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ENGLISH TEXTBOOK'S READABILITY AND JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract
This study investigated the English textbook readability and secondary school students' performance in reading comprehension in Ondo state, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research. The population consisted of all the public secondary schools in the State. The sample size was 680 JSS 3 students randomly selected from 24 public secondary schools, and Macmillan Brilliant English Student's textbook (Book 3).The Fry Readability Graph was used to determine the readability level of the comprehension passages used while Cloze Tests on 3 reading comprehension passages were used for data collection. The data was collected from the book through the application of the Fry Formula ratings converted into readability/grade level and students' performance in Cloze Tests. A major finding shows that the prescribed English textbook matches the students' level, yet the majority of them read at frustration level. Findings on the rural/urban performance in Cloze Tests show that students in urban schools outperformed their counterparts in the rural areas (urban schools mean value = 1.72 (SD=0.78) while rural schools mean value=1.41(SD=0.60).In other words, school location had significant influence on students' performance in Cloze Tests.Therefore, the study recommended among others, that teachers should be involved in the selection process of book prescription for learners. Also, all educators should make text readability a foremost criterion for book selection. Last but not the least, the Ministry of Education in Ondo State should partner with textbook writers and book publishers and make text readability cardinal point of their partnership.

***Keywords**: Fry Readability, Cloze Tests, Readability Graph, English Textbooks, Junior Secondary School.*

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Ability to comprehend is crucial to learners, especially at the Junior Secondary School level of education as it provides the foundation for further learning upon their transition to the secondary school level where greater demands will be made on their reading ability. It is believed that their

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inability to comprehend adequately could spell doom to their progress to the next level and indeed their general academic pursuits. This could invariably lead to the development of a negative attitude to reading engagement (Tunde-Awe, 2014) and subsequent dropping out of school.While emphasizing the interrelationship of reading and success in school, Onukaogu (2002:3) maintains that:

> *"In the modern school, efficient reading is the most important avenue to effective learning. Reading is so interrelated with the total educational process that educational success requires successful reading. Experience has taught us that those who fail in school usually have failed first in reading. Giordano Bruno pointed out that, 'if the first button of a man's coat is wrongly buttoned, all the rest are certain to be crooked. Reading is the first button in the garment of education."*

The opinion expressed above lends further credence to the primacy of reading skill and its importance in the school curriculum.

However, as crucial and as indispensable as the reading skill is for learning, many learners at the basic education level and secondary school levels have limited reading abilities. Research has proved that this problem is still a global challenge despite the various interventions put in place by some developed nations of the world like the UK and the USA (National Reading Technical Assistance Centre (NRTAC), 2010).The concern is that if this is the scenario in the USA, a developed nation that has put in place many intervention programmes to promote reading, then, the situation is expected to be more worrisome in developing nations like Nigeria where poverty, insurgency, and insecurity are some of the numerous challenges that have continued to gulp more of the national budget than the education industry. Isiugo-Abanihe (2002) has long reported an international study on reading achievement which shows that Nigerian children of ages 15 and below were rated the third poorest readers of 31 countries of the world. This implies that the reading achievement of Nigerian children is abysmally low.

The concern for students' continuous failure rate therefore necessitates the need to understand the causative factors. Some of these factors range from pedagogical to those related to the learners' literacy background in the second language being learnt. However, we assume that the problems associated with the readability of the prescribed English textbooks in Nigerian schools could be a major cause.

Clearly, comprehending a text is highly dependent upon its readability, a factor which many book writers and curriculum planners seem to have unfortunately ignored (Shoki, 2007; Ihebuzor & Ihebuzor, 2015). Therefore, this study examined if the language of the prescribed textbooks for Junior Secondary School learners matches their reading ability.

1.1. Problem Statement

The English language which is the language of instructional delivery and which is used for writing the prescribed texts in a second language context is not the learners' mother tongue. This and the factors related to the learners' poor linguistic proficiency often constitute problems to learners' comprehension of text in ESL situation. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to evaluate

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the readability of the textbook and as well analyse or evaluate learners' performance in the text comprehension before recommendation for use. The concern is that most teachers of English hardly do this and so, most learners continue to demonstrate low achievement in their quest to learn English. Therefore, this study investigated the readability of the prescribed English textbook for learners at the JSS 3 level of education in the secondary schools in Ondo State, South West, Nigeria. Learners' performance in reading comprehension using cloze tests was also examined. This is with a view to making useful suggestions on the basis of the findings. As far as the researchers are aware, no previous studies have fully addressed the factor of English textbook readability in all the JSS 3 schools in the state. Hence, this study is set to fill part of the research gap.

