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## Teacher Availability as a Correlate of Senior Secondary School Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement in English Language in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*For some years now, senior secondary school students have recorded an abysmally low achievement in qualifying examinations especially the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE). Several factors have been suspected as being contributory to this ugly trend especially in Ebonyi State. This study investigated the correlation between availability of teachers of English and senior secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension in English language in Ebonyi State. The design adopted for this study was the correlation design. The population consisted of 33,986 senior secondary school 2 students and 420 English language teachers which brought the total population to 34,406 respondents. Using Taro Yamen formulae for determining sample size, 396 student respondents was selected and added to the teacher population of 420 bringing the working population size to 816. One research question was formulated for the study and one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Instruments for data collection were a reading comprehension test adapted from the government-prescribed English language text – Intensive English for Senior Secondary Schools 2 and a Teacher Characteristics Inventory test (TCI). Research questions were answered using coefficient of correlation, while hypothesis was tested at an alpha level of 0.05, using step-wise linear regression. Items whose 'T' were less than significance of "T" were accepted (not rejected) while items whose 'T' were greater than significance of "T" were rejected (not accepted). Results showed a very high positive relationship between teacher availability and students' achievement. Based on the finding, recommendation was made.*

**Keywords:** Teacher availability, correlates, senior secondary school students, reading comprehension achievement

### **1. Introduction**

Reading Comprehension is an integral aspect of English language study which prepares students for effective writing and in-depth reasoning. For that, Reading Comprehension usually attracts a great chunk of the marks in the subject (English) in public examinations. Reading Comprehension tests the basic skills of communication in English language, using the media of speech and writing. According to West African Examination Council (WAEC, 2014), Reading Comprehension tests examine candidates' abilities in such cardinal areas as: the use of correct English, ability to find suitable replacements for chosen words or phrases, understanding of factual content, making deductions from the passage content, identification and explanation of basic literary terms and expression among others. It appears poor achievement in reading comprehension strongly correlates with students' poor achievement in English language among students in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. How much a student would achieve in reading comprehension depends on the availability of qualified teachers

Teacher availability appears to be a strong variable in students' academic achievement in reading comprehension. If teachers in a particular subject area are enough to handle the student population, their academic achievement will likely be higher than when teachers are in short fall. Nwangwu (2012) provides statistics of available teachers in most institutions in the country and shows that there is a shortfall in teacher supply in the country generally. According to him, the report showing Nigerian education road map published by Federal Ministry of Education(2009) shows that in formal education, available classroom as at 2006 was 497,871 with a shortfall of 1,152,412; for nomadic education, available classroom was 10,469 having a shortfall of 28,931. With regard to teachers, he puts existing shortfall at 969,078 for early child care development education; 388,147 for primary education; 581 teachers for junior secondary education; 1,580,000 for adult literacy, and 12,329 for nomadic education.

At the tertiary level of education, Nwangwu gives the statistic staff strength of Nigerian universities as 99,464. This according to him comprises 27,892 non-academic staff. The shortfall in academic staff for each sector by his statistic data is 19,548; 17,078 and 14,858 for universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively. Nwangwu therefore concludes that there is glaring teacher shortage in the various levels of academic pursuits in the country. The teacher shortage as observed by Nwangwu may have equally

had its toll on Ebonyi State schools. Statistics from Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board (EBSSEB 2013) shows that there are four hundred and twenty (420) English language teachers who take a student population of about 135,943 only for the senior secondary school. This leaves the teacher – student ratio for English at 1:324. Achievement will be low when few teachers take a large number of students beyond their capacity since instructional delivery will be difficult.

As a result of teacher shortage, inadequate attention may have been given to reading comprehension instruction especially in the senior secondary schools. In a study conducted by Ngwoke (2014) in Abakaliki and Onueke education zones of Ebonyi State, out of ninety five students sampled from fifteen different schools on reading instruction at the middle basic schools, 95 pupils agreed that they study English as a subject in class but that there is no separate time on the time table devoted to reading. This represents 100%. Forty five persons or 47.37 % said that most pupils do not have the prescribed English texts for class work, while thirty eight people or 40 % said they found reading boring. The above situation is a pointer to how much reading may have been neglected in our schools apparently due to teacher shortage; and we know that reading comprehension skills are acquired at reading classes. If inadequate attention is given to reading comprehension in Ebonyi State Schools, it may have a poor correlation with students' achievement in English language especially among senior secondary school students. But teacher qualification and teacher availability have a great roles to play on the attitude of the learner since the teacher is the facilitator of instruction. Both teachers' method and personality can make or mar learners' attitude to learning.

