

## Investigating Reading as a learning Method amongst Student Nurses in Buea, South West Region, Cameroon

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### ABSTRACT

Reading is a method of learning as well as self-teaching that is a basic necessity for the education and training of a nurse. Reading in most instances is enhanced by awareness of its importance, and knowledge of the techniques involved in. In the absence of these two, a student nurse may be incapacitated in the art of remembering and memory recall. Reading as a learning method was investigated among student nurses following the decline in remembering basic facts during oral examinations. This was more common with facts that had been studied earlier on in the education and training programme. Based on this, the study looked at three objectives: to outline some demographic parameters of the student nurses; investigate the importance and reasons for reading; and to assess students' knowledge on the reading techniques. It is hoped that the results on the importance, reasons and knowledge of reading techniques can motivate other student nurses.

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### Introduction

Reading is a method of learning as well as a method of teaching. A teacher who stops reading should stop teaching and a student who stops reading has stopped learning. This is so because the author sees reading as a serious and very important or basic skill that determines the academic success or failure of a student. Reading, traditionally, is looking at and understanding the meaning of written or printed material or words, figures or symbols(1). However, reading is also understanding written material and to be able to construct new knowledge and not just to memorise (2). Nursing is an open system with three interacting components: Nursing education, Nursing practice, and Nursing research (3). For all the three components, one cannot be competent if not knowledgeable, innovative and current; one has to drink deep into the fountain of knowledge by reading intentionally and purposefully. From another point of view, reading is considered from three perspectives which are the traditional view,(where learners learn how to read letters and then words before sentences), the cognitive view that enhances the role of background or world knowledge in addition to what is in the text that one is reading and the metacognitive view which is a culmination of both the traditional and the cognitive views (4). This is based on the control and manipulation that a reader has on the act of understanding the text. Hence, the study was focused on the cognitive and metacognitive views of nursing students with respect to reading. That is, reading to understand what you have understood so as to learn. The study posits that purposeful, intentional deep reading is not encouraged and

therefore neglected in nursing schools and students resort to rote learning or cramming in order to pass examinations and have the certificates, reducing the schools to mere crammers. Reading technique and reading to learn are not encouraged and the end result is that they send out nurses who cannot cope with reality on the field with consequences on the individual, the patients and the profession all due to classroom knowledge-gap and skills deficit. Quality education is very critical for any meaningful development. Becoming educated and learned emanates from intentional purposeful reading. Reading as a learning method by students should be encouraged and facilitated by the teacher to enhance quality. Quality education can actually grind out poverty from a community with good reading techniques assisting in the process.

It must be remembered that reading is a method of learning as well as a method of teaching. A teacher who stops reading should eventually stop teaching. Likewise a student who stops reading has stopped learning. According to Moyle (5) reading, is considered as the process of presenting speech in a more permanent visual form. It is turning the collection of written symbols into talk or in case of silent reading into sound speech. Reading is an art as well as a form of communication. Bartholomae and Petrosky (6) also view reading as a form of communication as they explained that when reading a book (or any written or print material), the book makes a mark on one's impression and the reader in turn, creates an impression on the book. Furthermore, Vacca, Vacca & Gove (7) view reading as operationalized by a number of

reading models, one of which is that reading is a communication event between the sender (the writer or author) and the receiver (the reader).

When reading, especially purposeful reading with an intention, one pay attention even when one is not fully understanding trusting that he or she will eventually understand as he or she reads on and relating what has been written to what he or she already knows or expects. Reading with enthusiasm and expectation is said to be a cognitive strategies by a highly motivated reader.

