

# Students' Perception of Teachers' Knowledge of Subject Matter in English Reading Comprehension Classrooms in Atiba Local Government Area, Nigeria

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## Abstract

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*The study investigated students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in English reading comprehension classrooms in Atiba Local Government Area, Nigeria. The participants were 250 SS11 students selected from five public secondary schools in Atiba local government, Oyo State. One instrument was used for data collection for the study: Questionnaire on students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom ( $r=.78$ ). Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequently counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The results revealed that students perceived that their teachers had a good knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom. There was no significant difference in male and female students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension. There was no significant difference in the science and humanities students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that English language teachers should be exposed to workshops that will help create a good teaching and learning environment, motivate students to read and comprehend better.*

**Keywords:** Students' perception, Pedagogical content knowledge, Reading comprehension, Teachers' knowledge of subject matter.

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## Introduction

There are four language skills in English, they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. They are four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend, produce, and use the language in effective interpersonal communication. Listening and reading are called receptive skills because learners do not need to produce language to do these, they receive and understand it. Speaking and writing are called productive skills because learners doing these need to produce language. All the skills are important but before a learner can write a language proficiently, she must be able to read the language well. The importance of reading as an indispensable skill for general literacy is quite enormous. Learners get information and insight by reading (text and context) so reading is very important for learner. Reading is a requisite skill for general literacy that is indispensable. It is the important language skills among the other three language skills because it is a tool for learning and a standard for measuring students' performance academically.

According to Anthony (2015) Reading is defined as a cognitive process that involves decoding symbols to arrive at meaning. Akinbote and Kolawole (2008) note that reading is the bedrock of meaningful educational achievement and one of the vital skills of language. Reading

ability in whatever discipline is seen as one of the key factors predicting general success in academic work at all school levels. Reading is one of the fundamental objectives of education which is meant to produce literate citizenry. As a consequence, all educated people in the world are expected to be able to read and write in the language of instruction (Ogunranti, 2003). Reading involves meaningful interpretation of words, phrases and sentences requiring all types of thinking such as judgmental, imaginative, creative critical and evaluative. It is a process of extracting meanings from the written language. Comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002). Falayi (2015) defines comprehension as the level of understanding a text where the reader interacts, responds or reacts to what has been read in a meaningful way. According to Duke and Carlisle (2011), comprehension is the act of constructing meaning with oral or written text. On the other hand, comprehension is the ability to make meaning out of a written text. Reading comprehension has its impacts on all other subjects taught in school. Hence, lack of good grip of comprehension is bound to have negative effect on the reading and learning. Therefore, inability to comprehend very

well results in mass failure of learners in examination (Okeke, 2010). Block and Pressley (2002) are of the view that learners should be able to effectively participate in the interactive process of reading comprehension involving the reader, the text and the context in order to perform successfully at school. In other words, students are to be actively involved with text information in a way that passes meaning that is specific to the reader.

According to “Unumeri (2009) “perception is defined in accordance with the opinions and views of someone”. However, perception is said to be critical because it influences the information in working memory. Background knowledge in the form of schemas affects perception and subsequent learning. Research finding also approves this about temporary causes of other behaviours (Adediwura and Tayo, 2007). Teachers' knowledge of subject matter is crucial in teaching and learning situation. Knowledge of the subject matter means the information and understanding teachers have about the subject they teach (Perini, 2002).

Reading comprehension is an essential tool for academic success in all school subjects and lifelong learning. It is tested in all aspects of the English language in external examinations but it is more expeditious in the comprehension part of the examinations which carries about 40% of the whole examination. However, reports have shown that many secondary school students in Nigeria have poor learning outcomes in English reading comprehension skills which partly accounts for poor results they obtain on yearly basis at public examinations such as West African Examination Council (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO). It is reported in the WAEC Chief Examiner's Report of 2018 that students' poor performance in English language is as a result of their inability to read extensively, they hardly spend time to read very good books like English and Literature textbooks which will improve them and help them have good command and good usage of English vocabulary of English language. It is further reported in the WAEC Chief Examiner's Report of 2019 that the performance of the students was fairly good as a result of the easy comprehension passage given but on the contrary, some candidates did not show a clear

understanding of the passage, some of the students resorted to direct lifting of the passage as answers. Also, most students could not give a correct replacement for word as used in the passage. From the report given by the Chief Examiner, it can be seen as supported by Okere (2012) and Owolabi (2012) that students in senior secondary schools lack the necessary comprehension skills and give incorrect meanings to words in the comprehension passage.

