Textbook Assessment: Matching the Reader with the Reading Text

Obiora, Florence Chinelo, Ph.D.
Road 18, Plot 9, Udoka Housing Estate, Awka
Mobile number: +2348033137446
E-mail: florachi80@gmail.com

Abstract

The study assessed the readability level of commonly used primary six English textbook. It matched the reader with the reading text to see if the textbook is within the ability of the reader to read it successfully. The method used for the readability assessment is the cloze procedure. Three passages were chosen from the beginning, middle and end of the book under study. A close test was constructed with three passages from the English textbook. The first sentence of each of the passages is left intact while the deletion of every 7th word starts with the second sentence of each passage. Two primary schools at Ibadan were used as subjects for the study and 100 primary six pupils were used as subjects for the study. Independent t-Test was used to compute the scores. The result shows that class placement of pupils did not agree with the readability level of their English textbook. Greater number of primary six pupils read their English textbook at frustration level. A few pupils read their textbook at instructional and independent reading competence level. The study also shows that sex did not influence pupils' readability of their textbook. Item analysis of all the questions was done to determine the discriminating power and the difficulty level of the whole questions. Most of the items discriminated sharply between the good and poor pupils while some items did not discriminate at all. The English text passages were difficult for the entire primary six pupils.

Introduction

In learning English as a second language, pupils need books which they will read on their own in order to learn the language appropriately. English textbooks recommended are mostly used by teachers as well as pupils. Often, teachers assign pages of those texts for pupils to read and do their assignment at home. The assumption behind assigning pages of texts to be read at home is that the text is within the readability level of those pupils. This assumption is not often correct in most cases. Thus, Olorode (1997) asserts:

> If a passage… contains too many difficult words, the reader will find it impossible to exercise the relevant skills needed for decoding meaning from the text. He will also not be able to make inferences that are relevant for the understanding of the story structure. Reading accuracy and efficiency will also suffer.

The problem of difficult words raised by Olorode (1997) is a factor which textbook writers should consider while writing text to ensure that the textbook is within the readability of the reader.

Statement of the Problem

This study intends to assess whether the textbook commonly used by primary six pupils is within their readability level.

Research Questions

The study will try to provide empirical answers to the following research questions:

1. Are textbooks writers' assumption that class placement of pupils corresponds to their reading level correct?

2. Is primary 6 English textbook under study readable or not?

3. What are the pupils' reading levels in comparison with the text?

4. Does sex influence pupils' readability of a text?

Hypothesis

1. Class placement of pupils corresponds to their assigned textbook readability level.

2. The new oxford English course for primary six pupils is readable.

3. Pupils will read their assigned English textbook at independent level.

4. Pupils will read their assigned English textbook at instructional level.

5. Pupils will read their assigned English textbook at frustration level.

6. Sex influences pupils' readability of a text.

Operational Definition of Terms

The following words related to this study shall be taken to convey the following meanings:

Readability: Ziriki (2009) defines readability as "reading ease, especially as it results from writing style." Perekeme and Agbor (2012) defines it as "the reading difficulty level of a textbook in relation to the class for which it is meant." For the purpose of this study, readability is taken to mean matching the reader with a text that is appropriate to his/her reading ability level.

Reading ability level or reading level: This means, the skill in interpreting a text accurately.

Independent reading level: This is the level at which a child can read without the help of a teacher.

Instructional reading level: This is a level at which the child can read with the help of the teacher and yet be challenged to stimulate his reading growth.

Frustration reading level: The grade level of material is too difficult for the reader even with the help of the teacher. The reader finds it difficult to identify words and is often tensed up.

Literature Review

The close procedure has been seen as a more suitable readability assessment measure in a second language situation (Emenyonu, 1986). She maintains that standardized reading texts with foreign backgrounds were not standardized on Nigerian students. Emenyonu (1986) recommended close procedure for Nigerian language teachers because she said that it is very easy for the teacher to construct and mark. Ayodele (2013) studied on "A Comparative Study of Textbook Readability and Students Comprehension Levels in Senior Secondary School Biology". He used close procedure and Flesch reading case formula. The findings show that all the textbooks are quite difficult and far above the reading comprehension level of the students. He suggested that text material should be written with reduced syllable and short sentence length that can be read with ease by students.

Perekeme and Agbor (2012) investigated on readability of language textbooks prescribed for Junior Secondary Schools and students' performance in reading comprehension in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The result shows that a few students read their recommended texts at recommended texts at instructional and frustration reading levels.