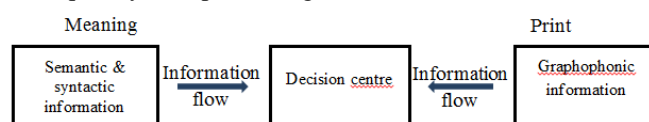
Reading that used to be considered as a mechanical process is now according to Southgate, Arnold & Johnson (4, 8) a thoughtful thinking process requiring that the reader should not only comprehend the print or text but to also contribute his own experiences and thoughts to the issue of understanding. This is reading to extract and construct meaning from the text and to create knowledge structures (schemas) in long term memory. Gray (9) however, views reading as a process that requires the reader to acknowledge important concepts and issues presented as well as pondering on their importance or significance, critically evaluating and finding out relationships between them so as to understand his own understanding of the ideas understood (metacognition). McEwan (10) calls it processing reading or cognitive strategies. In so doing this highly motivated reader develops critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and or evaluating information gathered from or generated by observation, reading, experiences, reflection, reasoning or communication to belief and action (11). This is highlighting that reading to acquire as well as to generate knowledge is crucial in developing critical thinking.

In deep, purposeful intentional reading, the reader does more than just comprehending facts in the text, his concentration is sharpened and his emotions are stirred up or excited, his attitudes and aims are worked up and his innermost being is generally ignited. Maurice quoted by (7) also succinctly opines that reading is a complex thinking process based on understanding. Reading involves making predictions as you read on (thinking of related ideas) about thoughts, events, outcomes and conclusions. Smith (12) views reading as igniting mental images that are indirectly and directly related to the text and that this visualization depends on the reader. Purposeful reading elates one's existing knowledge to new information in the text, embellishing the knowledge and building up one's own framework of ideas. This is saying that, reading purposefully and intentionally generates as well as builds up knowledge in the individual. Simply, (13) reading is teaching without talking or noiseless teaching and noiseless learning (noiseless self teaching). This is silent reading which (14) enhances understanding. Reading is an active conscious process and understanding what one reads is as much what is already in the individual's brain as what is in the text that is, integrating the reading process into larger theories. The purpose of reading, according to Anderson et al (13), is the construction of meaning, understanding actively and responding to what is read. Reading therefore is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction of the reader's previous knowledge, the information found in the text and the context of the reading situation. Thus giving reading the importance it deserves in the academic world. Vacca, Vacca & Gove (7) once more assert this by viewing reading as a series of things done in order to translate text into meaning through making use of

prior knowledge. They further assert that this is initiated by making predictions (educated guesses) about meaning and at the same time decoding graphic; this, they call the interactive models of reading. This further strengthens the fact that, reading excites or ignites mental images that are directly or indirectly related to the text.

The art of reading is initiated by the reader's prior knowledge and experiences as well as the ability to decode graphics and to decipher the text for comprehension, the purpose and the intention.

Some situations where reading is not seen as a method of learning is when the student is unable to decode and decipher such text. One of the teacher's responsibilities is to assist the students to develop skills to that effect. Sometimes, when reading a difficult text, the reader usually out of experience in his reading capabilities can make "educated guesses" which often fit in. Another situation occurs when the unaware students often mistakenly believe that they are reading when they are actually engaged in mindless reading and consequently zero processing (8).



**Figure 1. Information processing in interactive models of reading.**

**Source. Southgate Arnold and Johnson (8)**

Learning, succinctly defined by Papilila (15), is a long lasting (relatively permanent) change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience. Reading helps students to learn and think critically. Reading helps one to build a repertoire of knowledge. (personal epistemology).

Learning from the cognitivist viewpoint (constructivism) as opined by Petty (13) is aimed at understanding. Learners must construct their own meaning. Cognitivists aim to teach for understanding which requires that new learning (knowledge) be built on existing learning (knowledge) ; according to Tambo (16), it is the transfer of learning and this is the impact of learning upon subsequent learning. Positive transfer occurs when previous learning makes subsequent learning easier. What encourages reading especially in academic milieu is learning; because one reads so one can acquire knowledge that he or she would use to create relatively permanent change in him or her. Reading to learn requires that the student or reader reads in solitary (conducive environment) as reading (12) is an entirely solitary activity requiring quiet concentration in silence. Such reading is reading for learning. Many students cannot read for long in class because of the noise and distractions. As such, students prefer to read in libraries or their homes with less or no noise.

