

Effects of Reading Habits and Reading Level Proficiency on Essay Writing Performance in Senior Secondary School in Ondo State

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Abstract

This study evaluated the reading habits and reading proficiency of SSS II students in Ondo State and determined whether their reading proficiency influences their essay writing proficiency. It also analysed the relationship between the reading proficiency and essay writing proficiency of the students. A descriptive survey-type design was employed in this study. The population for this study comprised all the public Senior Secondary School II (SSS II) students in Ondo State. Using a multi-stage sampling technique. The instruments used for this study are: The Macmillan (2012) "Straightforward Quick Placement and Diagnostic test" for assessing students' reading level was deployed to assess the reading level (proficiency in independent reading and comprehension); The instrument used to determine the English Language essay writing proficiency consists of five different essay questions drawn from past questions of the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE); A concise, structured Questionnaire was developed and administered on the students to capture their reading habits. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the reading habits and proficiency level in reading and essay writing. Cross tabulation, chi square, and correlation coefficient were deployed to analyse the relationship between reading proficiency and essay writing proficiency. The findings of this study revealed that the number of students who engaged in reading habitually was very low, even though about 70.1 % of the students indicated an interest in reading. The results also revealed that the pre-intermediate level of reading proficiency was dominant among the SSS II students, with 37.0 %. Only 1.0 % of the students were at the Advanced level of reading. The mean proficiency score for the reading level test was 31.4. The study results indicate that there was a significant relationship between the reading level proficiency and the essay writing proficiency of the SSS II students.

Keywords: reading habit, reading proficiency, essay writing and comprehension

1. Introduction

Reading is an essential skill that plays a crucial role in enhancing the proficiency of individuals learning English as a Second Language (Ali & Asad, 2022). According to Goldman (2024), it is a complex activity that combines language and text-processing skills. Reading is an interactive process that helps students gain knowledge across various subjects. It is not just decoding written symbols but a multifaceted process that involves comprehension, connecting ideas, deduction, evaluation, problem-solving, and critiquing what is read.

A reading habit refers to a consistent pattern of reading that includes how often, when, and what an individual chooses to read. It can also describe the approach someone takes toward reading. Additionally, reading is a vital way to gain information that improves understanding of society and real-world situations, making it an essential foundation for helping people face the various challenges of the modern world (Akanda et al., 2013). While reading habits can develop into a lifelong pursuit, they are most effectively fostered during school years when individuals are still impressionable (Green, 2001). It is important to nurture a love of reading in children from an early age through secondary school and beyond to build strong reading skills. For this encouragement to be successful, parents must actively promote their children's interest in reading, which can be supported by providing financial help to buy books (Cahyo Adi Kistoro & Wachdiati, 2018; Rahadian et al., 2014). Many teachers encourage students to become enthusiastic readers, recognising that academic success is closely linked to the amount of knowledge gained from reading diverse materials. Building consistent reading habits is crucial, as regular reading improves vocabulary, writing skills, and critical thinking, all of which contribute to academic achievement.

A habit develops through repeated actions until it becomes ingrained behaviour (Gambrell, 2015). Reading must be practiced regularly for it to become a natural part of a student's routine (Carden & Wood, 2018; Lally et al., 2010). Reading behaviour is indicated by the frequency, duration, and type of materials read (Chettri & Rout, 2013; Clark et al., 2005).

Literacy is strongly linked to professional and personal development, making reading a vital skill for improving quality of life (OECD, 2008). It is one of the most important educational goals: to cultivate individuals who can comprehend and critically analyse texts (Grove & Hauptfleisch, 1982; Moreillan, 2007). Reading serves as a gateway to learning across disciplines and supports academic performance by enabling students to access and engage with subject matter effectively. Hall and Barnes (2017) describe reading as a powerful tool for education, awareness, and preparation for future careers and leisure.