Onochie (1987) used the close procedure and the fry readability formula of secondary school English textbooks. He correlated the score of the close text with that of multiple choice comprehension test and found out that the cloze test correlated highly with multiple choice comprehension text passages. After computing the result of the cloze test and that of the fry readability test, he found out that the cloze procedure is a more reliable instrument for assessing readability of books in a second language situation such as ours.

Johnson (1980) suggested the acceptable standard of performance on a close test but cautioned that this standard will vary with the deletion rate. The standard suggested by Johnson (1980) is what guided this study.

In conclusion, Johnson (1980), Emenyonu (1986), Onochie (1987), Perekeme and Agbor (2012), and Ayodele (2013) were of the opinion that the cloze procedure is more suitable for measuring comprehension, reading ability level of students and readability of texts in a second language situation.

Methodology

The total populations of the primary six pupils used for the study from two primary schools were 100. Intact classes were used for the study. Altogether, there were 42 males and 58 females. 40 minutes were used in answering the cloze tests by the pupils.

The English textbook used for this study is New Oxford English course for primary six pupils, commonly used by primary schools in Nigeria. The cloze test was constructed from the three reading passages lifted from the beginning, middle and the end of the book respectively.

To construct the test, the first sentences of each of the passages were left untouched. From the second sentence, every 7th word was deleted. Students were required to supply the missing word for each of the numbers. The numbers of deleted words from the three passages were 60 in number.

The reading passages were lifted from the beginning, middle and end of the book and as such, the test has content validity. Further validation of the instrument was done by sending it to experts in the field. The instrument was also vetted and approved by the researcher's supervisor before it was administered to the pupils.

Ex-post Facto research design was adopted for this study. the primary six English textbook(the readability of which was measured) was the independent variable while the pupils' readability levels(examples, ability to read adopted passages of the primary six English textbook at the level of meaning by supplying the missing words) was the dependent variable.

Result and Discussion

Hypothesis 1-5: Embodied in table 1 is the result for hypotheses 1 to 5.

Table 1: Cloze Procedure Test Competence Levels for all the Pupils in both Schools.

Competence Level	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 39% Frustration	78	78%
40 – 59% Instructional	15	15%
60 – 100% Independent	7	7%

Table 1 shows that out of the 100 primary six pupils who were used for the study, 78 of them read the text passages under the 0 – 39 competence level, which is the frustration reading level. The percentage of pupils who read the passages at this level was 78%. 15 out of the 100 pupils read the passages at the instructional reading level, while the remaining 7 pupils read the passages at the independent reading level. The percentages of pupils who read at the instructional and independent levels were 15% and 7% respectively. These results revealed that greater majority of the primary six pupils read their English language textbook under study at the frustration reading level. The result agrees with the findings of Onochie (1987), Ziriki (2009), Perekeme and Agbor (2012) and Ayodele (2013). Negligible percentage of pupils read at both instructional and independent reading levels. Thus, the commonly used English textbook for primary six pupils is not adequate for the class.

Table 2: Corresponding Competence Levels of the mean scores of Pupils on the CPT.

		Competence Level.		
		0 – 39% Frustration	40 – 50% Instructional	60 – 100% Independent
Mean score (x)	"A" and "B"	21.72%	46.73%	68%
	"A"	19.05%	48.50%	62.66%
	"B"	24.25%	44.71%	72%

Table 2 shows that the mean score of 78 out of 100 pupils who read the text at the frustration competence level is 21.72%. The mean scores of 38 out of 49 pupils in school "A" and 40 out of 51 pupils in school "B" who read at the same frustration level are 19.05% and 24.25% respectively. In the two schools, the mean score for all the

pupils who read the passages at the instructional level is 46.73%, while those who read at the independent level are 68%.

Table 3:

Statistics ╲ Sex	Male	Female
$\bar{x}$	26.26%	30.31%
S	14.78	18.75
T	1.18(ns)	

Table 3 shows that the mean scores of the male and female subjects at both schools are 26.26% and 30.31% respectively. The mean of females is higher than that of the males. The mean gain is 4.05%. To determine whether the mean gain is significant, the independent t-test between male and female subjects was computed. The t-value is 1.18. The t-value is not statistically significant at 5% level of significance.

Thus, sex difference did not influence the readability of the primary six English textbook at the two schools. This agreed with the findings of Onochie (1987).

Conclusion

To sum up, the study reveals that class placement of pupils does not correspond to their textbook readability level. Most primary six pupils read their recommended English textbook at frustration level. A few of them read their English textbook at instructional and independent reading levels. Differences in sex do not influence pupils' readability of a text.

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