#### **Problem statement**

The education and training of nurses and midwives entails a combination of theory (classroom knowledge) and practice. In the theory, concepts are passed down in class using various teaching methods requiring that the students make a lot of effort to complement. In complementing, reading is central in which the students read notes given in class, and other relevant material from various sources. During reading, much subject matter is remembered and new information is registered which may be used in class to ask questions for clarification. These clarifications enhance cognitive and metacognitive learning which is later translated into practice. Hence, during practice, there is memory recall that enables learning in the psychomotor and affective domains to occur. All of these will be difficult to achieve if reading is not encouraged amongst

learners. It would appear that most students encounter difficulties with reading or are unaware of the role of reading in learning. It is therefore for this reason that this research on investigating reading was conceived to assess and resolve some problems of reading as a learning method among student nurses.

### Research Questions

- 1What are some parameters of student nurses within Buea, South West Region, Cameroon?
- 2What is the importance of reading in the learning process among the student nurses?
- 3What are the reasons for reading among the student nurses?
- 4What is the knowledge of reading techniques among the student nurses?

### Specific objectives

To identify some parameters of student nurses within Buea, South West Region, Cameroon

To assess the importance of reading in the learning process among the student nurses

To assess reasons for reading among the student nurses

To assess the knowledge of reading techniques among the student nurses

### Research materials and methods

The research design chosen was the descriptive cross sectional survey (non-experimental) as it examined and described the importance students attach to reading as a learning method. The data were collected using a single questionnaire.

All nursing schools authorized by the Minister of Public Health according to Decision No D13.316/PR/MPH/CAB-authorising public and private health personnel training schools, Yaounde, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014 ([www.minsante.cm/www.s](http://www.minsante.cm/www.s)), in Fako division were included in the study.

The target population was the total number of student nurses found in all the institutions (411). The probability sampling technique was used as in it every unit, element or member of the population has a chance of being selected. The sample is unbiased. It is also advantageous in that it tends to be representative as every respondent has an equal chance of being selected and estimates are easy to calculate. Specifically, the multi-stage sampling technique including the cluster sampling method and simple random sampling technique were used. The cluster sampling method is a random sample of natural groups of individuals in the population. (17, 18). It is used when the population is dispersed over a wide geographic region. The four nursing schools in Fako division are all dispersed over the four sub-divisions which make up the division.

**Table 1. Showing Nursing Schools in Fako Division & Student Enrolment**

S/N	Name of school	Sub division found	Number of students
1	Limbe State Registered Nursing School	Limbe sub division	153
2	Maflekumen State Registered Nursing School Tiko	Tiko sub division	67
3	St Francis School of Nursing and Midwifery Bokoko, Buea	Buea sub division	111
4	Redemption State Registered Nursing School Muyuka	Muyuka sub division	80

Each school formed a cluster and students were selected from each school using the simple random sampling. Fifty small ballot papers written 'yes' therein and the rest written 'no' were twisted and presented, and those who met the inclusion criteria and consenting students were allowed to

randomly pick a ballot paper each. Those who picked yes were given the questionnaire to fill. The same process was done in all the four schools to get the sample size of 200 students approximately 50% of the target population. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire with four sections (parameters, importance, reasons and knowledge of reading techniques) was used.

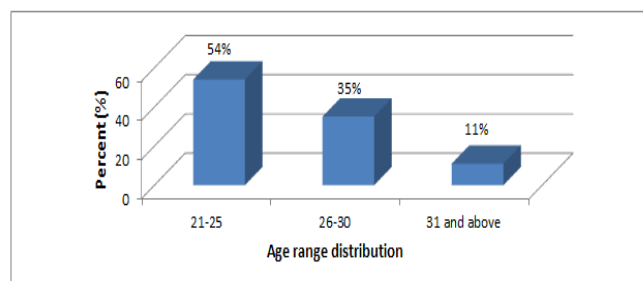
The data collection process included obtaining ethical approval from the Faculty of Health Sciences Institutional Review Board, clearances from the Directors of state registered nursing schools, and informed consent from the individual participants. The questionnaire was validated by pretesting (pilot study) before the data collection. At the end of each day, the number of consent forms were counted and made sure it corresponded to the number of questionnaires. The questionnaires were then checked, validated and then stored for subsequent use for data entering.

