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# READING COMPREHENSION: COMBATING READING DIFFICULTIES WITH FLUENCY AND ACCURACY IN CHILDRENIN PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMS

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## ABSTRACT
*There is something about reading comprehension with fluency, accuracy, and acknowledgment of punctuation that indicates quality education in children.The public library offers strategic programs for children's good practices in reading comprehension with fluency and accuracy. However, many children have difficulties in reading which frustrates and affects their performances. This study examined the performance of reading comprehension, fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed in children. It also harnessed the reading difficulties encountered by children. This was a qualitative study that took place in Onitsha Divisonal library, Anambra State. 25 children in primary 5 and 6 who are registered members of the library were sampled in the study. Their ages fell between 9-11 years comprising of males and females. A storybook was used for the reading comprehension exercise, fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed in reading. 5 comprehension questions were asked and marked to evaluate their performance. Each child's reading was recorded to determine fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed. The findings revealed that less than half of the children scored over 4 out of the 5 questions asked, ranked below 60% in fluency, accuracy and punctuation while reading the comprehension. The difficulties in reading observed were lisping (wrong pronunciation, dyslexia, slow reading and lack of confidence. The study recommended regular evaluation of reading outcomes, integration of fluency, accuracy and punctuation in the reading program andgiving individual attention to identify children with reading difficulties. Every child has the right to good quality education and services of the library.*

**Keywords:** accuracy and fluency, children, reading comprehension, public library

## Introduction
When a child has reading difficulties, he struggles with comprehension, fluency and accuracy.But knowing the reading skills helps with proficiency which tends to improve reading culture with rich tastes in choice of reading resources. It is this reading that dissipates illiteracy, makes a child cope with new knowledge in the changing world of the information society. Great Schools (2017) emphasized that a rich vocabulary and strong language skills are predictors of success in learning to read.The library with its natural responsibilities of nurturing of early education, creates enabling programs for stimulating reading skills in children. Children learn with different awareness skills such as identifying sounds in words, blending phonemes and segmenting words into sounds. New York State Library (2015) stated that it is the reading programs that put books in the hands of children and helps students build reading skills, prevent summer learning loss, and prepare for a successful school year. This is the essence of the library program, to create classroom-like spaces for children and enrich their reading experiences.

The public library strengthens the education system and refreshes the children's cognitive development as well as enhances the social services of the community. In place of this, Stone (2016) pointed out that our educational system isn't working well anymore for young people unless they are brilliant, rich, or, better still, both. Perhaps this is time library is

considered as a key and relevant comprehensive platform for social service for every child. If properly harnessed, libraries offer learning services thatprovide successful reading activities that prepare children for higher education thereafter. It then becomes important that children are guided right on the good practices of reading comprehension with deep immersion, analysis and critical thinking (Balsiger, 2018). The fact remains that when a child's mind is turned to a book, he loves to read, listens and adaptsto different learning skills as long as reading is incorporated. In other words, access to reading resources produces positive reading skills and proficiency in comprehension. This in turn improvesthe academic success to the children.

Importantly there are various degrees of reading difficulties. Spear-Swerling (2015) identified three reading problems as specific word-reading difficulties, specific reading-comprehension difficulties, and mixed reading difficulties.If the reading ability is not obtained, several doors leading to desirable goals will remain closed or at least very difficult to open. Therefore, being able to read opens many doors in life – just like not being able to read and write closes many doors.Every child can read statement proves that skills are learned. But when a child misses this opportunity of reading fluently and accurately, he may find it difficult to acquire reading habits in the later years.However, there seems to be the assumption that children of elite parents have more reading techniques which demonstrates their greater gains in oral language, concepts of print, letter recognition, and phonemic awareness. Perhaps this gap can be filled with the reading services of the library.

