

## **READING PEDAGOGY PROBLEMS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS – A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study sought to identify and proffer solutions to the reading pedagogy problems in secondary schools by examining some effective reading pedagogies, how best the merging of some reading instructions work, how strategic reading enhances the proper teaching and learning of reading and how reading can be taught in subject/content areas. Using a 20-item questionnaire, fifty teachers of English language from twenty-five schools in Ebonyi State were interviewed. All the questionnaires were retrieved and used in the analysis. The findings of the study revealed that reading pedagogy problems in secondary schools are associated primarily with the inability of teachers to teach reading in isolation as a separate subject and merge different methods of teaching reading for better results. The researcher however noticed that so many teachers are of the opinion that reading should be taught conventionally using some learning approaches. Some teachers, though, do not notice the difference between strategic readers and poor readers during all phases of the reading process, which include before reading, during reading and after reading. Some appropriate recommendations were made. To this end, teachers can do something to alleviate reading pedagogy problems by employing different methods/forms of reading instruction that enhance proper teaching and learning of reading. Participating in professional development programs designed to enhance effectiveness in helping learners read better will help teachers to improve their skills in teaching reading. More importantly, the teachers need to develop an understanding of reading stages, the reading profile of students as well as the causes and consequences of reading problems.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Reading as one of the language skills is a complex process that involves the writer, the reader and his mind to be able to translate the print into a meaningful idea. Sad to say, though, some people seem not to value reading or rather do not study reading as it were. Some read simply for the purpose of tests and examinations. Few read for the purpose of knowledge and pleasure. The problem lies not just with the readers, but also with the teachers of reading. That many students come into their classroom without the prerequisite knowledge, skill, or disposition to read and comprehend the material faced before them is undeniable. In fact, it is one of the most vexing problems facing secondary schools today (Rand Study Group, 2002 p. 2). Still, most teachers have failed to employ the best reading pedagogies or methods of teaching reading to the advantage of their students.

Upon realizing that he is aiding his learners to travel to other lands to meet people whose lives can enrich theirs and gain practical knowledge that will help them cope with the concerns of life, the teacher of reading will do everything within his reach to inculcate in his learners the reading skills, or better still, the ability to read, employing a variety of

methods. The learners of reading should be intimated that their ability to read influences how much a young person gets from his schooling.

When he seeks employment, his ability may influence the kind of work he is able to get and the number of hours he has to work in order to make a living. Housewives who read well are better able to care for their families with regard to proper nutrition, hygiene and prevention of sicknesses. Mothers who are good readers may also exercise a very positive influence on the intellectual development of their children. In fact, the benefits of reading cannot be over-emphasized. All these benefits accruable to a good reader would move a teacher of reading to employ any methodology or pedagogy to teach reading; And the learner of reading will avail himself of any opportunity and means to read.

It should be noted that at the primary school level, the pupils were exposed to reading, though the focus was on “learning to read”. But reading at the secondary level involves “reading to learn”. Many secondary school students today are at risk of reading deficiencies and in need of instructions that strengthen reading skills. Therefore, the target should be to foster the development of actively engaged independent readers.

Most times however, secondary school teachers have limited instructional time for implementing reading strategies and they expect their students to have reading comprehension necessary to read. At other times, the reading materials used in the classrooms are often difficult, and many students lose interest in reading altogether. Many students do not read at home and do not comprehend what they are required to read in school. Some are struggling readers who disguise their problems and manage to get by without really comprehending what they read. Some even resist reading.

In the face of all these ugly experiences in reading, what can a teacher of reading do? What are some reading pedagogies to employ? How effective are they? What are some pedagogical problems particularly in the secondary schools? What actually does it mean when we say a person can read?

At first sight, it means that someone can recognize marks and translate them into spoken words. Usually, what it means is that the person understands what he or she reads, or is “functionally literate”. Beyond the recognition of the letters and the words is the knowledge and understanding that the reader must bring to the fore of the written words to be able to make sense out of them. In the same vein, an adolescent who has difficulty in reading a school history text may have no difficulty in deciphering the complex information in a car repair manual while a history teacher might not understand the car manual.

These days in similar ways, we hear about “computer literacy” and “media literacy”, phrases that do make meaning until they are used in context. So, the method of imparting this literacy or reading counts. But how can one evaluate the effectiveness of the different methods of teaching reading? The words of Uche Azikiwe (1998:88) apply: “no method is the best for teaching... the successful teacher helps the learner to bring intelligence to bear on what is to be learned and to give such help, the teacher must use intelligence, insight, initiative and human understanding”.

