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CURBING READING COMPREHENSION FAILURES AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: A PRELUDE TO SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POST COVID-19 ERA

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ABSTRACT

Reading and understanding comprehension is vital to guarantee informed individuals with foresight and decisions that are crucial for sustainable national development. If sustainable development is described as ongoing process to enhance human well-being as well as continued national economic growth, then it requires that secondary school students who are looked upon as tomorrow's work force and leaders be adequately prepared for full participation in their future roles especially in this COVID-19 pandemic era. The pandemic has caused so many challenges to the Nigerian education system, especially at the secondary school level. The main argument of this paper is that sustainable national development is not possible without proper attention to secondary school students via the adequate teaching of reading comprehension. This paper, therefore examined the concept of reading comprehension, causes of Reading Comprehension Failure (RCF) as well as the symptoms. The underlining assumption is that if secondary school students are properly taught to overcome reading comprehension failures, they learn more through reading thereby improving their academic achievement which ultimately would lead to their positive enablement and empowerment then sustainable national development would be realized. The paper among other things recommended the introduction of proper and adequate teaching of reading at the basic level as a core subject by specialists in reading and adequate equipping of libraries/reading rooms. The paper concludes that effective teaching of reading comprehension is a major avenue for curbing reading failures and showcasing the human potentials in secondary school students as vital individuals for optimal sustainable development of the Nigeria nation.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Secondary School, Sustainable National Development, COVID-19.

Introduction

Effective reading is a language skill and tool for literacy acquisition. Particularly in English language individuals need not just in schools but for a lifetime of learning and growth. Reading Comprehension (RC) has been acknowledged as paramount for higher achievement in academic work among students and as efficiency tool towards their predicted role in the society. Through reading, students acquire relevant knowledge and learn values to enable them maximize their potentials and live as functional members of any society especially in the changing world of 21st century particularly in COVID-19 Era. Students who have not learnt to read may find it difficult to cope in schools because the COVID pandemic stopped most activities in school especially the traditional face to face teaching so that now students have a lot to read on their own.

Effective reading is paramount to understanding comprehension. Reading Comprehension is the understanding and

interpretation of what is read that is, successful interaction of a reader with a text. It is an indispensable language skill that is fundamental to communication and development. It is through reading that literate individuals see the world beyond their physical reach. It is through reading that learning materials that are put down in books can be understood and used to affect one's life or others. It is obvious that the learning of any subject in school curriculum depends on the reading ability of the students because it is the fundamental media of acquiring and promoting knowledge. Reading is basically a precursor to comprehension. Therefore, one of the most important skill teachers should develop in their students is the ability to read and comprehend. Once this is achieved, students can do well with their respective academic demands and subsequently in the world of work.

The English Language, being the official language in Nigeria, is the medium of instruction in schools as well as a core subject. Students must be able to read effectively in English language in order to study and make progress in other subjects existing in the academic curriculum. A student who cannot read and comprehend cannot be successful in academics and cope adequately with various challenges of life. Ofodu (2011) asserts that both experience and research have shown that students inability to read and comprehend simple English passages contribute to their poor performance both within and outside the school system. Ofodu went further to state that comprehension of written materials is one of the most fundamental objectives of the school system. Students reading need have been identified to include the following; inadequate reading texts, poor teaching of reading or non-existent teaching of reading, lack of libraries in many schools or ineffective libraries, poor reading environment and so on. When these needs are not accorded proper attention to help students attain proficiency in reading early in life, reading comprehension failure becomes the outcome which eventually hinders the students' overall development and achievement which in turn affects their positive contribution to rational development. Christopher in Ofodu (2011) laments that although Nigeria recognizes education as essential for development, she does not guarantee the adequate availability of basic reading materials for the child sent to school.

Most textbooks are written in English language. Therefore, in order to achieve success in English and all other school subject even in later life, there is a great need to lay emphasis on how to curb the issue of English reading comprehension failures among secondary school students without which their future participation in the development of the nation becomes bleak. The learning and practice of reading should start early in life and consolidated at the secondary school level. This is very disturbing because the globalised world of 21st century deems the ability to read as one of the most essential skills to succeed in school and in the work place. The ability to read and comprehend is a fundamental necessity for full participation in one's society and economy hence the worry about students who have reading failures at the secondary school level of education.

