

New Dimensions in Educational Development

**A FACULTY OF EDUCATION PUBLICATION
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY**

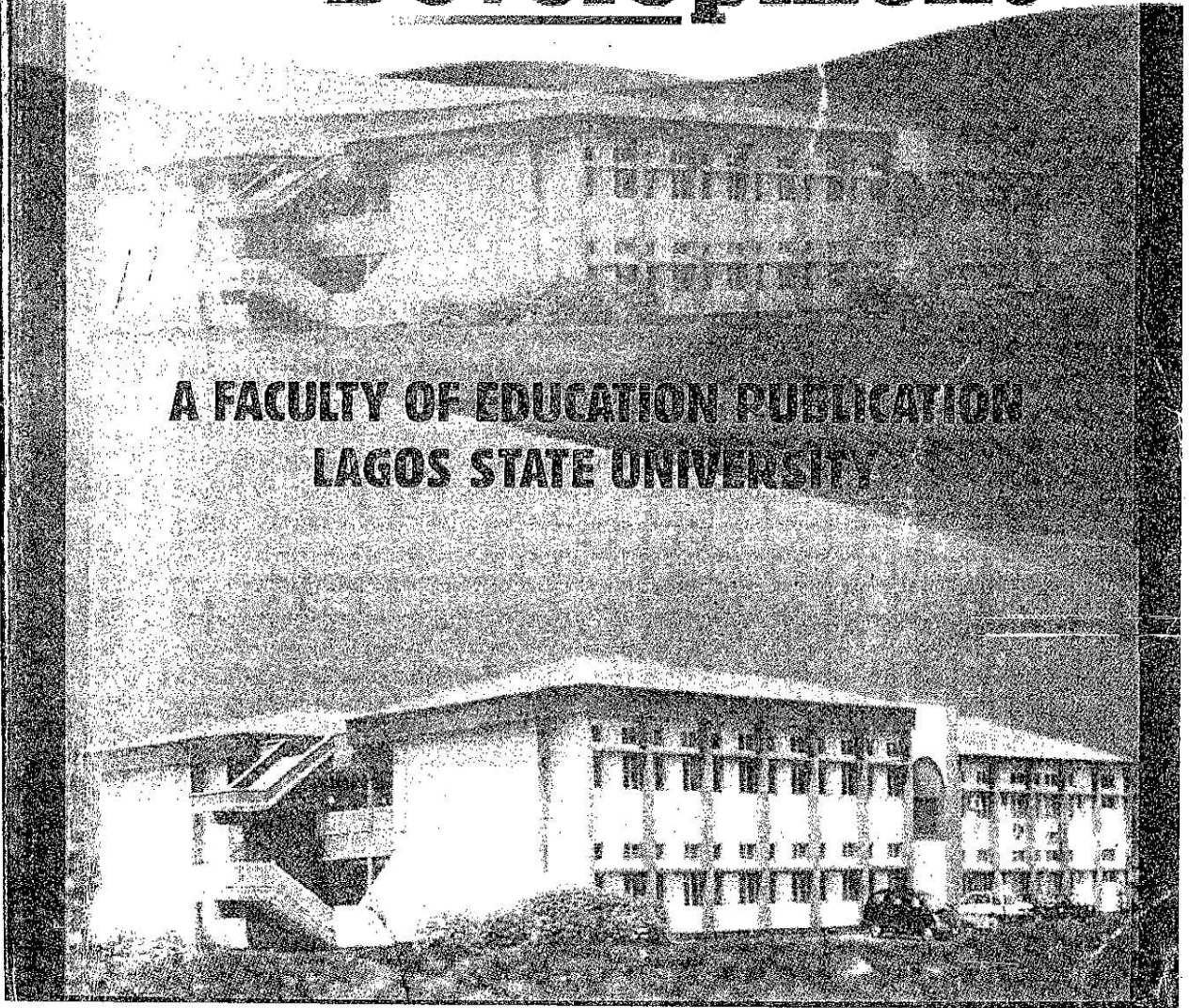


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CONNECTING ADOLESCENT AND READING: INTERESTS AT THE SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL

