

**READING SKILLS, GENDER AND LIBRARY USE AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL  
PUPILS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN ASABA, DELTA STATE.**

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**Abstract**

The study explored reading skills, gender, and library use among primary pupils in private schools, in Asaba, Delta State. Four research objectives, four research questions, and two hypothesis guided the study. The study population consists of 85 pupils in primary 5. The two primary schools used are Master Care International School and Noble Academy, both located in Asaba, Delta State. A purposive sample technique was employed to pick schools with well-established libraries that are accessible to students. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The findings revealed that the student's reading abilities were determined to be below the standard, signifying a necessity for enhancement in reading teaching and assistance. There is also a little disparity between male and female students in library utilization. The students exhibited a high level of involvement with library materials, and they acquire new vocabulary from library books, indicating a potential area for enhancement. The study recommends that schools should execute focused reading interventions, including phonics instruction, vocabulary enhancement activities, and comprehension tactics, to rectify the observed deficiencies in students' reading abilities. They can achieve this by incorporating library activities into the school curriculum to enhance their relevance and engagement for students. The study concluded that the pupils demonstrated significant involvement with the library, regularly utilizing its resources and participating in its events. They exhibited a significant degree of library utilization for academic assignments and personal reading.

**Keywords:** Delta State, Private Schools, Primary, Pupils, Reading Skills, Gender, and Library Use

## Introduction

A library is a collection of sources, resources, and services, as well as the structure in which they are housed; it is organised for use and maintained by a public body, institution, or private individual. Schools are one of such institutions that build libraries for a variety of purposes, all of which are aimed at supporting and enriching their students' learning experiences (Egwuonwu, Osuchukwu & Okafor, 2022)

A school library is described as an information center. It houses a wide variety of physical materials. It is effective in promoting reading habits, making teaching more engaging, and making learning easier through the provision of books and a conducive learning environment. School libraries are organized collection of books placed in schools for teachers and students. The use of the library among primary school pupils is critical for their academic development and instilling a love of reading. It gives pupils access to a range of information and resources that go beyond what is taught in the classroom (Ogugua, Unegbu & Esievo, 2019).

Maryam (2021) found that students who frequently utilise libraries demonstrate enhanced reading abilities, increased academic achievement, and improved knowledge retention. Extensive research has been conducted on reading due to its recognition as a crucial ability for attaining academic achievement. They claimed that there is a distinct disparity in reading performance between males and girls based on gender. There can be minor variances in reading preferences between boys and girls. The Studies cited above imply girls might enjoy fiction, while boys might incline toward factual texts. These are generalizations, though, and people's interests might differ widely from one another. Regardless of gender, regular library visits can introduce students to a variety of materials, pique their interest, and offer a calm environment for improving their skills in reading.

Reading is an essential ability that grants access to a wealth of knowledge and enables individuals to engage actively in society. Reading encompasses significantly more than only recognizing letters. It pertains to comprehending the significance of such symbols. It resembles a puzzle to unravel the message the author intends to convey. The understanding of written language is enhanced by a complex cognitive process. Peterson and Robinson (2020) assert that "teachers can cultivate cultural awareness, fostering respectful relationships among all individuals by reading these picture books with children." The enhancement of children's reading

skills can be achieved by the use of clearly articulated cultural knowledge and principles in visual materials. Educators can assist kids in developing excellent reading skills by fostering an engaging learning environment that allows them to create a passion for reading, yielding enduring benefits throughout their lives. Effective reading involves more than merely decoding words and arriving at the end of a text. It entails engaging with written content to fully comprehend its potential.

Proficient reading abilities encompass several fundamental components:

- Decoding is the process of recognizing and comprehending individual letters and words, subsequently transforming them into their corresponding phonetic sounds (Gough & Tunmer, 1996).
- Comprehension denotes the process of understanding a book by inferring meaning, analyzing its content, and retaining knowledge (Clay, 2000).
- Fluency denotes the capacity to read with precision and fluidity, while appropriately conveying emotion (Merga, 2020).

