



## Discussion Method and Students' Performance in Reading Comprehension: Implications for Counseling

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the effects of the discussion method on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in reading comprehension. The purpose was to find if the discussion method would improve students' performance in reading comprehension and if location will not significantly moderate the effect. The study adopted pretest posttest control group quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of 116 Senior Secondary class 2 students randomly selected through stratified random sampling technique. The sample was assigned to 2 groups of discussion and conventional method. The Achievement Test in Reading Comprehension (ATRC)] was used as pretest and posttest to collect data on students' level of mastery and performance in reading comprehension. The instrument was validated and a coefficient of 0.78 was obtained using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis. The experiment took a period of six weeks to complete. The results showed that the discussion method was effective in improving performance in reading comprehension and that urban school students performed better than rural school students reading comprehension when the discussion method was used. By counselling implication, this shows that the confidence and self-efficiency of rural school students need to be improved and their anxiety reduced as they approach reading comprehension. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made.*

**Keywords:** Discussion method, Students' performance, Reading comprehension, Counselling, Location.

### Introduction

The importance of English Language in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Apart from being the language used for

official transactions, it is also the language of instruction in schools. This means that it is practically impossible for a student to pass in any subject



except a local language subject without the knowledge of the English Language. This is because apart from delivering the lessons of the subjects in English language the textbooks and other reading materials for the subjects are written in the Language. Therefore, without a good grasp of the English Language a student may find it difficult to comprehend the learning materials of other subjects. This is why reading comprehension is important and it is specifically taught in the Secondary School in Nigeria. According to Rutzler (2020), reading comprehension is the ability to read, understand, process and recall what was just read. Its benefits can be found in the comprehension of all subjects including Science, Mathematics, History, etc. What is more important is to comprehend what has been read and this in itself has levels (Jose, Santos and Royes, 2013). Teachers and researchers agree that student take control of their reading comprehension when they are purposeful, thoughtful and reflective (Egbe and Daniyan, 2016)

Teaching reading comprehension, however, has its own challenges. Linane (2014) identified some of these which include the fact that students may not even read the text or that they skim parts of the text. Moreover, deficits in receptive language ability can also compound students reading comprehension problems. In other words, certain passages can overload students' working memory capacity and syntactical understanding. Therefore, reading comprehension

problems often occur because of students lack of experience and knowledge of complex sentence (Newmonic, 2016). Conti (2016) also found that major problems of reading comprehension include students reluctance to use the dictionary, thereby not checking the meaning and use of challenging words. Again, the background of students may affect them, being second language learners, especially when they come from rural areas due to lack of exposure (Kulo, Onchera & Indembukhaini, 2014). It therefore, requires conscious efforts to effectively teach reading comprehension. This is more so because the performance of secondary school students in reading comprehension has not been encouraging (Agbo, Kadiri and Ekwueme, 2019). Therefore, the chalk and talk method of teaching which has been the conventional way of teaching in Nigeria may not suffice for the effective teaching of reading comprehension.

One method that could be tried and which is not strange or difficult to utilize is the discussion method. This is a method whereby students are separated into groups to talk about a problem or an issue in order to reach a decision on it. In doing this, they exchange ideas, utilize their potentials in logical reasoning and sharpen their listening and communication skills as well as improve on the affective traits of tolerance, patience and open-mindedness. The method is adopted by the teacher who organises the discussion and monitors that the



students do not derail from the focus of discussion and that the session does not become rowdy or noisy.

Scholars have attested to the usefulness of the discussion method in teaching reading comprehension. Ketch in Tugman (2010) is of the opinion that discussion gives students opportunity to rehearse the thinking process, allows teachers to assess a student's thinking process and strengthens understanding of the text. Yusuf, Guga and Ibrahim (2016) experimented on 100 Senior Secondary Class 2 students and found that students who were taught using the discussion method achieved significantly better than those taught with conventional method. They went on to explain that the discussion method exposes the teachers' guidance using purposeful strategies aimed at directing learner's attention to important ideals and assisting them with difficult concepts in a manner in which other methods do not offer. Tugman (2010) also experimented on 99 pupils in 8th Grade and found that implementing literature discussion groups in the classroom had significant positive effects on reading comprehension. Other scholars (Abdulkaki, Suhaimi, Alsaqqaf and Jawad, 2018; Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey and Alexander, 2009; Rivera, 2013) also attested to the efficacy of the discussion method in enhancing performance in reading comprehension. However certain questions may agitate the mind whether these claims still hold for senior secondary school students in