1.2. Significance of the Study

It is believed that the outcome of this study will be significant to stakeholders in the education industry. First teachers would be exposed to some strategies that enhance reading instruction, particularly the use of cloze procedure as one of the strategies for teaching reading and a valid way of determining text readability.It will sensitise them on the need to determine the readability level of the prescribed English textbooks before accepting them for use.In doing that, they will be able to know their students' reading interests, attitude, problems, and skills and thereby, aid their learners' reading development. Also, parents will have an insight into their children's reading problems and thereby partner with teachers in their quest for text readability and ultimately, learners' better performance. Curriculum planners and the Ministry of Education will be guided in the recommendation and selection of appropriate English language textbooks for the junior secondary school and the senior levels and indeed at all levels of education, placing the interest of the end users far above their financial gains. Last but not the least, the government would be made to see the need for a renewed commitment on the provision of human and material resources that will motivate teachers to delight in working in rural areas and thus improve learning outcomes of learners in the rural areas.

1.3. Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the readability level of the prescribed English textbook when measured using the Fry Readability Formula?
2. What is the level of junior secondary school students' performance in reading comprehension using cloze tests?
3. What is the mean difference between the performance of students in the rural and urban schools in cloze tests?

1.4. Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the performance of students in rural and urban schools in cloze tests.

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2.0. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Textbooks and Instructional Delivery

The indispensability of textbooks as instructional delivery tools is never in doubt. Ihebuzor & Ihebuzor (2015) maintain that book types and instructional materials that learners are exposed to are among the factors that contribute to effective teaching and learning and that any meaningful and feasible progress in education industry is hinged largely on the production of quality textbooks and instructional media. As a result of this, Shoki (2007:4) rightly submits that the 'art and science of book selection calls for intricacies beyond mere policy statement and other flimsy considerations'. Also, Kasule (2011) cautions that it is erroneous for teachers to have a common assumption that a textbook recommended by the Ministry of Education automatically matches the ability of the learners in the class and therefore learners need not be guided. In other words, textbooks will not always suit learners alike and teachers must take responsibility of ensuring that no learner is disadvantaged.

As revealed by Esimaje, Nnamani & Amanze (2012),issues relating to text readability and selection are entrenched in the constitution of the different states in the US but lamentably, it is not so in Nigeria as readability is not given pivotal position in book selection. Also, Kasule (2011) maintains that textbooks are germane to good instructional delivery because they may be the sole teaching resource that teachers rely on for explanation of most concepts. He further adds that criteria such as learners' age, educational and cultural background, and language proficiency must be considered by textbook writers.

Clearly, these submissions hinge on the need to ensure that before textbooks are selected, subject teachers in particular need to ensure that the language matches learners' reading ability. As Freahat (2014) maintains, it is crucial to do both an assessment of the of the difficulty level of a recommended text and the readers' reading abilities level so that the right book is matched to the right reader.When this is downplayed, learners' frustration at most reading engagements persists and this largely accounts for their continuous failure.

2.2. The Concept of Readability and Factors that Affect Text Readability

Undoubtedly, book selection is intricately interwoven with readability. Readability is simply defined as what makes some texts easier to read than others. Harris & Hodges cited in Fry (2002:286) defines readability more comprehensively as 'the ease of comprehension because of style of writing'. The tool used to check for text readability score is called readability formulas. As Fry opines, most traditional readability formulas are objective because they use online computers which provide fairly accurate comparisons of books and student's ability in reading task. The simple procedure is to type the required number of words from a passage and paste online and in minutes the computer provides the readability formula score.

