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### **Effect of Teacher Variables on the Teaching of Initial Reading to Basics 1 and 2 Pupils in Imo State, Nigeria**

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#### **Abstract**

Teaching initial reading is a herculean task that must be carried out by qualified, mature teachers. This work is out to investigate if the conditions are met by initial reading teachers in Owerri, Imo State. This study is a survey, carried out on 300 pupils and 60 teachers, randomly selected from eight public basic schools in Owerri Educational Zone 1 of Imo State. Two research hypotheses were posed and two 4-point Likert rating scales; a checklist and a questionnaire with Cronbach Reliability Coefficient  $r = 0.63$  and  $r = 0.61$  respectively were used to generate data, analyzed using t-test. Findings revealed that adult, experienced teachers with Bachelor's degree in language education (B.Ed.) teach initial reading. There was no significant difference between Basic 1 and

Basic 2 teachers' teaching methods:  $t(58) = -0.381$ ,  $p = .146$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x} = 12.54$ ,  $S.D = 2.487$ ) to Basic two ( $\bar{x} = 12.75$ ,  $S.D = 1.741$ ) with the effect size of ( $r = 0.093$ ) very small; no significant difference in the challenges teachers face in teaching initial reading:  $t(58) = 0.064$ ,  $p = .842$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x} = 16.04$ ,  $S.D = 2.134$ ) to Basic two ( $\bar{x} = 16.00$ ,  $S.D = 2.200$ ) with the effect size of ( $r = 0.045$ ) very small; and no significant difference in teachers' cadre:  $t(58) = 0.844$ ,  $p = .258$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x} = 12.64$ ,  $S.D = 1.592$ ) to Basic two ( $\bar{x} = 13.03$ ,  $S.D = 1.926$ ) with the effect size of ( $r = 0.234$ ) moderate. It was therefore suggested that teachers should be qualified, have teaching experience, and use mother tongue in their classroom interactions to build in pupils a strong, life-long foundation in reading.

**Key Words:** Initial reading, mother tongue, qualified teachers, basic learners, teaching methods, reading difficulties, challenges

### Introduction

Teaching of initial or beginning reading has not been easy for both the teachers and the pupils. Beginning reading is a foundational skill that all children need if they are to succeed in life. It is a basic tool for learning. According to Brand (2004, p. 32) "reading is one of the language skills which learners need to acquire in their earliest lives." This means that every learner is supposed to acquire reading skill early in life because in formal education, initial reading is the foundation, a stepping stone and a ladder for getting to all other formal learning in the school system. Maduekwe (2007, p. 123) sees reading as "a complex skill which requires a lifetime effort to perfect." The above statement shows that it is a skill that cannot be mastered at once but it is a continuous process which should start from childhood to adulthood. Every learner is supposed to acquire reading proficiency or skills in the foundation stage. If the learner does not acquire it, he will struggle to catch on in the adult stage and will not progress well in his higher academic pursuit. Reading forms the basis for all other academic work and language skills, especially writing. The ability to write depends largely on the ability to read and what is written can only be meaningful if it can be read. Reading and writing are two sides of the same coin or co-relates. Stahl (2004, p. 54) sees reading and writing as "mutually supportive, essential to success in any given society and highly valued. Reading and writing are very important for social, intellectual and economic advancement." This goes to support the axiom that 'reading maketh a man and a man maketh a nation.' Any nation that is devoid of writers and readers lag behind. To this effect, the teaching of reading especially initial reading in any educational system should be encouraged and given priority for the growth of the system.

