

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

POOR READING SKILLS OF PUPILS: A CASE STUDY OF AXIM

ANGLICAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL



**A dissertation in the Department of Applied Linguistics,
Faculty of Foreign Languages Education, submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies, in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education
(Teaching English as a Second Language)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

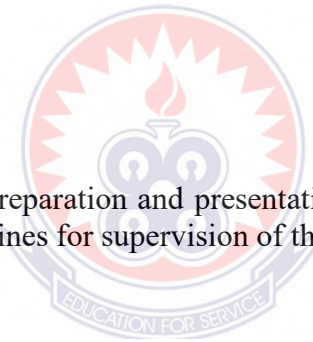
I, Naomi Borsah, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



Prof. Fofu Lomotey (**Supervisor**)

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

To my family and loved ones.



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ABSTRACT

Reading ability is a crucial developmental skill for learners of English as a second language. This is because it has a significant impact on the performance of students in other courses of study. Owing to this, it became necessary that the poor reading abilities among students of Axim Anglican Junior High school be investigated to ascertain the causes and devise probable measures to ameliorate the situation. This study was therefore set out to examine the causes of poor reading abilities among the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS and to explore measures that can be adopted in helping the pupils to overcome their poor reading abilities. A qualitative case study design was adopted using observation and interview for thematic analysis. The findings showed that lack of library, inadequate time for reading comprehension lessons, and lack of learner-centred approaches are some of the endogenous causes of poor reading performance among the students. It was also revealed that parents have not taken the responsibility to ensure that their children develop reading skills, as they fail to acquire reading materials for their children. On addressing the situation, the findings showed that teachers need more time for reading lessons; they need to adopt learner-centred strategies such as peer teaching. Based on the results, it is recommended that Axim Anglican Junior High School should have a library where the students can practise reading outside the classroom. Additionally, it is recommended that parents take responsibility of developing their children's reading ability by buying them books.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the study

English language has been assigned a functional status of a global language (Crystal, 2001). It has become a language of very high prestige, due to its function across the globe. It has been observed that in most international communications, English is used as either the sole language or one of the adopted languages. The language has become the *lingua franca* for international organisations in the world. Due to the high prestige English language has been given by both local and international community, it has become a language that people all over the world seek to learn and use. The craving for ability to learn and use English has been propelled by the advent of internet and its social media-applications. People need to learn English so that they can communicate with others via the internet. The need for people to communicate using English is not observable in countries where the language is assigned the status of an official language only, but also countries where it is considered a foreign or international language.

Learning a language involves the acquisition of two main skills: receptive skill, which consists of listening and reading, and production skill, which comprises speaking and writing. In a second language teaching and learning context, these skills are taught concurrently. It is therefore expected that learners of English as a second language be able to read well, at least to reflect their level of exposure to the learning of the language. This implies that as the pupils of junior high schools in Ghana are taught how to write, they are taught how to read. In fact, by the time a pupil starts JHS, it is expected that he/she is able to read materials whose language is at the level of the pupil. Unfortunately, the situation in some basic schools in the country indicates that some

junior high school pupils have challenges with reading. Concerning this, this research explores the poor reading problems of junior high school pupils in Ghanaian public schools.

In most countries of the world, including Ghana, where English is used as an official language, one's ability to read a text in English is crucial for an individual to contribute to any meaningful communicative event. In a second language learning context, it has been observed that the ability of English as a second language learner to read text written in English does not only show the level of competence of the learner in the language, but also the ability to participate on conversations (Zhang & Shanshan, 2011). It has even been noted that in countries where English functions an official language, one's ability to read texts in English determines the person ability to contribute meaningfully to national discourses (Beek & Mckeon, 2006).

In Ghana, English language has been assigned the function of language of education: it serves as a subject that is taught and a medium of instruction. Regarding the role of English in education in the country, Ghana, it has been considered one of the crucial subjects one must pass in order to progress from one level of education to the other. For instance, a student who fails to make a pass grade in English in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) is not allowed to enrol in any second cycle institution in the country. This means that it is a must that every student who sits for the BECE obtains a pass grade in English language. It is therefore worth noting that without the ability to read, one cannot understand the questions that are asked in the BECE. In this regard, ability to read well and understand what is written is crucial in pupils' performance in any examination in Ghana.

Additionally, almost all written information in Ghana, irrespective of the location and function, is in English. Inability to read English text puts one in a place

where she or he is disconnected from the available information. It needs to be mentioned that information is crucial in decision making process; therefore, if pupils are to make informed decisions concerning their social, academic and economic lives, they must be able to access information in the form of written text. Failure to master the skill to read disconnects pupils from information sources, because they would not be able to access information, both electronically and in print (N’Namdi, 2005). In this regard, it has become expedient that pupils attain mastery of reading right from the beginning of their education, as this enables them, in addition to accessing information, to learn on their own. Research has demonstrated that ability to read and acquisition of reading skills enable pupils to benefit from educational activities, and to participate fully in the social and economic activities (Hamza & Nur, 2018; Reutzel & Cooter, 2013).

Concerning the benefits pupils derive from acquiring reading ability, teachers and parents expect that pupils obtain an appreciable reading proficiency by the end of third grade, so that their success in academic activities afterwards would be enhanced (Fiester, 2010). Consequently, Reutzel and Cooter (2013) have asserted that stakeholders in education become burdened when pupils fail to acquire requisite skills in reading. It is against this background that English teachers in the junior high schools have the responsibility to ensure that pupils who are unable to read satisfactorily are guided and helped to develop reading skills before they complete the school, junior high school. The onus of ensuring that pupils acquire reading skills is on the English language teachers, because they are directly responsible for creating and applying various techniques and strategies that would lead their pupils to acquire reading ability and comprehend textual information (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013; Fiester, 2010).

Reading comprehension is one of the crucial aspects of English as second language learning. This has been the case because communication in the current dispensation has been in the form of written texts. Research has shown that ability to read information on the internet is one of the key reasons for the learning of English as a second language (Zhang, & Shanshan, 2011). People read, not because they have the ability to pronounce written words in the language, but more importantly to make meaning out of what has been written (Erssely, 2010). Readers will not benefit from reading if they are unable to understand what they read. Reading therefore becomes unimportant if the reader fails to decode the message of the written text. Affirming this position, Beek and Mckeon (2006) emphasized that comprehension is the reason for learning. Hence, the purpose of reading a piece of written text is the meaning the reader intends to obtain from the text.

For instance, Erssely (2010) argues that if readers can read the words in the target language but fail to understand what they read, it becomes highly probable that actual reading is not taking place. English as a second language learners who are unable to comprehend reading materials, they are given in the language classroom are prone to developing lack of enjoyment and interest for reading. With reading being a crucial means by which learners obtain information and knowledge, inability to understand written text by learners has a great detrimental effect on the academic performance (Hamza & Nur, 2018). In this regard, reading comprehension serves as one of the most commonly utilized language proficiency skills that learners of English as a second language across the globe are made to develop.

Unlike face-to-face communication in which meaning is enhanced by several non-verbal communication cues a speaker provides, readers are unfortunately underprivileged in this regard. This has contributed to the difficulty learners of English

as a second language, generally, encounter in comprehending the message of written texts (Mundhe, 2015). Lack of comprehension of a reading material consequently creates lack of enjoyment and interest for reading. The inability to comprehend a written material could be caused by inadequate knowledge of English vocabulary by the reader. By implication, therefore, there exists a strong relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge (Mundhe, 2015; Nozen et al., 2017).

Learners are required to develop sufficient knowledge of English vocabulary to be able to understand English texts. Nozen et al. (2017) have established that second language learners who have negative attitude towards English language are susceptible to encounter many challenges regarding comprehension of texts in the target language. Additionally, studies such as Nozen et al. (2017) report that prior knowledge supports second language learners in comprehending reading materials and construction of meaning. Concerning this, learners of English as a second language who lack the ability to connect their previous knowledge and envisage the probable meaning of the text they read, may fail to comprehend the text they read.

Studies have shown that the level of difficulty English language learners encounter in comprehending English texts that they read is dependent on the complexity of the language used in writing the text (Koda, 2010; Zwiers, 2008). It has been observed that the colloquial language that is used in conversations outside the classroom is different from the language found in the texts pupils are made to read (Westby, 2012). The language the learners read in texts are often academic language which comprises diverse words which the learners might not be familiar with, more complex grammatical structures and different text organization (Qrquez & Ab-Rashid, 2017; Zwiers, 2008). The ability to read and comprehend what is read makes pupils to develop interest for reading and serves as a tool for motivation and self-learning

(Hamza & Nur, 2018). Reading and comprehending what is read is a crucial role-player in the educational, working, recreational, and social lives of people (Koda, 2005). Reading comprehension ability of pupils therefore is a highly valued tool for educational, economic and social development of learners as they progress in life.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In Ghana, as observable in most of the non-native English-speaking countries, unsatisfactory reading skill by pupils is a great concern to English language teachers. That is, in spite of the crucial influence reading ability has on the academic performance of pupils, especially in the non-native English-speaking contexts, it has been established by findings of (Waston-Nortey, 2013) that pupils in Ghanaian public schools are plagued with poor reading skills. This finding has been corroborated by the work of Nezami (2012) which establishes that one of the crucial challenges of teachers of English in basic schools today is the issues of lack of interest for reading and unsatisfactory reading comprehension skills among pupils. Research has shown that poor reading ability is usually a concern to teachers, because of the detrimental affect it has on the academic performance of the pupils. For instance, in Ghana, English is both a medium of instruction and a subject that is taught in the classroom. Hence, any learner who fails to master reading skills is prone to unsatisfactory academic performance. This is because every other subject requires the learner to read English texts. For instance, research findings of Koda (2007) and, Nor and Rashid (2018) have shown that pupils without satisfactory mastery of English vocabulary with its consequential effect of unsatisfactory level of reading comprehension, usually encounter a succession of persistent poor academic performance.

In the current study, the researcher has observed that pupils of Anglican Junior High School in Axim, a town in the Nzema-East Municipal Assembly have various

degrees of reading difficulty. In the various classes that the researcher has taught over the years, more than half of the class struggle to read satisfactorily. This problem of poor reading ability among the pupils has made the majority of the pupils to develop lack of interest for reading and comprehension activities in the classroom. Consequently, this has an effect of unsatisfactory performance in the academic works of the pupils in the school.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study aims to achieve the under-listed objectives. Specifically, the study seeks to

- i. examine the causes of poor reading abilities among the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS;
- ii. explore measures that can be adopted to improve learners' reading ability.

1.4 Research questions

In order for the specific objectives of the study to be achieved, the research provides answers to the following questions.

- i. What are the causes of the poor reading abilities among the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS?
- ii. What measures can be adopted to improve the reading abilities among pupils of Axim Anglican JHS?

1.5 Significance of the study

There are research findings that report that poor reading abilities affect learners of English language in knowledge acquisition of other subjects and the ability to learn and use English language itself. Concerning this, it has become important that a study be conducted to reveal the causes of the poor reading abilities of pupils of Axim Anglican JHS. Additionally, difficulties that make it challenging for pupils to obtain

reading comprehension skills need to be curbed in order for the pupils to develop mastery of reading skills. This is because poor reading skills have adverse effect on the learning and use of English language, and the academic performance of the pupils in other subjects. Regarding this, this study becomes very significant, as it would reveal the causes of the poor reading abilities of the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS so that measures could be design to curb them.

The current study further seeks to reveal practical solutions that would curb the reading difficulties among the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS. That is, with the knowledge of the benefits that acquisition of reading comprehension skills offers to the pupils, the current study seeks to answer the question “how do pupils of Axim Anglican JHS be assisted by their English language teachers to overcome the challenges they encounter in reading comprehension?” The study is significant because its findings will identify causes of the reading difficulties and provide pragmatic solutions to the poor reading abilities among the pupils.