Plessis (2023) and the National Literacy Trust (2022) corroborated Gough and Tunmer (1996) by providing an additional component:

- Vocabulary, which necessitates a substantial vocabulary for comprehension. Comprehending word definitions facilitates our grasp of a text's overall significance.
- Engagement: Motivation and enthusiasm in reading are crucial aspects. Robust reading skills are more likely to develop in individuals who derive pleasure from reading.

Gender is a theoretical framework that defines the differences in traits between males and females, as well as boys and girls, and relates to the cultural expectations and roles allocated to each gender. It is the societal construction of female and male identities, which extends beyond mere biological differences between men and women. It includes the methods by which these distinctions are evaluated, employed, and relied upon to classify persons as either female or male, and to assign particular roles and expectations to them (Nzewi, 2017).

Ametefe & Ametefe (2017) characterized gender as a social construct that delineates and differentiates the roles and obligations of men and women, particularly regarding their

contributions, participation, and compensation within the economy and diverse social institutions. The examination of gender disparities has been a primary emphasis of social and scientific inquiry for numerous decades. Girelli (2022), as cited by Avotina, Pogule, and Velinda (2023), indicates that certain historical theories have sought to elucidate gender inequalities by highlighting the impact of biological elements. It reinforced numerous clichés regarding masculinity. A prevalent belief is that specific regions of the brain function biologically differently in men and women.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although education heavily relies on proficient reading skills, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the development of these essential abilities among primary school students in private schools in Delta State. It is essential to comprehend the influence of gender and library use on reading skills in these educational institutions for multiple reasons. Firstly, there have been identified differences in reading skills between genders in different educational environments. Secondly, libraries play a fundamental role in fostering literacy growth, but their impact in these educational institutions is yet uncertain. By addressing these gaps in limited information, the study can develop solutions to strengthen reading skills and promote gender equality and library use, thereby improving the learning experience of primary school students.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to be addressed.

- What is the level of reading skills possessed by primary school pupils?
- What is the gender difference in the use of library by primary school pupils?
- To what extent do primary school pupils use the library?
- What are the types of resources used by primary school pupils?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will be tested on a 0.05 level of significance.

- There is no significant difference between reading skills and use of library.
- There is no significant difference between gender of the pupil and use of library.

### **Literature Review**

### **Level of Reading Skills Possessed by School Pupils**

Skills in reading are an essential element of academic success. Academic achievement across all disciplines is contingent upon ability to read (Nyeke & Niyi, 2020). It provides pupils with access to knowledge, enhances their language and vocabulary, and fosters a deeper comprehension of their surrounding world (Plessis, 2023).

School libraries are vital for fostering the enhancement of reading abilities. Studies by Oraekwe & Emenari (2021) and Vuzo (2022) illustrate the positive impact of well-resourced libraries staffed by proficient librarians on users' reading skills. Peterson and Robinson (2020) assert that "teachers can cultivate cultural awareness, fostering respectful relationships among all individuals by reading these picture books with children." The enhancement of children's reading skills can be achieved by the use of clearly articulated cultural knowledge and principles in visual materials.

Despite the significance of reading, many pupils struggle to develop proficient reading skills. Studies reveal that 20–30% of pupils at educational institutions experience difficulties in acquiring reading skills (Plessis, 2023). This may result from limited access to diverse reading resources and insufficient reading training (Oluwatosin & Akporunor, 2021).

Furthermore, pupils who find enjoyment in reading tend to be more motivated to improve their skills. Unfortunately, socioeconomic position may influence reading achievement, as studies demonstrate a correlation between limited resources and diminished reading proficiency (LeNoir Foundation, 2023).

### **Gender Difference in the Use of Library by School Pupils**

Kersey et al. (2019), as cited in Avotina, Pogule, and Velinda (2023), assessed gender disparities in neurological processes by employing functional magnetic resonance imaging to scan the brains of children aged 3 to 10 years and adults. The collected images were analyzed for comparisons between children and adults, revealing no evidence of variations in brain functions between the two groups. Psychologists, sociologists, and educators have devoted decades to examining gender disparities in performance across numerous academic disciplines.

