# Evaluation of English Language Textbooks Used in the Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria: A Case Study of Lagos State Schools

**Udenwa, Victoria C. and Dr. Ikonta, Nonye R.**
*Department Of Arts And Social Science Education,*
*University Of Lagos, Nigeria.*

**Abstract**
*This study sought to establish the readability, comprehensibility, availability and the level of integration of English language and Literature in English in the English language textbooks in use in Lagos State junior secondary schools. Three hundred students and 60 teachers were selected from 20 schools in Lagos State. The stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure a representative sample of all the sub-sets. The instruments for data collection were cloze tests, questionnaires, observation schedule, interview questions, three English texts used at JSS level and Flesch reading ease formular. The chi square statistical tool, mean, media, mode and simple percentage were used to analyze the data collected in order to answer the five research questions and test the two hypotheses posited for the study. The findings show that:*

- *The English language textbooks in use in the junior secondary schools in Lagos State are difficult for the intended readers.*
- *There is imbalance in the integration of English language and Literature in English in the textbooks, among others.*

*Based on the findings, some recommendations were made on how to improve the situation.*

**Keywords***: Readability; Comprehensibility; Integration.*

**Introduction**

Textbooks are materials carefully written by experts in various fields to assist students/pupils acquire knowledge and achieve specific academic goals. They are undoubtedly indispensable tools to learners. Fodeh (1990) averred that textbooks are carefully designed by experts in the field specifically for classroom use with usual teaching devices. They are the bedrock for major academic achievements. For these reasons, educators responsible for pupil's development often ensure that they are exposed mainly to the textbooks that will exercise positive influence on them.

The contents of textbooks are therefore very important since they can play central roles in improving education for students at different levels. This explains why Okoye (1996) and Agagwuncha (1989) delved into the analysis and evaluation of textbooks used at various levels of education to determine their effectiveness in assisting students to learn.

It is therefore pertinent that evaluation of textbooks be carried out within a specified period of time by educators/researchers to enhance teaching and learning activities. Evaluation by its nature is a continuous exercise. It is simply to appraise/assess in relation to certain pre-specified standards. The essence being to

highlight the strengths, diagnose the weaknesses of a particular system or thing and obtain the feedback for bringing about the desired improvement.  In fact, Igwe (2003) opines that evaluation should be an integral part of both teaching and learning activities for efficiency and effectiveness in the system.  It is only through proper analysis of these books that their effectiveness in assisting students to learn will be determined, hence the justification for this study.

## Theoretical Framework

Evaluation of the readability of textbooks in this study is based on project 2006s; Aukernian (1972); and Estes (1986) views concerning readability of textbooks and evaluation procedure. Project 2006 (http:AAAS 2006) has recommended that the quality of textbooks should be determined through proper analysis of content, and that quality textbooks should be judged mainly on their effectiveness in helping students to achieve important learning goals.

According to Aukernian (1972), readability implies "difficulty", books that are difficult to read are marked as high readability while easy to read ones are low readability. He stated further that readability formular serves as an objective method of measuring components of writing such as sentence length, types and complexity, special language use, etc. He added that an "average" textbook should just be right for an "average class' which in itself consists of students with a wide range of reading abilities. Cloze text is another important evaluation technique which gives the average readability level of a textbook for a particular class. Estes (1986) states that it is a valid measure of a textbook's appropriateness for a whole class. Subsequently researchers such as Agagwuncha (1989) and Okoye (1996) have used it to evaluate the readability of different textbooks within particular class levels and it has been successful in measuring readability because it measures directly through the readers rather than indirectly through the counting of sentence features. This informed the choice of cloze procedure in this study.

## The Problem

Despite the efforts of some researchers in textbook evaluation, and the steps taken by government and non-governmental bodies to produce standard textbooks to promote learning, students' performance in English Language continues to be poor in internal and external examinations. Their poor performance and inability to produce correct answers to simple English assessment questions cast aspersions on the readability and comprehensibility of English Language textbooks used in schools. Another problem of the study was an investigation of the extent of integration of English Language and Literature in English in the textbooks, as recommended by the JSS Curriculum for enhanced language study. Also, the level of availability of the recommended English textbooks to the students was also considered important for this study.