The questionnaires were administered to the students who were expected to answer the questions averagely within 10 minutes. Study participants were seen during their break and free periods so that it did not interfere with their studies.

### Results

#### Parameters

An overwhelming 54% of respondents are within the age range of 21-25 years. This is representative of the educational landscape in the country as most students are relatively young. Just 22 respondents (11%) were above 31 years as shown on fig. 2 below



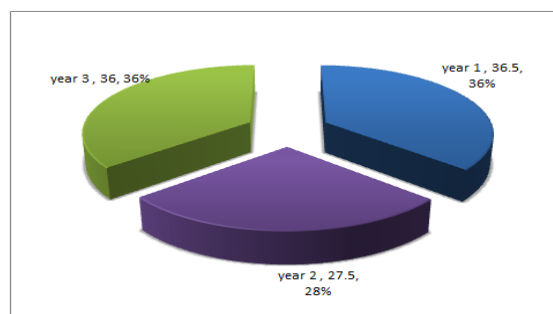
**Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by age range**

Out of 200 participants, 184 (92%) got admission into the nursing schools with the G.C.E. Advanced Level. This is as a result of the fact that this is the minimum requirement to be granted admission into such schools. Again, this level of education correlates with the mean age as seen above.

**Table 2. Distribution of respondents by entry certificate(s)**

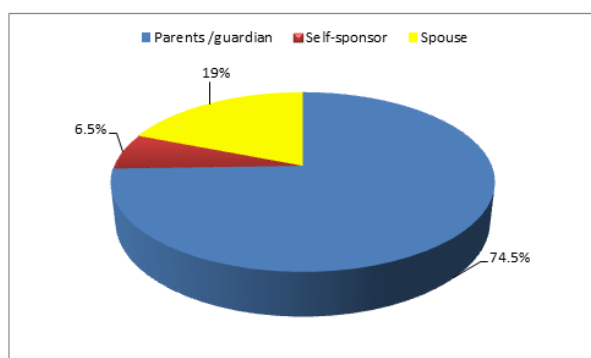
Nursing School	Frequency (n)	Per cent (%)
G.C.E. Advanced	184	92.0
First degree	9	4.5
Others	7	3.5
Total	200	100

An almost equal number of participants for the study were drawn from Year 1 and Year 3 as shown below:



**Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by level of study**

Seventy five point five percent (74.5%) of respondents are sponsored by their parents/guardians. This is as a result of the fact that most of them are relatively young (between 21-25 years) and thus cannot fend for themselves.



**Figure 4. Distribution of participants with respect to sponsorship**

### Importance

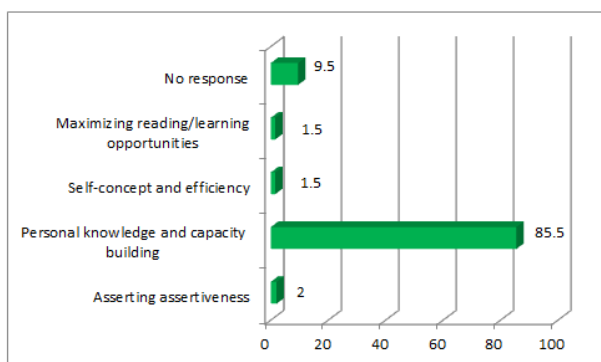
All of the respondents except one held that reading is important as a learning method.