Research and experience has shown that most secondary school students find it difficult to read and comprehend. Agwu (2011) lamented that many secondary school graduates in Nigeria cannot or find it difficult to read simple passages with understanding. As a result of this difficulties, the English language result of students as well as in other subject areas of

most students have been low as reported by the West Africa Examination Council Chief Examiner over the years especially in 2016 have been low. Reading comprehension failure is, therefore, a major problem to sustainable national development in Nigeria, and if left unchecked, it will mar the future of the Nigerian nation. In this regard, secondary school teachers should aim at developing in their students the proper ability to interact meaningfully with print text.

It is strange the way the average Nigerian secondary school students regard reading. When reading is mentioned, what readily comes to their mind is testing and examination. Students with reading failure are regarded as cognitively starved individuals, inexperienced and merely passive onlookers allowing many important things to pass by them. This is because many do not realize its importance in and out of the school curriculum. The fact that reading can be fun, exciting and joy is strange to them. When reading is made interesting and exciting and when it becomes a thing of joy to students, they would want to read more in order to learn and equally learn to read to perfect their reading skills and so succeed in other content areas in the school and otherwise.

To enhance, sustain and advance the current state of technology and development in Nigeria, secondary school students should learn and master how to read because reading empowers. This is very important so as to help Young Nigerians learn and avoid the sore experiences of the past generations. Onukaogu (2013) states that because our forefathers did not have a literacy culture, they were unable to record for generations coming after them the hall mark of their civilization regarding how their technology started, how it peaked and what led to its demise. He further posits that reading enables individuals to learn from the experiences of other nations whose technologies are ahead and with the newly acquired knowledge, attitudes and skills the nation will be in a position to move forward. Onukaogu opined that since a reading nation is a winning, progressive and living nation, reading should be promoted so that the generality of Nigerians can read, become informed and have fulfilled lives. And not just that but equally as a nation progress from being import and consumer oriented economy as well as acquire the knowledge and technology for managing and renewing the vast natural resources in the Nigerian nation. One wonders where Nigeria stands today after almost two decades of making the observation. Okeke (2012) reiterates Onukaogu assertion by explaining that the economic and social wealth of any nation depends on building a literate nation able to read widely for practical purposes and pleasure. Okeke explained that this entails making the present generation conscious of the importance of reading in their daily lives and ensuring that they have the level of literacy skills required in modern society.

Lane (2014) states that reading failure is likely to lead to negative consequences such as grade retention, drop out, limited employment opportunities and difficulties with basic life activities. The negative effects of reading failures among students can be devastating. Hence identifying effective ways for curbing reading comprehension failures especially in the new normal era and other intervention for struggling students become the burden of this paper. Makrakis (2012) also opine that education systems worldwide face various challenges such as that of equipping their citizens with necessary skills and competence to transform unsustainable practices. It goes without argument that education lays the

foundation for sustained economic growth and subsequently national development. Many children in developing countries like Nigeria struggle with reading comprehension failure. The purpose of reading is to enhance comprehension which extends beyond just understanding and has little meaning if learners do not comprehend and know how to apply it to make a better world. So reading is an essential aspect of human life and activities and as such a prerequisite to sustainable development of a nation.

In this COVID-19 pandemic era, the need for adequate teaching of reading comprehension among students at secondary school level cannot be over emphasized. The outbreak of corona virus and the eventual school closure disrupted teaching and learning in schools particularly public schools. One cannot begin now to estimate the extent COVID-19 interruption had affected students' learning. The school time tables, schedules and in fact the general school calendar have changed since the resumption of the school after lock down. There are so many grounds to be covered in order for the school to produce secondary school graduates who will compete with others both for admissions into tertiary institutions and in the labour market. One wonders how many students will cope with the situation of this era. The world seems to be new far different from how things were known and done. Nigerian students before the pandemic had poor reading habits. The effect of the pandemic may further exacerbate the issues, hence the need to seriously promote ways to curbing reading failures among secondary school is the major thrust of this paper.

