

Reading Errors Among Selected Second Language Readers: Implications for Reading Instruction

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Abstract: This researcher observes that there are divergent positions among scholars regarding the roles of experiential factors and linguistic factors in reading incompetence among L2 readers. This research was conducted with a view to determining the exact sources of reading errors among selected second language learners. The goal was to suggest strategies of reading improvement, using the context of the research as a microcosm of Nigeria and, by extension, other second language contexts. It emerged that reading competence was typically low. However, it is significant that linguistic inadequacies accounted for the bulk of the reading errors identified. This researcher advocates an approach to reading instruction which emphasizes wide reading that is extensive reading. This approach not only generates interest in reading but also creates the opportunity for the learners to gain exposure to data of the target language thereby improving their linguistic skills and subsequently improving their L2 reading.

Key words: Second language, reading errors, learners, foreign language, cognitive view, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Reading competence in a second language (L2) has been a matter of concern among scholars because of the observed tendency among L2 and Foreign Language (FL) readers across the globe to manifest profound reading difficulties. Wurr (2003) explains the situation by pointing out that L2 reading may place additional demands on the reader due to L2 language and cultural proficiency as well as previous literacy experience and belief. Unoh (1980), writing about the Nigerian L2 reading situation, points out the existence of reading problems such as slow reading, low comprehension, inability to distinguish main idea from subordinate details, ineffective recall, difficulty in creative reading and so on. Some scholars like Tswana (2005) have emphasized the experiential factor which they argue deprives an L2 reader of schemata required for comprehending texts written in an L2.

This view which is hinged on the Schema theory is viewed by Landry (2002) as an untenable explanation of poor L2 reading. Wallace (2001), in his own submission, observes that readers in second language situations often do not have the minimum threshold of general L2 ability required to read well.

Obviously, there are divergent positions regarding the source of reading difficulties among L2 readers. Yet, appropriate pedagogical responses would depend on a clear picture of the causes of reading problems. In view of this, this researcher embarked on this study to contribute to the establishment of a clear position regarding this

issue and to recommend solutions to reading problems. The research was conducted in Nigeria within the Lokoja metropolis among two groups of school pupils. One group had completed primary education while the other group had completed secondary education. The goal of the research was to find out their level of competence in reading materials that are deemed (based on appropriate readability tests) to be suitable for their level of literacy training.

The objective was to establish the nature of the reading errors with a view to recommending an appropriate remedy to reading deficiencies. Lokoja is a cosmopolitan town in the central part of Nigeria with people of diverse ethnic background. Its cosmopolitan nature is further enhanced by the fact that it is a state capital which is host to many federal government establishments. The town also is host to two tertiary educational institutions (a university and a polytechnic). Within a 30 km radius around the town are two of the biggest factories in Africa (The huge cement factory in Obajana and the large but struggling steel plant at Ajaokuta). The town is <2 h drive from Abuja the capital of Nigeria. These features create a population that is sufficiently cosmopolitan for the extraction of group to be used as a microcosm for the entire country and to a reasonable extent, for most ex colonial L2 contexts.

The study however, begins with an overview of essential issues related to reading competence, reading assessment and second language reading. Subsequently, the method of research used is presented. Thereafter, the

results are presented and analyzed. Discussions of emerging issues are then made with conclusions and recommendations drawn.

Reading competence: The centrality of the concept of competence to this study necessitates an overview of existing scholarly positions with a view to putting this research in proper perspective. Definitions of reading competence usually depend on the theoretical perspective from where one is viewing the issues involved in reading and there are indeed different theoretical perspectives of reading which may be classified as the traditional view, the cognitive view and the metacognitive view (Vaezi, 2006).

According to this scholar, the traditional perspective views readers as passive recipients of information in texts. Meaning is assumed to reside in the text. Readers simply reproduce it. Also, emphasis is laid on the decoding by readers of a set of written symbols into their speech equivalents. The process is often referred to as the bottom-up view of reading. This process has also been referred to as the outside-in approach because of its emphasis on meaning as a component of the printed page which is usually subsequently taken in by the reader.