However, the embarrassing outcomes of external examinations and results in Nigeria have necessitated the need to adopt strategies of learning to read comprehension effectively, fluently and accurately. The news of mass failure and massive exam malpractices have continued to question the roles of stakeholders in education activities which librarians are part of. For instance, WAEC has often complained of painful failure and massive malpractices (Today, 2016). In 2015, Adesulu (2015) stated the statistics showing that above 70 percent who sat the WASSCE did not obtain five credits including English and Mathematics. This anomaly often causes delay from being admitted into the tertiary institutions as the English language is a prerequisite for admission into any course in Nigeria. Here points at theemphasis on reading comprehension to decode, understand, interpret and process information (Reading Rockets, 2015). The children's section of the public library provides enabling environment for reading skills and total quality comprehension exercises. The gap in children's adoption of fluency and accuracy in reading comprehension is what this study aimed to tackle. Thus, this study harnessed the children's reading difficulties in respect to comprehension reading skills for maximum outputs.

It takes cohesion and fluency to read comprehension smoothly. According to Kızıltaş and Yildiz (2020) there is a serious relationship between fluency reading and reading comprehension. The connection implies that total quality reading adds value to children's academic performance. When it is applied in reading comprehension, the interpretation becomes clearer as children decode what they read, make connections between what they read and what they already know. Reading Rocket (2021) defined fluency as the ability to read with speed, accuracy and proper expression. This shows that fluency helps in understanding and forms a bridge with comprehensionwhether it is read aloud or silently (Pretorius, 2016).The point is having wide arrays of vocabulary and knowing the meanings of sufficient words which help the reader to draw conclusions about what he reads, what is important as well as the activities that surrounded the characters he reads about. As Roundy (2017) pointed out,the ability to process information that we have read and to understand its meaning is what reading comprehension entails. This is what every reader needs to know and builds the skills for greater success in comprehension reading exercises.

The importance of reading comprehension cannot be over-emphasized. This exercise is done across all levels of education. Child Trends Databank (2015) stated that the ability to read proficiently is a fundamental skill that affects the learning experiences and school performance of children and adolescents. This proficiency according to New York State Library (2015) is developed when children who enjoy reading read more. However, some children are frustrated and have difficulties in reading comprehension. According to Silbert (2014), the signs of poor reading comprehension were not answering questions about what was read, not understanding the logical sequence of a story, unable to tell the story after reading, not connecting the individual sentences or paragraphs of text, not knowing the meaning of ndividual words and los of interest or giving up easily. But the truth remains that learning occurs with intellectual and mental processes.

Studies have shown that some children are scarred of reading comprehension, lack fluency and accuracy with statements that "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid (Reading Rocket, 2021;Marygrove College, 2014). This seemingly creates problems in teaching a child to read. It amplifies the need to infuse critical reading as a learning strategy to enhance fluency and accuracy through the library services to the children.How proficient a child determines his confidence and drive in reading more.It is this firm belief that made Zimbabwe School Library Trust (2015) (ZRSLT) clarify its mission to anticipate unlocking the reading potentials in participating communities whilst putting a stop to child delinquency through participatory activities that engage the children in mental and intellectual capacity.

Several studies have revealed how children's library services contribute to proficiency in reading. For instance, libraries have been called smart Investment as Quality Library Programs Support ELA Achievement (Scholastic Library, 2016). IFLA (2015) put it, the public library for the children is providing open access to a great variety of high quality, selected resources, information and tools, in all formats including digital.Indeed, children who are raised with reading competencies are great assets in the institutions and communities as they achieve academic feats (Weiss,Caspe, Lopez& McWilliams, 2016; Osuchukwu, 2020). As primary school is the basis for the effective foundation of learning, it becomes necessary that good practices of the early formative approach of reading is rendered to produce intelligent students needed to drive the nation to a functional information literate society. Strengthening students' reading proficiency has been linked closely to their academic performance (Wu, et al 2014). Imbibing this love for reading is what every student must embrace to achieve holistic literacy in the 21st century. It is equally important for students' acquisition of basic education which prepares them for their future education for their secondary and higher education levels.Thus, the public libraries equip children with lifelong learning and literacy skills with the enablement to participate actively in reading programs.