By

Foluso O. Okebukola (Ph.D)

ABSTRACT

This paper addressed the need to determine the interests and motivation of adolescents regarding reading. Listening to students' voices revealed their self-knowledge, perceptions, interests and motivation regarding reading and becoming active and engaged readers. These provided insights into what teachers could do to help early adolescent development in reading and leaning from text. Fifty S.S 11 students randomly selected from three schools in Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State were involved in the study. Suggestions were advanced for improvement of teaching techniques towards building around the students' interests and motivations such that individual perspectives and insights are shaped by dynamic classroom interactions. In this way, students come to realize the satisfaction and enjoyment associated with being a reader.

INTRODUCTION

The decision to focus on motivation strategies was influenced by this writer's many years experience as a teacher at the junior and senior secondary levels and a later shift to teacher preparation.

This was significantly reinforced by the findings of a research conducted to find out pre-service teachers perception General English Course - a remedial and development English Programme put in place for the remediation and development of language and communication skills (Okebukola 2000). The study revealed that students prefer to read what they like. They indicated that if reading programmes are reflective of their interests, motivation will be improved and reading development enhanced. The question has since then emerged for which I did not have a ready answer - what target interests will best support early adolescents development in reading and in learning from text?.

Reading, no doubt, is at the heart of human and national development. It is a life long pursuit that is essential for the intellectual and social well-being of any modern nation. The least common denominator for the attainment of literacy, numeracy and life skills is the ability to read and comprehend materials that are read. Reading facilitates the teaching and learning processes. It helps in the mastery of relevant subjects taught and studied. Reading is a vital means of acquisition of knowledge, skills and the expression of thought especially in this modern world of science and technology which demands that one should be able to take an intelligent and informed interests in happenings within one's environment and the world at large. It is therefore important to invest efforts at determining the interests and motivations of adolescents towards becoming active and engaged readers.

Literature search suggests a steadily increasing interest in issues related to interests, motivation and attitude (Rivers; 1964; Abe, 1985; Emenyonu, 1987; Atwell, 1987; Caine and Caine, 1991; Matthewson, 1994; Cramer and Castle, 1994) These are interrelated terms we associate with feelings and in schooling with learner's inclinations to learn or in the case of reading with students' inclination to read. All the authors researched agree that lack of motivation or interest on the part of learners constitute a big stumbling block to effective language teaching.

As far back as 1964, Rivers identified three elements - intellectual capacity, a positive attitude toward the language and a strong motivation to learn as pre-requisites for the development of skills in learning a second language.

Caine and Caine (1991) noted that in schooling we have been inclined to treat feelings as if they were irrelevant or worse still malignant and counter productive to the real task at hand which is serious and vigorous scholarship. The words cognitive and affective are used as though they were dichotomous, cognitive has to do with knowing, thinking and learning with becoming educated while feelings are allowed in, only when there is time for fun (read frivolity, usually thought of as extracurricular). The Fun might be anything from reading time to art and music to recess and lunch. Caine and Caine concluded that "we do not simply learn things." What we learn is influenced and organized by emotions, emotions and cognition cannot be separated' (1991, P – 82).

Readers' affect is critical to successful reading, put in another way; affect is critical to the ability to develop meaningful understanding from text. Affect includes feelings about themselves as readers – self-concept as a reader, am I a competent reader? Is this something I can do? As well as their feelings about what they are reading.

Students must also feel connections to what they are reading, not just to the content but to the reading act itself. Atwell (1987) talks about fostering these connections in three ways: by helping students feel ownership for what they are reading, by providing students with time to get involved in a reading by participating with students in conversations about what they are reading. Atwell suggested piquing students interests in reading by allowing students choice of what to read, by providing time when youngsters could get involved in their reading and by creating a community of readers who genuinely and enthusiastically respond to one another's thought and insights

There are many ways for teachers to support their student's affective connections to what they read. Matheson (1994) writes extensively about the critical influence of attitude on students reading and offers 10 implications for instruction. These include teaching the abilities that underlie successful reading, establishing classroom norms and settings that support reading, encouraging students to read materials that they find personally engaging and satisfying and ensuring that independent students reading occurs in texts appropriation to students reading levels.