## Research Questions

This study revolves around answering the following research questions:
1.    What are the readability indices of the English Language textbooks in use in Lagos State junior secondary schools?
2.    How comprehensible are the English Language textbooks to the students they are meant for?
3.    Do the textbooks properly integrate English Language and Literature in English components?
4.    How far do the English Language textbooks cover the curriculum content for English Language at the junior secondary school level in Lagos State?
5.    How available are the English Language textbooks at the junior secondary schools?

**Hypotheses**
The following hypotheses are formulated to guide this study:
1. There is no significant relationship between the level of integration of English Language and Literature in English and the students' performance in English Language.
2. The content of the English Language textbooks for junior secondary school has no significant relationship with the performance of students in English Language.

**Methodology**
The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey since the aim is to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a set of English Language textbooks used in the junior secondary schools in Lagos State and their relationship with the students' performance in English Language. There were three aspects of sample involved in this study. Twenty junior secondary schools were randomly selected from two Local Government Areas of Lagos State in the proportion of 10 for each Local Government Area; 60 English Language teachers (three from each of the selected schools) were drawn as the representative sample of teachers. Then five students were drawn from each of the three classes (JSS 1 – 3) of the 20 schools through stratified random sampling making a total of 300 students. The stratified random technique was used to ensure that all the sub-sets involved were represented.

**Research Instruments**
The research instruments for this study were:
i.   The three English Language textbooks under study.
ii.  Questionnaire for teachers
iii. Cloze tests for students
iv.  Flesch reading ease formular for students
v.   Interview and observation schedule.

The textbooks were used as the primary source of data. The questionnaire was designed in a five point Likert scale style. It was divided into two major parts. The first part sought information on the biodata of the respondents; while the second part contained the questions properly designed to seek information on the major variables of the study (readability, comprehensibility, integration of English Language and Literature in English in the textbooks, the content coverage of the textbooks and their availability to the students).

Cloze tests and reading exercises were conducted for the 300 students using three different passages selected from each of the textbooks under study to determine the readability and comprehensibility of the textbooks. Other instruments used were interview and observation schedules for additional information and further clarifications of the issues under study, especially the level and adequacy of the integration. They were equally used to ascertain students' level of participation which partly determines their rate of understanding.

**Validity and Reliability of Instruments**
Specialists and lecturers in the field of curriculum methodology certified the content and face validity of the questionnaire. A test-retest method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. Three different cloze tests were conducted for a set of students from each of the three classes (JSS 1 – 3) in selected schools that were not involved in the main study on two separate occasions. The results were correlated and the coefficient of 0.80, 0.84 and 0.86 were obtained.

## Results and Discussion

There were five research questions and two hypotheses posited for the study. The response of the English Language teachers in the JSS in relation to the items on the questionnaire, cloze tests and reading exercises from different passages selected from the textbooks under study, the researchers' personal examination of the textbooks, interview and observation by the researchers were used in answering the research questions and analyzing the hypotheses. Simple percentages and chi-square statistical tool were equally used.

## Research Question 1

What are the readability indices of the English Language textbooks in use in Lagos State junior secondary schools?

**Table 1: Teachers' perception of the readability of English Language textbooks used in the junior secondary schools**

| Item No | Items | Responses | Number | % |
|---------|-------|-----------|--------|---|
| 1. | Students can read and comprehend *Intensive English for Junior Secondary Schools* independently. | SA | 8 | 13 |
| | | A | 10 | 17 |
| | | U | 7 | 12 = 58 |
| | | D | 20 | 33 |
| | | SD | 15 | 25 |
| | | **Total** | **60** | **100** |
| 2. | Students can read and understand *Junior English Project for Secondary Schools* without assistance from the teachers. | SA | 7 | 12 |
| | | A | 14 | 23 |
| | | U | 7 | 12 = 53 |
| | | D | 21 | 35 |
| | | SD | 11 | 18 |
| | | **Total** | **60** | **100** |
| 3. | It is easy for students to read and comprehend *Goodbye to Failures in English for Junior Secondary Schools* on their own. | SA | 14 | 23 |
| | | A | 22 | 37 |
| | | U | 6 | 10 = 60 |
| | | D | 10 | 17 |
| | | SD | 8 | 13 |
| | | **Total** | **60** | **100** |

Table1 shows that 58% of teachers said that students could not read *Intensive English for JSS* without assistance from the teachers. Fifty three percent (53%) of the teachers equally disagreed with item 2 indicating a level of difficulty for the students to read and comprehend *Junior English Project for Secondary Schools* without assistance. This finding agrees with the earlier findings of Etim and Unoh (1983) that students do not find their textbooks interesting because of the difficulty they encounter in reading and understanding them independently. However, greater percentage (60%) of the teachers agreed that students could read and understand *Goodbye to Failures in English Language for JSS* on their own. This indicates that this textbook is relatively easier for the intended readers than the other two.

