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Loud Difficulties Experienced By Upper Basic II Students in English Reading Comprehension in Ankpa Education Zone, Kogi State

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the loud difficulties experienced by Upper Basic II students in English reading comprehension in Ankpa Education Zone of Kogi State. The study utilizes a quantitative research design to analyze the performance data from 134 students across three schools, YMC (Private), SCCA (Urban), and ADCGS (Rural). The study employed An English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT) and an English Vocabulary Test (EVT) to assess students' skills. A descriptive statistics was used to answer research questions one and two while inferential statistics were used to answer research question three at 0.005 level of significant value. The finding of this research shows that there is a significant difference in reading comprehension between private and public school students, with private school students outperforming those from public schools. Also, findings suggests that while students achieved high mean scores in overall reading performance, the challenges that emerged were in areas pronunciation and intonation, affecting their loud reading abilities. This study opines that special reading interventions should be incorporated into schools' curriculum and that these special reading programs should focus on the need for parental involvement and community in the enhancement of students' reading skills.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational skill essential for communication, learning, and personal development. It involves the ability to decode written symbols and comprehend their meanings, allowing individuals to engage with various forms of texts which spans across literary, informational, and technical texts. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), reading is defined as "the process of constructing meaning from written text." This construction of meaning requires various skills, including phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and the ability to recognize and understand grammatical structures. The act of reading is not merely a mechanical process; it requires cognitive engagement and critical thinking, enabling readers to connect with ideas, interpret information, and derive meaning. According to Omachonu (2023), students' ability to do well in school will be affected in no small way if they have reading difficulties. Furthermore, Vanguri *et al.* (2024) supports the assertion, noting that students at Upper Basic Level often face difficulty in comprehending English texts while reading. Effective reading involves not only recognizing words but also making connections between the text and the reader's experiences and knowledge. Reading can be categorized into different types, such as silent reading and loud reading.

Within the broader context of reading, loud reading plays a significant role particularly in educational settings. Loud reading involves vocalizing text aloud, which can help learners develop their pronunciation, fluency, and

expressiveness. It is a common practice in classrooms, especially for younger learners or those acquiring a second language. In Nigeria, where English is often a second language for many students, loud reading becomes a vital tool for enhancing language skills and boosting confidence. Reading is a multifaceted cognitive process that involves the interpretation of written symbols to derive meaning. It encompasses several key components: decoding, comprehension, and critical analysis. Decoding refers to the ability to recognize letters and words, while comprehension involves understanding the meaning of the text and integrating it with prior knowledge. This interactive process is crucial for effective communication and learning. Furthermore, the act of reading plays a crucial role in cognitive development and literacy. Research has shown that regular reading contributes to improved vocabulary, better writing skills, and enhanced critical thinking abilities (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). As stated by the International Reading Association (2010), "Reading is the key to lifelong learning and personal growth."

Reading is not merely a skill; it is a complex and dynamic process that involves understanding and interpreting written language, ultimately serving as a vital foundation for education and personal development. Loud reading is particularly important for language development for several reasons. First, it helps improve phonemic awareness—the understanding of the sound structures within a language. This skill is crucial for reading proficiency, as it enables learners to decode words

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accurately. According to research, students who engage in loud reading demonstrate better pronunciation and intonation, leading to improved overall communication skills (Ogbodo, 2017). Loud reading aids vocabulary development and comprehension. When students read aloud, they are more likely to engage with the text actively, which enhances their ability to grasp new words and concepts. This engagement not only supports language acquisition but also fosters a deeper appreciation of literature and text, encouraging students to explore diverse genres and themes. In the context of Nigerian secondary schools, where educational challenges often intersect with linguistic diversity, fostering loud reading skills is critical. Many students struggle with the transition from their native languages to English, which can create barriers to academic success. By addressing the difficulties associated with loud reading, educators can enhance students' language proficiency, boost their confidence, and ultimately contribute to better academic outcomes. Research has indicated that reading difficulties are prevalent globally, but the context of Nigeria presents unique challenges. According to Okeke (2018), socio-cultural factors significantly influence reading proficiency among Nigerian students. Various studies (Ogbodo, 2017; Nwogu, 2019) have highlighted the correlation between students' socio-economic backgrounds and their reading abilities. However, Factors such like difficulties in identifying main ideas, and the influence of the learning environment are the reasons why students cannot comprehend reading materials (Susliana, 2025).

