



SUMMARISING SKILLS AS PANACEA TO PROBLEMS OF READING COMPREHENSION AMONG ENGLISH AND FRENCH LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, IKERE EKITI, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

It has been observed that, one of the reading problems facing students in tertiary institutions is the inability to summarize what they have read. In addressing this issue, two null hypotheses were generated and tested using descriptive and inferential statistics. One hundred and twenty samples were drawn from the population through stratified sampling technique. It was discovered that there was a significant difference between the students' achievement in writing main ideas when listening to lectures and when reading a passage. It was concluded that students need pedagogical assistance in reading skills to improve their comprehension level which will eventually assist them in both internal and external examinations. It was recommended that more emphasis should be laid on reading while summarizing skills should be more taught and encouraged either verbally or in written forms as a form.

KEYWORDS: Summarising Skills, Reading Comprehension, English language, French language.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a cognitive process in which a reader negotiates meaning in order to comprehend or create an interpretation. During reading, the meaning does not go from the page to the reader. Instead, reading involves a complex negotiation between the text and the reader. This is shaped by many factors: the reader knowledge about the topic, the reader's purpose for reading, the language community the reader belongs to and how closely that language matches the language used in the text, reader culturally based



expectation about reading based on his or previous experiences (Weaver, 1994). From this submission, one would infer that the essence of reading is comprehension.

Readers read for different purposes, and the way they approach the reading processes varies according to their purposes. Often, they read for enjoyment but at other times, they read to acquire information. When reading for enjoyment or entertainment, readers assume an aesthetic stance and when they read to acquire information, readers assume an efferent stance. They concentrate on the public common referents of the words and symbols in the text. Almost every reading experience calls for a balance between aesthetic and efferent reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). In a classroom situation, learners read efferent in order to write correct answers to a given passage.

In Nigeria, most learners use English language as a second language having acquired their native languages (MT). This seems to pose serious challenges to learners in areas of comprehending what they read as a result of their inability to achieve fluency in reading and acquisition of adequate vocabulary that will assist them in comprehension. This seems to suggest that their background is very weak.

The problem is more compounded each day as the number and size of content area of textbooks increase while the ability of learners to extract and construct meanings from what they read seems to diminish. According to McEwan (2004) "It is a pity that many students read it but don't get it". This indicates that reading, at times, is regrettably done without achieving its required goal; which is comprehension.

It is worrisome among students these days that they fail not only in external examinations but also in internal examinations. This call for urgent attention in addressing the ugly tide. It should be noted that there is a need on the part of teachers to devise a better means of assisting students to read and understand so as to make reading a rewarding concept. McEwan (2004) was of the opinion that "the essence of good teaching is to show students how to do what is required to be successful, not telling them to concentrate and try harder. Showing students how skilled readers extract and construct from text (understanding and retention of what they read) is the essence of becoming a good teacher. This is to further buttress the fact that teachers have a lot of challenges to better the reading fortunes of learners most especially in English Language. One of the challenges is to teach summary effectively.



A summary is one or two sentences (of something or a very short paragraph) that gives the main idea or, as some people call it, “the gist” of a story. Oyinloye (2002) sees summarizing as the ability to break point into smaller pieces of information. Readers should be able to identify the points discussed by the author on each item and as broken down in each paragraph. Summarizing is especially helpful when students understand and retain what they read. Summarizing could also mean paraphrasing, connecting and conceptualizing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is noted with discomfort by the researcher that the level of students failure in a result released by the College of Education Ikere Ekiti in alarming. It shows retrogressive responses of students to examination stimuli. One wonders what would have been responsible for this. Many questions came to mind in quick succession as to what might be responsible for this. Are students really reading at all? If not, what area(s) of the language possess problems to them and how can they be assisted? One could reasonably guess that most students read on aesthetic stance which is not good enough for comprehending reading materials for examination purposes. The study cannot really take care of all those areas discovered to be the sources of the problems: no background knowledge on the newly introduced concepts, vocabularies problems, organizations of content in terms of sentences and paragraphs, structures of the text and environmental factors. However, the study focuses on learner’s abilities to summarize a given passage.

