



## READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *English Language is a foremost and most prestigious language in Nigeria. It is the lingua franca, official language, medium of instruction in schools, the language of the media, politics, business, administration and most social interactions. It is a core school subject which every student must study and pass at a minimum of credit level before any employment or further educational pursuit can be guaranteed. Thus, English language is a major index for measuring the quality of the senior (high) school certificate examination and failure in English is tantamount of failure in the whole examination. Despite the high premium placed on English language, the students' perennial abysmal performance in all its components in high school examinations continues to cause disquiet among all the stakeholders (West African Examinations Council, WAEC, 2010). The Chief Examiners' Reports (WAEC 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010) have painted gloomy pictures about high school students performance in reading comprehension and summary writing thus: 'students perform poorly in that though the comprehension passages were straightforward and easy to follow, the candidates engaged in mindless lifting or copying of the passages as they could not put the answers in their own words; also the hallmark of good summary writing which are relevance and conciseness, exclusion of detail and extraneous materials were completely forgotten'. These perennial reports have provoked this study. Consequently, there is need to overhaul the English learning process by focusing attention on the complementary skills of reading and writing as tools for effective communication. Summary writing is advanced comprehension which requires deep understanding of the passage and the skill of paraphrase. The purpose of the study is to train English language teachers on the efficacy of using reading strategies to enhance comprehension and summary writing and subsequently to engage those teachers to teach high school students reading comprehension and summary writing employing appropriate reading strategies. This is because Song (2007) decried the absence of reading comprehension strategies in reading programmes in ESL classes.*

**Keywords:** *reading strategies, reading comprehension, summary writing, ESL situation, comprehension strategies*

### 1. BACKGROUND

English language is the most prominent language in Nigeria, it is the lingua franca, the language of administration and the mass media, the medium of instruction in schools and a core subject which must be studied and passed by all students irrespective of course of the level and study. In fact, it has been described as a major index for measuring the quality of high school external examination result (Ukwuegbu 1999). The high status of English language in Nigeria and the high failure rate in it has necessitated the need to

overhaul its learning process in order to achieve the goal of effective communication using the relevant language skills. Two of these skills – reading and writing have been focused on in this study as the major tools for determining students' capability in English.

The primary purpose of reading is to obtain information which could lead to enjoyment, appreciation, judgement and creativeness (Emenike and Odeyemi, 2002). Reading comprehension has been described by Pardo, (2004) as a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with the text through a combination of prior knowledge and previous

## **READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA**

experience, information in the text and the stance the reader takes in relation to the text. Reading comprehension features at three levels: on-the-lines for literal/factual information; between the lines wherein the reader reads the mind of the author, making inference and evaluation; and beyond the lines where reading goes beyond decoding facts and making inferences to thinking and making projections from the text (Davis, 2006). Reading is also gradable and so we can talk about “good readers” and “poor readers”.

A good reader is fluent, reads much, is not easily distracted because he reads with concentration and is able to follow the writers direction of reasoning and interpretes accurately the writers intended meaning (Hudson, 2000). Johnson (2005) describes good readers as “proficient readers” and attributes their proficiencies to the fact that they use reading strategies. According to Song (2007), reading strategies indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read and what they do when they do not understand. Thus, strategies help readers to engage with the text to monitor their comprehension and fix it when it fails (Pressley 1999). Studies have shown that these reading strategies or instructional techniques are students centred and when taught to students help to improve their performance on test of comprehension (Song, 2007). The strategies include: inference, visualizing, determining importance, predicting, read aloud, skimming and scanning, think aloud, questioning, synthesizing, among others.

Summary writing as an aspect of writing skill represents a short-to-the-point distillation of the main ideals in a text. Summary has been described as an advanced comprehension which requires deep understanding of the passage and the skill of paraphrase (West African Examination Council, WAEC, 2003). The use of appropriate strategies enables readers to sift main ideas from supporting details in reading texts and to be able to write same concisely and correctly.

The need to develop reading comprehension proficiency and summary writing skills becomes apparent. According to Pflaum and Bishop (2004), because youngsters are asked to read texts with increasing complexity, the (question of) the need for instruction in strategies for comprehending a variety of text types takes some urgency. Reading comprehension instructions should therefore focus on creating self-regulating strategic readers.

Despite the significance of teaching these strategies highlighted above, Johnson(2007) has observed that not much work has been done that relates to training in reading comprehension strategies in (ongoing classroom) reading programmes particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Thus teachers of English language and their students in Nigeria may not be conversant with reading strategies or use them to develop proficiency in reading comprehension and summary writing.