Most traditional readability formulas use criteria which have over the years been proved to be accurate (Fry, 2002). These are the syntactic difficulty (complexity of the grammar) which is usually measured by sentence length, and semantic difficulty (word meaning) measured by word length, number of syllables in a word, number of letters per word, and frequency count of unfamiliar words. In addition to the criteria of content and structure, Fry (2002) and Dale & Chall cited in Dubay (2004) agree that the success of a reader with a given text is also dependent on factors such

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as the text layout and design (format), learners' prior knowledge, interest and motivation, and optimal reading speed, some of which cannot be measured by readability formulas. Thus, for a reader to make a meaning out of a given text, all these factors are germane.Indeed it is believed that reluctant readers hardly persist in reading a difficult text especially literature texts (Esimaje, et al, 2012).

From the diverse types of readability formulae, this study uses the Fry Readability Formula and the Cloze Procedure to determine the readability of the textbook prescribed for the target learners—Junior Secondary School 3 (JSS 3) and then find out their performance in reading comprehension.

2.3. The Fry Readability Graph

The Fry readability graph is believed to be one of the most popularly used readability formulas by teachers because of its ease of use (Young, 2010). It can be used to determine readability of the prescribed texts for primary and high school levels. According to Fry (2002:288), the directions in using Fry Graph Formula are as follows:

1. Randomly select 3 one hundred word passages from a book (if the text is long).
2. Count the number of sentences in per 100 words
3. Count the number of syllables per 100 words
4. Enter the graph with average sentence length and number of syllables
5 Plot dot where the two lines intersect. Area where dot is plotted signifies the approximate grade level of the material.

2.4. Cloze Procedure

Readability formulas are perceived to have their limitations. For instance, researchers such as Young (2010) alleged that the formulas focus essentially on surface linguistic features of texts rather than variables related to the cognitive processes that learners bring to text comprehension. This criticism gave rise to the use of Cloze Procedure which was developed by Taylor in 1953 (cited in Dubay, 2004).It is believed that readability formulas (which could be used to measure text-based and author-based factors) should be combined with tests (to measure reader-based factors) so as to get more reliable assessment of the readability of a given text (Kasule, 2011).

The use of Cloze Test (CT) for measuring comprehension has been on for quite some decades (Helfeld & Henk, 2008). Indeed for over the past four or more decades, examining bodies like the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC)(of which Nigeria is a member), has been using the cloze procedure to measure reading comprehension ability of senior secondary school learners sitting for their external examinations. As Rye (2010) observes, CTs have a high degree of overlap with text comprehension and comprehension is germane to learners' ability to answer CTs. Essentially CTs are believed to be a reliable means of enabling ESL teachers to determine learners' reading ability and general language proficiency.

The traditional guideline in setting Cloze Tests is the systematic deletion of every-nth word (words ranging between 5 and 10). But the first and the last sentence of the passage are left intact. A learner' comprehension is assessed by his ability to supply the exact words deleted from the passage. The lower the scores, the more difficult the text is for the learner. In determining the comprehension levels of learners, their cloze scores are classified into 3 categories:

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1. 50- 60% = Independent level of reading—the learner can read and comprehend easily without assistance;
2. 35-50% = reading at the instructional level h—the learner can read and comprehend with teacher's guidance;
3. 0% -35% = the learner reads the passage at frustration level–h/she fails to progress satisfactorily and their comprehension is faulty.

To ensure the reliability and the validity of the Cloze Tests (CTs), Brown (2013) suggests that the passages to be used for the tests should be the ones that learners have not read. Other variables that influence its reliability include the length of the test (number of deletions), difficulty levels of the passage, and students' proficiency level. It was also suggested that the use of shorter cloze test of 20-25 items which will not lead to fatigue and thus discourage the students.

2.5. Related Empirical Studies

Shoki's (2007) study examined if readability was considered a criterion for book selection practices in some academic libraries in Nigeria. His major finding shows that only a negligible percentage of his respondents (10%) considered readability as a criterion for book selection in South-South Nigeria. His finding then seems to imply that the concept of readability is still a new phenomenon in Nigeria education system.

Eze's (2015) study examined the readability of the five Igbo language textbooks used in Nigerian secondary schools with the aim of determining the causes of students' recurrent mass failure in the subject in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). One of the findings revealed that the cloze procedure used for data collection was more superior to the conventional instructional methods in enhancing Igbo language comprehension. Therefore, she recommended that the cloze procedure be adopted in teaching Igbo language comprehension at the secondary school level so as to reduce failure rate in the subject.