Reading is also the primary means by which individuals acquire new information and broaden their understanding of the world (Moody et al., 2018). It plays a central role in personal growth and national development. A student's reading comprehension reflects their ability to interpret text, identify key ideas, analyse details, and draw meaningful conclusions beyond mere word recognition.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Reading is a skill that has tremendous effects on students' academic pursuits, and Students will gain knowledge, experience a variety of viewpoints, and improve their critical thinking abilities through reading. With the advent of smartphones and different social media platforms, many of our secondary school students are losing interest in reading either for academic purposes or for pleasure (Samuel, 2022; Popoola, Ajibade, Etim, Oloyede & Adeleke, 2010; Ilogho, 2011 & Endris, 2022). This major change in reading habits can have serious, lasting consequences. Reading widely can improve reading, while a lack of reading can impede one's academic performance. It is, therefore, imperative that today's learners start developing their reading habits. Many authors believe that there is a relationship between reading and writing. According to Jurecic (2006), teaching writing in a secondary school or college is thought-provoking because many students in this generation have been sidetracked from reading due to the inflow of television, movies/cinemas, videos and games, phones, and other issues. He believes that students need greater practice in utilising writing to find concepts, enhance positions, think critically about problems, argue, and generate new ideas about their environment (Jurecic, 2006). According to Maloney (2003), individual reading accounts for 85 percent of all college learning. Students aspiring to improve their writing skills should start reading early. This study evaluated the reading habits and reading proficiency of SSS II students in Ondo State and determined whether their reading proficiency influences their essay writing proficiency. It also analysed the relationship between the reading proficiency and essay writing proficiency of the students.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the reading habits and reading proficiency of SSS II students in Ondo State and determine whether their reading proficiency influences their essay writing proficiency. The specific objectives are to:

1. Evaluate the reading habits of the SSS II students in Ondo State,
2. Determine the reading proficiency of the students; and
3. Analyse the relationship between the reading proficiency and essay writing proficiency of the students.

1.3 Research Questions

Arising from the objectives above, the following research questions will be considered:

1. What is the extent to which students engage in reading either for pleasure or for academic purposes?
2. How proficient are the SSS II students in reading?
3. What is the relationship between the reading proficiency and the writing proficiency of the students?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relationship Between Reading and Writing

Reading involves decoding written text accurately and comprehending its meaning, while writing is the ability to produce connected text—sentences, paragraphs, and documents—through handwriting or keyboarding to communicate ideas. Carson and Leki (1993) emphasise that both reading and writing are essential components of literacy, where the interaction between the reader's interpretation and the writer's composition holds greater significance than the act of writing alone. Writers and readers begin with mental "drafts" of meaning, which they revise continuously in response to the evolving text (Reid, 1993). This reflects the interactive and recursive nature of both processes, which activate prior knowledge about language, content, and form to construct meaning.

Reading supports writing development by enhancing key competencies such as content generation, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2019). Research also shows that encouraging students to engage in both activities fosters deeper learning and insight into literacy development (Ilahiyah et al., 2019; Schoonen, 2019; Takkaç Tuglar, 2018). Berninger et al. (1994) argue that reading and writing share cognitive systems—including verbal intelligence, motor coordination, and memory functions—making them mutually reinforcing. Strengthening this connection can enhance learners' language awareness and improve their ability to retrieve and apply textual forms and meanings.

Recent studies have further validated this relationship in educational contexts similar to those found in multilingual and developing regions. For instance, Kim et al. (2023) conducted a meta-analysis showing that writing instruction significantly improves reading outcomes among students with reading difficulties, reinforcing the bidirectional nature of literacy development. Similarly, Getachew Mihret and Joshi (2025) reviewed 27 studies and found a strong positive correlation between reading proficiency and writing performance, particularly in African and South Asian school systems. Their findings highlight vocabulary depth and executive functioning as key mediators in this relationship.

In a Nigerian context, Etim, Oloyede, and Adeleke (2010) emphasised that students who regularly engage in reading activities demonstrate stronger writing fluency and coherence. Their study supports the idea that reading habits cultivated both at home and in school environments directly influence writing outcomes. Additionally, Karunaratne and Navaratne (2023) found that primary school students who read consistently showed marked improvement in sentence structure and idea organisation in their writing, underscoring the foundational role of reading in early literacy development.

2.2 Influence of Reading Habits on Essay Writing

The habit of reading is widely regarded as a crucial factor in acquiring new concepts, data, expertise, and experiences (Karunaratne & Navaratne, 2023). Through reading, students are exposed to diverse writing styles, which helps them subconsciously assimilate punctuation, grammar, style, syntax, document structure, and design. This exposure enhances their writing abilities, expands vocabulary, and fosters creativity and understanding. Prior studies confirm

that reading significantly improves writing skills. Saartik (2012) emphasises the indispensable role of reading in the writing process, while Krashen (2016) argues that reading is a more effective way to learn writing than writing itself.

