

---

## INVESTIGATING READING DEFICIENCIES IN STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL, IKENEGBU, OWERRI, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

**Priscilla Ebere Ogbedeagu and Stella D. Uzomah**

Department of Languages and Humanities

School Of General Studies, Alvan Ikoku Federal College Of Education, Owerri,  
Imo State, Nigeria

---

**Citation:** Priscilla Ebere Ogbedeagu and Stella D. Uzomah (2022) Investigating Reading Deficiencies in Students: A Case Study of Girls' Secondary School, Ikenegbu, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol.10, No.2, pp., 36-44

---

**ABSTRACT:** *Reading, as a basic communication skill, should be acquired by every second language (L<sub>2</sub>) learner of English to enable the learner fully integrate into the present technological and scientific age. This study investigates the reading deficiencies in students of Girls' Secondary School Ikenegbu, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. The objectives are to identify students' reading faults and speed, and proffer solutions to them. Three research questions guide the study, one of which is to what extent do reading faults hinder the L<sub>2</sub> reader of English? The theoretical framework is based on the Psycholinguistic Theory of Reading. The findings are that though there are reading faults identified, over 80% of the students are able to overcome their challenges. The study recommends, among others, that adequate and consistent reading comprehension exercises be regularly administered to help students overcome the challenges*

**KEYWORDS:** investigating, reading deficiencies and solutions.

---

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Obah (1981:10) captures much of the essence of what reading connotes in his elaborate description that :

*Reading involves the process whereby information is passed from the writer to the reader who without the props of facial movements, gestures or tone of voice, the ready accompaniment of speech context, must learn to isolate concepts that are represented by black and white symbols – marks or words on the page.*

For Ogwumike, Ndimele and Innocent (2015: 603) 'reading comprehension is the level of understanding of text or message.' The understanding, according to them, is seen in the knowledge got outside the text or message which happens as a result of the interaction with the words that are written. Reading deficiency, on the other hand, is a learning defect which manifests significantly in problems of reading accurately, speed or comprehension in a way that successful academic output is hindered. Another name for reading disorder is dyslexia (deficiency in spelling, writing as well as reading).

In academic learning the ability to read is considered very important. Reading by learners of English as a second language (L<sub>2</sub>) is one of the first moves they can make outside the classroom situation. That is, especially so in Nigeria which is both a multilingual and multicultural nation. Just like other aspects of language learning, reading is a complex task, and worse still are the challenges that face the L<sub>2</sub> students in the development of fluent reading abilities.

The students for the reasons above can only need a skilled reading teacher who, Darrell (2014:106) argues, is likened to a craftsman with a toolbox. This is because the craftsman can build just as much as the teacher can teach. In each case, however, they need good sets of tools to produce good results. Basically the two tools the teacher uses for the purpose of imparting the reading skills to the learner are quality reading materials and appropriate teaching techniques or strategies.

For the task of achieving effective reading for the learners, consideration must be taken of all that operate in the reader's recognition of all that operate in the linguistic levels of language, as well setting a goal, summarizing the text, interpreting it, assessment of set goals and above all, adjustment of the comprehension as the need arises. This definitely is a herculean task both for the teacher and the student, and readily confirms the complexity of second language reading. Teaching reading to L<sub>2</sub> learners requires quite a vast knowledge of the sound system of the English language as well as how sounds are represented on the page. In other words, the teacher should be equipped with the knowledge of phonetics and phonology, to be able to appreciate the kind of transfer the L<sub>2</sub> learner brings to target language; and teach him well in reading.

To have the understanding that words can be broken into units of sound to have 'phonemic awareness'. This is a key aspect in linguistic which the learners need to be able to some of the reading deficiencies. It goes this way: words must be decoded, and this is dependent on the ability to decode the sounds contained in the words. For instance, the word 'man' has three sounds represented by three letters; the first letter has the same sound as that in the first letter of the word 'mud'. After the first letter, m, what is left in 'man' is '-an' just '-ud' is left in 'mud' after the first letter, m. There are obvious differences in the letters as well as in the corresponding sounds. Students, therefore, who lack phonemic awareness, from the illustration above, will have problem learning to read because of the difficulty in decoding words into sounds.

