

## GLOBAL VIEW ON READING COMPREHENSION: IMPLICATION FOR FAMILY BACKGROUND ON PUPILS' READING ABILITIES

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the effects of family educational background on pupils' reading comprehension abilities in primary schools in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State-Nigeria. The study was quasi-experimental and purposive sampling technique was used to select 120 pupils from schools in the study area. The study raised two (2) objectives, answered two (2) questions and tested two (2) null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance and 95% degree of freedom. In the light of the above, the study discovered that significant differences exist between the mean academic performance scores of pupils on the basis of family background and gender in reading comprehension abilities. The study in view of the above made some policy recommendations.

**Keywords:** Reading, Comprehension, Gender, Family Background, Academic Performance

Reading comprehension difficulties has assumed a global dimension nowadays. Several studies have been conducted globally to identify the issues, challenges and prospects. There are globally generalized findings regarding reading comprehension abilities and at the same time, there are areas of discrepancies which cut across cultures, races and boundaries.

Reading is a socio-cultural process, which is based on students' prior knowledge and at the same time it helps to broaden students' experiences and knowledge. A great deal of research has focused on the cognitive aspects of reading (Adams, 1990) and has stressed the need to consider the balance between cognitive and social aspects of reading and literacy (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). Reading is a process involving the activation of relevant knowledge and related language to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another.

One of the most stable and consistently observed phenomena in the field of education is the impact of students' home background on achievement. Students whose parents have a higher level of education, a more prestigious occupation, or greater income tend to have higher achievement than students whose parents have a lower standing on such socio-economic status (SES) indicators (e.g., Sirin, 2005). Many theories have been proposed to account for this phenomenon, but there is little consensus about which explanation is the most powerful. One reason is that, in spite of the stability of the phenomenon, there is also considerable variation in strength of effects across educational systems and learning domains (Barone, 2006). So far, there has been little research on this variation, and on the mechanisms which give rise to it. Gender is another student characteristic which tends to be related to achievement differences.

Research into reading showed that successful promotion of reading takes place mainly at home and at school (Kraaykamp, 2001; Van Peer, 1991). Students' attitudes to reading can be influenced by their experiences, which can change over the primary school years and may differ for female students and male students. Children bring their family and cultural values, experiences and beliefs as they begin schooling (Comber, 2004; Thompson, 2002). Besides, school-based reading activities promote students' identity as a reader and their attitude towards reading (McCarthy and

Moje; 2002; Turner and Paris, 1995). The family background and school context can influence students' preferences and contribute to shaping students' reading attitudes and preferences (Myoungsoon and Heekyoung, 2002). The importance of parent/family involvement has been highlighted as a basic factor that can help children improve reading by providing motivating and pleasurable experiences with books and literacy (Ellen, 1994). Research data have shown that parental involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences on students' interest in reading, and their attitudes towards reading classroom (Rowe, 1991). Especially, mothers become systematically responsible for the literary socialization of their children.

School environment and students' gender are important variables that influence the academic success of adolescents' students. Academic Achievement differences in schools are usually accounted by learner factors like motivational factors, instructional factors and assessment factors. Research studies conducted at the secondary school level indicate that there exists a gender difference in science self-efficacy (Debacker & Nelson, 2000) in Gafoor (2014). However, in the view of Gafoor (2014) constructivist approaches that influence classroom environment will help cognitive development in both male and female students to reduce gender differences in their academic achievement in all areas including English Language. One of the most topical issues in the current debate all over the world observes Abdu-Raheem (2012) has been that of gender differences and academic achievement among students in schools.

A possible theoretical explanation on gender disparity on reading comprehension levels can be found in schema theory. According to schema theory, our system contains "an enormous number of schemata (the plural form of schema)" (Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977:128). Each schema contains many components, parts, or "slots", which are hierarchically linked, representing the relationships among the component relative to the schema in question (Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Carrel, 1991). If new information is incomplete, the reader makes inferences on the basis of the selected schema in order to fill in the missing parts.