The study of Esimaje, Nnamani, & Amanze (2012) focused on the readability of four English texts recommended for senior secondary and new entrants into the university in South-Eastern Nigeria, using two types of readability formulas. Results showed that the recommended texts were readable yet the students' performance in both internal and external examinations was low. Thus, the researchers concluded that the major cause could be traceable to learners' failure to read the prescribed primary texts (which are not usually made available by government or learners' parents) and over reliance on the secondary texts which provide mere overview of primary texts, and general poor reading habits.

Perekeme & Agbor (2012) examined the readability of language textbooks prescribed for secondary school students and their performance in reading comprehension in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. One of the findings was that the prescribed text was readable for the learners' level yet the majority of the respondents read at frustration level. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the students' poor performance in JSS Certificate English examinations is traceable to the difficulty of the English textbook.

Khoshsima & Pourjam (2014) investigated intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension when tested with cloze-test and open-ended questions with a view to determining

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if the two types of tests would have significant effect on their reading comprehension. Subjects were randomly divided into the control and experimental group, with each exposed to different treatments. A major finding revealed that the students in the experimental group performed better than the students in the control group in their reading comprehension ability. Thus, the researchers suggest that cloze tests and open-ended questions enhanced students' reading comprehension.

Furthermore, students' achievement in reading and ultimately their general academic achievement are also influenced by some variables related to school location. It is usually assumed that urban centres are better than rural areas in terms of infrastructural facilities like hospitals, electricity supply, good road networks, and pipe-borne water. The Central Place Theory (CPT) developed by Christaller in 1933/1966 (cited in Boussauw, Meeteren & Witlox, 2012) postulates that these facilities and lots more influence the travel behaviour of workers. And most workers prefer to stay and work in urban centres or places where all these are available and are within walking or short trip distance.

Many rural-based schools in Nigeria lack adequate human and material resources which could facilitate teaching/learning processes and indeed the general working condition is deplorable (Uzobo, Jack & Ogbanja, 2014). Therefore, most teachers working in rural areas demonstrate low commitment to work. It is not surprising that truancy, absenteeism, and generally poor school attendance behaviour are common features of students in the rural areas. Clearly, the repercussions on learners' achievement in English and other subjects could be grave.

Akinwumi's (2017) study on the effects of gender and school location on Ekiti State secondary schools students' achievement in reading comprehension reveals that students from the urban schools had higher achievement in inferring word meanings than their counterparts from rural schools. Also, Adebanjo & Ogundepo (2016) revealed that students in urban schools demonstrated higher competence in reading of prose passage than their counterparts in rural areas.

From the review of literature it is evident that the selection of appropriate text engenders comprehension and general success in ESL pedagogy and teachers' role is significant.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. The descriptive research survey attempts to establish the range and distribution of some social characteristics and to discover how these characteristics may be related to certain behaviour patterns or attitudes. The design is appropriate for this study because the study also seek to determine the effect of English textbook readability on students' performance in reading comprehension. The population consisted of: a). all the English textbooks recommended for use in the public secondary schools by Ondo State Ministry of Education; b). all the reading comprehension passages contained in the recommended textbooks and which have been schemed on a termly basis in the record of work; and c). all the public secondary schools in Ondo state which as at July, 2019 stood at 304.

The multistage sampling technique was used for selecting the sample for the study. From the 3 Senatorial Districts (SDs) in the state (Ondo North, South, and Central) made up of 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs), 6 LGAs were randomly selected (2 LGAs per SDs). From each of the 6 LGAs, 2 secondary schools were purposively selected, thus giving us a total of 24 secondary

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schools. From these schools, intact classes of JSS 3 students responded to the CTs and thereafter, 680 respondents which constitute the sample size were randomly selected.