The problem of L<sub>2</sub> is compounded by some extraneous factors. There are lack of adequate language resources unlike the L<sub>1</sub> readers. The social and cultural background knowledge bases that are prevalent among L<sub>1</sub> readers when reading in their own language are more or less absent for L<sub>2</sub> readers. Above all, the L<sub>2</sub> readers contend with cognitive resources and processing of both their own language and the target or second language.

Undeniably, there must always be a purpose why we read. Whatever reason it is also affects the way and what we read which presupposes that different materials or texts are read differently. For instance, when one is given an examination question paper, one reads it in such a way as to understand the questions to be able to answer the questions correctly. Carrell and Grabe (2010; p ) state the purposes for reading to include: reading to learn, reading for general understanding, reading to integrate information and reading to evaluate. They also add scanning and skimming as other purposes for reading.

Kola (2005; p 4) suggests that the two major areas to develop should be reading for understanding and reading to learn. According to the source, it is in these two reading purposes that comprehension occurs when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known.

### **Crucial Areas that Affect Second Language Reading**

It is important at this stage to consider those necessary linguistic areas that affect a second language learner's reading. For efficient reading to be achieved, careful study and application of these points are necessary.

**Word Recognition:** The importance of word recognition in L<sub>2</sub> reading for both young and adult reading learners in the fluency and awareness that it raises on the student for extended independent reading. One must be able to recognize words fast and without much effort, to be a proficient reader. In reading, however, both the eyes and the brain are actively involved, but more the brain. On the contrary, the learner's ability to understand the text is impaired when he employs much of his processing capacity in reading individual words due to poor word recognition.

**Vocabulary:** The attention of teachers should be drawn to the disadvantage the L<sub>2</sub> faces with the task of learning a new orthographic system different from his L<sub>1</sub> experience. In addition to this, he has to adjust to his L<sub>2</sub> experience by developing new processing mechanisms. On second language lexis, Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996) conducted a seminal study, strongly supported by Nation (2006). Their corroborated results point to the same fact that no less than 98% of the words of any print is needed to read short, unsimplified novels for pleasure. When translated, it implies that between 8,000 and 9,000 word families should be mastered, which equals to not less than 36,000 individual word types. Consulting the dictionary by an L<sub>2</sub> reader has been discouraged at the very point of reading a comprehension text. This strong position is based on results developed from studies by Sim and Weis (1984) and Hulstijn (1993). It does not in any way rule out the important role dictionaries play in vocabulary development contained in the comprehension text.

The role of guessing in drawing meaning and answers from any given reading passage is also an issue in L<sub>2</sub> reading context. Hulstijn (1998) in addition suggests the use of both the dictionary and guessing only in conjunction with reading.

**Reading Rate:** As much as speed is important in reading, it should be noted that pace is determined by what is being read. In other words, reading speed is relative to the need of a particular situation. Ajayi and Idakwo (1996: 82) identify these three reading methods: scanning, skimming and studying. While scanning and skimming are employed in extensive reading, studying which involves a careful, in-depth study of the text material is intensive.

The above-mentioned methods individually and collectively play their role in providing information to the reader; the material being read, the time and reason for reading are all necessary factors to be considered. In some situations, the reader applies their uses in a progressive manner, starting with skimming to get in a very short time some necessary information about the text. Scanning may follow to search for the particular information which the reader easily recognizes once he uses them. Thereafter he settles down to study, a reading method which enables him to understand the structure and content of the text. This involves getting detailed information.

Extensive reading plays important roles in promoting fluency, comprehension and vocabulary learning for L<sub>2</sub> reading. The different studies by Mason and Krashen (1997), Tudor (1989) and Elley (2000) all point to the claim that students who are exposed to extensive reading programmes for a regulated period of time, improve much better than some controlled groups which show no significant improvement over the same period.

**L<sub>2</sub> Language Proficiency:** Language proficiency for L<sub>2</sub> involve more reading skills. In addition to reading, other intellectual skills come to play, requiring efficient study skills. Such is seen in one of the well-known study techniques called SQ3R, an acronym that stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review.