Vaezi (2006) further explains that the traditional approach emphasizes the discrete skills that readers employ in reading; such as those involving understanding of formal features of writing like letters, words and structure. These views were the earliest views of reading. Indeed, reading research started on the note of this kind of view.

Vaezi (2006) observes that the cognitive view of reading which has been described as the top-down model, emerged in opposition to the bottom-up approach of the traditional school. The cognitive view, the scholar argues, comprises of a number of relatively more modern views. These views were put forward in the form of theories such as the substrata-factor theories, psycholinguistic theories and the schema theories. These views all in varying ways, emphasize the reader and how texts are processed in the reader's mind to arrive at meaning.

As scholarly perspectives on reading continue to evolve, scholars are beginning to arrive at a position where in the words of Vaezi (2006), there is now no more debates on whether reading is a bottom up language based process or a top down knowledge based process. Also, it is no more problematic to accept the influence of background knowledge on both L1 and 2 reading. According to the scholar, research has gone beyond this and is now beginning to focus on the control which readers execute on their ability to understand a text. This control is what is referred to as metacognition which is

now the current fad. The perspective of Koda (2005) on reading competence is slightly different. The scholar discusses all the modern views and theories of competence by classifying them into 3 broad categories: the cognitive view, the developmental view and the functional view.

The term cognitive view is used by Koda (2005) to classify those views that hold that before information extraction can take place, readers must adequately complete 3 processing clusters. These clusters are: decoding, information building and situation model construction. Decoding involves the extraction of linguistic information from the text while information building involves the integration of extracted ideas to uncover text meaning. The situation model construction involves the amalgamation of text information with prior knowledge.

The second perspective is the developmental school of thought. This school of thought agrees that learning to read involves the mastery of two basic operations (decoding and comprehension) and they do not develop in parallel. Both reading and listening share similar processing requirements and children acquire comprehension skills in the course of oral language development. By the time, they are learning to read therefore, listening comprehension skills are already well developed. In principle, children should be able to transfer listening comprehension ability to reading (Koda, 2005).

Koda (2005) points out that there is yet another view of reading competence called the functional perspective. This is a modern view has been variously proposed by different scholars over the years. According to this view, the purposes for which texts are read determine the manner in which the information is processed. Therefore, the indices of comprehension success vary in accordance with reading purpose. For the purpose of explaining the practical relevance of this view, different reading gears are identified, serving different purposes on a continuum of cognitive complexity. This means that reading test must bear in mind the competence level required for the purpose for which reading is done.

Farrar and Al-Qatawneh (2010) provide a more comprehensive view of approaches to the study of reading. They point out that there are five theoretical perspectives: the linguistic theories, the psycholinguistic theories, the cognitive theories, the sociolinguistic theories and the critical theories. According to these scholars, linguistic theory emphasizes the role that knowledge of features of language play in all aspects of reading. This inevitably leads to emphasis on discrete measurable skills of language. This appears to be quite similar to what Vaezi (2006) refers to as the traditional

perspective. The psycholinguistic theories, according to Farrar and Al-Qatawneh (2010), emphasize the use of cognitive functions especially the integration of prior or old knowledge into reading which the schema theory (for example) emphasize. These scholars further point out the features of the sociolinguistic theories which they argue how instructional and non instructional social situations impinge upon all aspect of reading.

Finally, they explain the critical theories which emphasize the ability of readers to analyze their own reading by thinking, solving problems and carrying out interpretive task beyond the literal level.

Singer (1985) in a manner similar to all the scholars, traces the development of views of reading from the early days of emphasis on discrete measurable skills to the time when cognition became recognized in the form of such theories as the sub strata factor theory and the current perspectives of focusing on interaction between reader and text in such a way that the reader goes back and forth from their knowledge to the data base of the text.