Conceptual Definitions

Reading is a mental activity that involves interacting with the printed or written text with the intention of bringing meaning out of it or imposing meaning on the text. Reading takes place at two realms which are the eyes and the brain. Other factors to support and enhance this metal activity include reader's world of experiences. Eze (2018) describes reading as a process of constructing meaning through interaction with the reading material. People use their prior knowledge along with clues from the text to construct meaning as they read. The goal of reading instruction is to help students become effective readers and read independently with meaning any material they encounter. Tamunobelema (2016) opines that reading involves the articulation of rational interpretation of verbal symbols requiring thinking, evaluation, judging and so on. According to Ur (2012), reading simply means "reading and understanding" and that if a student says "l can read the words but I don't understand what they mean" is not therefore reading but just decoding, translating the written symbols in their corresponding sounds. Since reading extends beyond academic success and school environment students should develop a love for reading, because in everyday life, students come across many types of reading materials.

Comprehension is the primary reason for any reading venture. It does not occur in the absence of reading therefore it is by-product of reading and reading is not meaningful without comprehension. Comprehension occurs "when a reader is able to act on, respond to, or transform the information that is present in written texts in ways that it demonstrates understanding. The essence of reading is to comprehend. In this regar Mullis and Martin (2015) assert that comprehension is viewed broadly to include not just what lies on the page (literal comprehension) but rather on how a reader can apply what is read to new

situations and tasks. As already stated, the major goal of any reading is comprehension that is, the reader gaining meaning from what is read. Comprehension occurs at various levels but the critical level of comprehension is readers using the ideas in the text as a basis for forming new ideas (being creative). This means that readers have evaluated what is read in relation to their experiences and background knowledge (reading beyond the lines).

Reading comprehension can be seen as the ability to process a particular text, understand its meaning and integrate it with what the reader already knows. Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016) defines reading comprehension as the understanding got from reading any text or print material. Reading Comprehension (RC) means more than visual exploration of printed materials or written passages. It is both perceptual and cognitive process because it involves the use of eyes and brain respectively. RC is an activity which engages the mind in critical thinking. In fact RC is the preparation and training of young minds to think clearly, logically and independently for effective adult life. It becomes an indispensable habit individuals need especially students to interact directly or indirectly with minds both far and near, thus establishing close links thereby learning to live and survive particularly in the world of 21st century with information and knowledge exploitation.

Secondary School Level (SSL) of education is very critical in the Nigerian educational system. It is the education children receive after basic education before the tertiary level. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (NPE 2013), the aims and objectives of secondary education in the country include preparation for:

a. Useful living within the society and
b. Higher education

Thus, the place of secondary education is of vital importance. Obasanjo (2012) states that secondary education trains individuals to relate and interact meaningfully with others in the society and to appreciate the importance of effective organization of human progress. The stated aims and objectives give a sense of purpose and direction as to what secondary level of education should be in Nigeria. But it is in doubtful whether the graduates of secondary schools adequately meet up with the societal demands in terms of quality. It is an open secret that secondary level of education is bedeviled by a lot of challenges and the issue of reading comprehension failure is one of them. It must be noted that education cannot be an instrument par excellence for achieving sustainable national development where students at secondary level of education have serious issues with reading comprehension. The contribution of this level of education to national development cannot be overemphasized especially where they serve as feeder for tertiary institutions and supply some needed manpower for national development. Obasanjo further stated that secondary education promotes productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same to the improvement of the existing skill and technique of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts. This is because education trains individual to be useful to themselves and contribute positively to the society they live.

At this level, many students are at adolescence stage where they make serious and far reaching decisions about their future. It is equally at this level of education that what they learnt at the basic level are modified or consolidated. So the ability to read with comprehension is very critical at this stage. Students should possess

adequate reading comprehension skill to help them cope with the demands of their academic and otherwise. Reading habits of secondary school students are poor due to poor instructional practices in schools. One wonders if the situation has improved after almost two decades of making the assertion. However, according to Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016) reading comprehension failure is a major hindrance to the advancement of functional literacy in Nigeria. From the foregoing, one begins to appreciate the seriousness of reading comprehension failures among secondary school students in Nigeria. If left unchecked will continue to mar the future development of the Nigerian nation.