Ekiti state, Nigeria and whether it holds from both urban and rural school students. These are the focus of this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The importance of English language in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized, being the language of instruction in schools. It means without a good grasp of it, students will find it difficult comprehending materials on almost every subject. This makes reading comprehension very important to students and this is taught in English language. Reading comprehension has its own challenges including the fact that students may skim the text in reading and that their background may affect their comprehension especially if they reside in rural areas. It, therefore, suggests that effective teaching of reading comprehension cannot depend on the conventional chalk and talk method but on other more participatory methods like discussion. Scholars have actually attested to the effectiveness of the discussion method in teaching reading comprehension at different locations. It is therefore, important to test if the discussion method would be effective for Senior Secondary School students in Ekiti State, Nigeria to learn reading comprehension and if their geographical location will not moderate the effectiveness.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the pretest mean scores of students taught with discussion method and the control group.



- 2 There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of students taught with discussion method and the control group.
- 3 There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of students taught with discussion method in urban and rural areas.

### Methodology

The study adopted the quasi-experimental design in which there was no randomization. The design had one experimental group exposed to the discussion method and a control group which was exposed to the conventional method. The sample comprised 116 Senior Secondary Class 2 students randomly selected through stratified random sampling from Ekiti state, Nigeria and assigned to the two groups having 58 each. The Achievement Test in Reading Comprehension (ATRC) was used as pretest and posttest to collect data on students' level of mastery and performance in reading comprehension. The discussion method instructional guide was also used as a lesson plan covering six weeks to teach reading compre-

hension. The validity of the ATRC was ensured through expert judgement while test-retest method was adopted to test its reliability. The instrument was administered twice with an interval of two weeks on a group of students who were not part of the experiment. The scores obtained were subjected to Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis and a coefficient of 0.78 was obtained which was regarded as adequate for the study. The instrument was administered on the subjects through research assistants and scores obtained were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistics.

### Results

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the pretest mean scores of students taught with discussion method and the control group.

To test this hypothesis the pretest, mean scores of the two groups were compared using t-test statistic. The result is presented in table 1

**Table 1:** t-test Summary of the pretest Means Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	Tcal	Ttable
Discussion	58	19.84	5.63	114	0.07	1.65
Control	58	19.76	5.65			

Table 1 shows that the critical value (0.07) is lower than the table value (1.65). Hypothesis one is thereby retained. There is no significant difference in the pretest mean scores of students taught with discussion method and the control group.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of students taught with discussion method and the control group.



To test this hypothesis, the posttest mean scores of the two groups were compared using t-test statistic. The result is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** t-test Summary of the Posttest Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group N	Mean	Sd	Tcal	Ttable
Discussion	58	51.12	8.12	13.8 1.65
Control	58	29.38	8.73	

Table 2 shows that the critical value (13.8) is greater than the table value (1.65). Hypothesis two is thereby not accepted. There is a significant difference in the posttest mean scores of students taught with discussion method and the control group.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of students taught with discussion method in the urban and rural schools.

To test this hypothesis, the posttest means scores of urban and rural school students exposed to the discussion method were computed and compared using t-test statistics. The result is presented in Table 3

**Table 3:** t-test Summary of the Posttest Mean Scores of Urban and Rural School Students taught with Discussion Method.

Location	N	Mean	SD	Df	Tcal	Ttable
Urban	28	54.93	3.42			
Rural	30	47.57	9.57	56	-3.84	1.67

Table 3 shows that the critical value (-3.84) is greater than the table value (1.67). Hypothesis three is thereby not accepted. There is a significant difference in the posttest mean scores of students taught with discussion method in the urban and rural schools.

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### Discussion

The findings revealed that there is no significant difference in the pretest mean scores of the experimental and

control groups. This is instructive in the sense that it depicts the groups as equal in their pre-treatment academic performance in reading comprehension. It is to buttress the fact that the post-treatment difference between the two groups was a function of the treatment.