Two instruments were used for data collection: the English textbook, the text-based readability formula by Fry (with a reading level expanded to Grade level 17); and 3 Cloze Tests for measuring comprehension. The first was used to determine the readability level of Macmillan Brilliant English for Junior Secondary Schools Students' Book 3 (which was purposively selected because it is the only textbook in use in all the secondary schools in the state). Three (3) comprehension passages which are in prose form and are of interest to learners, were selected from the textbook—one passage per term—(from the beginning, middle and the end of the text), each with 200 words. The 3 passages were retyped and each was cut and pasted online at the website for Fry graph formula: https://readabilityformulas.com/freetests/fry-graph.php. The readability scores (i.e. text difficulty levels), the number of years of education required for learners to easily comprehend the passage, and the number of sentences assumed to be complex were processed by the software. In line with Fry's formula, the calculations from the 3 passages are presented under the findings.

The second instruments were 3 CTs used in measuring learners' comprehension. The researcher designed each of them from each of the 3 selected comprehension passages. Each of the three passages had 200 words and 20 deletions were made from the first passage while 50 deletions were made from both the second and third passages, thus making a total of 70 items. This is in line with the suggestions of Brown (2013) that the optimum length of cloze tests should not be more than of 20-25 items for intermediate level. This is so that the testees will not be fatigued and be discouraged to complete the test, and to also ensure the test reliability.

To ensure the validity of the tests, the passages selected have not been taught: students' answers were based on a first reading engagement with the materials. The study was carried out at the beginning of the first term of a new academic session when the JSS3 students just resumed school.

The reliability of the CTs was established using test-retest method and the reliability coefficient was 0.83, 0.79 and 0.81 for each of the 3 CTs respectively. The test retest procedure also enabled us determine the time required to complete the test: one and a half hours was given to complete the test. The Pre-Service teachers of English who were posted to the secondary schools in the 3 SDs of the state for the mandatory Teaching Practice exercise served as research assistants. Also, the researcher's postgraduate students who are permanent teachers of English in some of the sampled schools assisted with data collection. This largely allayed test anxiety among the students. The Cloze (CP) Procedure was developed by Taylor in 1953 (cited in Dubay, 2004) and it involves the deletion of every 5th word from reading passage. It involves the following procedure:

1. Select a set of materials used in your classroom;
2. Delete every 5th word until you have about 50 (or less) deletions. Replace the deleted words with blanks of uniform length. No word should be deleted in the first sentence and last sentences of the text;
3. Ask the students to fill each blank with the exact word that has been deleted;
4. Count the number of correct responses. Do not count spelling mistakes as wrong answers.

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Data Analysis Procedure

The Fry Graph Formula and Cloze Procedure were used to analyse the data collected from the students' text. First the Fry Formula ratings were converted into readability/grade level (with online software) while the respondents' performance in the CTs was classified into the 3 readability levels.

4.1. RESULTS

The following are the findings from the study:

Research Question 1: What is the readability level of the prescribed English textbook using the Fry Readability Formula?

Table 1: Fry Readability Formula Showing the Readability Level of the English Text

Reading Passage	No. of Syllables	No. of Sentences
1. 100 words	147	6
2. 100 words	5	179
3.100 words	137	11

Total No of Syllables= 463÷ 3=154. Total No of Sentences=22÷3=7.3
Grade Level: 8 and 9 (equivalent to JSS 3)
Readers' Age: 12-14 years old
Reading Level: Standard/Average

Table 1 shows the results of the readability level of the English textbook when Fry Readability Formula was applied. Each of the 3 comprehension passages that were purposively selected from the text was subjected to Fry readability formula to determine the number of syllables and sentences in each of them. The total number of syllables for the 3 passages was 463 (463÷3=154) while the total number of sentences was 22 (22÷3=7.3). Having done that, we were able to determine the learners' grade level, and their age. It is instructive however, to note that the second comprehension passage was found to be difficult for the students' level as the online results show that the comprehension text exceeded the number of syllables. Thus, the Fry Graph did not plot the X-axis on the graph, meaning learner's age was not displayed. The summation on the table shows that Macmillan Brilliant English for Junior Secondary School Students' Book 3 (Upper Basic 9), written by Osisanwo et al. falls within Grade 8 and 9 (equivalent to JSS 3). The Fry Graph for each of the comprehension passages are attached as appendices for further clarifications.

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Research Question 2: What is the Level of Students' Performance in Cloze Tests?