### **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study was influenced by both cognitive and meta-cognitive theories of reading. Unlike the traditional theory which places emphasis on the form and views reading as basically a matter of developing a series of written symbols (words and structures) to make sense of the text (Nunam 1991; McCarthy 1999), cognitive theory emphasizes the interactive nature of reading and the use of strategies to monitor reading comprehension. According to Dole et al (1991), besides knowledge brought to bear on the reading process, a set of flexible, adaptable strategies are used to make sense of a text and to monitor on-going understanding. The meta-cognitive theory is concerned with the “thinking and control” readers exercise during the reading process. This control includes all the strategies and manipulations that readers have on the act of manipulating a text. The study draws from these theories to enhance comprehension.

# **READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA**

## **3. THE PROBLEM**

Many teachers and students of English language are not aware of reading comprehension strategies and so do not encourage their use in reading lessons. According to Maduekwe (2007) not much work has been done that relates to training students to use reading strategies particularly in ESL classrooms. Consequently, WAEC (2007) added that the hallmark of good summary writing which are relevance and conciseness, exclusion of detail and extraneous materials were completely forgotten. Most students perform poorly in comprehension as they are yet to come to grips with the complex skills of comprehension (WAEC, 2005). Similarly, students are not proficient in summary writing, they engage in mindless lifting of portions from the passage. The need to teach relevant reading strategies to help students cope with comprehension and summary writing becomes evident. The question is; will the teaching of specific reading strategies enhance students' proficiency in reading and summary writing?

## **4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study was undertaken to examine the place of reading strategies in the development of reading comprehension and summary writing proficiency of senior secondary I students. Specific objectives include, to:

1. establish the extent teachers and students in the study are knowledgeable about reading strategies
2. teach both students and teachers some top reading strategies and determine their effect on the reading comprehension performance of students
3. teach students the techniques of good summary writing using reading strategies and ascertain their impact on students performance in summary writing determine whether students exposed to the reading strategies will perform better in comprehension and summary than those not so exposed.

## **5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions guided the study

1. Are the English Language teachers and the students in the study aware/knowledgeable about reading strategies?
2. Will the students' exposure to reading strategies enhance their performance in reading comprehension and summary writing?
3. Will the students exposed to reading strategies perform better in reading comprehension than those not so exposed?
4. Will the students taught reading strategies perform better in summary writing than those not taught?

## **6. HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses were tested

1. The use of reading strategies will not have any significant effect on students' performance in reading comprehension.
2. Reading strategies will not significantly affect students performance in summary writing.
5. There will be no significant difference in performance in comprehension and summary writing between students who receive instructions in reading strategies and those who do not.

## **7. METHODOLOGY**

The Solomon Four quasi-experimental control group design was used in the study. The study population comprised all the senior secondary school (SSS1) students in four randomly selected schools in Ifako-Ijaiye area of Lagos State. A cluster random sampling of intact classes and 15 English teachers per school constituted the sample of 240 students and 50 teachers. The main instruments used were six reading strategies: predicting, inferring, summarizing, questioning, think aloud, and skimming and scanning. Other instruments include a structured questionnaire, and some reading passages. The questionnaire

## READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

and the passages were duly validated by relevant experts.

Data collection was done in four stages namely, administration of questionnaire on the teachers and students to determine their awareness of reading strategies, administration of pretest on the two experimental groups to determine their level of proficiency in reading comprehension and summary writing, teaching the English teachers how to use reading strategies to increase students reading abilities. They subsequently assisted in teaching reading to two groups of students using those strategies (three for each group) while the researchers supervised the teaching. The other two groups were taught reading and summary in the conventional way ie without the

application of the strategies. At the end of six weeks of intervention, all the four groups were post tested on reading comprehension and summary writing. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools.

### 8. THE RESULTS

The analysis of responses to the research questions and the results of hypotheses testing are hereby presented. Research question one sought to determine the teachers' and students' awareness of and use of reading strategies while reading. Tables 1a and 1b present the findings.

