





**An Assessment of the Speed Reading Ability of Sandwich  
Students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lagos,  
Nigeria: Implications for Teaching Rapid Reading Skills in  
Secondary Schools**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses the concept and usefulness of rapid reading. It also reports a study in which the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria Sandwich students formed the subjects. Their pre-training reading speed and comprehension scores were determined through a pre-test, after which they were subjected to a series of practice sessions on speed reading and comprehension for six weeks. At the end of the study, their post-test scores on reading speed and comprehension showed a significant improvement over their pre-training scores. It was then suggested that all teachers in training should be exposed to such reading activities so that they will be able to develop the rapid reading skills of their students at the secondary school level and thereby build a strong foundation for reading, necessary in all subjects.

**INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Rapid reading entails reading rapidly with good comprehension i.e. reading with greater speed without sacrificing meaning (Unoh 1972). But the problem is that a great number of students at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level in Nigerian secondary schools are unable to read due to several factors such as home background, lack of interest, dearth of reading materials, large class size, teacher factor among other factors. Teachers at that level are faced with the problem of many students who cannot read at all that when you talk about speed reading, such teachers are not familiar with the concept because they are mainly concerned with the basal stage. Again, students at the JSS level have been subjected to loud reading only at the primary level and the same thing goes on at the JSS level where the majority of the students do not own course books. As a result, the teachers

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organize loud and choral reading of the class readers (Ikonta, 2005; Ivey, 2002).

There is therefore the need for remedial reading at JSS level in order to increase the speed and comprehension rate of the students to enable them to get the best out of the school programmes and to be able to read extensively on their own. The purpose of instruction in rapid reading is therefore to help students to acquire the techniques of reading visually with understanding, through rapid visual and mental co-ordination (Nuttall, 1994). This foundation is best laid at the JSS level.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING RAPID READING SKILLS**

These include: A fast reader can read more in a given time, cover more ground and this is an advantage considering the amount of reading requirements at any given level of education.

- Rapid readers are also better readers in that they do not read word by word instead they chunk words in sense or thought groups and therefore make fewer eye fixations per line of text.

- Fast reading enables a student to complete his work, reading assignment, etc, faster than would have otherwise been the case.

- Rapid reading aids comprehension in that while a slow reader might

forget what he has read by the time he gets to the end of the text, the short time lapse between the beginning and end of a text enables the fast reader to still remember the content of the text

.. When rapid reading is developed in students, it will speed up all their work in other subjects and even in their work life.

- Rapid reading reduces the number of eye fixations per line and eliminates compulsive regression, eradicates vocalization, head movement, pointing habit and word-byword reading.

- It promotes efficient silent reading, scanning and skimming skills and self-education.

- It develops flexibility in reading i.e. moving faster on less important section and slowing down on more difficult areas or areas that need to be remembered.

- Rapid reading is invaluable in extensive reading programme which involves the ability to read quickly, independently and for pleasure/recreation.

#### **Training for Faster Reading**

In training for faster reading, attention should be given to the following:

- Reduction of the number of eye fixations per line i.e. reading in sense groups.

- Avoidance of compulsive regression.

- Eradication of the habit of vocalization and sub-vocalization.

- Elimination of pointing habit at words.

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- Discouraging of head movement while reading.
- Avoidance of word by word reading.
- Avoidance of excessive eye fixation.
- Lack of motivation and interest, etc.

All the above practices result in slow reading i.e. they are bad reading habits that slow down reading speed.

Also the type of texts for training should be simple enough i.e. it should be below the level of the current textbook for the class.

As for expected speed, secondary school students in ESL situation are expected to read at 120 - 150 wpm before the training while University students may read at 200 wpm (Nuttall 1994).

### **Research Questions**

In the light of the above, some questions were raised to guide the study, namely:

1. How fast could these in-service teachers read?
2. Is it possible for them to increase their reading speed and comprehension score within the contact period?
3. Is it possible for them to increase their comprehension rate within this period?
4. What is their average comprehension rate?
5. Do they manifest any of the poor reading habits that slow down reading speed?

### **Null Hypotheses**

It was therefore hypothesized that:

- a. There will be no significant difference between the subjects pre and post-test scores on reading speed,
- b. There will be no significant difference between their pre and post-test comprehension scores,
- c. There will be no significant difference between their pre and post-test scores on efficiency index.

