

PDF - READING DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY STUDYING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS\* IN NSUKKA EDUCATIONAL ZONE - researchcub.info **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this study was to identify the reading difficulties students' encounter while studying English as a second language in junior secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone. The design for this study was Ex-post facto design. The study was carried out in three Local Government areas that made up Nsukka education zone in Enugu state. The local governments are Nsukka, Igbo-Etiti, and Uzo-Uwani local government areas. The population was made up of all the JSS1 students in Nsukka Education zone. Two hundred (200) students were purposively sampled. Two schools from urban and two schools from rural areas, two male schools and two female schools were used. The instrument for the study was an extract taken from the students' recommended text. The students read the text while the researcher ticked the column in the rating scale that has the variable identified. Four research questions and two hypotheses were used for the research. The results were analyzed using mean, frequencies, standard deviation and t-test. The results were that there was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of the students in the urban and those in the rural areas in the reading ability rating scale used. Based on the findings it was recommended that English teachers should as much as possible teach reading comprehension with teaching materials such as audio-visual aids, audio tapes, pattern repetition and the use of flannel boards. Government should provide teaching aids such as audiovisual aids and language laboratories. This will enable students understand what they are taught.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the study**

The history of English language in Nigeria and how it came to be Nigeria's second language is not without our knowledge. Nigeria with over four hundred (400) multi-lingual communities and dialects use

English as her lingua franca and language of commerce and industry. Anyanwu and Otagburagu (2002) observed that English language came to Nigeria between 1781 and 1861. They explained that the teaching of English dated back to the early days of the European trading expeditions. According to Ogbuehi (2002) English language first came to Nigeria through European trade and later through the imposition of colonialism that the Portuguese and some English traders established Pidgin English with the native along the coast of Niger delta for the trading.

Many factors contributed to the acceptance of the English language as Nigeria's national language, one of them being that Nigeria has many languages and different cultures. Anyanwu and Otagburagu (2002) observed that the colonization of Nigeria led to the adoption of the language of the colonial masters. They further explained that the attitude of

the colonial masters towards the use of the indigenous language for official purposes was negative. This kind of attitude prevented the colonial masters to use one of the local languages for official functions. These made way for the acceptance of English language as the best and Nigeria's national language and lingua franca.

Today English language is the chief medium of instruction in Nigerian schools. Mgbodile (1999) agreed that the English language is one of the most important subjects both in internal and external communications and for gaining admission into institutions of higher learning. He observed that parents encourage the use of English language and wanted their children to learn and speak the white man's language. This is why the teaching of English language should be given adequate encouragement to make the future Nigerians fluent in both spoken and written English.

English language is a core subject in all the levels of Nigeria educational system, and every learner is expected to have at least a pass in it. The English language is made up of four skills: listening, reading and writing. Reading is a complex skill which is expressive in nature; it plays a very vital role in the educational life of an individual. Thus Ekpunobi (1991) stated that the ability to read is necessary for success in life and it is a sign of literacy. It follows then that as a student who cannot read efficiently has failed to acquire the skill that will enable him/her to become a literate person in the society. Therefore, reading is an important activity in a child's education because it is a major process towards success in his/her educational pursuit. After the child has acquired his first language, he must learn to read the second language under the guidance of the school or other external body. He must learn to develop skills in reading; such as intensive/extensive, critical/pleasure reading. Otagburuagu and Igbokwe (2001) agreed that reading is the key to the most advanced stages. In other words, reading is very crucial to learning because reading exposes a child to a wide range of information and knowledge. Yankson (1985) defines reading as an active attempt on the part of the reader to understand a writer's message. He states further that a more demanding type of reading is the ability to critically analyze and judge a text.