There is a probability that certain issues of socio-economic posedifferences in attaining and attending reading activities in the libraries. This also can be said to affect educational attainments. Some families can provide educational resources like computer, storybooks, reading rooms, etc laid good examples to their children's reading skills (Osuchukwu, 2020). This is referred to as cultural capital where parents' social class and educational qualifications are fairly closely linked with their children's reading proficiency (Sullivan & Brown, 2013 and Connelly, Sullivan &Jerrim, 2014). On the contrary, where parents are not highly educated and lack some basis of information literacy, it has implications on the children's learning and attendance to learning activities in the libraries. This is the reason libraries seem to be the best platforms for good practices of reading comprehension.

**Statements of the Problem**

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Comprehension is an activity that concerns itself with taking out meanings from sentences or words. Reading comprehension is one of the necessary subjects in the primary and secondary levels of education. The readers are expected to drive the real information incorporated by the author, accurately. The fluency and accuracy skills motivate the children and create the tendency to read more. However, there seems to be reading without actually recognizing the words, punctuation and meanings. Many Nigeria students have challenges in reading proficiency as revealed in their performance in the examinations. This could be because of a lack of fluency and accuracy in reading. This is because it takes a logical sequence to understand a concept. Many children do not easily pass into the secondary schools of their choice because of poor reading performance in the entrance examination which usually requires proficiency as a yardstick in the secondary schools. It is within the library setting that children learn the foundational skills for future school success.Therefore; the study looked into the children's reading difficulties with comprehension, fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the performance of the reading comprehension of the children in the library program
2. What are the performance of children's fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed in reading comprehension
3. What are the difficulties observed in the reading comprehension from the study?

**Research Method**

This is a qualitative study that harnessed the comprehension based on fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed in the children's department of Onitsha Divisional Library. It was a purposive sampling of children in primary 5 and 6 who attend library services in Onitsha. The sample consisted of 25 children, 13 males and 12 females. Data was collected using a storybook named "The day Kunle woke up late" by Ife Six-Year Project. It is a comprehensive series prepared for children within the age brackets of 9-11 years. Page 8 of the book was used for reading comprehension to measure fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed of the children. The page has 158 words with different punctuations to test the students. 60 seconds were given to each student to measure the components. All the students read the comprehension while they were evaluated. The researchers were librarianswith Post Graduate Diploma in Education and have experience in teaching children. The participants were registered members of the public library that attend regular Saturday reading programs. The researchers were permitted to research by the Director of the Library Board as they also doubled as volunteers to children's programs.

The reading was carried out and recorded with a voice recorder without the children's knowledge and attentionafter which the students were taught on how to read right with the correct pronunciation and reading skills. The researchers recorded the children's reading errors like skipping, repeating, inaccuracy, lisping, non-acknowledgment of punctuation, reversing and wrong reading. The reading errors were subtracted from the total number of words (158). The correct number of words read were divided by the total number of words and multiplied 100 which gave the reading accuracy percentage.

After the reading, the children were asked to answer 5 simple comprehension questions developed by the researchers to measure their comprehension. One point was given for every correct answere and zero point for unanswered questions. The data were analyzed in simple frequencies and percentages. They were presented in Tables and figures.

**Presentation of Results**

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**Table 1: Characteristics of the Participants**

| Name | Sex | Class primary | Age |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | M | 6 | 11 |
| Participant 2 | M | 5 | 10 |
| Participant 3 | F | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 4 | M | 5 | 9 |
| Participant 5 | M | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 6 | F | 6 | 11 |
| Participant 7 | F | 5 | 11 |
| Participant 8 | F | 5 | 10 |
| Participant 9 | F | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 10 | M | 6 | 11 |
| Participant 11 | F | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 12 | M | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 13 | F | 5 | 9 |
| Participant 14 | M | 5 | 9 |
| Participant 15 | M | 5 | 10 |
| Participant 16 | F | 5 | 11 |
| Participant 17 | M | 6 | 11 |
| Participant 18 | M | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 19 | M | 5 | 10 |
| Participant 20 | F | 5 | 11 |
| Participant 21 | F | 5 | 9 |
| Participant 22 | M | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 23 | M | 6 | 10 |
| Participant 24 | F | 6 | 11 |
| Participant 25 | F | 6 | 10 |