In view of the fact that each of these theories simply emphasize certain things which other theories may not emphasize so much and the fact that all the different components they emphasize have their relevance, Farrar and Al-Qatawneh (2010) advocate an eclectic approach which they describe as an interdisciplinary approach that involve linguistics, psychology, sociolinguistics and critical thinking. They point out that a conscious, purposeful and systematic integration of these theories results in a careful balance of numerous teaching and learning experiences. It would therefore be necessary to extract and itemize relevant concepts from all the above, in order to clearly outline the reading comprehension construct that would govern this research:

- There are a number of linguistic inputs to reading. These involve knowledge of graphology, syntax, lexico-semantic elements and other miscellaneous requirements for decoding
- A reader's application of the above will depend on the extent or level of his literacy training
- The application of all the skills mentioned earlier above will yield, for the reader, textual information or derived text information
- Full text comprehension however depends on the integration of text information with pre-existing reader knowledge which depends on the readers' experiential background

In view of the above, it is clear that reading competence is the ability to carry out (within the limits of literacy training) the task of integrating derived text

information and pre-existing reader knowledge such that the reader is ultimately able to extract from the text, the thought which the writer is trying to express.

Reading competence is a crucial issue because of the role of reading in modern society. Reading competence is the core issue in scholastic achievement in all academic pursuits. Therefore, it deserves all the scholarly attention it can get.

In view of the fact that this research is centered to a large extent on competence assessment, it would be necessary to provide a background for the intended tests.

Reading competence assessment: It has to be said that there are myriads of approaches to testing reading. It is possible to look at the issue from the perspective of the purpose for which the assessment is being done, the model being employed and the nature of the instrument to be used. According to Koda (2005), there are administrative objectives usually requiring large scale testing and diagnostic objectives usually meant for finding out sources of reading difficulties. Also, there are tests meant for classification purposes, to create a basis for comparing and differentiating examinees.

These can be carried out by using either the standard model or the informal model. The former involves the use of objective testing of acquired skills and is amenable to mathematical accuracy while the latter emphasizes practical use of such skills and is dynamic, flexible and sensitive to learners' variable capabilities.

Measurement instruments may include free recall tests, cued recall tests, multiple choice questions, cloze tests and so on. All the testing instruments have their advantages and disadvantages. These are also clearly spelt out by Koda (2005). The scholar observes that free recall has the advantage of being the most straight forward and easy to construct of the tests but that it is usually very difficult to score objectively and the option of formulating scoring templates often proves very difficult. Moreover, it often turns out to be a test of memory and pre-existing reader knowledge than a test of reading proficiency.

The cued recall system offers the tester the opportunity of going beyond general memory. It enables the tester to ask specific task based questions but limits opportunity to recall some thing that the reader may actually understand because only questions asked are responded to. The multiple choice objective test which is the most popular test is valued for the simplicity of scoring and the objectiveness but is often criticized for sometimes confusing testees with distracters and for the tendency of test results to reflect test taking skills and not reading skills. Koda (2005) also raises serious reservations

about the cloze test which she believes test only surface elements like word recognition and grammar while leaving out fundamental aspects of mental processing.

Also the cloze procedure, according to the scholar yields radically different results from the same test passages when the deletions are varied. One must stress the fact that the view that the cloze procedure is inappropriate for testing beyond surface elements is very untrue. Cloze tests are (from the experience of this researcher) able to test inference ability and the integration of experiential background into the understanding of texts. Moreover, when a lenient criterion is used for the scoring, the credibility of the test is enhanced. Indeed Koda (2005) himself affirms this.

None of these approaches to testing is 100% perfect. Each tester must determine his focus and apply informed discretion to determine which one best suits his objectives. This researcher believes that the cloze test is able to isolate the causes of reading errors very well. Since the identification of such errors is crucial in this research, the cloze procedure is the preferred option.

The cloze test which Roe *et al.* (1998) describe as easy to construct, administer and score takes less time than the testing formats usually employed in the informal Reading Inventory (IRI). The cloze procedure has an interesting theoretical foundation which may be relevant at this stage. Onochie provides some insight into the cloze procedure. He points out that the word cloze comes from the concept of closure in Gestalt psychology. This concept of closure refers to the tendency to complete otherwise incomplete experiences in order to make them meaningful wholes. According to the scholar, Gestalt is a German word for configuration or organization. Psychologists of the Gestalt school of thought believe that the world is experienced in meaningful wholes made up of patterns or configurations. A person uses the concept of closure while perceiving reality thereby seeing things in whole regardless of gaps or exceptions here and there.