The study is significant to English language teachers in other junior high schools also, as it measures the findings bring would also be applicable in other schools. It is worth noting that the significance of the study is also seen in the spheres of the extant literature. The findings of the study add to the available literature on English language education in the Ghanaian context and the global situation as a whole. Since reading ability is a crucial skill in English as second language learners are required to master, the findings of the current study contribute to the discussion on the English language learning in non-native contexts, and the role development of reading ability in a target language plays in acquisition and performance ability of the learner in the target language.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the causes of the poor reading abilities of pupils of Axim Anglican JHS, and to ascertain the measures that could be implemented in improving the reading abilities of the pupils. In order for the study to achieve this purpose, the research conducted the study on pupils and English language teachers of the Axim Anglican JHS. The study's participants are limited to only pupils and English language teachers of the aforementioned school. Other junior high schools in the municipality as well as other parts of the country, Ghana are not covered by the study. Additionally, there are other factors which might affect the abilities of the pupils to acquire reading skills in the school, but these factors might not directly be controlled by teachers of English in the school, the school itself or the parents of the pupils of the school. In this regard, the current study's scope covers only factors that are limited to the school environment and the home environment of the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS. Lastly, it is worth noting that certain children might be born with certain levels of defects, which may directly or indirectly contribute to the poor reading abilities of pupils. The current study does not scope over these biological factors. Therefore, the findings do not make reference to any biological deformity that might influence the acquisition of reading ability among pupils Axim Anglican JHS.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

In order for the study to achieve its purpose, the researcher should have conducted the research using all the junior high schools and all English teachers in the municipality but this was not done due to financial constraints.

Also, the study's participants should have covered other pupils and other English teachers in the municipality but due to time constraints, the researcher limited herself to the aforementioned school.

Additionally, due to financial and time constraints the researcher limited herself to school and home environment factors without looking at the biological factors which could have also been a factor.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

The rest of the study is organised as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the findings in the literature. In this chapter, the research looks at the discussions in the literature and provides the voice of other researchers on the subject matter of the current research. The discussion in chapter two provides the underpinning of the study. Additionally, the second chapter discusses the conceptual framework which the researcher adopts to explain the findings of the study. In Chapter 3, the study offers a discussion on the methodology the researcher employed in conducting the research. The chapter discusses concepts such as the research design, population, research instruments, and data analysis technique. Also, the research provides a discussion on how the research work adhered to certain ethical considerations to ensure that the study conforms to ethical requirements of research. The analysis and discussion of the findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. The researcher provided the obtained data to support the analysis and discussion. Chapter 5 consists of the summary of the research findings, the conclusions that are made as a result of the research findings, and the recommendations of study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussions in the literature and empirical studies on reading. The chapter is sectionalised into a discussion of the concept of reading in 2.1, importance of reading in 2.2, causes of reading difficulties in 2.3, reading models in 2.4, empirical studies of English language learner reading challenges in 2.5, and chapter conclusion in 2.6.

2.1 The concept of reading

Reading is the process of identifying and understanding the meaning of the characters and words in written or printed materials. As a noun, the notion of reading involves the process of taking in the sense or meaning of letters, symbols by sight or touch in the case of braille. Reading could be viewed as the interpretation of symbols to extract the meanings. Reading is therefore a multifaceted process that comprises word recognition, comprehension and fluency. Reading simply involves the process of making meaning from print or text materials. Reading as a process requires the reader to identify the words in print (a process known as word recognition), construct an understanding from them (a process called comprehension) and coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that the reading process becomes automatic and accurate (an achievement of fluency). Regarding this, reading in its entirety, entails the weaving word recognition and comprehension in a fluent manner. Research has demonstrated that reading plays a major role in the educational, working, recreational, and social lives of individuals (Qrquez & Ab Rashid, 2017).

A person's ability to read is considered a valuable skill that is highly valued. This is because reading ability is important for social and economic advancement.

Regarding this, reading ability is considered the most important skill among the four language skills because of its ability in improving one's overall proficiency level in a target language (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Krashen & Brown, 2007). Most researchers agree that reading comprehension is not simply recognizing individual words, or even understanding each individual word as our eyes pass over it. All models of comprehension recognize the need for readers to build up a mental representation of text, a process that requires integration across a range of sources of information, from lexical features to knowledge concerning events in the world (e.g., Garnham, 2001; Gernsbacher, 1990; Kintsch, 1998). For this reason, the simple view of reading, which could be seen as the first endeavour to describe the "balanced literacy", suggests that reading comprehension results from developing skills in the areas of decoding and linguistic comprehension (Kirby & Savage, 2008).

Although one may have reading difficulties in one's mother tongue, the problems get worse when reading is applied to a second language, as students might be lagging behind in a number of reading components, including accuracy, comprehension and speed (Qrquez & Ab Rashid, 2017). Lagging behind is a cognitive difficulty associated with the process of reading in another language (Alsamadani, 2008). Qrquez and Ab Rashid (2017) contend that these difficulties are more likely to be associated with the nature of the language pragma linguistic or even socio-cultural aspects. With reading considered a receptive skill, it forms one of the key skills learners of English language in Ghana are expected to acquire at the beginning of their acquisition process. It has been noted that reading skill enables the learners of English to decode the meaning of texts to comprehend the receptive material, the information the writers of the texts intend to communicate. Concerning this Hamza and Nur (2018) assert that the importance of language learners mastering reading skill can never be

underestimated. Reading ability serves as one of the essential means through which learners, for the purpose of education obtain information. Hence, research has demonstrated that reading has become a commonly utilised language proficiency skill in the world. This is because failure of students to master reading skill is a contributing factor to their failure in achieving academic expectations (Mundhe, 2015).

2.1.1 Types and purposes of reading

Types and purposes of reading cannot be separated from comprehension. Each type will determine what to achieve during or after reading. In conjunction with this Clarke and Silberstein (1979) point out that classroom activities should parallel the real world as closely as possible. Language is a tool of communication, so methods and materials should concentrate on the message, not on the medium. Then, the purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life. In general, there are four types of reading, and thus four purposes of reading (Clarke and Siberstein, 1979; Greenwood, 1981; Grellet, 1987), although the writers have slightly diverse terminologies. They are (1) skimming (in order to obtain the general idea of the author), (2) scanning (in order to obtain specific fact or piece of information), (3) intensive or thorough reading (in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a reading text, in this case, reading for detail), and (4) critical reading (in order to evaluate information to determine where it fits into one's own system of beliefs). These types of reading can also be called reading strategies for obtaining necessary information and for determining the proper approaches for a reading task.

2.1.2 Cognitive reading skills

Efficient reading depends first of all on having a purpose for reading. In this case, the reader knows why he is reading a text. One possible way of establishing a purpose of reading is by focussing the learner's attention on a particular cognitive skill.

Many lists of cognitive skills have been suggested by those who are interested in reading instruction, but they all include most of the following (Greenwood, 1981, p. 89):

1. to anticipate both the form and the content;
2. to identify the main idea (s);
3. to recognise and recall specific details;
4. to recognise the relationship between the main idea(s) and its (their) expansion (example, lists, etc.)
5. to follow a sequence, such as events, illustration, stages of arguments;
6. to infer from the text (to read between the lines);
7. to draw conclusions; and
8. to recognise the writer's purpose and attitude.

In relation to the above reading skills, Brown in Mueller & Tiffany (n.d.) has compiled a taxonomy of reading micro-skills. The taxonomy provides an overview of the skill processes learners must learn to perform as they become efficient readers. The following are the taxonomy of reading micro-skills:

1. Discriminate among the distinctive graphemes and orthographic patterns of English.
2. Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory.
3. Process writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose.
4. Recognise a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
5. Recognise grammatical word classes, verbs), systems, (e.g. tense agreement, pluralisation), rules and elliptical forms.

6. Recognise that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms.
7. Recognise cohesive devices in written discourse and their role in signalling the relationship between and among clauses.
8. Recognise the rhetorical forms of written discourse and their significance for interpretation.
9. Recognise the communicative functions of written texts, according to form and purposes.
10. Infer context that is not explicit by using background knowledge.
11. From events, ideas, etc., described, infer links and connections between events, deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, generalisation, and exemplification.
12. Distinguish between literal and implied meanings.
13. Detect culturally specific references and interpret them in a context of the appropriate cultural schemata.
14. Develop and use battery of reading strategies, such as scanning and skimming, detecting discourse markers, guessing the meaning of words from context, and activating schemata for interpretation of texts.

Furthermore, it is suggested in the lists that reading comprehension abilities be closely related to writing abilities, especially when they involve comprehending the organisation of the text. In this case, the two primary language skills are mutually reinforcing.

2.1.3 Summary

In this section, the concept of reading has been discussed. It is shown that reading involves the act of making meaning from texts, which is the interpretation of

symbols to extract meaning. This means that for one to be able to read well, he or she must endeavour to develop skills in the areas of decoding and linguistic comprehension. The discussion in this section has also looked at types and purpose of reading. As shown in the discussion the four purposes or types of reading are (1) skimming (in order to obtain the general idea of the author), (2) scanning (in order to obtain specific fact or piece of information), (3) intensive or thorough reading (in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a reading text, in this case, reading for detail), and (4) critical reading (in order to evaluate information to determine where it fits into one's own system of beliefs). It has also been noted from the discussion that readers need to build cognitive reading skills in order to be effective readers.

2.2 Importance of reading

In today's information age, reading has become a requirement for everyone who wishes to contribute to social discourses (Riadil, 2020). Information is largely in the form text, which the general society access through reading. Items in the form of text are read on mobile phones, in magazines, on advertising billboards and in newspapers. Anyone who has the habit of reading derives a lot of benefits from what he/she reads. For instance, a reader is able to obtain current information and acquire new knowledge from the materials they read. Stressing on the importance of reading, Yukselir (2014) explains that one of the crucial skills learners are expected to acquire is reading essential reading. With the ability to read, a person is able to access new information, gain access to explanation on issues, interpretations that have been given on concepts and notions.

Reading is needed for many developmental achievements such as attention, language, memory, and motivation. Any learner who has insufficient ability in reading stands the risk of experiencing challenges in academics, behaviour, social, and emotions (Hamilton, 2012). This implies that attaining reading skills is a necessity

because it serves as a primary tool for the child's success. According to Reutzel and Cooter (2013) learning to read is not a simple task, as it becomes a challenge for many learners. It has been noticed that when reading becomes a challenge for English language learners, their interest in reading reduces. In a research, conducted by Naafan (2018), it was revealed that the world was experiencing a declining interest in reading among school pupils in many parts of the world, and that has become a serious concern to stakeholders of education (Hempenstall & Buckingham, 2016). In a research conducted in the United States, by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Report (2011), the findings showed that 33% of fourth graders and 24% of eight graders in the nation's largest urban areas could not read at the basic level, and unable to demonstrate even partial mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills in reading.

In another study, Roberts et al. (2008) report that one out of every four pupils in fourth grade through form three was found to be a struggling reader and less than one-third of public-school form two students were found to read at or below their grade level. Reading, as has been suggested, is not as natural as breathing, talking or even walking; it is a complex activity which involves a number of skills (Waston-Nortey, 2013). There is a broad scientific consensus on what is needed to become a good reader based on clear empirical evidence on the high-priority skills that all children including those with reading difficulties must acquire, as they learn to read. These involve skills in phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (Dehaene, 2009; Hamilton, 2012).