Sustainability connotes quality of being able to continue for a long time or go through a course of activity for a long time. Lynn and Eda (2014) define sustainability as the practice of maintaining processes of productivity indefinitely, whether natural or man-made by replacing resources used with resources of equal or greater value without degrading or endangering natural biotic systems. Development connotes different things but when used in respect of a nation refers to the process of advancement of all aspects of people's life. Oyekhire and Igiemeh (2012) define development as a gradual growth of something or somebody. So development has to be gradual towards improving the welfare of life through harnessing of resources for the advancement of individuals for serious positive impact in the society. Lawal (2011) points out that development is a vital necessity to the growth and sustentation of any vibrant nation. Therefore, national development refers to the attainment of national goals which bring about progress and welfare of the citizens. It is the ability of a country to improve the life of its citizenry by developing the human capital and all other human endeavour. So if sustainable national development is defined as ongoing process to improve human life as well as continued national economic growth, it is then required that secondary school students who are tomorrow's leaders and labour force be adequately prepared for full participation in their future roles as responsible and functional citizens. Development is sustained when the people receiving it are involved. According to Ejiodu and Ehime (2013) national development is a process of cumulative change that results from positive forces that raise productivity and real income per head, create more employment opportunities and achieve a wider distribution of gains from the change itself in a nation. They stated that national development is multi-dimensional, encompassing, political, economic, legal, socio-political as well as linguistic changes. Hence, the discussion on curbing reading comprehension failures as a prelude to sustainable national development in any nation.

COVID-19 is the sudden outbreak of corona virus disease which broke out in China. It is caused by a new strain of corona virus (SARS-CoV-2) that has not been previously identified in humans. It became a major public health problem and challenges not only in China but all over the world and has affected and is still affecting different areas of life particularly in sphere of education. In Nigeria, as part of measures to control the spread of COVID-19 the Federal Ministry of Education, through the Permanent Secretary of Education ordered the immediate closure of schools including secondary schools on March 19, 2020. According to UNESCO, temporary closure of schools comes with high social and economic costs, with severe impact on children from disadvantaged background. Some private schools in urban areas engaged their students in

online teaching, but those in rural areas where left out. Again most public schools lack adequate facilities, to engage in online teaching and learning like it is done in developed countries. These disruptions of teaching and learning have consequences for the students especially young adults at secondary level. RCF is one of them.

Reading comprehension Instruction in Nigerian Public Secondary Schools

The ability to read is critical because it is one of the most fundamental aspects of school curricula. At the secondary level of education in Nigeria, students are expected to posses the necessary comprehension skills if they are to cope with the demands of the school curriculum. But the unfortunate trend in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom is that reading comprehension is actually not taught. The issue is that reading is not formally taught in the Nigerian School system at the secondary school level. As Egbe and Ayein-Daniyan (2016) posits, the assumption is that so long as students have been taught reading in primary school, there is no need to sustain reading instruction beyond that level. Yet many students did not learn how to read at the primary level and so many of them do not know how to read to learn. Students are failing to learn to read because they are not taught or being properly taught in a way to generate learning.

In recent years, the view of reading comprehension is gradually changing. It was erroneously viewed as part of English language with emphasis on a process of "read the passage and answer the following questions" commonly referred to as (comprehension passage). In classes with large population, the teacher merely asks few students to read the passage in turn and answer questions from them orally. This method ultimately leads to reading comprehension failure thereby it had affected students' academic quality. Yet there is a big difference between learning to read and reading to learn. Students need to be taught specific reading skills in order to learn. Again, Ibitoye (2010) remarked that the way teachers generally present texts to the students kill their interest and zeal to read. Students are then put off and lost interest in any activities that relate to reading any text be it written or printed text. It is taken as an integral part of English language which involves basically a process of question and answer commonly referred to as "Comprehension". The students are assigned to read a passage either silently or in turn and answer questions that are usually asked from the given passage (read and answer class text workbook). Most times the questions are not written out even on the white or chalkboard but are given orally. It must be made clear that the ultimate purpose of any reading is to comprehend the message of the text being read. One cannot enjoy a given text if one does not comprehend it neither can one react, nor benefit positively from any reading activity if one does not comprehend what one is reading. Many students do not want to read because to them reading is boring or too tasking. Hence there are many reluctant readers too. Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016) states that the teacher ends up testing listening comprehension instead of teaching the actual reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension failure in students is a serious issue because it affects students' performance in English language in particular and subsequently every other subject in the school curriculum. It is also a major obstacle not just to the advancement of literacy in Nigeria but to the overall development of the nation. Okeke (2012) laments that although Nigerians are intelligent and industrious but

Nigerians ingenuity of entrepreneurship and massive development remain incomplete until Nigerians embrace a thorough reading culture. This is because without it students will not acquire the basic literacy for successful educational engagement which creates critical thinking in them, broaden their interest thus help them to contribute to national development.