In the cloze test, these gaps are in the form of deletion of words in passages such that the testees will be asked to fill in the appropriate words. These deletions system often varies according to testers preferences. Onochie recommends a deletion system that involves the deletion of every fifth word (for adults), tenth word (for children).

This approach is adopted for this research. By and large the most ideal test procedures usually involve a combination of two or more types of tests to enhance validity of results. In this research, however only one test type is employed due to reasons that will be explained later.

Second language reading: It may be necessary to establish a clear perspective of the conception of second language (L2) that governs this research before discussing L2 reading. This is because there are diverse perspectives of what the term means. Also, the type of L2 readers in question is important in a discussion of influences on reading. For example Landry (2002) stresses the importance of first language (L1) influence as a factor in L2 reading. This however may be irrelevant to many of the respondents in this research as they are not deemed L2 learners on the basis of prior acquisition of an L1.

This writer views the concept of L2 in line with the perspectives of Afolayan (1987) and Akindele and Adebite (1999) and posits that a second language is a variety of a language which is used in a given sociocultural context that is non native and which creates a situation of bilingualism as is the case in ex-colonial countries where the languages of former colonial masters are still in use. One must stress the fact that the speakers' sequence of acquisition is irrelevant to this perspective.

This is radically different from the positions of Cook (1999) and Yule (1996) who emphasize the sequence of acquisition in their views of L2. Cook for example opines that L2 refers to languages other than the first in whatever situations or for whatever purpose. In places like Nigeria however, we now have millions who acquire both a local language and the local variety of English, simultaneously. Indeed, there are those who actually acquire English first and either never acquire a local language or go on to acquire one later in life.

Such people are still viewed as L2 speakers of English because most of the features of L2 English speakers which have pedagogical and communicative significance remain relevant to them. These features are also important for L2 reading. They include the following:

- Exposure to inadequate or inappropriate data of the target language
- Tendency to depend on written texts for appropriate and adequate data of the target language
- Inability, on the part of many, to become fully functional readers in target language texts

These are some of the generic features that characterize the typical L2 learner in a typical urban area in Nigeria regardless of individual differences in L2 status which are believed to have pedagogical implications, thereby requiring learner specific approaches to teaching at the early stages (Avalos, 2003). By and large, though there are parallels in L1 and L2 reading, there are peculiarities in L2 situations that may breed some reading difficulties. These as earlier stated are viewed differently

by different scholars. Wallace (2001) believes that the reading difficulties of the typical L2 reader exist because they often do not have the minimum threshold of competence in the language. While this is a fairly well accepted view, other scholars like Onochie have stressed experiential difficulties based on a comparison of performance in reading indigenous texts and non indigenous texts which revealed better performance in the local texts.

It is important to point out that this is hardly surprising and significant. Experiential problems inevitably affect the comprehension of non indigenous text and as such should not be over emphasized as factor when non-indigenous texts are involved. Although, this researcher is of the view that the ability to read non indigenous texts must form part of a broader reading comprehension construct in view of globalization, the current research is based on texts that do not contain concepts that are completely alien to the culture of the respondents. This researcher believes that this is really the best thing to do in order to objectively measure the intrinsic value of experiential problems as a factor in L2 reading.

On a general note, it must be said that the situation of L2 readers does not always have to be marked by disadvantages. Biliterate L2 readers are known to be considerably more flexible readers in the sense that they usually possess the knowledge and skills required to navigate from one language situation to another or even from one rhetorical style to another. They often develop strategies and schema for dealing with different languages and texts (Singhal, 1998). Most of the respondents in this research are as earlier said, not biliterates and may not have this advantage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research involved administering silent reading tests to selected respondents. Although, the objective of the survey was to obtain information that would be relevant to Nigeria, it was obviously not possible to obtain samples from the entire country. This researcher deemed it appropriate to focus on the area most accessible to him (the Lokoja metropolis) which is as earlier explained, metropolitan enough to yield results that can give a reasonable picture of Nigerian L2 reading. The respondents used in this research were selected from among pupils in the 1st year of secondary education and the first year of tertiary education. These were in effect people who had completed primary and secondary education, respectively. Limiting the study to pupils in school was a result of the fact that this research was primarily focused on pedagogical objectives.