The differences in evaluating the effectiveness of methods of reading are often the result of lack of agreement on what is trying to be achieved. Tests of reading ability are far more than deciphering and understanding words and letters. Another complication is the terminology used by the supporters of the very many different methods and sub-methods advocated. Often, the same name is given to different systems, and similar systems are given different names. Nevertheless, this multitude can be reduced to two for teaching basic literacy, which can be called “Phonics” and “Whole word”.

“Phonics” (code emphasis) requires the letters to be learned first, and then combined to form the word. “Whole word” (meaning emphasis) has the child first learn to recognize and understand the complete word or group of words in context.

A good teacher of reading, in order to avoid the pedagogical problems associated with reading, can adopt and encourage models such as strategic reading, using subject area material and the likes. They can also help their students to learn from the best, that is, reading to understanding and getting it right.

Though there are so many techniques and methods of teaching reading skills, the teachers of reading should know that:

1. The majority of the children will learn no matter the method;
2. The environment, attitudes and expectations both within and outside the school are more important than any method;
3. Any method can be less effective if it is a dull repetition of meaningless letters and phonics, or the rote memory of hundreds of whole words in boxing stories. A resourceful teacher can make any method stimulating. Dogmatic adherence to one method may be harmful. Adaptability to a child and situation is likely to be more productive;
4. At some stages, all children need to learn enough “attack skill” (phonics) to decipher new words. While the evidence is inconclusive, studies indicate that direct instruction works best for most children;
5. Children’s readiness to learn varies. With little help, some will quickly learn the basics at an early age; others will not be ready until much older. Attempts to force them too early may hinder later development;
6. A small group of children have specific problems that need special psychological or medical diagnosis and treatment by experts. Appropriate learning assistance may help. Inappropriate learning assistance, though, may aggravate the problem;
7. Often, what is called poor reading is really lack of background knowledge and understanding. After basic literacy has been achieved, there are specialized literacies;
8. Much reading and writing are subject-specific. Many areas of knowledge need special “attack skills” that are best taught within the context of a particular subject. This may be as obvious as learning a specialized vocabulary, to deciphering implied meanings, recognizing tones and understanding symbols and metaphors. The phrase “every teacher is a teacher of English” is more than a cliché;
9. The best way to improve reading and writing is to read and write with lots of variety and some direction. To maintain the skills, regular application is needed;
10. Common sense rather than philosophical dogma should prevail

(Adapted from <http://www.uas.com>, June 21, 2007).

Failure to appreciate these points could lead to reading pedagogy problems. Granted, the relative effectiveness of some reading pedagogies will later be x-rayed.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The way reading is taught will either improve or hinder the skills and abilities of students. Drawing from the different reading pedagogies, a good teacher can combine so many of them to improve. This research, therefore, is a study on the reading pedagogy problems in secondary schools.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and proffer solutions to the reading pedagogy problems in secondary schools by examining some effective reading pedagogies, how best the merging of some reading instructions work, how strategic reading enhances the proper teaching and learning of reading and how reading can be taught in subject/content areas.

### 1.4 Scope of the Study

The research was limited to some selected secondary schools in Ebonyi State and aimed at eliciting teacher's responses to some reading pedagogy problems particularly as it involves the methods of instruction employed by them and possible solutions.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study looks at the reading pedagogy problems in secondary schools, which will in effect help both the teachers and the students to appreciate reading and treat it as an integral part of language.

The findings will enable teachers of reading to employ effective strategies and techniques in

teaching reading for easier and better assimilation. It will also help students to develop a good reading habit and equally have a positive view of it. The findings can also benefit the curriculum planners and workshop organizers to provide adequate teaching aids for reading as well as create time for teaching reading and learning in the secondary schools.

Workshops meant to enlighten teachers more on the reading pedagogy to employ will also suffice.

### 1.6 Research Questions

To find out the major reading pedagogy problems, the following research questions are formulated.

- What are some effective reading pedagogies?
- How does the merging of some reading instruction methods work best?
- How does strategic reading enhance the proper teaching and learning of reading? and,
- How can reading be taught in content or subject areas?

### 2.0 Research Methodology

The survey research design was used while the study focused on some selected secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Fifty teachers were used to elicit the findings from twenty-five different schools scattered in the State.

Fifty copies of a twenty-item questionnaire were distributed to 50 teachers of the English language. These were filled out, collected immediately and used in the analysis.

### 3.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

The results of the study are presented with means and percentage values of the response to the research questions by fifty teachers using a 20-item questionnaire that they filled out.