**Research Question 2:** How comprehensible are the English Language textbooks to the students they are meant for?

**Table 2: Students' performance in the Cloze Tests**

| Description | Test 1: Goodbye to Failures | Test 2: Intensive English | Test 3: Junior English Project |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average raw Score | 10 | 6.5 | 7.6 |
| Mean Score % | 48.4 | 35 | 42.53 |
| Median Score % | 50 | 50 | 50 |
| Mode | 67 | 40 | 53 |
| Highest Score | 93 | 87 | 86 |
| Lowest Score | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 3: Interpretation of the students' cloze tests results**

| Tests | Frustration Level (0 – 44%) | | Instructional Level (45-55%) | | Independent Level (56-100%) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| 1 | 25 | 21 | 49 | 41 | 46 | 38 |
| 2 | 32 | 26 | 50 | 42 | 38 | 32 |
| 3 | 33 | 28 | 51 | 43 | 36 | 30 |

Table 2 shows the interpretation of the cloze texts. The percentages were obtained by dividing each number that fell within a particular range of score with the total number of students that wrote the test times (X) 100. It was evident from the table that greater percentage of the students fell within the instructional level than the other two levels, indicating that many of them need explanations from the teachers in order to read and comprehend the textbooks. The above finding supports the earlier finding of Long & McCarthy (1995) that students fail to extensively read their textbooks independently because of the difficulty they encounter. Thus, they always wait for the teachers in the classroom.

**Hypothesis 1**: There is no significant relationship between the level of integration of English Language and Literature in English and students' academic performance in English Language.

**Table 4: Chi-square test of relationship between the level of integration and perceived students' performance in English Language**

| Items No | Responses | | | | | Total | df | $X^2$cal | $X^2$tab | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | A | U | D | SD | | | | | |
| 4 | 5(9.5) | 9 (17.5) | 3 (5.38) | 25 (17.75) | 18 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| 5 | 10(9.5) | 22(17.5) | 5 (5.38) | 15 (17.75) | 8 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| 6 | 16(9.5) | 25(17.5) | 4 (5.38) | 9 (17.75) | 6 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| 7 | 6(9.5) | 15(17.5) | 7 (5.38) | 23 (17.75) | 9 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| 8 | 12(9.5) | 23(17.5) | 7 (5.38) | 12 (17.75) | 6 (9.88) | 60 | 28 | 80.41 | 41.3 | 0.05 |
| 9 | 4 (9.5) | 10(17.5) | 2 (5.38) | 28 (17.75) | 16 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| 10 | 7 (9.5) | 12(17.5) | 9 (5.38) | 20 (17.75) | 12 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| 11 | 16 (9.5) | 24(17.5) | 6 (5.38) | 10 (17.75) | 4 (9.88) | 60 | | | | |
| | **76** | **140** | **43** | **142** | **79** | **480** | | | | |

$P < 0.05$.

Table 3 shows the observed values with their corresponding expected values in brackets. The chi-square calculated value of 80.41 is greater than the critical chi-square value of 41.3 given 28 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The result supports the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative. This confirms that the level of integration of English Language and Literature in English in the English Language textbooks used in the JSS affect students' academic performance in English Language. This finding is in line with the earlier recommendation of Project 2061's Evaluation Procedure (http://AAAS 2000) that students' reading materials must be significantly reduced to allow time for them to learn the most important concepts and skills.

Also, the researchers found that the textbooks do not properly integrate English Language and Literature in English through chapter-by-chapter examination. Each chapter contains all the aspects of English Language: phonology/speech, comprehension, vocabulary development, summary, grammar and letter writing etc. with only one genre of Literature either prose or poetry in form of comprehension passage. Drama hardly features. This makes the ratio to be 6:1. Despite this, the researchers are of the opinion that the integration is still desirable because it promotes extensive reading by the students as revealed by some language teachers during the interview. Owoeye's (2004) assertion that a literary genre particularly drama develops and enhances the spoken aspect of language is not being promoted by these texts which hardly feature any drama activity.

**Hypothesis 2**: The content coverage of the English Language textbooks for junior secondary school has no significant relationship with their performance in English Language.