McEwan (2004) explains basic rules (Procedure and prompt) of summarizing. These include: Comprehend, to read and understand; chunk, to divide the text into parts, to make each chunk smaller; conceptualize, to think of a key word for each chunk, connect; combine the key words into a summary sentence. Oyinloye (2002) says that summary writing is based on the understanding the line of thought of a passage. He also asserts that students should be able to differentiate types of paragraph and should be able to follow the author from the beginning to the end in order to understand what the author is saying. He moves further to say that readers must identify the key facts as discussed in each paragraph of the passage to be summarized and be able to fish out the main points discussed in the paragraph.



It is worthwhile to note that an average college student has nothing less than twelve courses to be written within a semester of at most thirteen to fourteen weeks. At the end of each semester, students are examined in all these courses. This definitely calls for students' abilities to extract the relevance from the irrelevance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is essential to focus this study on key areas of learners' interest to make reading achieving the desired goal. In order to do this, the following research questions are raised.

1. Do learners identify the main ideas in the paragraph as the basis for assisting them to write correctly, answers to questions with less difficulty.
2. Do learners master the essentials of a good paragraph?
3. Are learners conscious of topic and supportive sentences in paragraphs ?
4. What measures can be taken to improve learners' knowledge in summary ?

Research Hypotheses

Resultantly from these research questions, two null hypotheses were generated.

HO1: There is no significant difference between the students' achievement in writing main ideas and supporting ideas when listening to lectures and when reading a passage.

HO2: There is no significant difference between the students' achievement in summary writing according to paragraph and mechanical accuracy when reading a passage.

Research Method

The research method was a quasi-experimental which involved experimental and control group. The experimental group was taught with a package of summarizing skills which will enable learners to identify the main ideas, supporting ideas, word classes, note taking skills, paragraphing and sentence construction among others. The control group has no access to the package of summarizing skills.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was the totality of part 1, 2, 3 students of the College of



Education. The College has five schools of study with different course combinations.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample was one hundred and twenty (120) respondents drawn from all five schools of studies in the College. These schools include School of Education Social Sciences, Sciences, Languages and Business and Vocational Studies. The sampling technique was stratified random sampling technique that cut across the three levels i.e Part I, 2 and 3.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was an achievement test based on the students' knowledge of summarizing skills in a given reading passage.

Validity of Instrument

The face and content validity of the instrument was established by experts in test and measurement and language education.

Reliability of Instrument

The consistency of the instrument was ascertained using test re-test method of finding reliability. The instrument was administered on 25 students who were not members of the main study. They were taught summarizing skills for three weeks and were tested before and after the study. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The analysis yielded 0.70 correlation coefficient which was tested at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the instrument was good enough.

Research Procedure

The student respondent selected for the study were taught for four weeks with a package of summarizing skills designed for the study. The data collected from the scores of achievement tests administered to both the experimental and control group were subjected to t-test statistical analysis. The data analyzed is reported in table 1 and 2 below:

Results Analyses and Discussions

H01. There is no significant difference between the students' achievement in writing main ideas and supporting ideas when listening to lectures and when reading a passage.



Table 1. t-test of students showing students' achievement in writing main ideas and supporting ideas when listening to lectures and when reading a passage.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Experimental group	52	2.144	3114.26	118	2.06	1.67
Control group	68	3.416	4211.41			

As indicated in Table 1 above, calculated t-table is 2.06 while the table value is 1.67 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the t-table value of 2.06 is greater than 1.67 the table value, the hypothesis that, there is no significant difference between the students' achievement in writing main ideas and supporting ideas when listening to lectures and when reading a passage is rejected.

HO2. There is no significant difference between the students' achievement in summary according to paragraph and mechanical accuracy when reading a passage.