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents by importance of reading**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	199	99.5
No	1	0.5
Total	200	100

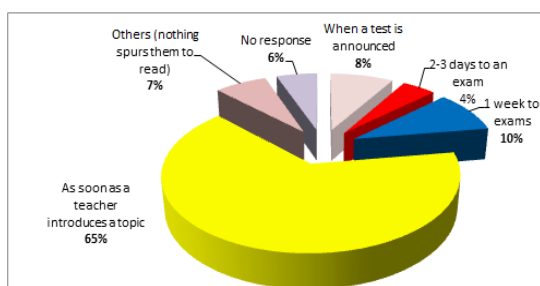
When participants were interrogated on why they read (notes, related textbooks and articles) as individuals, it was realized that most of them do so for personal knowledge and capacity building. This shows that reading here is not for leisure but for their own knowledge acquisition and capacity building to become future competent nurses.

### Reasons



**Figure 5. Distribution of respondents by reasons for reading**

As a result of the importance attached to the reading by the students and the reasons why they read, another majority (65%) say they start reading as soon as the teacher introduces a topic.



**Figure 6. Distribution of respondents by when students read**

### Reading strategy (technique)

As regards to reading strategy, the respondents were questioned on their knowledge about the SQR<sup>4</sup> approach. 26.5% of the respondents accepted to have heard about the approach. To further prove the claim, they were asked to explain, in their own words, what it means. It was noticed that just 7% of the respondents actually know what the SQR<sup>4</sup> approach means. This is against 87.5% who do not know what it means.

### Knowledge on reading techniques

Out of the total number of participants, 87.5% were not knowledgeable on reading techniques, while 7% were knowledgeable and 5.5% provided no responses (table 4)

**Table 4. Distribution of respondents by knowledge on the reading technique**

Variable	Percentage
Don't know what SQR <sup>4</sup> means	87.5%
Know what SQR <sup>4</sup> means	7%
No response	5.5%

The following table shows the distribution of reading materials as stated by the participants in the study. A majority of them opine that they use reading materials (pens, pencils, jotters). A minority cited other materials including beds, music, candles, juice, mobile phones, and TV.

**Table 5. Distribution of respondents by materials used during reading**

Materials	Frequency
Textbooks	42
Dictionary	39
Internet	37
Writing materials	180
Others	28

Majority of participants who valued the importance of reading were year 3 students (33.5%). These results were statistically significant with a p value of 0.004 using Fisher exact test.

### Discussion

Considering the parameters of the students, an overwhelming majority of the respondents are within the age range of 21-25 years. This is in accordance with the educational landscape in the country as most students are relatively young. Twenty-two respondents (11%) were above 31 years of age. This shows that most of the students are young adults who still need orientation when it comes to discipline, self-discipline and making of important decision especially educational and professional decisions. Some of them complained of tiredness, others watching television and some of them feeling sleepy when reading. This shows that there is some disorientation with some of the students. They are probably doing the right thing at the wrong time, so they need to be guided in their thinking, how to prioritize, what to do with their time and how to manage their time.

### To identify the importance of reading from the students' perspective

From the data collected, all the students except one hold that reading is important. When the students were interrogated, as to why they read as individuals, most of them responded that, they read to acquire knowledge and capacity building. This is contrary to (19) who purports that nursing students are taught to see the acquisition of knowledge as burdensome and that the only reason for learning is not to kill or harm the patient.



**Table 6. Distribution of respondents by level of study and when the start reading.**

Level of study	a-when a test is announced	b- 2-3 days to an exam	c- 1week to exams	d- as soon as teacher introduces a topic	e- others	TOTAL (%)	Fisher Exact
year 1 %	8 12.3	2 3.1	3 4.6	48 73.8	4 6.2	65(32.5)	P=0.004
year 2 %	2 3.6	7 12.7	12 21.8	33 60.0	1 1.8	55(27.5)	
year 3 %	6 9.0	2 3.0	4 6.0	46 68.7	9 13.4	67(33.5)	
No Response	00	00	00	00	00	13(6.9)	
TOTAL	16 8.6	11 5.9	19 10.2	127 67.9	14 7.5	200 100.0	

This showed that most of the students knew that reading is for knowledge acquisition and capacity building. In nursing education, everyone who graduates must be fully knowledgeable in terms of classroom knowledge for effective practical skills. About 15% of the students gave no response. What could be their reasons? It maybe that nothing motivates them to read and so learn. Maybe they are not interested in becoming competent nurses in future or perhaps these students did not freely choose to be student nurses, that is, they could have been forced to become student nurses.