Cramer and Castle (1994) regarded the love of reading as the central and most important goal of reading instruction. Okebukola (1998) suggested teacher's use of read aloud in content area classrooms.

The psycho-linguistic concept of language as individual behaviour and language skills as the acquisition of habits lends credence to the emphasis placed on the link between motivation and language skills.

This implies that reading, as a language skill is a habit that can be reinforced. It is therefore important for all of us as teachers to get in touch with our students' interests, attitudes and motivations regarding reading so as to gain an understanding of how they acquire the motivation to become active, engaged readers. Of course we need to find answers to the initial question what reading target interests will best support adolescents in the development of their reading and their learning from text? And such question as what exactly would our students say to us? What could we learn from them about how to help them become readers who could not imagine their lives without reading, who when asked if they would be self involved as a reader would answer an enthusiastic "Yes"

The best place to probably start is with student voices that will offer insights about their interests, their confusions, their attitudes and their motivation so that we might better encourage and support a love of all of them. This is the main thrust of this paper

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was aimed at determining students interests which will best support their development in reading and learning from text by the use of structured conversational interview. Information sought include the individual nature of student's reading motivation such as what books and stories are most interesting, favourite authors and where and how children locate reading material that interest them most. Teachers equipped with this information will be able to help students to actively construct meaning, learn about them and others, read strategically and enjoy reading.

SAMPLE

Fifty S.S. II students randomly selected from three schools in Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State were involved in the study. The choice of Badagry local Government was for logistical convenience.

INSTRUMENTATION

A scheduled Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) conversational interview (Gambrel, Pajmer, Codling, Mazzonu, 1996) was used in the study. The interview is made up of

three sections (See Appendix I). The first section probes motivational factors related to the reading of narrative text (3 questions) the second section elicits information about informational reading (3 questions) and the final section focuses on more general factors related to reading motivation (8 questions). The interview is designed to initiate an informal, conversational exchange between the researcher and the student. According to Burgess (1980) conversational interviews are social events that can provide greater depth of understanding more than rigid interview techniques. The primary purpose of the conversational interview is to generate information that will provide authentic insights into students' reading experiences. The instrument is considered relevant in the context because participating in a conversational interview allows children to use their unique ways of describing their reading motivation and experiences and to raise ideas and issues related to personal motivation that may not be reflected in the structured interview items (Denzin 1970).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The conversational interview was designed to elicit information that will help the teacher gain a deeper understanding of a student's reading motivation in an informal conversational manner (See Appendix II). The entire interview took approximately 5-20 minutes with the researcher asking probing questions which students answer on individual basis. Students who were shy or who replied in short and quick answers were encouraged to elaborate upon their responses through non-threatening phrases like "Tell me — and why do you think that —" probing of brief responses in this way revealed important and relevant information. Follow-up questions based on students' comments provided significant information for the teacher's use in planning reading programmes.

Validity checks were carried out using language education experts. Internal consistency the reliability of 0.82 was found for the student's version with a five-day gap between administration on a pilot sample.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of the conversational interview is to gain insights into what motivates the students to engage in reading. Therefore, the interview questions focus on reading that students find most interesting

From the study on story or book preference, it was found that 76.8% of the students preferred reading magazines and comic books. 90% reported they read romance books

because they are funny and easy to understand. 1005 believe that people read what they read for different reasons for example Tolu a sixteen years old noted that her parents read the newspaper for news while she reads poetry for examination purposes although she ordinarily would not opt for it, 96% revealed that they read literature because they are supposed to. For them literature is ok when it is a story like *Things Fall Apart* of The Gods are not to Blame but when it is a poetry it is boring. The interviewer explored a bit further asking "Why is poetry boring?" Many of the students talked about the difficulty of language. One of them would rather have comic instead of poetry. 98% preferred to read for fun rather than the school stuff, which they read only to pass examinations. When asked how school had helped them become good readers, 92% reported that listening to the teacher reading to them has helped them become good readers. That way, they know how to pronounce words correctly.

