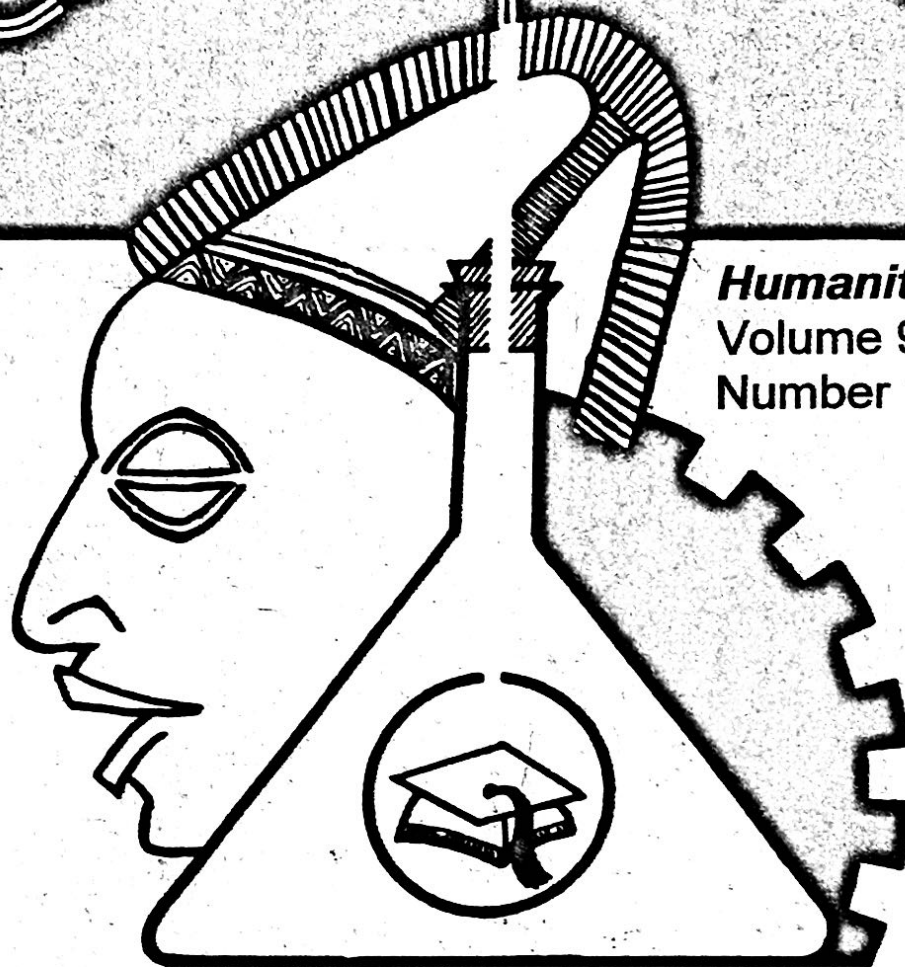


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COGNITIVE LEVEL OF READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: A STUDY OF COLLEGE OF EDUCATION EXAMINATION

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Abstract

Comprehension is what every learner needs for academic excellence, but it only helps to realize the learner's quality and pattern of thought to the teacher/examiner. The questions set by the teacher/examiner in the Nigerian College of Education should be of interest because they are meant for learners who graduate to play an important role in developing primary and junior secondary school learners. Such questions should be targeted at specific cognitive levels of comprehension, so that learners will go to the secondary school to lead younger learners to become efficient thinkers who can attain for Nigeria the technological glories that she desires.

Thus, this study investigates the cognitive levels focused by the examination questions set by the teachers of language and communication skills in 10 Colleges of Education in Nigeria. One hundred questions were randomly selected from 20 teachers and were check-listed against the cognitive levels of recognition, deduction, analysis and synthesis, using frequency count and the chi-square. Based on the findings from the study, appropriate recommendations are made.

Introduction

Reading researchers have devoted considerable attention to the nature of comprehension. They are agreed that comprehension has structure, and that the structure reflects the mind of the reader. The reader effects comprehension non-haphazardly (Lawal 1990; Olajide 1991). Chomsky (1968) believed that language (and language entails, among other things, comprehension) has a delicate nature that is intricate but categorizable. This position is consistent with Piaget (1954) who maintained that intelligence and cognitive level have implications for language learning and performance. According to the latter, intelligence is pre-conditional to the cognitive levels of an individual.

In the same direction, Abe (1991), James (1985), Lawal (1993), and Smith, Goodman and Meredith (1976) are unanimous that the cognitive focus of reading comprehension (or any other type of) questions can be determined, as a way of promoting the development of worthwhile thought processes among learners of all categories. Learners at the tertiary level specifically require order

cognitive skills, so as to do well (James 1985), and comprehension in English is a good avenue for enhancing the skills (Abe, 1991).

Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy clearly established that all groups of learners require being cognitively challenged by learning activities. Specifically, Barret (1972) demonstrated how reading comprehension activities, including the teacher's mode of evaluation, can incorporate cognitive expectations. Cognitive skills not only enhance intellectual development, they link comprehension to the external world and determine the reader's view on life. Smith et al. (1976) aver that a person's cognitive power moulds his/her personality.

This possibly explains why Lawal (1993) was worried that certain secondary school teachers' questions do not make enough cognitive demands on their teachers. He also observed that many basal materials implemented by the teachers contain questions that have low cognitive imports. Ironically, Nigeria's educational goal is to produce learners who can think rationally and creatively (FGN 1981).