Reading habits also influence academic performance. Oriogu (2017) found a strong correlation between reading and learners' academic success. Students who read regularly tend to perform better across subjects such as physics, math, English, and history (Whitten et al., 2016), while poor reading habits are linked to lower academic achievement (Balan et al., 2019). Akabuike and Asika (2012) highlight that reading inefficiency remains a persistent educational challenge, contributing to exam failures and declining standards in English language proficiency.

For L2 learners, writing is often the most difficult skill to master. Many struggle with generating ideas and selecting appropriate vocabulary. Reading widely helps them expand their knowledge base, apply it in writing, and become more imaginative. Wangchuk and Zangmo (2021) assert that reading positively influences readers' attitudes, ideas, and behaviors. Their study also showed that a two-year in-class reading program improved students' speaking and writing skills, enhanced subject learning, and supported character development.

Several researchers have explored the relationship between reading and writing. Ilahiyah et al. (2011) examined the link between reading motivation and writing achievement among Indonesian EFL students, finding a weak and negative correlation. Kirin (2010) investigated extensive reading among low-proficiency EFL learners and concluded that reading in large quantities improves writing ability, especially when learners have sufficient exposure to language input. Similarly, Jennifer and Ponniah (2019) found that extensive reading interventions enhanced students' writing, reading, and thinking skills, and increased their confidence in engaging with longer texts.

2.3 Reading Levels

Students in a classroom often exhibit varying levels of reading proficiency. If teachers overlook these differences, students with lower reading skills may struggle, leading to frustration, reduced comprehension, and academic setbacks. Understanding each student's reading level allows educators to select materials that are both accessible and challenging, fostering growth and a positive reading experience. It also helps identify students who may require additional support or intervention.

At the SSS II level, students who still struggle with reading may face broader academic difficulties. Poor reading skills can lead to feelings of inadequacy and falling behind peers, while proficient readers tend to experience increased self-esteem and motivation (Flagg, 2025).

Assessing students' reading levels provides valuable insights into their strengths and weaknesses, enabling tailored instructional strategies (Kodan, 2017). Reading proficiency is foundational to comprehension, which in turn underpins learning across subjects. Therefore, reading should be explicitly taught alongside curriculum content, including essay writing (Demirel & Şahinel, 2006; Rose & Acevedo, 2006).

Reading level is commonly used to measure a student's ability to understand written material. It reflects the complexity of texts a student can manage (Stewart, 2017). Assessments help determine students' comprehension skills and guide appropriate material selection.

Assessment tools vary but share a common goal: categorising learners based on performance. For example, oral reading assessments like Kodan's (2017) Error Analysis Inventory evaluate word recognition and vocal reading errors. Comprehension tests, such as those used by Sagirli and Kadioglu (2015), assess understanding through multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

Reading proficiency is often classified into three levels (Partnership for Reading, 2001; University of Utah Reading Clinic, 2018):

- **Independent Level:** 95%+ word accuracy; student reads easily.
- **Instructional Level:** 90–94% accuracy; material is challenging but manageable.
- **Frustration Level:** Below 90% accuracy; text is too difficult.

In Nigeria, publishers like Macmillan and Oxford University Press have developed reading assessment tools aligned with UK standards, which are applicable locally. Macmillan's framework includes levels from beginner to advanced and offers placement tests to evaluate students' reading abilities. This study employed the Macmillan tool due to its familiarity with the West African Examination Standard and its comprehensive range of questions targeting different proficiency levels.

3. Methodology

A descriptive survey-type design was employed in this study. The population for this study comprised all the public Senior Secondary School II (SSS II) students in Ondo State. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, 308 Senior Secondary II students from SSS in Ondo State made up the study's sample. In Stage One, four Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from the 18 LGAs in Ondo State. In the second stage, one Senior Secondary School (SSS) was chosen in each LGA purposively, making four schools in all. The schools chosen were the ones where the School Principals were eager to allow their students and teachers to participate in the study. In the third stage, an SSS II class was chosen randomly in each secondary school. All the students in the selected classes were allowed to participate in the study.