Furthermore, a lot of researchers have investigated and indicated differences between male and female students in reading influences, reading performance and strategy use (e.g. Biigel and Buunk, 1996; Chave, 2001). In addition, a number of studies have revealed gender in the amount of time allocated/devoted to reading. It has also been found that a higher percentage of girls indulge in leisure reading than boys (Abilock, 2002; Swalander and Taube, 2007). The females show a more positive attitude to reading and a preference for reading a variety of genre compared to males (Clark, Osborne and Akerman, 2008). Concerning the text genres, it has been revealed that boys preferred adventure, science fiction and sports stories, while girls enjoyed animal stories and stories about teenage problems (Simpson, 1998), as well as romance, friendship, animal stories and historical fiction. Shelly (1999) found that the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade children have stronger preference for humour and horror stories, followed by mysteries, historical fiction, adventure and science fiction. Also, in Abilock's study (2002) it was revealed that the girls preferred to read books about both males and females, while the boys would choose fiction about males. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the Effects of Family Educational Background on Pupils' Reading Comprehension Abilities in Primary Schools in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State-Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study was to examine the effects of family educational background on pupils' reading comprehension abilities in primary schools in Zaria metropolis, Kaduna State-Nigeria. The study was guided by the following specific objectives which are to:

- i. determine the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria in relation to their family educational background;
- ii. find out the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria in relation to their gender.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were answered in this study:

- i. What is the difference between the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils from literate and non-literate family in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the difference between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are hereby formulated and shall be tested in this study:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils from literate and non-literate family in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria;

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The study is a quasi experimental pre-test, post-test design. The sample consisted of 120 primary VI Pupils selected from 2 mixed schools in the study area. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the pupils from each school for the study. For the purpose of this study, an expository passage was selected from primary school standard Test Lessons in Reading.

The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation and t-test independent samples. The mean and standard deviations were used to answer the questions raised by the study. In addition, the t-test independent samples is used to test the null hypotheses postulated by the study. The data were analyzed at 0.05 alpha level of significance and 95 percent confidence level.

### **Results**

This chapter presents the data analysis including its discussion of results. The first section of this chapter presents answers to the research questions using means and standard deviations. The second section presents and interprets the two null hypotheses by means of inferential statistical techniques of Independent samples t-test at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The third section outlined the major findings of the study and the last section discussed the findings of the study in details and offer recommendations.

**Answering Research Questions**

Research Question One: what is the difference between the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils from literate and non-literate family in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria?

**Table1: Descriptive Statistics on Academic Performance Scores of Pupils from Literate and Non-literate Family**

Variable	Categories	N	Mean	Std.dev
	Non-literate	6	4.35	1.011
	Literate	6	4.90	.371

The descriptive statistics above revealed the reading comprehension performance scores of pupils' in relation to their family educational background. Their calculated mean comprehension performance scores were 4.35 and 4.90 for pupil from literate and non-literate family respectively. This implies that pupils from literate family have higher reading comprehension performance scores compared to their counterparts' from non-literate pupils.

**Research Question Two:** What is the difference between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria?

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on the Academic Performance Scores of Male and Female Pupils**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std.dev
	Male	6	1.81	1.39
	Female	6	2.62	1.45

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 revealed the mean academic performance scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension abilities. Their calculated mean comprehension abilities scores were 1.85 and 2.66 for male and female pupils respectively. This implies that female pupils had higher academic performance scores in reading comprehension abilities than their male counterparts.

**Null Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils from literate and non-literate family in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria;

**Table 3: Independent t-test Sample Statistics in the Mean of Male and Female Students on Gender-Neutral Texts at Literal Level Test**  
*Calculated  $t > 1.96$ , calculated  $p < 0.05$  at DF 11*

Variable	Categories	N	MMea n	Std.dev	Df	t cal	t-Crit	Sig (p)
	Non literate	60	4.35	1.011	118	4.88	1.96	0.000
	Literate	60	4.90	.371				