### **Research Procedure**

In order to assess the reading speed, comprehension score and rate of our sandwich in-service teachers and to prepare them for the challenges of training the JSS students in those skills, a mini research was conducted during their contact session. The assessment and the training were done based on book-centred practice of timed reading and comprehension exercises, as against machine-centred practice (Unoh, 1972).

The subjects consisted of 74 year three sandwich students. However, due to the fact that some either missed the pre or post-tests while some did not participate in some of the practice exercises, only 50 of them had complete data, hence the analysis was based on fifty subjects.

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The design for the study was the pre-test, post-test experimental group design.

The instruments consist of six rapid reading passages selected from some texts on speed reading practice by D. J. Williams (1968), S. O. Unoh (1972) and C. Nuttal (1994). Two were used for the pre and post-tests while four were used for class practice sessions. Also, observation schedule to determine the occurrence or otherwise of faulty reading habits was used.

The first lesson consisted of giving them the rudiments of what rapid reading entails, its uses and importance in education and work life, the practices that slow down reading speed and the need to avoid them and discourage them among their JSS students. This was followed by teaching them how to calculate their reading speed, their score, and comprehension rate or efficiency index, the need to be honest in such exercises since cheating means cheating oneself, the fact that the competition is with one's self, and that the important thing is to strive and beat one's record in subsequent exercises. This first period (2 hours) was rounded off with a pre-test i.e. a comprehension passage which they read while the writer indicated the time lapse as they read so that when each of them finished, he/she noted the time he stopped and proceeded to answer the ten multiple choice comprehension questions. They were asked to exchange their papers for scoring the comprehension answers while each student calculated his reading speed and comprehension rate, which the writer later crosschecked.

To calculate the reading speed, the formula is

x

$$y \times 6 = z$$

x = the number of words in a text

y = the number of 10-second intervals used to read the text

6 = number of ten-second intervals in a minute

x = reading speed in words per minute

e.g. if a text has 300 words and a student took 80 seconds to read it (i.e. 8 ten-second intervals) the calculation is

$$\frac{300}{8} \times \frac{6}{1} = 225 \text{ wpm}$$

To calculate the score, if a student gets five out of 10 questions right, his score is  $\frac{5}{10}$  or 50%

To get the reading rate or efficiency index we multiply thus:

$$\frac{5}{10} \times \frac{225}{1} \text{ or } \frac{50 \times 225}{100} = 112.5 \text{ wpm}$$

This is the rate at which a student reads with adequate comprehension. For the next six weeks, the students were subjected to two periods a week of variety of content and series of practice on reading fast and comprehending more using suitable passages.

They practised phrase reading or sense group reading where passages were divided according to sense groups using slashes and short lines to reduce eye

fixation per line. They also practised skimming and scanning exercises, flexibility in reading, and the use of cardboard masks to reveal only the line read and thus prevent regression. They also practised some strategies that enhance comprehension such as prediction, visualizing, inferring, higher order questioning, among others (Duke and Pearson 2002, Ellery,2005).

At the end of the six weeks, a post-test parallel to the pre-test passage was given to them with the same number of questions to check their

comprehension.

Their pre and post-test reading speed, their comprehension score and rate were all compared to find out if there has been any improvement both as a group and for selected individual students.

During the reading sessions, the writer in addition to indicating the time on the board also took note of students that exhibited faulty reading habits. At the end of each lesson, these students were informed and all were given some hints on how to reduce or eliminate them. The prevalent ones in order of the highest to the lowest occurrence include:

- Head movement
- Vocalization
- Excessive eye fixation
- Finger pointing
- Word by word reading
- Regression

## THE RESULTS

The first hypothesis states that there will be no significant difference between the pre and post-test performance of the subjects in their reading speed. Table one show the findings.

**Table 1:** T-test Comparison of the Subjects' Pre and Post-test Reading Speed.

N	Means	SD	df	T-cal	T-critical
50	133.22	32.46			
50	183.39	57.12			*S

$P < 0.05$

The result shows that at 0.05 levels, the difference between the pre and post-test means of the subjects on reading speed was significant. This is because the calculated t (5.73) was bigger than the table t of 2.02. This means that the series of rapid reading practices done by the subjects have resulted in an increase in their rate of reading. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected while the second research question on whether it is possible for them to increase their reading speed has been answered in the affirmative.