Four students, (2%) saw the reason for reading as asserting assertiveness. These students could see a deeper meaning in reading, not just to acquire knowledge but also to use such knowledge to express themselves while respecting the viewpoints of others, this comes with self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-esteem is very important for nursing students because self-esteem builds up self-confidence, and if you are self-confident you read with more zeal and the student becomes vicarious. This is in accordance with Sweet (20), the student becomes assertive and goes in for what he/she thinks is beneficial in terms of relevant knowledge. How good it is to get what you want (21). The researcher sees this quality in the students as very vital in nursing education. The student becomes resilient and persistent in the phase of challenges, as the tough keep going.

Three students (fig.7) saw reading as building up self-concept and efficiency and so it was considered to be equally important in reading for the students as these qualities help the students to achieve vicarious experiences that further motivates them to read. When a student develops such a reading culture, he or she equally develops such skill as self-efficacy that is holistic. Such include; behavioural self-efficacy, cognitive self-efficacy, emotional self-efficacy and cultural self-efficacy, which make him or her ready for any adaptation (21), and be an all-round balanced student capable of reading purposefully and intentionally despite odds. Self-efficacy helps the student to exercise self-control. Intelligent people are always eager to learn (21, 22). This holistic efficacy enhances engagement; which Richardson (23) says is very essential for deep reading. Once there is engagement, there is the zeal to read purposefully and intelligently too.

Three students (1.5%) expressed that they read to maximise reading and learning opportunities. This is in line with Deyoung (24) who asserts that knowledge is gained more by the students who go for what they want and reading from varied sources and the reading is constant (25). Constant reading increases retention as well as a quantitative increase in knowledge. This is in conformity with (26, 27) who both acknowledge that a reading culture creates a repertoire of knowledge.

To further ascertain the importance of reading from students' perspective, students were asked when they read. The response was that majority (fig. 6) reported that they start reading as soon as the teacher introduces a topic, 10% say one week to exams, 8% when a test is announced and 7% say nothing spurs them to read.

Sixty-five per cent expressed that as soon as a topic is introduced they begin reading. Such students are likely to be highly motivated readers that want to be agents of change (28). This is in accordance with (5, 6) who see such students' reading as reading to understand concepts and build a repertoire of knowledge. Such students, as also seen by (29) do not only read to understand the print or text but also to create knowledge structures (schemas) in long-term memory. The author thinks that, reading as soon as a topic is introduced is very important for understanding, as the students read in a relaxed manner. No tension, no fuss. These students while reading try to understand what they understand. This is in line with Dole and Smith (4, 11) who both call it metacognition. Because such students are reading to understand and not just to pass an exam or test, they may more likely read, prepare questions on points that they have not understood, thus helping the teacher to help them. This is further showing that some students do ascertain the importance of reading. This is in line with McEwan (10) who sees such as reading for ideas not just for information (8, 30, 31). They all see this as discovery reading, reading for knowledge and such reading creates a research mind and critical thinking skills.

The students who read only when a test is announced or 2-3 days to exams do so by cramming, that is, rote reading. Such students see knowledge as burdensome as Krammer (29) sees it. Such students will only acquire superficial knowledge because of shallow reading. Such knowledge is soon forgotten and the student perpetually remains empty and since no knowledge is registered (after exams or test all is forgotten.) no previous knowledge is available and so subsequent reading is not fruitful. This is in accordance with Tambo (16) who views that, with shallow reading there is no knowledge transfer. When there is no positive knowledge transfer, there is no learning. This is so because reading to learn is easily achieved when new information relates to previously read information that can be retrieved or remembered and or linked. This 'no knowledge transfer' is even more so when students do not read to master information or knowledge but read only to pass tests or exams.