The importance of reading as a language skill is quite evident and has been emphasized by many scholars. Whether in the primary, the secondary or the tertiary levels of education, efficient and effective reading is the bedrock to the learners' success. This success is credited to the good and effective teaching of initial reading. In teaching

initial reading, the teacher should consider the children's interest level and the work to be taught and use a systematic approach which will motivate the children to learn. At this point, the cadre of teachers that teach initial reading comes to mind. This critical level of education must be handled carefully by qualified and experienced teachers with various teaching skills- methods and strategies and who can understand the psychology of pupils of that education stage (level). This is very important because the foundation for permanent literacy is laid at the primary level. Ituen (2007, p. 8) stated that "it is important for teachers to guide children to read materials that are suitable for their grade". This means that a child should not be given what is above his mental and chronological age to read. In this case, the teacher should use strategies and methods that will bring out the best from the pupils. Among the commonly used methods and approaches being used by teachers of this reading cadre are: Picture reading method, Play-way method, Dramatization method, Interactive method, synthetic method, alphabetic method, phonic method, analytic approach, whole world method, sentence method, story and paragraph method, holistic method, and eclectic approach. (Anukam,1999). Any of these methods and approaches are used by the teacher in line with the age, readability level of the learners, the environment and more importantly, the reading text.

Reading helps a nation to grow; any nation that wants her country to grow must embark on effective primary school reading programme. To this end, the National Policy on Education (2014, p.4) section 1 states that "every Nigerian child should have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities. Every child has to be educated according to his academic ability". To achieve this, the government ensures that the child should be taught in the language that he is familiar with, the language that will help him to understand, internalize and retain what is taught and this is no other language but the mother tongue or the language of immediate community or environment. This invariably means that the teaching of initial reading to basic school pupils is done in a Nigerian language to a Nigerian child. Sometimes this policy is not adhered to. The teaching of initial reading in the mother tongue is to make reading effective. Reading in mother tongue is as the same in one language as in any other language because the basic things in any literacy derived in a first language situation are the same in all languages.

These things are:

- The encouragement of self and communal pride in the language.
- The identification with the people's culture of which the language is the primary carrier.
- The development of oral and written fluent expression in an intelligent and acceptable form of the language so as to guarantee full and effective participation in the social and cultural values of the society in question.

- The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
- Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children and acquisition of competences necessary for self-reliance.
- Integration of the individual into the community and acquisition of appropriate skills, social abilities and competencies for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (National Policy on Education 2014, pp. 4-5).

Reading problems are endemic. There has been reports of cases where learners in higher classes or grades continue to battle to read and write even to write their names (Barone, 2005). Indeed, children find it difficult to write and read names like Chimeremumma, Munachimso in Igbo and Christiogonus, Evelyn, et cetera in the English Language.

Reading has been at the heart of every civilization and at the core of reading is comprehension hence the two are inseparable (Nwosu & Unachukwu 2014). The habit of reading is mostly developed early in life and teachers are naturally important in the achievement of this. They deal with learners on a day to day basis in the school contexts. Teachers play a central role in the children's intellectual growth. They are conversant with what the children do. So, their perspectives on teaching beginning reading are critical and crucial in life because when reading habit is developed, it becomes the core of personal, social, political, cultural and economic progress.

In any country, the basic school years are critical because an attempt to promote reading becomes a task that must be overcome for that country to forge ahead. This is why the teaching of initial reading is a stepping stone to reading success, but because of the problems associated with it, the Nigerian society cannot pass for a reading nation going by the downward slope in the graph of academic success. Abimbola and Adeoye in the works of Nwosu and Unachukwu (2014, p. 255) noted that this might have led to the recurrent abysmal failure recorded in public examination in Nigeria and called for a state of emergency in addressing this unfortunate trend given the fact that Nigerian students are developing increased apathetic attitude to reading and learning. Nwosu and Unachukwu (2014), observed that "the reading culture among Nigerian children in comparison with that of the western nation is tragically deficient" (p. 254). This shows that the reading culture of Nigerian children is very poor. Reading culture is the ability of one to understand every aspect of a topic. The effort one makes to understand and assimilate everything one reads. In reading, inability to understand the topic or subject matter can lead to failure in absorbing the message of the author. Reading culture calls for hundred percent (100%) understanding of what one reads. Anything short of that can lead to limitation and when limitation sets in, it can hinder the individual's ability to identify the developmental opportunities that can help him in life. Reading culture can place one on a higher pedestal, a position to invent, to discover and to improve

on others. Therefore, education that lacks reading culture ends up like a bird which flies from the ground to an anthill.