Table one shows the characteristics of the participants. Out of the twenty five children, 13 were males while 12 were females. Again 14 were in primary 6 and 11 were in primary 5. It shows the homogenity of the participants being in the upper class of primary school. The ages from 9-11 also indicate the appropriate range for the class and the reading resource used for the study.

**Table 2: Performance of Reading Comprehension**

| NAME | Comprehension questions answered correctly | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | 2 | 2/5 |
| Participant 2 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 3 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 4 | 5 | 5/5 |
| Participant 5 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 6 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 7 | 5 | 5/5 |
| Participant 8 | 5 | 5/5 |
| Participant 9 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 10 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 11 | 2 | 2/5 |
| Participant 12 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 13 | 5 | 5/5 |
| Participant 14 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 15 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 16 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 17 | 2 | 2/5 |
| Participant 18 | 2 | 2/5 |
| Participant 19 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 20 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 21 | 4 | 4/5 |
| Participant 22 | 3 | 3/5 |
| Participant 23 | 2 | 2/5 |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Participant 24 | 5 | 5/5 |
| Participant 25 | 3 | 3/5 |

Table 2 shows the performance of the reading comprehension of the children in the library pogram. Out of the five questions asked from the comprehension, 5 participants answered 2 correctly, 8 answered 3 correctly, 7 answered 4 correctly and 5 answered 5 correctly. This shows that almost half of the participants scored over 50% on the comprehension question.

**Table 3: Performance of Children's Fluency, Accuracy, Punctuation and Speed of Reading Comprehension**

| Component | Below 30% | 40-59% | 60-79% | 80-100% | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Oral reading fluency | 7 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 25 |
| Oral reading accuracy | 9 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 25 |
| Acknowledgement of Punctuation | 12 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 25 |
| Speed in reading within 1 minute | - | - | 4 | 21 | 25 |

From Table 3 on the performance of children's fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed of reading comprehension, it is shown that 7 participants'fluency was below 30%, 8 ranked between 40-59%, 6 ranked 60-79% while 4 were graded 80-100%. On oral accuracy, 9 participants scored below 30%, 7 had 40-59%, 5 had 60-79% and 4 had 80-100%.

On acknowledgment of punctuation, 12 participants had below 30%, 6 scored 40-59%, 4 scored 60-79% while 3 ranked 80-100%

On speed in reading comprehension, only 4 participants had between 60-79% while 21 ranked between 80-100%. No participant read below 60%. This shows that more than half of the participants performed below 60% in all the components established.

