

Cloze Procedures and Nigerian Secondary School Students 'Achievement in Comprehension of Expository Texts

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Abstract

This article looks at cloze procedure and Nigerian secondary school students' achievement in comprehension of expository texts. Cloze procedure is a device or technique used in determining the extent a reader has comprehended a particular passage. It is a yardstick used in measuring learners' comprehension especially in English language. The technique was developed by a popular Psychologist Taylor to assess learners' level of understanding a reading material. Expository texts illustrate, educate, entertain, explain, and describe issues. Among issues raised in the paper are; functions of cloze procedure in teaching English in Nigerian secondary schools, readability level was also discussed, cloze procedure as a teaching instrument, cloze and reading comprehension, using cloze procedure in teaching reading, the expository text, types of expository text and strategies to enhance comprehension of expository text. The basis of this article is to determine the extent readers of the English language in Nigeria secondary schools comprehend expository texts via the use of cloze procedure. The conclusion of this paper was based on the proper articulation of the ideas raised.

Key Words: Achievement, Cloze, Expository and Procedure

Introduction

The competency of language use on the part of the second language learner is attributed to the application of cloze procedure in determining the reading comprehension level of individual learners. The term **cloze** was first developed by Taylor in 1953. The proponent holds that the term cloze is derived from the Gestalt psychology concept of closure. This concept describes a tendency that humans have to complete a familiar but not quite finished pattern to really grasp the information therein. Simply refers to the tendency of individuals to complete a pattern once they have grasped its overall importance and relevance.

Similarly, in view of Rye (2008), cloze procedure is essentially a cognitive task. The reader has to reason and construct suggestions to fill the gap on the basis of the evidence derived from the context, the completion of meaning based on understanding and reasoning as cognitive task. In line with the above view, Taylor (1953) who was the first scholar to use and study cloze procedure for its effectiveness upheld it as an instrument for determining the readability of materials in the reader's native language. In the early 1960s studies focused on cloze as a measurement of reading comprehension in L₁ and L₂. In 1970s, cloze began to be used as measurement of overall L₂ proficiency (Ahluwalia, 2009). Today, cloze procedure is widely used in various languages and as a part of some large-scale language texts especially in the English language comprehension passage.

The cloze procedure can be used with students at all levels of reading ability to check students' achievement in comprehension or test vocabulary knowledge. The exercise involves taking a passage of a text that students have previously read and deleting words from it. Students must supply or fill the omitted words to complete the (Ahmad, 2013). Completing these sentences require critical thinking skills and allows teachers to gauge how well students are to use semantic and syntactic cues to construct meaning from a text. Cloze can also be used to determine how well students have retained knowledge content or vocabulary of a particular text (Ogenyi, 2011).

Expository texts are texts of information, illustrate science and technology, social sciences that expose students to issue on cause-effect, problem-solving, meta-cognition, compare/contrast, texts of the nature always have classical language in presentation of information and language processing techniques. Reading expository text is critical for growth in reading ability and most urgent to rank normal achievers, the ability to read, comprehend, and analyze expository texts. In achievement of secondary school students' comprehension, structure elements in expository text vary. It is important to introduce students to the components of various texts throughout schooling period. It is also educational to teach and model the use of these components properly at the being of every learning process. The recognition and the use of text organization are essential processes underlying comprehension and retention of a learner (Williams, 2010).

Functions of Cloze Procedure in Teaching English in Nigeria Secondary Schools

In teaching English language in Nigerian secondary schools, cloze plays important function in enhancing learners' comprehension of the subject. Cloze has been used in teaching for different purposes in education system in the country.

(a) Cloze functions as a measure of readability.