It was revealed that students find comics and magazines more accessible than their school books. They are also cheaper. Sometimes teachers tell them what books to read but they are always either too expensive or not available, 80% of the students would rather spend their leisure watching movies because they find this more interesting especially when the books are "dry and boring".

The following authors topped the list of students' favourites in this order

1. Sir Arthur Canan Dorle
2. Cyprian Ekwuensi
3. Enid Blyton
4. Nancy Drew Series
5. Chinua Achene
6. Ola Rotimi

The interviewer probed further why students preferred those authors -- Many of them responded that they tell romantic, detective and adventurous stories while some of them like Chinua Achebe use simple everyday language.

These are a sampling of comments that emerged from students' interviews but even from these few, the reflections reveal important insights about students' self knowledge and perceptions of reading, literature and school. They expressed an awareness of different types of reading and different reasons for reading. Parents read newspaper for news, students read romance books and comics because they are fun and easy to

understand. They expressed dislike for anything that is boring. Several students talked about two specific types of reading: what they are assigned to read which they often find dull and boring and what they choose to read which they experience as 'Fun' and far removed from what goes on in the classrooms. Students made connections between reading and other media such as film. They seem to know they could learn from both but as adolescents they prefer movies.

Interestingly when asked about the contribution school made to helping them become better readers, these students often focused on quantity. They had a sense that the more they read, the better they got.

One other item mentioned here is the implication from many of the students that the teacher is a critical component in the reading process. Among other things, teachers read to students, introduced them to books and organized classrooms around time to read. In these classrooms teachers made reading a priority.

From these adolescent voices we are informed as teachers about specific topics, books and authors that individual students find engaging and motivating. We should then build their reading around them especially in the area of assignments and term papers. The students interview also revealed particular activities related to reading that the students enjoy for example majority of them enjoy watching films and they do this most of the time at home. The teacher could teach writing stories by asking students to write down the stories of the movies they watch at home and read to peers in the classroom. Occasionally the school can organize movies for students and allow them to write and read the stories as competitions for which they are rewarded.

Many of the students express satisfaction and interest in teachers reading to them. He, the teacher can organize "Young Authors Day" where children present their stories to parents and guest. By so doing students become readers who will be active constructors of meaning both individually and in socially structured settings.

The interview revealed that students do not realize that reading a textbook is different from reading a comic book. They need to be taught that these readings are different. This borders on the differences between effective and not so effective readers. (Clay 1991) Effective readers monitor their understandings. They realize when they have not understood and they mobilize strategies to correct the problem. For instance, they might

simply reread or they might ask themselves what they think the author's intention is, thereby helping a focus and purpose for reading. They may pay particular attention to headings and subheadings using them as guides and creating understanding. When effective readers encounter a word they do not know, they may keep reading to see whether the meaning is revealed in the text or they may simply keep reading because they find, as is sometimes the case that not knowing the word does not compromise their understanding. On the other hand, they may find that they need to consult a teacher, a friend or even a dictionary to clarify a word meaning. They do something to ensure their comprehension.

Readers should be encouraged to make connections between what they read and their own lives and to make connections among various texts and authors. Teachers should encourage readers to think Beyond literal information and to Consider the Big ideas (themes) in a reading, not simply for the sake of identifying theme as a literal element but to reflect on their own feelings and attitudes in the context of ideas that emerge from a reading.

The classroom focus should be on learning rather than teaching this is because the meaning readers construct cannot be taught in the sense of passing intact information directly from one individual to another. In these classrooms, the teacher's role is to structure an environment where learners construct understandings that represent their own idiosyncratic perspectives and insights as well as those that are shaped by dialectic interactions with their peers and the teacher. In other words classrooms where learning occurs. This is the essence of strategic reading which Paris, Lipson and Wixson (1994) defined as reading that involves "self controlled learners" who "Plan, evaluate and regulate their own skills" (P. 788).