In the context of second language learning, ability to read text in the target language has been considered fundamental skill that is necessary for the attainment of high-level proficiency (Riadil, 2020). According to Hung and Ngan (2015), attainment

of reading skill is a requirement for the second language learner in the development of the socio-cultural competence. In the area of education, reading is construed as an obligatory activity that teachers and their students undertake all the time, because they always read different kinds of textbooks. Regarding this, the research of Hung and Ngan (2015) reports that the development of reading skills is essential in education for the students to improve their level of vocabulary in the target language, develop appreciable writing skills and speak the target language fluently.

Still in the context of education, learners are required to undertake independent learning, where they can be autonomous of their own learning activities. In the context of English as a second language learning, it has been by researchers the ability of the target language learner to undertake independent learning is crucial to the mastery of the target language. For instance, the study of Little (2004) reports when the English language learner becomes autonomous it helps him to learn things that the teacher would not have taught him, and even things that the teacher might not know; autonomous learning is necessary because it is not everything that teacher can teach the students. It is therefore required for the student to learn beyond teacher-guided instructions. However, before autonomous learning can be possible, the English as a second language learner must develop an appreciable level of reading skill. This will make the learner to take active role in the language learning process (Tassinari, 2012). Autonomy in learning therefore makes the learner take control of the learning materials.

In a study that was conducted by Ardi (2017), technology was found to promote learning autonomy, since the target language learners become free in managing their learning and cognitive processes. Regarding this, the research of Hazaea and Alzubi (2018) established that when learners of English as a second language are able to use social media applications, including WhatsApp, they develop the sense of learner

autonomy in context of reading, because these platforms constitute an interactive and a reflective platform that help the English learners outside of the classroom. These platforms also give them the opportunity to learn from other people. Furthermore, as their findings suggest, this mobile app can be utilized to share summaries, extra readings and tasks. It needs to be mentioned that studies that have advocated for the encouragement of learner autonomy have highlighted the essence of the learners' active roles and self-evaluations in autonomy. Promoting learner autonomy in the Indonesian context may encounter cultural challenges.

2.3 Cause of reading comprehension difficulties

Different studies in non-native English-speaking contexts have investigated reading comprehension challenges among non-native English learners. For example, Chawwang (2008) investigated English reading problems among Thai EFL learners. The study found that most of the students face difficulties in reading English texts. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge was recognized as one of the main issues (Gunning, 2002). It was revealed in the study that vocabulary knowledge of the learner of English plays an important role in the ability to read and understand the reading materials presented to the learners. For instance, researchers such as Carlisle (2000) and Qian (2002) have concluded that most of the textbooks that the English as a second language students are given to read contain technical expressions. These researchers have concluded that due to the insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary, the learners are confronted with difficulties in understanding technical words. The lack of adequate vocabulary further prevents the learners from accessing the synonyms and antonyms, and the connotation and denotations of most of the words in the textbooks (Carlisle, 2000; Nuttall, 2000).

Another contributing cause of the difficulties English as a second language learners are confronted with is the text complexity. The implication is that the English language learners' fluency in the language enables him to obtain more in-depth understanding of text. The more the learner understands the texts written in English, the better the enthusiasm to read. Hence, understanding of vocabulary in the text is prominent when it comes to reading. So, the more the students read and understands what he reads, the more motivated he becomes in reading, and that makes him master the skill of reading. The more readings the student does, the higher the likelihood that more vocabulary will be acquired, which will consequently help the learner in clarifying the strange words by relating them with the context in which they are used (Dennis, 2008).

Another cause of reading difficulty facing learners is their inability to understand complex sentences in reading comprehension. Complex sentences are sentences that consist of several clauses, and at times contain conjunctions such as although, because, furthermore, and however (Scott, 2009). Other causes of difficulties in reading comprehension among EFL learners include coordinating conjunctions, prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and nominalizations. They cause a lot of difficulties in reading comprehension because they make the writings more complex and difficult to comprehend (Nuttall, 2000). However, Trehearne and Doctorow (2005) further identified other factors such as useful learning methods, reading habits, text form, and effective reading comprehension strategies.

According to Davoudi and Yousefi (2015), causes of difficulties in reading for many learners include environmental, instructional, and biological sources. The authors argue that for one reason or another, learners who face reading difficulties have comprehension problems, and for some students, these comprehension problems could

be due to imprecise or ineffective word recognition and decoding methods. The environmental circumstances influence the learners' reading comprehension. They may have many difficulties in understanding reading materials in a disorganized environment. However, those in a peaceful and controlled environment may have more effective reading ability. Students in an insecure domicile find it difficult to concentrate on their reading. But if they find themselves in safe environments, efficiency in their reading comprehension tends to improve. It is proven that learners lose focus in reading comprehension in a noisy place such as areas with high volume of televisions or radios (Dennis, 2008). Other researchers have also reported that reading difficulties among learners could be attributable to deficiencies in language or cognitive processes (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009). Also, motivation and concentration are factors that might influence reading comprehension, since particular group of readers could understand simple words or expressions, but face difficulty in understanding longer sentences (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009).

2.4 Reading models

Researchers and language teachers have come out with different models that think would help promote effective reading outcomes at the various levels of language learning. The model is the bottom-up model which is able to build up basic units and sentential levels (Xu,2016) and used to scan the smallest units(bottom) to the larger units (top) of linguistic components until the meaning can be explored entirely (Dara, 2019). The bottom-up model operates on the principle that the best way to develop reading for children who are beginning to read and children with reading difficulties is by directly and systematically teaching them to decode letters and sounds, and then blending the sounds to form mono-syllabic word, bi-syllabic words and poly-syllabic words into phrases and then sentences. The emphasis of the bottom-up theory,

especially for a second language (L2) learner is that reading should be acquired through extensive drill and practice.

Implications of the bottom-up theory to the teaching of reading is that, once a pupil masters decoding skills or can decode a text very well, using the knowledge in phonics, will make children derive meaning of the text automatically. According to the theory, a reader processes text by first recognizing the lower level of units of language; the letters and their corresponding sounds and by blending these lower-level units into more complex units. This means that the reader first perceives and reads letters, and then continues to combine the letters into words, then blends several words to form phrases, clauses, sentences and then finally, decodes a text. Again, the bottom-up theory view reading as a matter of decoding single letters, words or focusing on areas such as eye-voice span speed of reading and lip movement during silent reading (Hebert, Bohaty, Nelson & Brown, 2016). This theory is relevant to the study because it emphasizes the use of phonics and comprehension in reading development. For example, the theory's emphasis on developing reading through series of repeated skills in letter and sound relationships are attributable to phonics and phonemic awareness instruction.

Again, the emphasis of the theory and the basis of the study on the five components of reading accept the notion that, to learn to read, children must work through and develop series of repeated skills in letter and sound relationship as in phonics, and text knowledge in reading comprehension, thereby making the theory relevant for this study. Also, as the study seeks to find out the approaches teachers use to remediate reading difficulties among struggling readers, the bottom-up theory is applicable. This is because the theory embraces the saying, “teach children to read and they will be able to read” and this is the foundation upon which this study is based.

The second model is what has been referred to in the literature as the top-down approach. This model has been seen to be appropriate for higher level learners by helping the reader to skim a text and helps the language learner to use schematic knowledge (i.e. linguistic knowledge and background information) that they have already been known to make a good prediction of the meaning of the text they read during the reading activity (Mikulecky, 2008). In top-down models of reading, the reader's cognitive and language competence plays a key role in the construction of meaning from printed materials. Most of these models (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971) are based on psycholinguistic theory, that is, the theory in which there is an interaction between thought and language. Goodman (1967) defines reading as a process which involves using available language cues that are selected from perceptual input on the basis of reader's predictions. As the information is processed, tentative decisions about meaning are confirmed, rejected, or refined as the reading progresses.

Graphic information in the top-down models is used only to support or reject hypotheses about meaning. Meaning, in this case comprehension, according to these models is obtained by using only as much information as necessary from the graphic, syntactic, and semantic cue systems. Other cues are based upon the reader's linguistic competence. In contrast to reading as translation models, that is, the bottom-up ones, top-down models theorists believed that skilled readers go directly from print to meaning without first reading to speech (Harris & Sipay, 1984). These models are influenced by psycholinguists, and they are mostly appropriate for skilled readers at the level of advanced or more advanced.

The third model is the interactive model which coherently reveals how various language sources providing continuous inputs interact or compensate each other (Aidinlou, 2012). Researchers have categorised the integrative approach into three

different senses: (1) reading as an interactive process, which focuses on the text-reader relations, (2) interactive model of reading, which concentrates on the integration of lower- and higher- components of the reading process, and (3) textual interactive reading, which involves those interactions with the text as a whole. Proponents of the interactive reading model believe that, at least for skilled or advanced readers, top-down and bottom-up processing in reading seem to occur simultaneously. It is assumed according to this model that comprehension is dependent on both graphic information and the information in the reader's mind. Comprehension, therefore, may be obstructed when a critical skill or a piece of knowledge is missing. In a case such as this, the skilled reader compensates by decoding a word, relying on context, or both word and context.

In conjunction with these theories, reading is defined as the meaningful interpretation of printed or written symbols, while comprehending is a result of the interaction between the perception of graphic symbols that represent language and the reader's language skill, and his knowledge of the world. In this process the reader tries to create meanings that are intended by the writer (Harris & Sipay, 1984, p.8). Therefore, the nature of reading task changes as the learners' progress from less mature to more mature levels. Reading in this case is not one skill but a large number of interrelated skills that develop gradually over a period of years. So, it is a complex process in which the recognition and comprehension of written symbols are influenced by reader's perceptual skills, decoding skills, experiences, language backgrounds, mind sets, and reasoning abilities. This last model will be discussed further as this model has become the centre of interest for recent theories, research, and practice in teaching reading. The discussion will be covered in schema theory.

2.5 The phonic method

Since the current study investigates the reading challenges of English learners at the lower level of education, it is assumed that the bottom-up theory is the preferred model, therefore the discussion does not focus much on the top-down model. Phonics instruction teaches students to understand and learn the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. It also teaches children how to use these relationships to read and write words accurately (Oxford, 2001). The core aim of phonics instruction is for students to learn and use the alphabetic principle –the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds (Oxford, 2001). This principle helps greatly in developing children’s ability to read words, both in isolation and in reading passages (Martínez 2011, p. 28). Phonics is one of the components of reading, and it refers to the sounds of the letters of the alphabets in words (NRP, 2000).

Phonics is the relationship between a specific letter and its sound and the letter combinations and the sound they represent (Adams, 2000). According to Wood and McLemore (2001), when a pupil comes across an unknown word, with the knowledge of phonics, the pupil can try to read the word by focusing on the specific sound of each letter or combination of letters. For example, if a pupil does not recognize the word, “chant” the pupil might break the word apart into pieces such as /ch/ /a/ /n/ /t/ or /ch/ /ant/, assigning an appropriate sound to each separate letter or combination of letters. A systematic phonics instruction teaches language learners the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences and how to use these to decode and spell words. Also, it teaches phonemic awareness which is the ability to analyse and manipulate phonemes in

speech, for example, how to break the spoken word *teach* into three phonemes, /t/-/e/-/ch/, or how to blend these phonemes to form a whole word.

Like the audio-lingual teaching method, phonics emphasizes on repetition and drills using the sounds that make up words. Information is received and processed beginning with the smallest sound units, and proceeded to letter blends, words, phrases, and sentences. Thus, novice readers acquire a set of hierarchically ordered sub-skills that sequentially build toward comprehension ability. Having mastered these skills, readers are viewed as experts who comprehend what they read. The bottom-up model describes information flow as a series of stages that transforms the input and passes it to the next stage without any feedback or possibility of later stages of the process influencing earlier stages (Stanovich, 1980). In other words, language is viewed as a code and the reader's main task is to identify graphemes and convert them into phonemes. Consequently, readers are regarded as passive recipients of information in the text. Meaning resides in the text and the reader has to reproduce it.