The research conducted by Avotina, Pogule, and Velinda (2023) examined the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls concerning their scores or answers. Boys perform somewhat better on multiple-choice questions and practical activities

that necessitate several operations. Both genders exhibit equal interest in participating in competitions; therefore, educators, parents, and society needs to foster and sustain this interest in the future by motivating and supporting students. Ibegbulem (2021) indicated that initiatives are underway to improve student utilization of the library, necessitating the supervision of library hours to ensure appropriate student attendance and usage. His findings indicated that hours of supervised library use enhanced the achievement of male students more than that of female students in English Language, though not significantly; however, in Mathematics, the increase in achievement for male students was significant.

Akande and Bamise (2017), as cited in Ibegbulem (2021), assessed the utilization of school library resources and services in enhancing students' academic motivation in selected secondary schools in Osun State, Nigeria. The study revealed that while the majority of respondents (53.5%) utilized the library weekly, 36.5% did so daily and 10.4% monthly. Notably, daily library users were largely male (49.2%), whilst the majority of weekly users were female (71.1%).

### **Extent of Use of the Library by Primary School Pupils**

Ampofo (2019), as cited in Monity and Abam (2024), asserted that library facilities significantly impact children' reading proficiency in the choice schools. Consistent with the current work Hunter (2019), as cited in Monity and Abam (2024), asserts that sufficient and regular utilization of libraries can result in elevated academic performance among pupils. It is reasonable to assert that pupils who regularly utilize the school library will uncover more information than those who do not engage with it. A suitable school library is a setting featuring comfortable classroom arrangements and facilities, characterized by the pertinent utilization of instructional resources and engaging classroom activities that enhance student motivation and comprehension of their studies.

The proper use of school libraries is primarily to create a conducive learning environment for students to achieve educational objectives. Atoyebi, Oloniruha, and Kolawole (2021) conducted a study to examine the utilization of school libraries by kids in selected elementary schools in Ibadan, Nigeria. Their findings indicated that students utilize the library for reading activities. They moreover recommended that school administrators and owners allocate time for

students to utilize the library in order to cultivate a reading culture at this level, and that contemporary library resources be made accessible for student consultation.

### **Types of Resources Used by Primary School Pupils**

Amabali, Usman, and Adesina (2018), as cited in Egwuonwu, Osuchukwu, and Okafor (2022), assert that library resources encompass both physical and non-physical materials available for reading or access within the library. They clarified that physical resources refer to tangible printed materials that can be observed and manipulated by the user. They comprise books, journals, newspapers, periodicals, and manuscripts. Non-prints are resources accessible solely through devices such as computers, CD-ROMs, and mobile phones that provide online information. Resources in the school library function as instructional materials for education and learning.

Ilavonga and Kimani (2022) conducted a study examining the types of informational materials available in the Kimilili community library that enhance performance. The findings revealed that 70 respondents (83%) identified core textbooks as the primary resources, while more than half of the pupils indicated storybooks. Sixty (50%) identified novels as resources, forty (48%) identified magazines, and thirty-five (42%) indicated maps and charts. Forty-five (54%) newspapers and thirty (36%) referenced former examination papers as the. Only 24 individuals (24%) identified Atlases as resources available in the neighborhood library. The results align with Maharaj's (2018) study, as cited in Ilavonga and Kimani (2022), which asserted that community libraries are vital resources for education, research, and recreation. He further claims that they offer access to a diverse array of knowledge and information in several formats according to the user's needs, including books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, audiovisual materials, and digital resources. The study acknowledged that students would identify the materials they predominantly utilize, resulting in a lower percentage for atlases.

### **Research Methods**

The study population consists of 85 pupils in primary 5. The two primary schools used are Master Care International School and Noble Academy, both located in Asaba, Delta State. A purposive sample technique was employed to pick schools with well-established libraries that are accessible to students. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was developed based on the research objectives and designed to gather both

qualitative and quantitative data. Before the distribution, the questionnaire underwent a piloting phase to ensure clarity and relevance. The questionnaires were physically distributed within the school premises to the selected participants.