Table 1a. Students' Awareness of Reading Strategies

Items	Weighted Responses	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. We know little about reading strategies.	716	3.58	2.122	Accepted
2. We are taught reading using some reading strategies.	453	2.27	1.581	Not Accepted
3. We have been taught some strategies like inferring, predicting, think aloud, skimming and scanning, summarizing, among others.	397	1.99	0.332	Not Accepted
4. We can read using some reading strategies.	388	1.94	0.215	Not Accepted
5. We know little about techniques of summary writing.	698	3.49	2.327	Accepted
6. Our teachers teach us how to write good summary.	579	2.90	1.452	Accepted
7. We are good in summary writing using strategies.	447	2.24	0.883	Not Accepted
8. We practise summary writing weekly using relevant reading strategies.	431	2.16	1.017	Not Accepted
9. Reading strategies can motivate students to read with interest and understanding.	655	3.28	1.895	Accepted

Table 1b. English Language Teachers' Awareness of Reading Strategies

Items	Weighted Responses	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. I teach my students reading using reading strategies.	148	2.96	2.252	Accepted
2. I have taught my students strategies like inferring, predicting, think aloud, questioning, skimming and scanning,	145	2.90	1.818	Accepted

**READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA**

summarizing.				
3. My students can read using reading strategies.	122	2.44	0.632	Not Accepted
4. I know enough about techniques of summary writing.	158	3.16	1.515	Accepted
5. I teach my students how to write good summary.	167	3.34	2.027	Accepted
6. My students are good in summary writing.	113	2.26	0.645	Not Accepted
7. My students practise summary writing weekly using reading strategies.	118	2.36	0.783	Not Accepted
8. Reading strategies can motivate students to read with interest and understanding	165	3.30	2.552	Accepted

The items in tables 1a & b are considered accepted at 2.50 mean value and above. The responses of the students on awareness/knowledge and use of reading strategies show that the accepted mean values of 3.58, 3.49, 2.90 and 3.28 reveal that while the students know little about reading strategies and less about techniques of summary writing, they agreed that reading strategies can motivate them to read with interest and understanding.

On the part of the teacher respondents, the acceptable items with the mean values of 2.96, 2.90, 3.16, 3.34 and 3.30 reveal that they teach students reading strategies, teach them reading

using strategies and teach them to apply specific reading strategies, and affirm that reading strategies motivate students to read with interest and understanding. The responses from both groups reveal a lot of inconsistencies and contradict each other showing that one group must have made false claims. In the course of the study, it was discovered that the students had no knowledge about reading strategies and knew very little about summary writing. Research question two sought to ascertain whether the exposure of students to reading strategies will increase their comprehension and summary writing abilities. Tables 2a and 2b present the findings.

Table 2a. Students' Post-intervention Performance in Reading Comprehension

Group	Variable	N	Mean	SD	percentage
E <sub>1</sub> (Treatment)	Pre-test	60	35.17	16.10	46.6
E <sub>1</sub> (Treatment)	Post-test	60	61.86	13.21	53.4
E <sub>2</sub> (No treatment)	Pre-test	60	32.33	15.87	59.5
E <sub>2</sub> (No treatment)	Post-test	60	29.33	19.03	40.5
C <sub>1</sub> (Treatment)	Post-test	60	59.83	17.22	60
C <sub>2</sub> (No treatment)	Post-test	60	33.0	18.80	40

Table 2b: Students' Post-intervention Performance in Summary Writing

Group	Variable	N	Mean	SD	percentage
E <sub>1</sub> (Treatment)	Pre-test	60	10.83	13.05	44.9
E <sub>1</sub> (Treatment)	Post-test	60	48.16	12.05	55.1
E <sub>2</sub> (No treatment)	Pre-test	60	16.17	18.33	38.4
E <sub>2</sub> (No treatment)	Post-test	60	15.33	14.31	35.7
C <sub>1</sub> (Treatment)	Post-test	60	49.83	13.21	56.75
C <sub>2</sub> (No treatment)	Post-test	60	10.33	12.48	43.3

## READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

The data in tables 2a & b reveal that the mean scores of the students in both comprehension and summary writing increased at the post-test in favour of the treatment groups. This shows that when students are exposed to appropriate and relevant reading strategies and summary writing techniques they read strategically and

improve their performance in reading and summary writing.

The Hypothesis stated that the exposure of students to reading strategies will not significantly affect/influence their proficiency in reading and summary writing. The findings are present in table 3.

Table 3a. T-test Comparison of Experimental Groups Performance in Reading and Summary Writing.

Variable	No	Mean	SD	Df	T-cal	T-crit	Remarks
<b>Reading:</b>							
Pre-test	60	35.17	16.10	58	19.937	1.645	P.0.05 *S
Post-test		61.83	13.21				
<b>Summary Writing:</b>							
Pre-test	60	10.83	13.05	58	33.589	1.645	*S
Post-test		48.16	12.05				

Table 3a reveals that in both reading and writing, the students exposed to the reading strategies did significantly better in their post

study performance in both reading and summary writing at 0.05 level of significance ( $19.937 > 1.645$ , P.0.05)

Table 3b: Effects of Exposure to Reading Strategies on Students' Performance in Reading and Summary Writing.