**Table 5: Chi-square test of the relationship between content coverage in the English textbooks and perceived students' performance in English Language**

| Items No | Responses | | | | | Total | df | $X^2$cal | $X^2$tab | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | A | U | D | SD | | | | | |
| 12 | 16(14.13) | 29(22.88) | 2(3.38) | 9(12.25) | 4(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| 13 | 17(14.13) | 24(22.88) | 0(3.38) | 11(12.25) | 8(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| 14 | 18(14.13) | 25(22.88) | 3(3.38) | 9(12.25) | 5(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| 15 | 10(14.13) | 19(22.88) | 5(3.38) | 18(12.25) | 8(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| 16 | 5(14.13) | 20(22.88) | 10(3.38) | 12(12.25) | 13(7.38) | 60 | 28 | 36.77 | 41.3 | 0.05 |
| 17 | 18(14.13) | 22(22.88) | 3(3.38) | 11(12.25) | 6(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| 18 | 14(14.13) | 23(22.88) | 0(3.38) | 15(12.25) | 8(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| 19 | 15(14.13) | 21(22.88) | 4(3.38) | 13(12.25) | 7(7.38) | 60 | | | | |
| | **113** | **183** | **27** | **98** | **59** | **480** | | | | |

P < 0.05.

Table 4 reveals that the calculated chi-square value 30.77 is not significant given 28 degrees of freedom at 0.05 alpha level when compared with the critical chi-square table value of 41.3. Thus, the conclusion is that students' poor performance in English Language is not to be attributed to the content coverage of the English Language textbooks in use in the JSS. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. According to Meyer, Marsiske and Wills (1993), apart from textbooks' content, other factors like reader's attitude and purpose are equally major contributors to the reading and understanding of textbooks.

**Research Question 5:** How available are the English Language textbooks at the junior secondary schools?

**Table 6: Data analysis on the availability of the recommended English Language textbooks**

| Item No | Items | Responses | Number | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | The textbooks are readily available to the students. | SA | 3 | 5 |
| | | A | 9 | 15 |
| | | U | 0 | 0 |
| | | D | 32 | 53 |
| | | SD | 16 | 27 |
| | | **Total** | **60** | **100** |
| 21. | The government supplies the textbooks as promised by the State and Federal governments. | S | 2 | 3 |
| | | A | 5 | 8 |
| | | U | 12 | 20 |
| | | D | 19 | 32 |
| | | SD | 22 | 37 |
| | | **Total** | **60** | **100** |
| 22. | Most parents can and do provide the English Language textbooks in use for their children | SA | 60 | 13 |
| | | A | 8 | 17 |
| | | U | 10 | 10 |
| | | D | 23 | 38 |
| | | SD | 13 | 22 |
| | | **Total** | **60** | **100** |

The above table reveals that majority of the students do not have the textbooks. The government does not live up to its promise and some parents cannot afford the textbooks. This affects students' academic performance. The finding negates Ulerick's (2000) declaration that for students to achieve maximum academic performance, their reading materials must be adequately provided. Little wonder Widdowson (1985) laments that course materials particularly textbooks are not readily available for the students.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings the researchers recommend that:
- The English Language textbooks should be made comprehensible enough for the intended readers.
- The textbooks should be constantly reviewed to achieve a proper and balanced integration of the aspects of English Language and genres of Literature in English.
- It is important for the government to provide these textbooks for the students or help to reduce the cost by subsidizing their production, etc.

**Conclusion**

It is an established fact that textbooks are indispensable materials to learners. Ndahi (1989) described textbooks as the most dominant and comprehensive materials for effective teaching and learning activities. Without textbooks much will not be achieved in the academic world. Thus, it is necessary that educators, governments, teachers and parents give adequate attention to the textbooks used in school especially English Language textbooks as the language of education and communication. Once students are proficient in English Language, they will excel in other subjects (Ikonta and Ezeana, 2004).

The study suggests that it will be more beneficial to make the English Language textbooks used in schools comprehensible enough for the intended readers to encourage more personal reading by the students.

The complexity of integrating English Language and Literature in English is the crux of the matter in the English Language textbooks used at the JSS level.  Teachers should be given adequate and up to date information and teaching on how best to use these textbooks for maximum benefit.  Besides, the review of the textbooks is important for a proper and balanced integration of aspects of English Language and genres of Literature.

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