The reliability of the study was conducted using the test-retest method. The researcher administered the instrument to 30 respondents (Jasmine College, Asaba, Delta State) which is outside the scope of the study. This was done under two two-week intervals. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Statistics was used to calculate the separate administrations. Section by section and total reliability were done and the following reliability indexes were obtained. Level of Reading Skills = 0.82; Library Use = 0.93; Library Resources Used by School Pupils = 0.67; and whole reliability = 0.82. Data analysis primarily involved descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), with criterion mean placed at 3.00 and standard deviation, to interpret the quantitative data collected through a questionnaire. In addition, the first hypothesis formulated was tested using correlational coefficient, the second was tested using a t-test.

## Results and Discussion

The chapter presents the results and discussion of findings in line with the research questions and hypotheses.

### The Pupils' Bio-Data

**Table 1: Schools of the Respondents**

Schools	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Master Care International	50	58.8
Noble Academy	35	41.2
Total	85	100.0

The majority of respondents (58.8%) are from Master Care International, while 41.2% come from Noble Academy. The table shows that Master Care International has a higher representation among the respondents compared to Noble Academy.

**Table 2: Gender of the Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	40	47.1
Female	45	52.9
Total	85	100.0



Table 2 displays the gender distribution of the pupils. Out of the 85 pupils surveyed, 40 are male, accounting for 47.1%. In contrast, 45 of the pupils are female, representing 52.9%. This indicates a slightly higher proportion of female respondents compared to males.

## 2: Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1. What is the level of reading skills possessed by the pupil?

**Table 3: Level of Reading Skills Possessed by the School Pupils**

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Neu.		Std. Dev.
I can read most words on my own without help.	5	3	6	20	6	1.72	1.13
I can sound out new words I don't know.	10	9	14	28	24	2.45	1.32
I can follow the story when I read.	2	1	4	27	51	1.54	0.84
I can answer questions about what I read.	2	2	5	24	52	1.56	0.89
I know how to write my own version of the story I just read.	3	3	16	30	33	1.98	1.02
I can read different kinds of writing, like instructions, poems, and fact books.	2	6	11	23	43	1.88	1.17
I am sure of myself when I have to read out loud in class.	4	3	7	17	54	1.66	1.09
I can briefly talk about the people or events in a story.	6	4	8	33	34	2.00	1.16
Aggregate Mean						1.85	1.08
Criterion Mean						3.00	

The aggregate mean of 1.85 is significantly lower than the criterion mean of 3.00. This suggests that the pupils' reading skills is below the benchmark (mean = 3.00) for what is considered satisfactory. Therefore, the reading skills of the pupils is low.

Research Question 2. What is the gender difference in the use of the library by the pupils?

**Table 4: Gender Difference in the Use of the Library by School Pupils**

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	3.5637	40	.78510
Female	3.4531	45	.78504
Total	3.5052	85	.78236

The data reveals that the extent of library use among male pupils is 3.56 (Std. Dev. = .79). In comparison, female pupils have an average library use extent of 3.45 (Std. Dev. = .79). Conclusively, while male pupils on average use the library slightly more than female pupils, the difference is minimal.

The minimal difference in library use between male and female pupils implies that both genders are similarly engaged with the library. This suggests that the library can create programmes and distribute resources in a way that benefits all students equally.

Research Question 3. To what extent do the pupils use the library?

**Table 5: Extent of Use of the Library by the School Pupils**

Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		Std. Dev.
I visit the school library.	8	10	40	13	14	2.82	1.14
I borrow books from the library to read at home.	65	2	9	2	7	4.36	1.26
I use the library resources for my school works	45	12	9	10	9	3.87	1.44
I attend library events like story time, book clubs, or author visits	43	8	18	6	10	3.80	1.43
I use the library for quiet study time.	26	7	23	6	23	3.08	1.58
I use the library computers for research or learning	56	2	10	12	5	4.08	1.37
I learn new words from the books I read in the library	12	2	14	8	49	2.06	1.46
I go to the library with my friends to copy notes	50	7	11	7	10	3.94	1.46
Aggregate Mean						3.50	1.39
Criterion Mean						3.00	

The data from Table 5 illustrates the extent of library use among pupils. On average, pupils show a strong engagement with library resources and activities. Specifically, the aggregate mean for library use is 3.50, which is notably higher than the criterion mean of 3.00. This higher aggregate mean suggests that pupils' use of the library exceeds the expected level.