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural nation with many ethnic groups. These ethnic groups speak different languages in which they try to showcase and give recognition to their culture. This makes the language situation in Nigeria complex and the teaching of initial reading becomes a herculean task which needs to be tackled so that the children will develop reading habit. Without developing and cultivating reading habits, visions of functional education and national development will only be a mirage.

Teaching of initial reading involves a friendly, carefully, attentive, patient and perceptive guide or way and offers careful supervisions and good encouragement. For an activity of a teacher to be seen as teaching, he must create a conducive classroom environment select and design learning methods that are friendly with the learners and from which the learner acquire the required experience in order to develop the appropriate skills, attitude and knowledge. This shows that how effectively a child learns to read affects very much how effectively he reads to learn. Reading to learn involves practical application of skills and strategies developed through the use of good method during the critical years of early reading instruction. It entails the functional use of cognitive and language processing techniques or strategies developed both consciously and incidentally during our early contacts with the written or printed words and their proper collocations.

However, unless a good foundation in learning to read had been successfully laid at an early stage, these reading strategies cannot be effectively applied, neither can the reader himself develop more effective one for personal use. Some of the reading strategies include:

- The 3S3R (Survey, study read, speed read, recall, review and reflect).
- The SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Revise and Recall)
- The OK4R (Overview, Key-points, Read, Recall, Reflect and Revise).

The teaching of initial reading is best approached from the standpoint of promoting language development and comprehension. Language cannot be separated from the society because it is the main instrument through which social interaction takes place. On the grounds of this, teaching of initial reading to basic one and two should be based on the interdependence of the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is why Nwosu and Unachukwu (2014, p. 254) observed that a skilled reader must acquire these:

- Recognition of the fact that reading is done for a purpose.
- To get meaning and that this involves the reader actively participating.

- Recognizing most words automatically, read fluently, vary their reading rate and hear the text as they read.

Reading skills should be built on sound foundation of communicative and linguistic competence but most of the time the problems associated with the methods of teaching initial reading seems to be bottleneck in the realization of these skills. A reader whose early attempts to learn to read proved frustrating or unpleasant could develop an unconscious aversion to reading tasks and could even acquire the reluctant reading and learning syndrome. These problems may be overcome through the strategies and well researched methods of teaching initial reading.

Reading is not a natural process but it needs to be shown, explained and experienced. It takes time, energy, support from parents or guardians, Government and healthy enriching environment to learn how to read. Reading is a two-way process and should be encouraged not only at school but also at home because when parents encourage their children by reading regularly to them and talking over what the children are reading with them, children increase in their reading skills and do better at school (Christensen, 2006).

Vera and Denis (2003), on the nature of challenges teachers face, opined that the “teachers face the problem of lack of teaching and learning materials and methods as well as classroom management in teaching initial literacy to standard one learners”. This badly affects the teaching and learning of initial reading. As a matter of fact, a teacher without teaching material will be ineffective and cannot achieve much in his teaching. It is like a farmer who goes to farm without farming tools. Therefore, without teaching materials, teaching of initial reading will be ineffective.

Many children are being left behind in an educational system due to the method used in teaching them. Cooper (2005, p. 229) asserted that “the success of children in reading depends largely on the teacher’s commitment to curriculum”. Therefore, the teacher should choose the type of method or approach they believe will work best for them. But a number of teachers of initial reading are not trained well enough in teaching initial reading and are finding it difficult to use good teaching methods like picture reading method, play-way method et cetera in their classes. Nwosu and Unachukwu (2014, p. 225) agree that “the methods of teaching reading are very crucial factor in understanding”. They have no doubt that the strategies employed in teaching reading can improve or accelerated or retard the reading interest and comprehension skills of children. They opined that many teachers do not employ instructional strategies that can stimulate and sustain the reading interest of children. When this happens, some children struggle because they have received poor or inadequate reading instruction and it becomes a problem for them because the more risk factors a child has in instruction, the more likely it is that he will encounter reading problems.