That teachers' evaluation practice in the secondary school falls below cognitive expectation seems to call for an evaluation of teacher preparation in Nigeria. For example, how the Nigeria Colleges of Education, an institution saddled with the preparation and production of teachers for the Junior Secondary School (NNCE 1991), evaluate the trainee teachers need to be investigated. If the questions involved do not challenge the trainees' cognitive abilities, and they are not taught to construct and administer questions, which have cognitive weight, it is not likely that such trainee teachers would graduate to become effective examiners on their various subjects.

Problem

Efficient comprehension is necessary for meaningful learning at all levels of education. Without comprehension, reading is a futile undertaking, the core of the former being cognitive skills that have been sufficiently developed in the reader. Reading activities and the teacher's mode of evaluation go a long way to develop the learners' cognitive skills. All the questions posed by the teacher must be addressed to specific but appropriate cognitive levels. The teacher can do this only if his/her own training adequately sensitized him/her to the cognitive skills. It is, however, not yet clear if all the questions posed by teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education satisfactorily place cognitive thrusts on the learners who are expected to become the teachers of Nigeria's future leaders.

Research Questions and Hypothesis for the Study

On the basis of the foregoing theoretical background to, and the problem of the study, the following questions and hypothesis were raised:

Questions:

Dr Stephen Billy Olajide

- (a) Do the examination questions set by College of Education teachers make cognitive demands on the students?
- (b) How often do the questions require the students to recognize certain facts?
- (c) Do the questions make the students to mainly recognize and deduce facts?
- (d) Do the teachers' examination require the students to analyze ideas and proportions?
- (e) How frequently do the questions require the students to analyze and synthesized ideas?

Hypothesis

- (a) The examination questions posed by teachers in Nigeria Colleges of Education do not significantly differ on the basis of the cognitive levels they address.

Procedure

The study involved 100 questions randomly selected from the pool of 250 that had been set by 20 randomly selected teachers of Language and Communications Skills from 10 randomly sampled Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The 100 questions had been meant to test reading comprehension by the teachers. Reading comprehension formed an important component of Language and Communication skills, a compulsory course for all students in Nigeria Colleges of Education (NCCE 1991). The researcher felt that practice in such a course has implications for learning other courses because students read in all disciplines.

The data were then subjected to a checklist which has been validated and tested for reliability through assessment by other reading researchers, and a pilot-test. The checklist had been prepared to reveal which of the cognitive levels of Recognition, Deduction, Analysis, and Synthesis each questions targeted. The researcher had regarded the former two as belonging to the lower order, and the latter two higher order, in line with James (1985) and Lawal (1993).

Frequency count and the chi-square were later employed by the researcher in order to resolve the set research questions and hypothesis.

Findings

It was found from the study that there is a lopsided relationship among the questions set by the teachers of Language and Communication Skills in the

Nigeria Colleges of Education and the cognitive levels of recognition, deduction, analysis, and synthesis as shown in the table below:

TABLE 1: Frequency distribution of the past questions on General Studies English in Nigerian Colleges of Education

Targeted Cognitive Skill	Frequency	% of Distribution
Synthesis	05	05
Analysis	25	25
Deduction	51	51
Recognition	10	10

From the table, Research Question (a) is resolved positively. The examination questions set by teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education to test Language and Communication Skills do make cognitive demands on the examinees. Also, the examinees are made to analyze ideas and proposition (Research Questions d). However, the questions more frequently require them to analyze, than synthesize. Similarly, examination questions require the examinees to recognize far less frequently than deduct. The greatest cognitive demand made by the questions is analytical. In other words, the examination questions posed by the teachers place differing cognitive thrusts on the students in Nigerian Colleges of Education.

In order to determine the significance of the difference in the cognitive demands made by the questions, the chi-square statistic is employed at 0.05 alpha level as follows:

TABLE 2: Result of chi-square test of significance of difference in the cognitive levels addressed by the questions set by teachers of Language and communication Skills in Nigerian Colleges of Education

Dependent Variable	X ²	X ³	Session
Cognitive level	(0.05)	(0.05)	S
Synthesis	1.6	7.81	S
Analysis	0.0	7.81	NS
Deduction	27.04	7.81	S
Recognition	1.4	7.81	NS

Note: NS = Not significant

S – Significant

Thus, significant difference existed in the rates at which teacher question caused the students to deduce and synthesize; while the students were usually required to deduce, they hardly synthesized.

Implication and Conclusion

Thus it can be safely held that teacher's questions in the Nigerian Colleges of Education do not make enough cognitive demands on the students because such questions fail to cut across the cognitive levels. The cognitive activities such students are mostly engaged in belong to the lower order which do not make them intellectually better than the students of the secondary school who are also gravely confined to that order by the questions posed by their teachers (Lawal 1993). Unfortunately, the graduates of the College should teach in the Secondary School (NCCE 1991). This tends to suggest that the quality of thought to language – the vehicle of expression in any discipline – that may emanate from the Nigerian Secondary School would remain poor till God-knows-when. No nation can rise above the quality of its teachers, implying that not many learners can rise above the quality of their teachers.

This also implies that those preparing the trainee teachers in the College of Education do not attach importance to (or do not know the need for) the development of the trainees' language – related cognitive endowment. Those charged with the teaching of language and communication skills should let their examination and classroom questions cause their students to recognize, deduce, analyze and synthesize sufficiently. According to James (1985), these activities constitute '...the minimum skill...' which advanced students '...require for specific reading tasks...' (p.291). Reading comprehension is an activity of activities which all learners require for their intellectual development. As such, teachers should ensure that comprehension questions make student intellectualize across the cognitive levels in the Nigerian Colleges of Education and other tertiary institutions. It should always be realized that the quality of the mind of the trainee teacher will reflect on the mind of the learner he/she graduates to teach.

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