Theory of Reading

Reading theories have had their shifts and transitions like teaching methods and approaches. As new ideas develop, the old ones are discarded and the new ones celebrated. Usually, the new ones begin as reactions against the old ones with particular focus on the weaknesses of the old ones. The reactions and counter-reactions gave birth to the three theories we have in reading. Starting from the traditional theory which focused on the printed text and moving to cognitive theory, which enhanced the role of background knowledge in addition to what appeared on the printed page, it culminated in the meta-cognitive theory, which is now in vogue.

Traditional Theory of Reading

In the traditional theory, novice readers learn a set of hierarchical ordered sub-skills that sequentially build towards comprehension ability. What this implies is that reading begins with the identification of letter features which leads to word recognition. Words are then organized into sentences from which the reader derives meaning. Having mastered these skills. Readers are viewed as experts who comprehend what they read. According to Nunan (1991), reading in this view is basically a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalents in the quest for making sense of the text. He referred to this process as the bottom up view of reading.

Mcarthy (1999) called this view 'outside-in' processing; referring to the idea that meaning exists in the printed page and is interpreted by the reader and then taken in. This model of reading has been under attack as being insufficient and defective for the main reason that it relies on the formal features of language, mainly words and structure. Although it is possible to accept this rejection for the fact that there is over reliance on structure in this view, it must be noted that knowledge of linguistic features is necessary for comprehension to take place.

Cognitive Theory

To counteract over reliance on form in the traditional view, the cognitive theory was introduced. The cognitive theory is also known as the top-down model. The theory emphasizes the interactive nature of comprehension. Dole *et al.* (1991) stated that, besides knowledge brought to bear on the reading process, a set of flexible, adaptable strategies are used to make sense of a text and to monitor ongoing understanding. According to Nunian (1991), and Dubin and Byeina (1991), the cognitive theory is in concordance with the psycholinguistic model of reading. The model sees reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game, a process in which reader sample texts, make hypothesis, confirm or reject them, make new hypothesis, and so forth (Paran, 1996). Here, the reader rather than the text is at the heart of the reading process. The reader makes use of his background knowledge of the subject at hand, and the knowledge of the overall structure of the text. Rather than decode every symbol or word, the reader forms hypothesis about what might follow next in the text. The 'schema' theory also fits within the cognitive view of reading. The schema theory suggests that the knowledge a reader carries around in his head is organized into interrelated patterns. These are constructed from his previous experiences and they enable him to make predictions about future experiences. Rumellik (1997) describes schemata as 'building blocks of cognition which are used in the process of interpreting sensory data, in retrieving information from memory, and in guiding the flow of the processing system. The implication of the cognitive theory is that, if a reader's schemata are incomplete and do not provide an understanding of the incoming data from the text, he will have problem processing and understanding the text.

Meta-Cognitive Theory

The meta-cognitive theory on the other hand, views reading as a process which involves thinking while reading. It is based on the control and manipulation that a reader can have on the act of comprehending a text (Vaezi, 2006). There is no more debate on whether reading is a bottom-up language-based process or a top-down knowledge-based process. It is also no more problematic to accept the influence of background knowledge on both LI and 12readers. Research has gone even further to define the control readers execute on their ability to understand a text. This control, Block (1992) refers to it as meta-

cognition. Klein *et al.* (1991) state that strategic readers attempt the following, while reading. They firstly identify purpose before reading, secondly, they identify the form or type of the text before reading, they think about the general character or features of the form or type of the text -For instance, they try to locate a topic sentence and follow supporting details towards conclusion, they project the author's purpose for writing the text, and they make continuous predictions about what will occur next -based on information obtained earlier (prior knowledge) and conclusions obtained within the previous stages. These views imply that rather than decode every symbol, or even every word, the reader forms a hypothesis about what might follow next in the text. From the hypothesis, he reaches a probable conclusion.

From the above analysis, we can see that reading theory has had its shifts and transitions. We, however, wish to state that the three theories are relevant to this study. This is because comprehension cannot take place without the knowledge of the linguistic features which is the view of the traditionalists. In the same vein, there cannot be background knowledge, which is emphasized by the cognitivists, without knowledge of linguistic features. Similarly, readers cannot think and make predictions about what will occur next while reading, a view upheld by the meta- cognitivists without background knowledge which in turn is a product of knowledge of linguistic features. We, therefore, conclude that the reading theories do not function as linear and independent processes but mutually reinforce one another for comprehension to take place.

Loud reading, characterized by the oral reading of text with appropriate expression, encompasses several challenges:

Pronunciation Issues

Many students struggle with the pronunciation of English words, leading to miscommunication (Ishola, 2020).

Intonation Problems: Students who have intonation problems often find it difficult to read fluently. This sometimes is as a result of one's acquaintance with his or her background.