Furthermore, Nigerian education system seems to lay more emphasis on paper qualification, so most students struggle to study and get good grades thus attention is not given to the proper development of the mind. Yet it is only when the mind is developed through reading that society stands a better chance to be developed. Students in secondary school as future leaders are expected to cultivate a reasonable level of proficiency in reading comprehension to help them especially after formal school hours. The outcry is that Nigerian nation need students whose personal values and behaviour are affected positively by what they read which helps to gear them towards becoming functional members and leaders of the society contributing maximally to its sustainable development. Students do not need to be pushed to read and besides assigned reading, they need to read consistently on their own beyond what is required. It is only when students are guided to become effective readers that the goal of reading comprehension instruction is achieved and hope for a brighter tomorrow sustained. Onukaogu (2017) avers that reading is not properly taught as disciplines on its own right in secondary schools. Onukaogu established that what goes for teaching of reading at both Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS) levels is mimicry of what the teaching of reading should be. Some studies such as (Ekanem, 2017 and Ape, 2014) reveal that reading instruction in most Nigerian secondary schools has no well-informed direction. They maintain that teachers do not possess the necessary strategies to teach RC.

Learning must be challenging to most students because some cannot read, some may be able to read and yet unable to comprehend what they have read. Again there are some who can read and comprehend but they do not want to read. They have no interest. This situation calls of repositioning of teaching especially at the secondary school level. Reading comprehension is clearly for now, to empower students for future development, employment, attaining higher-level education and productivity in the nation. Empowerment aims to help individuals to initiate take control of and lead development. RC plays a vital role in this regard.

Causes OF Reading comprehension Failures

Despite decades of teaching and learning English language, to ensure all students become successful, effective readers, the rate of reading failure in Nigeria especially among secondary school students remains high.
The various causes of RC include the following though not limited to them:

Decoding Skills: Students with decoding weaknesses struggle to read and may perform poorly because they cannot read the words. Reading comprehension failure is mostly caused by failure to acquire phonological awareness and skills in alphabetic coding early by the student. Egbe and Ayeni-Daniyan (2016) posits that decoding is important but it is only the beginning of the processing of comprehending. So deliberate, thoughtful cognition is essential since reading is essentially thinking. Anderson (2011) posits that children's early attainment of decoding

skill is a reliable predictor of later reading achievement. Comprehension can only be meaningful to students who can recognize most words fairly rapidly and accurately in the text meant for their class level. This increases their comprehension of the text. Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016) counsels that the knowledge of sounds and letters and how they can be combine to produce words are vital in the improvement of reading comprehension otherwise reading comprehension failure may result.

Poor Vocabulary Knowledge: This can also be seen as students operating with limited vocabulary. Vocabulary plays a vital role in RC and in students overall academic success. Vocabulary knowledge had to do with the knowledge of word meanings. Being able to pronounce a word correctly does not mean or guarantee that one understands its meaning. One of the major reading difficulties students encounter which result to total reading failure is the impact of increasingly unfamiliar vocabulary found in texts as they progress in their reading. If students come across many unfamiliar vocabularies in a given text, it slows down the reading speed and affects meaning constructed from the text. This means that the readability level of the text is increased which is one of the significant causes of students' reading comprehension failures. Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016) maintains that a reader must be able to distinguish the meaning of most words encountered for comprehension to take place. Thi, according to him, is based on the fact that some texts contain highly technical and multisyllabic words that students usually find difficult to decode. Agwu (2011) posits that successful readers can easily read meaning from texts because they have a greater existing vocabulary, then more experience using context clues and greater background knowledge. Deficiency in high vocabulary knowledge is sure road to reading failure in students.

Poor working memory: Some students are faced with biologically risk factors. Some scholars point out that neuro-imaging of children showed that children with reading comprehension difficulties showed specific abnormalities in regions typically associated with memory. They further explained that short-term memory holds information in the mind for only a few seconds while it is being processed. Long term memory is where such processed information is permanently stored. Working memory is an intermediary and active memory system in the information processing area of the brain which people use everyday. So sentence comprehension depends heavily upon adequate working memory. It is required to comprehend sentences that are complex in structure and even where preservation of word order is vital to correctly understand many complex sentences. Sentences are held in working memory and are integrated with one another that is, as each sentence is read, understood, associated and integrated with the previous one and so on. By the end of reading a given text, both the details and main ideas are retained in working memory, otherwise the reader may have retained isolated facts without knowing the sequence of events leading to RCF.