Group	Variable	No	Mean	SD	Df	T-cal	T-crit	Remarks
<b>Reading:</b>								
E <sub>1</sub>	Post-test	60	61.18	13.21	118	1.930	1.645	*S
C <sub>1</sub>	Pos-test	60	59.83	17.22				
<b>Writing:</b>								
E <sub>1</sub>	Post-test	60	48.16	12.05	118	1.33	1.645	NS
C <sub>1</sub>	Post-test	60	49.83	13.21				

Also in reading, E<sub>1</sub> significantly performed better than C<sub>1</sub> judging by the calculated t-value of 1.930 while is higher than the critical t-value of 1.645 at 118 degree of freedom and 0.05 confidence level. The difference between the two treatment groups may be due to the particular strategies used for the E<sub>1</sub> group namely, skimming and scanning, making inference, and questioning. In writing, the difference in their mean performance was not significant: the t-calculated was 1.33 while the critical t was 1.645 at 118 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Both groups therefore gained from the treatment and increased their reading and summary writing

proficiency. The next hypothesis states that there will be no significant difference in reading comprehension and summary writing proficiency of the students exposed to reading strategies and that of those not exposed to the strategies. A 2-way ANOVA test of the performance of the four groups in reading showed the calculated F-values of 0.695, and 1.160, for the treatment groups and F 0.605 and 0.395 for the untreated groups while the critical F-value was 1.910 at 0.05 level of significance. The students who were taught reading strategies performed significantly better than those not exposed to the strategies. Similarly, the summary writing test produced

# **READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA**

F-values of 0.704 and 0.493 for the treatment groups and 0.404 and 0.215 for those not exposed to the strategies at 0.05 level of significance ( $F = 1.910$ ). The groups that participated in the intervention therefore increased their reading and summary writing abilities while the other two groups did not.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study have shown the need for and the effectiveness of reading strategies in enhancing students' proficiency in reading and writing. The first research question sought to ascertain the level of awareness and knowledge about reading strategies. The findings show that while the students indicated that they were not familiar with the strategies, the teachers claimed that they were aware of and teach reading using specific strategies. The actual intervention revealed that the teachers must have made contradictory claims in that students had no knowledge about the strategies. Research question two sought to determine if students ability/proficiency in reading and summary writing improved after the study when student participants were compared with those not exposed to the strategies. The findings from the students mean scores after the study as well as the test of significance of difference between their mean scores revealed that the use of the strategies significantly enhanced the students ability in both reading and summary writing. This finding supports Song's (2007) assertion that success in learning mainly depends on appropriate strategy used and that unsuccessful learners can improve by being trained to use effective strategies.

When the mean scores of the four groups of students were compared using ANOVA, it was discovered the two groups exposed to the strategies performed significantly better than the groups not so exposed in the both reading and summary writing. Citing Baker and Brown (1984), Garner (1980), Song (2007) stated that readers who use strategies are able to notice inconsistencies in a text and employ strategies

to make these inconsistencies understandable. Ali (1999) and Leki (2001) had earlier stated that meaning construction and text comprehension appear to depend upon the degree of active response to a text. Song (2007) concluded that strategies help to improve reading comprehension; they help to enhance reading efficiency; they help students as experts do; and they help students process text actively to monitor their comprehension.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS**

From the findings, it is evident that the use of reading strategies impacted positively on students reading and summary writing ability. The object of reading is to make meaning and the intended meaning may feature at the literal, inferential and evaluative levels requiring students to read on the lines, between the lines and beyond the lines respectively with appropriate/relevant reading strategies. It is when this meta-cognitive process of comprehension is attained that re-stating concisely in summary writing can be done successfully. Summary writing, which most students are scared of is just an advanced comprehension. This seeming fear will be removed when students are taught reading strategies that aid comprehension and summary writing.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are pointed: 1. Teachers should be adequately informed and trained on how to teach reading strategies to their students so that students can read strategically. 2. Teachers should create awareness in the students on the importance and usefulness of reading strategies. 3. Students should be guided to practice appropriate and relevant reading strategies at the three reading stages of pre-reading, reading and post-reading stages to enhance their reading proficiency. 4. The curriculum for training teachers should be enriched with

# READING STRATEGIES: A CATALYST FOR ENHANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND SUMMARY WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

topics on different reading strategies global and specific ones, to create awareness and teach students teachers how to use them among their student- because this study revealed that such knowledge and awareness are presently lacking among teachers of English and their students.

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