Because of the functions of cloze in learning, it is used to measure the difficult level of a text. Many Nigerian students face the problem of difficult level in reaching expository texts. If the language is too difficult, the task will lead to frustration and lack of confidence in reading on the part of the learner. As a result of this, it is necessary for teachers of language to assess the difficult level of any reading material which they expect their learners to read (Rye, 2010). Cloze procedure has turned out to be a subtle instrument for measuring readability. It is used particularly to assess the difficult level of textbooks and other reading materials. Cloze procedure can measure the difficulty a text, not in terms of words length or familiar or of sentence, but in terms of a particular individuals understanding of, and response to the language structure of the text. It measures a personal response to linguistic variables in reaching exercise. In relation to the idea above, Kilfoil (2008), points out how particular cloze procedures would be used as criteria for establishing the readability and comprehension level of texts. Based on this achievement, readability, and comprehension level of texts. Based on this achievement, readers of the English language are classified into three levels.

- (i) Independent level: The learners can read fluently and comprehend easily with assistance from the teacher.
- (ii) Instructional level: The learners here can read and comprehend if they receive guidance from a teacher.
- (iii) Frustration level: The learners at this level fail to progress satisfactorily and their comprehension is faulty.

Assessment of the readers from the three levels outlined above indicate that if learners get 90 percent in the multiple-choice test the text is considered suitable for learners at the independent level and would not require much guidance from the teacher with the percent of 75-89 percent, the text is considered suitable for learners at the instruction level and requires some teacher guidance and less than 75 percent of reading level of a text is considered to be at the frustration level and would be too difficult for teacher guidance cloze procedure is not only valuable in providing information as to how readable expository texts are for students who use them, but also invaluable as a means of comparing different text (Adewale, 2011).

(b) Cloze procedure as a test of language proficiency.

In English language, cloze procedure is often used for testing purposes. It seems a wide range of skills like vocabulary, grammar, structure and reading skills are involved in the process of completing a cloze procedure. Some scholars indicate that cloze procedure is a good test for overall English language proficiency. For instance Ahluwalia (2009), claims that cloze procedures are integrative and global measures of language competence of every learner. The scholar further maintains that tests measures the grammar of expectancy underlying the skills of thinking, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing.

It then means that cloze procedure measures global language competence consisting of linguistic knowledge textual knowledge and knowledge of the world (Ereke, 2009). As it calls on tastes to use knowledge such as vocabulary grammar, sentence construction, text structure, cohesion and the readers background knowledge to determine language efficiency of the learner. Ugwu (2009), regards cloze procedure as one of the integrative test, global tests that integrate language components into a total language went, which requires an integrated performance from the learner in a meaningful context. From the view of the scholar, a cloze can replace the sections on text structure, written expression, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Adeniyi (2011), maintains that cloze tests are reliable for measuring the language proficiency of ESL students. Cloze texts are also important parts of foreign language tests. Cloze procedure is recognized as a very efficient means of measuring integrative English language competence. The integrative language competence involves the skills of thinking speaking, reading, understanding, and writing. The English language teaches accept the effectiveness of procedure as an instrument for testing integrative English language competence almost without question, which might explain why cloze procedure is so popularly used in various English language exams both internal and external respectively.

Cloze procedure as a teaching instrument

Another phase in the use of cloze procedure in English language teaching is a teaching instrument to improve learners' language ability cloze procedure according to Akpan (2009) is a passage completion technique which is an informal instrument to determine learners' instructional reading level. Knowing the actual reading level of the learners, teachers can adjust and give guideline to the learners. Lombard (2009) contends that:

The use of cloze procedure as a teaching instrument for students to practice, using context clues as reading strategy, and to encourage vocabulary improvement in teaching English language. The methods of teacher-made cloze texts rational deletion and accepted word scoring always combine with the negotiation of comprehension of the text and discussion of the word choice after the completion of cloze tests (p.88).

Cloze exercises are widely used by Nigerian English language teachers to assess students in the classroom. The essence of the above excerpt as portrayed by the author is that teachers use cloze exercise to improve students' language ability. Because of teacher's inappropriate use of cloze procedure, students regard it exercises as practice for cloze tests in examinations rather than exercises that related to their practical reading and writing abilities in English language. Reading is a very important skill in language learning in particular and education in general. This is because knowledge of all school subjects and further education is got through reading (Agwu, 2009). Dada (2010) also claims that reading is the most important skills for second language learners in academic contexts. Students must develop an approach that will enable them to read academic texts with ease and understanding. Reading is the meaningful interpretation of written or pointed symbols. The meaningful interpretation is the comprehension of the text. At the intermediate and advanced levels, Cooper (2010) indicates that reading comprehension involves a large number of reading skills.