Reading involves processes at different levels, from recognition of graphemes to the integration of global ideas from the text into the reader's knowledge. As a process, teaching initial reading involves many complex skills; the ability of the child to perceive printed words, to skim for information and then perhaps read intensively. A child who has achieved these complex skills does not find reading difficult. He enjoys reading to get information and equally reads for pleasure.

Reading is an activity and for a good reading habit demands not just the reader's cognitive skills but also emotional or effective skills. Therefore, the teacher has to use appropriate method to initiate or inculcate early in the child's life so that the child should carry it into the adult life. The Bible says "train up a child the way he should go and when he grows up, he will not depart from it". This is to say, if a good method is used to inculcate a good reading habit into a child early in life, he will be an extensive, effective and efficient reader in future.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The importance of reading as a language skill is quite evident and has been emphasized by many scholars. Whether in the lower basic primary, the secondary or the tertiary levels of education, efficient and effective reading is the bedrock to the learners' success. At this point, the cadre of teachers that teach initial reading comes to mind. This critical level of education must be handled carefully by qualified and experienced teachers with various teaching skills- methods and strategies and who can understand the psychology of pupils of that education stage (level). This is very important because the foundation for permanent literacy is laid at the lower basic primary level. It is on this note that this research work is set out to find out the cadres of teachers teaching initial reading and also to examine if there is any significant difference in the challenges these teachers face in the course of teaching initial reading in public lower basic primary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives are raised for this study:

1. To examine if there is any significant difference in the cadre of teachers that teach basic one and two pupils in public lower basic primary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.
2. To also examine if there is any significant difference between the responses of basic one and two teachers on the challenges they face in teaching initial reading to basic one and two pupils in public lower basic primary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.

### Research Hypotheses

- H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the cadre of teachers that teach basic one and two pupils initial reading in public.
- H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the responses of basic one and two teachers on the challenges they face in teaching initial reading to basic one and two pupils.

### Methodology

This study was a descriptive survey, carried out on 300 pupils and 60 teachers. Simple randomly sampling method was employed to select 127 basic 1 and 173 basic 2 pupils to make 300 pupils, and 60 basic 1 and 2 teachers from eight public basic schools in the three senatorial zones (Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu) of Imo State for the study. Two research questions were posed and two 4-point Likert rating scales: a checklist and a questionnaire with Cronbach Reliability Coefficient  $r= 0.63$  and  $r= 0.61$  respectively were used to generate data analyzed using Independent t-test.

### Results

- H0<sub>1</sub>:** To examine if there is any significant difference in the cadre of teachers that teach basic one and two pupils in public lower basic primary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Table 1: The independent t-test showing the difference between Basic one and Basic two teachers' cadre**

Teachers' Cadres	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig	R
Basic One	28	12.64	1.592	58	.844	.258	0.234
Basic Two	32	13.03	1.926				

Table 1: Shows that no significant difference was found between Basic one and Basic two in terms of their teachers' cadre,  $t(58) = 0.844$ ,  $p = .258$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x}= 12.64$ , S.D.= 1.592) to Basic two ( $\bar{x}= 13.03$ , S.D.= 1.926) and the effect size of ( $r = 0.234$ ) is moderate. Hence, H<sub>03</sub> will be accepted which shows that there is no significant difference between the cadre of teachers that teach Basic One and Basic Two pupils.

- H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the responses of basic one and two teachers on the challenges they face in teaching initial reading to basic one and two pupils.