It appears Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State still lack the required number of qualified English language teachers despite recent concerted efforts by Ebonyi State government to recruit and inject more teachers into the state school system. According to Nwofia, Ude and Chukwu (2006), there had been a continual recruitment of teachers into Ebonyi State Secondary Education system since the year 2000. She maintains that in year 2000 alone; about one thousand (1000) teachers were recruited. In year 2004, five thousand (5000) teachers were recruited and in year 2006, about one hundred (100) non-tutorial staff was also recruited. But despite these efforts, there still appears to be a glaring imbalance in the teacher- student ratio especially in the senior secondary schools where students are prepared for certificate examinations. Osagie (2013) admits that available records show that we do not have enough teachers. Data gathered from Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board (2014) show there is a total number of two hundred and twenty two (222) secondary schools with a total student population of about four hundred and forty two thousand, seven hundred and seventy students (442,770) students. Out of this population, one hundred and thirty five thousand, nine hundred and forty three (135,943) students are of the senior secondary while the rest are of the junior secondary classes. Total teacher population was put at two thousand, four hundred and eighteen (2,418) out of which number four hundred and twenty (420) are English language teachers distributed as follow; Abakaliki =175, Afikpo =110, Onueke =135.

When a total student population of 135,943 of the senior secondary classes is matched with a teacher population of 420, the ratio is 1:324. The table of teacher-student population in Ebonyi state between 2011/2012 and 2013/2014 academic sessions is presented below:

Education Zone	2011/2012			2012/2013			2013/2014		
	Stds	EngTrs	Ratio	Stds	EngTrs	Ratio	Stds	Eng.Trs	Ratio
Abakaliki	4,2721	175	1:245	40865	175	1:234	52920	175	1:303
Afikpo	3,5067	110	1:318	32289	110	1:294	30751	110	1:280
Onueke	3,8654	135	1:287	39849	135	1:296	51,822	135	1:384

*Table 1: Statistics of Student-Teacher Ratio in Ebonyi State School for SSI-SS3 (2011-2014)  
EBSSEB (2014)*

The analysis by EBSSEB does not separate English language teachers into junior and senior classes, and so the number of teachers presented in the table is taken as being responsible for both the junior and senior secondary classes. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004), states that the teacher-student ratio shall be 1:40 at the secondary school classes, but with the current statistics of 1:324 teacher-student ratio, it can be seen there is a serious lack of teachers of English language in our senior secondary schools.

The introduction of Free and compulsory Primary Education (FPE) in Ebonyi state on June 16, 1999 by the civilian administration in the state led to a population explosion in the state schools. This fact is admitted by Elechi in Nwofia, Otu, Ude and Chukwu (2006:4). According to her, "The introduction of the policy (FPE) really increased the population of students, that is, school enrolment." However, the intermittent efforts by the state government to inject more teachers into the state school system have not really met the required staff need of this industry in the state.

English language teachers' shortage might have persisted as a result of several factors ranging from poor remuneration, leading to transfers and change of service, retirement and lack of zeal in taking up teaching appointment. The table above goes to show how teacher shortage might have adversely affected reading comprehension achievement in senior secondary schools of Ebonyi state. In the circumstance where one teacher grapples with over two hundred students in the teaching of English where such teacher has to teach reading comprehension, Essay, writing, Lexis and Structure, Grammar, and Summary among others; administer tests and mark them, as well as conduct the end of term assessment, students' achievement may be affected adversely.