The ESL and EFL textbooks influenced by this perspective include exercises that focus on literal comprehension and give little or no importance to the reader's knowledge or experience with the subject matter, and the only interaction is with the basic building blocks of sounds and words. Most activities are based on recognition and recall of lexical and grammatical forms with an emphasis on the perceptual and decoding dimension. Even though this model of reading has been criticised for over reliance on the formal features of the language, mainly words and structure, it must be confessed that knowledge of linguistic features is also necessary for comprehension to take place.

In helping pupils to acquire mastery of reading, Waston-Nortey (2013) explains that pupils need lots of opportunities to build spoken language by talking and listening,

learn about prints, books, sounds of spoken language, identify the letters of the alphabet, and listen to books read aloud. On the importance of acquiring phonics skills, Hamilton (2012) established that attaining phonics skills is one of the essential skills teachers need to develop in their pupils by incorporating phonics techniques in the reading instructions of beginning and struggling readers. Phonics techniques are very crucial in reading lessons for struggling readers since deficits in phonics contributes to poor comprehension (Moats 2000).

In this regard, Dehaene (2009) argued that developing skills in the various components of reading among pupils must invariably be the focal point when reading remediation programme is to be carried out among struggling readers. Dehaene added further that all children, especially those who struggle with reading, need to acquire phonics skills in addition to the other essential components of reading in a balanced and comprehensive reading manner in order to become successful readers. This position is supported by Soiferman (2016) who indicated that with reading being a skill-based process, teaching of it should emphasise the sound-symbol patterns, otherwise known as phonics, where children would be taught the names of the letters and the sounds of those letters. Phonics, which has been cited as one of the essential components of reading (Dehaene, 2009; NRP, 2000), is beneficial for children from all sociolinguistic and ability groups, especially when it is accompanied by memory aids such as key words for sounds, pictures, and articulatory gestures (McCardle et al., 2008).

Although phonics instruction is the same for all children (Allen, 2007; Badian, 2001), Forman and Torgesen (2001) argued that some students will only become literate when the instruction is more intense, more explicit (clearer), more comprehensive, and more supportive. Forman and Torgesen further contended that, the same effective pedagogy for all students is required including those with reading difficulties, but

increased repetitions, greater clarification of concepts, and additional re-teaching of letters, letter names and sounds, usage of flashcards and manila cards are necessary for struggling readers in order for them to reach the same level of proficiency that others reach with less intensity, practice, re-teaching, and support (NICHD, 2000). Also, studies have found that about 15 percent of the variations in reading achievement among children at the end of the school year are attributable to factors that relate to the skills and effectiveness of a teacher's approach to teaching of reading (Connor, Alberto, Compton, & O'Connor, 2014).

Vadasy and Sanders (2010) discussed several salient factors that a teacher should take into consideration in the classroom for effective phonics instruction. These include taking time to assess learners' reading strengths and needs through exercises, identifying learning patterns, repetitions, rehearsals, monitoring learners' reading patterns, not only as a group but as individual learners by organizing instructions based on group needs of the learners; recording how learners are responding to assessment and teaching, and the teacher reflecting on instructional practices and motivation in view of the learners' performance. In a study conducted by Adomah (2016), it was concluded that phonics instruction has positive effect on pupils reading ability. Among the recommendations of the study were, techniques such as 'look and say', as well as the 'eclectic methods', and use of varied models should be adopted by teachers in the teaching and handling of phonics and reading skills, especially at the lower primary level.

2.6 Comprehension

In a study undertaken by Rashid (2012), it was argued that comprehension of a language does not only involve the understanding of individual words that exist in the lexicon of the language, but also active engagement with the content to create a mental

representation. Accordingly, Qrquez and Ab Rashid (2017) point out that successful comprehension is that one that involves coordination of skills at many levels to extract and construct meaning. It is worthy of note that for the reader of a text to access the meaning being communicated by the writer, multiple skills are required of him/her. However, the complexity of accessing the message of a text is partly attributable to the language of the text. For instance, Qrquez and Ab Rashid (2017) argued that the level of difficulty associated with comprehension of certain content depends on the complexity of the language use. For instance, Westby (2012) contended that there exist certain differences between the language that we use in everyday conversations-colloquial language and the language use in school, which is formal. Everyday conversations are originally used to achieve daily tasks and share personal information. Academic language includes a different set of words, more complex grammatical structures and different text organization to express content which describes complex relationships (Zwiers, 2008). Comprehension of a text is therefore dependent on the type of language use.

2.6.1 Comprehension models

A number of different models have been suggested by researchers; mental models by Gernsbacher (1990) and Johnson-Laird (1983), and Construction-Integration Model by Kintsch and Rawson (2005) to account for the complex process of understanding text. The bottom-up models where the process of reading starts with the written words and comprehension is constructed by building the representation stepwise from the individual phoneme to the understanding of the entire text. The top-down models confirm the importance of inference making and schemes used to predict the content of the texts. The parallel models suggest that these two processes (bottom-up and top-down) work in parallel, simultaneously (Kahmi& Catts, 2012).

2.6.2 Variables involved in comprehension

Shrum & Glisan (1994, p. 114-116) review some research findings on the variables involved in comprehension. According to them, there are six variables that affect comprehension, both oral and written. The first variable is the importance of context and background knowledge in understanding input. The degree to which the reader is able to merge input with previously acquired knowledge structures or schemata, determines how successful he or she will be in comprehending. This linking of new and existing knowledge helps the reader make sense of the text more quickly. The second variable is the degree to which the reader uses strategies such as guessing in context. Prediction of forthcoming input is one characteristic of native readers' processing. Many studies support the claim that learners who interact with text through strategies such as predicting, skimming, scanning, and using background knowledge comprehend much better than those who fail to use these strategies. The third variable is the purpose for reading or the nature of the task. The type of task determines the kind of strategy required.

Two kinds of reading strategies, extensive and intensive, involve different objectives and skills. Extensive reading, usually reading for pleasure, requires the ability to understand main ideas, find specific information, and read quickly. Intensive reading, on the other hand, most often as reading for information, requires the ability to read for details, understanding implication, and follow relationships of thought throughout the text. The fourth variable relates to the length of text presented for comprehension. At the beginning level, students are typically given shorter, edited texts to read. Students who process shorter texts are more likely to use word for word processing strategies since the demands on memory permit greater attention to detail. Some evidence suggests that larger texts may be easier for students to comprehend

because they are more cohesive and interesting to students, although the texts require more top-down processing. The fifth variable in the comprehension process is related to the type of written text presented. Traditionally, the difficulty of texts has been judged on the basis of the simplicity of grammatical structures and the familiarity of the vocabulary. This may be due to the fact that comprehension is tested on the basis of grammar and vocabulary recognition rather than on the interaction with the text's message. But empirical studies revealed that exposure to texts with unfamiliar grammar and vocabulary does not significantly affect comprehension.

Other factors such as the quality of the text itself in terms of factual consistency and coherence, as well as the background knowledge and motivation of learners, may be more important considerations for teachers when selecting texts. The sixth variable in comprehension is the treatment of new vocabulary. It is acknowledged that the use of vocabulary lists with definitions does little to help the reader build vocabulary or comprehend more effectively while reading. It will be more effective if new words are presented in their thematic and discourse relationship to the text than in their dictionary definitions. As an alternative, the teacher uses pre- and post-reading discussion in order to link text information to reader background knowledge. Therefore, in order to comprehend written texts well, the instructor should take into consideration the following variables: (1) background knowledge of the student, (2) strategies that students use in the comprehension task, (3) purpose of reading or the nature of the task, (4) length of the text, (5) type of text, and (6) treatment of new vocabulary.

3.6.3 Summary

It has been shown that comprehension comprises both understanding of words and engaging a text with the goal of creating a mental representation of the idea. As a result, comprehension of a text demands multiple skills from the reader. It has also been

shown that complexity of the text also affects the comprehension ability of the reader. The section has also hinted on some comprehension model, including mental models and Construction-Integration Model, which fall within the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. Discussing the strategies involved in text comprehension, the section highlighted that readers may engage in extensive reading and intensive reading. On factors that may affect comprehension of a text, the section summarised them as 1) background knowledge of the student, (2) strategies that students use in the comprehension task, (3) purpose of reading or the nature of the task, (4) length of the text, (5) type of text, and (6) treatment of new vocabulary.

2.7 Related studies

In a recent study, Hartney (2011) investigated reading difficulties in English as a second language of grade 3 learners in one primary school in the Khomas education region of Namibia. Hartney used mixed-methods approach in the case study which reveals that many children lack proper reading skills and they cannot read properly. Raihan and Nezami (2012) conducted a study on comprehension strategies and general problems in reading faced by Arab EFL learners at Najran University in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to find the reasons behind the low-level performance of university students in reading comprehension. A survey was conducted through the teachers' questionnaire, and students were observed during several reading sessions. The results show that students face spelling and pronunciation problems to a great extent.

Elwér (2014) examined the cognitive and language profiles in children with poor reading comprehension using a longitudinal perspective. Elwér found high levels of instability in compromised oral language skills, such as vocabulary, grammar and verbal memory across all test occasions for the poor oral comprehension (2014). The study identified certain habits and preferences of EFL learners regarding various

personal practices of the reading process in the first language (L1) as well as in second language (L2) by using 10-item questionnaire on a Likert scale format. The students' responses indicated the lack of interest as well as the lack of motivation towards 'academic reading' in both L1 and L2.

In another study, Qrquez and Ab Rashid (2017) discuss English as a foreign language (EFL) reading comprehension difficulties faced by students at a university in Jordan. The researchers obtained data using questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to 200 students at Yarmouk University. The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first part contains demographic information about the participants and the second part includes two sections: the students' preferences and the students' reading difficulties. The findings of the study indicated that the respondents were motivated to learn as they are in dire need for acquiring English. In spite of their motivation to learn, however, they were confronted with several challenges in reading process, which include ambiguous words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited available time to cognitively process the text.

Also, Al-Jarrah and Ismail (2018) investigated reading comprehensions difficulties among EFL learners in higher learning institutions. The study was conducted within the paradigm of a quantitative methodology, where 100 out of 281 Arab students of Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) were sampled to participate in the study. The researcher employed Cross tabulation in undertaking the data analyse. The findings of the test showed that the major challenge that confront the Arab EFL learners was inability to recognize the types of text. The researchers conclude that the reading difficulties the learners encounter could affect their English language proficiency and academic performance. It recommended based on the findings that to curb the problem, there is a need for

shared responsibility among English language teachers, instruction policy makers, public and private bodies responsible for educational policy learning and implementation, and the EFL learners.

Melinda (2021) conducted a study that sought to describe what needed to take place in Australian schools in order to offer effective literacy support for adolescent students with reading difficulties. The central thesis of this paper is that the Response to Intervention (RtI) model provides a useful framework for organizing multi-tiered evidence-based reading interventions for struggling adolescent readers. The study discussed the needed adaptations of the model for the secondary context and the supposed benefits and weaknesses of flexible and fixed groupings as an approach to teaching struggling reader how to read. The study revealed that Australian schools cannot afford to adopt a “business-as usual” approach in teaching the struggling readers. The study showed further those reasonable adjustments within classrooms, where the learning occurs, are not enough to enable the learners acquire the needed reading skills. Melinda de Haan (2021), in the study, proposed that schools should rather look at how they could employ the Response to Intervention model to provide varying levels of evidence-based reading intervention by relying on experts’ advice.