This attitude of students reading only when a test is announced or when exams are fast approaching will make our nursing institutions to be cramblers. Deyoung (24) says students should not be trained to soak up knowledge as a

sponge (24), such a method of reading will create and widen the knowledge-gap deficit in the field of practice (2). Such students Kaddoura (32) frowns at the teachers who encourage these students by using assessment methods that favour rote reading and disfavour those who understand but do not reproduce the teacher's notes verbatim. Such reading is only to pass tests or exams, so the students will not be encouraged to read purposefully and intentionally for the acquisition of knowledge.

#### **To identify the reading strategy often used by nursing students**

Finding out if the students were aware and used the standardized reading technique of SQR<sup>4</sup>. Students were asked if they had heard about the technique and 26.5% said they had heard and out of the 26.5%, 7% actually knew what it means.

Reading techniques if fully or systematically used enable the students to easily associate new knowledge to previous knowledge which helps to embellish the knowledge thus increasing the student's repertoire of knowledge that is, acquiring and generating knowledge. This view is shared by (2, 29). In other to be an agentic reader, reading has to be coordinated and organised. Coordinated and organised reading (using reading technique which is a strategy) helps the student to maximise reading and learning opportunities, develops a self-concept and self-efficiency as well as having a vicarious experience. The student is assertive and showing that she/he understands what he/she is understanding (metacognition), is resilient; capable of overcoming odds during reading (regarding challenges as motivating factors to forge on) and acquiring personal epistemology and capacity building which further optimizes and reading learning opportunities (12, 32). Such a student will no doubt be able to transcend such classroom knowledge smoothly into practical situations. Such a student will more likely be a critical thinker. She will at the end of her training, easily glide from a novice nurse to an advanced beginner, to a competent nurse, then to a proficient nurse and then to an expert nurse without getting exasperated (45). This is in line with Dewey (39) who asserts that there should be harmony of theory and practice. This accordingly can be got through intentional purposeful reading using the standardized reading technique designed by Frances P Robinson in 1946 (9) and modified subsequently as stated by (32). Once this classroom knowledge is obtained in this standardized coherent manner maximally, it becomes easier to translate into practice. For you cannot give what you do not have. In nursing practice, classroom knowledge without practice is sterile and practice without classroom knowledge is grooving in the dark. Either way only, is dangerous to nursing practice and to the profession. Reading per se does not guarantee reading. This is in line with Petty (23) and Smith (22) who all opine that it has to be coordinated, organised, be purposeful and intentional, otherwise it is shallow reading, which is purposeless with zero processing. Staggering reader scan be assisted by using the reading technique.

#### **Conclusion**

Majority of the students do acknowledge the importance of reading as a learning method. Some read for personal knowledge acquisition and capacity building, others read because they want to maximize any reading and learning opportunities, others for self-concept and others read to be assertive. These are all positive reasons for reading which could be harnessed and encouraged in nursing schools. Most students read in their homes in the confines of their rooms because it is conducive and reading is a solitary activity. It is therefore suggested that libraries should be built

in these schools so that students can read where there are more text books and internet services and other resources free of charge.

It is clear from the students that a great number of the students do not know the SQR<sup>4</sup> reading technique and therefore, do not use the reading technique to read to learn.

#### **Recommendations**

A program of activities be given to the students at the beginning of each semester or term and that no tests or examinations should be announced.

Both the institution and the students should respect the program for this will make them more matured and be fully responsible for their studies.

An orientation should be done clearly spelling out their responsibilities and institutional expectations.

It is also recommended that reading and therefore, studies in a nursing school should be given all the seriousness they deserve.

A functional library should be instituted in each nursing school in Fako Division.

The reading technique should be the first lesson to be taught in the first year at the beginning of the semester and revised at the beginning of each semester in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years. This will help in inculcating a reading culture in all the students.

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