Parental failures: Students also experience reading comprehension failures as a result of insufficient parental guidance and supervision. Many parents claim to be busy and as such they do not show enough interest in the education of their wards and children. The home environment also contributes to reading comprehension failures of secondary schools students. The parents should play a vital role in reading ability of their children and where this

is lacking or poorly done reading failure results. Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016) explicates that the socio-cultural practice of the child's learning environmental greatly influences the meaning a learner constructs.

Lack of adequate instruction: Many educators and other stakeholders in education industry agree that one serious problem facing secondary education borders on reading comprehension failures. Fatimayin (2012) points out that reading failure can also be experienced by capable students who fail to advance in reading particularly if they receive poor quality instruction from their teachers. Poor methodology in classroom activities is one of the major causes of students' reading failure. Many teaches simply do not know how to teach reading. However, this may not entirely be the teachers' fault. Most teacher training programme is inadequate because most teacher-training institutions are not adequately equipped and oriented to prepare teachers meaningfully for reading instruction at secondary level of education. Ekanem, Udosen and Jude (2019) remark that the tragedy that faces the teaching of reading in Nigeria today is that secondary school teachers are not instructed on how to intervene appropriately or adequately when they encounter non-readers in their classrooms. As noted by Onukogu (2013), that reading is highly neglected. Good teaching and other classroom reading programmes are very important because it is always the teacher's responsibility to plan, prepare, provide and teach reading comprehension program that will enable students to become skillful and effective readers. As already stated the ultimate purpose of any reading effort is to comprehend the message of the text being read. Students cannot enjoy reading if they do not comprehend any given text which also means that they cannot evaluate, react or learn from the reading. Students need to be helped and supported to become effective readers who understand what they read by teaching them effective comprehension strategies and effective ways to make sense of what they read. Other causes may include the following; weak oral language and background knowledge, poor language processing abilities which can be in form of semantic processing, inference, text structure and grammar and lack early exposure to language and other literacy activities.

Some Symptoms of English Reading Comprehension Failures

It is assumed that when a student reads well, comprehension is sure. But this may not always be true. Sometimes students may not understand most of what they are reading. When this is the case, they exhibit some or all of the following symptoms:

- They have trouble recalling or summarizing or even answering questions about what they have read.
- They struggle to follow the logical sequence of events or a story.
- There is difficulty distinguishing significant information from minor details thereby they are unable to connect ideas in a passage.
- They struggle to make inferences, which involve using what one knows to make a guess about what one do not know or reading in between the lines.
- They struggle to link prior knowledge to new information from the passage to make meaning.
- They do not know the meaning of individual words.
- They lose interest and give up reading.

Students with these symptoms must definitely have problems with RC which disrupts their

learning process and in turn affect their progress in school and in the future.

Curbing Reading comprehension Failures

Teachers, educators and researchers are of the opinion that reading is one of the most important skills for educational and professional success and development. Olaofe (2013) explains that reading is the most important activity in any language class. In Oyetunde (2009) view, those who read more have larger vocabularies and write better. Considering the importance of reading comprehension in day to day lives of individuals and students in particular serious efforts should be geared towards curbing its failure among secondary school students. With so many things to read and for sustainable national development to be a reality the need of curbing, this challenging situation becomes more urgent. Students take control of their reading when they are purposeful, thoughtful and reflective in their reading. For curbing RCF among secondary school students the following issues should be done:

Good Instruction

Teachers should teach students to be active participants when reading. Teachers at the secondary school level must be involved in planning and executing programmes that should help curb RCF. Reading should not be left to English language, teachers alone, after all most subjects are taught with English language and their text books written in English Language, so every teacher should get involved. To this end, reading should be emphasized in their class-room instruction in their various subject areas. There must be deliberate teaching of reading. Ur. (2012) argues that all subjects require reading comprehension. Eze (2018) argued that comprehension will improve when teachers carry out appropriate instructions in the area of reading strategies. Therefore students should be properly guided to comprehend a text by teaching them effective comprehension strategies. When teachers adopt adequate pedagogic strategies to aid students to understand the text they read, RCF will be history.