The Macmillan (2012) "Straightforward Quick Placement and Diagnostic Test" for assessing students' reading level was deployed to assess the reading level (proficiency in independent reading and comprehension). The test has a total of fifty questions, with the complexity of the questions increasing from the first set of questions (Beginner) to the last set. The first 40 are grammar questions, and the final 10 are vocabulary questions. The teacher who will use the assessment test has been provided with the answers to the questions in a separate document and a guide to help decide the level of the reader. Since this test instrument was developed by experts, it was assumed that a reliability test was not necessary. Macmillan's Readers Level Test was designed to help learners identify their reading level, and educators in the United

Kingdom use it informally or in classroom settings to determine the level to place the students with respect to reading ability. The tool was developed collaboratively by Macmillan and subject matter experts in the United Kingdom. The English-speaking West African countries' education curriculum was designed after the UK model. Thus, the Macmillan reading level diagnostic tool, which is often used by English language teachers in the UK to test students' reading ability, should also apply to students in the West African English-speaking countries. The reading level test was administered to all the students in the selected classes. The Straightforward test has 50 questions, each worth one point. The first 40 are grammar questions, and the final 10 are vocabulary questions. To determine a student's level, the following conversion chart was provided as a guide.

Table 3.1. Conversion Chart

Total score	Level
0 - 15	Beginner
16 – 24	Elementary
25 - 32	Pre-intermediate
33 – 39	Intermediate
40 – 45	Upper Intermediate
46 – 50	Advanced

The instrument used to determine the English language essay writing proficiency consists of five different essay questions, and the students were requested to answer just one within 50 minutes. These questions were drawn from past questions of the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The WAEC marking scheme was used to grade the essays written by the students. Teachers of English Language who were WAEC Examiners were engaged to mark the essays. A concise, structured questionnaire was developed and administered to the students to capture their reading habits. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the performance of the students in the two tests conducted. These include frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation. The cross-tabulation and chi-square statistic were used to examine if there is an association between the reading level and the essay-writing performance of the students. In addition, the correlation coefficient was estimated to determine the strength and type of relationship between the two variables of interest.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Reading Habits of Senior Secondary School II Students

Interest in Reading Novels

The data in Table 4.1 reveal that 70.1% of students expressed interest in reading novels, with urban students (78.6%) showing higher enthusiasm compared to their rural counterparts (61.7%). The overall interest level is encouraging, but the disparity between urban and rural students suggests that there is a need for targeted interventions.

Table 4.1. Students' Interest in Reading Novels

Location	Like Reading Novels		
	Response	Frequency	Percent
Rural	Yes	95	61.7
	No	59	38.3
	Total	154	100
Urban	Yes	121	78.6
	No	33	21.4
	Total	154	100
Combined	Yes	216	70.1
	No	92	29.9
	Total	308	100

4.2 Access to Novels

The data in Table 4.2 reveal a concerning gap in access to reading materials: only 31.8% of students in rural areas and 57.8% in urban areas reported owning a novel. Overall, just 48% of students possessed a novel. This lack of access is likely to hinder students' motivation to read regularly and, by extension, it can negatively affect their writing development. The lack of access to novels may be due to a lack of awareness on the part of parents about the need to buy non-recommended texts (novels) for their wards. It could also be due to poverty, which could have made it difficult for parents to meet the educational requirements of their ward. Reading and writing are interdependent skills; limited exposure to written texts restricts vocabulary acquisition, sentence structure familiarity, and content generation, which are all essential components of effective writing. Lack of access to novels may limit the students' vocabulary and overall English writing proficiency.

Table 4.2. Ownership of Novels

Location	Own Novels at Home		
	Response	Frequency	Percent
Rural	Yes	49	31.8
	No	105	68.2
	Total	154	100.0
Urban	Yes	89	57.8
	No	65	42.2
	Total	154	100.0
Combined	Yes	138	44.8
	No	170	55.2
	Total	308	100.0