**Table 2: The independent t-test showing the difference between Basic one and Basic two teachers on challenges they face in teaching initial reading**

Teachers' Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig	R
Basic One	28	16.04	2.134	58	.064	.842	0.0453
Basic Two	32	16.00	2.200				

Table 2: Shows that no significant difference was found between Basic one and Basic two teachers on the problems they face in teaching initial reading,  $t(58) = 0.064$ ,  $p = .842$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x} = 16.04$ , S. D= 2.134) to Basic two ( $\bar{x} = 16.00$ , S.D.= 2.200) and the effect size of ( $r = 0.045$ ) is very small. Hence,  $H_{02}$  will be accepted which shows that there is no significant difference between the responses of Basic One and Two teachers on the problems they face in teaching initial reading.

### Discussion

Findings in Table 1 above shows the Cadres of teachers engaged in teaching initial reading in Imo State Basic Public schools. Basically, statistics reveals that teachers with NCE and B.Ed. degree certificates, males and females with sufficient teaching experience are largely engaged in the teaching of initial reading. There was no significant difference found between Basic 1 and Basic 2 teachers in terms of teachers' cadre,  $t(58) = 0.844$ ,  $p = .258$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x} = 12.64$ , S.D.= 1.592) to Basic two ( $\bar{x} = 13.03$ , S.D.= 1.926) and the effect size of ( $r = 0.234$ ) is moderate. Hence,  $H_{03}$  was accepted. These findings agree with Ituen (2004, 2011) Otagburuagu and Anyanwu (2002), and Duru (2011) who all opine that learners at initial reading stage should be taught by experienced, qualified and competent teachers who must see the stage as the foundation upon which all life-long education of the child rests, and which must be strongly laid to avail the child of the problem of reading inefficiencies in his or her later years.

Table 2 shows no significant difference between Basic 1 and Basic 2 teachers on the difficulties they face in teaching initial reading,  $t(58) = 0.064$ ,  $p = .842$  with Basic one ( $\bar{x} = 16.04$ , S.D.= 2.134) to Basic two ( $\bar{x} = 16.00$ , S.D.= 2.200) and the effect size of ( $r = 0.045$ ) is very small. Hence,  $H_{02}$  was accepted. These findings agree with Wearmonth (2004) who sees multilingualism as a serious problem of literary acquisition and development influenced by cultural diversities, but suggests that teacher should use the cultural experience of the learner in his teaching. Christensen (2006) identified the problem of inadequate facilities and personnel as a serious one while Brand (2004) identified the ages of learners at this level as a serious one claiming that most of the learners at this state hardly can differentiate between right and wrong,

though the reading readiness may have been clearly expressed. Vera and Dennis (2003) also shared the same opinion that parents' socio-economic status plays a major role in initial reading of their children.

### Conclusion

Teachers' roles in the life of every learner are very important and cannot be overemphasized. Whatever a learner becomes in his/her academic endeavours in life is attributed to such teachers that set the foundation of such child's academic careers. Therefore, a child who unfortunately falls into the hands of 'poor teachers'... poor in teaching pedagogies; poor in knowledge and deficient in experience, teachers who cannot improvise relevant instructional materials to teach initial reading to learners in these categories, and such a child whose parents are financially marginalized, facing the present day economic recession, is bedevilled with reading difficulties. However, teachers teaching initial reading can be of great help as they vary their teaching methods, approaches and techniques to suit the initial reading class categories.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that:

- foundation building is very crucial to every structure that is set to last. Teachers teaching initial reading should know that they are the foundation builders and so must be ready to go extra kilometers in their teaching methodologies to encourage the learners in this category to appreciate, and create interest in reading upon which the academic future of their learners holds.
- they vary their teaching pedagogies to help their learners internalize and transfer the knowledge from the native language to the target language.
- teaching is not just a career, but the mother of all other careers. Whatever a child becomes in life is the product of what his/her beginning was. Teachers teaching this category of learners must be very versatile in the use of appropriate methods, approaches, techniques to transfer his/her instructions to the beginner-readers most importantly in the area of second language teaching-learning situation. many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to a second language.
- education stakeholders should help provide adequate and sufficient reading materials, and instructional materials for basic, initial reading learners in this category

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