This research involved a total of 300 respondents (150 with primary education, 150 with secondary education). The schools involved were selected purposively to yield responses from both government owned and private schools with a ratio of about 7-3. Also attempt was made to achieve a reasonable balance of male and female respondents. In all 160 males and 140 females were involved as respondents.

Based on the earlier discussed theoretical perspective on reading competence assessment, this researcher made a decision to use the cloze procedure for the reading tests because it is an option for testing the linguistic and cognitive processes involved in reading as the respondents strive to guess the options to fill the spaces created in the passages, thereby integrating text information and existing reader knowledge.

It would have been much better to combine the cloze test with at least one other test format to make the conclusions more valid. This could actually have resulted into significant changes in individual scores even if the final overall picture remains. However, obtaining the whole hearted cooperation of respondents while carrying out research is often problematic in Nigeria. It is often wise to minimize the tasks that respondents are expected to perform. The idea behind this is to get the best from little rather take the risk of obtaining unreliable data from the inclusion of more tasks.

Also, the option of including informal activity based assessment may amount to subtle instructional guidance which may contradict the test objective of assessing ability to do independent reading. Indeed, one of the competence levels identified after the test is the instructional level which involves those who require instructional guidance to read well. Any procedure that resembles instructional guidance will obviously compromise this approach, as one would have no basis for differentiating those who can read independently from those who require instructional guidance. Moreover, prior knowledge of text which may be inherent in informal procedures such as prior discussion of material is (in the opinion of this writer) not quite suitable for the objective of scrutinizing readers guessing process in order to test the impact hitherto acquired experiential knowledge.

This researcher administered two separate tests. One was for respondents with primary education while the other was for respondents with secondary education (that is 6 and 12 years of schooling, respectively in the Nigerian context). The tests were of course subjected to the Fry readability test to confirm their suitability for the selected category of readers. The Fry test is generally acceptable

for second language situations (Appelt, 2006). It is important to point out again that this researcher ensured that the texts were largely devoid of concepts that were completely unknown in the respondents' culture. It seems obvious that a fair assessment would require this. Also, one must point out that the scoring system was lenient such that any words that could grammatically and semantically fit into the cloze test blanks were accepted. The exact words in the original passage were not necessarily required.

Subsequently the results were scored and aggregated according to three categories: independent level (60 and above), instructional level (40-59) and frustration level (0-39). A total of eleven samples (the only available one for independent level of secondary education and two each for the other reading levels of the two categories of respondents) were analyzed for reading errors. The number of errors was tabulated according to the following categories developed by Onochie:

IC-In Context
PC-Partially in Context
OC-Out of Context
GE-Grammatical Errors
SE-Semantic Errors
EE-Experiential Errors

Subsequently, the test passages were rearranged in such away that the deletions appear vertically in serial order. Six columns were created in front of each deletion, one each for the identified category of errors. The column that best represent the nature of the testee's response for each deletion is marked as shown in Table 1.

Note that Table 1 is merely a demonstration of what this researcher did. It contains 10 out of the 50 blanks from the test passage completed by one of the respondents. Obviously, all the analyzed responses of 50 items each cannot reflect in this write up.

RESULTS

The results of the analyses for both categories of respondents are shown in Table 2 and 3.

Reading expectancy: With overwhelming proportions of the respondents reading out at frustration level for simple prose passages (70.6% for primary education and 81.05% for respondents with secondary education) it is clear that reading competence levels are tragically low.

Frequency distribution of reading errors: Table 4 and 5 showing the distribution of reading errors in accordance

Table 1: Sample of analysis of reading errors

Samples	IC	PC	OC	GE	SE	EE
He grinned and frowned and finally stuck <u>it</u>				•	•	
A long, pink tongue. I must be <u>ugly</u>			•			
He said to himself, looking down at <u>the</u>	•					
Blank; white sheet of paper before him. <u>And</u>				•		
He pencil-skipped the oval shape of his <u>frowned</u>	•					
Face and looked back in the mirror. <u>And</u>			•			
He saw himself, an average boy with <u>the</u>			•			
Two distinguishing features. His rather tall and <u>his</u>				•		
Forehead sloped just like father's and probably <u>his</u>		•				
Father's father. His bubble nose had no <u>shape</u>		•				