Riadil (2020), in a study that investigated the reading skills of English as a Foreign Language students of Tidar University. This study sought to examine the problems and to identify the strategies of reading that could be adopted by the learners to help them overcome their reading problems. The study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach that employed a questionnaire to obtain the data for the research. The findings of the study showed that the problems the learners faced include difficulty when they had to comprehend the texts, difficulty in pronouncing words correctly, mastering the vocabulary, and the difficulty in connecting the ideas the words convey.

Moreover, the result revealed that the strategies the learners employ when confronted with reading difficulties were the use of dictionary, contextual cues, using scanning and skimming techniques, and trying to predict the content of the text. The findings also indicated that to comprehend the texts, the learners needed to master the vocabulary or use formation word (context clue) to predict the meaning of words. They also have to predict the content by using the key word in the texts.

In addition, Oduro et al (2021) conducted a qualitative inquiry into exploring the approaches used by teachers to remediate phonics difficulties among struggling readers at UNIPRA South Cluster of Schools at Winneba. The researchers sampled Grade 4 English language teachers as participants for the study. An unstructured interview was conducted by the researchers with the help of an interview guide in obtaining the data. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis approach. The study reports that the grade 4 teachers predominantly used the jolly phonics and rhyming methods in remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers. It was further revealed that materials used during instruction were flashcards, manila cards, chalkboards and textbooks. The study recommended that Ghana Education Service should design professional development programmes to equip teachers with effective strategies for reading instruction. The current study therefore seeks investigate the causes of poor reading abilities among the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS, and explore some of the factors that can be adopted to improve the situation.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the discussion in the extant literature on reading difficulties learners of English as a second language face, in the course of learning English. The models of learning have also been discussed in this chapter. In summary, different studies have been conducted in an attempt to ascertain the factors that impede

learners of English as a second language from achieving appreciable reading skills (Azeroual, 2014; Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2015; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Pangsapa, 2012; Shehu, 2015). The focus of these studies was to ascertain the causes of English learners' inability to read and understand text. The findings of the studies identified factors such as inability to decode meaning, inadequate vocabulary, sentence structures, syntax, text types, background knowledge and text organizations. Some of the studies also centred on reading comprehensions difficulties among English language learners (Nergis, 2013; Sanford, 2015; Vaseghi, Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). These studies reported factors such as reading strategies (cognitive and metacognitive), textual complication, environment conditions, anxieties, interests, encouragements, medical problems, and decoding as factors that the learners encounter in reading comprehension.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the research's methodology is presented. The chapter scopes over the areas of research approach, research design, population of the study, the sampled population, sampling techniques, instrumentation for data collection, validity and reliability of the method, procedure for data collection, method of data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research approach

This research employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the poor reading skills of pupils of Axim Anglican JHS of the Nzema-East Municipal Assembly in the Western part of Ghana and how the problem can be improved. Creswell and Poth (2018) have observed that qualitative research begins with certain assumptions, and it employs interpretative frameworks to explain the research problems, address the meanings individuals or groups of people ascribe to a social or human problem. According to Creswell (2013), researchers who conduct their studies within the qualitative research paradigm adopt an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry whereby data is collected in a natural setting, which is sensitive to the people and the places under study, and undertake analysis of the data, both inductively and deductively in order to establish patterns or themes. The researcher adopted this approach for this study because it enabled the researcher to collect data from the field where the research participants experienced the problem being studied. Additionally, using a qualitative research approach offered the researcher the opportunity to conveniently collect the study's data through interview sessions with the research participants in a very convenient manner.

3.2 Research design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a research design is type of inquiry that could be formalised within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches, with the aim of providing a particular direction for the procedures the researcher follows in undertaking the research study. A research design has, as indicated by Van Wyk (2012), is the overall plan for the collection of the research data in order to provide answers the research questions the study seeks to investigate. In this study the research adopted a case study research design which is the most appropriate format and orientation for school-based research. Following Ary, Sorensen and Razavieh (2010), the current study, which seeks to explore the poor reading skills of pupils of Axim Anglican JHS of the Nzema-East Municipal Assembly in the Western part of Ghana and how the problem can be improved, is fashioned in a case study design, since reading difficulties is a school-based problem. The researcher adopted a case study design because it allowed the researcher the opportunity to record the voice of participants through interview in a flexible manner.

3.3 Population

A research population, according Hayford (2013), is a cluster of elements or cases, which could be individuals, objects, or events, that meets specifically set criteria. The population of the research constitute the objects the findings of the study would be generalized. The population for this study constitutes pupils of Axim Anglican JHS of the Nzema-East Municipal Assembly in the Western part of Ghana. The school has about 300 pupils. This population comprised all the pupils in both A and B classes, from Form 1 to Form 3.

3.4 Sampling technique

Purposive sampling technique was used by the researcher in extracting the study participants. A small sample of teachers was selected because they are English language teachers responsible for teaching reading difficulties among the pupils in Axim Anglican JHS A & B. The four English teachers in the school were purposively sampled because they were in the best position to provide the relevant information regarding the research questions. According to Avoke (2005) purposive sampling technique, enables the researcher to handpick the cases to be included in the sample based on the researcher's judgment of typicality. Additionally, Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explained that in purposive sampling technique, the researcher uses his judgment to select a sample that he considers, based on prior information, would provide the data the needed data. Regarding these reasons, the researcher employed purposive to guide the selection of participants for this study.

3.5 Sample

The sample for the study is 60 pupil respondents, all of them in the Form 2 classes: Form 2A and Form 2B. Additionally, the study sampled four English language teachers in the school. The researcher sampled four English language teachers because, Axim Anglican JHS has four English language teachers, two of them teach at Axim Anglican JHS A, and the other two teach at Axim Anglican JHS B. The Form 2 classes have been chosen because the pupils at this level were about to be promoted to Form 3, where they will be prepared to write their BECE. At form two, the pupils are supposed to have mastered reading skills to some extent. These are learners who have gone through the stages of learning to read to reading to learn, and have received instruction in reading development and are therefore expected to read proficiently.

Table 1: Teacher respondents' demographic characteristics by number of years taught

Number of Years Taught	Number of Respondents	School
1-5	1	Axim Anglican JHS A
Above five years	3	Axim Anglican JHS A & B

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of teachers by number of years they have been teaching in the school, Axim Anglican JHS. The distribution shows that, 1 English language teacher from Axim Anglican JHS A has been teaching for less than five years. Four of the English language teachers have more than five years of experience in teaching English language Axim Anglican JHS A & B.

Table 2: Respondents' demographic characteristics by gender

Gender	Number of Respondents	School
Male	2	Axim Anglican JHS A
Female	2	Axim Anglican JHS B

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents by gender. As shown in Table 2, there are two female and two male teachers.

Table 3: Respondent's demographic characteristics by academic qualification

Qualification	Number of Respondents	School
First Degree (B. A, B.Ed)	3	Axim Anglican JHS A&B
Masters Degree (M. Ed)	1	Axim Anglican JHS B

Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents by professional qualification. As shown in the Table 3, one of the teacher respondents from Axim Anglican JHS B holds Master's Degree in English education, while the remaining three English teachers hold B. A and B. Ed in English education. None of the teachers has a qualification below first degree.

Table 4: Demographic characteristics of pupils by gender

Gender	Number of pupils Respondents	School
Male	32	Axim Anglican JHS A&B
Female	28	Axim Anglican JHS A&B

Table 4 shows that the pupil respondents for the study comprise 32 males and 28 females. This means that more males participated in the study than females.

3.6 Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data from the respondents. The interview items probed into the key themes in the research questions on the poor reading skills of pupils of Axim Anglican JHS of the Nzema-East Municipal Assembly in the Western part of Ghana and how the problem can be improved. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) postulate that semi structured interview is appropriate for a qualitative study because it can be conducted on phone, through the internet, face-to-face, and allows the interviewer the opportunity to probe questions for respondents to express their true feelings using an interview guide based on the research questions.

Macmillan and Schumacher (2001) added that a semi-structured interview guide allows the researcher the opportunity to workout some questions (aide memoire) in advance, free to modify them based upon his/her perception of what seems most appropriate. Since an aide memoire or guide is allowed in this type of interview, the

questions were phrased, and allowed for probing and clarification of answers, on the key issues raised in the research questions. Focus group interview was used to gather data from teachers. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) defined focus groups as a form of group interviews which relies on the interaction among participants who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher. Focus group interview allows for merging the views of participants and stimulus to teachers who can express their comments or opinions in a less threatening and a more flexible way (Cohen et al., 2000). Therefore, it is for the above reasons that semi structured interview guide was chosen to guide the study.

3.7 Procedure for data collection

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from University of Education, Winneba which stated the purpose of the study. Since Axim Anglican JHS is in Nzema-East Municipal Assembly in the Western part of Ghana, the researcher, with the introductory letter, obtained permission from the Nzema-East Municipal Education Office. A pre-visit was paid to the school to book appointment with the school authorities and teachers. The purpose was to establish rapport and to explain the details of the study to the teachers involved in the study. Having read the introductory and permission letters from the University of Education, Winneba and the Municipal Education office, respectively, the school head agreed, and gave the green light for the commencement of the interview. An appointment was then made for a second visit such that it was possible to meet all teachers involved in the study.

On the second visit, and with the help of the school head, the researcher was introduced to the teachers involved in the interview. The researcher then sought the teachers consent. Having agreed to participate in the interview, the teachers agreed with the researcher, a suitable date, time and venue for the interview. On the day of the interview, participants could select a convenient place within the school for the

interview to be carried out. The interview began with greetings from the researcher and a self-introduction. The researcher encouraged the participants to feel free to express themselves since there were no correct or wrong answers. During the interview, participants were tape-recorded with their permission. The format for the interview was focus group. The teachers were interviewed together.

The interview questions were asked from an interview guide and lasted for one hour. The interview ended by assuring the participants that their identity in the study would remain anonymous and would not be disclosed without their consent. Finally, the researcher thanked the participants and the school head for their support and assured them that copies of the findings would be made available to them upon their request. On the third visit, the teacher observed reading comprehension lessons in both of the classes, Form 2A and Form 2B. The class observation was done for one hour. The researcher went with a note book and wrote the observations he had during the lesson. There was one hour observation of the Form 2A and another one-hour observation for the Form 2B class. In both instances, the researcher took notes which added to the information obtained from the interviews.

3.8 Data analysis

The data were analysed qualitatively using narrative themes from the interview data which was audio recorded and transcribed. The analysis of the interview data was guided by key themes that emerged from the data. The process started with transcribing all interviews and highlighting words and sentences that served as units for more detailed themes. The transcripts of the audio recording were sent to the participants of the interview to determine whether the transcripts corresponded with what the participants said during the interview. After this, responses from each participant were

played back several times. This was done to identify the various points of view reflected in the major themes in the research questions.

In order to categorize each view expressed, each major theme was written down individually on pieces of paper and as the responses were played several times, the key words and phrases expressed were jotted down under each theme. The various views gathered were then compared according to the themes to reveal the concept map for connections. The various words, phrases and opinions that reflected on the research questions were finally categorized in relation to the themes that emerged. These were also corroborated by the observation notes during the analysis. The researcher used verbatim expressions of the respondents in reporting the data with inferences from literature.