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Summary showing Students' Performance in Cloze Test

Students' Performance in Cloze Test			Senatorial District			
Reading Level (Percentage Scores)	**Percentage Category**		**Ondo North**	**Ondo Central**	**Ondo South**	**Total**
Frustration (0 - 43%)	Below Average	F	105	150	103	358
		%	50.2	50.7	58.9	52.6
Instructional (44 - 56%)	Average	F	66	93	51	210
		%	31.6	31.4	29.1	30.9
Independent (57 - 100%)	Above Average	F	38	53	21	112
		%	18.2	17.9	12.0	16.5
Total		F	209	296	175	680
		%	30.7	43.5	25.7	100.0

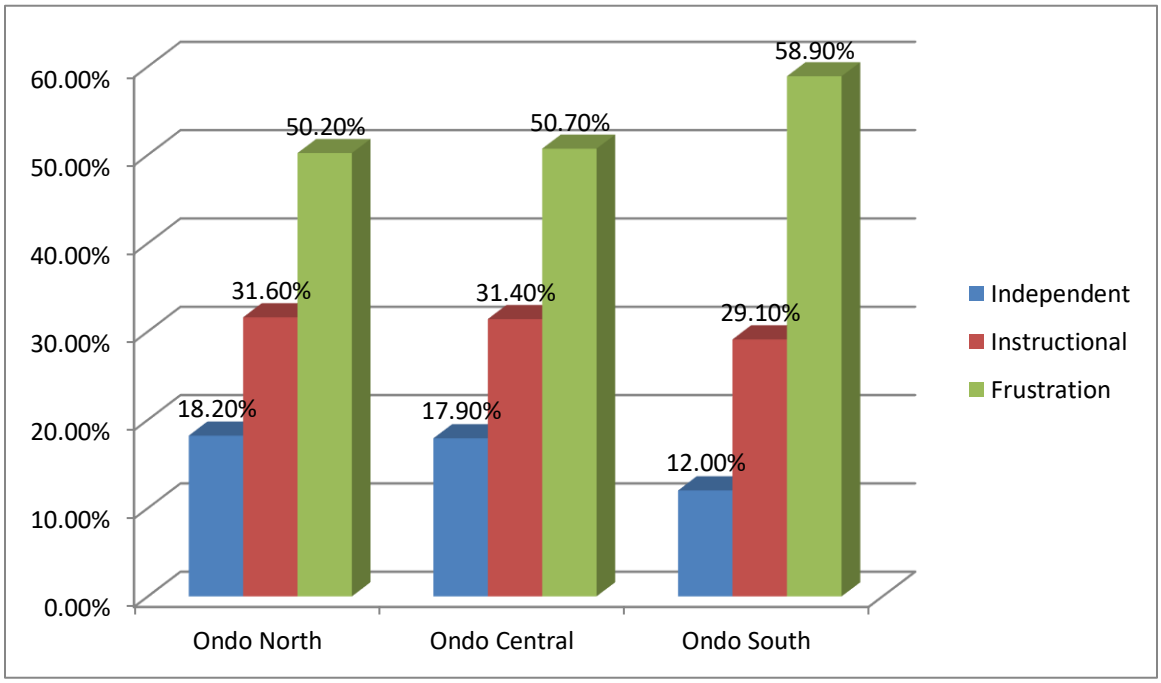

Figure 1: Bar Chart showing Students' Performance in Cloze Tests

The results in Table 2 revealed that majority of the sampled students performed below average in the CTs. In Ondo North Senatorial District (hereafter SD), 50.2% of the respondents performed below average, 31.6% were of average performance, while 18.2% were above average in performance. In Ondo Central SD, 50.7% performed below average, 31.4% were of average performance, while 17.9% were above average. In a similar but worst situation, 58.9% of those

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sampled from Ondo South SD were below average, 29.1% were of average performance, while 12% were above average.

In summary, 52.6% of the respondents read at Frustration Level, 30.9% read at Instructional Level, while just 16.5% read at Independent Level. These results imply that the students' performance in CTs in the three senatorial districts was very poor.

Research Question 3: What is the Mean Difference between the Performance of Students in the Rural and Urban Schools in Cloze Tests?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing the Difference in Rural and Urban Schools Students' Performance in Cloze Tests.