Comprehension Challenges

Students often read text aloud without fully understanding its meaning (Adebayo, 2019).

Fluency

Lack of practice contributes to poor fluency in reading in

English Language (Eze, 2021).

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the loud reading difficulties experienced in English Language by JSS2 students of Ankpa Education Zone?
2. To what extent do students derive meaning from what they read?
3. What is the significant difference between the mean of the private school and that of the public schools?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the loud difficulties experienced by Upper Basic II students in reading comprehension in English within Ankpa Education Zone. The population of the study included Junior Secondary School students across three schools representing different educational contexts: a private school (YMC), an urban public school (SSCA), and a rural public school (ADCGS). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 134 students from these schools to ensure a representation of different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The sample included 30 students from YMC, 54 from SSCA, and 50 from ADCGS.

The study utilized two main instruments: the English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT) and the English Vocabulary Test (EVT). The ERCT was designed to assess students' abilities in loud reading, focusing on fluency, intonation, pronunciation, and observation of punctuation marks. The EVT aimed to measure the students' vocabulary knowledge, a critical factor influencing reading comprehension. Data were collected during scheduled reading sessions in a controlled environment to minimize distractions. Each student participated individually in the loud reading assessment, which was audio-recorded for detailed analysis. The vocabulary test was administered in a written format, ensuring consistency in testing conditions across all schools.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores were computed for each loud reading component (fluency, intonation, pronunciation, punctuation, and audibility) using the analysis of variance. A t-test was employed to compare the performance of students in private and public schools, while ANOVA was used to examine differences among the three schools in terms of vocabulary proficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

Skill	School	Total Score	Mean Score
Fluency	YMC	82	6.83
	SSCA	138	6.38
	ADCGS	101	5.05
Intonation	YMC	65	5.41
	SSCA	110	5.00

	ADCGS	90	4.45
Punctuation	YMC	102	8.50
	SSCA	142	6.57
	ADCGS	96	4.80
Pronunciation	YMC	66	5.50
	SSCA	109	5.04
	ADCGS	85	4.25
Audibility	YMC	114	9.70
	SSCA	210	9.72
	ADCGS	194	9.70
Total			100

This table shows that intonation and pronunciation seem to pose more problems to students than the other areas (fluency, observation of punctuation marks). Despite these problems, the respondents in three groups have high mean scores in loud reading as can be seen from

the table.

To determine whether there were statistically significant differences in performance across the three schools, a one-way ANOVA was performed separately for each skill. The results are presented below:

Table 2: Differences in performance across the three schools

Skill	F-statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Fluency	27.92	< 0.001	Significant difference across schools
Intonation	6.81	0.002	Significant difference across schools
Punctuation	55.68	< 0.001	Highly significant difference across schools
Pronunciation	3.88	0.027	Significant difference across schools
Audibility	0.25	0.778	No significant difference across schools

Fluency, Intonation, Punctuation, and Pronunciation all showed statistically significant differences in mean scores across schools ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the schools performed differently in these areas. The most pronounced difference was observed in Punctuation,

with an F-statistic of 55.68, suggesting that students from YMC significantly outperformed the others in this skill. In contrast, Audibility did not yield a statistically significant result ($p = 0.778$), implying that all three schools had comparable levels of audibility in student speech.

Table 3: Summary of Scores for Vocabulary Test.

School	Number of Respondents	Total Score	Mean Score
YMC	30	382	12.73
SSCA	54	534	9.88
ADCGS	50	405	8.10

The above table shows that the respondents from YMC (Private) have the highest mean of 12.73 followed by SSCA (Urban) with a mean of 9.88. ADCGS (Rural) has the lowest mean of 8.1

These results, therefore reveal that the students derive meanings from the everyday common vocabulary as they read in the English Language.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Public and Private Schools

School Type	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Public	43.60	9.34	-3.25	58	.002
Private	58.15	18.85	-4.00	57.999	.000

The below table shows that the calculated value of T is -3.249 and T significant is .002. Since T significant of 0.002 is lesser than the set alpha (α) level of 0.05, it follows

that a statistically significant difference exists between the mean of 58.15 of the private school and that of 43.60 of the public schools.

Discussions

The findings from this research reveal critical insights into the reading capabilities of students across Ankpa Education Zone. The summary of scores for loud reading highlights that while students generally perform well, there are specific challenges, particularly in intonation and pronunciation. These aspects appear to pose more difficulties than fluency or punctuation, indicating a need for targeted instructional strategies. The relatively high mean scores across all groups suggest that students are proficient in basic reading tasks, yet the persistent issues with intonation and pronunciation may hinder their overall reading effectiveness and expression. These findings are consistent with Omachonu's (2023) investigation into reading difficulties among JSS One students in the Idah Education Zone. Omachonu identified pronunciation and intonation as significant challenges in oral reading, similar to the results observed in this research. Furthermore, socio-economic factors were found to play a crucial role in influencing students' reading abilities, with students from private schools outperforming their public school peers due to better resources and supportive learning environments.