Results of the independent samples t-test statistics in Table 3 shows that significant differences exist between the mean academic performance scores of pupils from literate and non-literate family in reading comprehension abilities. Reason being that the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value of 4.88 is higher than the t-critical value of 1.96, at Df 118. However, their calculated mean literal performances were 4.35 and 4.90 by male and female students respectively. Consequently the null hypothesis which states that there was no significant difference between the reading comprehension abilities of primary school pupils from literate and non-literate family in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria is hereby rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

**Table 4: Independent t-test Sample Statistics in the Mean of Rural and Urban Students on Male Related Texts at Literal Level Test**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std.dev	Df	t cal	t-Crit	iiig (p)
	Male	60	1.81	1.39	118	4.39	1.96	0.000
	Female	60	2.62	1.45				

*Calculated  $t > 1.96$ , calculated  $p < 0.05$  at DF 118*

Results of the independent t-test statistics in table 4 shows that significant difference existed between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Reason being that the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value of 4.39 is higher than the t-critical value of 1.96, at Df 118. In addition, their calculated mean literal performances were 1.85 and 2.66 for male and female pupils respectively. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria is hereby rejected.

### **Major Findings**

The study discovered the following:

i. Significant differences exist between the mean academic performance scores of pupils from literate and non-literate family in reading comprehension abilities. Reason being that the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value of 4.88 is higher than the t-critical value of 1.96, at Df 118.

ii. Significant differences exist between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Reason being that the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value of 4.39 is higher than the t-critical value of 1.96, at Df 118.

### **Discussion of Results**

The following are the discussion of results. On account of the results of the hypotheses coupled with result of the research questions.

Significant differences exist between the mean academic performance scores of pupils from literate and non-literate family in reading comprehension abilities. Reason being that the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value of 4.88 is higher than the t-critical value of 1.96, at Df 118.

Significant difference exist between the reading comprehension abilities of male and female primary school pupils in Zaria Education Zone, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Reason being that the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance while the t-calculated value of 4.39 is higher than the t-critical value of 1.96, at Df 118.

School environment and students' gender are important variables that influence the academic success of adolescents' students. Academic Achievement differences in schools are usually accounted by learner factors like motivational factors, instructional factors and assessment factors. Research studies conducted at the secondary school level indicate that there exists a gender difference in science self-efficacy (Debacker & Nelson, 2000) in Gafoor (2014). However, in the view of Gafoor (2014) constructivist approaches that influence classroom environment will help cognitive development in both male and female students to reduce gender differences in their academic achievement in all areas including English language. One of the most topical issues in the current debate all over the world observes Abdu-Raheem (2012) has been that of gender differences and academic achievement among students in schools. It is widely accepted that females score higher on average than males on test of verbal abilities, while males score higher on average than females on tests of mathematical ability. However, stereotype threat has been identified as a possible influence on the difference between males and females in certain topics or aspects etc.

A possible theoretical explanation for the influence of the content of texts on sex differences in comprehension performance can be found in schema Theory. According to schema theory, our system contains "an enormous number of schemata (the plural of schema)" (Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977:128). Each schema contains many components parts or "slots" which are hierarchically linked, representing the relationships among the components relative to the schema in question (Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Carrel, 1991). If new information is incomplete, the reader makes inferences on the basis of the selected schema in order to fill in the missing parts.

Gender differences studies reached different conclusions, some favoring males and others favoring females (Brantmeier, 2001; 2003; Bugel and Buunk, 1996; Hyde and Linn, 1988; Myers, 2002; Rosen, 2001; Pae, 2004; Yongqi; 2002). Most of these studies used gender-oriented reading

texts and the findings suggest that there is a need for more research on reading comprehension using gender-neutral text.

### **Conclusions**

In the light of the foregoing, it is concluded that pupils from the literate family outperformed their counterparts from the non-literate family and that gender affects the reading comprehension abilities of pupils in favour of males.

### **Recommendations**

The study in view of the above, recommends remedial classes for male pupils and pupils from non-literate families and the need to explore reasons behind poor academic performance of male students in reading comprehension passages as compared to their female counterparts. The study further suggests adequate attention with regards to reading comprehension as the study shows that non-literate family pupils were lagging behind in reading comprehension abilities.

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