimulating exercises on literal, inferential and critical texts to enable them to tackle any form of comprehension questions as it will be unwise to contemplate expunging inferential and critical questions from students' academic activity.
- 3 Teacher should change their teaching methods from the routine "read and answer" question to more pragmatic approaches that tap on the students' reflective abilities and help them to answer higher order cognitive questions.

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