Moreover, the vocabulary test results present a compelling narrative about the students' engagement with the English language. The highest mean score from YMC (Private) students suggests that they have a stronger grasp of everyday vocabulary, which is essential for comprehension and fluency in reading. This proficiency in vocabulary not only aids in decoding texts but also enhances their ability to derive meaning from what they read, which is crucial for academic success.

The T-test results further illuminate the disparities between public and private schools, revealing a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension scores. With private school students scoring notably higher than their public school peers, this research challenges the notion that educational quality is uniformly distributed. The implications of this finding are profound; it suggests that factors such as teaching methods, resource availability, and student support systems in private schools may contribute to improved literacy outcomes. This finding agrees with the studies of Lubienski and Lubienski (2013), which highlight significant achievement gaps between public and private school students, often attributed to differences in resources and teaching methodologies.

These results underscore the urgent need for educational stakeholders to address the disparities in resources and support provided to public schools. Implementing targeted interventions to enhance reading skills, particularly in intonation and pronunciation, could help elevate students' performance across the board as noted by National Reading Panel (2000), which underscores the critical role of vocabulary instruction in literacy development. Additionally, fostering a rich vocabulary environment, as seen in YMC, can be instrumental in improving comprehension levels in both public and private settings.

In summary, while the overall performance in loud reading is commendable, the identified areas for improvement warrant attention. By focusing on the specific challenges students face and addressing the educational inequalities between school types, we can work towards fostering a more equitable and effective literacy environment for all students. Ultimately, these efforts will not only enhance reading proficiency but also empower students to become more confident and capable readers, better prepared for academic challenges ahead.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for the language teacher. Language teachers should be aware of the fact that a child's ability to understand what he reads and his ability to read efficiently are invaluable in his academic pursuit; that if a child has reading problems of any kind, especially in the aspect of intonation and pronunciation, it seem to pose more problems to students in aspects of self-confidence. Teachers should however, always make sure that their students understands the tenets of repetition as key to retention. Reading may not be much meaningful to the child if comprehension is low. The ability to comprehend efficiently and with reasonable speed increases student's confidence and recall. The teacher, therefore, has the responsibility of helping the students develop sensitivity to reading skills and thus improve reading performance.

Learners should not be tied down to their class reader only. Textbook writers should make provisions in language textbooks to enable learners to have access to a variety of reading materials containing exercises and drills that would help them overcome their reading problems. There is, therefore, the need for language teachers, curriculum planners and school administrators to take concrete steps that are realistic and attainable for the improvement of reading skills among students taking into consideration the great importance of the use of efficient reading in a complex society like ours.

Recommendations

Targeted Professional Development

Training should be given to educators, especially educators affiliated with public schools. The training should focus on effective teaching strategies that give more emphasis to intonation and pronunciation in reading. These trainings, in the form of workshops and other types of professional development programs should focus on the best practices that can aid the acquisition of these skills, thereby making teachers to support their students' reading fluency better.

Resource Allocation

The government should provide more recent teaching resources and additional funding for public schools. Public schools will benefit greatly from additional funding and resources allocation. This will enable them access in time, high-quality reading materials, technology,

and instructional tools that promote engagement and comprehension.

Vocabulary Enrichment Programs

It is recommended that the government should implement vocabulary enrichment initiatives that host everyday language use in the curriculum. This could involve activities like thematic units, word games, and vocabulary-focused instruction.

Reading Interventions

Curriculum developers should develop and implement 'targeted' reading intervention programs for students struggling with comprehension and fluency. These programs should focus on personalized instruction that addresses individual students' needs, leveraging both small group and one-on-one formats.

Peer Learning and Collaboration

The government should encourage collaboration between private and public schools through mentorship programs or reading partnerships. This can help public school students to become more acquainted with recent teaching methods that boosts their reading skills.

Parental Involvement

Parents should be involved in the reading process by providing support to their children's reading at home. Workshops for parents can help them understand the importance of reading aloud, discussing texts, and fostering a positive reading environment, which can reinforce students reading comprehension in school. Regular Assessment and Feedback: School leaders should implement a system of assessment that regularly check students' progress in reading skills, particularly in intonation and pronunciation.

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