Deboer and Dallman (2009), maintain that good reading comprehension requires flexible use of reading strategies that integrated different reading skills for different purposes. Reading as a search for meaning that requires the active participation of the reader. The authors here claim that reading includes two aspects; one is the reading process and the skills needed for this process. It involves reading skills like skimming, scanning, reading. For comprehension and critical reading, language skills such as vocabulary knowledge, syntax knowledge and discourse knowledge to be meaningful, the reader should have prior knowledge of the text. The other aspect is the active role of the readers. It requires learners to use the reading skills consciously and effectively. For instance, use of background knowledge to help comprehension of a topic-use textual cue to confirm the readers expectation selective or combinative use of different reading skills for different tasks, identify links between ideas, guessing vocabulary from context (Cooper, 2010).

In reading meaningful is dependent on learners fluency in reading this is what Merritt (2009), calls intermediate skills, the ability which enable a reader to read fluently. Fluency in reading depends on learners' ability to make use of certain cues in the context to help them predict what words are going to come next. In this way the reading process is not showed down by the learner spending a long time focusing on every word. Samuels (2009:45) argues that reading is a psycholinguistics guessing game and a constructive language process. The scholar opines that the fluent reader is able to use factors in language which make letters and words predictable to construct hypotheses about what may be coming next in any language sequence."

These hypotheses are then confirmed or modified as the eyes scan the ensuring context information. The processes involved in fluent reading are in some ways similar to the processes involved in comprehension of expository texts. When reading expository texts, the reader samples the context information, constructs a response and then checks the responses with the available context information (Rye, 2010). According to Carrell and Eisterhold (2008), the role of background knowledge in English as a second language is to activate the prior knowledge of the reader. The previously acquired knowledge is called prior knowledge. The reading process is never a passive process, but rather a dynamic process in which the reader is not only involved in information search, but he is engaged in information reformation. Reading entails the cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message. It is a process of retrieving and comprehending some data from a source and placing them with their volatile memory for processing. These ideas are usually a sort of representation of language such as symbols to be examined by sight or by thought. Reading involves prediction and construction of meaning (Ncharam, 2007).

Cloze and Reading Comprehension

In the recent years, research indicates that cloze procedures measure reading comprehension. Helfeld and Henk (2008) claim that the traditional cloze test has enjoyed twenty-five years at use as a measure of reading comprehension ability it enhances readers understanding. Research has shown that cloze performance is closely related to the performance on the reading comprehension tests; such as multiple choice questions and simple answer questions. Rye (2010) observes in his experiment that there is an eighty-five percent overlap between the cloze test and the comprehension text. From the view, cloze test can be considered reliable in assessing reading comprehension of learners. In relation to the view, Gunning (2008), asserts that cloze procedure can be used as a comprehension tests. As the author puts it, “if you have not comprehended what you have read, you have no basis for filling in the blanks”. Because the words are omitted, the readers are forced to pay close attention to meaning. Neville (2009), contends that “if learners can restore correctly the words omitted from a passage they must have a good grasp of its comprehension” It is obvious from the assertion that cloze can be used to assess reading comprehension of a second language learners in various facets.

Cloze Procedure and the Assessment of Reading Strategies

Globally however, cloze procedure is used to assess reading strategies used by readers or to development learners reading abilities. Because some words are deleted cloze forces readers to be more aware of the meaning and calls for the use of reading skills like skimming and searching that are often neglected in second language reading (Steinman, 2008). On this note, Ahluwalia (2009), considered the process of taking a cloze test as involving more active reading rather than passive reading and readers should be more conscious of their reading strategies during thus process. Brown (2009) opines that cloze test are based on contextualized written language, it needs readers conscious and effective use of reading strategies.