Reading, therefore, is an act of decoding printed matter. According to Anukam (1999) reading involves the association of sounds and symbols. Nwadike (2001) suggested that reading is an act of deciphering what is written. It is a receptive form of communication and differs from speaking and writing in being a comprehensive activity. It is a thinking process, which involves making sounds and interpreting symbols. Acquiring reading skills implies not only the ability to recognize and say aloud the printed words on a page but also what they mean. Reading involves a combination of activities of the eye, which perceives and explores the verbal symbols and sounds, which discovers and interprets the thought that lie beneath them. It is also clear that reading means far more than visual exploration of printed or written words, it is in fact a very important aspect of the art of the psychology of learning. Reading is thinking and as such a reader has to understand the author's thought and not merely his words. The

process of reading is very complex and many phases or aspects are involved in the completion of this process. The first process in reading is the sensory impression which, maybe either visual or tactile. The auditory sense is also very important to the reading process, since a beginning stage in reading is the association of the printed symbol with spoken language. Reading is seen as an associational process because learning to read depends on a number of the types of associations. The child starts learning to associate objects and ideas with spoken words. This shows that reading is an art depending on visual letter recognition.

The reading background provided at home is a powerful factor in finding out how well the child will excel in school. Parents, who show interest in the reading of their children at home, build strong foundation in the reading habit of their children. A happy home and the presence of variety of attractive and colorful books for children enhance better chances of reading at school. Parents at home exert great influence on a child's life. This means that if parents are interested in their children's performance in reading and thus show appreciation of their success; the child will be motivated. It is also evident that there is a link between the development of reading ability and the socio-economic background of the child. Azikiwe (1988) suggested that if the home and its environment did not provide a child with the opportunity to use materials that are familiar with the English language, the child's reading abilities will be retarded. In other words the socio-economic background of a child determines to a large extent the success or problem a child encounters in reading.

Another contributing factor to the success or failure in reading of the child is poor home environment/background. Most secondary school students especially those from rural areas come from poor homes and as such lack reading materials because they could not afford the relevant texts. Illiteracy of some parents also contribute to poor reading abilities of students because those parents who are rich but are illiterates do not know the value of reading and as such cannot encourage their children to have necessary reading materials. Therefore, a child's home and background determines to a large extent whether the child will be good or bad reader.

Nevertheless, some reading difficulties have been identified as; inability to decode printed materials, low retention as a result of regression, nervousness, mother tongue interference, lack of retention among others. Regression is moving backwards on already read lines or sentences. Azikiwe (1988) observed that pupils in the primary schools were often forced to move backwards to the beginning of a sentence or phrase because of a strange word which they may come across, thereby losing the meaning of the already read words. Learners encounter considerable difficulties when learning a second language especially the English language which is a foreign language in Nigeria this is because the sound system/ the grammar of the first language (L1) or the mother tongue impose difficulties on the new language or second language (L2) which leads to foreign language pronunciation and

grammatical errors. Nervousness affects the reading of some students especially those from rural areas who may not be privileged to have been taught mainly with English. They may be nervous when expressing themselves in the English language, because they feel that others are laughing at their expressions and pronunciations.

The need for good foundation in reading cannot be overemphasized as there is a widespread complaint about low level of achievements in the English language among students in secondary schools. The West African examination council O' level results has continued to show that English language has one of the least numbers of passes. The West African examination council chief Examiners report (1998-2001) has confirmed this report. Past researchers have commented on the concern of the parents to the low achievements of the students in English language in both junior certificate (JCE), and senior certificate examinations (SSCE). The federal government of Nigeria, in support of the need to improve on the achievement of English stated on the national policy on education (1998) stated that the goals of primary education is to inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively and to eradicate mass illiteracy where every Nigerian will be in the position to read and write.

Despite the efforts made by the government, teachers and researchers to improve on the reading habits of students, they still encounter a lot of difficulties in their bid to acquire proficiency in reading the English language. This problem is peculiar to Nsukka Educational Zone. In commenting among Nigerian school children, Okonkwo (1998) agreed that:

Our school children lack the ability to read. Even those that are able to read read at a slow pace and cannot get enough information contained in the books read. They cannot assimilate or analyze information or use information in confronting personal problems in life....they do not read books apart from the recommended and compulsory books.