4.3 Sources of Novels

The distribution of the students' novel reading sources is shown in Table 4.3. While 31.2% of students in both rural and urban areas received their novels as gifts, 14.3% of students in both rural and urban areas borrowed novels, and roughly 26.0% of students in both rural and urban areas stated that parents/guardians were responsible for providing novels for their ward. Table 4.3 shows that the major source of novels, both in the urban and rural areas, is the parents/guardians, although the percentage was higher in the urban areas compared to the rural areas. This discrepancy might be explained by the fact that students from rural areas whose parents had low or no education could not afford to buy novels. The information in this Table reinforced Table 4.2, which indicates higher access to novels in the urban compared with rural areas. This table shows that parents/guardians in rural areas were probably less able to meet the cost of buying novels for their wards. This is in line with the argument presented earlier in the literature that the income of parents may determine the extent to which children's basic needs are provided. Parents from poor households may not be able to provide basic educational materials, including textbooks that can enhance learning, to their wards (Drajea and O'Sullivan, 2014).

Table 4.3. Sources of Novels

Location	Sources of Novels		
	Source of Novel	Frequency	Percent
Rural	Parent	27	17.5
	Guardian	1	0.6
	Gift from Others	45	29.2
	Borrowed	20	13
	Have no Novel	61	39.6
	Total	154	100
Urban	Parent	53	34.4
	Guardian	11	7.1
	Gift from Others	51	33.1
	Borrowed	24	15.6
	Have no Novel	15	9.7
	Total	154	100
Combined	Parent	80	
	Guardian	12	3.9
	Gift from Others	96	31.2
	Borrowed	44	14.3
	Have no Novel	76	24.7
	Total	308	100.0

4.4 Last Time Student Completed Reading a Novel

Table 4.4 presents the distribution of the last time they completed reading a novel. Students who completed reading a novel a week ago in the overall percentage were 26.3% of the entire students' body. This is an indication that the majority of the students were not reading as they should. It confirms the concerns of many researchers like Ilogho (2011) and Popoola, Ajibade, Etim, Oloyede & Adeleke (2010); the population of reluctant readers is exploding. Infrequent reading habits not only hinder literacy development but also compromise students' writing proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking skills.

Table 4.4. Last Time Student Completed Reading a Novel

Location	Last Time Student Completed Reading a Novel		
	Response	Frequency	Percent
Rural	A week ago,	30	19.5
	Two weeks ago,	8	5.2
	This month	14	9.1
	Last Month	21	13.6
	Can't remember	26	16.9
	No response	55	35.7
	Total	154	100
Urban	A week ago,	51	33.1
	Two weeks ago,	12	7.8
	This month	12	7.8
	Last Month	29	18.8
	Can't remember	42	27.3
	No response	8	5.2
	Total	154	100
Combined	A week ago,	81	26.3
	Two weeks ago,	20	6.5
	This month	26	8.4
	Last Month	50	16.2
	Can't remember	68	22.1
	No response	63	20.5
	Total	308	100.0

4.5 Reading Proficiency of Senior Secondary School II Students

Table 4.5 presents the distributions of the reading level test scores of the students under investigation based on the Macmillan reading level classification. Alarminglly, about 2.3% of the SSII students examined were at the beginner's level, and 13.6% were at the elementary level, which aligns more closely with upper primary school standards. The largest proportion,

37.0%, fell within the pre-intermediate level, while only 11.4% reached the upper-intermediate level, and a mere 1.0% attained the advanced level. With a mean score of 31.4 out of 50, the average student remains below the proficiency threshold expected for senior secondary students preparing for the West African School Certificate Examination (WAEC).

These findings underscore a critical gap in reading readiness and highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to elevate students' literacy levels before they face high-stakes assessments.

Table 4.5. Macmillan Reading Level Score Classification

Classification	Frequency	Percent	
Beginners	7	2.3	
Elementary	42	13.6	
Pre-Intermediate	114	37.0	
Intermediate	107	34.7	
Upper-Intermediate	35	11.4	
Advanced	3	1.0	
Total	308	100.0	
Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
10	47	31.4	7.1

4.6 Essay Writing Proficiency of Senior Secondary School II Students

Table 4.6 reveals that 29.6% of the test respondents scored between 1 and 5 marks (**maximum = 50**), followed by 39.1% who scored between 6 and 10 marks over 50. About 20.8% of the students scored between 11 and 15 over 50, while 8.1% scored between 16 and 21 over 50. 2.3% of the test respondents scored between 21 and 26 over 50. The result in this table revealed that the minimum score of the Essay Writing Proficiency test was 1, and the maximum score was 26, while the mean was 9.0. This result implies that students in SSS II in Ondo State are far from meeting the required West African Examination Council standard for essay writing. Since these students were in their penultimate secondary school year at the time of the experiment, it means both the students and their teachers must devote the next academic year to improving the students' essay writing proficiency to meet the West African School Certificate Examination standard.