To attain good instruction, teachers should choose texts that are easily comprehensible to students – texts must be at the language level of students. The texts chosen must be of interest to the students that is to say that those texts must capture their world view. The story in the text should be familiar to students-what they can easily relate to. Again teachers should encourage students to read using topic interests so that they get the key information in a text in addition to teaching them on predicting ideas in a text. Teachers must teach comprehension skills instead of decoding skills. Teachers should use strategies that are current and proven such as Directed Reading and Thinking Approach (DRTA) and Thematic Approach in teaching reading. DRTA allow learners to predict meaning as they are reading. In DRTA, teachers do not frown at errors but see them as scaffolds which learners can use to correct and modify their learning activities. On the other hand, thematic approach uses themes drawn from the text to connect other subjects across the school curriculum. It projects a holistic use of language as well as enables the learners see reading as relevant and vital to high achievement in the content area. If teachers incorporate the following factors into their classroom practices, students will become successful, effective readers.

Parental Involvement

Parents not just teachers should also help the students see reading as lifelong enablement. Parents should try to provide them with reading

empowerment that will make them enjoy their various school subjects. Students should be encouraged and made to understand by their parents that their future depends to a great extent on their ability to continue to educate themselves through reading both extensively and intensively. This type of reading involves personal choice and through this they gradually build interest which empowers them to guard against reading comprehension failures.

Again, there is need for parents and other significant adult who can read to help students outside school hours. The parents can help by launching a family reading programme. Parents should ensure that the right books are provided and create an enabling environment to help their children to read. As Fatimayin (2012) avers, children who learn to read before coming to school and one who learn to read successfully in school come from homes where there are enough reading materials and they are often read to.

Provision of standard library/reading rooms

Students do not learn to read by chance, they have to be taught how to read and read to learn. It is in line with this that reading as a subject should be taught, students' learning environment enriched with relevant print materials that would encourage extensive and intensive reading. Students learn to read by being exposed to meaningful literacy activities consistently and regularly. Thus helping them form positive attitude and love reading. The logic is that sustainable national development has a direct link with reading comprehension practices of secondary school students. The school libraries/reading rooms should have relevant and current books of interest to the students.

It is a fact that of all the competencies recognized to contribute to lifelong learning and sustainable development, none is quiet as vital and central as the ability to read printed text well. Medadi (2014) is of the opinion that reading has been recognized to greatly contribute to lifelong learning and sustainable development. Again the ability to read is a determiner of students' success or failure. Therefore students must learn to read well and make it a habit in order to perform well in all subjects and even outside their academics. A good reader has opportunity for greater achievement.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper discussed the issue of curbing reading comprehension failures among secondary school students bringing out some reasons why the failures occur. The paper also identified some symptoms of reading comprehension failures and explored some authoritative ways of how students can overcome and grow into successful effective and independent readers who comprehend what they read especially in this COVID-19 era. This is because after the lockdown, because of the pandemic students have a lot to read, so that if the basic reading comprehension strategies are not taught and learnt reading comprehension failure would result.

Improving reading skill of students is a step in the right direction especially in a globalised world bombarded with different technological gadgets and knowledge explosion. When all recommended is done reading comprehension failures will be greatly curbed among secondary school students in Nigeria and the hope of sustainable development will be realised. The goal of education is to ensure that all children in Nigeria can read, therefore preventive efforts must be targeted especially for children who need them most. This should be done as early as possible at the basic level

of education before children get up to secondary school to experience reading comprehension failures. To this end the following recommendations are made:

- The government should provide schools with adequate modern facilities that can aid teaching and learning even when there is no pandemic like COVID-19.
- Teachers should be trained and retrained as regards e-learning classroom culture that will support face to face contact especially in this COVID-19 era.
- Reading should be introduced as a core subject at basic level to be handled by specialists in reading not necessarily by English language teachers.
- Children at basic level should be taught using phonics and they should be given ample opportunities to read and write.
- Activities that support and build up comprehension should occupy classroom practices. This will make it possible for children to catch reading comprehension and not carry it over to secondary school or even tertiary institution.
- Government at various levels, parents and the community should provide and stock secondary schools libraries with the needed books, magazines, newspapers and so on.

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