The normal flow of the reading process is interrupted in cloze procedure readers have to use reading strategies more flexibly. In support of the views, Fyfe (2013) mentions the use of cloze exercise in the formative assessment of reading strategies in secondary schools across the globe. Nigeria as one of the countries in the world uses this procedure to determine the reading here and comprehension ability of the English language learners. The cloze exercises were used as the assessment task which the scholar introduced into the natural reading tasks. Gunning (2008), goes on to conclude that is an essential teaching technique that fosters reading for meaning and use of context especially effective for students who fail to read for meaning. Interestingly, Glazer (2014) explains that:

To fill in the gaps correctly, students must have a good grasp of the meaning of the text as a whole. Processes involves include the use of reading strategies such as previewing-read the whole text before starting the cloze test, predicting, using context clues about the deleted words in the surrounding context, using language knowledge to select appropriate lexical items and proper grammar forms for the gap (p. 68).

It is imperative here to note that a learner employs effective reading strategies to perform optimally well in cloze procedures. Another Scholar Edinburgh (2009) in this view argues that when facing a cloze passage students employ the reading skills of searching for information from the surrounding syntactic and semantic circumstance, re-reading the whole passage looking for clues that their memories tell them that are present and look for maternal which may provide a basis for a guess.

Using Cloze Procedure in Teaching Reading

Cloze procedure could be used to help learners improve their reading competence in various degrees. Greene (2009) in furtherance to this observes that teacher-made cloze tests can also be validly and reliably used in some situations. The scholar argues that teachers should use cloze procedure to construct their own reading tests. These need not necessarily replace professionally developed tests, but there are situations where teacher-made cloze tests could be adequately used. It is worthy pointing out that only the proper use of cloze procedures can improve the reading ability of the learners. Cloze procedure will be effective when the instruction is carefully sequenced in length and difficulty, and adjusted to the reading abilities of the students. Similarly, Steinman (2013) views that: When preparing a cloze passage with intention that the message will be comprehended by the readers who read beyond the sentence. We should provide a cloze training for our students, during which we emphasize the value of reading the whole text before focusing on the deletions (p. 39).

In relation to the above idea, for using cloze for instance, a teacher can gain an understanding of particular problem area in learner's reading ability analyzing the errors learners usually make in close passage. Bamford (2014), argues that performance on the cloze procedure reflect the learner's ability to use the language content. A cloze exercise is especially valuable for students who neglect context clues. The view of the author is that cloze procedure also helps in developing the ability to infer implicit meaning from a cloze passage when using group discussion activities. In such activities cloze procedure makes students read carefully and reason together meaningfully about their choice of word to fill the deletion. This method helps students think about the context beyond the immediate linguistic segment. The teacher can help the learning process to continue after the group discussion by giving credit for appropriate, as well as correct response, and explain possible reasons behind the author's choice of words in a text.

Michael (2013), asserts that cloze procedure has the advantage that it does not require a teacher to 'set in' on the whole reading process, but just convenience. Primarily, working on short passage would produce frustration when students are unfamiliar with cloze procedures. Using this procedure means that students should have the chance to become acquainted with cloze. The cloze passage should be related to learner's interest or expected areas of interest to avoid increasing the level of difficulties in reading. The use of cloze procedure exposes students at this level of learning to comprehend expository texts better.

The Expository Text

The expository text is a type of composition that explains the nature of an object, an idea or a theme. It may exist apart from other types of composition, but frequently two or more types of composition are blended. For instance, description that could enhance composition or argument that could support the message in the text being read (Ray, 2014). The expository text is a form of prose in which the author presents information that is directive in nature to the reader. This is done in order to enable the reader to understand the information that is provided in the text. The directives are in form of explicit stated specific-cues that guide the reader to note important information. The information actively engages the reader in a dialogue with the author. It shows, tells and guides the readers understanding. Good expository texts contain all the elements of a narrative text. It has elaborate and meaningful information that help in understanding the text (Michael, 2013).