Table 2: Reading expectancy table for respondents with primary education

No. of respondents	Independent 60-100	Instructional 40-59	Frustration 0-39
150	14.00 9.33%	30.0 20.0%	106.0 70.6%

Table 3: Reading expectancy table for respondents with secondary education

No. of respondents	Independent 60-100	Instructional 40-59	Frustration 0-39
153	1.00 0.66%	28.00 18.67%	121.00 80.67%

Table 4: Summary of reading errors (primary education)

Samples	IC	PC	OC	GE	SE	EE
Independent level sample 1	23	0	6	8	3	0
Independent level sample 2	23	0	3	6	4	1
Instructional level sample 1	17	2	1	12	9	1
Instructional level sample 2	18	4	0	10	8	0
Frustration level sample 1	8	5	9	19	12	7
Frustration level sample 2	9	3	7	12	11	4
Total	98	14	26	67	47	13

Table 5: Summary of reading errors (secondary education)

Samples	IC	PC	OC	GE	SE	EE
Independent level sample 1	20	0	6	7	1	0
Instructional level sample 1	14	1	8	8	6	4
Instructional level sample 2	20	0	7	3	4	0
Frustration level sample 1	7	0	6	16	10	8
Frustration level sample 2	4	0	8	25	16	11
Total	62	1	3	59	37	23

with the identified categories and the analyses procedure stated earlier. The summary of reading errors reveals quite clearly that the bulk of errors occur in the area of grammar and semantics for the two categories of respondents. About 59 of the counted errors are grammatical while 37 are semantic errors.

These far outweigh the other error categories that have 1, 3 and 23 for partially-in-context, out of context and experiential errors respectively.

Analysis of reading errors: As earlier sated, Table 1 shows how the source of the reading difficulties are identified in accordance with earlier identified procedure. However, the original passage from where the cloze test

is constructed is with the deleted words underlined. This particular one was administered to respondents with primary education. It involved the deletion of every 8 word. Note that the lenient criterion was used for scoring. The test passage was extracted from Obele (1988)'s Stepping out. He grinned and frowned and finally stuck out a long, pink tongue. I must be serious, he said to himself looking down at the blank, white sheet of study before him. Swiftly he pencil-sketches the oval shape of his own face and looked back at the mirror. Again he saw himself, an average boy with only two distinguishing features. His rather tall and receding forehead sloped just like father's and probably like father's father. His bubble nose had no shape at all.

DISCUSSION

It has emerged from the research that an overwhelming majority of the selected educated Nigerians used in this research appear to be unable to read up to the level of their perceived literacy training. This conclusion is may be valid in view of the fact that the results of the reading tests administered indicated that about 70% of those with primary education read at frustration level while about 81% of those with secondary education fall into the same category. One must again stress that the respondents were given a wide berth with a scoring system that allowed for any words as long as such words would fit the context of the passage. The failure rate was high in spite of this.

A close look at the reading errors (in percentage terms) reveals that most of them are errors of language incompetence which often translates invariably to reading incompetence. About 68.26% of errors committed by respondents with primary education are grammatical and semantic errors while 69.94% of such errors are also grammatical and semantic for respondents with secondary education.

Implications for reading instruction: The implications of reading at frustrations level are, according to Ewall (1989) that comprehension is <50% and word recognition is below the required 90%. Also, the readers cannot really understand the text and will show signs of tension and discomfort. It is also likely that the readers concerned will engage in vocalization. Only 20 and 18.30% for primary level and secondary level respectively could read at instructional level that is at comprehension level of about 75% and word recognition level above 90%. The reader in this category requires instructional guidance to understand an appropriate text. Only 9.33 and 0.65%, respectively could read appropriate level text without

help. The overall implication of all these is that as far as capacity to read is concerned, something is desperately wrong in the system we operate in Nigeria. Although many reasons have been given for this situation, this researcher is of the opinion that among all these reasons, the factor of teaching is probably the crucial factor. Scholars have observed that reading is usually not properly taught in Nigeria (Unoh, 1980). However, this researcher is of the opinion that reading is usually not taught at all! What we often take for the teaching of reading actually is the teaching of language using reading.