Readers can be promoted by making the learners practice reading in a conducive learning context. According to Cummins (1979), reading in both the first and the second languages share similar underlying proficiency. Carrell (1991), however, holds a contrary view as posited by his studies which saw the second language proficiency as a stronger predictor than the first language reading ability, second language reading.

**Cues on Background Knowledge of Text structure and Discourse:** To be versed in the title of the passage being read gives an added advantage to an L<sub>2</sub> reader of reading comprehension while admitting the importance of background knowledge, Carrell and wise (1998) and Pritchard (1990) also considered the influence of other factors such as cultural content as equally positive roles. For Pritchard, students prefer sets of strategies for passages that are culturally familiar than for those that are not: Furthermore, Carrell (1992) asserts that students are more likely to understand and remember what they read, if they possess the background knowledge of the text. Carrell considers the awareness the students have of the different patterns authors used to organize expository texts for which they can explore structure strategy in reading.

**Possible Factors Affecting Reading Abilities of L<sub>2</sub> Readers:**

Below are listed factors and habits that make our reading defective. In other words, they hinder efficient reading .

- (a) Vocalization – Voice reading
- (b) Sub-vocalization or lip reading
- (c) Regression
- (d) Poor decoding of author’s messages
- (e) Poor rhythmic eye movement
- (f) Hearing impairment
- (g) Poor reading rate
- (h) Poor/lack of physical facilities- improper lighting of reading materials
- (i) Poor word/letter recognition
- (j) Pointing to words with finger or object/finger pointing to words
- (k) Dyslexia – poor visual memory
- (l) Lack of knowledge of lexical items in the text.

Based on these deficiencies to effective reading, the teacher falls back on his textbook for the two most important tools as a remedy to the problem-quality and graded reading materials and appropriate teaching techniques.

### **Reading Materials**

The importance of these in the nascent stages of the reading development is undeniable. The reading materials are graded according to the interests, age and class of readers. They should be interesting and some consideration is given to the difficulty levels of the recommended texts. The difficulty levels are determined by the predictability of the text, amount of written materials on each page as well as the total number of new lexical words. These notwithstanding, efficient reading is hindered as a result of factors such as the lack or shortage of basic reading or instructional materials. In such a situation, a resourceful reader uses alternative materials such as improvised instructional materials and the recommended texts for the class.

### **Teaching Techniques/Strategies**

After proper assessment of the students'/Learners' weaknesses, a skilled teacher is able to place the learners in their right groups for the appropriate instruction and learning. One or of the popularly tested manuals in reading should always be handy for use in the classroom. Darrell Marris' (2014) second edition of *Diagnosis and Correction of Reading Problems* is very helpful in confronting this arduous task.

Darrell (2014:137) recommends the following remedial measures for the emergent reader:

- Reading materials- read the text/material.
- Support reading – echo-reading; partner reading of the text
- Sight vocabulary – looking out for familiar words for the establishment of a word bank
- Word study: depends on the content – short vowels, long vowels, consonant clusters (use them to build word families)
- Writing: sentence writing (with the teacher's support)

Apart from affording the reading learners opportunity of interaction with the teacher, the grouping arrangement provides the teacher with more chances to observe the performances of the individual learners.

**Objectives of the study:** Three objectives are formulated for this study namely-

1. To identify reading faults in students.
2. To identify students' reading speed
3. To proffer solution to the problems identified.

**Research Questions:** These research questions based on the research above are raised for a proper guide in the study:

1. To what extent do reading faults hinder the L<sub>2</sub> reader of English?
2. To what extent do JSS 1 students possess reading speed?
3. To what extent can remedial measures be taken to correct deficiencies in L<sub>2</sub> students?

### **METHODS**

This study is based on the Psycholinguistic theory of reading which an offshoot of the Skills Model theory is. Sheridan (1981:3) posits that the Psycholinguistic Model views reading as a process of predicting meaning based on the reader's knowledge of oral language syntax, semantics and phonological cues. Based on the reader's stored information about how language works from his knowledge of oral, a reader already knows something about how words are ordered and what kinds of meanings words possess in certain contexts.