Types of Expository Texts

It is imperative to note that there are six major categories of expository texts which include; descriptive illustrative, functional sequential, persuasive and argumentative. The descriptive text makes use of definition of ideas, classification of parts of members of an object, and description of similarities and differences between characters and incidents. The illustrative content uses analogy and example for further explanation on idea raised. The sequential content, focuses on how a process is arrived at like how a decision is, made and how products are created. Emphasis placed on how a cause produces an effect. The functional content, gives introduction into the author's point of view and how the point of view is developed. From the introduction, a transaction is established in former information is merged with current information. A general review of the theme is part of the text. The argumentative and persuasive tests do not only present information but express opinions and views about that information. Basically, arguments are presented in the most convincing manner in order to support a particular ideas or opinion. It then means that understanding these various types of expository texts will help teachers select relevant expository texts for different exercises when necessary (Torgesen, 2014).

Strategies to Enhance Comprehension of Expository Texts

Strategy is plan or technique used by students to get information from a text whether it is for the purpose of choosing the correct lies on a multiple choice texts or getting enough information to correct an effective report in reading instruction depends largely on technique. According to Agwu (2002), strategy is an overall plan for the orderly, presentation of content of learning material. It is a plan Erick or stratagem employed to achieve an immediate objective in learning similarly, strategy is applicable to both students' teachers respectively. Strategy is that which actually takes place in class. It depends upon the teacher, his individual artistry and on the composition of the class.

Strategy 1

Activating background knowledge: This is one of the strategies that is used to increase learners comprehension of a text. Research shows that comprehension is enhanced when readers activate prior knowledge or make connection to background knowledge. Activating relevant background knowledge helps readers make connections between what they know and what they are reading. For instance, having the knowledge about Mars, Jupiter and other planets can help readers when reading about the solar system.

Strategy 2

Questioning: The questioning strategy encourages the reader to generate and answer questions before and during reading which aid comprehension. Prior to reading, good readers ask themselves questions that activate background knowledge. Good readers consider the text structure the writer has followed and ask questions such as; does this text has a descriptive structure-or a sequential structure. If the text has a sequential structure readers should be encouraged as they read to ask themselves what will happen next. If the text is descriptive or expository and focused on one topic, readers should ask themselves as they read what the subtopics are. Good readers continually ask and question as they read.

Strategy 3

Analyzing Text Structure: This strategy looks at text structure and exposition Text structure awareness or the ability to analyze text in terms of its structure is a mental awareness of how writers organize information text structure, how the ideas in a text are interrelated to convey a message to a reader. It involves the reader looking mentally for the text structure, looking at keywords, subheadings and other text features that can reveal the structure the writer is using. Signals or cue words used by notification writers send a signal to the reader as to the text structure the writer has followed. For instance, in linear string texts, signals words and phrases such as to begin with them, following and after tell the reader that there is a sequential structure that are thing follows another. Inside the text therefore subheadings, labels, captions, tables, graphs charts, maps, timelines and figures in no small measure to assist readers in navigating expository text.

Strategy 4

Creating mental images: This is one of the strategies that improves comprehension of expository text. Creating a mental image of the text being read enhances comprehension. Patrick (2012), states that good readers are like architects when reading text. The readers can see ribs and bones of the text. Structure is the key to comprehension, to comprehend a passage is to create a mental structure readers use visual image to process the ribs, bones and structure of a text.

Conclusion

Primarily, cloze procedure was first used by Taylor to determine reading ability of every English language learner comprehending a passage. It was also used as a device for testing comprehension ability of a learner. The cloze procedure is a good device that enhances second language learners' comprehension especially in the areas of expository texts. Learners' achievement in any teaching text is dependent upon the level of comprehension. Without optimal comprehension of the learner in the text read, the achievement will be marred. Secondary school students' achievement in the comprehension of expository texts has been low over the years which have reflected in their performance in external examinations. For the fact that many scholars and teachers are not too familiar with the cloze procedure, it tends to be very new in Nigeria education system.

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