#### Question 1: What are some effective reading pedagogies?

**Table I: Effective reading pedagogies**

S/NO	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	No	TOTAL	X	SD
1	Reading is the most important language skill	25 140	10 30	5 10	-	50	180	3.6	1.8
2	I do not teach reading in isolation	25 100	15 45	5 10	-	50	160	3.6	-
3	I have my own method of teaching reading	25 100	18 36	5 10	2 2	50	148	3.0	-
4	I teach comprehension passage conventionally	28 112	10 30	2 4	10 10	50	156	3.1	-
5	Skills are not unimportant in the teaching of reading	5 120	5 15	15 30	25 25	50	90	1.8	2.2

From the table above, it could be observed that item 1 with a mean score of 3.6 falls under the real unit of acceptance, thus indicating that reading is the most important language skill. Item 2 with a mean score of 3.2 also indicate that most teachers do not teach reading in isolation which is a big pedagogical problem in reading while item 3 with a

mean respondent of 3.0 also indicates that most teachers adopt their own method in teaching reading. In addition, item 4 indicated that most teachers teach comprehension passages with conventional method. Finally, item 5 with a mean score of 1.8 shows that most teachers disagree that skills are not unimportant in the teaching of reading.

**Question 2: How does the merging of some reading instruction methods work best?**

**Table II: Merging instructions methods**

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	No	TOTAL	X	SD
6	The merging of two or more reading instructions works best	30 120	18 54	2 2	-	50	176	3.5	0.3
7	Students appreciate reading when they are involved	32 128	10 30	4 4	4 4	50	166	3.3	0.9
8	I employ cooperation learning approach	21 84	15 45	12 14	7 2	50	155	3.1	0.3
9	I sometimes read first to produce a model for the students and at other times allow them to read and produce a model for themselves	18 72	22 66	5 10	5 5	50	153	3.1	0.3
10	I teach unfamiliar words with different strategies	25 100	17 51	8 16	- -	50	167	3.3	0.9

From table II above, items 6-10 fall under the real limit of 3.5, 3.3, 3.1, 3.1 and 3.3 respectively, which strongly indicates that majority of the

respondents agreed that the merging of some reading instruction methods work best.

**Question 3: How does strategic reading enhance teaching and learning of reading?**

**Table III: Strategic reading and enhancement of reading**

S/NO	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	No	TOTAL	X	SD
11	I employ strategic reading to my reading pedagogies	30 120	18 36	2 2	-	50	170	3.05	1.8
12	I always notice the difference between strategic readers and poor readers during all phases of the reading process	21 84	15 45	12 24	2 -	50	155	3.1	0.3
13	The teacher, of strategic reading develops and follows an organized plan in promoting students' growth in the use of the strategies.	30 120	18 36	2 2	- -	50	180	3.6	1.8
14	My method of teaching reading strategies begins before reading, involves during reading and climates after reading.	35 140	10 30	5 5	- -	50	180	3.6	1.8
15	Strategic reading is the best method of teaching reading	18 72	19 57	10 20	7 7	50	162	3.0	1.2

From table III above, it is obvious that all the items raised to test the research question indicated that strategic reading enhances teaching and learning of reading.

This was supported by items 11-15 with the mean scores of 3.05, 3.1, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.0 respectively that fall under the real limit of 2.5.

#### Question 4: How can reading be taught in content or subject areas?

**Table IV: Teaching reading in content areas**

S/NO	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	No	TOTAL	X	SD
16	Reading can be taught in content areas	11 84	16 48	10 20	3 3	50	155	3.1	0.3
17	Students can build vocabularies in different fields of study when reading is taught in content areas	18 72	19 57	10 20	7 7	50	162	3.0	1.2
18	The factors to consider while teaching in content areas include only the text, environment, students and interaction	21 84	15 45	122 4	2 2	50	155	3.1	0.3
19	Reading involves more than reading the lines and reading between the lines	18 72	22 66	5 10	5 5	50	153	3.1	0.3
20	Reading is literacy	25 100	17 51	8 16	- -	50	167	3.3	0.9

Table IV above shows that all the items in the questionnaire that are raised to test the research question (IV) fall within the real limit of 2.5. Items 16-20 have the mean scores of 3.1, 3.0, 3.1 and 3.3 respectively.

In item 16, the respondents agreed that reading could be taught in content areas. This was supported with a mean score of 3.1 while item 17 with a mean score of 3.0 indicated that students could build vocabularies in different fields of study when reading is taught in content areas. Item 18 also indicated that the environment, text and student interactions should be considered in teaching reading in the content areas. Yet, most of the respondents failed to include themselves (teachers) as one of the factors to consider. In addition, item 19, with a mean score of 3.1 indicated that reading involves more than reading the lines and reading between the lines. Finally, item 20, with a mean score of 3.3, also indicated that reading is literacy.