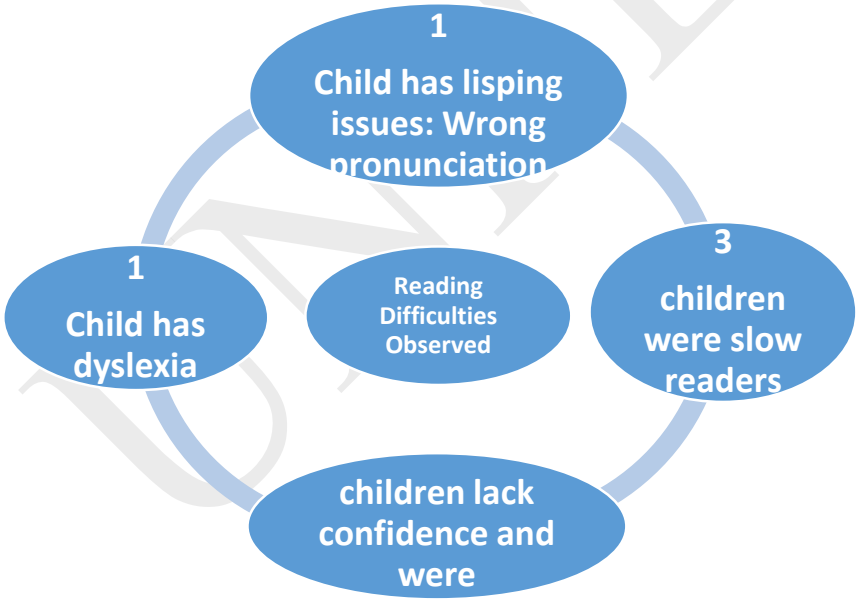



**Figure 1. Difficulties Observed from the Reading Comprehension**

The figure shows the difficulties observed from the study. A child has dyxlesia, 1 child hasa lisping challenge of calling "r" instead of "l", 3 were slow readers while 2 lacked confidence and were uncomfortable. It shows that children

encounter many challenges that affect their reading comprehension.

**Discussion of Findings**

The characteristics of the participants (Table 1) have shown that both males and females are included in the children's reading comprehension program of the public library. It implies that reading is important and valuable for everyone irrespective of gender. Again the ages and classes of the participants indicate the idea that the slogan, catch them young is doable. This relates to the emphasis that children who are raised with reading competencies add value to the institutions and communities as well as achieve academic feats (Osuchukwu, 2020).This is because, at that age and class, the children can still get it right which will take them to the other levels of educationand long-life learning.

Clearly, the performance on the reading comprehension with the scores on Table 2 indicates the level of understanding and interpretation of what was read. This shows power over written words and how children decode comprehension. The scores of the comprehension exercise with about half of the participants getting three answers correctly out of the five questions is not a bad grade but more effort is needed.

On the other hand that the performance of children's fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed of reading comprehension Table 3 showed more than half of the participants scoringbelow 60% may likely reflect Silbert (2014) signs of poor reading comprehension which included difficulties in not answering questions about what was read, non-logical sequence of a story, inability to tell or connect with the story as well as not knowing the meaning of individual words and lost of interest. The implication is that if the children are not guided right at the lower level in the library program, reading may always be difficult which can cause dropping out and giving up on education.

It has been established that some children have difficulties in reading comprehension. This revelation in figure one indicates the need in evaluating children's reading problems with the library services. Indeed, there are different abilities as not everyone can follow up intellectually at the same time. It may be that those children with the lisping problems, slow reading, dyslexia and lack of confidence did not come from homes that provide extra reading resources and reading spaces. Scholars like Sullivan and Brown (2013) and Connelly, Sullivan and Jerrim (2014) referred to it as cultural capital where parents' social class and educational qualifications are fairly closely linked with their children's reading proficiency. But that notwithstanding, the library is a friendly space for every for inclusive learning at all times, irrespective of class, status, tribe and gender.

**Conclusion**

It is clearly shown in the study that reading comprehension is critical in children's educational activities and success. Thus, it is concluded good practices of reading comprehension are the antidotes that will impact children's academic performance. If the children have adequate reading skills, they will integrate them into all their subjects across all educational levels. The components of fluency, accuracy, punctuation and speed are relevant in reading comprehension. These aid understanding and interpretation of written words, thereby aligning with equitable quality education. Again, the difficulties children encounter during reading comprehension need to be identified and corrected. These children are still growing and can be molded into smart, outstanding students and personalities that will transform society with good knowledge.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be a regular evaluation of reading outcomes for children on the library reading programs to enable re-strategizing of activities

2. Librarians in charge of the children's program must integrate fluency, accuracy and punctuation in the reading program
3. Awareness should be created for more children to attend the reading program in the library for wholesome support to classroom learning
4. Every child is valuable which necessitates that individual attention needs and attention should be employed in the reading program to identify children with reading difficulties. This will help to correct all anomalies of reading within the formative age.
5. Volunteers with reading skills should also be engaged to participate in the children's reading program of the libraries. It will add value to the reading practices.

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