However, there was a significant difference in the posttest mean scores between the groups. The group exposed



to discussion method performed much better in reading comprehension than the control group. This result supports earlier results which depicted the efficacy of the discussion method in enhancing performance in reading comprehension (Abdulbaki, Suhaimi, Alsaqqaf and Jawad, 2018; Yusuf, Guja and Ibrahim, 2016; Tugman, 2010, Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey and Alexander, 2009). The discussion method is exciting to students because it helps to increase their confidence on sharing their own ideals and become more mature, self-guided and independent (Rivera, 2013). In places like Ekiti State, Nigeria, where the culture had encouraged younger ones to keep quiet when elders are talking (Folayan, 2016), it would not be strange to find some excitement in students who were asked to speak their minds over issues. Having participated in the discussion, therefore, the tendency is for them to internalize what they have discussed, some of which could be under relaxed moods since they were discussing with their peers. These may explain the outcome of the performance of the discussion group.

The findings also revealed a significant difference in posttest mean scores, between urban and rural school students. Urban school students performed significantly better than rural school students. Nwuneli (2005) found that students from educated parents were better readers than those from uneducated parents. The educated parents are in the urban areas. Iyioke (2008) also found that students in the urban areas read and comprehend better than those from rural areas, most of who are preoccupied with arduous farm work a lot of the times. These must have influenced the outcome on the effect of

location on the performance of the students.

### **Implications for Counseling**

Learning is divided into domains including cognitive, affective and psychomotor and a lot of the times the cognitive domain is mostly attended to and certificated in the public secondary schools in Nigeria. From the findings of this study, it is observed that the domains of learning influence each other. This fact has been corroborated by Khidzir, David and Ibrahim (2016). The discussion method has been found to be effective in teaching reading comprehension. Rivera (2013) says that the method is exciting to students and it helps to increase their confidence in sharing ideas and becoming mature, self-guided and independent. These are not cognitive skills. It shows that when teachers create opportunities to achieve other domains, this helps the cognitive domain. Through discussion, students develop listening skills, tolerance, patience and open mindedness. They also develop persuasion and communication skills. In doing these, they internalize the learning items and this enhances the retention of what they have learnt. This suggests that teachers will do well if they pay attention to the development of the domains in whatever they are teaching so that the students will achieve all round achievement in all domains of learning.

Moreover, the findings revealed that urban school students are better than rural school students when the



discussion method was used. Kulo, Onchera and Indembukhani (2014) had opined that student background will affect their learning of English Language and this may explain why urban school students appeared better. Scholars have explained that psychological factors like self-efficacy, fear, anxiety and attitude may affect student performance in reading comprehension (Yogurtcu, 2012, Alrabai, 2014). These challenges will definitely be more with rural school students as regards reading comprehension. This is because their exposure to the cultural background of the English language is limited and since they are conscious of this, their entry level attitude to reading comprehension and their self-efficacy are likely to be low while their anxiety level would be high. Teachers, therefore, need to always employ counselling strategies to shore up confidence and self-efficacy of rural school students and also reduce their anxiety level as they approach materials on reading comprehension. They can also use the video to bridge the cultural gap by exposing them to films or documentaries that depict what life is in the civilized world.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the discussion method is effective in enhancing students' performance in reading comprehension in Senior Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. It is also concluded that when the discussion method is used, urban school students will perform better than rural school students in reading comprehension. By implication, the different domains of learning affect each other and teachers must capitalize

on this and consciously utilise this to always ensure better performance in reading comprehension.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby made:

- 1) Secondary school teachers of English language should always adopt the discussion method to teach reading comprehension.
- 2) Teachers in rural schools should complement their teaching of reading comprehension with video or documentaries which can bridge the cultural gap between the students and the cultural background of the English Language.
- 3) Teachers should always provide opportunities for the achievement in affective and psychomotor domains in whatever they teach in reading comprehension.
- 4) Teachers should always use counselling strategies to shore up the self-efficacy and confidence of rural school students and to reduce their anxiety before they approach reading comprehension.

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