**Procedure: Participants** - 41 students from JSS 1i of Girls' Secondary School, Ikenegbu in Owerri Municipal of Imo State, Nigeria, participated. JSS 1i is a class of 50 students. 41 students were present and participated in the reading exercises and only 36 of them returned their scripts after the comprehension exercise aimed at testing their understanding of the passage; five students did not hand in their scripts.

The population is 500 made up of 10 streams of JSS 1, each of 50 students. Ten percent of the population was purposively selected with the aim of handling a most likely less intelligent class as it is believed that classification is based on merit. The sample size is 41, nine being absent. This sample size was chosen for logistic reasons.

### **Instrument**

The recommended English language textbook, *High Standard English for Junious Secondary School 1*, is used. It is believed that the students would all have the textbook. The comprehension passage titled, 'Disobedience in the Boarding School' in Unit six of the textbook, is selected for the reading exercise. The study employs the Skills Model in addition to the Psycholinguistic Model Theory for the purpose of having a sequential order of instruction based on steps.

The following steps are employed:

1. Model Reading. One of the researchers carefully reads the passage observing the punctuation marks and pronunciation.
2. General reading. The students are asked to read the passage aloud generally while the researchers record some observations. The reading is repeated.
3. Individual reading. The researchers appoint slow and fast readers carefully observed, during the general reading to read this time individually while recording their speed and accuracy.
4. Silent Reading. Students read the passage silently, once. One of the researchers observes the reading while the other writes down some questions on the chalkboard based on the text but different from the questions the passage came with in the textbook. Students copy down the researchers' questions. They study the questions and write down their answers.

Data collection is through observation aimed at discovering some reading faults (**See picture as document**). The reading faults are structured under a four-point scale of very high extent, high extent, low extent and very low extent, to address the research questions.



---

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data are collected based on the research objectives and questions. They are analyzed using the simple percentage.

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do reading faults hinder the L<sub>2</sub> reader of English?

Four reading faults, among others, observed during the exercise are grouped for the analysis of research question 1. Total number of participants is 41. These frequencies and percentages are presented for very high extent, high extent, low extent and very low extent respectively. The groups are (A) pointing to words: 8 (20%), 6 (15%), 12 (29%) and 13 (32%). (B) nodding of heads: 11(27%), 7 (17%), 10 (24%), 13 (32%), (C) vocalization: 11 (27%), 9 (22%), 8(20%), 13 (32%) and (D) sub-vocalization: 8 (20%), 10(24%), 11 (27%), 12 (29%). The results above show that more students are without reading faults as the number/percentage of those with reading faults is less.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do JSS 1 students possess reading speed?

For this analysis, some reading faults observed are grouped under the same four point scale as research question 1. They are (A) regression: 7(17%), 5 (12%), 16 (39%), 13 (32%) (B) poor word/letter recognition: 2 (5%), 2 (5%), 17 (41%), 20 (49%) and (C) poor reading rate: 4 (10%), 2 (5%), 23 (56%) and 12 (29%). This result shows that in spite of the students' reading faults analyzed above only a total of six students out of forty-one recorded a poor reading rate. The fastest reading as recorded, as by the researchers, is three minutes while the slowest is five minutes.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent can remedial measures be taken to correct reading deficiencies in L<sub>2</sub> students?

A comprehension exercise given to determine the effects of the reading faults of the students as a remedial measure produced these results:

- Poor/lack of physical facilities: 19% of the students had no textbooks, either because they were not provided for them or that they did not bring the books with them to school while 81% had the books with them.
- Lack of knowledge of lexical items in the text: 15% of the students had no knowledge of some lexical items in the text which affected their full understanding of the passage read while 85% had knowledge of the lexical items.
- Poor decoding of the author's message: 12% lacked understanding of the author's message while 88% could decode the author's message.