#### 4.0 Findings

The reading pedagogy problems in secondary schools are associated primarily with the inability of teachers to merge different methods of teaching reading for better results.

From the findings, the researcher noticed that so many teachers are of the opinion that reading should be taught conventionally using some learning approaches. Some teachers, though, do not notice the difference between strategic readers and poor readers during all phases of the reading process, which

include before reading, during reading and after reading.

The findings are discussed with regards to:

- Some effective reading pedagogies;
- The merging of different reading instructions;
- The use of strategic reading; and,
- The teaching of reading in subject/content areas.

#### 4.1 Effective Reading Pedagogy

It has earlier been discussed that there is no definite reading pedagogy, but good and innovative teachers employ different forms and even create some by themselves, which aim at helping the learners of reading. The findings of the research show that among other things, many teachers are doing that. Forty-three (43) out of fifty (50) respondents agree that they have their own methods of teaching reading as can be seen in item three (3) of the questionnaire. Unfortunately, though, many of the teachers failed to recognize that reading requires skills and skillful direction as can be seen in item 5 of the questionnaire.

Forty (40) teachers were of the opinion that skills are not important in the teaching of reading. This therefore militates against the effort to employ and administer effectively some reading pedagogies, since no reading instruction will work well without skills by the teachers.

#### 4.2 Merging of Some Reading Instructions

There is no gainsaying that a good teacher is he/she that employs different methods of teaching. In teaching reading, there are many strategies and

approaches. Virtually all the teachers sampled agreed that the merging of two or more reading instructions works best as could be seen in item 7, which has a mean cluster of 3.3 and a standard deviation of 0.9. Incidentally, one of the reading pedagogies that work well is ignored by some teachers as can be seen in item 8 (use of cooperative learning approach). A total number of 14 teachers out of 50 sampled do not use this method. Eight of them do not involve their students while another eight do not teach unfamiliar words with different strategies.

#### 4.3 Use of Strategic Reading

Only two teachers out of fifty said that they do not employ strategic reading in their reading pedagogies, yet, fourteen do not notice the difference between strategic readers and poor readers during all phases of their reading process. This shows that some teachers do not make use of strategic reading effectively. Thirteen teachers disagree that strategic reading is the best method of teaching reading.

While strategic reading helps students to actively construct meanings as they read (interacting with the text, thus, a good reading pedagogy), it cannot be said to be the best. However, the merging of many reading instructional methods works best.

#### 4.4 Teaching Reading in Content/Subject Areas

Thirty-seven teachers agree that reading can be taught in content areas, which they come to an agreement can help students build vocabularies in different fields of study. Sad to say, though, thirty-six teachers among the sampled 50 agree that only the text, environment, students and interactions should be considered while teaching reading in content areas, thereby excluding themselves. The factors can never be complete without the teachers and the outcome of the interactions. Forty of the respondents agreed that reading involves more than reading the lines and reading between the lines. Yes, this is in line with the models for teaching reading in content areas, which also include reading beyond the lines, that is, applying the message in meaningful ways. Eight teachers argued that reading is literacy.

#### 5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the researcher recommends that teachers:

1. provide time for content area reading instruction on a continuous basis throughout the school year;
2. activate background/prior knowledge before reading;
3. challenge students to create their own organization and meaning of text, concepts and vocabulary;
4. model effective reading behavior;
5. provide a variety of reading resources for students to use;
6. provide free reading time;
7. demystify reading, i.e., make invisible thought processes visible by modeling questioning strategies while reading and using teacher-think-aloud;
8. use group and interactive strategies to encourage reading as a social process;
9. provide relevant, interesting and age-appropriate reading materials;
10. clarify the purpose of reading;
11. teach students to use text-coding strategies;
12. provide many opportunities for students to read and practice reading enhancement strategies and tools;
13. connect reading activities to life situations and other curricular in the school;
14. use direct instruction for teaching vocabulary and specific reading techniques;
15. maintain a classroom environment that fosters cognitive collaboration, conceptualization and group problem solving;
16. provide repeated exposure to vocabulary word; and,
17. encourage students to read daily for fun.

#### 6.0 Conclusion

It has been noted that teachers can do something to alleviate reading pedagogy problems if they cannot be eradicated totally. What they can do include employing different methods/forms of reading instruction that enhance proper teaching and learning of reading.

Participating in professional development programs designed to enhance effectiveness in helping learners read better will help teachers to improve their skills in teaching reading.

Though merging two or more methods of teaching reading helps, the teacher needs to develop an understanding of reading stages, the reading profile of students and the cause and consequences of reading problems.

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