Many other reasons have been identified to contribute to students' poor performance in reading comprehension. Students' low language proficiency (Jibowo, 2007), lack of exposure to the use of effective strategies and their wrong usage does not allow students perform well in reading and other language skills (Ezeokoli, 2012; Babalola, 2012 and Salako, 2012). The acquisition of knowledge of subject matter by teachers is essential in a teaching and learning situation. Teachers' Knowledge of Subject Matter means the information and understanding teachers have about the subject they teach (Perini, 2002). Teachers' should acquire a good body of knowledge to be transferred to the students. That is to say, no knowledge, no impart. Nwuba and Nwuba (2005) is of the opinion that for a teacher to be efficient and productive, S/he should have good grasp of the subject matter to be taught. That is, English Language teachers should be well exposed about the subject and get accustomed with current principles of teaching reading comprehension. Teachers' Knowledge of subject matter is not just about getting information about the subject. It includes getting the skill to transfer to the learners. Knowledge of subject matter is therefore a wholistic package which involves getting the information that will enhance the teaching and learning of the subject (Bisong, 2005).

Some empirical studies indicate the influence of teacher's knowledge of subject matter on students' performance. Duke (2011), examined the effective practice of reading comprehension in Delta State. Five schools were randomly selected to participate in the study. The sample of the study comprised 100 male and female students from five secondary schools in Delta State. The research design used for the study was a survey design. A well-structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection, the reliability of the

instrument was determined using a test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered in each of the five secondary schools and was collected immediately to enhance the rate of returns. frequency distributions were used to calculate the percentage of responses for each question. Using the Pearson product moment correlation, the coefficient of reliability was found to be 0.72. The results revealed that there was no significant difference between students of high and low academic performance in terms of their reading comprehension. The study is similar to the present study in finding out the variables that would determine students' achievement in English reading comprehension. Similarly, Ezeokoli (2004) carried out a study on Reading Interests and Achievement in Reading Comprehension among Senior Secondary School students in Ibadan, Nigeria. The subjects for the study were 450 male and female students from 18 schools randomly selected from Ibadan Metropolis. Two instruments were used for the study; Voluntary Reading Interest Questionnaire and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test. The results of the study indicated that students' voluntary reading out of school was low and inadequate. The findings indicated a significant relationship between types of materials read and achievement in reading comprehension.

In addition, Obiekezie (2008) investigated the influence of teacher effectiveness and students' background on reading comprehension performance of SS3 students in Cross River State, Nigeria. A sample of 1485 students were randomly selected from 30 secondary schools. Ex-post facto was the design used for the study. Instruments for data collection were the Perceived Teacher Effectiveness and Students' Background Survey Questionnaire and Test of Reading Comprehension. The results indicated a significant difference in reading comprehension performance among the students who perceived their teacher's effectiveness as high, moderate and low with those who perceive their teacher as high, showing a better performance in reading comprehension.

The present study considered the problem of teacher's knowledge of subject matter from the view of the students. When a teacher acquires knowledge or get experience and is

unable to transfer the knowledge to the students, it is as if the teacher had no knowledge. Knowledge of subject matter should be obvious in the teaching and learning process in the classroom and the students should be aware of it.

### Research Questions

1. What is students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom?
2. What is the difference between male and female students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom.
3. What is the difference between the perception of students in science and students in humanities?

### Significance of the Study

The study revealed students' perception of Teachers knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom in Oyo, Nigeria. Teachers would be informed on the required style to adopt in teaching and the style to adopt when reading so as to comprehend. The findings of this study would provide empirical information for teachers on how to convey knowledge of reading comprehension to the students and also add to the pool of research on solution to the poor performance of students in reading comprehension and English language. Students' should be able to explore their previous knowledge with the help of the teachers' as a means of making meaning from reading comprehension.

### Scope of the Study

The study covered five public senior secondary schools from Atiba Local Government, Oyo, Oyo State. A total of two hundred and fifty Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) students were selected for the study.

### Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design type: Five (5) senior secondary schools were randomly selected from eleven (11) public senior secondary schools in Atiba Local Government, Oyo, Oyo State. Fifty (50) students were randomly selected from each school, making a total of two hundred and fifty students (250). In

all, a total of two hundred and fifty 250 students participated in the study. One research instrument was used for data collection: Questionnaire on students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom ( $r=.78$ ). Data collected was analysed using Descriptive Statistics of Frequency counts, Percentage Scores, Mean and Standard Deviation. The instrument used for the study was a Questionnaire on Students' Perception of Teachers' Knowledge of Subject Matter in Reading Comprehension classroom (QSPTKSM). The questionnaire consists of ten instruments. The instrument was used to measure the students'

perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom. The reliability was determined using Cronbach Alpha formular. The reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. The data collected from the instrument were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage scores, mean and standard deviation.