This view will be expounded under the section on recommendations. The implication of the above is that the respondents have not mastered the meaning system and the grammatical structures of the text. This, one can safely assume may be a function of the fact that for the respondents, English language is functionally a second language in which they have profound problems, especially in a context of inadequate teaching.

Korppi observes that there is indeed a problem with competence in reading in a second language, such that an understanding of the relationship between second language acquisition and reading development has to be properly grasped. It is the view of this researcher that this relationship operates in such a way that language problems negatively affect reading, leading to reading incompetence which generates a low interest in reading. This in turn negatively impinges upon language development in a cyclical way because reading is a crucial factor in second language development.

CONCLUSION

Having obtained the relevant data and analyzed same, it is clear that the reading competence level of the respondents in this research is abysmally low. They have also been discovered to have significant problems with grammatical structure and semantic relationships requiring teaching attention because low linguistic competence leads to reading incompetence. This leads to low involvement in reading which in turn leads to limited exposure to linguistic data of the target language.

This problem operates in a cyclical way. An approach to the teaching of reading which would enhance language development while at the same time boosting interest in reading will therefore be very relevant to the situation. Extensive reading programs have in recent times been found to be the most effective in this regard (Susser and Robb, 1990; Yamashita, 2004). This researcher therefore recommends this approach to reading for the Nigerian situation. Susser and Robb (1990) define the concept as

reading of large quantity of materials or long text for global or general understanding with the intention of obtaining pleasure from the text. The implication of the above definitions is that there are a number of crucial principles involved in extensive reading:

- It involves a large number of materials or materials of considerable length for free reading by learners
- The emphasis is more on general understanding than indebt study
- Emphasis is more on the need for the texts to give readers pleasure than on linguistic drills

One way to properly understand the relevance of extensive reading is to view it against the background of the kind of teaching that currently goes on in the schools. The current approach which is based on intensive reading involves a close study of short passages, including syntactic, semantic and lexical analysis (Susser and Robb, 1990). This approach has been the preferred choice in second language situation because people over the years have assumed in error that spending time on scrutinizing linguistic elements of texts is a way of boosting language proficiency in view of the L2 learner's limited contact with the target language.

It is erroneously assumed that the exclusive use of extensive reading is more of an L1 strategy as L1 learners already have oral competence in the language and do not need the linguistic drills. In L2 situations, the teaching of reading is naturally subsumed under the teaching of language with reading texts treated as language teaching aid. The huge disadvantage in this as scholars like Susser and Robb (1990) have pointed out is that it tends to become a tedious drudgery because of the grueling linguistic exercises. According to Alderson and Uquahart cited in Susser and Robb (1990), intensive reading does not amount to reading but rather a language lesson. There may actually be a transfer of negative feelings toward reading generally. The point here is that intensive reading can be counter productive as it deprives the learner of the benefit of language improvement from wide reading. It 'programs' the learner towards dislike for reading.

On the contrary recent studies in both Foreign and second language situations by the above named scholars have identified the enormous benefits of extensive reading for increasing the tendency to read and consequently help the reader to improve in reading. Their works are based on the results of practical implementation of extensive reading for learners of English in non native contexts. Pang *et al.* (2003) point out that the more children read the more vocabulary and knowledge they acquire and the more fluent they become. Extensive

reading is the system capable of achieving this as it involves making children read as much as possible (without hindrance) materials that fit the SSS formula (that is start with something simple). Although, extensive reading is often beset with many problems of practical implementation such as availability of books, library facilities and the problem of defining the quantity of materials to be read by the different categories of learners, it is the view of this researcher that these problems can be overcome with enough will and commitment. Also, teacher re-training and re-orientation will be required.

This researchers concedes that the inability to employ at least one alternative test procedure before concluding the investigation of reading competence among the respondents in this research is a significant technical limitation. The conclusion regarding reading competence levels however generally fall in line with consensus views of L2 reading competence. Beyond this, the most significant issues in this study are the issues raised regarding the source of the reading problems and the prescribed solution.

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