They frequently borrow books to read at home, utilize library resources for school work, and attend library events. Pupils also regularly use library computers for research or learning and often go to the library with friends to copy notes. Despite these positive trends, the data indicates that pupils "Rarely" learn new words from library books. This points to an area where library use could be improved, particularly in terms of vocabulary development. Therefore, the extent of the pupils' use of the library is high.

Research Question 4. To what extent do the pupils use the various types of library resources?

**Table 6: Extent of Use of the Various Types of Library Resources by the School Pupils**

Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		Std. Dev.
Fiction books (story books)	5	2	17	15	46	1.88	1.17
Nonfiction books (text)	18	13	9	8	37	2.61	1.65
Magazines or newspapers	52	7	6	4	16	3.88	1.61
Dictionaries	9	6	9	10	51	1.96	1.40
Educational games (legos, puzzles)	23	9	10	5	38	2.69	1.73
E-books and audio books	36	12	7	5	25	3.34	1.73
Graphic novels or comic books	20	9	7	9	40	2.53	1.69
CDs and DVDs	44	14	9	3	15	3.81	1.53
Aggregate Mean						2.84	1.56
Criterion Mean						3.00	

The usage of library resources, as indicated by the aggregate mean of 2.84, is below the expected level represented by the criterion mean of 3.00. While pupils demonstrate strong engagement with certain resources like magazines, e-books, audio books, and CDs/DVDs, this suggests that, overall, pupils' use of library resources could be improved, with particular areas of frequent use contrasted against resources used less often. Therefore, the extent of the pupils use the various types of library resources is low.

### 3. Testing of the Hypotheses

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant relationship between reading skills and the use of the library.

**Table 7: Relationship Between the Pupils Reading Skills and the Use of the Library**

		Level of reading skills	Use of School Library
Level of reading skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.354
	N	85	85

Use of School Library	Pearson Correlation	.102	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.354	
	N	85	85

Based on the data from Table 7, the correlation coefficient is 0.102, indicating a very weak positive relationship between reading skills and library usage. The significance value (p-value) is 0.354, which is greater than the level of significance of 0.05. This means that the observed correlation is not statistically significant. In conclusion, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between reading skills and the use of the library is accepted. The weak correlation and lack of statistical significance suggest that reading skills and library usage are not strongly related in this study.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There is no significant difference between the gender of the pupils and the use of the library.

**Table 8: Difference Between the Gender of the Pupils and The Use of the Library**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-cal.	df	P. Value	Decision
Male	40	3.56	0.79				
Female	45	3.45	0.79	0.649	83	0.941	Accept

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference between the gender of the pupils in private primary schools in Delta State and the use of the library. The calculated t-value of 0.649 with 83 degrees of freedom, and the resulting p-value was 0.941 was derived. Given that the p-value ( $p = 0.941$ ) is greater than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the use of library between male and female pupils in the schools.

The result suggests that gender does not significantly influence library usage among pupils in private primary schools in Delta State. In other words, gender does not have a meaningful impact on how pupils use the library in these schools.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Execute focused reading interventions, including phonics instruction, vocabulary enhancement activities, and comprehension tactics, to rectify the observed deficiencies in students' reading abilities.
2. Advocate for an expanded array of library materials, particularly those that facilitate vocabulary enhancement and improve reading proficiency.
3. Incorporate library activities into the school curriculum to enhance their relevance and engagement for students.

## Conclusion

The study concluded that the pupils demonstrated significant involvement with the library, regularly utilizing its resources and participating in its events. They exhibited a significant degree of library utilization for academic assignments and personal reading. The pupil's reading skills were below the standard, and their utilization of specific library resources, especially for vocabulary enhancement, might be optimized. Targeted interventions are necessary to improve reading skills and facilitate the effective utilization of library resources. The library can significantly contribute to pupils' academic achievement and personal growth.

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