Government's level of commitment to uplifting the standard of life of teachers appears to be another factor in English language teacher shortage especially in the senior secondary schools in Ebonyi state. That could also be responsible for the imbalance in the teacher-student ratio in the teaching of English language studies. Government appears to be content with being public school proprietors but hardly perform her statutory proprietorial roles. Government has not really funded education properly. Anzza (2013)

laments that even when the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommended that 26% of national budgets should be directed to education, Nigeria has not complied. When education is not properly funded, both teacher quality and teacher quantity are negatively affected and this will negatively affect students' achievement. When teachers are not properly remunerated, it impacts on virtually every aspect of their life; their personality, their method of teaching and personal relationships with their students. This study is set to investigate the correlation between teacher availability and senior secondary school students' reading comprehension achievement in English language in Ebonyi State.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

There has been poor achievement recorded in the English language examinations especially as conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC). There was for instance a steady decline in the performance of students in the English language results between 2011 and 2014 showing only a slight improvement in 2015 as obtained from WAEC (2015). For instance according to WAEC (2015), results show that between the year 2011 and 2015, the percentage of senior secondary school students who obtained credit passes in 5 subjects including English language stood as follows:

Year	% performance
2011	57.24
2012	38.81
2013	36.57
2014	31.28
2015	39

Table 2: Percentage Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in English between 2011 and 2015

The teacher, according to Onwuka (1981) is in the real sense, the key factor in the implementation and success of curriculum. Onwuka maintained that the teacher remains indispensable in the entire process of education since he determines what actually are to be learned and equally controls the learning experiences that go on in the classroom. If there is dearth or unavailability of qualified teaching staff in English Language, achievement will most likely continue to be poor. The problem of this study therefore is to find out the relationship between availability of teachers and senior secondary school students' reading comprehension achievement in English language in Ebonyi State.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this study was to investigate whether there is a relationship between availability of teachers and senior secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension in English in Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

### 1.3. Significance of the Study

Findings from this study will be of immense value to the Ministry of Education and the Secondary Education Board whose responsibilities include approval of school establishments and recruitment and posting of teachers, to employ more discretion in school approvals and teacher posting to schools. Schools should be approved with the will to staff them with needed teachers. Recruitment and transfer of teachers should also be with the intention to strike the balance, ensuring that no subject is left to suffer unduly, especially the English language.

It is commonly observed that most teachers shun posting to rural schools or do everything humanly possible to effect a transfer soon after they are posted, thus leaving the rural schools without enough teachers. This condition often leads to the hiring of what has come to be popularly known as "PTA teachers" who are the employees of the schools' Parent-Teacher- Association and, who may not have the requisite qualifications for teaching. This usually affects students' achievement in English language.

### 1.4. Scope of the Study

The study focused on relationship between teacher availability and senior secondary school students' reading comprehension achievement in English language in Ebonyi State. The study was focused on the three education zones in Ebonyi State namely: Abakaliki, Afikpo and Onueke.

### 1.5. Research Question

One research question was formulated to guide the study thus:

What is the relationship between teacher availability and senior secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension in English language in Ebonyi State?

### 1.6. Hypothesis

One hypothesis was tested at an alpha level of 0.05 of significance namely:

There is no significant relationship between teacher availability and reading comprehension achievement of senior secondary school students in English language in Ebonyi State.

## 2. Methodology

The design adopted for this study was a correlation design. Teacher availability variable was correlated with students' achievement in reading comprehension. A correlation study according to Cherry (2015), is used to investigate relationships between variables.

The population for this study consisted of all SS2 students in the one hundred and eighty nine (189) public senior secondary schools in the three Education Zones in Ebonyi State, whose population was 33,986 students and the 420 English language teachers (EBSSEB 2013), which brought the total population to 34,406.

In the three Education Zones, all the senior secondary schools studied English language and also used the same recommended text books in English. Using Taro Yamane formulae for determining sample size, a sample size of 396 respondents was selected from the student population. When added to the teacher population, the sample size became 816 respondents. Using simple random sampling by balloting, twenty (20) senior secondary schools were selected representing 34%. The population of teachers was not sampled because it was a manageable population. The schools were carefully chosen ensuring that the urban and rural status of each education zone was reflected.

The instruments for data collection were: (i) a Reading Comprehension test adapted from the prescribed English text for senior school classes-*Intensive English for Senior Secondary Schools 2*, and a Teacher Characteristics Inventory (TCI)

Research questions were answered using coefficient of correlation, while hypotheses were tested at an alpha level of 0.05, using step-wise linear regression. Items whose 'T' were less than significance of "T" were accepted (not rejected) while items whose 'T' were greater than significance of "T" were rejected (not accepted).