The application of Darrell Marris' five-point *Diagnosis and Correction of Reading Problems* is recommended to the learners as effective measures to improve their reading skills. The major problems identified in their written comprehension exercise are technical errors of grammar which require in-depth teaching of grammar by the teachers. The findings are quite impressive as the researcher had expected a poor result hence their choice of JSS 1i.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the issues raised in this treatise, the following recommendations have been made:

- In planning the L<sub>2</sub> reading curricula, implications for reading instruction is important to an effective reading curriculum
- Viable goals for instruction should be to determine how L<sub>2</sub> reading abilities can be fully developed.
- Consistent reading comprehension exercises should be given to help students overcome the challenges.
- Investigation should be carried out on readers who are working on two languages, where a transfer from L<sub>1</sub> will possibly affect L<sub>2</sub> reading as a result of difference in the texts of the two languages

## CONCLUSION

Put together, it is reasonable that a certain level of proficiency is needed for any first language (L<sub>1</sub>) reading strategies and skills to be meaningful to second language reading. Such can be productive when these learners are taught in small groups, at the appropriate difficulty level with the teaching materials and proper applications of the teaching techniques.

## REFERENCES

- Ajayi, W. & Idakwo, V. (1996) *Communication in English language*. Osogbo: Limbs Press
- Anderson, N.J (1991). *Individual Differences in Strategy Use in Second Language Reading and Testing*. *Modern Language Journal*, 75
- Anderson N.J (1999). *Exploring Second Languages Reading*. Boston MA: Heinie & Heinie
- Carrell, P.L (1991). *Second Language Reading: Reading Ability or Language Proficiency?* *Applied Linguistics*, 12
- Carrell, P.L (1992). *Awareness of Text Structure: Effects can Recall*. *Language Learning TESOL Quarterly*.
- Carrell, P.L & Wise, T.E (1998). *The Relationship between Prior Knowledge and Topic Interest in Second Language Reading Studies in SLA*, 20
- Cummins, J (1991). *Linguistic Interdependence and the Development of Bi-Lingual Children*. *Review of Educational Research*, 49
- Darrell M, Elley, W (2000) *The Potential of Book floods for Raising Literacy Levels*. *International Journal of Education*, 46
- Darrell, M (2014). *Diagnosis and Correction of Reading Problems*. New York: Guilford Publications
- Gabriel A, Olumi M, Nwachukwu U, Kolapo A & Odinko N (2016). *Standard English for Juniors Secondary Schools I*, Ibadan, Nigeria, Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Goruchi & Taguchi (2008) *Repeated Reading for Developing Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension: The case of EFL Learners in Vietnam*. *System*, 36
- Grabe, W (2009) *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hulstijn J.H (1996) *When do foreign Language Readers Look up the Meaning of Unfamiliar Words? The Influence of Task and Learner Variables*. *Modern Language Journal*, 77
- Koda, K.C (2005) *Insights into Second Language Reading*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mason, B & Krashen, S.C (1997) *Extensive Reading in English as a foreign Language*. *System*, 25



- Nation, I. S. (2006). *How Large a Vocabulary is needed for Reading and Listening?* Canadian Modern Languages Review, 63
- Ndimele, O. M. & Innocent, K. H. (2006). *Fundamentals of Mass Communication*. Port Harcourt: M. J. Grand Orbit Communications
- Ogwumike C; Ndimele, OZ0- Mekuri & Innocent, K.H (2015). *Fundamentals of Human Communication, in Issues in the Study of Language and Literature: Theory & Practice* (2015) Kamalu, I & Tamunobelema, I(eds) Ibandan, Nigeria. Krafts Books Ltd.
- Pritchard, R.H (1990). *The Effects of Cultural Shemeta on Reading Processing Strategies*. Reading Research Quarterly, 25
- Schmitt Norbert (ed) (2010). *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.UK: Hodder & Stroughton Ltd.
- Sheridan, E M (1981). *Reading Horizons: Theories of Reading and Implications for Teachers, Vol 22*
- Taguchi E, Takuasu-Maass & Garsuch, G C (2004). *Developing Reading Fluency in EFL. How Assisted Repeated & Extensive Reading Affect Fluency Development* Reading in a Foreign Language 16