3.9 Ethical considerations

A qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis dissemination of qualitative reports (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Some of the ethical issues to consider normally when undertaking a study include; privacy, confidentiality, sensitivity to cultural differences, gender, religious and anonymity (McCosker, Barnard & Gerber, 2001). Therefore, the researcher debriefed the participants where the general and specific objectives, physical and emotional risk associated with the study were explained. In an easy-to-understand language, participants were assured that if they choose not to participate in the study, for whatever reason, they will suffer no negative consequences for withdrawal, or being forced to do so. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and were free to withdraw from the study if they felt so. Besides, they were not to use their own names as a way of ensuring anonymity. Also, the respondents were assured that the researcher will not report or discuss any confidential information obtained from them

without their permission, and that their names and any trace that will lead to the revelation of their identities be made anonymous. Lastly, guiding principles of research such as acknowledgement of sources of published information to avoid plagiarism were duly observed.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion on the methodology of the study. The issues discussed include the research approach and design, the accessible and sampled population, the sampling technique, the data collection method, and the data analysis technique. The chapter also outline some of the procedures the researcher followed in order for the study to conform to ethical responsibilities of research.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the data and findings of the study. In this chapter therefore, the research presents the data generated from focused group interviews conducted with English teachers of pupils with reading difficulties. The findings reflect themes that emerged from the data under the main variables of the research questions. The chapter is divided into three main sections. Section 4.1 addresses the research question one which seeks to unravel the causes of poor reading abilities among pupils of Axim Anglican JHS. Section 4.2 addresses the research question two which aims at revealing measures that can be taken to help learners overcome their reading difficulties. The chapter ends with a conclusion in section 4.3.

4.1 Causes of poor reading abilities among the pupils

This objective explores various causes of poor reading abilities among the pupils. Two main themes emerged from the data. The factors are endogenous factors and exogenous factors. There are several themes that emerged from these themes. The subsections below present the findings on the various themes.

4.1.1 Endogenous factors responsible for poor reading abilities among pupils

Endogenous factors are factors that pertain to the school environment. One of the issues that the research question probed aimed at determining whether the school environment supports teaching and learning or reading. To obtain information to answer the question, the researcher interviewed teachers and conducted an observation in the school.

4.1.1.1 Lack of library facility

The observation revealed that the school does not have a library. According to the study participants, the unavailability of a library in the school is one of the reasons why the students struggle to develop their reading skills. To confirm the observation of the researcher, some of the teachers were interviewed. The data below serves as the responses of the teacher interviewees.

TR1:

Yes! As you can see, we do not have a library. I don't know if the district does not understand the crucial role a library plays in the lives of the students. One cannot deny the fact that the absence of a library in the school is adversely affecting the pupils.

TR2:

You are right! The school does not have a library. Our pupils are disadvantaged by the lack of a library facility in this school. where do they learn? At least if they go the library and see the books there, or probably see some people reading in the library, they may develop interest in reading something. But without the library, our pupils are not benefitting from the advantages of a library.

TR3:

If the school were to have a library, our pupil will develop interest in reading. Assuming a child wants to read, where is that reading activity going to take place? The implication is that we need to do every reading practice in the classroom, which is not helping us, or probably our pupils to master reading skills.

TR4:

The school does not have a library. Your observation is absolutely correct. The school needs a library facility to enhance teaching and learning. I am sure some of the woes of us, the teachers in attempting to inculcate reading habits in our students are attributable to the absence of a library in the school.

From the responses of the teachers, it is clear that Axim Anglican JHS has no library facility. The absence of the library, a place where the pupils can go to read and practise the act of reading, is a contributing factor to pupils' lack of ability in reading. This assertion is corroborated by the assertion of one of the teacher participants who intimated that "... *the woes of us, the teachers in attempting to inculcate reading habits in our students are attributable to the absence of a library in the school.*" Davoudi and Yousefi (2015) concur with the findings of the current study by indicating that causes of difficulties in reading for many learners include environmental factors. The author argued that environmental circumstances influence the learners' reading comprehension.

It is worthy of note that the more readings the student does, the higher the likelihood that more vocabulary will be acquired, which will consequently help the learner in clarifying the strange words by relating them with the context in which they are used (Dennis, 2008). In this regard, the absence of a library in the school implies that vocabulary acquisition of the students is adversely affected. The findings corroborate other researchers' argument that second language learners have difficulty understanding complex sentences because they struggle to read (Scott, 2009). In some other studies, it was revealed that coordinating conjunctions, prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and nominalizations. As shown in the findings of the current study, when students lack the ability to read fluently, they cannot read materials that contain

some of these structures which has a ripple effect of poor reading habit (Trehearne & Doctorow, 2005).

4.1.1.2 Lack of opportunity for the students to practise reading in the classroom

The researcher also observed classroom teaching and learning of reading. The observation exercise was carried out during a lesson on reading comprehension. It was revealed through the observation that the pupils were not given the opportunity to practise reading skills. The researcher observed that some of the pupils never got the chance to read the passage. The teacher called two of the pupils to read the passage for the lesson. This was done in the A Class. After the two pupils had finished reading the passage, the teacher proceeded to explain the passage and called individuals within the class to re-tell what the passage was about and the lessons they got from it. From what occurred in the classroom, the teacher could not give every pupil the opportunity to read. Even though those who were asked to read were able to read satisfactorily, the rest of the pupils did not participate in the reading activity.

In the B Class, the observation note indicates that the majority of the pupils were not given the opportunity to read the passage. However, four pupils participated in the reading task. It was noted that those four pupils who were made to read, had their names mentioned by the teacher. This suggests that those pupils have been the readers for the class. To confirm the observation made, the researcher interviewed the teacher participants regarding the reason why only a few of the class members were called to read the passage. The responses of the teachers indicated that those who were called to read were the only pupils who could read in their respective classes. The data below captures the responses of the teachers in this regard.

TR5:

As you can see, we are many in this classroom. You can imagine if I have to give every pupil the opportunity to read. So yes, we are many in the classroom, but I normally allow those who can read to read. It is not everybody who can read. Allowing them the chance to read means that we are not going to complete the lesson.

TR6:

I cannot give everyone the chance to read in class. We are many and we need to complete the lesson for the day. It is safer and time saving to allow those who can read to read.

TR7:

It would have been better to have everyone read in class, but certainly time wouldn't allow that. We are more than twenty-five and time wouldn't allow everyone to participate in the reading. The lesson will be over in no time, and we need to cover what we are expected to cover.

It has been reported by the teacher participants that it has been always difficult to get every pupil in the classes to participate in the reading activities. The reason for this difficult situation is the time constraint. According to the teachers, they need to complete whatever they need to complete for the lesson for the day.

The teachers were further asked whether they try to rotate the readers. As indicated, time could not allow the teachers to make everyone read during reading comprehension lessons. As a result, the study sought to determine whether the readers are rotated to enable others to read in the next lesson. From the responses of the teachers, and in corroborating with the observation made by the researcher, the pupils are not rotated so that those who could not get the chance to read during a lesson could

read in subsequent lessons. Regarding this, the teacher respondents made the following assertions.

TR 8:

The fact is that it is not everyone who can read so well. So generally, those who can read are asked to read. Even though the two students who read are not the only people who could read, the majority of the students cannot read fluently as those who read today.

TR9:

Some of the students cannot read so to help me finish the lesson for the day, I ask those who can read to do the reading. Some of them could try something, but I may have to be correcting them. Usually, when I need more time for them to be able to complete the comprehension activities, I allow only those who can read well to do the reading.

TR10:

I have been trying to make others too read, but I rarely do so. The time is not enough and we are many in the class so everybody cannot read. I allow those who can read to read.

From assertions of the teacher interviewees, it has been confirmed that only those pupils who have some appreciable level of reading ability are made to read during reading comprehension lessons. The teachers explained that usually, they encounter time constraint. And this problem of inadequate time does not allow them to grant every pupil in the classroom the opportunity to participate in the reading activities. Unfortunately, the pupils who lack the ability to read are also not rotated so that they could get the chance to improve upon their reading skills.

4.1.1.3 Approaches teachers adopt in teaching reading to their students

In the attempt to ascertain the cause of the poor reading problems that the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS are confronted with, the researcher, as part of the observation activities, examined the approaches the teacher of English language use in teaching their students. It was discovered from the observation that the teaching approach the teachers adopt is often geared towards teacher-centredness. There was very little activities in the classroom that make the learners contribute towards the learning of reading. For instance, it was noted that the students were not given time to practise what they were to read. It was expected that after the teacher had led the reading activity, the class would have been given some time to read silently or among themselves. These would have created the opportunity for the struggling readers to pick some reading clues from their colleagues who could read the text. The failure of the teachers to allow their learners some time to rehearse or practise the reading activities also contribute significantly towards the learners' failure to master reading ability.

To confirm this observation, the researcher enquired from the teacher participants whether this observation is actually the case. The researcher interviewed the teachers regarding the availability of opportunity for learners to practise reading among themselves. The responses below capture the views of some of the teacher participants.

TR 11:

Ideally, the pupils need some time to practise what they are taught. This time of practise should be monitored by the teacher. However, I don't think my fellow teachers and I have enough time to allow this. Remember, we need to carry out the reading activity and make the students do an exercise. The time available

for the reading comprehension is probably not adequate to effectively carry out all these activities.

TR12:

Practice, they say, makes a man perfect. Without ample time and adequate practice sessions, we are likely to fail on our mission of helping our students achieve reading competence. It is the expected norm that after teaching, learners are made to practise what they are taught in the form of exercises. However, as you have mention, we hardly allow some time for reading practise. We often focus on the comprehension activities, at the expense of the reading tasks.

TR 13:

We are usually concerned with written exercises. We hardly award marks for reading. Due to this, we tend to be more focused on the comprehension exercises than the reading tasks. You see, the time factor is also one of the reasons. You need to make the students read and write the exercises. So, we cannot allow ten to fifteen minutes of the 45 minutes for the learners to do practice of personal reading activities. Even though this would been very good in terms of helping them master the reading skills, especially those students who are struggling to read, the lack of ample time prevents us, especially me from making my students carry out reading activities on their own in the classroom.

From the responses of the teacher interviewees, it is clear that the students are not allowed sometime during reading lessons to practise what they are taught. It needs to be mentioned that some of the students need the help of their mates to master what their teachers teach them. This has been the premise for peer teaching strategy. It is therefore expected that as the learners struggle to read, they should be given some time

to practise reading. Unfortunately, as we have observed from the classroom and confirmed from the teacher-respondents, the learners do not have time or a session within the lesson for individual to practice reading. This finding is in agreement with the observation Oduro, Mensah, Quansah, Lawer and Ankoma-Sey (2021) that reading skills are likely to be improved when teacher devote time to the reading practice and allow struggling readers to practise frequently.

4.1.2 Exogenous factors responsible for poor reading abilities among pupils

The research also sought to ascertain factors outside the school environment that contribute to the poor reading skills of the students of Axim Anglican JHS. To obtain the data, the research employed interview strategy. The teachers of English in the school provided their opinions on the factors outside the school that they consider to have affected the development of reading abilities among the students. According to the responses obtained from the teacher participants lack of reading materials in the homes of the students, parents lack of interest in academic performance of their children and the lack of reading interest among the whole society are responsible factors outside the school that affect, adversely, the development of reading skills among students of Axim Anglican Junior High School. The responses below are some of the views of the teacher interviewees.

TR1:

Education of children is not the responsibility of the teachers alone. Parents also have a role to play. Some of our students do have mastery over reading because their parents provide complementary assistance to whatever the teachers do in school. Parents who do not enforce reading habits in their children are not doing any good thing to their children. Parents are supposed to buy books for their children to read in the home.

TR2:

Reading skill development is noted to be the task or responsibility of the teacher. However, when parents are interested in the reading development of their children, they need to continue playing that role from where the teachers left off. In the home, parents must ensure that their children have books to read. They even need to guide their children to master reading by supervising their reading activities at home. It is not enough helping them with their homework.

TR3:

In the home, parent needs to support their children to improve upon their reading skills. if they think they have no time to do this themselves, they can hire home tutors to teach their children at home. If parents recognise the fact that reading ability is the foundation for learning, I think they will invest their time, money and energy into helping their children in developing reading skills.