## Results

**Research question 1:** What is students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom?

**Table 1:** Summary of Analysis of Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage scores, mean and standard deviation of Students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception	Male	107	28.4486	4.54170	.43906
	Female	143	27.5734	4.36453	.36498

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		- t test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 - tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Perception	Equal variances assumed	.293	.589	1.542	248	.124	.87517	.56768	-.24292	1.99326
	Equal variances not assumed			1.533	223.459	.127	.87517	.57095	-.24997	2.00031

Table 1. reveals the responses of the students to their perception of their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom. It reveals the weighted mean of 2.79 out of the 4.00 maximum obtainable score, which is higher than the standard mean of 2.50. This means that students perceived that their teachers have good knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension. Table 1 shows that out of the 10 items used to measure perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension by their students, 4 items with means above the weighted mean score contribute to good perception of their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension. The 4 items are ranked as follow: uses teaching method that make learning to be interesting with mean score (3.50>2.79) is ranked highest among the mean scores rating, follows by gives illustration well while teaching the vocabularies in the classroom (3.44>2.79), makes known the objectives of reading comprehension while teaching (3.41>2.79), lastly, does not have a good

knowledge of what he/she teaches (2.82>2.79). While the remaining 6 items with means less than the weighted mean are not contributing to students' good perception of their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom. The 6 items are; sometimes define concepts wrongly (2.78<2.79), uses inappropriate instructional material (2.54<2.79), never uses student's previous knowledge while teaching (2.50<2.79), hardly knows the structure and direction of reading comprehension (2.49<2.79), hardly uses familiar examples to explain concept of the subject matter (2.36<2.79), and dominates instructional process in reading (2.10<2.79) respectively. In conclusion, students' responses show that they perceived their English language teachers' subject mastery as very good.

**Testing of Null Hypotheses**

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in male and female students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension.

**Table 2:** Difference in male and female students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension

Gender	N	Mean.	Std.d	Df	T	P-value	Remark
Male	107	28.45	4.54	248	1.542	0.124	N.S.
Female	143	27.57	4.36				

N.S. denotes not significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 indicates that there is no significant difference in in male and female students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension ( $t = 1.54$ ;  $df = 248$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Table 2 further reveals that male students have better perception of their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension means score (28.45) than their female counterparts (27.57). This difference in male and female students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading

comprehension is not statistically significant. This means that gender (male and female) of students has no influence on students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension of science and humanities students

**Table 3:** Difference in science and humanities students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension

Specialisation	N	Mean.	Std.d	Df	T	P-value	Remark
Science	129	28.13	4.25	248	0.673	0.502	N.S.
Humanities	121	27.75	4.67				

N.S. denotes not significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference in the perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension of science and humanities students ( $t = 0.67$ ;  $df = 248$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Table 3 also indicates that science students have better perception mean score of teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension (28.13) than their humanities counterparts (27.75). This difference in their perception of their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension is not statistically significant. This implies that the area of specialization of students (science and humanities) has no influence on their perception of their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension.

### Discussion of the findings

The result of the study revealed that students perceived their teachers' knowledge of subject matter as high. These findings is in harmony with the findings of Brabham (2002), Nwuba and Nwuba (2005). These studies found out that teachers' knowledge of subject matter is crucial to improving students' reading comprehension performance. Teachers' knowledge of subject matter is important because teachers who are knowledgeable exhibit the act of boldness, teach the subject matter with mastery and skills. Teachers' who have a very high level of Knowledge encourage and help students to learn. There is no doubt that, students who have knowledgeable teachers would perform well. However, since the information on teachers' knowledge of subject matter was based on students' perception, students who usually have good performance in reading comprehension can perceive their teachers to be very good in the area of teaching reading comprehension than those with poor performance. In other words, for teachers to

be efficient they must be well grounded about the subject. This corroborate the findings of Baumgart (1977) who reiterates emphasised show of knowledge of subject matter as one of prerequisites for effective teaching and learning. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know, so, they must be masters of their subject.

The study shows that there is no significant gender difference in the perception of both male and female students in teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension. Both male and female students show positive attitude towards their teachers' knowledge of teaching reading comprehension. By implication, the gender of students does not influence the way they perceive the mastery of subject matter by their teachers. Osikomaiya (2020). In her study on the effect of Scaffolding instructional strategy and gender on students' attitude to reading comprehension revealed that there was no significant gender effect on students' towards reading comprehension. The result indicated that there was no significant difference in the perception of both humanities and science students towards their teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension. The science and humanities students' show positive attitude towards their teachers' knowledge of teaching reading comprehension. By implication, the class the students belong to does not influence their perception of mastery of subject matter of the teacher in reading comprehension.

### Recommendation

The study has underscored the need to activate teachers' knowledge of subject matter in reading comprehension classroom. The following recommendations were therefore made based on the findings of this study:

- 1) Federal ministry of Education and

professional bodies should applaud teachers, schools, states that have shown high dedication and achievement in order to encourage them to sustain and improve on their existing performance.

- 2) Teachers' should be exposed to seminars, conferences and workshop on how to implement appropriate strategies for teaching reading comprehension. These will deepen their knowledge of subject matter and expose them to current ways of making teaching reading comprehension more fascinating to the students.
- 3) Educational stakeholders in states with low participation and achievements in reading comprehension should identify its cause and proffer solution.

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