Table 4.6. Essay Writing Proficiency Score

Score (Maximum = 50)	Frequency	Percent		
1 – 5	91	29.6		
6 – 10	120	39.1		
11 – 15	64	20.8		
16 – 20	25	8.1		
21 – 26	7	2.3		
Total	307	100		
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Essay Writing Proficiency Score	1	26	9.0	4.9

4.7 Effects of Reading Proficiency on Essay Writing Proficiency

Table 4.7 presents the cross-tabulation of the students' reading level proficiency with their essay writing proficiency, along with the chi-square statistic. The level of significance presented, 0.000, indicates that there is a significant relationship between the reading level proficiency and the essay writing proficiency of the SSS II students. The correlation coefficient of 0.000 indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. The implication of this is that an improvement in the reading level will lead to an improvement in essay writing. This finding corroborates the findings of many researchers, like Jennifer & Ponniah (2019), Wangchuk & Zangmo (2021) & Kirin (2010), who have investigated the relationships between reading and writing.

Table 4.7. Cross-Tabulation- Macmillan Reading Level Score Classification by Essay Writing Proficiency Score

Macmillan Reading Level Classification	Essay Writing Proficiency					Total
	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	21 - 26	
Beginners	6	1	0	0	0	7
Elementary	21	10	6	3	2	42
Pre-Intermediate	42	50	18	2	2	114
Intermediate	17	42	35	12	0	106
Upper-Intermediate	4	16	5	7	3	35
Advanced	1	1	0	1	0	3
Total	91	120	64	25	7	307
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)			
Pearson Chi-Square	69.170	20	0.000			
Likelihood Ratio	70.212	20	0.000			

Correlation Coefficients: Macmillan Reading Level Score Classification with Essay Writing Proficiency Score

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Pearson's R	0.300	0.062	5.499	0.000
Spearman Correlation	0.336	0.054	6.235	0.000

5. Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

To ascertain if reading competence affects essay writing ability, this study assessed the reading habits, reading proficiency, and essay writing proficiency of SSS II students in Ondo State. Additionally, it examined the relationship between students' reading proficiency and essay-writing proficiency. The findings of the study revealed that the number of students who engaged in reading habitually was very low, even though about 70.1% of the students indicated an interest in reading. This is probably because many of them did not have access to novels. There was a disparity in interest in reading and access to novels between students in the urban and rural schools. The result also revealed that the pre-intermediate level of reading proficiency was dominant among the SSS II students, with 37.0%. Only 1.0% of the students in this penultimate year were at the advanced level of reading. This means that most of the students must significantly improve their reading proficiency in their final secondary school years in order to be well prepared for their final English language examination. The study result indicates that there was a significant relationship between the reading level proficiency and the essay writing proficiency of the SSS II students.

Given the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. To bridge the disparity between the urban and rural students in terms of interest in reading, the state's ministry of education should introduce in the educational curriculum, the reading of novels such that whether you are in the rural or urban school, there should be periods during the school hours when students should be made to read and discuss selected novels that are culturally relevant and are in tandem with the SSS class the students are.
2. During parents' and teachers' meetings, Principals should create awareness among the parents on the need to buy novels for their wards beyond the school-recommended texts.
3. Given the potential effect of household poverty in limiting the procurement of reading materials for their wards, the government, through the Ministry of Education, should provide soft copies of reading materials that the students can read on government-provided tablets or parents' Android phones. This was the strategy used in Osun State, a neighbouring state to Ondo, where the government provided a tablet to each secondary school student that contained all required reading materials.

4. Teachers in secondary schools should conduct diagnostic reading assessments at the start of each term to identify students' proficiency levels and tailor instruction accordingly. This will help them to deploy differentiated teaching strategies that meet learners where they are.

Finally, while reading habits and proficiency are important contributors to writing ability, other factors such as the quality of the teachers' feedback and the availability of writing practice opportunities may also significantly influence essay performance. Future research could benefit from exploring these additional dimensions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what shapes effective writing.

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