The above observation which was made a decade ago still implies to some of our school system. Some children still do not comprehend or analyze what they have read. The chief examiner's report of 1998- 2001 also showed that Nsukka Educational Zone has the least passes in English in senior secondary school certificate Examination.

Experiences of the teachers and the researchers in the field has shown that there are some lapses in senior school examination which lead to poor performance in English language examinations, these lapses have been traced to poor reading abilities among students. This calls for the reason of the present study of the reading difficulties experienced by studying English as a second language in junior secondary school in Nsukka Education Zone.

### **Statement of the problem**

Reading is a pre-requisite for learning and so, the poor reading habits of the secondary school students cannot be separated from their poor performances. Poor reading abilities can cause poor performance in examination. The ability to read well, especially reading and interpreting questions has been identified as an important reason for this situation. Reading

has not received the proper attention due to it by students. The inability to read properly may be because of the students' lack of sufficient skills in reading. It is often erroneously taken to be the easiest skill which is not. Studies in reading have revealed that there are all kinds of reading difficulties that create problems to readers and aggravate learning problems.

Reading, therefore, is most functional when it facilitates the learning process and effectively promotes our intellectual development. This is to say that efficient reading certainly promotes understanding, retention, and recall, transfer of learning and achievement of good intellectual development. Nevertheless, reading difficulties continue to exist among students, especially those in junior secondary schools. These difficulties include; inability to decode printed materials, low retention as a result of regression, mother-tongue interference, lack of retention among others. These reading difficulties pose a lot of problems in secondary school certificate Examination and therefore become a source of concern to teachers, administrators, counselors, policy-makers, students as well as parents. However, despite research work done on reading problems in Nsukka urban, it is imperative that a proper study should be carried out in Nsukka Educational Zone to find out the reading difficulties students encountered in reading, particularly in regression in their reading comprehension.

### **Purpose of the study**

The general Purpose of study is to find out the reading difficulties encountered by studying English as a second language in junior secondary schools.

Specifically the study intends to:

1. Ascertain the extent of regression on what was read.
2. Find out the extent of regression in the reading comprehension of the students.
3. Determine how slow reading relates to their reading difficulties.
4. Ascertain the extent of mother-tongue interference in the reading comprehension of the students
5. Determine the extent location of school in the rural areas contribute to the reading difficulties of students.

### **Significance of the study**

In fact, this study will be of immense help to so many benefactors. Some of them are: the students of English of the junior secondary school level, the teachers of English, the curriculum planners, other researchers, parents and society.

The students at the junior secondary school level will be exposed to better reading skills and this will give them good opportunity of reading better in their higher level of education. The study will serve as an eye opener to teachers of English because they will be exposed to better techniques of teaching reading skills to students of the junior secondary schools. The study will also help the curriculum planners by bringing to their focus the extent at which the educational purposes are achieved in Nigerian secondary schools. With this, the curriculum

planners will be able to allot appropriate time for teaching reading English in the junior secondary schools. The study will bring to the focus of the researchers the areas that have been studied and areas that are yet to be studied. Parents and the society will heave the sigh of relief when their children perform better in school certification examination.

### **Scope of the study**

The study will be limited to difficulties students encounter when studying English as a second language in junior secondary schools in Nsukka Educational Zone.

The content scope was an extract from unit one of the prescribed text of Junior Secondary School (JSS1). That is; intensive English book one, titled "Ngozi and Emeka".

### **Research questions**

These research questions guided the study.

1. To what degree can the students recall what has been read from the given passage?
2. To what degree can Junior Secondary School students (JSS1) read a comprehension passage?
3. To what extent does slow reading relate to their reading difficulties?
4. To what degree does mother-tongue interference affect the reading comprehension of students?
5. To what degree does location of school in the rural areas contribute to the reading difficulties of students?

### **Research hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of males and the mean achievement scores of females in the reading ability rating scale used.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students in the urban and those in the rural areas in the reading ability rating scale used.

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