Table 2. t-test of students showing students' achievement in summary according to paragraph and mechanical accuracy when reading a passage.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Experimental group	52	3.421	3411.24	118	1.89	1.67
Control group	68	2.816	222.17			

$P > 0.05$

Table 2 showed that the calculated table is 1.89 while the table value is 1.67 at 0.05 level of significance. Since t-calculated value of 1.89 is greater than t-table value of 1.67, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the students' achievement in summarizing according to paragraphs and mechanical accuracy when reading a passage is rejected.



DISCUSSION

From the two tables presented above, it is obvious that many students were not well grounded in summarizing skills and this inadvertently affects their abilities to infer meanings from whatever they read. For learning to be effective, most especially, using lecture method as applied to tertiary institutions, students should be taught how to differentiate the main ideas from supporting ideas. The findings from the study showed that students' ability to differentiate type of paragraphs was very essential in writing summary. This corroborates the assertion of Oyinloye (2002) that students must acquaint themselves with main ideas and supporting ideas in each paragraph before they can write good summary. Constructing meanings from these different sentences demands conscious efforts of the readers to process the linguistic constituents of the text. This process can be at both micro and macro level. Micro level of the text structures involves connectives like; because, although, rather etc and cohesive ties (Nist & Mealy, 1991). Also, the macro-structures are discourse markers which signal the logical and systematic development of ideas in a text. (Van & Dijk, 1976).

Brown and day (1983) are of the opinion that summarizing is the ability to recursively work on information presented to reader as succinctly as possible. This requires judgment and effort, knowledge and strategies. This is an indication that summary, or simply put, restating the meaning of what a reader reads in his/her own words different words from those used in the original text, is a daunting task for all readers. Students at all levels need to be assisted in summarizing skills.

On Table 2, it is observed that, there is a significant difference between students' achievement in summarizing according to paragraphs and mechanical accuracy when reading a passage. Oyinloye (2002), is of the opinion that summarizing according to paragraphs entails the cognition of students to identify different function of paragraphs. These functions include; explanation, description and narration. Also, mechanical skills in form of punctuations; full stop, comma, colon, question marks are all essentials in giving meanings to vocabularies as contextualized in the passage. This submission indicates that ability to summarize is the peak of vocabulary enrichment. In order to achieve a high level of vocabulary, students need to be taught steps involved in reading a passage. This involves



identifying paragraphs: writers use a paragraph to convey a unit of the information which they want to convey. In doing this, a topic sentence is used to convey the main point or the central idea which the sentences are used to buttress the main point shown by the topic sentence.

CONCLUSION

It could be reasonably concluded that students need pedagogical assistance in reading skills so that their academic performances can be improved. This urgent re-appraisal becomes essential because of their difficulties to write main ideas and supporting ideas when listening to lectures and when reading a passage. Also, it could be concluded that many students cannot summarize what they have read to improve their comprehension level which will eventually assist them either in internal and external examinations. It could be also be concluded that many students may have the idea of what they read but the appropriate vocabularies may not be available to drive home their points.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, it could be seen that reading is a cognitive process needed by every successful student. Reading will only be meaningful if comprehension is achieved. Reading comprehension entails the abilities of students in writing main ideas and supporting ideas when listening to lectures and reading a passage. Comprehension too is not an easy concept that could be achieved without efforts by both teachers and learners. For comprehension to be achieved, summarizing skills should be taught which would facilitate comprehension. In a nutshell, the following recommendations are essential.

- (1) More emphasis should be laid on reading.
- (2) Summarizing skills-should be taught to both English and French language students.
- (3) Students should be made to summarize either verbally or in written forms whatever they are taught as a form of evaluation.
- (4) More attention of students should be drawn to acquisition of appropriate vocabularies as the basis of answering questions from reading comprehension problems.



- (5) Students should be familiar with basic summarizing cues: topic and supporting sentences.

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