From the responses of the teachers, it is noted that the development of reading ability among students is not the preserve of only teachers. As asserted by the teacher interviewees, parents need to invest their time, money and energy into helping their children learn how to read. According to the responses of the teachers, the efforts of the teachers are not enough. Parents need to offer assistance in making sure that their children master reading skills. As shown from the responses, lack of reading materials in the homes of the students for the students to practise reading is partly responsible for the poor reading skills of some of the students.

The findings of the study are in agreement with the findings of other studies. For instance, Torres (2019) revealed that home-related factors have a very crucial impact on the reading comprehension abilities of learners. Torres (2019) explained further that if parents have a good educational background, it would be easier for them

to lead and help their children in their academic difficulties, especially in reading. Consequently, as revealed in the current study, learners who do not have reading materials at home would hardly develop interest in reading. This confirms the findings of De Leon (2009) that if the child is exposed to reading materials it would have a great impact on the reading habit and interest of the learners.

4.2 Measures that can be adopted to improve learners' reading ability

With regard to kind of measures that teachers in the Axim Anglican JHS can adopt in improving reading fluency among their pupils, the researcher employed interview as a tool to elicit their information from the participants. Accordingly, the responses showed the emergence of four sub-themes. As indicated by the teachers, instructional methods, teaching and learning materials, assessment practices and motivation are some of the areas that teachers may have to focus in helping their students overcome their reading challenges.

4.2.1 Instructional methods

Pertaining to instructional methods, the participants explained that the adoption of effective teaching methods, especially teaching methods that are learner-centred, would help ameliorate the reading difficulties among the students. As revealed in the previous sections, most of the struggling readers hardly participate in the reading activities. This is because the teachers often select those students who are relatively fluent in reading to always read in class. This implication of this situation is that it leaves the struggling readers passive and idle: the fluent readers read while all struggling readers sit quietly and analyse the speed and accuracy with which the text is being read (model reading), unison reading is often not practised. Other teachers added that they break reading passages into segments or paragraphs and read, and make other

fluent readers to read so that the struggling readers could emulate (partner reading). The responses below are some of the views:

TR14:

I do the model reading then after that I ask fast readers to read through the passage. At times we read in unison. I read and let them read after me. My method is to read in the first instance, and make the good readers, about two students, to also read. Because some of the students struggle to read, they feel shy to read. This makes them uncomfortable to read when they are called to read in class.

TR15:

As for this one it is a very difficult task. I do the partner reading. I do tell them to pick up with those who are fluent readers. So, I tell them to read at the same rate that I read. So, they follow what I read. They listen to me attentively and they read as I do. I sometimes encourage them while we go along with repeated reading of passages. I pay special attention to them sometimes after closing I spend about thirty minutes for them. We have those whose reading fluency is very poor so sometimes too we come to school early before the regular time and practice fluency before others come in. I make sure fluency is practiced within thirty minutes each day.

TR16:

I normally read for them to follow after me. I try to identify some of the fluent readers to read on behalf of the class. I normally do not put the students in groups to read. We read as a whole class. I do model reading or I ask more fluent reader to read for them to see how it is read fast.

This is how I go about fluency instruction for those who have fluency difficulties. But I am not able to make every student in the class to participate in the reading exercise.

TR17:

For fluency, if a passage is given, I do what is called model reading and repeated reading. I read and I ask the children to listen as I read to them.

Sometimes too I use fluent readers to read as the others listen, after I ask them to do silent reading and later read aloud. Sometimes too I assist them to read. I write a passage on the board and break the reading into paragraph and teach them to observe punctuation marks.

If you have to pause you pause and a comma you do as such.

From the responses of the teacher participants, we realise that the method they teachers adopt is the same. The teacher models the reading and allows the fluent readers to read. Even though the teachers have established that they make the students read after them during the reading session, none of the teachers mentioned that every student in the classroom is given the opportunity to read. Acquisition of reading skills is very crucial that teachers need to provide every opportunity for their students to develop reading ability. For instance, the research of Hung and Ngan (2015) explained that the development of reading skills is essential in education for the students to improve their level of vocabulary in the target language, develop appreciable writing skills and speak the target language fluently. However, this is not always the case, as some of the students are given the opportunity to read in class due to lack of time and poor reading ability.

Often, as indicated by the teachers, it is the fluent readers that are made to read. The responses of the teachers also showed that no attention is given to struggling

readers. It would have been better when ample time is set aside for struggling readers to practise how to read the passage. It would have also been more effective if these struggling readers are assigned into groups with their peers who are more competent in reading. Even though some of the teachers in their responses posited that they engaged readers in repeated reading activities, where a teacher reads for the students and the students read along, this does not help in measuring individual performances of the students.

The whole-class method of reading (unison reading), using peer fluent readers (peer/partner reading) and using read aloud strategies have been mentioned by some of the teachers as strategies they use. However, these strategies do not enable students who have difficulties to read for the teacher to assess their reading performance in order to provide feedback. As they low-reading ability students are made to read in the class, they are unable to improve upon their reading skills. It is important to emphasize that when learners are able to develop reading ability, they become autonomous learners.

For instance, the study of Little (2004) reports that when the English language learner becomes autonomous in reading, it helps him to learn things that the teacher would not have taught him, and even things that the teacher might not know; autonomous learning is necessary because it is not everything that teacher can teach the students. It is therefore required for the student to learn beyond teacher-guided instructions. However, before autonomous learning can be possible, the second language learner must develop an appreciable level of reading skills. This will make the learner to take active role in the language learning process (Tassinari, 2012). Autonomy in learning therefore makes the learner take control of the learning materials. However, as shown in the responses of the teachers, the students who are not fluent in

reading are given opportunity to develop fluency in reading, and this prevents them from developing to become autonomous readers.

4.2.2 Teaching and learning materials

Teachers indicated the teaching and learning materials they use in improving fluency skills among struggling readers. According to the teachers, textbooks, storybooks and blackboard are the main teaching and learning materials used in teaching readings. According to the teachers, some of the texts or passages their students read are made up of difficult words, and unfamiliar words. According to the teachers, this situation does not make the learners develop interest in the reading activities, as their comprehensibility becomes too abstract. The following are some of the responses of the teachers.

TR18:

I use textbooks. At times too I use story books. I make sure they all have copies of the story books. There are times that I make them sit in groups so they can read together. We look at the pictures in it and then read it. The unfortunate thing about the reading materials is that some of them contain words that are difficult to explain because they are not familiar words.

TR19:

I write a short story on the blackboard and make them read. Sometimes too, we read the passage from the English Language Textbook. In using the blackboard, I write a short sentence on the board and drill the students on how to read it fluently for a number of times. Unfortunately, time constraint does not allow everyone in the class to have his or her

turn in the reading activities. I try to explain the words in the passage to the students through formation of sentences.

The kind of teaching and learning materials used by teachers to improve reading ability among the students have been outlined in the comments above. Teachers noted that the use of textbooks, and storybooks make fluency acquisition easy and simple. Teachers said this because a lot of different and simple sentences could be taken from such materials to facilitate the reading process for struggling readers. The teachers lamented that not every student has the opportunity to read because of time limitation. It was also mentioned by the teachers that some of the reading passages contain words that are not familiar, making comprehensibility a challenge. One would have expected the teachers' efforts in writing passages on the board and providing reading models for the students emulate would help in addressing the reading challenges of the students. However, as indicated by the teacher respondents, this effort is negatively affected by time constraints which does not allow every student to his or her turn in reading the text.

The findings agree with the assertion of Riadil (2020) that the problems learners faced in reading comprehension include difficulty to comprehend the texts, difficulty in pronouncing words correctly, mastering the vocabulary, and the difficulty in connecting the ideas the words convey. With the lack of opportunity for less-fluent readers to practise reading in the classroom, it should be expected that these problems will persist.

4.2.3 Assessment practices

Another theme that emerged from the study is the mode of assessment the English language teachers adopt in measuring the reading performance of their students. In their responses, the teachers indicated that they make their students to read

passages from books, and paragraphs written on the board. As the students are made to read, the teachers assess the reading fluency and speed of the readers. Teachers explained these in the following comments.

TR20:

I assess the reading performance of my students by asking them to read a passage from the textbook or written paragraphs on the board. As the students read, I sit and observe. As I observe their reading, I make them pause when necessary and provide the needed support, in terms of pronunciation.

TR21:

For assessing reading fluency, I do that by calling them upon to read in front of the class. Usually, time does not allow me to make sure every student read for me to assess.

TR22:

Assessing reading ability, I do it by asking the students to read a short passage in their textbook. During the reading, I ask questions. They read for me to listen and take notice of their speed and pronunciations.

TR23

In assessing my students reading ability, I give them short paragraphs from the text book or write the paragraph on the board for them to read. They read to my hearing and then I assess their reading speed and word pronunciation. I ask them to read on the board one after the other. I check the realisation of punctuation marks also in their reading.

It was clear from the comments of teachers that teachers assessing reading ability among their students take different forms. Some of the teachers make their student readers to re-read several times. As the students read, the teachers also check the appropriate use of punctuation marks and pronunciation of words. As shown by the teachers in their responses, the number of students they have and the limited time available prevent them from allowing everyone to read in the class. It is worthy of note that these assessment strategies could have been effective if the teachers had enough time to make it possible for every student to take part in the reading activity. This finding is consistent with the findings of Riadil (2020) and Hung and Ngan (2015) that teachers need to take assessment strategies seriously as it has an impact on the outcome of students' performance by providing feedback to the students.

4.2.4 Motivation

To find out how teachers improve reading ability among their students, motivation emerged as a theme. Teachers in the discussion indicated how they motivate their students during reading instruction. The responses below represent some of the views the teacher respondents provided concerning how they motivate their students to read.

TR24:

I make good comments about the performance of the reader. For instance, I sometimes say 'you have read well' 'I like the manner in which you pronounced the words' 'your pauses and realisation of the punctuation marks are on point'.

TR25:

There are few occasions that I bought story books for my students. I normally give book to students whom I think have put in effort to improve their reading ability.

TR26:

The students who are able to perform well in the reading task are sometimes exempted from next reading task. This serves as motivation for others to also try and read well so that they could also be exempted from the next reading task.

The observation from the responses shows that the teachers have various ways by which they motivate the students to put in their best in mastering the reading skills. This shows that students can become fluent readers when their teachers take adequate steps to motivate them in their reading endeavours. This means that, struggling readers will become fluent readers when they are appropriately motivated. Therefore, measures teachers used to motivate their students regarding reading in the classroom instruction was in the form of praises and giving them story books.

It has been noticed that when reading becomes a challenge for English language learners, their interest in reading reduces. In a study conducted by Naafan (2018), it was revealed that the world was experiencing a declining interest in reading among school pupils in many parts of the world, and that has become a serious concern to stakeholders of education (Hempenstall & Buckingham, 2016). This implies that teachers of English need to undertake measures to motivate their students to develop interest in reading. In this regard, teachers used these motivational strategies to encourage the formation of reading habit among the students. Reading itself is a difficult task, as indicated by

research. This is consistent with the argument of Reutzel and Cooter (2013) that learning to read is not a simple task, as it becomes a challenge for many learners.

This means teachers of English language in the Axim Anglican JHS are desirous in making their students acquire reading skills. This finding is in consonant with the argument of Hamza and Nur (2018) that when the need for acquiring reading competence becomes the driving force behind the teaching activities of teachers, they undertake measures to motivate their students to develop reading skills. Reading ability serves as one of the essential means through which learners, for the purpose of education obtain information. Hence, research has demonstrated that reading has become a commonly utilised language proficiency skills in the world. This is because failure of students to master reading skill is a contributing factor to their failure in achieving academic expectations (Mundhe, 2015). To help the students avoid failing in their academic pursuits, teachers need to motivate their students to acquire reading skills.