Teachers should actively promote learner's purposefulness, engagement and internationality through such strategies as K-W-L (Ogle 1986). This strategy asks students to think before they begin reading about what they know about a text or the ideas it might contain, it asks them to reflect after the reading on what they have learned. The strategy helps students engage in processes of effective reading that is engage in important thinking processes before, during and after a reading. Because effective readers understand there are diverse purposes for reading, they do not approach each text in the same way. They realize for example that various patterns exist in expository texts, biographies, comparison, comics, cause and effect and so on.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper began with the need to think through those things that motivate students to learn because for many of them, learning to read seems almost effortless while others seem mired in confusion. It is realized that individuals approach with positive feelings only those things that they do well or in which they are developing competence and learning to be effective. It evolved into a documentary of student's own views on their self-knowledge, perceptions, interests and motivations regarding reading and becoming active and engaged readers. Those offer one way to answer the initial question – what target interests will best support early adolescent development in reading and learning from text.

The information gleaned from the interview should help teachers to design classrooms in which the focus is on the learner and on learner's meaning constructions that lead to individual perspectives and insights that are shaped by dynamic classroom interactions, classrooms where instructional processes are designed to help students become competent, strategic readers; classrooms where students come to realize the satisfaction and enjoyment associated with being a reader. Only then will all students have an opportunity to feel competent and successful only then will they encourage them to do what competent readers do – read.

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MOTIVATION TO READ PROFILE

Conservational Interview

Name..... Date.....

A. Emphasis: Narrative Text

Suggested prompt (designed to engage student in a natural conversation): I have been reading a good book..... I was talking with..... about it last night. I enjoy talking about good stories and books that I've been reading. Today I'd like to hear about what you have been reading.

Tell me about the most interesting story or book you have read in this week (ie even last week). Take a few minutes to think about it. (Wait time) Now, tell me about the book or story.

Probes: What else can you tell me? Is there anything else?.....

2. How did you know or find out about this story?.....

Assigned	In School
Chosen	Out of School

3. Why was this story interesting to you?.....

B. Emphasis: Informational Text

Suggested prompt (designed to engage student in a natural conversation): Often we read to find out about something or to learn about something. We read for information. For example, I remember a student of mine..... whop read a lot of books about..... to find out as much as he/she could about..... Now, I'd like to hear about some of the information reading you have been doing.

1. Think about something important that you learned recently, not from your teacher and not from television, but from a book for some other reading material. What did you read about? (Wait time). Tell me about what you learned.

Probes: What else could you tell me? Is there anything else?.....

2. How did you know or find out about this book/artile.....

Assigned	In School
Chosen	Out of School

3. Why was this book (or article) important to you?.....

C. Emphasis: General Reading

1. Did you read anything at home yesterday?..... What?.....
 2. Do you have any books at school (in your desk/storage area/locker/book bag/ today that you are reading?..... Tell me about them.....
 3. Tell me about your favourite author.....
 4. What do you think you have to learn to be a better reader?.....
 5. Do you know about any books right now that you'd like to read? Tell me about them.....
 6. How did you find out about these books?.....
 7. What are some things get you really excited about reading books?.....
 8. Who gets you really interested and excited about reading books?.....
- Tell me more about what they do.

APPENDIX II

MRP Conversational Interview: Direction for use

1. Duplicate the Conversational Interview so that you have a form for each child.
2. Choose in advance the section(s) or specific questions you want to ask from the Conversational Interview. Reviewing the information on students' Reading Surveys may provide information about additional questions that could be added to the interview.
3. Familiarise yourself with the basic questions provided in the interview prior to the interview session in order to establish a more conversational setting.
4. Select a quiet corner of the room and a calm period of the day for the interview.
5. Allow ample time for conducting the Conversational Interview.
6. Follow up on interesting comments and responses to gain a fuller understanding of students' reading experiences.
7. Record students' responses in as much detail as possible, if time and resources permit you may want to audiotape answers to A1 and B1 to be transcribed after the interview for more in-depth analysis.
8. Enjoy this special time with each student.