To test the second hypothesis on whether there will be a significant increase in their comprehension scores, 't'-test analysis for the group was on

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the difference in the pre and post-test mean scores. The result is shown on table two.

**Table 2:** T-test Comparison of the Pre and Post-test Mean Scores on Comprehension Score

N	Means	SD	df	T-cal	T-critical
50	6.54	1.53	49	3.85	2.02
50	7.60	1.19			

P < 0.05

Table two shows that there was a significant difference between the two means, the null hypothesis was therefore rejected in that within the period in question the subjects were able to improve on their comprehension ability as a result of the training they went through.

The third hypothesis sought to find out whether their efficiency index (Unoh, 1982), reading score (Williams 1968) or reading rate (Nuttal 1994) also improved i.e. the rate at which they read with comprehension. Table 3 presents the findings.

**Table 3:** T-test Comparison of the Pre and Post-test Scores on Efficiency Index.

N	Means	SD	Df	T-cal	T-critical
50	87.02	29.77	49	6.18	2.02
50	143.18	58.38			

P < 0.05

Table 3 shows a significant improvement in the rate of comprehension of the subjects at the end of the training, as evidenced from the t'-test statistical analysis. The null hypothesis was also rejected while the third and fourth research questions got answered in the affirmative.

Research question 5 asked whether the subjects manifested any faulty reading habits. During the series of practice some faulty reading habits were observed by the writer.

They include in order of the highest to lowest occurrences:

- Head movement
- Vocalization
- Excessive eye fixation
- Finger pointing
- Word by word reading
- Regression
- Lack of interest and motivation

These were pointed out to the class especially to the offenders and ways of eliminating them were suggested and practiced. For example, holding the head with the hands, putting a pencil across the lips while reading, use of cardboard masks, etc. It was pointed out that the eyes move faster than the head, the lips, and the hand, so that moving any of these while reading

definitely slows down the reading speed. It was also emphasized that speed without comprehension is a useless exercise as the main reason for reading understands of what is read. Research question 5 has therefore been answered.

## **DISCUSSION AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

The implications of the findings include:

- The participants in this study have been sensitized through practical sessions on the need to improve their reading ability.
- They have actively participated in finding their reading speed, their comprehension score and rate. They have practised eye fixation exercises as well as skimming and scanning exercises.
- As a result they have improved in their reading speed as well as comprehension performance.
- They have also tried to reduce the faulty reading habits that they brought to school.
- Above all, these teachers in training are mostly teaching at the junior secondary schools where rapid reading skills are usually developed.

The implications include the fact that the participants will hopefully apply what they have learnt on their students. Most of them on entry had never heard anything about rapid reading practice and since no one can give what he does not have, this aspect of reading has been grossly neglected in the secondary schools. Sequel to undergoing such training, it is hoped that rapid reading skills will henceforth be developed in their students while rapid reading will begin to feature in their classes.

Another implication is that if these adult participants could make some gains from such training, the young JSS students whom the training is meant for will likely make a lot of gains from such programme since they are still around the critical period age when the plasticity of the brain is still evident. And if that be the case, the vicious circle of poor reading ability of students at the secondary school level will gradually reduce.

Again if the JSS students imbibe rapid reading skills, they will be able to read for leisure, read more and read better than would have been the case. This will rob-off on all the other subjects in the curriculum and eventually lead to the over-all improved performance in all the subjects because efficient reading is still the key to most learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has attempted to discuss the concept and importance of rapid reading. It went on to report a mini study conducted during the sandwich programme at which a group of students were subjected to training and assessment of their reading ability. In addition, their faulty reading habits



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were pointed out to them while series of practice sessions were organized for them.

Their post-test mean scores in reading speed, comprehension score and rate revealed a significant improvement over their pre-test scores. It was therefore concluded that even in L<sub>2</sub> situation, it is possible for learners to improve or even double their reading speed when subjected to serious training as suggested by Nuttal (1994).

It is therefore the opinion of this writer that all student teachers should be exposed to training in rapid reading and comprehension in order to improve not only their own reading ability but also to be able to train their own students at the secondary school level.

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