Senatorial District	Location	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Ondo North	Rural	1.45	.597	58
	Urban	1.77	.804	151
	Total	1.68	.764	209
Ondo Central	Rural	1.40	.606	82
	Urban	1.78	.791	214
	Total	1.67	.762	296
Ondo South	Rural	1.35	.580	40
	Urban	1.59	.727	135
	Total	1.53	.701	175
Total	Rural	1.41	.595	180
	Urban	1.72	.781	500
	Total	1.64	.749	680

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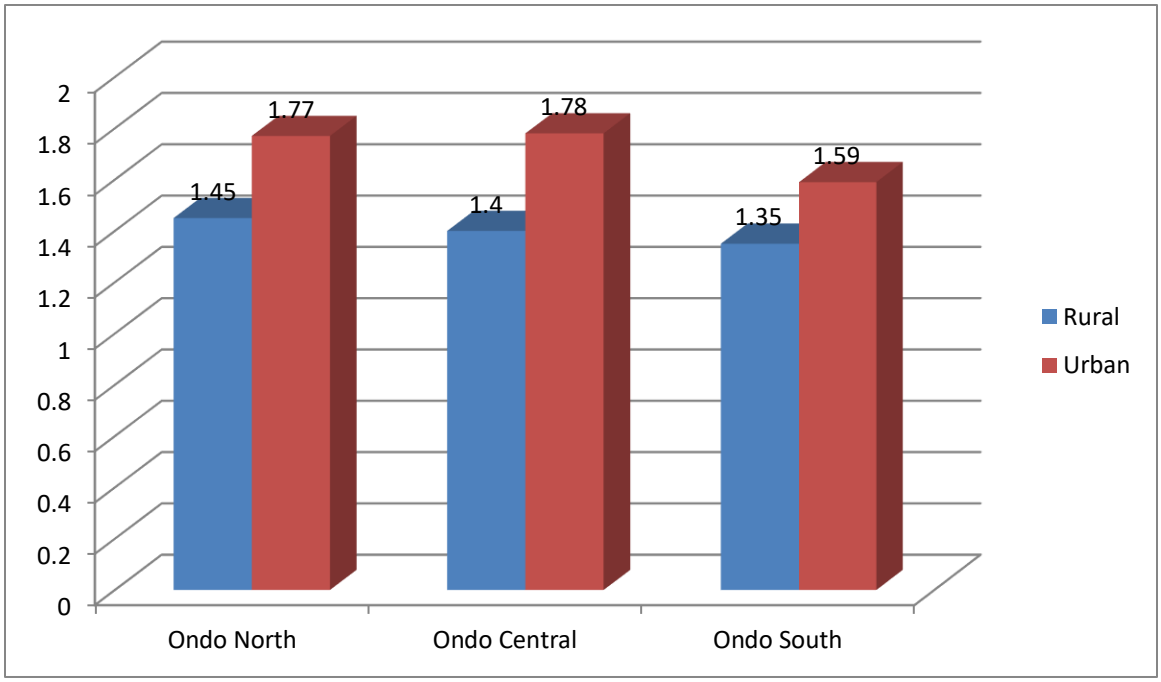

Figure 2: Bar Chart showing the Mean Difference in Rural and Urban Schools Students' Performance in Cloze Tests.

Table 3 shows the differences in the students' performances in CTs based on the SDs in Ondo State. It is revealed that in Ondo North SD, students in the urban areas (M=1.77; SD= 0.80) outperformed those in the rural areas (M=1.45; SD= 0.60). Also, in Ondo Central SD, students in urban areas (M=1.78; SD= 0.79) performed better than those in the rural areas (M=1.40; SD= 0.61). Lastly in Ondo South SD, students in the urban areas (M=1.59; SD= 0.73) also outperformed those in the rural areas in CTs (M=1.35; SD= 0.58).

In summary, results revealed that students from urban areas with a mean value of 1.72 (SD=0.78) performed better in CTs than their counterparts in the rural areas who had a mean value of 1.41 (SD=0.60). This implied that there was a mean difference of 0.31 between the performance of students in urban and rural areas when performances are compared in CTs, with the urban students performing better.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the performance of students in rural and urban schools in Cloze Tests.