The correlation coefficient table as presented by Nwana (2008) was used as bench mark for interpreting the degree of relationship. According to Nwana (2008:311) the correlation interpretation table runs thus:

	Correlation	Interpretation
	0.80 to 1.00	Very High, Near perfect Relationship
	0.60 to 0.80	High Relationship
	0.40 to 0.60	Medium Relationship
	0.20 to 0.40	Low, Definite Positive Relationship
	0.00 to 0.20	Very Low, Virtually No Relationship

Table 3: Table of interpretation of correlation coefficient  
Source: Nwana (2008)

### 2.1. Research Question

What is the relationship between teacher availability and senior secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension in English language in Ebonyi State?

Variable	Achievement	Teacher Availability.
Achievement	1.0000 (420) P=.	0.9038 (420) P=0.000
Teacher Availability	0.9038 (420) P= 0.000	1.0000 (420) P=.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficient between Teacher Availability and Students' Achievement.  
 $r=0.90$

From the result in table 4, the coefficient of correlation between Students' Achievement and Teacher Availability was 0.90. This falls within the range of 0.80 – 1.00 and showed a very high and positive relationship. This indicates there is a relationship between teacher availability and students' reading comprehension achievement.

There is no significant relationship between teacher availability and reading comprehension achievement of senior secondary school students in English language in Ebonyi State.

Variable	Computed R	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	Standard Error	Beta	"T"	Significance of "T"
Teacher Availability	0.9038	0.8168	0.8164	4.7170	0.9038	41.922	0.0000
Constant						0.855	0.3932

Table 5: Significance of Relationship between Teacher Availability and Students' Achievement  
Significant at  $P<0.05$

Result in table 5 indicated that “T” which was 41.922 was greater than significance of “T”. The hypothesis was rejected. It means there is a significant relationship between teacher availability and students’ achievement in reading comprehension.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Relationship between Teacher Availability and Senior Secondary School Students’ Reading Comprehension Achievement

Result showed a very high coefficient correlation between teacher availability and students’ reading comprehension achievement with a relationship of 0.90. Similarly result of the corresponding hypothesis indicated that “T” was 41.9 and greater than significance of “T”. Hypothesis was rejected as result showed there was a significant relationship between teacher availability and senior secondary school students’ reading comprehension achievement. This indicates that the more available qualified teachers are at the service of the students, the better students learn and the higher their achievement. Where there are insufficient teachers taking too many students, there is bound to be a poor impact on students resulting in poor achievement. FRN (2004) stipulates that teacher- student ratio in the secondary school should be 1:40; but statistics gathered from EBSSEB (2013) shows that teacher student ratio is as high as 1:324 in the secondary schools in Ebonyi State. This is very academically unhealthy both for teachers and students. How does one teacher grapple with the teaching of 324 students, administer and assess their weekly tests in grammar lexis and structure, comprehension; summary, essay and letter - writing? No matter how qualified the teacher is, he/she is unlikely to impact very positively on the students’ achievement when he/she is over burdened with too many students to take care of. The finding on teacher availability also agrees with Abanihe et al (2002) who accuse the various governments in Nigeria of doing nothing to employ language teachers to teach at the various school levels. In this wise, Ebonyi State government is among the culprits. For a senior secondary school student population of about 135,943 to face a teaching staff population of 420 amounts to an attempt to murder education in general and the teachers in particular as they must work themselves to death if they must satisfy the academic needs of the students. When the teacher is over worked, he/she becomes sick and a sick teacher can hardly teach. Health conditions of both teachers and students have been found to correlate with senior secondary school students’ reading comprehension achievement.

### 4. Conclusions

There has been a persistent poor achievement of senior secondary school students in qualifying English language examinations such as the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) among others. Various factors had been blamed for this situation. The study set out to investigate how dearth of teachers correlates with senior secondary school students’ reading comprehension achievement. Results revealed that teacher availability has relationship with students’ reading comprehension achievement. This study has succeeded in successfully establishing the fact that poor achievement of senior secondary school students in qualifying examinations has been chiefly as a result of dearth of teachers in Ebonyi State secondary School system.

### 5. Recommendations

Government should make recruitment of English language teachers a more regular exercise than what is currently the practice. Moreover, qualified English language teachers should be posted to rural schools. To make this gesture attractively workable, government should give monetary incentive to these English language teachers. Apart from that, government should make it a policy for school principals and the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) to provide free residential homes for such rural English teachers. This will be a good incentive for teachers to readily accept posting to any part of the state and also to put in their optimal best.

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