4.2.5 Home-centred strategies that can curb reading difficulty among students

In the quest to find solution, the researcher enquired from the English language teacher through interview, the kind of student measures that could be put in place to help students improve their reading abilities. From the responses of the teachers, it became apparent that the students must be provided with reading materials always. Mohd Mahibur Rahman and Eid Alhaisoni (2013) argued that lack of good learning materials affects learners reading ability. The data below captures some of the responses of the teachers.

TR27:

I think the school environment, parents should also make it their responsibility to inculcate reading habits in their children. Some parents do not buy reading books for their children, and this does not help.

TR28:

Children who come from homes where there are materials to be read, are more likely to develop reading habit, that will eventually make them good readers. If reading skills is made to be acquired only in the classroom, one needs to expect that students will struggle to acquire it. Parents should provide reading material to their children to read them at home.

TR29:

It would help a lot if children are provided with reading materials that they could be reading at home. Parents must insist their children read at home, and not just attending to their assignments.

From the responses of the teachers, we realise that when students are made to develop the habit reading at home, their reading skills will improve. The teacher respondents explain that reading skills can also be improved when students assume the responsibility to be reading at home. The teachers also admonished parents to take the responsibility of ensuring that their children become fluent in reading by insisting that they read at home. This means that when the children read at home it would become a form of practice for the development of reading skills.

The findings of the study are consistent with other research findings. For instance, research conducted by Qrquez & Ab Rashid (2017) demonstrated that reading plays a major role in the educational, working, recreational, and social lives of individuals. Hence, when parents are able to inculcate reading habits in their children,

they are going to help their children improve upon other aspects of their lives. As shown from findings of the research, a person's ability to read is considered a valuable skill that is highly valued due to its ability to enhance social and economic development of the students (Krashen & Brown, 2007; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

4.3 Conclusion

This section of the research provided the discussion of the data on the causes of reading difficulties among Axim Anglican Junior High School students. The analysis of the data showed that there are different factors that are responsible for the reading challenges among the students. The findings showed that there are both endogenous and exogenous factors contributing to the poor reading skills of the students. Regarding the endogenous factors, it is shown that absence of a library facility, lack participation in classroom reading tasks and teaching methodology are some of the causes of reading difficulties among the students of Axim Anglican Junior High School students. The exogenous factors revealed in the analysis include failure of parents to buy reading books for their children and lack of dedication of time and efforts in helping children learn at home by parents are responsible for poor reading skills of children. The chapter also revealed the measures that may be put in place to ameliorate the situation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter of the study, the summary of the findings of the research, the conclusions that are drawn based on the findings and recommendations are presented. The study was set out with two objectives and two research questions. The first objective of the research sought to ascertain the causes of poor reading abilities among the students of Axim Anglican Junior High School. The second objective of the study deals with exploring measures that can be adopted in helping the students of Axim Anglican Junior High School to overcome the reading challenges that confront them. The study provided explanations of the main theories that inform the teaching of reading, especially at the lower levels of learning. That is, even though the study is not informed by any specific theoretical disposition, the Bottom-up theory with its key notion of phonics and the Top-down approach. These theoretical positions were explained in order to provide the understanding of some of the decisions the teachers take in the classroom regarding the approach and methodology of teaching reading to their students. This chapter serves as the final chapter of the study. The rest of the chapter is sectionalised as follows: summary of findings of the study is presented in 5.1, the role of reading ability in enhancing students' performance is presented in 5.2; pedagogical implication of the study is captured in 5.3 and the recommendation for future studies is presented in 5.4. In section 5.5, the chapter presents the conclusion of the study.

5.1 Summary of findings

The summary of the findings is presented based on the research objectives. Regarding the first research objective, the following findings were made based on the data analysis:

5.1.1 Causes of poor reading abilities among pupils of Axim Anglican JHS

The study sought to find out the causes of the poor reading abilities among the students Axim Anglican Junior High School students. To achieve this objective, the researcher carried out both participant observation and interview. These findings revealed that two broad categories, endogenous and exogenous, cause the student to have low reading ability. The endogenous factors, as revealed in the study comprise school related factors that prevent the students from mastering reading skills. Within the school environment, it is revealed that the school lacks library facility, and this plays a crucial role in the students' failure to master reading skills. Both observation note and interview responses established that students of Axim Anglican Junior High School do not benefit from a library facility and this has adversely affected the reading performance of the students. According to the findings of the study, the availability of a library facility would have complemented the teaching activities in the classroom. The teacher respondents explains that their quest to inculcate reading habit in their students is not being realised due to the absence of a library in the school.

It was also revealed that in the classroom setting, the teachers of English become selective in appointing readers in the class. The observation and interview responses confirmed that not everyone in the classroom participates in the reading exercises as there is always inadequate time allocated for the reading comprehension lessons. According to the finding of the study, the lack of ample time for the lesson prevents teachers from devoting time for struggling readers in the class. The study showed that,

often fluent readers are made to read on behalf of the class. Apart from the inadequate time for the lesson, the student population for the various classes is also large. This implies that if the teacher wants every student in the class to read the passage, they may not complete the reading task to be able to undertake comprehension exercises on the passages they read.

Although it is not everyone who gets the opportunity to read in the classroom, it would be expected that the teachers rotate the readers so that everybody can participate in the reading activities. However, the findings of the study revealed that teachers of English in the Axim Anglican Junior High School do not rotate their readers. The implication is that teachers hardly do anything to improve the reading ability of the struggling readers. The findings showed that the teachers are more interested in making the students complete the comprehension exercises, at the expense of helping the students to overcome their reading challenges. The study also revealed that the students were not given time on their own to practise what they were taught. The findings of the study showed that even though some of the students could read, they were not given the opportunity to teach their peers who could not read.

5.1.2 Measures to improve learners' reading ability

The study also sought to reveal some teacher-centred strategies that could be adopted to improve reading abilities among the students. It is shown in the findings that instructional methods could be changed. The study findings showed that the situation whereby only fluent readers are made to read makes the struggling readers passive in the classroom. The teachers explained that since the struggling readers become passive, teachers could break reading passages into segments or paragraphs and make fluent readers read so that the struggling readers could emulate (partner reading). The findings

showed that teachers in Axim Anglican Junior High School often do not adopt teaching approach that makes every student to participate in the reading activity.

The study also showed that teachers used story books, textbooks and sometimes wrote passages on the board for the students to read. In spite of all these efforts, the study revealed that time constraint prevents the teachers from making all the students participate in the reading tasks. Regarding reading assessment, the findings of the study revealed that as the students are made to read, the teachers assess the reading fluency and speed of the readers. However, the problem of lack of inclusive reading, where only fluent readers are made to read the passages prevent comprehensive assessment of the whole students in the class.

The study revealed that teachers also motivate their students to read. This means that, struggling readers are encouraged to some extent to become fluent readers by appropriately motivating them. The findings showed that measures teachers used to motivate their students regarding reading in the classroom instruction occur in the form of praises and giving them story books. This means teachers of English language in the Axim Anglican JHS are desirous in making their students acquire reading skills, even though this desire is negatively affected by time constraint.

Another finding of the study is the home-centred strategies that can curb reading difficulty among the students. The study showed that parents should provide their children with reading materials to read at home. This means that when the children read at home it would become a form of practice for the development of reading skills. It was also shown in the findings that when the home situation depicts a reading environment, pupils tend to develop reading skills. Concerning this, the findings of the study revealed that parents themselves need to be reading parents. When children

constantly observe that their parents are reading books, they will also develop the habit of reading.

5.2 The role of reading ability in enhancing students' performance in ESL

From the findings of the study, it is realised that reading ability is crucial in mastering the target language. English is studied in the Ghanaian schools as a Second Language. The context of learning the language is a contributing factor to the difficulties the pupils encounter in mastering the use of the language. As indicated from the findings of the study, there are different factors that contribute to the success of the learners in achieving mastery in English language. The study revealed two factors: endogenous factors and exogenous factors. It needs to be mentioned, as revealed in the findings of the study, that reading ability among pupils plays a crucial role in their ability to master the English language. The findings showed that through reading, the learners are able to obtain contextual knowledge of words; they are able to use sentential constructions in the books they read in their own sentences and ultimately increase their stock of vocabulary. Pertaining to this, the study's findings revealed that when situations are made better, both endogenous situations and exogenous situations, the pupils of Axim Anglican JHS will improve upon their reading ability, which will then positively impact their performance, both speaking and writing, in the English language.

5.3 Pedagogical implications

Based on the findings of the study, stakeholders need to put measures in place to ensure that both endogenous and exogenous factors are favourable for positive impact on reading ability among pupils of Axim Anglican JHS. Firstly, teachers of English language in the school need to be trained in the appropriate techniques of teaching reading comprehension to non-native learners of English by organising

workshops and refresher courses for them. This will help them improve upon their teaching skills and enable them to adopt effective teaching methods and strategies in the classroom. The school and the District Education Directorate need to also ensure that the school has a functional library that the pupils can use. This will serve as a motivation for the pupils to read and improve their reading skills.

Moreover, classrooms with many students should have the students divided. This makes the application of student-centred language teaching methods possible. This will also enhance effective teaching and learning. Parents also need to be sensitised through the PTA on the importance of reading ability on the performance of the pupils. This will make the parents of the pupils to appreciate the need to invest in the development of reading skills among their children. With this kind of sensitisation, parents will now buy reading books for the children, and may even be willing to engage home teachers to help their children master reading skills. As revealed in the study, the exogenous factors are also crucial in affecting the development of reading abilities among the pupils.

Based on the conclusions of the study, it recommended that teachers of English language in Axim Anglican Junior High School adopt teaching methods that are inclined towards learner-centredness. When teachers are making teaching and learning of reading in the classroom participatory, it would help build the confidence of poor readers in the classroom. It is also recommended that teachers allow sometime within the lesson for the partner reading. This would allow the students to engage in peer teaching of reading among themselves. It is also recommended that Axim Anglican Junior High School is provided with a library facility. This would enable the students the opportunity to practise reading on their own. As the library is utilised by the students, it would serve as an avenue where the limited time for reading practise in the

classroom can be complemented. Additionally, parents should provide their children with reading materials and ensure that they discharge their responsibilities in ensuring that when their children return from school, they do some reading.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Regarding this research, it is recommended that further studies that investigate the phenomenon of poor reading ability among the students of Axim Anglican Junior High School be conducted using quantitative paradigm of research to strengthen the findings of the current study. It is also recommended that future research expand the participants of the study to cover other junior schools within the area in order to reveal more comprehensive findings that the directorate of education in the district can adopt to propose a comprehensive mechanism to fix the challenge.

5.5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that students Axim Anglican Junior High School lack reading ability because of both school environment factors and home environment factors. It is worthy of note that lack of a library facility in the school, lack of ample time in teaching reading and the approach of teaching reading are responsible for the inability of most of the students in the school to master reading skills. In the home, it is realised that parents are to buy reading materials for the children and do assume the responsibility of ensuring that their children develop the habit of reading at home. It is concluded, therefore that when parents assist teachers in supervising the reading behaviour of the children, the reading ability of the students would improve tremendously. Learner-related factors such as prior knowledge, understanding, and motivation have the tendency to affect reading comprehension skills of the learners. Furthermore, prior knowledge plays a vital role in learners'

comprehension. It is also concluded that teachers' approach to teaching where by teacher centred strategies are adopted in the classroom does help in building reading ability among the students. Even though teachers are sometimes aware of the role of motivation in encouraging reading interest among the students, the unavailability of time devoted for the teaching and learning of reading is a major factor that thwarts the desire of teachers in improving reading ability among their students.



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