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Table 4: Independent t-test showing the difference in rural and urban schools students' performance in Cloze Tests

	Location	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	P
Reading Level Performance	Rural	180	1.41	.595	678	-4.943	< .05
	Urban	500	1.72	.781			

Table 4 shows that location of school had significant influence on students' performance in CTs [t(678)= -4.94, p < .05]. This is such that students in schools located in urban areas (M=1.72; SD= 0.78) performed better than their counterparts in the schools located in rural areas (M=1.41; SD= 0.60) when their performance in CTs is compared. Figure 2 and table 3 above show more comprehensive findings.

4.2. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study provided answers to three research questions while one hypothesis was tested. The result of the first research question shows that the prescribed English textbook falls within the readers' age (12-14 years old) and grade level 8 and 9 (equivalent to JSS 3) as the sentences are of the recommended length and the language is comprehensible enough. This finding agrees with the studies of Perekeme & Agbor (2012) and Esimaje, Nnamani & Amanze, (2012) that the prescribed English textbooks were suitable for learners at the JSS level. This finding is however, contrary to the findings of Gyasi (2019) which revealed that his subjects (diploma students for year one to three) found the recommended English language textbook unreadable because the readability score was above the statistically higher than the recommended readability scores.

The findings for the second research question show that though the prescribed English textbook was suitable for the respondents' age, the majority of the respondents from the three SDs in the state performed woefully in the CTs. The summary shows that52.6% of them read at frustration level, 30.9% read at instructional level, while just 16.5% read at independent level. The implication is that since the student respondents could hardly comprehend the given CTs, they will find the recommended English textbook unreadable. This finding is in consonance with those of Esimaje, Nnamani, & Amanze, (2012) and Perekeme & Agbor (2012) that the recommended English texts for the respondents' level were readable, yet they demonstrated poor performance in text comprehension.

Furthermore, findings on the rural/urban performance in CTs show that students in urban schools outperformed their counterparts in the rural areas.In other words, school location had significant influence on students' performance in CTs. This finding corroborates those of Adebanjo & Ogundepo (2016) and Akinwumi's (2017) that students in urban schools often demonstrate higher competence and achievement in reading than their counterparts in rural areas because of unequal distribution of human and material resources.

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5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions to be drawn from this study is that the prescribed English textbook for the learners at the JSS 3 level in the locale of study is very difficult for their level, at least going by their performance in the CTs which were developed from the purposively selected comprehension passages from their textbook. Thus, one can safely state that the difficulty level of the prescribed text is a major reason for learners' continuous low achievement in English language at the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) which is often used for their placement into the senior secondary school level.

Indeed when each of the comprehension passages was subjected to Fry graph formula for their readability level, the online result for the second comprehension passage titled: Is Sleep Necessary shows that the text exceeded the maximum number of syllables. This means the text is difficult for the students' level. Hence, the Fry Graph was not plotted on the X-axis on the graph which normally shows learners' age level. If more passages from the students' textbook were subjected to readability check, the probability is that more passages may be unreadable for the learners.

It must be stated that most of the English textbooks (including the text examined in this study) prescribed for use in Nigerian primary and secondary schools were written by Nigerian university dons. Clearly these university teachers are not likely to write in dictions that are suitable for the learners' age and experiential background, hence the imminent failure rate as witnessed today in both internal and external examinations.

Consequent upon these findings therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers who are familiar with the learners and can easily determine the suitability and readability of the English textbook should be involved in the selection process of the prescribed book. When this is done, teachers' instructional delivery will yield better achievements from learners.
2. As a matter of urgency, educators should make text readability a foremost criterion for book selection in Nigerian secondary schools and indeed all levels of education.
3. The Ministry of Education in Ondo State should have a joint progressive partnership with textbook writers and book publishers. Text readability should be a major or cardinal point of the partnership. Unreadable books for English and other subject should not be recommended for learners at any level of education.
4. Book publishers should place learners' interest far above their personal financial gains or sales of textbooks. They should not exert any undue pressure on government during textbook selection process.
5. Book review should be done on regular basis so as to constantly meet learners' growing needs at different grade levels.
6. Teachers should adopt some move innovative strategies that will facilitate instructional delivery and thus enhance greater achievements in learning outcomes.
7. Government should make conscious efforts to provide human and material resources for the schools located in rural areas so that teachers will be motivated to work there.

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